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Femme Fatale 2010

Lt Col Kristal L. Alfonso, USAF

Legitimizing Change among Muslim Women in Malaysia and Egypt

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Girl Soldiers: The Other Face of Sexual Exploitation and Gender Violence

Waltraud Queiser Morales, PhD

Youth Empowerment in Kenya: A Policy-Science Analysis of Government Values and Priorities

Christine Mwangeli Mutuku



AIM HIGH . . . FLY-FIGHT-WIN





Left to right: Rémy M. Mauduit, editor, Air and Space Power Journal–Africa and Francophonie, Lt Gen Allen G. Peck, commander, Air University; Maj Gen Gabriel Poudiougou, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mali Armed Forces; Col Maj Amadou S. Gueye, technical adviser in charge of military cooperation and external relations, Mali Armed Forces; and Lt Col Allen Pepper, US Army, chief, Office of Security Cooperation, Bamako, Mali



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A Story of Courage and Perseverance

The day will come when men will recognize woman as his peer, not only at the fireside, but in councils of the nation. Then, and not until then, will there be the perfect comradeship, the ideal union between the sexes that shall result in the highest development of the race.

—Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906)
American Women’s Suffragist

In this issue, four women writers address the progress toward gender equality that Susan B. Anthony envisioned years ago. Ms. Kristal Alfonso, a pilot and lieutenant colonel in the US Air Force, highlights in her article “Femme Fatale 2010” the arduous battle women had to wage in order to serve, fight, and die for their country as soldiers. During operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, American female warriors have proven that they are formidable fighters who can engage in direct ground combat. This advance in women’s rights, however, would not mitigate what girls and women still endure in many countries around the world. Ms. Vanessa Mousavizadeh’s article “Legitimizing Change among Muslim Women in Malaysia and Egypt” introduces us to the long, hard struggle of Muslim women to free themselves by reforming Islamic scripture, tradition, and society from within. Ms. Waltraud Queiser Morales, PhD, acquaints us with the plight of the girl soldier, a victim of many of the grossest violations of human rights ranging from battery, sexual abuse, and torture to outright slavery. In “Girl Soldiers: The Other Face of Sexual Exploitation and Gender Violence,” she points to the International Rescue Committee’s description of “the systematic atrocities committed against the world’s children as no less than a slow ‘genocide’ or ‘holocaust.’ ” Finally, Ms. Christine Mwongeli Mutuku, in her article “Youth Empowerment in Kenya: A Policy-Science Analysis of Government Values and Priorities,” apprises us of a prophetic initiative—the Kenya National Youth Policy. If developing countries had adopted and earnestly implemented such an initiative, perhaps we would not be witnessing the “Jasmine Revolution” in Tunisia and the expected political tsunami in Africa and the Middle East.

Rémy M. Mauduit, Editor
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Femme Fatale 2010

LT COL KRISTAL L. ALFONSO, USAF*

According to Tolstoy, war and women are things that don't go together—they exist apart. But when I witnessed all the atrocities of 1941, the death of my friends and relatives, peaceful civilians, I wanted to liberate my people from the enemy. I want you to underline in red that it was the cherished dream of the girls to liberate the land, but none of us wanted to fight—to kill.

—Capt Mariya Dolina
125th Guards Bomber Regiment
Hero of the Soviet Union

Women have always participated in armed conflict, most often as active supporters of the armies they followed. Some women, usually the wives of soldiers, served as nurses, laundresses, cooks, and seamstresses. Others chose active participation in battle, including the famed Mary Hays McCauly, who earned the moniker “Molly Pitcher” during the Battle of Monmouth in 1778 when she provided medical care and pitchers of water to Continental Army members fighting the British. After shrapnel struck her husband, McCauly took up his position as a gunner so that the artillery crew could continue to fight. Gen George Washington rewarded her bravery by making her a non-commissioned officer.¹

The story of Molly Pitcher symbolizes the realities of women and war, which has always affected them to some capacity, despite civilized society's best attempts to protect the gentler sex from war's brutality. Yet, regardless

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of Molly Pitcher's successes on the battlefield, American culture has traditionally denigrated female participation in war. In most cultures, even today, the idea of a woman engaged in combat operations is anathema. History, therefore, has either completely dismissed female contributions and participation in armed conflicts or relegated their involvement to scandalous supporting roles, such as prostitutes or pillow-friendly spies.

In an effort to explore whether current US laws and policies excluding women from combat remain valid or need amending, this article reviews three case studies that demonstrate the variety of ways women have participated in modern armed conflict. The first one examines the experiences of World War II female Soviet pilots in their more traditional involvement in armed conflict. The second analyzes the asymmetric aspects of female participation during conflict, focusing specifically on terrorist activities. The final case study presents American females' experience in the All Volunteer Force, emphasizing their performance in combat operations since such participation began in the 1990s.

The article concludes by proposing how the US military and society should move forward in the debate over the role of women in combat. Despite the best attempts by critics to argue that society should protect women from the violence of war, in reality, women in the All Volunteer Force structure currently engage in combat.

The three case studies offer evidence that women have participated and always will participate in combat. Moreover, their successful contributions have made a difference. To deny citizens the right to fight for their country based solely on gender remains blatant discrimination. The United States should once again assume a world-leadership role with regard to equality, live up to the rhetoric of its principles, and demonstrate the civic parity of women and men.

Soviet Female Fliers of World War II

Over the centuries, Russian culture has embraced and even glorified the female warrior ethos.² Although the role of these *polianitsy* or warrior heroines diminished as more stringent patriarchal cultures emerged, legends of female fighters remained a part of Russian culture.³ Evidently, whenever the motherland came under threat of invading forces, women stood to fight alongside Russian men.

The Russian Civil War presented women further opportunities for involvement in combat operations. The Workers' and Peasants' Air Fleet, for example, which desperately sought pilots to fight against the White anti-Bolsheviks, did not object to the use of women in combat roles. Marxist ideology promoted equality among the sexes. The struggle of women in a patriarchal society paralleled that of workers against capitalism; leaders of the communist revolution found willing supporters and participants among the disenfranchised half of the population. Communist leaders propagated the belief that once the revolution succeeded, "men and women naturally would become equals; there could be no gender discrimination in a socialist state."⁴

Under Bolshevik leadership, Russian women gained what few other females had: equality. Previously the provisional government had granted women equality under the law, equipping them with improved educational and professional opportunities.⁵ The Bolsheviks championed the theory that Marxist socialism would resolve all societal difficulties, equating the establishment of a socialist government with the creation of a utopian society in which men accepted "women in combat as a matter of course, without sexist resistance or pious welcome speeches."⁶

Later, Soviet educational opportunities afforded women in the 1920s and 1930s allowed a number of them to receive flying training, mostly through aero clubs although a select few took military training. Soviet women recorded several civilian aerial achievements, including the nonstop flight of the *Rodina*.⁷ Crewed by three females, this aircraft broke the women's international record for flight over a straight-line distance, establishing a new nonstop standard of just over 26 hours.⁸ Further, Maj Marina Raskova, navigator on the *Rodina*, survived alone for 10 days in the subarctic forests of Russia on a couple of candy bars and wild berries following her bailout prior to the aircraft's emergency landing. She immediately became a hero in the Soviet Union, and Stalin himself propagated her heroic image.

Hitler Invades the Soviet Union

Despite the popularity of the *Rodina's* female military officers, when Hitler initiated Operation Barbarossa, the Soviet military included very few women.⁹ Although no government regulation specifically denied females acceptance into the military, Soviet military leadership discouraged them

from volunteering for active military service and often turned volunteers away. Instead, Soviet leaders encouraged women volunteers to join paramilitary groups in order to receive various types of military training, including flight training. Sponsored by the Soviet Komsomol (a communist youth organization), Soviet women maintained higher levels of fitness through military-related sports and received weapons training, including sport sharpshooting, and even flight training.¹⁰

In response to Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Raskova sought to tap this wealth of fighting potential among female Soviets, using her influence with Stalin and the Defense Ministry to persuade them to press forward with female aviation units. Women, particularly instructor pilots, inundated Raskova with requests to join her units or asked how they could "put their skills to use in the service of their country—more particularly, how they could get to the front, preferably in an airforce [*sic*] unit."¹¹ Stalin finally agreed to establish the 122nd Composite Air Group, comprised of three all-female units: the 586th Fighter Regiment, 587th Bomber Regiment, and 588th Air Regiment.¹²

The Result

Despite attempts to highlight the contributions of women during the war, the Soviet public and military apparently knew very little about the female combatants. Maj Marta Meritus of the 125th regiment described a reunion for veterans following the war: "The commander of the front, under whom we fought during the war, asked why we had been asked to this reception and who we were. We had to explain that we were the pilots and the mechanics of the 125th regiment. He had thought it to be a male regiment, and it was a surprise to him to learn about us after the war. Even now very few men can believe that women crews could fly the dive bomber."¹³ Until recently, Western reactions were even further dismissive.

According to Kazimiera Cottam, Western scholars tended to regard female Soviet combatants merely as part of Soviet propaganda, noting that accounts of "female success in the military [were] often dismissed as anecdotal, propaganda-type stories."¹⁴ The Soviet government and military did little to dispel such assumptions. Although Russia has a rich history of women successfully serving in combat, its modern armed forces represent a

more conservative approach to women in combat, similar to the Soviet experience during and following World War II.

During the 1990s, half of the conscripts in the Russian Army were women, many of them serving in combat positions—including machine gunners.¹⁵ The performance of these female combat troops bodes ill for future inclusion of Russian women in combat. According to Gen Vladimir Konstantinov of the General Staff's Organizational-Mobilization Main Directorate, "In 1999 all female contract soldiers of the Leningrad Military District 138th and 200th permanent readiness motor-rifle brigades refused to go to fight with their units in the second Chechen campaign, causing immense problems in refitting the units with men."¹⁶ The Defense Ministry reports that the current percentage of female recruits is holding steady at 24 percent and that in future operations, the ministry will exclude women from combat operations.¹⁷

Shahidas in a Brave New World

Most Americans associate the current overseas contingency operations with conflict between Western secular ideals and radicalized Islamic traditions. The American press and media continue to reinforce this notion. Terrorism serves as a tool for oppressed peoples and groups seeking political upheaval, but state actors also often resort to terrorism to control their populations. In the modern era, both the oppressed and the oppressors have used terrorism without mercy and without limitation.

Societal Expectations in the Modern Age of Terrorism

Encouraged by news reports, Americans further assume that Islam seeks to relegate women to subservient roles and that most Muslim women would resist this subjugation, if able, as American women did during their suffrage and equal rights movements. These assumptions are misguided. In the traditions of the three major religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) stemming from the Middle East, a woman remains subservient to the man of the household. In contrast to male children, nonbelievers, and slaves, all of whom can rise above their initial positions of inferiority through age, acceptance of faith, and emancipation, women remain "irredeemably fixed in [their] inferiority."¹⁸

The veil has come to symbolize this struggle between the traditions of Islam and modern Western ideals. Attempts by the French government to remove the veil from Algerian women during Algeria's war for independence actually resulted (in addition to other, more gruesome tactics such as rape) in women joining the Algerian resistance movement. In ceremonies across Algeria, French military and colonial leaders *encouraged* women to unveil themselves in front of crowds of their fellow Algerians and Muslims.¹⁹ Steps taken by the French military to emancipate Algerian women from cultural and societal traditions revealed two ironies. First, the French strategists demonstrated their ignorance of Algerian culture: prior to their initiatives, most Algerian women did not wear the veil.²⁰ Second, the act of unveiling represented the release of Algerian women from male oppression, but French soldiers raped them as a means of coercing obedience and acceptance of French rule by all Algerians.²¹ After the colonial government instituted its program to lift the veils of Algerian women in 1958, they began to don veils in defiance of the French authorities.²²

Instead of winning the hearts and minds of half the targeted populations in unstable areas in the world, Western attempts at liberating women from their traditional cultures have repeated the results seen in French-controlled Algeria. Women have turned away from Western ideals of freedom to seek justice for fellow Muslim or tribal members. As Bernard Lewis observes, "One of the most noticeable consequences of Islamic revival has been the return, by women though not by men, to full traditional attire."²³ Further, Lewis explains, Muslims have traditionally believed that "the converse of tyranny was not freedom but justice."²⁴

The return to traditional dress is not the only way in which Muslim women currently demonstrate their dedication to culture, religion, and society. Increasingly, women from across the Muslim spectrum wish to join the fight against perceived Western oppression. Within the Palestinian territories, female combatant units have recently begun to form. In 2002 four young women conducted suicide-bombing missions against the Israeli military and civilians. These *shahidas* (female martyrs) became role models for Palestinian women who seek the release of their communities from Israeli control. In 2005 the first all-female unit formed under the military wing of Hamas—Izz al-Din Al-Qassam (derived from the name of a

famous Palestinian religious leader who resisted the British rule of Palestine and founded the Black Hand).²⁵

The impetus for women to join modern resistance movements and sacrifice their lives for their community parallels the motivations of female Soviet fighters in World War II. Modern female resistance fighters seek primarily to contribute to the defense of their national identity or tribes while bringing honor and security to their families. Similarly, modern female insurgents increasingly participate in combat operations as well as in more traditional supporting roles. The use of women in suicide operations by conservative Islamic groups has initiated a new phase in insurgent struggles worldwide. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Palestinians have used women to send Israelis a deadly message: “Terrorism is not just a fringe phenomenon. Terrorists are not just strange young men whispering in dark rooms. Terrorists are high-school students, terrorists are women—and terrorists are all around you.”²⁶

Chechen Black Widows: Honor Is All That Remains

Chechen rebels have certainly exploited the tactical advantage of women combatants. Most Americans, if they are aware of the conflict between Chechnya and Russia at all, assume that the Chechens are simply another terrorist group motivated by a radical form of Islam. The tragic events of the school massacre in Beslan and the occupation of the Moscow theater by Chechen rebels as reported by Western media outlets encourage this perception.²⁷ More recently, reports of attacks by two female Chechen rebels on the Moscow Red Arrow underground train further highlight the infatuation with terrorists’ religious views. A report from the British paper *Daily Mail* emphasizes the religious affiliation of suspected terrorists yet makes no mention of other underlying causes for rebels turning to terrorist actions.²⁸ The article accentuates the religious affiliation of the suspected bombers, claiming that the women were likely “Muslim women radicalized by the situation in the North Caucasus” and that they were part of the “Shahidka” movement, a term deriving from the Arabic word *shahid*.²⁹

News reporting and comments from Russian officials continue to focus on the religion of the rebels rather than the political situation that precipitated this terror movement. Naturally, this perspective can encourage the reader to assume that this group is merely another radical Muslim terrorist

organization. This assumption is incorrect and fails to acknowledge the key motivating factor for Chechen rebels, including female fighters: the cultural importance of personal honor. Chechen “Black Widows” or female suicide bombers adhere to the “rules of *Adat*, a traditional Chechen code of honor,” which inspires them to “exact retribution for the sake of honor” against the Russian occupying presence in Chechnya.³⁰ For the same reasons their men challenge the occupation of their homeland by the Russians, Chechen women have demonstrated, with deadly consequences, their dedication to fighting for their people and culture.

In 2003 Chechen rebel commander Abu al-Walid al-Ghamidi explained why women account for 60 percent of Chechen suicide bombers: “These women, particularly the wives of the mujahedin who are martyred, are being threatened in their homes; their honour and everything are being threatened. They do not accept being humiliated and living under occupation.”³¹ Moreover, they are not the only women in the modern era who have suffered personal tragedies and then turned to terrorism; resistance fighters in Sri Lanka have channeled their grief and anger into weapons against their government.

Tamil Black Tigresses: Hindu Honor with a Nationalist Twist

The Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka (LTTE), that country’s minority Hindu population, sought the establishment of an independent Tamil state, free from involvement of the majority Buddhist population (Sinhala). LTTE actively recruits women, advocating their use in operations to secure political objectives. Such action brings considerable honor to the woman and her family; in turn, Tamil society reveres the “Black Tigresses” as saints since they are willing to die for their people. Acceptance of women in the Tamil insurgency even led to innovations in terrorist operations. LTTE developed the first suicide belt, for example, designing it for female use since it makes the wearer look pregnant, allowing the insurgent to pass through security checkpoints with ease.³²

Thenmuli Rajaratnam—the first female Tamil Tiger suicide bomber, later honored as a saint by LTTE, and known as Dhanu—detonated a bomb, killing 16 bystanders during her assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. According to most sources (and supported by LTTE propagandists), Dhanu’s motivations for her action stemmed from her gang rape at the hands of

Indian soldiers sent by Gandhi to Sri Lanka to suppress the Tamil separatist movement.³³

In the case of Dhanu, the accepted explanation of her actions began when occupying Indian forces slaughtered her family and raped her.³⁴ In Tamil culture, such women see martyrdom for their people as their only option. According to Robert Pape, “Some of the female suicide bombers in Sri Lanka are believed to be victims of rape at the hands of Sinhalese or Indian soldiers, a stigma that destroys their prospects for marriage and rules out procreation. . . . ‘Acting as a human bomb’ . . . is an understood and accepted offering for a woman who will never be a mother.”³⁵ Not only does suicide bombing release a woman and her family from the stigma of rape, but also it gives a woman unable to produce children a means to mother her society. In the Tamil culture, “Tamil mothers make great sacrifices for their sons on a daily basis; feeding them before themselves or the girl children, serving them and so on.”³⁶ For a woman who cannot contribute to society in this fashion, fighting against her people’s enemies may often seem the only option.

The American Experience

In the remote eastern Paktia province of Afghanistan, a roadside bomb exploded through a four-vehicle convoy of Humvees in April 2007, wounding five Soldiers. The medic assigned to the convoy rushed to protect the victims from insurgent gunfire “as mortars fell less than 100 yards away.”³⁷ After the convoy held off the attackers, the medic told the Associated Press that she “did not really think about anything except for getting the guys to a safer location and getting them taken care of and getting them out of there.”³⁸ The medic moved the wounded to a safer location over 500 yards away, where they received treatment on site before a helicopter evacuated them.

That Army medic, SPC Monica Lin Brown, received the Silver Star in March 2008 for her actions; ironically, Army regulations prohibit her from serving in a frontline combat role. The reality of combat operations has forced the Army to ignore those regulations since both Afghanistan and Iraq present cultural challenges demanding the presence of female Soldiers. In both locations, they “are often tasked to work in all-male combat units—not only for their skills but also for the culturally sensitive role of providing medical treatment for local women, as well as searching them and otherwise

interacting with them.”³⁹ The restrictions remain despite the Army’s recognition that Specialist Brown’s “bravery, unselfish action and medical aid rendered under fire saved the lives of her comrades and represents the finest traditions of heroism in combat.”⁴⁰ The 19-year-old Brown became the second woman since World War II to receive the Silver Star, the nation’s third-highest medal for valor.

Brown’s actions in combat directly contradicted the policies of her commander in chief, Pres. George W. Bush, who announced in a 2005 press conference that he would not authorize women to serve in ground combat units although he accepted the roles of women on combat surface ships and in aircraft.⁴¹ Although President Bush forbade women from serving in the infantry, artillery, armor units, and all special operations forces, he did not order them out of combat-support units and duties, such as medics, since such a directive would hamper the military’s performance in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁴²

Therefore, women carried on in their support duties and continued to excel in combat environments, with the exception of Specialist Brown. Within a week of the firefight that earned her the Silver Star, the Army chose to withdraw Brown from the field since, as she put it, “her presence as ‘a female in a combat arms unit’ had attracted attention.”⁴³ This reaction by the Army appears dubious.

Discrepancies between policy and combat realities in regard to Specialist Brown’s case were not the first incident to highlight the shortcomings of current policies on women in combat. Ironically, in the same year that President Bush issued his policy on women in combat, Sgt Leigh Ann Hester from the Kentucky National Guard came under fire during an ambush of her unit in Iraq, an event that eventually led to her nomination for a Silver Star. Thus, she became the first woman to receive this medal in the current conflict.

As a member of the 617th Military Police Company, Hester and her squad were escorting a supply convoy when Iraqi insurgents attacked. During the middle of the fight, she “led her team through the ‘kill zone’ and into a flanking position, where she assaulted a trench line with grenades and M203 grenade-launcher rounds.”⁴⁴ Hester went on to clear two trenches of insurgents, killing three of them with her rifle. Rather than reveling in becoming the first woman since World War II to win the Silver

Star, Sergeant Hester simply took pride in “the duties I performed that day as a soldier.”⁴⁵ She attributed her response under fire to the training she received, claiming that she reacted as any Soldier should: “It’s your life or theirs. . . . You’ve got a job to do—protecting yourself and your fellow comrades.”⁴⁶ According to the *Washington Post*, the awarding of Hester’s Silver Star “underscores the growing role in combat of U.S. female troops in Iraq’s guerrilla war, where tens of thousands of American women have served, 36 have been killed and 285 wounded.”⁴⁷

Unlike the Army, whose female members must enter either the aviation arm or the military police for combat opportunities, the Air Force has allowed and even encouraged women to volunteer for combat positions.⁴⁸ After Secretary of Defense Les Aspin opened up combat aircraft to women in 1993, they slowly began to enter the male-dominated world of combat fighters and bombers. Despite Air Force encouragement and recruitment efforts to coax women into fighter and bomber aircraft, the number of female combat pilots remains small. As of 2008, only 70 women fly fighter aircraft.⁴⁹ That number reflects about a 50 percent increase of the 47 who flew fighters in 2002.⁵⁰

One female fighter pilot in this new generation, Maj Melissa “Shock” May, who flies the F-16, recently received the Distinguished Flying Cross for a combat mission over Baghdad. During that mission, May and her four-ship formation took out Soviet-made mobile surface-to-air missiles to allow the Army to continue its movement into the city by enabling US air superiority.⁵¹ One wingman who took fire had to drop his external fuel tanks in order to evade an incoming Roland missile. May described the scenario in an interview with the *Air Force Times*: “There we were, in the weather and getting shot at. . . . And, after dropping his tanks, he [her wingman] was low on gas.”⁵²

In reality, women do serve in combat despite the best attempts of some pundits to restrict or completely deny them the opportunities to do so. The All Volunteer Force depends on the skills and professionalism of women, who make up nearly 15 percent of the force. Military leaders across the services recognize the crucial roles that women play in successful mission accomplishment. Even though they have proven themselves capable of handling the rigors of various combat roles, and even though senior military

leaders acknowledge the necessity of female participation, there remains strong political opposition to the issue of women in combat.

The Way Backward

Although the US military currently utilizes female Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan to gather intelligence through conversations with local women and to assist in policing female suspects, these same Soldiers are explicitly restricted from assignment to combat positions.⁵³ In 2005 legislation introduced in the House of Representatives sought to increase restrictions on female participation in the war on terror by prohibiting women from serving in forward support companies.⁵⁴ In a paper responding to the outcry over the proposed amendment, supporters stated that “there is no military or demographic reason, however, why America must expose young women, many of them mothers, to direct ground combat.”⁵⁵

The Center for Military Readiness (CMR) goes even further in its objections to women in combat, proclaiming that the discussion involves not only the exposure of young mothers to the violence of combat but also the effectiveness of a gender-integrated fighting force. The CMR espouses that the realities of physical capabilities, unit discipline, ability to deploy, and unit cohesion trump calls for equal civic opportunities.⁵⁶ The center claims to support the right of women to serve but only in jobs that do not involve direct ground combat.

In his scathing criticism of women serving in the military (*Weak Link: The Feminization of the American Military* [1989]) and his follow-up (*Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster* [1998]), Brian Mitchell pushes the debate beyond serving in combat to serving in the military altogether. He bases his conclusions on the fact that women do not adhere to the expectations of typical male combatants, using evidence from the service academies and recent sexual-assault scandals to drive home his point: “There are two kinds of cadets and midshipmen at today’s federal service academies. One is male: aggressive, strong, daring, and destined for combat; the other is female: none of the above.”⁵⁷

At the heart of the debate over women in combat remain three basic propositions. First, female physical capabilities, including pregnancy issues, obviously differ from men’s and thus affect overall unit effectiveness. Second, critics argue that the presence of women hinders unit cohesion by limiting

male bonding and creating disciplinary challenges due to the supposed sexually charged nature of coed units. Finally, many people assert that a civilized society based on Judeo-Christian morality should not send its mothers and daughters into harm's way.⁵⁸ This final argument also uses the issue of sex to suggest that captured female combatants will certainly become victims of rape or sexual brutality and therefore should avoid exposure to such risks.

For example, Mitchell's second book on the subject, *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster*, highlights the Navy Tailhook scandal, the controversies over the Air Force's Lt Kelly Flinn, and the sexual-assault scandal at Aberdeen Proving Ground.⁵⁹ Interestingly, Mitchell either ignores or has no knowledge of scientific studies of female physical standards and cases of successful combat-unit integrations in the Air Force that occurred between publication of his two books.⁶⁰

Most notably absent from his follow-up analysis is the US Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine's 1997 study of how female Soldiers responded to a physical fitness regimen designed to improve their performance of specified tasks associated with assigned duties, such as heavy lifting and long-distance marches with 75-pound backpacks.⁶¹ Following the prescribed Army time constraints for physical fitness programs, the study revealed that appropriate training vastly improved female Soldiers' performance. The training regimen—which replicated the actual work the women would do instead of emphasizing the typical push-ups, sit-ups, and long-distance-running programs—concluded that 78 percent of the participants could meet the Army's minimum requirements for "very heavy" jobs, up from the prestudy level of 24 percent.⁶²

The results of the study suggest that with proper training, women can perform physically demanding duties despite their perceived physical inferiority. Furthermore, the female stature offers benefits that exceed those of males. For example, the smaller bone structure of a female mechanic enables her to reach areas within an aircraft engine that an average man cannot access.⁶³

This study also highlights an important aspect of military readiness, the gender issue aside. Traditionally, prescribed physical standards for military jobs have had little to do with the actual work at hand.⁶⁴ A perfect example is the obstacle course present at most military installations. Most

military jobs do not require a service member to jump up and over a wall, but a barrier of this type remains a common element of all the services' obstacle courses.

Less documented evidence exists for directly disproving the two other arguments readily cited by opponents of allowing women in combat and in the military. The contention concerning the effect of women on unit cohesion and discipline clearly falls under the responsibility of unit leadership, at either the squad or service level. Prior to the integration of women into the military, unit cohesion and the good order and discipline of a unit challenged its leadership.⁶⁵ To make a persuasive argument, opponents had to frame the debate in terms of negatives associated with integrating women into military units. Thus, the concentration on physical standards, unit cohesion, discipline, and mission effectiveness represented a shifting of the "debate from the grounds of belief to that of practical effects."⁶⁶ Critics of allowing women in combat and in the military essentially chose to ignore the ramifications and challenges associated with homogeneous groups in favor of trying to prove that the presence of women created more problems within military organizations.

Truly, for these critics the debate most often rests on the notion that the nation's political leaders cannot morally allow and condone organized violence against the female segment of the population. This argument also appears difficult to prove since it derives from subjective views of morality. On the one hand, it is acceptable to allow women to serve in traditional female roles in the military since those do not directly involve them in violence. In testimony to a 1992 presidential commission, Mitchell states that "women are desperately needed as military doctors and nurses, for the very reason that the military cannot get enough doctors and nurses, male or female, as it is."⁶⁷ As long as women are protected from organized violence, social values remain intact. As Senator James Webb implied in a 1979 opinion piece and as the CMR currently suggests, allowing women to serve in the military condones and even encourages violence perpetrated against them.

Furthermore, none of the critics addresses the social acceptability and nobility of men engaging in organized violence against other men. Generally, each opponent of including women in combat and in the military implies that violence perpetuated by men against other men remains an acceptable societal norm. Their arguments consist of two simple explanations: (1) it is

acceptable for men to engage in violence against other men but not for women to engage in or become victims of violence, and (2) society values its female members more highly since they deserve protection from violence.

Again, this aspect of their argument appears untenable. From a different perspective, it seems that American society places the safety of its female citizens above that of its male citizens, thus discriminating against the latter. Moreover, a closer examination of opponents' arguments reveals a lack of respect for half of the American population since they suggest that men serving in the military need to behave inappropriately in order to bond, develop their violent tendencies, and become effective combatants.

If Mitchell's argument holds and civilian leadership removes the 15 percent of women currently serving in the Army, would combat effectiveness diminish? In a RAND study of the assignment of Army women during recent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, individuals in the field testified that "there simply were not enough personnel to do the job without women."⁶⁸ Moreover, which option would do more damage to the fabric of American society: full inclusion of women into the military based on physical capabilities, or revocation of laws that have allowed them to serve for almost a generation? Finally, has the integration of women into combat roles truly impeded combat effectiveness? The final assessment remains unclear; thus far, however, women have proven formidable combatants, whether participating in official or unofficial capacities.

Realities of the All Volunteer Force in Overseas Contingency Operations

As the number of women in the military increases, commanders recognize that without their service in a variety of roles, units would struggle or even fail at their assigned missions. Since the Gulf War, military leadership has recognized that the "United States [can] no longer fight a major war or campaign without women."⁶⁹ Detractors counter that this reliance on women in critical roles directly results from services' decision to assign women to those roles.

Current hostilities confronting the United States present no clear delineation between front and rear lines. Rosemarie Skaine, an expert on gender issues in the military, suggests "that the old front line no longer exists because present day conflicts are peacekeeping tasks and that modern weaponry is more technologically operated than in the past."⁷⁰ Current Department of

Defense, Army, and Marine Corps policies continue to restrict women from direct ground-combat roles, yet support positions such as those in the military police, supply, and intelligence have placed women into Iraq's and Afghanistan's "fluid lines of conflict" and "challeng[e] traditional ideas about what constitutes a 'combat' position."⁷¹

Moreover, the notion that exclusion policies protect women from the dangers of combat directly conflicts with the realities of insurgencies or irregular wars presently ongoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. The disparity is most evident in the Army's use of women. Erin Solaro, a proponent of opening up combat roles to women, describes how, "in our current war, for example, female soldiers drive fuel tankers all over Iraq. They are not, however, allowed to crew tanks. A fuel tanker is not a glamorous target, but it is a lucrative one, particularly if it is resupplying tanks or Bradley fighting vehicles."⁷² Although the Air Force continues to lead the services in terms of integration, specific career fields such as special operations remain closed to women. Women can fly close air support missions to assist special operations forces on the ground and risk being shot down and captured by the enemy; however, they cannot serve in those ground units.

Over the three decades since the integration of women into the armed forces, organizational decisions, cultural shifts and evolutions, and the performance of women have contributed to a convoluted organizational schema or thought process that now pervades the US military: Policies exclude women from combat, yet they have performed well in combat; since operational needs sometimes dictate the use of women in these traditional combat roles, the armed forces will merely temporarily attach them to those restricted roles.

Solaro explains how this organizational schema, instituted in the early years of the All Volunteer Force and in effect today, demonstrates "the lineal ancestor of the present pretense that women in Iraq and Afghanistan are not *assigned* to combat units, only *attached*" (emphasis in original).⁷³ The armed services have always accepted the possibility that women may become involved in combat yet have willingly chosen to deny them opportunities to serve in official, direct ground-combat positions. In reality, however, women do perform duties in direct ground combat. Paul Wolfowitz, former deputy secretary of defense, clearly recognizes the truth about the environment in which the integrated US military operates: "As we consider the

issue of womanpower in the service today it's not just a matter of women being entitled to serve this country. It is a simple fact that we could not operate our military services without women. And as skill levels essential to our missions continue to increase, it will be even more essential that we draw from all our citizens, that we draw from the largest pool of talent available."⁷⁴

The Solution: Selection Based on Capabilities, Not Gender

Along with the apparent evolution of American society's perception of women serving in combat, one sees evidence of a cultural shift. In the two current wars, women have died in the line of duty and in combat operations with no outcry from the American public. Contrary to the opinion that the spectacle of bringing women home in body bags would trigger enormous public outcry, there is "little evidence that the [American] public is somehow less willing to tolerate their suffering than that of men."⁷⁵ The only public outcries have come primarily from antiwar critics who use the death of any service member to draw attention to their political position.

Fears that placing women in combat positions would precipitate declines in the military's combat effectiveness have not been realized. The fact remains that influences other than women's involvement—such as technological advances in communications—have created greater changes in the military.⁷⁶ Similarly, dependence on the All Volunteer Force has also induced the military to adapt to the realities of women making up an increasing percentage of the services. Since "the country's ability to maintain an all-volunteer army has been considered to depend on the effective use of the female labor force," military leaders who deride a return to the conscripted force have had to find a way to exploit the capabilities of women.⁷⁷

Not all attempts have been successful, as Solaro suggests. However, just as the integration of black Soldiers took time to overcome organizational biases and obstacles, so is the integration of women into combat roles slowly moving forward. Senior Army leaders acknowledge the contributions of female Soldiers in the counterinsurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many Army leaders, including Gen Gordon Sullivan, former chief of staff, challenged a proposed congressional amendment in 2005 that would have further restricted women's combat roles simply because such a reversal would

hamstring Army operations around the world by closing 21,925 slots currently open to female Soldiers.⁷⁸

For the American military, much of the emphasis has shifted away from the inabilities of its members to the capabilities they bring to the fight. In the case of female Soldiers on patrol in Iraq, their gender has allowed the military to engage and interact with half of the Iraqi population without violating cultural taboos and restrictions, thus facilitating greater human intelligence, threat assessment, and access to the people often responsible for rearing the next generation of Iraqi citizens. If followed to the letter, current policies would deny the military these opportunities.

Critics suggest that Gen Norman Schwarzkopf condemned women to minor support roles in the military when he declared, “Decisions on what roles women should play in war must be based on military standards, not women’s rights.”⁷⁹ Schwarzkopf’s assessment actually supports the idea that *capability, not gender* should enable or preclude an American from serving in combat. Furthermore, “the situation and ‘the rules’ have changed but our modern military has not adapted itself to this new world”; refusal by opponents to acknowledge the realities of the performance of women in combat roles only hinders the debate.⁸⁰ To ensure appropriate policies on combat forces, the military must practice honest and objective assessment.

Once capabilities rather than gender drive assignment decisions, all other issues associated with integrating women would become typical leadership challenges. Should members of an integrated unit, for example, engage in inappropriate relationships, unit leadership must address these situations and mete out appropriate punishment for violations under the *Uniform Code of Military Justice*.

Conclusion

The real catch was to have a female medic out there because of the cultural sensitivities and the flexibility that gave commanders. It is absolutely not about gender in terms of how they [women] will do.

—Maj Paul Narowski, 73rd Cavalry Regiment

Overseas contingency operations have rekindled debate over the assignment of American women to combat positions, revealing that the regulations governing the role of women in combat are “vague, ill defined, and based on an outmoded concept of wars with clear front lines that rarely

exist in today's counterinsurgencies."⁸¹ Despite the realities of the current conflicts, the debate over the role of women in combat will never cease as long as political leaders continue to relegate women to inferior roles in American society.

By acknowledging the vital role women play in armed conflicts, the political leadership of the United States can shape American culture to recognize that women can and do engage in violence for and against the state. When Americans can culturally accept this fact, troops fighting the current wars will be better prepared to face female insurgents in the future. Ultimately, such insurgents share similar motivations and strive for the same universal objectives as military women and their predecessors in the resistance: they fight to give their children a safe future.

Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, explains that modern female resistance fighters and suicide bombers are "fully aware of being free women with an important message to pass on and who could be examples to all women the world over."⁸² Furthermore, tactics employed by terrorist organizations and insurgencies, including the use of female combatants, have rendered combat-exclusion policies pointless. A recent RAND study of the Army's assignment of women to combat roles found current policy "not actionable" since it was "crafted for a linear battlefield" that depended on notions of "forward and well forward [that] were generally acknowledged to be almost meaningless in the [current] Iraqi theater."⁸³ If America's current enemies, undoubtedly more conservative about the role of women in their societies, acknowledge the efficacy of female combatants in their operations, political leaders must recognize what military leaders have accepted as fact. Women can contribute successfully to combat operations and remain ready to do so.

American female warriors face strong criticism from pundits who desire a return to an all-male combat force. Like their sisters who fought for the Soviet Union, American women serve a nation that propagates notions of equality yet continues to discriminate, based on gender. When President Bush "forcefully backed the Army's [combat exclusion] restrictions" and proclaimed a policy of "no women in combat," he reinforced the notion that American women are not the equals of American men.⁸⁴ Such proclamations further inhibit the abilities of women to integrate fully and reinforce perceptions that they are incapable of effectively serving in combat roles.

Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan directly contradict the arguments put forth by critics of using women in combat. Females have proven that they are formidable fighters who can engage in direct ground combat. Combat units such as Private Brown's have accepted women as equal members, Brown's unit considering her "one of the guys, mixing it up, clearing rooms, doing everything that anybody else was doing," and wanting to keep her as its medic.⁸⁵ Recently, George Casey, the Army chief of staff, testified to lawmakers that combat-exclusion policies needed review "in light of how women have served in the two wars."⁸⁶ This announcement came after the Navy rescinded its policy banning women from serving on submarines. Apparently, a move to lift all bans and use capabilities-based standards to determine fitness for duty in any position enjoys strong support, although conservative opposition continues to paint a picture of mothers going off to war. However, John Nagl, retired Army lieutenant colonel and president of the Center for New American Security, assessed that in light of the 220,000 women who have fought in both wars and the 120 who have paid the ultimate price, we should "simply recogniz[e] a truth that's already been written in blood and sweat on the battlefield."⁸⁷

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have forced the United States to reevaluate a number of foreign and domestic policies, including preemption, as well as the organizational structures of American armed forces. These wars have also highlighted the need for policy makers to reconsider combat-exclusion rules that currently govern US combat operations. Women have always been subjected to the violence of war. It is now time for the United States to encourage and empower American women to serve in combat roles if they meet physical requirements determined by the specific role—not some arbitrary physical standard. Policy leaders should rescind current combat-exclusion policies and welcome American women as civic equals.

Notes

1. US Field Artillery Association, "The Story of Molly Pitcher," http://www.batteryb.com/molly_pitcher.html.

2. Despite the propaganda that the all-female units provided Soviet leaders, few Western and Russian academics have conducted extensive research into this aspect of Soviet history. Further, until the fall of the Soviet Union, Western historians had limited access to official documentation, and what little that exists is written in Russian. Thus, the majority of this research has depended on the efforts of three women: Reina Pennington, Kazimiera Janina Cottam, and Anne Noggle. In the course of my research, I came across con-

traditions in unit designations, spelling of names, and translations of interviews and speeches. I have done my best to provide the most accepted interpretations of the data provided.

3. Reina Pennington, "Wings, Women and War: Soviet Women's Military Aviation Regiments in the Great Patriotic War" (master's thesis, University of South Carolina, 1993), 3.

4. *Ibid.*, 8.

5. Kazimiera Janina Cottam, *Women in War and Resistance: Selected Biographies of Soviet Women Soldiers* (Nepean, ON: New Military Pub., 1998), xviii.

6. Pennington, "Wings, Women and War," 9.

7. Anne Noggle, *A Dance with Death: Soviet Airwomen in World War II*, 1st ed. (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1994), 6.

8. Pennington, "Wings, Women and War," 25.

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13. *Ibid.*, 137.

14. Kazimiera Janina Cottam and Galina Markova, *Soviet Airwomen in Combat in World War II* (Manhattan, KS: Military Affairs/Aerospace Historian, 1983), xii.

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18. Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2,000 Years* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 206.

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24. *Ibid.*

25. Kai Adler, "The Women of Hamas: 'Islam Protects Us,'" *Qantara.de*, 26 January 2006, http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-478/_nr-391/i.html.

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28. Mail Foreign Service, "Hunt for 'Black Widow' Terror Gang after Female Suicide Bombers Kill at Least 38 in Bomb Attacks on Moscow Trains," 29 March 2010, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1261502/Female-suicide-bombers-Moscow-kill-30-attacks-tube-trains.html>.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Christoph Reuter, *My Life Is a Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 150.

31. Robert Anthony Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 2005), 32.

32. Rosemarie Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), 51.

33. Pape, *Dying to Win*, 229.

34. *Ibid.*, 230.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Arjuna Gunawardena, "Female Black Tigers: A New Breed of Cat?," in *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?* [JCSS Memorandum no. 84], ed. Yoram Schweitzer (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, August 2006), 84.

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38. Ibid.
39. Ann Scott Tyson, "Woman Gains Silver Star—and Removal from Combat: Case Shows Contradictions of Army Rules," *Washington Post*, 1 May 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/30/AR2008043003415.html>.
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51. Patrick Winn, "Female Airmen Deadly in Iraq, Afghanistan," *Air Force Times*, 13 January 2008, http://www.airforcetimes.com/news/2007/12/airforce_deadly_women_071229w/.
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53. Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 16.
54. Despite objections from senior Army leadership and female service members, the legislation forced the Army to renew its commitment to ban women from ground-combat roles, as in the infantry and field artillery.
55. Center for Military Readiness, "The Hunter/McHugh Amendment to H.R. 1815: Codification of DoD Regulations Re: Women in Land Combat," 23 May 2005, 3, <http://cmrlink.org/CMRNotes/Hunter-McHugh%20FAQ's%20052305.pdf>.
56. Center for Military Readiness, "Women in Combat: Frequently Asked Questions," 22 November 2004, <http://www.cmrlink.org/WomenInCombat.asp?DocID=237>.
57. Brian Mitchell, *Weak Link: The Feminization of the American Military* (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 1989), 86.
58. Helena Carreiras, *Gender and the Military: Women in the Armed Forces of Western Democracies*, Cass Military Studies (London: Routledge, 2006), 89.
59. Lt Kelly Flinn, the first female B-52 pilot, created controversy by having an affair with an enlisted woman's husband. For more information, see "Times Topics: Kelly J. Flinn," *New York Times*, http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/f/kelly_j_flinn/index.html. In 1996 Aberdeen Proving Ground had a series of incidents involving sexual harassment, assault, and rape, which led to the convictions of several Army officers and noncommissioned officers.
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81. Tyson, "Woman Gains Silver Star."
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86. Dan De Luce, "Wars Force US Military to Review Ban on Women in Combat," Agence France-Presse, 27 February 2010, http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gCawP28SAr_a-XX1k8Bpk8YpsIUQ.
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Legitimizing Change among Muslim Women in Malaysia and Egypt

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Some people consider Islam oppressive, particularly to women. Yet, Islam is a structure of many structures and contains the capacity for creativity and change. This article examines some ways in which the structures that constitute Islam serve as the vehicle for legitimization of some Muslim women's actions and the medium for more equal treatment.

Historically, men have interpreted Islamic texts (Qur'an, Sunnah, Hadith) to the detriment of women.¹ Evidence exists in those texts that women should be treated more fairly than they are in some Muslim countries today. Islamic educators are pinpointing where the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Hadith provide room for reinterpretation. The knowledge that some women gain from reinterpretation empowers them as they publish that knowledge or take it home and engage their families. This knowledge—this reinterpretation—is a “human resource,” in the words of William Sewell Jr., that women in Malaysia and Egypt can use in different ways to improve their lives.²

Islamic education has led to making choices about and questioning long-established principles of action. It has led to female empowerment, calling for more equality in public and private realms. The forms of that empowerment range from public outcry to private mission. Empowerment for some Muslim women in Malaysia and Egypt looks like the right to choose how to interpret a passage of the Qur'an that, thus far, has been interpreted for her. It looks like the right to earn new respect from her husband and her community for her devotion to Islam and her new understanding of the choices embedded in interpretations of it. Empowerment for a Muslim woman looks like a scholarly female teacher who offers her

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students thoughtful, objective options and choices to make on their own. It looks like a woman who uses knowledge of Islam to question her designated roles in society.

This article defines Islam as a set of norms, principles, and identity that Muslims hold sacred and important. It defines empowerment as a bottom-up process with which women analyze, develop, and voice their needs and interests.³ Whether intended or not, empowerment should lead to more equal redefinition of social or political space relative to men.

Structures are principles of action that reflect a power dynamic. They articulate to, reflect, and overlap with each other; sometimes compete with each other; and sometimes reinforce each other. The nature of structures is intertwined with action. Structures exist only insofar as they are acted upon—and because they depend so much on action, they remain in states of perpetual reformulation. Actions can create, reinforce, and transform structures. A child who asks a parent for permission to act reinforces a hierarchy of kinship relationships. A Christian who attends church on Sunday reinforces the relationship between a priest and his patron, between society and religion.

Inherent within each social relationship is the capacity for change. Just as structures shape actions, so may people change their actions and transform structure. The church patron may start reading the Bible on her own, interpret it differently from her priest, publish articles about her new interpretation, and influence the way her community engages with its branch of Christianity.

This article focuses on understanding how the interplay between structure and agency enables creativity that can cause change. The degree to which change occurs is not the subject of this study; rather, it examines how agents creatively use structures and resources to reinterpret notions of legitimacy. This reinterpretation lies at the root of their pursuit of change. A pressing analytical challenge in gender studies today involves the attempt to theorize “both change and continuity, invention and repetition, and understanding the forms they take.”⁴

The study considers the cases of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; and Cairo, Egypt. In Malaysia the members of Sisters in Islam (SIS) are legitimizing more equal treatment for Muslim women by adhering to an Islamic frame-

work but debating interpretations within it. In Egypt some Muslim women are doing the same—but to a lesser degree and by way of a different process.

First, the article places SIS and the Egyptian subjects in the context of the larger debate about the kind of feminism in which such women engage. Second, it explicates Sewell's argument concerning the interrelated natures of structure and agency—the foundation for this analysis—thus preparing the reader to engage the evidence within the context of structure and agency as Sewell sees it.⁵ After explaining the research process and then delving into the evidence, the article concludes, having illustrated how some Muslim women creatively manipulate structures and legitimize their efforts to obtain more equal treatment for themselves and others. It shows that the structures which constitute Islam are inherently malleable and that agency can come from the most seemingly rigid structures.

Feminism as a Frame

It feels natural to see feminism where women seek equal treatment. In the case of members of Malaysia's SIS, they pursue a kind of Muslim feminism in terms of gender equality and do not mind being categorized as feminists. However, in Egypt the very word *feminism* evokes ire and indignation.

Egypt's long history of secular feminist discourse was discredited as elitist and Western during the Islamic revival of the 1970s and 1990s. Ever since, feminism has become a foil for many Egyptian Muslim women activists. "Scholars of the Middle East [e.g., Soroya Duval, Yvonne Haddad, Jane Smith, and Sherifa Zuhur] have agreed that one of the most pronounced characteristics of Islamic women's groups is their reaffirmation of nationalist and anti-Western views."⁶ Instead, Egyptian Muslim women have embraced an Islamic framework to talk about equal rights. Haddad and Smith describe female Islamic scholars as those who "participate actively in promoting the rights and opportunities that they believe Islam truly accords them . . . [from] a position that speaks from within their own culture, consciously avoiding articulation that represents foreign ideologies or perspectives that seem to reflect Western feminism."⁷

Azza Karam famously developed a typology of Islam-oriented feminism, applying it to Muslim women activists. She divides the field into three types: Islamic/Muslim, Islamist, and secular, concluding that Islamic/

Muslim feminists constitute the most meaningful kind of female Muslim activist today in Egypt.⁸ Among Muslim feminist activists who use a Quranic framework to create more space for themselves are those who have reinterpreted the Qur'an in meaningful ways and those who have dared to translate it again in its entirety.⁹ Islamic/Muslim feminists adopt a worldview in which Islam can be contextualized and reinterpreted for the purpose of promoting equal treatment between men and women under the law and of allowing freedom of choice to play an important part in the expression of faith. SIS includes Islamic/Muslim feminists.

Islamist feminists, on the other hand, are guided by a desire to help fashion a "proper Islamic society and state."¹⁰ Muslim feminists generally do not believe in fashioning an Islamic state; they largely support secular government. The key characteristics of Islamist feminists are twofold. First, even though they work openly and avidly for women's rights, they refuse the title "feminist." They deem feminism an enemy of women's rights as they see them through the lens of the Qur'an. Second, they refuse such a title because it emphasizes the rights of women for the purpose of gaining freedom not appropriate to their place within a "proper" Islamic society. They believe in balance, not equality, between men and women. This balance derives from the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet (s.a.w.). The Egyptian Muslim women featured in this article fall under this category. However, referring to such women as feminists is both antithetical to their purpose and inaccurate. They do not believe in equality between men and women as a secular feminist might envision it. Rather, they believe that a balance must be struck between men and women in which everyone assumes his or her rightful and complementary roles. They refer to this balance as "equality." Hence, they frame the struggle for equality differently—such that women do not work in opposition to men but in conjunction with them. They refuse to acknowledge existence of a "women's" problem. Rather, issues that Muslim women face are societal injustices. In an interview for a newspaper, Qazim, an Egyptian, explained that equality between the sexes is the basis of Islam in spite of differences: "Difference does not mean inequality. . . . One should not desire the attributes of the other. For Allah is just. And ultimately there is balance."¹¹ Further, as Qazim explained, "Allah gave certain different blessings to men and women, but these are partial differences that do not mean inequalities—there is a unity of kind."¹² This study refers

to such women—antifeminists who believe in balance between men and women accorded by the Qur'an rather than gender equality—as *hurriyat al-mar'a* (women of freedom). Moreover, instead of simply observing ways in which Muslim-oriented activists pursue gender equality, it explores the process by which agency and structure interact and produce change by looking to Sewell's theoretical work.

Noting the Limitations of “Habitus” and Explaining Change

Sewell reformulates Anthony Giddens's notion of the dual nature of structure and Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus in order to create a place for human agency within a theory of structure. Previously, structure and its outcomes were conceived of as fixed and rigid, but Giddens conceives of structure as not only constraining action but also enabling it.¹³ In terms of their duality, “structures shape people's practices, but it is also people's practices that constitute (and reproduce) structures.”¹⁴ That actors are “knowledgeable” about social and cultural limitations, for example, and are “enabled” means that people “are capable of putting their structurally formed capacities to work in creative or innovative ways.”¹⁵ Further, because structures both reinforce themselves and enable actors, one should consider them processes rather than static states of being.¹⁶

Structures are principles that pattern the practices of people's lives and that reflect the importance of power.¹⁷ As these principles are put into practice, they produce and reproduce social life.¹⁸ They are also generalizable in that one can apply them to new contexts and new situations.¹⁹

One can see a certain action, experience, or publication by an actor or group of actors through the lens of two or more axioms at once, depending upon the aspect of the action, experience, or publication on which one wants to focus—because Sewell's axioms are not independent of each other in reality. The people who enact them are parts of competing structures within which they transpose schemas (rules) and may produce unpredictable (as well as predictable) consequences with any action. Some engage in reinterpretation, as actors read the Qur'an through their own experiences and education. Further, those people constantly find themselves subject to an intersection of structures from within and without Islam in which they act, react, produce ideas, and reinterpret ideas.

Structures consist of human and nonhuman resources, both of which enhance or maintain power: “Human resources are physical strength, dexterity, knowledge, and emotional commitments,” [whereas] “nonhuman resources are objects, animate or inanimate, naturally occurring or manufactured.”²⁰ Further, these resources are unequally distributed, but every member of a society controls some measure of human and nonhuman resources: “Part of what it means to conceive of human beings as *agents* is to conceive of them as *empowered* by access to resources of one kind or another” (emphasis in original).²¹

Sewell devises five axioms to explain how a society comprised of many varying structures and resources that reinforce themselves and each other also generates transformations.²² He contends that, first, practices are guided by many distinct structures. For example, the actions of people at any given time may be guided by hierarchies of power within the family, class, race, socioeconomic background, religion, and so on. Sometimes those structures are competing, sometimes not. Second, within this multiplicity of structures, the learned rules, which guide action, are generalizable to a wide range of situations. For example, one can extrapolate the hierarchy of kinship relations to embody state-mass relations. Third, the applicability of any learned rule to a new setting renders the accumulation of resources unpredictable. Some people might interpret any given principle differently than expected as well as apply that principle differently. Consequently, it is difficult to know just how many variations on power accumulation can be derived from resource accumulation and vice versa. For example, or as Sewell explains, “a joke told to a new audience, . . . a cavalry attack made on a new terrain. . . —the effect of these actions on the resources of the actors is never quite certain.”²³

Fourth, one can derive a multiplicity of meanings from any symbol or language or text—and this applies to resources as well. Resources differently interpreted may empower unforeseen actors and teach different rules of action. For example, a human resource like emotional commitment to Islam may be interpreted as a reason to pursue justice for women. As a result, an interpretation of Islam legitimizes the pursuit of such justice while reinforcing that person’s version of the structure of Islam, guided by kinship ties, class, and so on. That legitimization empowers the actor to pursue change, even as she reinforces the structures that guide her action. This

ability to “transpose and extend schemas to new contexts” is inherent in agency.²⁴ Fifth, and finally, Sewell contends that structures overlap and intersect.²⁵ An elaboration of each axiom will assist the reader in understanding the complexity of the relationship between agency and structure.

Axiom One: The Multiplicity of Structures

Though structures can be homologous, “it is never true that all of them are homologous” as Bourdieu proposes.²⁶ First, structures differ between institutional spheres “so that kinship structures will have different logics and dynamics than those possessed by religious structures, productive structures, aesthetic structures, educational structures, and so on.”²⁷ Second, important differences exist within spheres: “For example, the structures that shape and constrain religion in Christian societies include authoritarian, prophetic, ritual, and theoretical modes. These may sometimes operate in harmony, but they can also lead to sharply conflicting claims and empowerments.”²⁸

Axiom Two: The Transposability of Schemas

The key to Sewell’s understanding of the transposability of schemas is that an actor can apply a schema in *new* contexts, not just in “similarly shaped problems.” According to Bourdieu, “To say that schemas are transposable, in other words, is to say that they can be applied to a wide and not fully predictable range of cases outside the context in which they are initially learned.”²⁹ Sewell notes that “the real test of knowing a rule is to be able to apply it successfully in *unfamiliar* cases. Knowledge of a rule or a schema by definition means the ability to transpose or extend it—that is, to apply it creatively” (emphasis in original).³⁰

Axiom Three: The Unpredictability of Resource Accumulation

The unpredictability of resource accumulation refers to the idea that power accumulation due to activities guided by social structures is not entirely predictable.³¹ Further, “if the reproduction of schemas depends on their continuing validation by resources, this implies that schemas will in fact be differentially validated when they are put into action and therefore will potentially be subject to modification.”³² For example, “a brilliantly successful cavalry attack on a new terrain may change the battle plans of subse-

quent campaigns or even theories of military tactics . . . [just as] a succession of crop failures may modify routines of planting or plowing.”³³

Axiom Four: The Polysemy (Multiplicity of Meanings) of Resources

Because one can interpret resources in various ways, they can “[empower] different actors and [teach] different schemas.”³⁴ That is, any resource may convey more meanings than any one person can generally understand.

Axiom Five: The Intersection of Structures

One can interpret resources in various ways because “structures or structural complexes . . . overlap.”³⁵ Different actors embedded in different structural complexes can claim an array of resources, just as a single actor embedded in different structural complexes can claim those same resources.³⁶ Schemas, however, “can be borrowed or appropriated from one structural complex and applied to another.”³⁷ For example, one could borrow the rules particular to Christianity and apply them to government. Sewell’s axioms, especially his third and fourth, offer a window into the interplay between agency and structure observed among the Muslim women who are the focus of this study.

Methodology

Here, an interpretive method identifies cases in which Muslim women utilize Islamic textual knowledge to legitimize efforts to obtain more equal treatment. The study uses biographies, observations, and interviews to identify the strongest incidents of this use of textual knowledge to improve the quality of life for women. Examples occur in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait, Somalia, Malaysia, and elsewhere. In the 1990s and 2000s, sociologists, anthropologists, and geographers observed and interviewed such women. The present study addresses cases in Malaysia and Egypt.

Methods of empowerment used by SIS in Malaysia offer an illustrative comparison to the kinds of empowerment found in Egypt. Although many women’s organizations exist in Malaysia, SIS remains one of the most well known and respected both inside and outside the country. Additionally, its agenda is decidedly framed within the context of Islamic texts. Further, SIS is prolific, publishing scholarly and newspaper articles, books, and book-

lets—many in English. All the resources available to this study illustrate SIS's method of reinterpreting Islamic texts for the purpose of creating more equality for Muslim women in Malaysia.

Egypt, the second case study, provides interesting contrasts in reinterpretation between some Muslim women activists in Egypt (*hurriyat al-mar'a*) and the members of SIS. Moreover, an abundance of literature is available in English. The Egyptian portion of this research draws from interviews administered by Saba Mahmood, Elizabeth Fernea, Azza Karam, and Beth Baron.³⁸ Mahmood and Sherine Hafez seek to explain some aspect of the “piety movement.” Karam establishes a typology of Islam's feminists. Baron and Fernea's approaches largely focus on feminist histories. These sociologists, anthropologists, and historians identify patterns by applying in-depth anthropological techniques that address the daily lives of devout Muslim women, usually in Cairo. Their attention to detail, reflections, and analytic discourse provide an intimate understanding of these women within certain contexts. This study limits itself to interviews or observations by the above authors because they represent the best in-depth field research. Those who conducted interviews did so during the 1990s, among different women in roughly the same class of Cairene women.

The incidences in which some Muslim women pursue more equality by way of an Islamic framework are not isolated and unusual. That is, even though examples of their using Islamic texts to legitimize actions are not usually the object of scholarly research, they are not difficult to locate within the types of resources under scrutiny here. This analysis is certainly not the first to notice how women are embracing the Qur'an. Zahra Kamalkhani notes how an “increasing number of women [are] entering into Islamic orthodoxy and intellectualism.”³⁹ Though Kamalkhani refers to Iranian women, her statement reflects a broader movement combining Quranic knowledge and a desire to obtain more equality for Muslim women. Neither is this study the first to comment on how devout Muslim women are embracing the Qur'an, earning social respect and legitimacy, and then using that legitimacy to get what they want. Mahmood provides much insight in this regard.⁴⁰

The subjects interviewed and observed in the research mentioned above share certain characteristics: they are devout, Muslim, and female. They have found opportunities either to learn from or teach about Islamic

texts. This process has legitimized their efforts to seek more equal treatment for themselves and/or others. Social legitimacy empowers their efforts. Yet, few researchers attempt to identify and then explain ways in which some Muslim women learn how to use Islamic education to give their activities legitimacy. Further, no researchers have explored the idea that the many structures which constitute Sunni Islam enable some Muslim women to legitimize their reinterpretations of social space.

Some Muslim women consciously use Islamic textual knowledge to push the limits of acceptable social and political behavior. Others *unconsciously* push those limits. This study does not delineate between the two—to do so would require original field research involving Muslim women, which is lacking here. However, many competent scholars have conducted field work in various locations on devout Muslim women who are gaining access to Islamic education. This study co-opts their works for its purposes.

Cases: Context of Comparison

This analysis uses two case studies—Malaysia and Egypt—to meaningfully compare the ways in which Muslim women use Islamic textual knowledge to empower themselves.⁴¹ Both countries, former British colonies, house a majority Sunni Muslim population. Moreover, both have governments that desire to appear modern so as to appeal to foreign investment and thereby further their economic development, and both governments struggle to give secular court rulings legitimacy over Sharia (Islamic law) rulings.

Malaysia is just over 50 percent Muslim whereas Egypt is over 90 percent.⁴² Malaysia's population is divided amongst three major ethnicities and religions: Malay (Islam), Indian (Hindu), and Chinese (Buddhist). Malays, deemed Muslim upon birth, adhere to a set of Sharia laws that tend to override any secular court rulings. Indians and Chinese may choose which court they wish to utilize. Malays also receive lawful privileges that Indian and Chinese citizens do not. For example, "the constitution states that the Prime Minister and the chief ministers of the individual states [have] to be Malay."⁴³

Malaysia

SIS is one of three organizations that constitute the core of what is now referred to as “the new women’s movement” in contemporary Malaysia.⁴⁴ It consists of a group of 10 highly educated women active in other women’s organizations during the 1980s when the state and women’s organizations in Malaysia debated the Domestic Violence Act, which sought to be multiethnic by covering all women in the country. This caught the attention of a series of Muslim groups that protested the act on two fronts, both related to the Qur’an. First, the Islamic groups argued that “men have a right to beat their wives” and second, that “domestic violence was a family matter” and thus should be treated with Sharia law under state jurisdiction “rather than be treated as a criminal matter under federal jurisdiction.”⁴⁵

SIS’s strategy involves (1) pointing to the many ways in which male interpretation of the Qur’an and the life of the Prophet Mohammad (s.a.w.) (Hadiths) and the Sunnah oppress women, (2) deconstructing that interpretation, and (3) countering it with a reinterpretation of certain verses that is more historically grounded and representative of the overall spirit of the Qur’an.⁴⁶ SIS seeks to provide women with equal rights within an Islamic framework.

In order to disseminate the processes of deconstruction and reconstruction of certain Islamic tenets to the public, SIS hosts several workshops, study sessions, conferences, and law clinics each year (many of them free), attended by hundreds of Malay Muslims. Additionally, members of the organization are prolific, publishing thematic, easy-to-read short works in English and Bahasa Malaysia on subjects such as family law, polygamy, women’s reproductive rights, and guardianship law, which they distribute at events. In more concrete terms, SIS makes a difference in people’s lives by fighting for or against certain laws.

In contrast to the exegetical method of isolating verses to interpret in order to suit a certain male-centric agenda, SIS has carefully analyzed and documented its reinterpretation of the Qur’an in order “to extract the spirit of the message” as the group pursues a more female-friendly agenda.⁴⁷ “For the Sisters, the only authentic source is the text of the Qur’an, while the authority of the Hadith is of uncertain, and sometimes contradictory status, due to the historical circumstance in which it was constructed.”⁴⁸

Through training, education, and publications, the members of SIS show how “*ijtihad* [Quranic interpretation] must be exercised in concert and through democratic engagement with the *ummah* [Islamic community]” if Islam is to be relevant to Malayan lives today.⁴⁹ These Muslim women activists have developed a particular type of agency—one in which they “deconstruct discriminatory discourses and practices that are legitimized by certain interpretations of religious texts.”⁵⁰ Essentially, they emphasize the role of human agency in interpretation, which creates room for reinterpretation.

The director of SIS, Zainah Anwar, comments that the problems in Malaysia related to women’s rights are largely due to the dominance of male interpretations of the Qur’an.⁵¹ She explains that people read the Qur’an and as an understanding of that reading forms into language, “the process of human agency, of human understanding and human intervention has come in and interacted with the revealed word.”⁵² That is, when rules are codified and fatwas delivered, much room still exists for reinterpretation because they are based on human understanding of God’s word and reflect human tendencies and norms of a certain time. As time changes, those manifestations of human interpretation must also change.⁵³ Thus, agency and (re)interpretation are inevitable. As norms, tendencies, and times change, so must interpretation.

Egypt

The Egyptian government has banned religiously oriented organizations, silenced secular feminist discourse, and co-opted official Muslim-oriented feminism. By doing so, the secular state has effectively quieted the official line but actually participated in promoting the Islamist agenda. John Esposito describes Muslims today as “a newly emerging alternative elite, modern educated, but more formally Islamically oriented than their mothers and grandmothers.”⁵⁴ Since the 1970s and its global resurgence of Islam, Muslim women in Egypt are likely aware that their embrace of Islam is perhaps more pronounced than that of their mothers and grandparents. Azza Karam notes that “the state has silenced the discourse of secular feminism, whilst furthering its own ‘Muslim’ discourse” by establishing state-supported Islamic feminism and dismantling secular feminist groups.⁵⁵ The government-supported women’s nongovernmental organiza-

tions (NGO) do not dare speak in opposition to regime rhetoric or activities, concentrating entirely on charitable work for Muslim women.⁵⁶ Women activists in Egypt participate in NGO women's associations, female branches of political parties, state-sponsored women's organizations, and groups formed around issues involving women.⁵⁷ However, no unified Muslim women's union exists that is not a branch of the government. The lack of an organization comparable to SIS has called for creativity in order to make a meaningful comparison between Egypt and Malaysia. Consequently, this study sought evidence of Muslim women acting on Islamic education for the purpose of obtaining better treatment, outside an organizational setting in Egypt.

Evoking Change: Malaysia

This section demonstrates how SIS has redefined boundaries within Islam by questioning the authenticity of some Hadiths and by reinterpreting Quranic passages. It also discusses how SIS educates the public about the proper treatment of women, according to SIS's interpretation of Islam, in question-and-answer form. Within the following evidence, Sewell's theory about the relationship between structure and agency helps to explain how change comes from within an Islamic framework.

Hadith Authenticity in Question

SIS questions the authenticity of some Hadiths in order to dispute their interpretation.⁵⁸ A history of questioning the authenticity of Hadiths within Islam creates a structural opening within which to further debate their validity, keeping the rights of women in mind. In so doing, SIS acts on the premise that a reinterpretation of Hadiths will redefine the ways in which women see their roles in society. That is, SIS attempts to redefine those roles by using reason to tackle interpretations of Hadiths. This process reflects the change that Sewell talks about. Reinterpretation entails redefining meanings while reinforcing the many structures that constitute Sunni Islam for SIS members (axioms one and four). Certain Hadiths are interpreted differently by SIS, resulting in a legitimized, woman-centered perspective of Islamic texts and evoking Sewell's fourth axiom of how differently interpreted resources may empower unforeseen actors and teach

different rules of action. SIS's intentions to legitimately raise the status of women from within Islamic texts represents an exercise in such reinterpretation—the teaching of different rules of action in particular. The organization has laid the foundation on which to criticize the degradation of women in some Hadiths, describing the prevalence of forgery and explaining how it occurred, the details of which are not essential to this study. SIS solidifies its right to question Hadiths by pointing to a long tradition of men who have done the same:

All the Islamic authorities agree that an enormous amount of forgery was committed in the Hadith literature. . . . The very existence of a copious literature on *marḍu'at* (forged traditions) remind [*sic*] us of this reality. . . . Moved by the desire to safeguard the Sunnah of the Prophet (s.a.w.) against falsification and error, the ulama have undertaken painstaking efforts to verify the authenticity of Hadith, and a separate discipline, called *usul al-hadith*, was developed. . . . Had there been an accurate documentation of Hadith, as there was of the Qur'an, there would have been little reason for the development of the discipline of *usul al-hadith*.⁵⁹

SIS explains how, despite the weakness of antiwoman Hadiths, they tend to prevail. The group then provides an example of conflicting Hadiths, the antiwoman version prevailing:

When there are conflicting Hadiths on a certain issue, it is usually the anti-women Hadith that is popularized. For instance, in Sunan Abu Dawud, it is reported that the Prophet (s.a.w.) appointed Umm Waraqah to be the imam to lead the prayers of her household, while the muezzin (the person who announced the call to prayers) was an elderly man. This Hadith is said to have a stronger *isnad* (chain of transmission) than another contradictory Hadith, reported in Sunan Ibn Majah, that a woman cannot be imam when there are men in the congregation. . . . However, it is the Hadith in Sunan Ibn Majah that is well-known to Muslims today.⁶⁰

Here SIS shows that more than one Hadith exists on the issue of whether women should be allowed to lead men in prayer. At least one Hadith, more authentic than the more popular Hadith, does allow a woman to do so in certain circumstances. However, the more well-known Hadith, which most individuals abide by, bans women from leading prayer when men are in the congregation—thus, it is the one that prevails. SIS then quotes a Hadith that conflicts with the Qur'an:

Another popular Hadith is the one reported by Abu Hurayrah and documented in Sahih Bukhari vol. 7, Hadith no. 114 that says: "From Abu Hurayrah: the Prophet (s.a.w.) said, 'Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should not hurt (trouble) his neighbor. And I

advise you to take care of women, for they are created from a rib and the most crooked portion of the rib is its upper part.”

This claim is not supported by the Qur’an for God says: “O Mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful for your duty toward Allah in Whom you claim (your rights) of one another, and toward the wombs (that bore you). Lo! Allah hath been a Watcher over you” [Surah an-Nisa’, 4:1].⁶¹

SIS suggests that perhaps the Hadith quoted above comes from Christianity because of the description of the way woman was formed from the rib of a man, as expressed in Genesis 2:21–23.⁶²

The following example further elucidates the process by which SIS negotiates reinterpretation of Islamic texts. Again, the organization begins with a question—in this case, one about the extent to which Islam enables the degradation of women:

[Part 2, Question 1:] I heard that if the Prophet (s.a.w.) could have his way, he would have asked wives to prostrate to their husbands and that if there is an ulcer excreting pus from a man’s feet to the top of his head, and his wife were to lick them, she would still not be able to fulfill his rights as a husband. Is it possible that Islam degrades women to this level?⁶³

In response, SIS first quotes the Hadith that evoked the above situation:

It is believed that these claims are derived from Hadiths such as: “No human may prostrate to another, and if it were permissible for a human to prostrate to another I would have ordered a wife to prostrate to her husband because of the enormity of his rights over her. By God, if there is an ulcer excreting pus from his feet to the top of his head and she licked it from him, she would not fulfill his rights.”

Or: “It is not lawful for anyone to prostrate to anyone. But if I would have ordered any person to prostrate to another, I would have commanded wives to prostrate to their husbands because of the enormity of the rights of husbands to their wives.”⁶⁴

SIS then references male scholars of Hadiths who had labeled the authenticity of these Hadiths “very weak” to “fairly good but strange.” No scholars cited by SIS consider the above Hadiths “sound” (i.e., authentic).

A multiplicity of structures is evident in the many principles that people enact regarding what it means to them to be Islamic. Just as “Christian societies include authoritarian, prophetic, ritual, and theoretical modes,” so do Islamic societies contain a multitude of competing structures.⁶⁵ Within Islam itself, SIS has pointed to the four competing schools of thought that influence interpretations of Islamic texts.⁶⁶ Instead of discred-

iting them, the organization identifies the ones that most respect women's rights; it does so by emphasizing the existence of the not-so-popular but more authentic interpretations of Islamic texts that support women's rights (axiom four—empowerment of unforeseen actors).

Therefore, although some men have used the tools of reinterpretation to oppress Muslim women, SIS uses the very same ones to gain ground for them (axiom four). The organization reinforces the sacred nature of Quranic interpretation and in so doing legitimizes its questioning of that interpretation. These efforts render a seemingly conflicting agenda compatible while enabling SIS to teach different rules of action (axiom four). That SIS has created space for female interpretations of Islamic texts educates women who might otherwise not question the version of Islam taught to them at the local mosque (axiom four). That questioning points to creativity and to agency. The process of questioning the authenticity of Hadiths reflects part of Sewell's fourth axiom—that meanings can be interpreted in different ways. Granted, some men hold up antiwoman Hadiths as the most authentic, but SIS refers to Islamic texts to justify the inauthentic nature of those same excerpts. In fact, almost all of the content of Islamic texts is subject to interpretation. This susceptibility to interpretation also serves as Islam's strength, keeping it adaptable.

Quranic Reinterpretation

SIS's ideas about how women should be treated intersect with how male interpretations of Islam reflect the treatment of women (axiom five). The group uses the Qur'an as well as the Sunnah and Hadiths to condemn polygamy when certain Quranic passages in particular have been interpreted as condoning polygamy (axiom four). SIS engages a system of understanding—the prevalent male-centered interpretation of Islamic texts on the subject of polygamy—and questions it, using agreed-upon tools (disputing the authenticity of a Hadith or Sunnah and reinterpreting the Qur'an) to oppose it. All the while, SIS looks to texts within Islam to make legitimate its conclusions about the role of polygamy in Islam.

Since the nineteenth century, several leading Islamic scholars including Sheikh Muhammad Abduh, the Grand Mufti of Egypt until his death in 1905, have pointed out that polygamy was reluctantly tolerated by Islam due to the pre-existing conditions at the time of revelation. . . . The guiding principles in the Qur'an against polygamy can be demonstrated by firstly, limiting the maximum number of wives to four, then by enjoining on the fair and just

treatment of multiple wives, and finally by declaring that fair and just treatment is impossible.⁶⁷

Here SIS takes the reader through the logic of this argument: the Qur'an reluctantly allowed polygamy, then limited the number of wives to four, insisted on equal treatment among them, and finally declared that equal treatment among multiple wives is impossible. Thus, polygamy should not be allowed, according to the Qur'an. This analysis reflects Sewell's fourth axiom, dealing with the varying interpretations of resources such as knowledge, which empower unforeseen actors and/or teach different rules of actions. Despite the implication of empowering unforeseen actors, the examples offered here illustrate the teaching of different rules of actions by means of different interpretations.

SIS further challenges the legitimacy of polygamy by explaining that the notion of its preventing certain social ills is questionable:

An argument that is sometimes put forward in support of polygamy is that it is intended to reduce social ills such as illicit affairs, prostitution and the birth of illegitimate children. However, the legality of polygamy has not actually put an end to these social ills among the Muslim community. In some cases, it might even have contributed to the problem of social ills among young people who have been brought up in unhappy and neglected polygamous households (pp. i-ii).

Without spending much time on this point, the authors refer to surahs within the Quran:⁶⁸

It is disheartening that many of those who advocate polygamy seem to ignore Qur'anic injunctions on polygamy in Surah An Nisa 4:3: "if you fear you cannot deal justly (with your wives), marry only one (wife)." The Qur'an is also the only holy scripture that contains the phrase "marry only one." A further injunction is to be found in Surah An Nisa 4:129 which goes on to add that "You are never able to be fair and just as between women, even if it is your ardent desire." If the rights of Muslim women are upheld and advanced as contained in the spirit of the Qur'an, then the justice that it embodies will never be ignored (p. ii).

SIS immediately cites a second and then a third surah:

"If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two, or three or four; But if you fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one. . . . That will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice." Surah Al-Nisa 4:3. . . .

"You are never able to be fair and just as between women, even if it is your ardent desire." Surah An Nisa 4:129 (p. 2).

SIS authors quote from an “authentic” Hadith that relates a story about how the Prophet (s.a.w.) felt about polygamy:

Many forget the authentic hadith (as reported in Sunan Ibn Majah) which reported that the Prophet (s.a.w.), when asked if he would permit Saidina Ali to marry another woman, said that he would not, “unless and until Ali Ibn Abi Talib divorces my daughter, for surely she is part of me and what troubles and agitates her, troubles and agitates me too; and what harm befalls her befalls me too” (p. 5).

SIS reinterprets excerpts from the Qur’an and Hadith in order to justify an antipolygamy stance, taking the tools ordinarily reserved for supporting polygamy within Islam and using them to negate polygamy (axiom four). The organization questions the Quranic basis for polygamy by highlighting passages in Islamic texts not commonly referred to, thus creatively pursuing a new dimension for Islam—one that opposes polygamy. Even more clearly, during this process, SIS attempts to legitimately manipulate long-supported guidelines within Islam about how women are treated in a certain context. Thus, the actions of SIS are guided by Muslim feminism as well as by its devotion to Islam, reflecting Sewell’s first axiom. SIS has interpreted the principles of Islam differently than expected, reflecting axiom three. Meanwhile the group also teaches new rules of action with regard to how people conceive of polygamy because it uses knowledge (a resource) of Islamic texts and interprets those texts differently (axiom four). By these means, SIS is attempting to transform Islam creatively and organically, from within itself.

Public Education: Changing Minds

Every time SIS approaches a question with the intention of reinterpretation and logically answers that question using Islamic sources, the organization cannot know what kind of response it will instigate. This points to axiom three, which contends that it is difficult to know what types of empowerment might come out of applying learned rules to a new setting (or new rules to a familiar setting). SIS’s arguments and actions lead others, such as those who frequent its meetings and workshops, to empowerment by informing them of their rights under the law. Through its many efforts to educate the public about the ways in which Islam can empower women, SIS launches a sort of intellectual cavalry attack on Malaysian Muslims, arming them with new interpretations of Islamic texts.

Zainah Anwar, executive director and a founding member of SIS, remarks that

Sisters in Islam began as a research and advocacy group with a focus on interventions in the law- and policy-making process. We write memoranda to the government on law and policy reform, as well as open letters in the press on current issues. Our aim is to generate informed public debate on these issues and to build a constituency that will support a more enlightened interpretation of Islam on specific matters in contention.⁶⁹

SIS's influence lies largely in its determination to make issues public. It believes that the "Qur'an supports the universal values of equality, justice and a life of dignity for women" and that the people have a right to debate these issues in the public domain.⁷⁰ In this way, interpretation no longer lies in the hands of male Islamic scholars alone but also in the hands of people who are encouraged to engage Islamic texts themselves. SIS helps the public do this by breaking down issues and explaining why and where certain beliefs about the treatment of women in particular come from and where room for reinterpretation resides (see the example above). Quranic exegesis is not the only way in which SIS educates, though. Anwar also explains the role that public education plays in SIS's agenda:

Another important strategy is public education to raise awareness and build an essential core group of activists and opinion-makers. We organize a monthly study session on topical issues in Islam, conduct a monthly training workshop on women's rights in Islam, offer an annual public lecture series by prominent progressive Islamic scholars, and mount a biennial regional workshop on key aspects of Islam and women's rights.⁷¹

The training workshops include classes such as Gender and Sharia (beginning) and Gender, Human Rights, and Sharia (advanced), which have been taught since 2000. Furthermore, by launching Telenisa in 2003, SIS began offering free legal advice on Sharia laws and other issues that Muslim women face. Every year, through Telenisa alone, SIS deals with more than 600 cases ranging from inheritance to violence against women.⁷²

This effort has prompted predictable responses. Some people try to discredit SIS members' qualifications for interpreting Islamic texts because they have not been formally educated in religious schools. Others "equate our questioning and challenging of their obscurantist views and interpretations of the Qur'an with questioning the word of God."⁷³ Questioning the word of God is considered anti-Islamic. SIS members are told to respect ancient interpretations of Islamic texts as reliable and to ignore a long tradition of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning).⁷⁴ Also, some individuals contend

that offering differing interpretations of Islamic texts causes confusion among the Muslim public, which leads to disunity. Only *ulama*, Muslim scholars, have the right to interpret. In spite of this backlash, SIS continues to make issues public as often as possible and to appeal to the government to create more equality for women.

Sometimes the results of SIS's efforts are not so predictable. For example, in January 2006, it successfully repealed amendments to Malaysia's family law that would have made it easier for men to pursue polygamy and divorce.⁷⁵ By making issues public and by simultaneously educating the public, SIS uses its actions and publications to create both predictable and unpredictable consequences, some of which empower Muslim women, thus allowing for unpredictable resource accumulation (axiom three). It is difficult to know just how Malaysians interpret what they learn during workshops and how they implement their interpretations at home, if they choose to implement them at all. SIS's Islamic education may spur unpredictable resource accumulation.

The Deconstruction of Beatings

Women's treatment (such as beatings) within their family hierarchies influences SIS's strategies for reinterpretation of Islamic texts (axiom one). For example, SIS approaches problems such as domestic violence by publishing comments or questions that it receives and following up with answers. Though simply organized, this question-and-answer method deals with complex issues and educates average Muslim women, creating opportunities for them to legitimately challenge the behavior of their husbands with the backing of Islamic texts.

Here, SIS responds to a concern about whether Islam allows wife beating:

6. My husband beats me, and he tells me in Islam I cannot tell anyone what happens between a husband and his wife. Besides, he says a husband can "discipline" his wife if she disobeys his wishes because she has committed *nusyuz*.

Actually, it is very clear from many authentic Traditions that the Prophet (s.a.w.) strongly disapproved of the idea of beating one's wife. For instance, on more than one occasion, it is reported that he said:

"Could anyone of you beat his wife as if she is a slave, and then lie with her in the evening?"
(Bukhari and Muslim).

“Never beat God’s handmaidens.” (Abu Dawud, Ibn Majah Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Ibn Hibban and Hakim, on the authority of Iyas ibn ‘Abd Allah; Ibn Hibban, on the authority of ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abbas; and Bayhaqi, on the authority of Umm Kalthum).⁷⁶

Having established the premise that the Prophet (s.a.w.) disapproves of wife beating, SIS explains how the misunderstanding arose:

The problem of violence or abuse does not come from the Traditions, but from the term “*idribubunna*” (in Surah an-Nias’ 4:34) which is usually translated as “beat them with a single strike.” The root of this word is “daraba.” If one were to consult an Arabic dictionary, one would find one of the longest lists of meanings in the whole Arabic dictionary ascribed to this word! In the Qur’an, depending on the context, “daraba” can mean “to travel,” “to strike,” “to set up,” “to give (examples),” “to take away,” “to ignore,” “to condemn,” “to cover,” or “to explain.” When encountering a word with multiple meanings, it is important to use common sense to identify the proper meaning according to the context and form within which it is being used.

Upon explaining the philological source of the problem, SIS puts the problem in historical context:

In the pre-Islamic period known as the Age of Ignorance (*Jabiliyah*), there were gross practices of physical and emotional abuse of females. Even if the usual translation of “daraba” as “a single strike” is to be accepted, seen within this context, the single strike would be a restriction on the pre-existing practice and not a recommendation. Later, as Muslim society in Madinah developed towards an ideal state, the final verse in the Qur’an on male-female relationship (Surah at Tawbah 9:71) regards women and men as being each other’s protecting friends and guardians (*awliyya*) which emphasizes the cooperation between the two in living together as partners.

Notice how SIS breaks apart each section of comment six, identifying the root of each issue and addressing it in its present context:

As for *nusyuz*, the Qur’anic discussion of *nusyuz* is used for both women (Surah an-Nisa’ 4:34) and men (4:128). Thus, *nusyuz* cannot actually mean a woman’s disobedience to her husband, as is often assumed.

As for not telling anyone about what happens between a husband and a wife, a distinction has to be made as to the context. It is certainly improper for either a wife or a husband to tell others about their spouse’s personal failings by way of gossip and backbiting. However, when actual harm is involved, it is necessary and proper to file a complaint in order to get legal recourse.

A summation of findings follows. Notice how, whenever possible, SIS refers to Imams (religious scholars) to validate its findings:

Neither the Qur'an nor the Traditions justify a husband beating his wife for merely disobeying his personal wishes. In fact, all the early Muslim authorities stress that the "beating"—if resorted to at all—should be only if the wife is guilty of gross immoral conduct, and should not cause pain but be more or less merely symbolic, such as with a toothbrush or a handkerchief, while some great Muslim scholars, e.g., Imam Shafi'i are of the opinion that it is barely permissible, and should be avoided.

Finally, SIS's use of the word *misogyny* reminds the reader of the authors' Muslim feminist leaning:

The fact that authentic and strong Traditions of the Prophet (s.a.w.) expressing his disapproval of the practice of wife-beating are not being popularized is another instance of the attitude of misogyny—undisputed Traditions in favour of women are frequently neglected, while Traditions of dubious authenticity discriminating against women are frequently highlighted.

For SIS, reinterpretation of Islamic texts is a tool of power used to educate and thus empower other women in Malaysia. Again, this clearly denotes Sewell's fourth axiom. SIS interprets Islamic texts differently, thus potentially empowering unforeseen actors (those who might read the booklet containing such interpretations) and teaching different rules of action. The format makes the information accessible. Regular references to male scholars and the Qur'an legitimize SIS's findings. Members of SIS use knowledge to empower themselves and others. Having found an opening for creative reinterpretation, the organization continues to tap it, hoping that such efforts will change the way women and men see their roles in relation to each other within Islam.

Evoking Change: Egypt

This section examines the efforts of four Egyptian women on behalf of the rights of Muslim females. First, Labiba Ahmad, among the first *hurriyat al-mar'a*, extended the role of mother to that of mother of a nation. Second, Abir took the knowledge she accumulated from Quranic studies and manipulated her husband's behavior. Third, Hajja Faiza, a Quranic teacher, offered her students a choice where there was thought to be none. Finally, Heba Ra'uf, among the most modern of the *hurriyat al-mar'a*, attempted to expand the reach of Muslim women in Egypt by looking within Islam for legitimization. As in the Malaysia cases, all four women evoked change (more equal treatment for women) from within the framework of Islam and in so doing illustrated some of Sewell's axioms.

Labiba Ahmad: Nationalizing Motherhood

Labiba Ahmad (1870s–1950), an early example of *hurriyat al-mar'a*, was among the first of such women to empower females from within Islam. Her agenda fused a call to Islam with a notion of Egyptian nationalism. Beth Baron refers to Ahmad as a bridge between generations, “linking the *Salafis* (Islamic reformers who looked to the first generation of Muslims as a model) and later Islamic radicals” (italics in original).⁷⁷ In founding the Society of Egyptian Ladies’ Awakening (*Jam’iyyat Nahdat al-Sayyidat al-Misriyyat*) and a journal, the *Women’s Awakening* (*al-Nahda al-Nisaa’iyya*) (1921–39), Ahmad sought to create a cultural ideal in a “new Islamic woman” to legitimately counter that of the “new (secular) woman.”⁷⁸

Ahmad’s framework was that of Islam. She made the role of mother central to women’s lives, infusing nationalist calls to action in her agenda, due to the presence of the British at the time. Ahmad commended the “‘influence of the virtuous mother in shaping the nation,’ and asked, ‘what is the nation if not a collection of families?’”⁷⁹ So it begins to become clear how Sewell’s axioms relate to her. She applied the notion of female family member to that of mother of the nation, taking one structure and transferring its principles to another. The latter illustrates Sewell’s second axiom on the multiplicity of structures and on learned rules being generalizable to a new setting.

Ahmad carefully distinguished her society from that of liberal feminist Huda Sha’rawi, the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU), whose mission was “to reform Islamic family law rather than spread the word about its merits and strengthen Egyptians’ religious identity.”⁸⁰ Such reform points to a liberal framework rather than a religious one. Thus, Ahmad spoke highly of the EFU’s charity work but distanced herself from the fundamental premise from which the members worked because religious morality was not at the center of the union’s program.⁸¹

Ahmad and the EFU used the journal *Women’s Awakening* as their primary tool to disseminate their moralist agenda in Egyptian society and beyond. In the journal, she demonized anti-Islamic social practices or projects such as alcohol consumption, mixed bathing at beaches, and the building of a sports complex for females: “Isn’t the woman capable of exercising while she is in her home . . . for in prayer and its movements are the greatest exercise.”⁸² She believed in extending Quranic education to all but did not

think that boys and girls should be taught the same curriculum “because she saw them as destined for different roles in life.”⁸³ Ahmad asked, “When will the people understand that the duty of a girl is to be a mother?”⁸⁴ Like the practice of SIS, she used Islamic education to evoke unpredictable and predictable resource accumulation among Egyptian Muslims (axiom three). Labiba Ahmad is likely considered the first of the “modern” *hurriyat al-mar’a*, largely because of her methods of address, regular travel, and influence. Beginning in 1933, Ahmad gave weekly addresses on Royal Egyptian Radio. The readers of her journal, who already loved her, often listened to her talks on social and religious themes consistent with the content of her journal. During this time, Ahmad developed close ties with Hasan al-Banna, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, since they shared a vision of Islamic revival in Egypt.⁸⁵ Throughout the 1920s and 30s, she traveled to Mecca multiple times, building a network of relations—the Saudi king, sheikhs, government officials, and other pilgrims among them: “She mingled with Muslims from other countries and developed a wide circle of correspondents in the Arab world . . . and beyond.”⁸⁶

Ahmad used her access to the public through her public profile and writings to put mothers on pedestals as virtuous centerpieces of a successful nation. By promoting the spread of Quranic education, she encouraged women to learn about their rights within Islam and to know that their most important role resided in motherhood.⁸⁷ Ahmad created space in society for herself by generalizing the role of mother of a household to that of the nation. Whether she succeeded in helping others legitimately create public space for themselves remains uncertain. Clearly, though, she did reinterpret the role of women within the Qur’an, thus legitimizing her own access to a public arena. Like SIS, Ahmad reinforced some of Islam’s structures while reformulating some aspect of them, thereby giving her more freedom of movement and influence, and, through her actions, implying that other women had a right to those freedoms. She taught different rules of action by amplifying the role of motherhood, thus speaking to Sewell’s fourth axiom.

Labiba Ahmad transposed rules about the physical, emotional, and mental boundaries of being a good Muslim woman. When Muslim women were expected to stay home and be good wives and mothers, she made their role that of caretaker and heart of the nation, encouraging them to take on

a public duty that not only remained within the framework of Islam but reinforced it.

Abir: Wife and Mother

Some Egyptian women use their knowledge of Islamic texts to validate their questioning of the parameters of their roles as wives and mothers. These *hurriyat al-mar'a* experience and take advantage of conflicting claims about the role of women in an Islamic society. By attending Quranic classes, they reinforce the religious structures. By learning about flexibility within the Qur'an regarding the proper role of women, they find an opening. By learning that alternative and better treatment for women is in line with Quranic teachings, they simultaneously reinforce and question. By learning about how women were treated in the time of Mohammad and the debate surrounding their treatment, for example, some women return home with renewed energy and attempt to change their space. As some women engage this process, they tap into Sewell's first axiom as their ideas about how a woman should be treated and their religious beliefs overlap and sometimes conflict. They also access his fourth axiom as they reinterpret the information they acquire at Quranic lessons and apply that interpretation at home. Abir is such a woman.

Insisting on attending Quranic classes, Abir organized her days to ensure that she could fulfill all her duties at home, leaving her husband no excuses about why she should not attend.⁸⁸ Based on what she learned in the classes, by using everyday methods of persistence and by serving as a good role model herself, she persuaded her husband, Jamal, to become more pious. As explained below, Abir's methods of resistance created space for herself and empowered her within her home. These methods of empowerment are particular to her role as an Islamic-educated mother and wife.

Abir's methods of empowerment are interesting because she empowered herself within her home by making her husband more pious. By forcing her husband toward a more pious lifestyle, she gained his respect. Her story offers an example of a Muslim woman who enhances her position at home by embracing Quranic education.

Abir enrolled in a two-year program to train to become a "*da'iya*" or teacher of religious lessons, having attended local lessons for some time. Jamal, a Muslim who seldom practiced his faith, was embarrassed by his

wife's embracement of Islam and criticized her at every turn, calling her "backward." He threatened to take another wife and would not engage in practicing Islam at home. Abir remained resolute. She knew that her husband, like many men in Egyptian society, feared accusations of being anti-Islamic.⁸⁹ Still, Abir had to work diligently to bring her husband around. She took special care in her duties concerning the home and her son so that Jamal would not have good reason to stop her from pursuing her teaching license. Eventually, she used several tactics to wear her husband down. She embarrassed him publicly for not performing prayers. On Fridays at home, she played recorded sermons depicting hell, torture, and reckoning with God at full volume. Though Jamal was never happy about Abir's attending school, he slowly began to pray more regularly and gave up drinking alcohol and watching X-rated films in their home.

Abir's successful efforts to use Quranic knowledge to create more space for herself is an example of how a series of overlapping structures can be reinforced and changed as actors reinterpret and gain ground. What is striking about this story is that Abir sought better treatment and a better behaved husband by reminding him of his Islamic duties. Backed by Quranic legitimization, she used her Quranic knowledge of her role of wife and mother to persuade her husband to lead a more religious life and in so doing, created a happier home for herself. She gained renewed respect in her role as mother and wife from her husband, reflected by his conformity to her pressure. This unpredictable outcome resulted from implementation of her interpretation of new knowledge (a resource) she acquired at Quranic school, in keeping with Sewell's fourth axiom. Further, the ways in which people might manipulate structures and reestablish interpretations are not necessarily predictable—and neither are the outcomes or the ways in which power is shared or usurped.

Hajja Faiza: Islamic Teacher

When some Egyptian women engage in Quranic education, they are unsure of the consequences. Will their husbands forbid them to attend meetings or classes? Will their children protest? Then, when a woman returns home with new knowledge to wield at her husband, will her family acknowledge her devotion to Islam, or will her husband beat her or force her to divorce? Will her new devotion to Quranic teachings make her family

closer to or more distant from her? In any situation, such a woman might guess at the consequences, but she will not really know the extent to which she has transformed her arena until she acts upon the information she has obtained. Some *hurriyat al-mar'a* produce naturally unpredictable consequences from educating themselves or others about Islamic texts. This process of engaging in Quranic education and these unpredictable consequences evince Sewell's third axiom.

A popular, educated teacher of the Qur'an, Hajja Faiza holds weekly meetings for women who want to learn about its teachings. She uses her knowledge of scholarly sources to provide women who attend her meetings with informed choices.⁹⁰ Faiza has no equal-rights agenda; rather, she has an Islamic agenda. She is spreading Islam, but in so doing she has made herself known for offering choices to the women in her audience—choices that may empower them at home.

In the majority-Sunni tradition, women are prohibited from calling believers to prayer or delivering Friday sermons. Neither can they lead groups to prayer in which both men and women are present.⁹¹ All four schools of thought—Shafi'i, Hanafi, Hanbali, and Maliki—recommend that men pray together in a mosque rather than at home; the schools differ when it comes to women. Only Hanbali jurists suggest that women collectively pray in a mosque.⁹² If women happen to pray collectively at home, "the Shafi'i, Hanbali, and Hanafi schools recommend that a woman lead the prayers."⁹³

Faiza has led congregations of prayer and reflection even when a male Imam is present, subjecting herself to public criticism by a famous male *da'iyah*, Shaikh Karam, who also preaches at Umar mosque. He has accused her of *bid'a*, "a term in Islamic doctrine that refers to unwarranted innovations, beliefs, or practices for which there was no precedent at the time of the Prophet (s.a.w.), and which are therefore best avoided."⁹⁴

At one of her lessons, a member of her audience inquired as to whether Faiza's "practice of leading women in prayer when a male imam was present" is an act of *bid'a*.⁹⁵ She responded that the author of the question must have heard this criticism from Shaikh Karam and refuted it thus: "[That opinion] is based on the Maliki school. The other three schools [Shafi'i, Hanafi, and Hanbali] say that it is permissible for a woman to lead other women in prayers, and is in fact better [*afdal*]. There are three opinions on

this matter [from among the four schools] that are in agreement, and the fourth is different.”⁹⁶ She then explained that she follows the majority opinion while Shaikh Karam follows the minority opinion, but that *both* are within their rights because “it is our right [*min haqqina*] to select from any of the opinions available in the four schools, even if the opinion happens to be noncanonical or anomalous [*shadhdh*].”⁹⁷

Such questions and answers demonstrate one way that Faiza approaches her students. She neither shows disrespect toward the male *da'iyah* nor acquiesces to his opinion. Instead she gives her students a choice that they must make of their own free will. The method is particularly poignant insofar as legitimizing different interpretations of the Qur'an makes the structures that overlap with it porous and, thus, malleable. This porous nature then may result in unforeseen consequences, actors, and the teaching of different rules of action—Sewell's fourth axiom. The validity gained through this process empowers each student who makes choices and acts on them; thus, the student becomes the unforeseen actor who applies different rules of action to daily life.

In another example, when asked about female circumcision (a common practice in Egypt), Hajja Faiza reasoned that the Hadith that supposedly condones circumcision is “(weak), a classificatory term in hadith literature that refers to a Prophetic tradition of dubious authority.”⁹⁸ She concluded that female circumcision is not obligatory, recommended, or reflective of a custom of the Prophet (s.a.w.) or his followers; thus, practicing it is optional. She added that some believe that it is important to follow weak Hadiths for good measure and that some support circumcision because it is said to be good for women's psychological health. The choice is theirs, but she strongly recommended consulting a medical doctor if the decision is affirmative.⁹⁹ Again, Faiza created for her students choices that enable action which can both reinforce and/or undermine overlapping structures within Islam (axioms one and four). The choices owe their legitimacy to reinterpretation of the Islamic text. The fact that they also enable action, possibly of an unforeseen nature, points to axioms three and four.

Hajja Faiza left to her students the final decision of whether they should follow the Hadith. She empowered the audience with choice. Like SIS, Faiza's agency resides in offering a choice and opening a space that did not exist before. This knowledge of choice results in a variety of predictable

and unpredictable consequences related to how her students choose to act out their choices and how their families and communities will respond to those actions (axiom three).

Heba Ra'uf: Academic

Heba Ra'uf represents the younger generation of *hurriyat al-mar'a* in Egypt.¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, in spite of being a *hurriyat al-mar'a*, she has managed to give credence to the concept of "women's issues." First, in her master's thesis, she showed how revered Islamic scholarship supported women who qualified for high public positions, leading her to conclude that women should be allowed to become judges or heads of state. As Karam points out, this stance is "extremely contentious," especially among the Muslim Brotherhood, but largely appeals to young, educated Islamist women.¹⁰¹ Ra'uf also believes that, ultimately, a Muslim society seeks a united and religiously governed national *umma*. At that time, an ideal role for women will come into effect: women will not venture outside the home.

Karam calls her position on women "innovative."¹⁰² Ra'uf clarified her position on women in an interview that appeared in the *Middle East Report* in 1994: "She argued that women's liberation in Muslim societies 'necessitates a revival of Islamic thought and a renewal within Islamic jurisprudence.'¹⁰³ In the same article, she explained that she wishes to defend Islam from "stagnation and bias" rather than "reconstruct Islamic law."¹⁰⁴ Ra'uf reflected on the divisive nature of feminism in an interview with Karam: "Feminism aims only at women; has one ever heard of 'masculinism'? In order to address the whole issue of women's oppression, one must address the whole society."¹⁰⁵ She criticized association of the family with only private matters, contending that the way to women's liberation lies through the primacy of the family as an essential *political* unit for Muslims.¹⁰⁶ Here Ra'uf was channeling the Islamic teaching of Sayyid Qutb, who referred to the family as "the basis of society."¹⁰⁷ She might also have been building upon Labiba Ahmad's generalizability of the concept of "woman as mother" to "woman as caretaker of the nation."

In effect, Ra'uf's main contention in terms of centrality of the family is that the family unit is the one institution the state cannot ban. Thus, the family protects its members against state oppression. Further, because the Muslim state is in a state of jihad (holy war), women should serve in the

military and participate actively in the management of their country (*umma*).¹⁰⁸ According to Ra'uf, the only roles that women would be allowed to pursue are those which further the Muslim state under the veil of jihad.¹⁰⁹

She mentioned that raising a family is not an obstacle for women but a political act, after which they are free to “perform other public and equally important roles.”¹¹⁰ Karam contends that Ra'uf's efforts to collapse the private and public together give women space to do something other than raise a family, thus serving “to protect and enhance women's socio-political roles and rights.”¹¹¹ She concludes that Ra'uf fashioned a way to deconstruct and reconstruct Muslim women's roles, doing so by combining the public and private and by deglorifying motherhood as well as politicizing it.¹¹² In other words, Ra'uf's legitimate reinterpretation of the role of women from within an Islamic framework redefined that role as political and public (at least temporarily), while reinforcing Islam itself. This reinterpretation offers yet another, though more sophisticated, example of how some Egyptian Muslim women have validated and redefined new space within the context of Islam. Ra'uf's creativity intersects the structures of Islam as well as the male interpretation of Islamic texts and the Egyptian patriarchy (axiom one). Her method of collapsing the public and the private points to Sewell's second axiom, in which learned actions that guide rules are generalizable to new situations. She remains within an Islamic framework but reinterprets the role of women as political units within Islam and does so in scholarly writings. That reinterpretation reflects Sewell's fourth axiom: resources such as knowledge can empower unforeseen actors and teach different rules of action.

Conclusion

The articulation, manipulation, reinforcement, and undermining of any given structure may happen at any time naturally. Each structure overlaps with others and relies on agents to reify itself. How and why and within what context agents act constantly reshape the structures with which they engage. In the evidence presented above, some Muslim women are working to transform Islam from within itself. Consequently, they are also able to make legitimate the changes they have attempted, thus empowering their

actions and perhaps causing unintended as well as predictable consequences in their readership or classrooms.

Sewell's axioms provide a compelling means of talking about the interaction of structure and agency in terms of Muslim women in Egypt and Malaysia. In the latter country, the Sisters in Islam organization reinterprets Islamic texts in order to question the role of Muslim women in Malaysian society. SIS legitimizes its arguments and actions by questioning within an Islamic framework, thereby justifying better treatment for women by building upon a history of debating the meanings contained within the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Hadiths. In Egypt, Islamic teachers like Hajja Faiza offer a choice of reinterpretation to women like Abir. Through textual reinterpretation, both have become agents of change by finding room to maneuver within the context of Islam's overlapping structures. For generations, Egyptian activists such as Labiba Ahmad and Heba Ra'uf have been transforming ways to think about the role of women among Egyptian Muslims. They give their actions validity by adhering to a strict Islamic framework.

In spite of this article's contribution to the area of Islam-oriented feminist studies, much work remains. Field research would likely clarify Sewell's theory of the interaction between structure and agency by providing more evidence, for example, that unintended consequences or actors do in fact produce change in some cases. It would be useful to know in how many instances change did occur from said unintended consequences or actors and how much change occurred.

Further, an in-depth analysis of male contributions to the area of Islamic/Muslim feminism would prove interesting and pertinent. Are some Muslim men empowered by the actions or writings of some Muslim feminists? How many Muslim men fight for something like gender equality within an Islamic framework? And do those men resemble Islamic/Muslim feminists or *hurriyat al-mar'a*?

Notes

1. "What is the difference between Sunnah and Hadith? As Sunnah means the mode of life, the Sunnah of the Prophet (s.a.w.) means the mode of life of the Prophet (s.a.w.) and Hadith means the narrations of the life of the Prophet (s.a.w.); the two terms came to be used almost interchangeably, in spite of the slight difference between them. . . . There have been however differences of opinion." Nik Noriani Nik Badlishah and Norhayati Kaprawi, *Hadith on Women in Marriage* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia: Sisters in Islam, 2004), 2.

2. William H. Sewell Jr. "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation," *American Journal of Sociology* 98, no. 1 (July 1992): 9.

3. This definition is adapted from a broader discussion on empowering women by Zoë Oxaal with Sally Baden, "Gender and Empowerment: Definitions, Approaches and Implications for Policy," revised (Brighton, UK: University of Sussex, October 1997), a briefing prepared for the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/re40c.pdf>.

4. Julie McLeod, "Feminists Re-reading Bourdieu: Old Debates and New Questions about Gender Habitus and Gender Change," *Theory and Research in Education* 3, no. 1 (2005): 24.

5. Sewell, "Theory of Structure," 1–29.

6. Sherine Hafez, *The Terms of Empowerment: Islamic Women Activists in Egypt* 24, no. 4, Cairo Papers in Social Science (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2003), 34.

7. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane I. Smith, "Women in Islam: The Mother of All Battles," in *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint*, ed. Suha Sabbagh (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2003), 147.

8. Azza M. Karam, *Women, Islamisms and the State: Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1998).

9. Nimat Hafez Barazangi, *Women's Identity and the Qur'an: A New Reading* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2004); Asma Barlas, "Believing Women" in *Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002); Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Riffat Hassan, "Rights of Women within Islamic Communities," in *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective: Religious Perspectives*, ed. John Witte Jr. and Johan D. van der Vyver (Cambridge, MA: Kluwer Law International, 1996), 361–68; and Laleh Bakhtiar, *The Sublime Quran* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2007).

10. Karam, *Women, Islamisms and the State*, 206.

11. *Ibid.*, 220.

12. *Ibid.*, 219.

13. Cited in Sewell, "Theory of Structure," 4.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, 2, 6.

18. *Ibid.*, 6.

19. *Ibid.*, 8.

20. *Ibid.*, 9.

21. *Ibid.*, 10.

22. *Ibid.*, 16–19.

23. *Ibid.*, 18.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*, 19.

26. *Ibid.*, 16.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, 16–17.

29. *Ibid.*, 17.

30. *Ibid.*, 18.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*, 19.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*

38. Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, *In Search of Islamic Feminism: One Woman's Global Journey* (New York: Doubleday, 1998); Karam, *Women, Islamisms and the State*; and Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

39. Zahra Kamalkhani, "Reconstruction of Islamic Knowledge and Knowing: A Case of Islamic Practices among Women in Iran," in *Women and Islamization: Contemporary Dimensions of Discourse on Gender Relations*, ed. Karin Ask and Marit Tjomsland (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1998), 178.

40. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 176–97.

41. Historical and contextual information about Malaysian society and culture is drawn from the following unless otherwise noted: Anna Spiegel, "Women's Organisations and Social Transformation in Malaysia: Between Social Work and Legal Reforms," in *Negotiating Development in Muslim Societies: Gendered Spaces and Translocal Connections*, ed. Gudrun Lachenmann and Petra Dannecker (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 67–92.

42. Chinese make up 34 percent of the population; about 10 percent are Indian.

43. Spiegel, "Women's Organisations and Social Transformation in Malaysia," 68. "From 1970 until 1990, a general programme of affirmative action, known as the New Economic Policy (NEP), guaranteed favourable quotas for Malays in many educational and occupational arenas, and special financial assistance in many sectors of the economy. This programme was essentially renewed, with minor modifications, as the New Development Policy (NDP) in 1991, and has not reversed the trend towards state capitalism." Judith Nagata, "How to Be Islamic without Being an Islamic State: Contested Models of Development in Malaysia," in *Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity*, ed. Akbar S. Ahmed and Hastings Donnan (London: Routledge, 1994), 87.

44. All information about SIS is drawn from that organization's Web site, unless otherwise noted. See <http://www.sistersinislam.org.my>. The other two organizations are the Women's Aid Organization and the All Women's Action Society. The original women's movement in Malaysia dates back to anticolonial struggles against the British and then the Japanese. The new women's movement emerged in the 1980s in the wake of the UN's Women's Decade. It differentiated itself from the old by constructing itself "as cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic, and multireligious with a clearly defined critical attitude toward the state." Spiegel, "Women's Organisations and Social Transformation in Malaysia," 69, 71.

45. Zainah Anwar, "Islamisation and Its Impact on Laws and the Law Making Process in Malaysia," in *Warning Signs of Fundamentalism*, ed. Ayesha Imam, Jenny Morgan, and Nira Yuval-Davis (Nottingham, UK: Women Living under Muslim Laws, 2004), 74.

46. For example, in 1997 in response to a Sharia ruling on criminal offenses that included vaguely worded rulings such as punishment for defying or disputing religious authority or behaving in an offensive manner publicly, SIS asked the government to "promote the interpretation of religious texts and the formal and informal teaching of Islam that reflect the spirit of justice and equality granted to women in the Qur'an, and that also take into consideration the changing role and status of women in the family and the community." Sisters in Islam, "Syariah Criminal Offences Act and Fundamental Liberties, 1997: Memorandum on the Provisions in the Syariah Criminal Offences Act and Fundamental Liberties," 8 August 1997, http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=699&Itemid=209.

47. Nagata, "How to Be Islamic," 80.

48. *Ibid.*, 79–80. The members of SIS are aware that to some individuals, referring to the Hadith or the words of the Prophet (s.a.w.) as "of uncertain, and sometimes contradictory status" amounts to heresy. *Ibid.*, 79.

49. Nora Murat, "Sisters in Islam: Advocacy for Change within the Religious Framework," in *Warning Signs of Fundamentalism*, ed. Ayesha Imam, Jenny Morgan, and Nira Yuval-Davis (UK: Women Living under Muslim Laws, 2004), 144–45. Nora Murat is a member of SIS.

50. Spiegel, "Women's Organisations and Social Transformation in Malaysia," 185.

51. Terry Lane, "Feminist Islam," *National Interest*, 4 January 2004, <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/natint/stories/s1012873.htm>.

52. *Ibid.*

53. Ibid.

54. John L. Esposito, "Introduction: Women in Islam and Muslim Societies," in *Islam, Gender, and Social Change*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), x.

55. Karam, *Women, Islamisms and the State*, 132.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid., 101.

58. "Unlike the Qur'an, which was taken down in writing during the lifetime of the Prophet (s.a.w.), most of the Hadith was recorded after the death of the Prophet (s.a.w.). Therefore, while the authenticity of the whole Qur'an is unquestionable, the authenticity and authority of a substantial amount of Hadith has [*sic*] been open to dispute and debate among various scholars. It is generally known that the Prophet (s.a.w.) discouraged the documentation of his sayings and Sunnah in the early stages of his mission, in order to prevent the possibility of confusion between the Qur'an and his Sunnah. . . . Therefore, the collecting of the Hadiths only began in the second century of Islam [early eighth century CE]. By then, the Muslim territories had spread widely, and Hadith collectors travelled to various parts of the Muslim world in search of those who had information on the sayings and deeds of the Prophet (s.a.w.). The narrations, traditions and stories recorded in the Hadith collections are reproduced through *isnad*, which refers to the transmission of Hadith through a chain of narrators. It is important to note that the authenticity of a Hadith depends on the reliability of its reporters and the linkage or transmission among them, i.e. the *isnad*" (italics in original). Badlishah and Kaprawi, *Hadith on Women in Marriage*, 3–5.

59. Ibid., 6–7.

60. Ibid., 12–15.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid. "And the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.'" Genesis 2:21–23. Ibid., 12–15.

63. Ibid., 15.

64. Ibid.

65. Sewell, "Theory of Structure," 16–17.

66. The four schools of thought (Sunni) are Shafi'i, Hanafi, Hanbali, and Maliki. For more on their differences and similarities, see al-Qadi As-Safadi, *The Mercy in the Difference of the Four Sunni Schools of Islamic Law* (London: Dar Al Taqwa, 2004).

67. Zaitun Mohamed Kasim, *Islam and Polygamy* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Sisters in Islam 2002), i. All quotations on polygamy are drawn from this source unless otherwise noted.

68. *Surah* should not be confused with *Sunnah*. A *surah* is a section of the Qur'an.

69. Zainah Anwar, "Sisters in Islam: A Voice for Everyone," *Fellowship Magazine*, September/October 2004, accessed 10 January 2010, <http://www.forusa.org/fellowship/sept-oct-04/anwar.html>.

70. Murat, "Sisters in Islam: Advocacy for Change," 142.

71. Anwar, "Sisters in Islam: A Voice for Everyone."

72. Zainah Anwar, "Whither Modernization?," *Star*, 24 October 2009, <http://www.sistersinislam.org.my>.

73. Anwar, "Sisters in Islam: A Voice for Everyone."

74. "*Ijtihad* therefore is an exercise of one's reasoning to arrive at a logical conclusion on a legal issue done by jurists to deduce a conclusion as to the effectiveness of a legal precept in Islam." Abdur Rahman I. Doi, *Shari'ah: The Islamic Law* (London: Ta Ha Publishers, 1984).

75. Ida Lichter, *Muslim Women Reformers: Inspiring Voices against Oppression* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books 2009), 245.

76. *Nusyuz* or *nushuz* is "a state of disorder between a married couple." Sayyid Qutb in Sisters in Islam, "Are Muslim Men Allowed to Beat Their Wives?," http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=601&Itemid=298. All quotations to follow about wife beating are taken from this source unless otherwise noted.

77. Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*, 190.

78. Ibid.
79. Ibid., 201.
80. Ibid., 198.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid., 201.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid., 206–9.
86. Ibid., 206.
87. Ibid.
88. All information about Abir’s life is summarized from Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 176–88.
89. Soroya Duval, “New Veils and New Voices: Islamist Women’s Groups in Egypt,” in *Women and Islamization*, 62.
90. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 85.
91. Ibid., 87.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid., 87n14.
94. Ibid., 87. “*Bid’a* is distinct from heresy (*ilbad*): the latter is considered to be an act of conscious rebellion, and the former the result of confusion, especially when it refers to disagreements about the authority of pertinent Prophetic traditions.” Ibid., 87n18.
95. Ibid., 87–88.
96. Ibid., 88.
97. Ibid.
98. Ibid., 85. The authenticity of each Hadith is determined by the way the information was collected and recorded, the constancy of the content of the Hadith with that of the Qur’an, and the ability and trustworthiness of the reporter. Badlishah and Kaprawi, *Hadith on Women in Marriage*, 8–11.
99. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 85–86.
100. Karam, *Women, Islamisms and the State*, 223.
101. Ibid. While spending time with Ra’uf, Karam experienced first hand the appreciation that she evoked in young Islamists. Moreover, the Brotherhood likely does not despise Ra’uf because that organization allowed her to edit the women’s page of its weekly opposition newspaper, *Al-Sha’b*. Ibid., 224.
102. Ibid.
103. Ibid.
104. Ibid.
105. Ibid.
106. Ibid., 225.
107. Ibid.
108. Ibid., 227. In this, Ra’uf’s ideas coincide with those of other Islamists, such as Muhammad Al-Ghazali. However, the latter restricted suggested military service for women to duties such as nursing and meal preparation. Ibid., 226.
109. Ibid., 228.
110. Ibid., 227.
111. Ibid., 228.
112. Ibid. Male Islamists like Sheik Al-Ghazali and Adel Husayn both emphasized the importance to Islamic society of women’s role within the home, but “theirs was a quest to reconstruct the social glorification of motherhood which in itself is not new.” Ibid., 229.

Girl Soldiers

The Other Face of Sexual Exploitation and Gender Violence

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A simple perusal of the hundreds of online resources on “child soldiers” will reveal that in the first decade of the twenty-first century, some of the worst abuse and exploitation of these victims is under way.¹ Mankind has made extraordinary progress over the last 300 years in enhancing sensitivity to and awareness of, as well as making policy and passing legislation directed against, many of the most egregious violations of human rights, ranging from battery and torture to outright slavery. Both international humanitarian and human-rights laws have formally and explicitly recognized children’s rights and extended special protections.² Recently, more governments have acceded to the United Nations’ Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.³

Nevertheless, at this very moment, according to recent appeals by non-governmental organizations such as World Vision, the International Rescue Commission, and the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, as well as major intergovernmental organizations, including the United Nations and specialized agencies such as the United Nations Children’s Fund, millions of children around the world not only are the victims of violent conflict and war but also have been forced to become child soldiers. The International Rescue Committee has described the systematic atrocities committed against the world’s children as no less than a slow “genocide” or

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“holocaust” that has yet to grab the world’s full attention and prompt an organized response.⁴

Underlying Causes and Consequences of Using Girl Soldiers

Conditions of civil war and armed conflict undermine the ability of families and communities to protect young members of both sexes—but especially very young girls, who are socially, culturally, and often religiously restricted, even in peacetime. Moreover, a large number of these female victims of social chaos and violence become orphans and refugees, desperately struggling to survive the hunger, pain, and disease that terrorism, revolution, and war bring. These girls are easy prey in a cycle of abuse. Global conflicts rob them of their childhood, humanity, and very lives. Sources estimate that over 300,000 children younger than 18 have been caught up in over 30 global conflicts.⁵ Of these, some 40 percent or 120,000 child soldiers are girls, whose plight is often unrecognized since international attention has largely focused on boy soldiers.⁶ Generally, when people speak of child soldiers, the popular image is that of boys rather than the thousands of girls who comprise the less visible “shadow armies” in conflicts around the world. Girls not only serve as active fighters but also perform other military functions, from intelligence and medical support to cleaning and cooking. Worse, a number of young—even prepubescent—girls become sex slaves to service the forces and/or are coerced into pseudomarrriages with commanders of armed groups.⁷

According to the United Nations and Save the Children, key conflict areas where the tragic problem of boy and girl soldiers has been and remains acute include Colombia, East Timor, Pakistan, Uganda, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and western and northern Africa.⁸ However, conflict-induced atrocities against boys and girls are not entirely new. In wars historically and in modern conflicts such those in as Afghanistan, Chechnya, the former Yugoslavia, Haiti, Liberia, Peru, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone, recruitment and abuse of child soldiers have occurred. Like the boys, typically the majority of girl soldiers are abducted or forcibly recruited into regular and irregular armed groups, ranging from government-backed paramilitaries, militias, and self-defense forces to anti-government opposition and factional groups often based on ideological, partisan, and ethnic or religious affinity. A minority of girls, especially, may

seem to join irregular armies “voluntarily,” but most have no choice and are desperate to escape the violence and abuse around them, enlisting simply to survive.

Once militarized and hardened by brutality, young children of both sexes are often compelled to carry guns and kill—sometimes other children and even family members and relatives. In horrifying interviews, former child soldiers have revealed that they had no choice other than kill or be killed. Often commanders of armed groups prefer child soldiers because young children, especially girls, are more obedient, vulnerable, and malleable, and their moral codes are unformed and readily manipulated. Children can be indoctrinated early to become the next generation of terrorists and rebels as well as a sympathetic support base in civil society. And because most child soldiers are unpaid and require less food, they provide quick, cheap fighter power on demand. With the proliferation of light but deadly arms, even very young girls can serve as combat soldiers. In one report, a humanitarian worker in Liberia in 2003, near the end of the 10-year civil war, reported seeing a “child soldier so small that the barrel of her gun was dragging on the ground.”⁹ Both very young girls and boys can perform essential support functions and free up more seasoned, adult male warriors. Consequently, girl soldiers, no less than boy soldiers, have become disposable cannon fodder in the front lines of third world armies, terrorist groups, and guerrilla insurgencies.

Conditions of political and social instability and violence are often caused by or accompanied by overpopulation, scarcity, and environmental devastation such as drought, flood, famine, and other natural and man-made disasters.¹⁰ Some of the worst ecological devastation and human-rights abuses have occurred in the “failed states” of Africa; however, the Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America have had their share of intrastate violence. Hans Magnus Enzensberger coined the term *molecular civil wars* to describe the breakdown of the state and the out-of-control civil wars wherein young and desperate children prey on the helpless and each other.¹¹ In his view, these irregular wars not only are rife in the economically disadvantaged developing world but also are expressed in the brutal gang violence and urban warfare that beset major industrialized and postmodern societies around the globe. Experts also have noted that these “low-intensity armed conflicts shade directly into terrorism and

the illegal traffic in weapons and drugs,” blood diamonds, rich minerals, and human and sexual slavery.¹² These conditions victimize the young and foster a culture of violence and lawlessness that may become an attractive—as well as the only viable—alternative for young boys and girls, who will become traumatized and more readily “socialized” into the next generation of insurgents, support forces, and warriors. Globally, entire generations of children have already been decimated by this crisis, especially young girls—once the future mothers, caregivers, and familial anchors within these societies.

The “Shadow Armies” of Girls

Experts indicate that half the ranks of progovernment paramilitaries and rebel soldiers involved in the raging violence and civil wars in Africa consist of recruited or abducted child soldiers and that about half of these are girls.¹³ In Uganda, for example, human-rights organizations have documented the abduction of tens of thousands of terrified children from impoverished villages during the night and their induction into rebel guerrilla armies like the Lord’s Resistance Army operating in the north. The International Rescue Committee documents that more than 30,000 children have been forced into military slavery during the decades-long civil war still raging against the Ugandan government, and that 1.7 million people or some 80 percent of the population has become displaced. In the midst of this migratory turmoil, young girls, who flee their homes and communities, are especially at risk since they are routinely raped and forced to become sex slaves to rebel commanders and troops at large.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, where conflict has rekindled recently, has also experienced horrific war-related abuses of its children. There, despite the official end of the 1998–2003 civil war among four competing rebel factions, a decade of fighting, volcanic eruptions, outbreaks of the deadly Ebola virus, and massive refugee displacement internally and into neighboring countries have provided conditions conducive to the routine kidnapping and abuse of young girls as child soldiers and sex slaves. All the battling groups have recruited and abducted child soldiers, who have made up some 40 percent of the armed groups. At least 30,000 children have engaged in active combat there. Thousands of girls, currently as many as 12,500, are in armed groups and serve these irregular Congolese forces in

support and sexual roles.¹⁴ As long as the fighting continues, the process of disarmament and demobilization of girl (and boy) soldiers will remain stalled.

The Darfur region of the Sudan is another critical area of internal warfare, abuses against women and young girls, and the forcible abduction of child soldiers. Efforts by national governments as well as both private and international agencies to resolve this crisis and protect the young and vulnerable have proven unsuccessful. Since the outbreak of renewed rebellion in 2003, brutal attacks against African ethnic farming groups by the Janjaweed—a proxy, progovernment militia of Arab nomads—have killed over 200,000 people, and 2.5 million have fled, crowding into refugee camps.¹⁵ In 2004 approximately 17,000 children served in the forces of the government, armed militias, and opposition groups; some 2,500 to 5,000 child soldiers served in the Sudan People's Liberation Army alone, despite the fact that the insurgent group claimed to have demobilized 16,000 child fighters, including an estimated 600 girls, between 2001 and 2004.¹⁶ Also, in Liberia during the civil war between 1989 and 1997, an estimated 21,000 children were part of armed groups, and some 5,000 girls actively fought in the war. Conflict resumed in 2000, and by the end of 2003, the number of girl soldiers had increased to 8,500 as violence raged in neighboring countries, despite a peace agreement in August 2003.¹⁷

By early 2008, new conflicts in Kenya and Chad were degenerating into the lawless chaos of rapacious governmental and private armies of the Congo or Liberia and the tribal and ethnic genocide of Rwanda. In Kenya, a land of relative prosperity and stability, roving bands of machete-wielding young men and boys have committed atrocities against the rival ethnic groups, killing women and children in the rich Rift Valley region.¹⁸ Armies of “glue-sniffing street children” in the volatile slums of major cities sifted through the destruction left from the looting and violence of angry mobs. To date, some 800 people have been killed, and at least 300,000 displaced. Unless conditions stabilize, these rampaging youths and homeless boys and girls are potential child armies in the waiting.¹⁹ Despite oil revenues in Chad—one of the poorer, less stable African countries—fighting among rebel groups against the government and a four-year, undeclared proxy war between Chad and the Sudan have the potential to escalate into a wider regional conflict. The crisis in Chad, a country with a porous border and similar political and ethnic divisions, is an extension of the conflict in Darfur.

The army of Chad's authoritarian president has incorporated child soldiers into its ranks, some as young as nine years old and hardly taller than the automatic weapons they carry. A Human Rights Watch report of 2007 confirmed that boys and girls have been pressed into fighting for both government and rebel armies.²⁰

The situation is also critical for girl soldiers across Asia. In South and Southeast Asia, girls joined armed groups "to escape domestic servitude, forced marriages and other forms of gender-based discrimination."²¹ For example, in Sri Lanka, where the separatist insurgency led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has recently revived, some 43 percent or 21,500 of the 51,000 child soldiers involved in the conflict are girls.²² Reportedly, 128 of 180 Tamil Tiger guerrillas killed in one government attack were young girls.²³ The civil war has escalated in the last two years with renewed attacks and bombings, one by a girl suicide bomber in February 2008.²⁴ In the Philippines, girls are also regularly recruited as soldiers in the various guerrilla insurgencies active for decades in that country. However, in both Sri Lanka and the Philippines, girl recruits have not been sexually abused, and, as in some other armed groups, intimate relations between men and young women are forbidden without the approval of the woman/girl and the commander of the armed group.²⁵ On the other hand, in Afghanistan, girls have been forced into marriages with fighters in factional and clan-based militias and armed groups.²⁶ In Nepal both armed Maoist rebels and government forces have recruited, abducted, and tortured children. The Maoist People's Liberation Army forcibly recruited young girls (and boys) into its "People's War," abducting them from schools and subjecting them to political indoctrination. In some cases, girls and boys were never released but given arms training and placed in combat zones or used in other support roles. Some 2,000–4,000 children were recruited between 1996 and 2004, including a number of girl soldiers, who, in some cases, reported sexual abuse. In turn, government forces abducted, questioned, and tortured boy and girl soldiers as suspected terrorists.²⁷

Although not as widespread or pernicious a problem as in Africa and Asia, in Central America and Latin America since the 1960s, both guerrilla and paramilitary groups have incorporated child soldiers—including young girls, primarily from peasant and indigenous groups—into their ranks either by enticement or duress. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Sendero Luminoso or

Shining Path guerrilla movement in Peru had a significant contingent of young females, some forcibly recruited; and the various guerrilla and revolutionary groups in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua included girl soldiers. With the end of insurgencies, many of the girls have been pulled into juvenile gangs. In a number of cases, these girls may have been voluntary recruits drawn to a popular cause or seeking to escape the general poverty, conflict, and/or reprisals by state security forces and paramilitaries. However, voluntary enlistment did not always protect them from abuse and exploitation, nor were they free to leave. Unfortunately, statistics are hard to come by since leaders of irregular forces and armies do not advertise the role of child soldiers, much less young girls, fearing prosecution for war crimes.

In Colombia, after the rise of major guerrilla movements in the 1960s and 1970s, a growing number of girl soldiers and female cadres joined or were forced into the ranks of guerrilla, narco-terrorist, and paramilitary groups.²⁸ The more prominent armed groups include the antigovernment rebels of the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, or National Liberation Army), and progovernment proxy forces of the AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, or United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia), respectively.²⁹ Of approximately 14,000 child soldiers recruited by paramilitary and armed opposition groups, the number of women and girls was quite high. For example, in the ranks of the FARC and ELN, women and girls constituted up to 50 percent of all recruits. In 2001 a United Nations official condemned the use of more than 2,500 girl soldiers, primarily in the FARC, and their rape and sexual abuse by commanders.³⁰ Although paramilitaries tended to have fewer women and girls in their ranks, girl soldiers attached to armed groups on all sides of the civil war were treated harshly, reporting that they were often forced to use contraceptives and undergo abortions.³¹

All parties in the 40-year Colombian civil war claimed to respect international human-rights law, including that affecting children and women. Yet the tactic of irregular war itself has eroded the distinction between combatants and civilians.³² Moreover, defenseless peasants and indigenous peoples (even from neighboring countries) have been victims of marauding private armies out to conquer and appropriate territory and resources. Mas-

sacres have occurred on all sides—especially of women and children—and millions of displaced Colombians have become both internal refugees and residents of camps in bordering states. Of these, over half are under 18 years of age and considered children under current human-rights law.³³ Indeed during the worst days of the drug wars in Colombia, children were recruited into juvenile gangs of *sicarios* (boy killers) to serve as “cannon fodder for the Medellín cartel,” providing logistics, intelligence, and propaganda support.³⁴ Paramilitaries continued this practice and systematically recruited child soldiers into their urban militias, many of which have become Mafia-like drug gangs. Also, waves of violent “social cleansing” campaigns have targeted urban “delinquents” and street children, including young girls forced into prostitution.³⁵ After the increase in kidnapping in the 1990s, women and girls, whom Colombian guerrillas held for months and years as a form of extortion and as a means of financing their cause, sometimes became recruits as well as sexual partners and “wives” to soldiers and commanders.³⁶

Special Challenges of Disarming and Rehabilitating Girl Soldiers

These cases demonstrate that during both internal and external warfare, irregular (and even regular) armies systematically and intentionally employ gender-based violence—or violence that targets women and female children disproportionately—as an effective instrument of terror, psychological warfare against communities, and outright ethnic cleansing.³⁷ Gender-based violence can be directed against young girls and females from all cultures and socioeconomic classes although the poor and dispossessed are more readily targeted. Armies target women and young female children because they are the most vulnerable and powerless generally—especially in underdeveloped and conflict-ridden third world countries. Particularly in Africa, for example, human-rights workers have witnessed systematic and unspeakable violence against women and very small children; moreover, they have encountered rape victims as young as 14 months. In desperate situations of survival, girl soldiers may be forced to barter their sexual services to avoid greater abuse and mutilation or simply to remain alive for another day or week. Indeed the International Rescue Committee and United Nations human-rights organizations report the use of rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution and “marriage,” and general violence and mutilation as typical

weapons employed against girl soldiers worldwide. Clearly these tactics rise to major human-rights abuses and war crimes in some situations, but they also threaten the public health and safety of the populations where they occur.³⁸ In Africa, as elsewhere, the HIV/AIDS pandemic as well as other sexually transmitted illnesses has been fueled by indiscriminate, gender-based violence. Other negative consequences include high maternal and infant mortality rates (as well as subsequent suicides by mothers) and the abandonment of unwanted children.³⁹

Forgotten Casualties of War: Girls in Armed Conflict, a report published in 2005 by the Save the Children Fund, emphasized not only the terrible abuse against female children but also the special difficulties in correcting the consequences of human-rights violations and reintegrating girls into their communities. Programs of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) have had less success with girl soldiers because females are regularly met with censure and rejection. They find themselves in a no-man's land, "trapped between recrimination from the armed group if they leave and from the community if they return home."⁴⁰ Many girls, according to the report, are "too scared to stay and too scared to leave" armed groups, and many never have a choice.⁴¹ Families and communities reject them as "unclean," "immoral," or even as "whores" who have sullied the family's and community's honor. Girls returning with babies found even greater resentment and isolation in their communities. Once the former girl soldiers were stigmatized as promiscuous and trouble making, and without a social-support network or livelihood, the cycle of gendered victimization and abuse often continued, compelling them to turn to the sex trade in order to survive. Without the community's protection and/or international intervention, they may find themselves at greater risk for recruitment yet again by armed groups.

The disarmament and rehabilitation of girl soldiers have been slow and difficult in Colombia. One researcher concluded that between 1988 and 1994, approximately 25 percent of rehabilitated guerrillas were women although fewer of them participated in fighting and high-risk roles.⁴² Fewer girl soldiers and women have died in the civil war, but more women have been displaced and become triple victims. They or their families have suffered violence, endured the loss of their means of subsistence, and undergone social and emotional uprooting.⁴³ As with girl soldiers and female

victims elsewhere, this victimization made it especially difficult to demobilize and reintegrate them into society. For one reason or another, society more readily stigmatized women as “responsible for their own disgrace.”⁴⁴

In addition to the psychological, cultural, and social impediments, the report also noted the chronic underfunding of DDR programs compared to the enormous need, especially in Africa. The study indicated that in Sierra Leone alone over 20,000 children were entitled to a DDR package, which included money for three years of school or skills-training fees. However just 4.2 percent of girl soldiers there and 2 percent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo received the benefits of the DDR process.⁴⁵ Many girls interviewed by Save the Children feared the scrutiny and stigma and were uncomfortable with the militarized orientation of the process. Unfortunately, the number of weapons decommissioned largely determined the program’s success. As funds became scarce and dried up, only girls who could prove that they knew how to fire a gun received meager assistance packages—usually a bit of food, water, plastic sheeting for shelter, and sometimes a small, one-time payment and a ride home. Moreover, as long as conflicts continued to rage, these girls could not pursue their studies or new livelihoods but often remained subject to further violation and forcible recruitment; indeed, irregular forces routinely targeted schools and training centers as prime “hunting grounds” for new child soldiers.

Key Role of the International Community

Forgotten Casualties of War: Girls in Armed Conflict criticized international efforts on behalf of girl soldiers, citing the fundamental problem of gender discrimination: girls “face discrimination on a daily basis—from their fellow soldiers, commanders, fellow citizens, governments—and perhaps most shocking of all—from the international community.”⁴⁶ The girls themselves identified key ways that the international community could help further their reintegration into their communities: mediation and emotional support; assistance in education, training, and employment; and medical care to treat sexually transmitted diseases and promote reproductive health. Further, the report concluded that funds should continue to support the release of children from armed groups, even during conflict; that community development was essential to the DDR program for children; that a special fund should target the specific needs of girls and remain independent of

any formal DDR or political process; and that “all states should ratify, enforce, monitor and report on international treaties to protect children,” especially the recent United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol.⁴⁷

Although the disarmament of girl soldiers is essential, equally important to a solution is their reintegration into communities. An important first step involves confronting misconceptions head-on and recognizing the central role that gender and gender bias play in the process. The image of girl soldiers has emphasized gender-based violence (rape and sexual captivity) and tended to ignore research showing that in a number of countries, especially during recent conflicts in Africa, significant numbers (up to half) of girl soldiers have been active fighters. On the other hand, this problem also includes girls in noncombat and military-support roles; when funding falls short, these girls in particular, as well as girls in general, are the most disadvantaged.⁴⁸ The report recommends that a minimum of 40 percent of funding be used for the DDR of girls and that girls in particular require and should receive special assistance outside the formal DDR process.⁴⁹

The global campaign to end the tragedy of girl soldiers has intensified. In October 2006, a new study by the United Nations secretary-general—*Ending Violence against Women: From Words to Action*—and the General Assembly resolution of December 2006 to increase “efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women” represented important steps. Also, in November 2007, five former girl soldiers from Uganda, abducted in their teens and now aged between 20 and 28 years, visited Radhika Coomaraswamy, the special representative of the secretary-general for children and armed conflict at UN headquarters in New York to urge more international support for women’s programs. As leaders in a community-and-peer-based nongovernmental organization known as Empowering Hands, which facilitated the return of former Ugandan girl soldiers to their communities and civilian life, the women demonstrated not only solidarity with other girl soldiers but also hope for a humane solution.⁵⁰

In the final analysis, the crisis of girl soldiers is extensive, complex, and long term. It represents an integral component of gender-based violence and the militarization of societies. No community or society is immune; even developed and relatively conflict-free countries have come under criticism for the recruitment of girls younger than 18 years of age into their

armed forces.⁵¹ The solution to the exploitation of girl soldiers will require not only sensitivity and understanding but also the consistent enforcement and prosecutorial and financial commitment of home governments and of the international community. Moreover, at the root of the problem of girl soldiers lie endemic conflict and the absence of life alternatives; until a majority of countries can achieve socioeconomic stability, most solutions will remain tentative.⁵²

Notes

1. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has defined *child soldier* as "any child—boy or girl—under 18 years of age, who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including, but not limited to: cooks, porters, messengers, and anyone accompanying such groups other than family members. It includes girls and boys recruited for forced sexual purposes and/or forced marriage. The definition, therefore, does not only refer to a child who is carrying, or has carried, weapons." See "Factsheet: Child Soldiers," UNICEF, accessed 13 January 2008, <http://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/childsoldiers.pdf>. Covering the period April 2001 to March 2004, *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004* (London: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2004), is a follow-up to the 1996 UN report on child soldiers—the so-called Machel Report by Graça Machel, the UN secretary-general's expert on the impact of armed conflict on children. According to the *Global Report*, child soldiers are involved in active conflicts in 28 countries and territories (occupied Palestinian territories), the majority in Africa (13), Asia (seven), and the Middle East and North Africa (six); only Colombia in the Americas and the Caribbean; and only Russia in Europe and Eurasia. See the Machel Report, "The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children," 26 August 1996, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N96/219/55/PDF/N9621955.pdf?OpenElement>; and the Machel Strategic Review Report, "Will You Listen? Young Voices from Conflict Zones," 2007, http://www.un.org/children/conflict/_documents/pdf/Will_You_Listen_english.pdf.

2. Notable are the 1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention and the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. For a comprehensive overview, see Rachel Harvey, *Children and Armed Conflict: A Guide to International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law* (Montreal: International Bureau for Children's Rights, 2003), 25–35, http://www.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/story_id/000044.pdf. This is a joint project with the Children of Armed Conflict Unit of the Children's Legal Centre and Human Rights Centre of the University of Essex, Colchester, United Kingdom.

3. The age of 18 has posed a particular dilemma for a number of countries where persons younger than 18 can volunteer and be recruited for military service. As a consequence, some governments have proven reluctant to sign international agreements that would ban military service for anyone under that age (some countries sign with reservations). The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2002) raised the standard age of 15 years, as originally set in the convention as well as the 1949 Geneva Conventions and subsequent 1977 Additional Protocols. States that become party to the 2002 Optional Protocol must increase the age for voluntary military recruitment to 18. Also in 2002 the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court entered into force, which made "the conscription, enlistment or use of children under 15 in hostilities by national armed forces or armed groups a war crime." See "Factsheet: Child Soldiers"; and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict," accessed 13 January 2008, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc-conflict.pdf>.

4. See various online reports of the International Rescue Committee, <http://www.theirc.org/resources/irc-cypd-child-soldiers-fact-sheet-august-2007.pdf>; "Forced to Flee: Uganda's Young 'Night Commuters,'" accessed 18 January 2008, <http://www.theirc.org/where/page-28828228.html>; and "Children Targeted in

Uganda's Horrific, Overlooked War," 17 March 2004, accessed 18 January 2008, http://www.theirc.org/news/children_targeted_in_uganda-s_horrific_overlooked_war.html.

5. Most sources cite 300,000 as the estimated number of children involved. See Matt Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War: Girls in Armed Conflict* (London: Save the Children Fund, 2005), 1; "Factsheet: Child Soldiers"; and International Rescue Committee, "Child Soldiers Fact Sheet," accessed 13 February 2008, <http://www.theirc.org/resources/irc-cypd-child-soldiers-fact-sheet-august-2007.pdf>. However, these numbers are in flux as conflicts decrease or intensify. Documents and fact sheets by the UN and UNICEF also have estimated that 250,000 children are involved in conflicts worldwide. Similarly, the number of conflicts has varied from 28 to 30 countries (see endnote 1 above) and even higher in earlier reports. A recent UNICEF press report notes that, "according to the new Secretary General's annual report on Children and Armed Conflict, the number of armed groups and forces identified as using children has climbed from 40 in 2006 to 57 in 2007." See "Number of Armed Groups or Forces Using Child Soldiers Increases from 40 to 57," UNICEF, 12 February 2008, accessed 14 February 2008, http://www.unicef.org/media/media_42833.html.

6. Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, 1. See also Joe De Capua, "120,000 Girls Believed to Be Child Soldiers," *Voice of America News*, 25 April 2005, accessed 13 January 2008, <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2005-04/2005-04-25-voa27.cfm>; and Jonathan Steele, "Armies of Girls Caught Up in Conflict," *Guardian*, 25 April 2005, accessed 18 January 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/apr/25/child-protection.uk>.

7. For example, see Susan McKay and Dyan Mazurana, "Girls in Militaries, Paramilitaries and Armed Opposition Groups" (invited background paper for the International Conference on War-Affected Children, Winnipeg, Canada, 2000); Susan McKay and Dyan Mazurana, *Where Are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives during and after War* (Montreal: International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 2004), <http://uwacadweb.uwoy.edu/MCKAY/Documents/girls%20ang%20v5.pdf>; Susan McKay, "The Inversion of Girlhood: Girl Combatants during and after Armed Conflict," in *A World Turned Upside Down: The Social Ecologies of Children in Armed Conflict*, ed. Neil Boothby, Michael Wessells, and Alison Strang (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2006), 89–109; and Dyan Mazurana and Susan McKay, "Child Soldiers: What about the Girls?," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* 57, no. 5 (2001): 30–35.

8. Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, vi, 1.

9. *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*, 78. Liberian president Charles Taylor was later accused of war crimes for his enslavement and conscription of child soldiers. The ongoing trial against him started in June 2007 in the Hague. See "War Crimes Trial Resumes for Former Leader of Liberia," *New York Times*, 8 January 2008, A8. Taylor's government-backed militias committed major atrocities in neighboring Sierra Leone to gain control of so-called blood diamonds. The conflict in northwest Africa, including neighboring Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire, involved the systematic use of child soldiers, as well as a number of girls, by Liberian government forces and two armed rebel groups. The government had a special boys unit whose members were as young as 12; children as young as seven were recruited. The abuse against girl soldiers was egregious, and older girls were made to capture and recruit younger ones for sexual services. Reports also indicated that children as young as 10 were sent to the front lines, often drugged by their commanders, and forced to witness and participate in human-rights abuses. See *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*, 76–78. See also Human Rights Watch, *How to Fight, How to Kill: Child Soldiers in Liberia*, 2 February 2004, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/402d1e8a4.html>.

10. For example, see Michael N. Dobkowski and Isidor Wallimann, eds., *On the Edge of Scarcity: Environment, Resources, Population, Sustainability, and Conflict* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002); and Michael N. Dobkowski and Isidor Wallimann, eds., *The Coming Age of Scarcity: Preventing Mass Death and Genocide in the Twenty-First Century* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998).

11. Chris H. Lewis, "Paradox of Global Development and the Necessary Collapse of Modern Industrial Civilization," in Dobkowski and Wallimann, *Coming Age of Scarcity*, 50; and Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Civil Wars: From L.A. to Bosnia* (New York: New Press, 1994).

12. Leon Rappoport, "Scarcity, Genocide, and the Postmodern Individual," in Dobkowski and Wallimann, *Coming Age of Scarcity*, 271.

13. For an overview of girls in armed conflicts in Africa, see Florence Tercier Holst-Roness, *Violence against Girls in Africa during Armed Conflicts and Crises* (Addis Ababa: Second International Policy Conference on the African Child: Violence against Girls in Africa, 11–12 May 2006), [http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/violence-girls-conference-110506/\\$File/International-Policy-Conference.pdf](http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/violence-girls-conference-110506/$File/International-Policy-Conference.pdf).

14. Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, 1, 7, 11; and Beth Verhey, *Where Are the Girls? Study on Girls Associated with Armed Forces and Groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo* (London: Save the Children UK and the NGO Group, November 2004). The war officially ended in 2003, but the killing and death have not stopped. Renegade militias have been battling with the government in the eastern region, displacing 800,000 people. The parties reached a tentative peace agreement in January 2008. A recent study has concluded that since 1998, more than 5.4 million people have died of hunger, disease, and various war-related causes; nearly half were children younger than five years. See Lydia Polgreen, "Congo's Death Rate Remains Unchanged since War Ended in 2003, Survey Shows," *New York Times*, 23 January 2008, A8; and "Congo Opens Talks on Ending Fighting in Eastern Region," *New York Times*, 7 January 2008, A10.

15. "Sudanese Soldiers Fire on U.N. Peacekeepers in Darfur," *New York Times*, 9 January 2008, A3.

16. *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*, 291, 318–20.

17. Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, 7; and Amnesty International, Liberia, *The Promises of Peace for over 21,000 Child Soldiers*, 17 May 2004.

18. Kenya has over 40 tribes, including the four major ones: the Luo, Luhya, Kikuyu, and Kalenjin. Since independence, the Kikuyu have been on top, generating ethnic jealousy and hatred. But most of the country's violence has occurred after elections, as in 1992 and December 2007, so that most experts believe that the issues are really political, blaming divisive leaders who have manipulated ethnic divisions. See Jeffrey Gettleman, "Kenya, Known for Its Stability, Topples into Post-Election Chaos," *New York Times*, 3 January 2008, A1, A6; and Jeffrey Gettleman, "Signs in Kenya That Killings Were Planned," *New York Times*, 21 January 2008, A1, A9.

19. Jeffrey Gettleman, "Kenyan City Is Gripped by Violence," *New York Times*, 6 January 2008, A6; and Jeffrey Gettleman, "U.S. Envoy Calls Violence in Kenya 'Ethnic Cleansing,'" *New York Times*, 30 January 2008, A3.

20. See Lydia Polgreen, "Fighting in Chad Stirs Fears of Wider Conflict," *New York Times*, 7 February 2008, A1. Chad has known endemic violence for decades. Pres. Idriss Déby seized power in a military coup in 1990 and was reelected in 2006. Three rebel groups, based in Darfur and reportedly sponsored by the Sudanese government, have been trying to overthrow him. The Sudan, on the other hand, accuses Chad of harboring Sudanese rebels fighting the government in Darfur.

21. *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*, 21–22.

22. Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, 1, 7–8. Since 2006, when the two-decade separatist war reignited and a cease-fire broke down, over 5,000 people have been killed (some 70,000 since the war began in 1983).

23. "Information: Impact of Armed Conflict on Children," UNICEF, accessed 18 January 2008, <http://www.unicef.org/graca/kidsoldi.htm>.

24. "Bombings Mar Sri Lanka's 60th Anniversary of Statehood," *New York Times*, 5 February 2008, A9.

25. The experiences of girl soldiers in Sri Lanka and the Philippines were somewhat distinct from those of girls in Angola and Colombia—clearly, situations can vary significantly. See the early, perhaps first, study on girls in violent conflict by Yvonne E. Keairns, *The Voices of Girl Child Soldiers* (New York: Quaker United Nations Office, December 2002).

26. *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*, 21.

27. *Ibid.*, 190–92.

28. See Keairns, *Voices of Girl Child Soldiers*. Keairns interviewed Colombian girl soldiers.

29. These are only the major irregular armed groups. In recent decades, a number of additional guerrilla forces have operated in Colombia, including the M-19 (Movimiento 19 de Abril, or the 19th of April Movement), the EPL (Ejército Popular de Liberación, or People's Liberation Army), and various rightist death squads and paramilitary groups.

30. *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*, 126–27.

31. *Ibid.*, 21, 127.

32. For example, a document by the AUC that circulated in 1997 noted the dilemma of an irregular war:

The present conflict, because of its very nature, lies outside the norms of International Law, which apply to conventional warfare. Nevertheless, the AUC considers that the norms of International Humanitarian Law . . . should be an inescapable obligation. . . .

It is a complicated matter for actors in the war to establish clear distinctions among active combatants, active sympathizers, passive sympathizers, auxiliaries, informants, suppliers, couriers, tax collectors, extortionists, transporters, advisers, commission agents who are benefactors, promoters, or disguised, etc., and the rest of the civilian population.

See Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez G., eds., *Violence in Colombia, 1990–2000: Waging War and Negotiating Peace* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2001), 251, 253. The FARC (as well as the paramilitaries) has also violated its pledges to the United Nations not to recruit children. See *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*, 18–19, 126–30.

33. Bergquist, Peñaranda, and Sánchez G., *Violence in Colombia*, 22–23.

34. Fernando Cubides C., “From Private to Public Violence: The Paramilitaries,” in Bergquist, Peñaranda, and Sánchez G., *Violence in Colombia*, 131.

35. Luis Alberto Restrepo M., “The Equivocal Dimensions of Human Rights in Colombia,” in Bergquist, Peñaranda, and Sánchez G., *Violence in Colombia*, 95–126.

36. Reportedly, the FARC holds 700 abducted captives for ransom, including over 40 political hostages, among them Ingrid Betancourt, a former presidential candidate. A number of recent news reports have covered this situation. See Jenny Carolina González and Simon Romero, “Marches Show Disgust with a Colombian Rebel Group,” *New York Times*, 4 February 2008, A3.

37. One may define gender-based violence as “physical, psychological or emotional harm, including sexual harm or the threat of harm which is directed at an individual or group of individuals (children and adults) on the basis of their gender.” Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, 15.

38. The 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court considers the conscription or enlistment of “children under the age of 15 years into the national armed forces or armed groups or using them to participate actively in hostilities” a war crime in both international and noninternational armed conflicts. *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*, 25.

39. Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, 15. Moreover, Save the Children has documented that 32 percent of all girls in armed groups in West Africa admitted being raped, 38 percent received treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, and 66 percent were single mothers.

40. Steele, “Armies of Girls.”

41. Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, 12.

42. Donny Meertens, “Victims and Survivors of War in Colombia: Three Views of Gender Relations,” in Bergquist, Peñaranda, and Sánchez G., *Violence in Colombia*, 157, 168.

43. *Ibid.*, 162.

44. *Ibid.*, 165.

45. Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, 7; and Dyan E. Mazurana and Khristopher C. Carlson, “From Combat to Community: Women and Girls in Sierra Leone,” January 2004, accessed 18 January 2008, <http://www.womenwagingpeace.net/content/articles/SierraLeoneFullCaseStudy.pdf>.

46. Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, 1.

47. *Ibid.*, 2.

48. *Ibid.*, 21–22.

49. *Ibid.*, 27.

50. "Former Girl Soldiers Bringing Hope to Their Peers in Uganda," press release, United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, 9 November 2007, accessed 18 January 2008, <http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/pr/2007-11-09171.html>.

51. For example, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom recruited into the armed forces persons younger than 18 years. Additionally, a number of Western countries, including the United States, have failed to require government recipients of military aid and training to end their use of child soldiers.

52. See Paul Collier et al., *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*, World Bank Policy Research Report (Washington, DC / New York: World Bank / Oxford University Press, 2003).

Youth Empowerment in Kenya

A Policy-Science Analysis of Government Values and Priorities

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Sound decision making, implementation, and evaluation abilities are attributes that define high-performing organizations and even governments.¹ The need and drive to perform are more crucial within newly formed departments, especially those dealing with an ever-present issue. Such was the case at the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs (MSYA) in Kenya, created in December 2005 and given the mandate to attend to youth issues and concerns. Soon after, the MSYA designed and developed the Kenya National Youth Policy (KNYP) with the goal of mainstreaming and coordinating youth programs in the country. Like other policies, the KNYP provided a formal blueprint to notify concerned employees and offer them the necessary direction to make proper decisions for the public good while guiding their behavior to align with the strategic intent, values, and norms as defined by the MSYA and the central government. Besides the sheer number of young people, the KNYP identified the following youth challenges: unemployment and underemployment, health issues, dropouts from schools and colleges, crime and deviance, limited facilities for sports and recreation, abuse and exploitation, limited participation and lack of opportunities in decision-making processes, poor housing, and constrained access to information and communication technology. Additionally, the KNYP identified girls and street youths as groups needing special attention and solutions.

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A careful analysis of this policy, however, revealed no apparent attempt to address, let alone solve, the issues concerning young Kenyans, as identified by the KNYP. Although the policy appeared quite comprehensive, few resources have been committed towards implementation, with no indicators of priority issues deserving of greater funding.

Why do we need to understand the priority values of government officials who deal with youth issues? First, to overcome poverty and institute sustainable development, African nations have to empower their young people. Given the multifaceted nature of empowerment, it is crucial to establish and declare which values the MSYA is more vigorously pursuing to achieve youth empowerment in Kenya.

Second, because public administrators are part of the political system that authoritatively determines societal values, thereby dictating the success of policy formulation, implementation, and even evaluation, it was necessary to understand whether or not the department had defined priority values/issues to guide its employees. Faced with dilemmas and unclear situations, public officials often refer to personal, professional, organizational, legal, or public-interest values for direction.² In a situation in which different value sources compete, decision making becomes complicated. With this in mind, the MSYA should clarify for employees which values/issues have the higher priority and articulate these for the public. An agenda listing particular issues destined to receive urgent government attention and funds not only would alleviate public skepticism of the department's functionality but also would pacify stakeholders, who could learn why particular goals are funded.

Due to limited funding, comprehensive implementation of the KNYP is not possible. This study explores the government's work ethic and identifies possible weaknesses in addressing youth issues in order to inform the political debate. Moreover, since decision making in Kenya takes a top-down approach, studying these issues will expose the fact that different perspectives on youth issues may exist, even at the top, making a clear attack strategy elusive.

This article seeks to determine the values that public administrators at the MSYA consider pertinent in enabling young people to contribute to national development efforts and live better lives. In so doing, it explores the Kenyan government's perspective on this matter and identifies the rel-

evant values/issues emphasized and prioritized by officials as needing urgent government attention.

Background

Studies analyzing government values and prioritization vary from those focusing on the policy-analysis process to those identifying tools to assist in the decision-making process. Since public policy concerns citizens' well-being and involves a wide number of interested parties, several analyses have presented viable tools to assist in problem definition, analysis, and decision making.³ To collect intelligence useful in defining the problem and understanding alternative solutions, some studies elaborate on the role played by narratives while others make use of interviews as a way of addressing the need for openness and transparency in reporting and exploring public values in societal decision making.⁴ Once the problem has been identified and defined, it is put on the government agenda for debate. In his "policy streams" model, John Kingdon discusses how events such as natural calamities, accidents, and human error can focus the public's and government's attention on an issue.⁵ The government also sets agendas by means of the "outside initiative," "mobilization," or "inside access" models.⁶ However, factors such as social values, institutions, power and powerlessness, and resource availability still influence policy outcome.

Some studies address how social values affect decision makers at the workplace. When confronted with ethical dilemmas, these individuals may resort to personal values or agency artifacts as concrete and dependable "text" regarding societal values and identity.⁷ Elizabeth Ravlin and Bruce Meglino argue that work values affect perceptual organization and act as a guide to decision making, whereas Harry Van Buren and Bradley Agle hold that religious values and beliefs significantly affect managerial values and decision making.⁸ Saundra Glover and others examine the influence of gender and the moral intensity of the conflict situation on ethical decision making in light of workplace values, finding that decision makers rely on sources of value other than the organization's.⁹ Other scholars have analyzed how institutions affect the policy process, the effect of feedback on decision makers, and ways of influencing decision making, principally in the United States.¹⁰

Studies analyzing decision processes in Africa have looked at ways of democratizing such processes and the challenges faced by African leaders after the democratization wave of the 1990s.¹¹ Other research attempts to understand how leadership could be transformed to include women and the consequences of such a move on decision making.¹² However, the consistent failure of African leaders to respond to the needs of their people has attracted a wealth of studies on instituting effective leadership that “utilizes the resources available—both natural and human—responsibly.”¹³ Unfortunately, because this kind of leadership has been missing in Africa, development for the common good has proved elusive, even in the most fertile and resource-rich countries. Given that governmental action creates and/or sustains conditions that dictate citizens’ economic well-being, these studies have emphasized the need to revolutionize African leadership and mobilize citizens to hold their leaders accountable for the allocation and use of funds. Deepa Narayan identifies four elements of empowerment that must underlie institutional reform: access to information, inclusion and participation, accountability, and local organizational capacity.¹⁴ However, since on average, countries in Africa are less efficient than other countries, reform in any governmental sector would require substantial budgetary allocations.¹⁵

The need for beneficial change in African politics and leadership is especially acute because political elites continually undermine development and empowerment by sabotaging policies. Citing specific health policies in Kenya, Joanna Crichton laments how policies relating to contraceptive services often receive weak or fluctuating levels of commitment from national policy elites, thus inhibiting policy evolution and undermining implementation. She also notes the challenge of sustaining support for issues within Kenya’s policy arena even after these problems have reached the policy agenda.¹⁶ Nick Devas and Ursula Grant review some examples of and reasons for good (and bad) decision-making practices in a sampling of municipal governments in Kenya and Uganda.¹⁷ They determined that, despite the importance of committed local leadership, central monitoring of performance, articulate civil society organizations, and the availability of information, success remains far-fetched since the inclusion of stakeholders, especially the poor, is never guaranteed.¹⁸ In particular, Dickson Mungazi criticizes African leaders for not seeking to learn new things from other

people, challenging them to realize and uphold integrity and respect of law—values crucial to their job performance.¹⁹

Studies of Africa have also identified different empowerment strategies that, if provided and financially supported, would prepare Africa for a prosperous future. Some of them address ways of improving education, which would enable young people, especially street children, to compete in the labor market.²⁰ Other research has analyzed the effects of government's failure to provide quality education due to the politicization of decision making.²¹ Some commentators have advocated the improvement of rural areas and opportunities for young people, which would enhance their transition to and stay in the labor market; others have insisted on upgrading health care in Africa.²² Encouragingly, several analyses elaborate on Africa's ability to solve its own problems. These studies emphasize the need for African governments to employ local social institutions such as "harambee" (pulling together) in Kenya to motivate people to institute sustainable development in their communities.²³ Mike Boon hails traditional African political systems, which emphasize interactive leadership, believing that "modern" Africa could learn from this kind of management, which employs responsive, effective policies in addressing socioeconomic challenges.²⁴ Additionally, Jacob Gordon indicates that Africa's leadership will be considered mature and responsive once governments effectively address current socioeconomic and political concerns.²⁵

Regardless of the existence of research on the role of leadership in creating an environment conducive to empowering people, none has explored public administrators' perspectives on youth empowerment in Kenya. This article, therefore, applies a policy-science framework as a means of understanding the values that guide the MSYA in addressing youth concerns in Kenya.

Context

A sub-Saharan country located on the east coast of Africa, Kenya gained its independence from Great Britain on 12 December 1963 and became a republic on 1 June 1964. Kenya's population has increased dramatically, from 6 million people in 1950, to 9.5 million in 1965, and to 19.65 million by 1985.²⁶ By 1999 it had grown to 28.7 million, and current estimates (2009) put it at 39.4 million, pending the findings of the official census.²⁷ Today, individuals from one to 30 years of age constitute 75 percent

of the population, and those 15 to 30 years old, 32 percent.²⁸ The median age is 18.7 years with a literacy rate of 85 percent.²⁹

Kenya has a diversified economy that includes agriculture, manufacturing, industries, and tourism. For 75 percent of the population, however, the basic economic system is agriculture. The country's gross domestic product has witnessed an impressive growth rate for the last six years or so: 2.9 percent (2003), 5.1 percent (2004), 5.8 percent (2005), 6.4 percent (2006), and over 7 percent (2007).³⁰ In spite of these impressive figures, many people live at or below the poverty rate (e.g., 50 percent in 2000).³¹ Since young people make up most of this figure, about 72 percent of Africa's youth subsist on less than two dollars a day.³²

Upon its independence in 1963, Kenya made a commitment to fight the three enemies of broad-based human development: poverty, disease, and illiteracy.³³ Thus it became necessary to address the role of young people who, at that time, had figured prominently in the success of nationalist movements during the colonial era. Kenya's first attempt to address youth issues came in 1964 with creation of the National Youth Service, an organization given the mandate of looking into young people's concerns and of devising ways of integrating them into the national economy. Due to the National Youth Service's limited scope and success, subsequent development plans such as "Sectional Paper No. 2 of 1992 on Small Scale and Jua Kali Enterprises, the 1997–2001 Development Plans, and the National Poverty Eradication Plan 1999–2015" included policies for dealing with national youth concerns.³⁴ However, these policies failed to meet their objectives due to (1) a high population growth rate that put immense pressure on available resources as the number of young people kept rising, (2) lack of appropriate skills among the youth, (3) unclear and uncoordinated youth policies and programs, (4) resource constraints, and (5) youth stereotypes.³⁵

The most significant attempt to address youth issues, however, came about five years ago with the creation of the MSYA, which, with a great sense of purpose and urgency, designed and developed the KNYP to mainstream and coordinate youth programs in the country. The MSYA "visualizes a society where youth have an equal opportunity, as other citizens, to realize their fullest potential, productively participating in economic, social, political, cultural and religious life without fear or favor."³⁶ Moreover, it has committed itself to "creat[ing] proper conditions for the youth to empower themselves

and exploit their potential,” with the goal of “promot[ing] youth participation in the democratic processes, as well as in community and civil affairs, ensuring that youth programs involve them and are youth centered.”³⁷ Although this policy obligates all members of society to assist young people, it challenges the government to become the lead agent by “providing the necessary framework for young people to fulfill their obligations.”³⁸

Understandably, since young people have the most potential, physical strength, and energy, and since they constitute the largest proportion of the educated population, they should be the main focus of various development and socioeconomic programs, especially in Africa. Because African governments are not likely to embark on gathering intelligence from concerned parties—particularly poor people, of which youth represent the largest portion—any realistic strategy must first explore concerned government agencies in order to identify their values. Only by so doing can a proper diagnosis of government weaknesses lead to improvement in setting agendas and funding allocations. Besides, a need exists to explore Africa’s leadership to understand its weakness and areas for improvement. This study attempts to do so in sub-Saharan Africa, using two narrative studies conducted with two officials at MSYA offices in Nairobi, Kenya.

Methodology and Analysis

A comprehensive tool in the analysis of human problems, Harold Lasswell’s policy-science framework deals “with knowledge of and in the decision processes of the public and civic order.”³⁹ It seeks to provide decision makers with a tool to fully comprehend problems as they exist in a given context in order to “develop recommendations that are both realistic and desirable,” doing so by adhering to three principles: contextuality, problem orientation, and diversity.⁴⁰

Because every problem is embedded in a web of social relationships, policy science seeks to establish *contextuality*, which involves social mapping and the decision-mapping processes. Since the former looks into any social context that exists in relation to a problem, the simplest representation thus emphasizes participants, perspectives, situations, base values, strategies, outcomes, and effects. The decision-mapping process assists in reconstructing possible events, leading to implementation of a particular

policy. This process distinguishes the following power outcomes: intelligence, promotion, prescription, invocation, application, termination, and appraisal.⁴¹

Since humans interact with each other and define problems according to values embedded in their personalities as well as their ethnic and national identities, *problem orientation* seeks to understand the issue at hand and invent solutions. At this stage of the policy process, participants begin a self-examination by conducting five intellectual tasks: *goal clarification*, *trend analysis*, *factor analysis*, *predictions*, and *alternatives*.

Regarding the third principle of policy sciences, *diversity*, Lasswell challenges those involved in decision making to avoid narrow-mindedness and remain open to various problem-solving methods. He asserts that the methods employed should not be limited to a narrow range; instead, he advocates *content analysis*, *decision seminars*, *silhouette analysis*, and *developmental constructs*, among others.⁴² This study applied the social-mapping process, under *contextuality*, to provide an in-depth analysis of the study location.

The Social-Mapping Process

To understand an issue's past, present, and future, one uses the social-mapping process to emphasize *participants*, *perspectives*, *situations*, *base values*, *strategies*, *outcomes*, and *effects*. Lasswell defines *participants* as those who pursue values that satisfy outcomes and *value* as "a category of preferred events" or outcomes pursued by actors through various institutions.⁴³ He believes that, during the social process, participants seek eight values: *power*, *enlightenment*, *wealth*, *well-being*, *skill*, *affection*, *respect*, and *rectitude*.⁴⁴

Many participants are interested in youth empowerment in Kenya. These include young people, parents, government, politicians, elites, faith-based organizations, and Kenyans in general—each uniquely defining youth empowerment and seeking to maximize a variety of value outcomes. Youth wish to be empowered. They not only want to increase their knowledge base (*enlightenment*) and abilities (*skill*) in anticipation of enhancing future economic security (*well-being*, *wealth*), but also wish to please their parents (*affection*) and enhance their own sense of virtue (*rectitude*). Moreover, young people demand participation in political processes and the sharing of *power* with current leaders. Parents also want their children appropriately equipped to face future challenges and handle adult responsibilities. Presumably, they value having *enlightened* children with skills to harness their

potential and contribute to the family's well-being. Parents also anticipate community esteem (*respect*) that attends educated offspring and the sense of moral worth (*rectitude*) derived from fulfilling parental obligations. Moreover, the Kenyan government, through the MSYA and other departments, wants to equip its citizens with *enlightenment* and *skills* to steer the country into economic prosperity and growth (*wealth*). Most likely, the government's goal is to develop an enlightened community by creating a skilled and knowledgeable labor force and citizenry. Politicians, on the other hand, want to win favor in the eyes of the public (*respect*) and therefore wish to maximize values that would keep them in *power*. Presumably, faith-based organizations, elites (policy analysts, think tanks, and educators), and the general public also want to promote *enlightenment*, *well-being*, *wealth*, *skills*, and *respect* among Kenyans.

However, young people find it difficult to empower themselves due to their limited *base values*. Nevertheless, because these values "include all the resources available to a participant at a given time," young people do have the energy, motivation, and academic qualifications to positively affect the policy process.⁴⁵ In contrast, public officials, politicians, and elites have financial resources, power, and authority. These *base values* have cultivated an attitude of dictatorship that, whether intentionally or unintentionally, marginalizes young people. Among other participants in the policy process, religious leaders have rectitude and morality on their side, academics have knowledge and expertise, and parents have experience and skills in child care—*base values* that each can use to legitimize their arguments or demands on this issue.

The question here is what *strategy* each participant will engage in to affect value outcomes. How can young people employ their energy, motivation, and academic qualifications to have their voices and concerns acknowledged in the policy arena? What should each cluster of participants do to affect the policy, and how would they mobilize their resources to have an impact or a voice? Young people clearly understand their power limitations and continue to appeal for inclusion in Kenya's decision-making processes. Young people can make their demands known by pursuing *strategies* that make use of associations, the media, participation in political campaigns, and so forth. Unfortunately, due to persistent marginalization, they have also engaged in riots and criminal activities to air their frustrations

and concerns. The government's strategy has been to delay, promising to look into the issue but never doing so.

Persistent youth challenges and Kenyan politics have created different *perspectives* on this issue, described by Lasswell as "subjective events experienced by participants in the social process," including value demands, expectations, and identities of the participants in an issue.⁴⁶ Unsurprisingly, young Kenyans identify themselves as today's leaders and are adamant about inclusion in power sharing and any reform that will apportion some influence and wealth to them. Presumably, public officials perceive that their experience as administrators and former youth gives them special abilities to determine and address young people's challenges. By producing the KNYP, the government, through the MSYA, feels that in due time many of these concerns will be addressed, leading to the empowerment of young people. Parents and the general public are skeptical that the government will do so since constructive interactions between these two parties rarely occur. The *situations* or arenas in which interactions with young people take place may well be the home, social gatherings such as religious services, and political campaigns; they may even occur through the media.

Narrative Studies

Guided by the need to gather subjective opinion and to explore government officials' perspectives/values concerning youth empowerment in Kenya, this research project conducted narrative studies to collect data to analyze, using Lasswell's eight social values.

As a qualitative research strategy, a narrative study involves interviewing a subject (normally an expert) with the hope of attaining better understanding of a topic. In June 2008, two narrative interviews were conducted at MSYA offices in Nairobi with two male government officials (GO-A and GO-B) at the MSYA who had the time and willingness to participate in an intensive one-on-one interview about youth issues in Kenya (table 1). Although narrative studies are not representative, they were deemed appropriate and adequate for the study because they offered the opportunity to examine the respondents' subjectivity and the meaning they attach to youth empowerment; they also captured the discussions as provided. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, unstructured questions (generated from the KNYP) were posed to these officials.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics and perspectives of the subjects

Subject	Marital Status	Education	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Assumption 1	Assumption 2
GO-A	Single	College	32	Male	Abaluhya	Empathetic	Skill
GO-B	Married	College	47	Male	Agikuyu	Out of Touch	Wealth

The interviewees were encouraged first to analyze ways that public institutions could empower the youth in Kenya, allowing them to lead better lives and contribute to the well-being of the nation. Next, the officials were asked to identify issues that should be the government's highest priority with regard to empowering young people effectively. Given the subjects' qualifications and experience in dealing with young people, they provided insightful information on youth empowerment in Kenya. Regardless of the potentially unlimited number of perceptions that the officials could have had concerning youth empowerment or the lack of it, this study assumed that (1) they would have similar perspectives since they work for the same department and have most likely read the KNYP, and that (2) their prioritization of the issues would vary.

Analysis

Data transcription from the hour-long interviews yielded dozens of indicators on youth empowerment. Statements that addressed the research question were correlated to Lasswell's eight values (table 2).

Table 2. Values sought in the social process

Value	Definition
Power	Victory or defeat in fights or elections. To receive power is to be supported by others; to give power is to support others.
Enlightenment	Scientific discovery, news. To receive enlightenment is to obtain knowledge of the social and natural context; to give enlightenment is to make such knowledge available to others.
Skill	Instruction, demonstration of proficiency. To obtain skills is to be provided with opportunities to receive instruction and to exercise an acquired proficiency; to contribute to the skill of others is to enable them to have corresponding opportunities.
Wealth	Income, ownership transfer. To obtain wealth is to receive money or other claims to the use of resources for production or consumption; to give wealth is to transfer money or claims.
Well-Being	Medical care, protection. To receive well-being benefits is to obtain the assistance of those who affect safety, health, and comfort; to contribute to well-being is to assist others in the same way.
Affection	Expression of intimacy, friendship, loyalty. To receive affection is to be an object of love, friendly feeling, and loyalty; to give affection is to project these sentiments towards others.

Value	Definition
Respect	Honor, discriminatory exclusion. To receive respect is to obtain recognition from others; to give respect is to grant recognition to other people.
Rectitude	Acceptance in religions or ethical association. To receive favorable evaluations in terms of rectitude is to be characterized as an ethical or religious person; to evaluate others in terms of rectitude is to characterize them correspondingly.

Source: Harold D. Lasswell, *A Pre-view of Policy Sciences* (New York: American Elsevier, 1971), 18.

The fact that the interviewees' responses reflected differences in their attitude and analysis of the youth situation refuted the study's first assumption, mentioned previously, that they would have similar views since they work for the same department and are conversant with the KNYP. GO-A had considerable empathy for the youths' plight, but GO-B's attitude and tone revealed his lack of sympathy for them. According to social constructionist theory, such differences could well stem from an individual's history, culture, and experience.⁴⁷ GO-A's age (32) puts him closer to the youth experience than his 47-year-old counterpart—explaining his apparent empathy. GO-A seemed to understand where the government has gone wrong in regard to the quality of education in Kenya, expressing his ideas about introducing technological courses into the education curriculum and decentralizing institutions to create more jobs. Furthermore, as a graduate of the 8-4-4 education system, he had experienced the problems associated with Kenya's education system.⁴⁸

Similarly, GO-B's age and the fact that he went through the old British education system could account for his opposing views and disconnection with the experiences of young people.⁴⁹ Vivien Burr maintains that experiences dictate perceptions and that history and culture, ever-dynamic concepts, mold people and explain cohort dichotomies in ideas and values.⁵⁰ Moreover, as is widely known, politics in Africa and affiliation with political parties are consistently defined along ethnic lines. The fact that the president of Kenya, Mr. Mwai Kibaki, is an Agikuyu, like GO-B, may suggest a correlation between ethnicity and GO-B's unwavering support for the government.

With regard to the study's second assumption, the respondents did indeed differ in their prioritization of youth issues that need urgent government attention. GO-A suggested updating the 8-4-4 education curriculum to make it compatible with current market needs by adding desirable skills such as computer technology. In the context of Lasswell's eight values, GO-A preferred the prioritization of skill (enlightenment) in Kenya's youth

empowerment process. GO-B, however, believed that the government should focus on employment creation, commenting that “jobs are the single most important empowering opportunity . . . because if you provide employment to young people, then all the other empowerment areas fall into place.” Inherently, he selected wealth as his preferred value.

Discussion

The interviewees’ apparent prioritization of different values may well have revealed the kind of decision-making processes adopted by Kenya’s public organizations and the government at large. These officials’ confession that Kenya’s youth remain unaware of the MSYA indicated that government decision making and implementation reflected an inside-access model—one in which proposals arise within government units, and then the issue expands to identification and attention groups in order to create sufficient pressure on decision makers to put it on the formal agenda.⁵¹ However, at no point does the public become greatly involved. As eager as young people are to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives, the interviews make clear that intelligence, crucial in the formulation of the KNYP, was not collected from the prime stakeholders—youth. Thus this study has served to expose Kenya’s weakness in attending to youth issues.

Moreover, since the two interviewees prioritized different issues, one may justifiably conclude that the MSYA has no defined order or values regarding youth empowerment. Insofar as values determine what is right and what is wrong, murkiness and lack of clarity in organizational values “[invite] unnecessary ethical dilemmas and [encourage] an environment in which ethical lapses flourish.”⁵² Other implications include “well-meaning but out-of-step individuals, diminished team spirit and camaraderie, organizational turmoil, . . . poor integration and communication with the values of the public.”⁵³ Since a lack of prioritization may result in conflicting attention and implementation of goals within the MSYA, Kenya should clearly indicate which area, among those discussed in the KNYP, has priority in empowering young people. Such openness would serve to combat building skepticism that the government does not care about youth, causing many people to question the MSYA’s role. Additionally, because the MSYA has received few resources to achieve its objectives, it is in no position to address

all of the identified issues simultaneously. The current funding is too limited for such a comprehensive approach. As GO-B said, “There is a lot to be done.”

This study also discovered that other youth issues needing urgent attention supposedly do not fall within the MSYA’s jurisdiction, bringing into question its functionality and capacity to fulfill stated goals. Although collaborating with other departments, such as the Registrar of Persons, Ministry of Education, or the Ministry of Health, may offer a solution, the autonomy of government agencies, bureaucratic infighting, and difficulties experienced in soliciting their cooperation on any given issue compromise the MSYA’s strategies and effectiveness. Together with the ministry’s stated objectives, which offer only a list of youth challenges that are quite vague about how exactly to empower young people, lack of jurisdiction to attend to most of the identified issues puts Kenya’s development and its chances for sustainability in jeopardy.

If the Kenyan government had asked its officials to prioritize youth issues identified in the KNYP, responses would have varied greatly. To a significant degree, this study has revealed government’s weakness in attending to youth concerns and empowering them by showing that, although both interviewees worked in the same office at the MSYA, each has his own way of defining youth issues and each holds a theory about addressing them—theories laden with their own personal values. Hence, exploring this problem has significance because it indicates that the objectives outlined in the KNYP are diagnostic at best and do not reveal a concrete plan of action to empower youth.

Without setting limits, this research should prove useful to various institutions within Kenya and Africa as a whole in terms of assessing various viewpoints, prioritizing them, and reaching an amicable conclusion on how to empower youth. Additionally, it will serve to challenge policy analysts to become more comprehensive when searching for alternatives to solve youth problems. It offers a needs-assessment tool—policy science—to those stewards of public service interested in understanding human problems and analyzing alternatives. Moreover, the study has shown that it is possible to have clear insight into the thought processes of all concerned. One hopes that this study will begin to nourish a healthy, needed dialogue in Kenya and in the distressed continent of Africa concerning youth empowerment and will lead to an improved decision-making process. (Since this research

applied narrative interviewing to collect data, the results cannot be generalized to Kenya as a whole and are limited only to the sample itself.)

Recommendations and Conclusion

To build on this study, future researchers could choose to compare public officials' perspectives with those of young people and thereby illuminate differences in their perceptions and explain why policies formulated by the Kenya government have yet to serve youth well. Additionally, more research needs to be conducted—for example, establishing a working definition for youth empowerment. Doing so would lay the groundwork for creating measurements to gauge youth empowerment, or the lack of it, in this region. Such an effort must involve young people themselves, not to mention effort and intelligence.

This study sought to understand the prioritization of certain values among government officials given a mandate to address youth issues and institute their empowerment in Kenya. Members of the MSYA are responsible for defining problems experienced by young Kenyans and formulating viable strategies; they also are expected to coordinate the efforts of other departments so as to provide the necessary tools and framework for youth to discover and harness the power within themselves. Granted, creation of the MSYA is appropriate, but it remains to be seen whether that organization can attain its goals.

The viewpoints of this study's two subjects revealed that working for the same department and sharing its vision, mission, and goal do not necessarily mean that officials are in synch on how to go about achieving defined objectives. The findings indicate that individuals, influenced by such factors as age and varying life experiences, differ in their estimation of their agency's priorities, a fact that emphasizes a need for government to set an agenda for departments authorized to deal with youth issues. Can this research then correctly surmise that the officials' prioritization of different values exposes a potential weakness in the government's decision making and implementation agenda and its ability to institute sustainable development? The answer is yes. Several concerns support this response.

Even though the interviewees' divergent values and perspectives certainly advance our understanding of the complexity of youth empowerment or development, they also reveal the different paths and values that subjects

advocate while pursuing a similar goal—in this case, youths' well-being. Thus, it is possible that policy-making elites have difficulty agreeing on what value/issue to pursue in the first place. Of more concern is the view, held by GO-B, that youth know nothing and are biased. Intentionally or not, public officials and leaders have upheld the belief that only adults can make sound decisions to satisfy everyone's needs. To continue the practice of having adults prescribe and enforce their decisions on young people is unfair and mutes the voices of young people, stifling their economic and political growth and inevitably nourishing poverty and its vices.

Furthermore, this study disclosed the potential benefits of including Kenya's youth in the policy process and harnessing their intellect, energy, and aspirations for economic growth. As in other African countries, the fact that this process—from initiation, analysis and decision making, implementation, and even evaluation—takes a top-down approach hinders the successful inclusion of young people in Kenya's policy arena. This suggests that only those in power make and implement decisions that affect the rest of the population without necessarily soliciting its support. Regardless of the MSYA's stated priority of enhancing youths' well-being, the unrelenting marginalization of young people in important spheres of community life illuminates deficiencies in the policy arena. In such a scenario, one may justifiably argue that only policies which uphold the elites' interests and status are approved.

Moreover, the study discovered that the problem of sustainable development, under which youth empowerment falls, may be not only logical and ideological but also empirical. More than likely, Kenya's policy makers, like their African counterparts, lack the appropriate tools to deliberate on complex issues such as youth empowerment and development. Since public policy and economic development strategies in general, and youth empowerment in particular, require consideration of explicit and implicit causes of problems (e.g., young people's idleness and poverty), this study recommends applying a well-tested policy-analysis tool, such as policy science, to address such a daunting task because it offers dependable, comprehensive, rational, and integrative information on an issue.

To fully understand Kenya's failure to achieve sustainable development, one must understand the government's prioritization and agenda-setting processes. When considering alternatives and making decisions, public ad-

ministrators should not only establish dialogue with young people but also set up a system that considers their views as well as analyzes and incorporates their values. Doing so will empower them to become better people, friends, and citizens.

Notes

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