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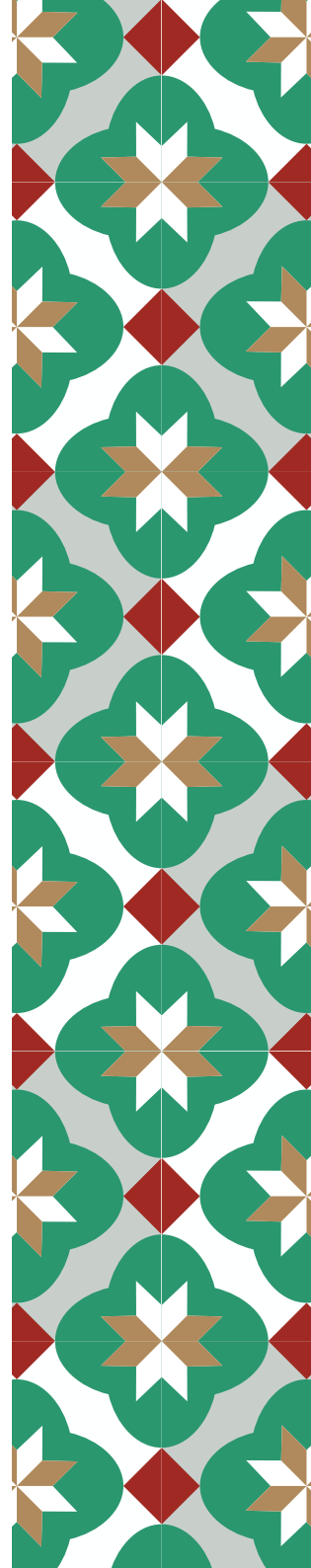
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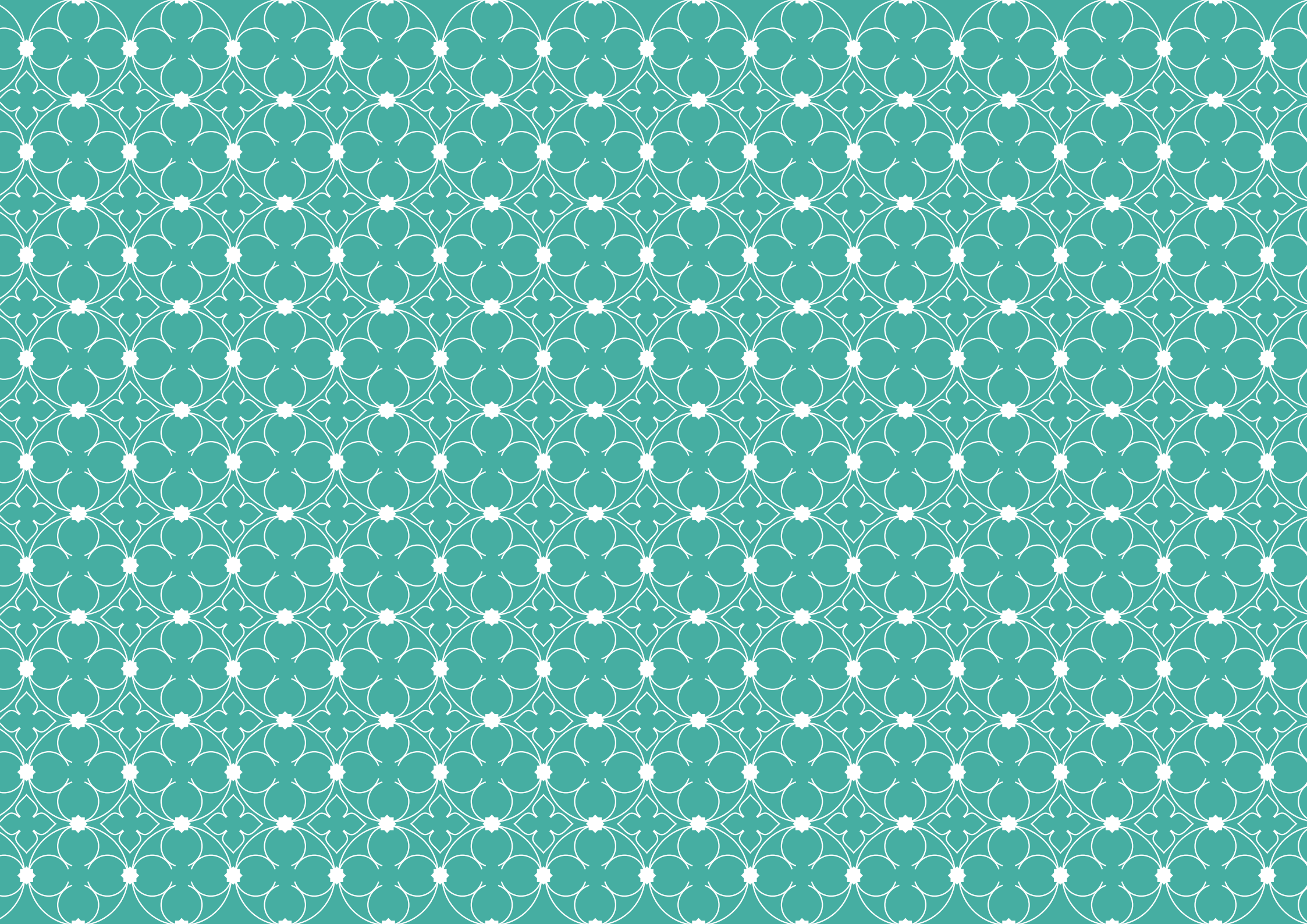
Women & Islamic Cultures Online

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Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures Online

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The Online edition of the Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures was launched in 2010. EWIC Online has published all 1,246 articles by the 907 authors which were published in the original six-volume Print EWIC (2003-2007). Annually, EWIC Online will upload and publish two supplements, Spring and Fall. Each supplement will include an average of 20-25 articles, averaging 4-5,000 words apiece, making each supplement approximately 100,000 words.

As of 2011, Supplements I-IV have been published, bringing the total number of articles in EWIC Online to approximately 1,350, well over 2 million words, written by 1,000 scholars from every region of the world. The articles cover every topic for which we were able to find authors from every discipline which has produced research on women and Islamic cultures. EWIC focuses on all women in Muslim majority societies and Muslim women in Muslim minority societies. These articles are collected in a searchable database on the Brill EWIC Online website for ease of access.

The vision of EWIC Online is two fold: First to continually update research on topics which were published in Print EWIC; Second to continually expand the horizon of scholarship by adding new research topics and new technologies of publishing as they present themselves. EWIC Online Editors have gone back to the original 410 article topics developed for Print EWIC and solicited

numerous articles on those topics which had not been available during the publishing run of Print EWIC (such as an article on breast feeding in South East Asia). A number of the original Print EWIC topics were revised as new materials made the original descriptions outdated or inadequate (the entry descriptions for cinema were updated); and some entry descriptions were deleted entirely (the entry description on “iconic” women was dropped).

Expanding the horizon of research, EWIC Online has added 35 new article entry topics as new research emerged; as transformations among women and Islamic cultures called for new perspective; and as technologies of knowledge production allowed for innovative possibilities. Among the new article topics added to EWIC Online are entries on women and FaceBook, Twitter, Skype, texting, and other social media; women and diaspora studies; women and national and transnational security regimes; online dating; web representations and blogs; cartoons, graphic novels, and comic books; children’s literatures; the translation industries; encyclopedia productions; international development agencies; domestic violence; hip-hop and rap; academic political and social movements; homosexual and queer movements; tourism; informal urban settlements; television as a form of representation; and on children’s literatures.

Technological changes offered by online publication allows for more visual images than was possible in Print EWIC. EWIC Online is experimenting with film clips, YouTube like clips, as well as other digital representations. In addition, music and other audio forms of publication now become possible with EWIC Online. Given the digital opportunities, EWIC Online articles have been longer and more in-depth than the Print EWIC articles could be.

EWIC continues its rigorous attention to inter-disciplinarity and multi-disciplinarity. As much as possible we ask authors to be comparative and to contextualize key concepts within local contexts. EWIC articles try to address historical embeddings of events and processes as much as possible. Terms such as “Muslim woman”, and “Islam” which appear to have accepted understandings are problematized and situated. While EWIC avoids biographical sketches of “outstanding” Muslim women, in an effort to challenge the “exceptional woman” view of Muslim women, there are occasional articles which reference specific women in greater detail, as appropriate to those topics.

The Editors work collectively to address the rapidly changing situation of women and Islamic cultures. EWIC Online attempts to capture events such as the Arab Spring; the uprisings in Iran around the 2009 elections; the dramatic emergence of Facebook, Twitter and other social media among women throughout the Muslim world; the powerful presence of female youth in public arenas around the world; the massive migrations and transnationality of new generations of women and youth; the profound economic and social changes precipitated by the increasing urbanism throughout the world; the on-going figurations and refigurations of Islam and Islamic movements as women assimilate them and as the movements take on gendered questions; and the unrelenting recognition of globalism at every possible level—economic, political, social, religious, cultural.


EWIC Online undertakes outreach activities to engage scholars, students and the lay community in issues related to women and Islamic cultures. For example, EWIC organized a panel at the Middle East Studies Association Meetings in December 2011, in Washington, DC. to share our research, especially on women, youth and the Arab Spring. EWIC has organized panels at previous MESA meetings; at the Women’s History Conference in the Berkshires; and has done launches in Cairo, Egypt, as well as Anchorage, Alaska. Outreach beyond these panels and workshops and website, include numerous public talks and lectures given by the EWIC Editorial Board.


As General Editor, I have also worked to democratize access to EWIC by developing the EWIC website, available for free public access: <http://sjoseph.ucdavis.edu/ewic/>. The EWIC website hosts the EWIC Scholars Database, currently publishing the templates of over 1,800 scholars in a searchable database.

We invite scholars to log on to <http://sjoseph.ucdavis.edu> and fill out a scholar’s template for publishing or to update their templates if previously published. We invite scholars, graduate students, practitioners and professionals to let us know of their expertise and willingness to join us in this exciting project to bring the most rigorous research on women and Islamic cultures to the scholarly and lay public.

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New Modes of Communication: Web Representations and Blogs: North Africa

The Muslim countries of North Africa – Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya – provide an interesting context for exploring some of the salient trends in the adoption, use, and implications of new information and communication technologies (ICTs). Within less than one decade, the use of mobile telephones, the Internet, online spaces, and social network sites (Facebook, MySpace) has known spectacular growth, especially among the segment of the Maghribi population whose voices are usually underrepresented in the public sphere: young women and men. Between 2000 and 2007, the number of Internet users in Morocco and Algeria, for instance, increased by 4,500 per cent and 3,740 percent respectively; mobile phone subscribers reached 73 and 77 percent of the population in Libya and Tunisia respectively (see Table 1). While overall access to the Internet remains relatively low in this region compared to the rest of the world, the remarkable popularity of the new media compels us to move beyond mere speculation about whether or not they have any social and political impact worthy of scholarly attention.

The new media, as this entry demonstrates, are operating within a very dynamic region where new spaces of social interaction are beginning to transform citizens' habits of self-expression, communication among themselves as well as communication about and with their social and political institutions. While some analysis has highlighted the subversive or democratizing promises of the new technologies, the first two sections of this entry discuss forms of empowerment by grounding technologies within the broader contexts of North African countries where issues of accessibility and state surveillance and censorship affect the uses of the technologies. The third section focuses on the Maghribi political blogosphere to highlight the emergence of alternative forms of civic engagement and social and political critique. The last section turns to mobile telephones and cyber social networks to reveal individual forms of empowerment, particularly with respect to gender (redefinitions) and identity politics.

Technologies in context

Technologies of communication, regardless of their novelty or sophistication, acquire meaning only within the specificities of the larger environment in which they are embedded and used. These environments are already structured by power differentials across, age, class, gender, and ethnic lines. In exploring the social and political meanings of the technologies and in assessing the scope of their empowering potential, we have to acknowledge both the power differentials at play, as well as their reproduction through the institutions, practices, and realities of everyday lives.

The realities of the Maghrib region are complex, dynamic, and differentiated. Although Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia are united by their geographic proximity, linguistic similarities, and long Islamic traditions, their social, economic, and political realities are different enough (Zoubir and Haizam 2008) to produce a nuanced map of Internet development and use. Significant differences exist not only at the level of natural resources endowment and household

income, but also in the rates of adult literacy, state investment in information infrastructure, and their politics concerning freedom of expression.

The Maghrib countries have been experimenting for the last two decades with different forms of political and economic liberalization with varying degrees of success (Zoubir and Haizam 2008). After years of military rule, Algeria seems to be leaning toward a more participatory polity; Libya's decades of isolation and closed economy are gradually yielding to slow integration with the global world economy; Morocco's political and economic liberalization have opened more spaces for the participation of new political actors and the emergence of new economic and social entrepreneurs, while Tunisia has invested more in economic development and growth than in civil liberties.

Challenges in bridging the gender gap are common, however, across the Maghrib, despite the fact that Tunisia and Morocco have the most progressive Family Status Laws in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. Resilient patriarchal structures and ideologies reproduce and reinforce gender differences in access to resources and development opportunities in the region. The 2008 *Global Gender Gap Index* produced by the World Economic Forum captures this reality by ranking Tunisia 103 out of 130 countries, Algeria 111 and Morocco 125, while Libya remains unranked given the unavailability of data. Gender inequality is based on gaps measured in economic participation, educational attainment, health and life expectancy, as well political empowerment. Despite the absence of accurate gender disaggregated data in the use of and access to new media, the gender digital divide is a reality in the region given the overall persistence of the gender literacy gaps in all four countries, and the feminization of poverty. Not surprisingly, the digital divide within countries "broadly reflects the gender divide" and the dominant patterns of discrimination (Gurumurthy 2004, 22).

Gaps in gender equity and varying levels of economic and political participation provide a context where trends in the development and uses of the technology remain unpredictable. Although Tunisia was the first Arab country to introduce the Internet (1991), their technology has grown relatively slowly. Between 2000 and 2007, the number of Internet users grew by a mere 854 per cent compared to 4,500 percent growth in Morocco over the same period (Tables 1 and 2). Yet Morocco has the lowest Gross National Product per capita and the highest rates of adult illiteracy in the region, with the widest literacy gender gap. Despite this, the country has the fastest growing community of Internet users in both the Maghrib and MENA (Internet Usage Statistics 2007).

Table 1: Development Indicators and Technology in the Maghrib

	Algeria	Libya	Morocco	Tunisia
Population				
2007	33,506,567	6,293,910	30,534,870	10,342,253
Income Per				
Capita 2007	7,309	13,565	3,835	7,086
Literacy Rates	60.1% F	74.8% F	39.6% F	65.35% F
Over 15 (M&F)*	79.5% M	92.8% M	65.7% M	83.39% M
Internet Cafes	3,000	700	4,000 Δ	300
Personal Computer				
Per 1000, 2005–06	10	24	30	62
Internet users				
Per 100, 2007	10.34	4.36	21.14	16.68
% Internet Growth				
2000–07	3,740	1,950	4,500	854

• Source: World Bank 2009; Central Intelligence Agency 2007; Internet Usage Statistics 2007; International Telecommunication Union 2007.

*M=Male and F=Female

Δ Recent estimates by the Moroccan Internet Society (www.misoc.ma)

The Internet was first introduced in Morocco in 1995. Its rapid growth has been facilitated by the large numbers of cybercafés (estimated at 4,000), the flexibility of their schedule (24 hours a day, for most), their neighborhood proximity, and the decreasing rates per hour (average 50 cents/hour). The Moroccan blogosphere, estimated to include 10,000 blogs in 2006, has since grown into the largest in North Africa (OpenNet Initiative 2007). The 2009 World Internet Statistics ranks Morocco third and Tunisia eighth in the African continent in terms of Internet penetration.

Table 2: Change in Internet users* per 100 inhabitants, 2000–07

Year	Algeria	Libya	Morocco	Tunisia
2000	0.49	0.19	0.68	2.72
2004	4.64	3.57	11.28	8.35
2007	10.34	4.36	21.14	16.68

• Source: International Telecommunication Union 2007

* Internet users are defined as persons with access to the Internet (as opposed to subscribers who must have purchased access through a service)

Despite the relatively higher purchasing power in Algeria and Libya and a narrower gender literacy gap, Internet use is still surprisingly limited in both countries although it was introduced more than a decade ago, 1994 and 1998 respectively. Both countries still have fewer numbers of personal computers than in Morocco and Tunisia and fewer Internet users. The number of Internet cafés in Algeria, however, has grown enormously, which explains the noticeable growth of 3,740 percent between 2000 and 2007.

Low Internet penetration in developing countries points to such access-restricting factors as the high cost of technology, low rates of basic and computer literacy, time constraints for women, and the dominance of English language. All these challenges are equally observed in the Maghrib. Yet, as Tables 1 and 2 show, the correlation between all these factors is less systematic than usually maintained. We have to look at the regimes' (in)tolerance of free speech as a key indicator in the development of the new media.

State control and censorship of connectivity

As in the rest of the Middle East, the spectacular popularity of the Internet among growing segments of the Maghribi population has triggered an equally spectacular reinvention and sharpening of authoritarian impulses. Governments have mobilized a variety of multilayered censorship measures of surveillance and control to impose physical, legal, and/or technological restrictions on technology users.

In addition to harsh press laws and regulations that punish dissent, Tunisia deploys extensive filtering and blocking of sites with critical views of the regime. Repeated cases of harassment, arrest, and imprisonment of Internet users have earned Tunisia its rank among the “enemies of the Internet” according to Paris-based freedom watchdog, Reporters without Borders. All internet cafés “are supervised by the regime and access to the video-sharing website Dailymotion is regularly blocked” (RWB 2008, 166). Algeria and Libya, also ranked very low in Internet freedom, deploy a vast arsenal of regulations and approaches to monitor cyber activity and persecute perceived regime offenders. Censorship and retribution are justified by the twin loose categories of “public order” and “public morality.” These categories cover dissenting political views and Islamist materials, as well as pornographic materials and homosexuality. Algeria’s highly centralized network subjects all Internet connections to control and censorship by government servers before content reaches the global Internet (OpenNet Initiative 2007). Libya does not monopolize Internet service providers, but strict control is exercised over oppositional websites and through regular blocking of Amazigh-related websites (<www.libyaimal.com>) and Libyan human rights sites (<www.libyanhumanrights.com>).

In Morocco, restrictions on Internet use and the filtering of cyber materials have remained relatively minimal until recently. The reputation of Morocco’s tolerance of online free speech started to suffer in 2008 when the 24-year-old blogger, Mohamed Elraji, was tried and sentenced to two years imprisonment for criticizing the king. The same year, Fouad Mortada was arrested for assuming the identity of Prince Moulay Rachid on Facebook. Both young men were later pardoned, but the reputation of Morocco as a dreamland for Internet users has been

tarnished since. In addition, users have internalized self-censorship by avoiding open criticism of the three topics that test the country's tolerance for freedom of expression both online and off: Western Sahara, royal authority, and defamation of Islam.

The development, use, and regulation of the Internet in the Maghrib provide compelling evidence about one of the unresolved tensions crippling the development of technologies in the Arab countries. On the one hand, the regimes demonstrate a keen desire to wire their societies with the technologies to facilitate their global economic integration and enhance their competitiveness. On the other hand, their profound distrust of the democratizing potential of the technologies fuels their deep-seated fear of citizens' access to open sources of information. The more citizens develop skills for creating alternative systems of information sharing and knowledge production, the more heightened are the regimes' anxieties about losing monopoly over the nature, direction, and sources of information.

Cyber censorship and control of information are practices that no longer mask the regimes' tendencies to infantilize their citizenry. Conversely, users' manipulations of technologies consistently test the regimes' discourses of political liberalization and debunk much of the professed improvements in their human rights records.

Interestingly, the constant surveillance and threat of censorship and persecution render the simple fact of accessing the Internet in these contexts an empowering act in and of itself. The mere attempt at expressing oneself, through blogs, chat rooms, YouTube, or Facebook, acquires exaggerated meanings for both the user and the controlling regimes. While the technologies are not turning all users into political activists or advocates for human rights, and while not all users are champions of gender equity, some uses could potentially be perceived as political acts of defiance, resistance, and/or subversion. Indeed, trends in the use of new media suggest a strong desire to be informed and connected across gender and age lines despite the regimes' taxing censorship measures and the structural constraints limiting access to and use of information technologies.

Politicizing modes of communication

The prolific literature on empowerment recognizes the thick and multilayered meanings of the concept. Empowerment includes affirmation of agency, greater access to resources and participation in decision-making, enhanced self-confidence, and enlargement of individual choices (Kabeer 1994, Narayan 2005, Sharma 2008, Rowland 1997). While different degrees of emphasis are placed on each of these dimensions, the literature on ICT's potential for women's empowerment foregrounds their "transformative" aspects. A key distinction is made between empowerment "as capacity building to cope with the requirements of life more efficiently versus capacity building to transform the conditions of life and assert alternative gender roles" (Huyer and Sikoska 2003, 4). Along with this comes the distinction between individual and collective forms of empowerment. While the former highlight gains in the individual's level of knowledge, self-esteem, and confidence in using technology, the latter points to women's capacity to organize themselves as political actors and advocates for change who use "public information as an input

to their agendas, and put it to the service of women at large" (Huyer and Sikoska 2003, 9).

Although these distinctions are important, we need equally to acknowledge the intersections between individual and collective forms of empowerment, given the network-building capabilities of the technologies themselves and the collectivistic context in which technologies are used. The contexts in which young women and men access the technology are structured by already existing webs of social networks and relationships that are carried over and reinforced by the technology. Recognizing this leads us to broaden our understanding of "connectivity" to include the "social spaces of networking that surround women and link them and their personal, household, community and other networks to ICTs" (Huyer and Sikoska 2003, 8). This also helps us capture the direct and indirect forms of women's access to the technology as well as recognize the important links "between people, technology, institutions, and places which can in turn lead to more effective and powerful uses of technology" (Huyer and Sikoska 2003, 8-9). The next section reflects on the multidimensionality of empowerment in the Maghrib.

Blogging political engagement

New media in Muslim societies have attracted attention as potential political tools for creating (alternative) public spheres and spaces for political dissent, networking, and activism (Eickelman and Anderson 1999, Skalli 2006a). In the Maghrib, some of these promises are materializing in the bold and creative ways that citizens use new technologies – political blogs, YouTube, Facebook, and chat-rooms – to articulate their political consciousness and foreground their political engagement.

The participation of women in these spaces, though not substantial, is significant enough to demonstrate that the Maghribi political blogosphere is gendered. Despite the scarce political commentary in Libya, the first brave and witty blogger in 2007 was a young girl with the cyber identity of Highlander (Gazzini 2007, 11). In Tunisia, the Best Blog Prize in 2005 was awarded to a young Tunisian woman, La Rebelle, for the pertinence of her "blog of rebellion around a cup of coffee, emotion, truth" (<<http://tn-blogs.com/>>).

The remarkable presence of youth in these spaces is not surprising given the population structures of the Maghrib where those 30 years old and younger constitute more than half of the total population. What is surprising, however, is the multiple ways in which young women and men engage in a dialogue with their political institutions and leaders even within spaces categorized as apolitical, such as "jokes" and "society," suggesting that political leaders have a great deal to learn about and from Maghribi youth.

Cyber comments reflect deep cynicism about the local political scene and a heightened concern for violations of citizens' rights and freedoms. Political blogs deliver a pertinent, informed, and penetrating critique of the social, political, and economic institutions that hinder development in the region. They also introduce to the world a brave young citizenry that is resilient and determined to invest its civic energies in expanding the boundaries of freedom against all odds. As a young Tunisian blogger vouched, "We are fed up. We need real change, not a revolution, just [to] express ourselves freely ... but what can we lose? [The government] stopping

our blogs, we can create a blog for the occasion. We will post our notes in a new blog. We will create an aggregator for the occasion and see what happens. If the 300 blogs and the aggregator are censored; no problem. We will do the same thing with new addresses” (*Magharebia* 27 June 2007).

Often, the Maghribi blogosphere is more proactive than the written press and more efficient in rallying public opinion to defend human rights violations. When the young Moroccan blogger Mohammed Erraji was arrested in 2008 and sentenced to two years in prison, the story was barely reported in the print media while the blogosphere immediately questioned the fairness of the trial and appealed for international support.

In Tunisia, young students from the Tunisian Institute for Press were actively involved in the production of the first Tunisian online magazine, *Kalima*, while many others contributed to the diffusion of its contents in support of the often harassed journal editor and human rights advocate, Siham Bensedrine (Pintak 2007, 2). Young Tunisians, according to Bensedrine, are “experts at web publishing” and outsmart state censorship of the journal: they used proxy sites, copied the journal “from computer to computer using flash discs” and deleted it once read (Pintak 2007).

These efforts highlight interesting connections between cyber activism and changes in the real world of the Maghrib. Several youth-driven initiatives about naming injustices and shaming the nation have repercussions beyond cyberspace. For example, in the case of the famous YouTube Targuist Sniper, a young Moroccan from a small mountain town in northern Morocco (Targuist) videotaped in 2007 Moroccan gendarmes (royal police) in the act of accepting bribery. The release of the video was timed with the visit of the king to the region: nearly 400,000 YouTube visitors watched within the first week and many millions subsequently. The video prompted immediate reaction from police headquarters, which arrested the nine policemen caught on camera, and the anti-corruption units were ordered to follow cases of corruption.

Moroccan media commented on the initiative after the newsworthiness of the story was established by the French newspapers *Le Monde* and *Libération*, and Al Jazeera television (Sekkouri and Zaroui 2008). In a recent interview with the Moroccan online weekly *TelQuel*, the Sniper said he was “just a Moroccan citizen who dreams of a better Morocco, and of security services worthy of the name, whose priority would be to protect the people and not to pick them clean as is the case today.” Similar video initiatives have been reproduced in other regions of the country where teams of young citizens complement each others’ technological skills to “build on the methods used by political dissidents from the past who were forced to remain underground” (Sekkouri and Zaroui 2008).

It is precisely in the areas of reinforcement of skills, complementarity, and networking that there is a greater promise for women’s empowerment in the Maghrib. Networking and alliance building are powerful tools and expressions of women’s empowerment. In real or virtual spaces, through old or new media, networking has proved to be one of the powerful forces in the recent developments of women’s mobilization in the region (Skalli 2006a).

Scarce gender disaggregated data on Maghribis’ access to and use of technology puts

limits on assessment of gender empowerment. This does not, however, lie in the way of identifying ways in which new technologies are serving as “amplifiers of women’s voices and perspectives” (Gurumurthy 2004, 38) in the Maghrib. Many initiatives are already solidifying the activists’ advocacy agenda and improving their efficacy in using media as political tools for awareness-building and mobilization.

In 2004, a national network of 17 Moroccan women’s organizations and centers for battered women launched the website Anaruz (<www.anaruz.org>) to promote women’s freedom from violence as “a right and not a privilege.” Grounded in the reality of the women’s movement in Morocco, the initiative builds on the advocacy work of women’s associations over the last decades and extends their mobilization to areas long considered by male structures too private to justify their inclusion in public debate and political action. Anaruz acts as an information broker and an unparalleled platform for collecting, disseminating, and updating information on domestic violence. It informs the (national and international) public, creates a social dialogue and pressures policymakers to respond to the basic rights of Muslim women. Going online encourages activists to reach out for and garner the support of diasporic communities invested in the democratization of their home countries.

Research on the use of Internet by migrant communities reveals interesting efforts at coordinating political action. Migrant groups attempt to “use the political process in one country to influence events in another country” (Staeheli et al. 2002). More research is clearly needed to determine how the Maghribi diaspora uses the technologies to reconnect with their compatriots to effect political change. The few documented examples reveal interesting trends. The United Kingdom-based exiled Libyan community who settled abroad in the 1970s “used their websites primarily to create networks of Libyans abroad and to lobby with foreign governments against the ruling establishment in Tripoli” (Gazzini 2007, 3). Given the strict surveillance on cyber activity inside Libya, young Internet users rely on proxy servers and satellite connections to circumvent restrictions, access Libyan opposition sites abroad, and communicate with them. Recent cyber mobilization efforts pressured the government to sack the head of Tripoli’s Al Fateh University about whom reports of corruption were sent by students and teachers to the United Kingdom-based online journal, *Akhbar Libya*, and published by the journal’s editor-in-chief (Gazzini 2007).

The same motivation for citizenship action across borders was behind the creation of the photoblog *Intikhabat2007.com* (election 2007) by three friends from Morocco, France, and Canada. The site founders were motivated to “find creative ways to improve the political situation” in their country and encourage Moroccan citizens to “express their thoughts on politics one picture at a time” (Brea 2007). Additionally, the site provides direct links to political parties’ programs, relevant websites, legal documents and other political information. This initiative was meant to complement such vigorous political blogs as “Larbi,” “Eatbees,” and “Ibn Kafka” established within the country.

The diaspora also uses the Internet to rekindle ties with their culture, maintain relationships with their families and communities, and negotiate their “complex and layered

identity” (Gazzini 2007, 10). Second-generation Maghribi youth in Europe and the United States are organizing themselves on the Internet along ethnic lines to collect and disseminate information about their countries, and to connect with fellow citizens across borders through social network sites. Maghreb.nl and Maroc.nl are two of the early websites set up by second-generation youth in the Netherlands (Brouwer 2006) to negotiate their identities and citizenship and to network with communities. In many similar instances, the Internet empowers first-generation migrants to maintain their strong financial and social ties with their homeland, while second generations use technologies to express their identity politics.

New media and identity politics

Instances of individual and collective forms of empowerment facilitated by new media should not be underestimated within societies where restrictions on freedom of speech and movement come from diverse institutions. In addition to authoritarian regimes, patriarchal ideologies and established gender norms constrain individuals’ freedoms. In the Maghrib, as elsewhere, new media are creating unprecedented opportunities for young men and women to discover themselves and the “other” as they negotiate the demands their societies make on their gendered identities. This section of the entry briefly highlights forms of empowerment facilitated by mobile telephones and the Internet.

In the four Maghrib countries, mobile subscriptions have become phenomenally popular across regional, age, income, and gender lines. Nearly two-thirds of the population in each country are subscribers while fixed telephone lines seriously lag behind, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Mobile Cellular Subscribers per 100 inhabitants, 2000–07

	Algeria	Libya	Morocco	Tunisia
Mobile Subscribers	0.28	0.75	8.01	1.25
2000				
2004	15.09	8.71	30.1	37.38
2007	81.41	73.05	64.15	75.94
Land Line per				
100 people	9.06	14.4	7.76	12.42*

• Source: International Telecommunication Union 2007

*Data for land line telephones are from 2007, except for Libya which is from 2005.

Such growth has tremendous implications not only for market activities, but most importantly for potential transformations in individuals’ communication habits, management of time, negotiation of privacy in collectivistic cultures, and reformulation of the norms of sociability. Although more research is required to assess the long-term impact of these transformations, the cellular seems to provide “yet another impetus towards experimental identity construction and

politics” (Kahn and Kellner 2004, 89).

The purchase, ownership, and use of mobile telephones are practices imbued with power struggles over established gender definitions and roles. A recent study of the uses of ICT by legal centers for victims of domestic violence in Morocco reveals that many interviewed victims consider their mobile more than a mere tool of communication: they refer to it as “your friend in need, your brother, mother and father,” “a solution to problems,” “a protection sometimes,” and “a necessity.” Other victims recognized the power struggles involved in ownership since they resented their husbands’ control over their use of the phone: “the man sees the cell phone as an enemy. If the man has the right to have the cell phone, the woman also has the right to have it and is in need of it” (Tafnaout and Timjerdine 2009).

For the young generation, ownership of mobile phones and the use of Text Message System have quickly developed into a marker of youth communication and youth culture. Collected views from youth in the region highlight the extent to which the cell enhances their sense of agency and independence in managing their time, relationships, and the personal flow of communication (<lequotidien-tn.com>). The cell is also seen to fulfill significant socio-psychological functions by helping young men and women overcome their shyness and fear of expressing themselves.

Some of the social implications of the technology in the urban centers are seen in its providing more communication opportunities and relationships between young men and women. While fixed lines permit patriarchal structures to restrict such possibilities, the use of mobile telephones “generates alternative strategies for connectivity that produce important slippages and openings in the spatial fixity and temporal uncertainty of sociality in the public sphere” (Bahiyiyh 2006, 201).

Many similar forms of slippage take place in the gendered use of the Internet and visits to cybercafés. Real or virtual trips to the cybercafé and participation in social network spaces permit a renegotiation of the gendered management of space and time. In the patriarchal realities of Maghrib countries, still ill-reconciled to the principle of gender mixing, women’s access to the public space is an ongoing project of negotiation with male claim to exclusive ownership of public space. Women, as Leslie Kanes-Weisman aptly put it, “are taught to occupy but not control space” (in Ormond 2001). Such ambivalent societal attitudes are reflected in pervasive sexual harassment targeting women in schools, offices, on the streets, and in other public spaces (Collectif 95 Maghreb Egalité).

While Internet cafés are spaces not as inappropriate for urban young Maghribi women as ordinary cafés or leisure spaces, their access remains relatively restrained by location and operating hours of the cafés. When trips do take place, their empowering significance becomes multidimensional. Accessing the technologies enables young women to expand and articulate their subjectivities as well as consciously participate in producing information and acquiring knowledge. The links between identity politics and online presence should not be underestimated: cyberspace might be, after all, the rare space that allows them to articulate the uncertainties and anxieties they face as they negotiate the different demands made on them by global forces

and local realities (Skalli 2006b).

For young women and men, using online spaces such as Facebook and personal blogs means more than mere opportunities for chatting, flirting, and dating. They are spaces where they affirm the importance of their voices, try to make sense of their realities, and create their own meanings of their gendered social experiences. In the process, they exercise agency through the processes of self-directed learning and peer-to-peer based communication that are situated outside the parameters of hierarchical structures of learning and knowledge production. The new practices are undermining the established traditions of imparting information and knowledge. They are also disrupting the generational logic where the old are always seen to know more and better.

Conclusion

This entry demonstrates the emergence of empowering spaces and practices that result from the interactions between new communication technologies, resourceful young citizens, and dynamic contexts in North Africa. Clearly, technologies do not in themselves guarantee empowerment, but “technological leaps contain the seeds for random and unanticipated change” (Gurumurthy 2004, 7). The Maghrib countries might still be under-wired, in comparison to the rest of the world, but the astounding rates of the adoption of modern technologies are such that changes in communication habits are beginning to transform (urban) people’s lives.

Despite the pervasive biases (urban, gender, literacy, and income) restricting the uses of technologies, new opportunities and possibilities are emerging for Maghribi citizens to engage with the institutions of their societies. Technologies neither disrupt nor redress unequal structures of power in the Maghrib. Yet, the remarkable presence of young male and female voices on the Internet speaks to their desire for greater inclusion in the processes of economic and political development in their countries. It is around issues of exclusion that we see the strengthening of old forms of resistance and political engagement and the emergence of new forms of political organizing.

However, women’s economic empowerment through the technologies remains visibly marginal in the Maghrib. Results from a recent survey of Tunisian businesswomen demonstrate the limited use of the technologies and the challenges still to overcome. Nearly 82 percent of women do not have a website, 45 percent had never used the Internet and only 51 percent regularly use email (CNFCE 2008). The assessment of the much publicized virtual marketplace project, set up by anthropologist Susan Schaefer Davis with the support of the World Bank, is a sobering reminder of the huge gaps technologies cannot fill. Given the poverty and illiteracy of the women carpet weavers from Moroccan villages, connecting their products to global markets largely rested on the skills, resources, and personal investment of the American anthropologist as she coordinated efforts between several entities (Buskens and Webb 2009).

In the end, while we have to recognize the empowerment potential of technologies, we cannot afford to overlook how technologies exacerbate the exclusion of the already marginalized communities in the Maghrib.

Loubna H. Skalli

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Music: Indonesia

Introduction

Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, hosts a remarkable variety of Muslim music and dance genres that women perform and continuously develop. Unlike some other countries in the global Muslim *umma* (community) where women are allowed to perform artistic genres only in the private sphere, women throughout Indonesia perform in both private and public contexts, having found various ways to overcome the religious obstacles to their participation that some orthodox '*ulamā*' (Muslim religious leaders) and organizations have put in their way. This entry examines the controversies associated with the female performing arts and the roles of Muslim women in the indigenous art forms, localized Islamic forms, a pan-Islamic genre, arts of the Malay-speaking world, new tradition-based creations, and the commercial world of the popular arts from the late 1960s onwards. Examples are taken mainly from West Kalimantan, Aceh, Mandailing (North Sumatra), west-coastal North Sumatra, West Sumatra, South Sumatra, the island of Bangka, and northern coastal areas of Java. In the popular arts, examples are mainly from the cosmopolitan city of Jakarta.

The traditional, patriarchal-oriented history of the archipelago's musical arts during the early conversion of its former non-Islamic kingdoms (beginning in Aceh around the 1290s) tells of male religious teachers and returned pilgrims from Mecca who spread the faith largely by establishing Sufi brotherhoods. Members of these Sufi groups repeatedly chanted texts or phrases from the Qur'ān as a way to commemorate or be mindful of God (*dhikr*, remembrance) as they sought divine union, in some cases accompanying themselves with their own frame drums. Both foreign and Indonesian researchers (e.g. Isjkarim et al.) have portrayed the development of forms of prayer, the pan-Islamic art of Qur'ān recitations, and the regional Muslim arts (including Sufi-influenced forms) as exclusively male achievements. However, it stands to reason that early conversion included teaching women as well as men how to pray, how to recite the Qur'ān, and how to sing devotional songs, in some cases with body movement or dance; and women throughout Indonesia continue these activities creatively to this day. Yet in some areas where strict gender segregation has been the social norm (as in Aceh today), groups of women have had no choice but to create their own separate songs and dances, which are performed for female audiences at family celebrations. Many of their genres have Muslim song texts and melodies that have an Arabic flavor, which is not surprising given the people's constant exposure five times daily to the call to prayer, set in one or other of the Arabic *maqāmāt* (modes). Some genres are believed to be based on transplanted Middle Eastern music and dance genres that must have resulted in a greatly expanded soundscape for both women and men when they were introduced centuries ago.

The dearth of reliable sources for the premodern period means that the detailed history of female Muslim artistic activity in the archipelago has yet to be written. Colonial writers rarely mentioned female artists, let alone described their activities. One late nineteenth-century Dutch scholar wrote that women in Aceh had a form of "devotional recreation ... a *ratéb saman* (sitting

dhikr) of their own" and that some women danced erotically with male partners at a Muslim Acehese funeral (Snouck Hurgronje 1906 II, 219, x), but he provided little detail. However, wax cylinder recordings that he made around the turn of the twentieth century show that at least as early as the 1890s, Muslim women in Aceh and West Java were performing the art of Qur'ān recitation (*seni baca al-Qur'ān*), devotional *dhikr*, and *qasida* and *nasyid* songs (sung religious poetry), in some cases with frame drum accompaniment. Most twentieth-century scholars, whether Indonesian or foreign, have also neglected the study of the women's arts.

Controversies

In contrast to Islamic cultures in the Arab world, where religious scholars have debated whether Muslims should perform and listen to music at all, Indonesian Muslims tend to regard most artistic genres involving sound, even the call to prayer, as music. Moreover, they describe Qur'ān recitation, whether by women or men, as "the music of the Quran" (Rasmussen 2001, 35). Indeed, the term *seni baca al-Qur'ān* (Indonesian, the art of reading the Qur'ān) itself clearly indicates that recitation of the Holy Book is regarded as an art. While accepting that both male and female Muslims should be allowed to perform and listen to music, they dissociated themselves from forms based on *adat* (traditional customs), in which the women throughout the archipelago played an important role as artists, and sometimes as shamans. Indonesian religious scholars have also engaged in the discourse about the place of women in the Islamic arts and their preferred artistic styles. Like their orthodox Middle Eastern counterparts, these men have argued that female artists' behavior must be socially controlled, given the sensuous powers and entertainment function of their music and dance performances. Based on the assumption that entertainment tends to distract one from "remembering God," they equated the perceived seductiveness of female performance outside the home with immoral behavior.

The main concerns about the propriety of women performing in public seem to be less about the music and dance itself and more about the visual aspects of performance style when women go on stage. Female performers are expected to wear modest dress that covers the body (*tutup aurat*) and to use sensually restrained body language when performing. Until the early 1980s, female performers of Islamic-related arts wore local traditional dress which showed the shoulders and arms and included decorated hair styles with a bun, but from the 1990s they have commonly worn varieties of Muslim apparel that covered most of the body and Muslim-style head coverings (*jilbab*).

From the early twentieth century, Muslims in the Malayo-Indonesian archipelago divided into two main groups: the less orthodox "traditionalists" and the relatively strict "modernists." The modernists, who adhere to a literalist and purist interpretation of the Qur'ān and reject *adat* and its associated arts and rituals, believe that women should perform only in the privacy of their homes, and that they must dissociate themselves from arts that are linked to ancestral and nature-spirit veneration. The traditionalists, on the other hand, tend to be tolerant of women performing in the public sphere, sometimes with men, and they resolve the religious ambiguities in a way that allows local spiritual ideas to be combined with Islamic teachings. Early twentieth-

century modernists wanted to purify Islam of its animist and more extreme Sufi elements and – partly through their newly created Muhammadiyah movement – to use it as a rallying call for the anticolonial struggle. Their contemporary counterparts still aim to purify the practice of Islam and to improve public and private moral behavior, including, they believe, by controlling the activities of women and by rejecting Western materialism.

Not surprisingly, then, the modernists prefer song texts – whether traditional or modern and popular – that convey Muslim moral and religious issues. Acehese modernist religious leaders, many of whom own and run male or female Muslim boarding schools and mosques, believe that in order to avoid tempting the opposite sex women should not appear on a public stage at all, unless they are seen only by other women (Amirullah 2006). Despite the prohibition, however, women performers in Aceh and throughout Indonesia have been active in the public arena over the past several decades, taking part in a myriad of Qurʾān-reciting contests and Muslim song and dance competitions and festivals that are organized by various levels of government, some of which involve media appearances.

Indonesian scholars frequently divide the arts that are associated with Islam into two categories: “arts with an Islamic flavor” (*kesenian yang bernafaskan Islam*) and “arts with a Islamic theme” (*kesenian Islami*). The latter include the art of Qurʾān recitation (*seni baca al-Quran*); the devotional songs that possibly developed from liturgical chanting (e.g. *qasida*, Arabic *qasīda*); and songs with texts that promote *dakwah* (deepening of faith, Arabic *daʿwa*) performed with body percussion or frame drum accompaniment. All of these genres are performed by females and males, usually separately. At least one of the song-dances featuring body percussion, Aceh’s *ratéb meuseukat*, was until recently developed and performed only by women.

To have “an Islamic flavor,” an item must be performed in a modest manner and with acceptable body language. The category of “arts with an Islamic flavor,” on the other hand, includes religious and secular items that are partly religious and partly secular, or are secular with a few added Islamic phrases. Even secular songs sung in Arabic are commonly associated with Islam because Arabic was the language of the revelation of the Qurʾān, and the culturally-Arab Middle East is Islam’s heartland. Some commentators describe secular songs performed in Indonesian as having an Islamic flavor if religious sayings such as *LailahaillaLlah* (There is no god but Allah) are inserted into their texts, or they are accompanied by instruments associated with Islam.

The centuries-old controversy among Middle Eastern theologians about the permissibility of musical instruments has not been a major concern to their Indonesian counterparts, though for some extreme modernists the frame drum (*rebana*, *rapaʿi*, etc.) is the only really acceptable instrument. The view is that the Prophet indicated his approval of the frame drum, and of women performing it (e.g. at weddings), as mentioned in a *hadith* attributed to his wife, ʿĀʾisha (Double-day 1999, 109–12). However, most Muslim Indonesians also regard the following instruments as acceptable: the short-necked *gambus* lute (which resembles the Arabic *ʿud*), the violin (*biola*, the sound of which somewhat resembles that of the Arabic bowed string instrument, *rabāb*) and the *ketipung* hand drums (which resemble, or are identical with, the Arabic *marāwīs* hand drums).

They are played in various ensembles, especially in Malay-speaking areas of the archipelago.

The controversy about the role of female Muslim performers in the popular, commercial arts, such as the genres *nasyid modèren* and *dangdut dakwah*, emerged from the 1960s and continues unabated to this day. Since the 1970s, many modernist Muslims have expressed the view that the glamor surrounding popular performance and films was improper and irreligious. For example, the televised Festival Nasyid Indonesia, held for the first time in 2004, led to fierce debate among *nasyid* fans about the worship of female star performers by the mainly female audiences, and many modernist fans condemned the shows’ limited *dakwah* content and their commercialism (Barendregt 2006, 40). However, most songs with *dakwah* texts were found to be acceptable.

Traditional female Muslim musical arts Performances in the private sphere

As the main carers in the family, women everywhere provide the earliest musical experiences of children in their homes, experiences that are remembered for a lifetime. Not surprisingly, the women of the archipelago have developed their own rich song repertoire, which include songs with memorable melodies and lyrics about religion, moral behavior, motherly love, and devotion to the motherland, as well as laments and shamanic healing songs. Among their most beautiful creations are lullabies, often containing religious phrases, which are sung while rocking a baby to sleep. Lullabies by semi-professional female singers also form part of the formal song repertoire that is interpreted anew in each performance at baby thanksgiving ceremonies, especially along Sumatra’s west coast. These lullabies are usually set to poetic quatrains in the local language and performed with complex melodic ornamentation (Kartomi 1987). Mixed-gender Malay song-dances with partly Muslim texts such as *tari anak* (child dance, Figure 1) for baby thanksgivings and other ceremonies are common in coastal Malay areas of North Sumatra. New choreographies based on these older dances have been developed since the 1960s.



Figure 1. A woman and man dancing a Malay *tari anak* (child dance) after Muslim prayers at a baby Thanksgiving ceremony in Sibolga, 1979.

Photo: H. Kartomi

Different areas of Indonesia have different gender-related practices in daily life and the arts. For example, in Aceh’s matrilineal, male-dominant society, the genders are engaged in separate pursuits. Men are traditionally encouraged to go abroad and seek their fortune, leaving women in charge of home and agriculture, or business. The women organize their families’ life event and religious ceremonies, including a

baby's first bath or haircut, circumcisions, and celebrations held when a child has learnt to recite the entire Qur'ān. Other ceremonies include weddings and holy day celebrations such as *Idulfitri* (Festival marking the completion of Ramadan, the fasting month) and *Iduladha* (Festival of the Sacrifice). In accord with the rule that female performers should be seen only by women, traditional Acehese female musicians and dancers normally perform in a separate room or outdoor area at domestic ceremonies, and the men perform for male audiences in their designated area. In devout areas of rural Java, on the other hand, female and male performers and audiences frequently mix on such occasions.

Performances in the public sphere

Muslim women throughout the archipelago also perform many genres in the public sphere, including at Qur'ān-reciting contests, fundraisers, election campaigns and other political events organized by the local village head, district head, governor of a province or the national government, all of which usually attract media attention. Examples of such female genres in the provinces of West and South Sumatra and in western Aceh include devotional and secular "sitting song-dances" (as opposed to "standing dances") in which a group of women sit (actually kneel, prostrate themselves as in Muslim prayer, and rise up on their heels) and perform patterns of body movement and body percussion (rhythmic hand-beating of select body parts), as they sing. In the western Acehese dance *meuseukat*, for example, a solo singer and chorus can either sing texts from the Muslim liturgy (*diké, ratéb*), in which case their performance is regarded as a liturgy-related form and is called *ratéb meuseukat* (or *ratéb duek*), or they can sing secular texts about the beauty of nature, daily life, social criticism, etc., in which case it serves as a form of entertainment and is simply called *meuseukat* or *ratôh duek* (sitting chattering) (Kartomi 2006); see Figure 2. Many Acehese hold that Islam initially spread in Aceh by way of traveling religious leaders who not only taught the people how to pray but also promoted Islamic devotional exercises (*ratéb*) which were eventually transformed into genres "with Islamic themes." Thus, the sitting dances are believed to have originated as *dakwah*, the early outreach and conversion to Islam with the continuing call to believers to deepen their faith and express their piety. Indeed, the *rateb meuseukat*, with its Muslim prayer-like performance style, seems to confirm this.

The creative development and maintenance of a number of these Acehese genres must be attributed to women artists, although such recognition is rarely forthcoming in official documents. For example,



Figure 2. An Acehese *ratôh duek* dance with a *dong* (standing/walking) section led by a male *syèh* (Marzuki Hassan) in Melbourne, 1992. While singing a *ratéb* text, the dancers cup their hands over their ears like an *adzan* enunciating the call to prayer.

Photo: H. Kartomi

research into *ratéb meuseukat*'s oral history suggests that its performance practice, including its movements, floor plans, body percussion and songs, were developed by females (Kartomi, forthcoming). A woman named T. Aji Rakibah, who is remembered as the daughter of Habib Seunagan, taught her version of the genre to girls and women in Blangpidie, western Aceh (Aceh Barat Daya), in the late nineteenth century. The genre subsequently spread throughout west and south Aceh, but declined during the war period of the 1940s. Two decades later, another pioneering woman artist, Ibu Cut Asiah of Meulaboh, observed the song-dance in a village in the Beutong area, and revived it by developing a new choreography for her troupe, which was attached to the Meulaboh *bupati*'s (district head) office. Its performance was so successful that her choreography was recommended for performance at provincial festivals and formal government events, and for troupes embarking on national tours. Some male groups who learned it were chosen to perform another version of *meuseukat* on prominent occasions, though they mostly did so in the related form of the *ratôh duek* (sitting chattering) song-dance.

Depending on its texts, the genre was regarded as having either an Islamic character and called *ratéb meuseukat* or as having an Islamic flavor, when it was simply called *meuseukat*. *Meuseukat* was eventually performed in Aceh by thousands of female and male troupes, by members of Acehese diasporas overseas, and by artists on international tours. Thus, female artists successfully regenerated *meuseukat* in various stylistic transformations across the generations and it has survived to this day. In the New Order era of President Suharto (1966–98), the state expected *meuseukat* groups to include which praised of the New Order's policy of "development" at celebrations and in government campaigns (e.g., Kartomi CD 2, track 3, 1982), yet even on those occasions the performers usually inserted some religious texts or phrases.

In the province of West Sumatra, a sitting song-dance genre that somewhat resembles *meuseukat* in its performance practice but is often accompanied by episodes of frame drum playing and has an independent ethnic Minangkabau history and identity, is known as *indang* (lit. to winnow the rice), or *indang rapa'* (*indang* with frame drum accompaniment). Performed by a row of women, or men, who kneel on their heels with their shoulders touching, a solo vocalist (Minangkabau, *tukang diki*) leads members of the response chorus (*tukang indang*) as they sing Islamic devotional texts (Minangkabau, *diki*; Arabic *dhikr*) or secular texts (*syair*, poetry) that include Islamic phrases, and they sometimes pick up their *rebana* and play episodes of unison and interlocking frame drum rhythms. Scholarly and popular belief holds that *indang* was originally a harvest ceremony based on Minangkabau ani-



Figure 3. Alternating singers of devotional and secular texts in a *meuseukat* song-dance performance clapping their hands above their heads as part of their body percussion routine in Meulaboh, Aceh 1982.

Photo: H. Kartomi

mist beliefs, and that it was transformed into a Sufi exercise and instrument of *dakwah* when the people converted to Islam in the sixteenth century. The high degree of precision and virtuosity demanded in contemporary performances requires extensive group rehearsal and discipline. Presented at weddings, circumcisions and official ceremonies, some performances are classed as having an Islamic theme and others as having an Islamic flavor.

The most prestigious genre for women or men throughout the global Muslim community is the art of Qur'ān recitation (*seni baca al-Quran*). The majority of Muslim girls in both rural and urban areas of Indonesia learn to recite the Qur'ān in their neighborhood prayer halls, mosques and Muslim boarding schools. In parts of rural West Sumatra, a *Kitab Suci* (Holy Book) celebration is organized by the local *camat* (district head) twice a year at harvest time, for scores of teenagers – mostly girls – who have successfully recited the Qur'ān right through. They celebrate the success of their examination by reciting a five-minute excerpt each, followed by traditional performances and a feast. In other areas, girls may perform in a Qur'ān-recitation contest in a



Figure 4. A row of teenage girls performing the *indang* sitting song-dance in Nagari Mandahiling, Pariaman, West Sumatra, in 1982. After playing their frame drums, they place them on the floor in front of them and look to the right with palms and fingers outstretched (as in the photo) and then to the left, after which they repeat the movements many times and clap in a continuous interlocking rhythmic pattern of body percussion.

Photo: H. Kartomi

conformity in political and cultural matters (Rasmussen 2001, 42). The competitions and festivals serve to promote very high standards of recitation. Performers are judged for their textual fluency, modal exposition, musicianship, breath control, vocal timbre, melodic ornamentation, tempo, rhythm, and comportment. To this day, outstanding female reciters enjoy celebrity status as judges of the most prestigious competitions and festivals such as the month-long Festival Istiqlal held in Jakarta during the fasting month of Ramadan, and as speakers about the art of

neighborhood mosque organized by the district level government. Competitions and festivals are also organized by the regional, provincial or national government, and at the international level, usually with professional female reciters acting as judges, and attended by thousands of onlookers in male, female and mixed groups (Figure 5). Such occasions provide opportunities for groups of women to entertain the crowd between recitation sessions by performing other *Islami* items, such as *qasida* songs and *nasyid* (song, hymn) songs (with texts performed by a vocalist and response chorus) in Arabic, Malay, or another local ethnic language.

Since the late 1970s, countless *seni baca al-Quran* festivals and contests have been held in the major cities. Suharto's government encouraged women to learn to recite the Qur'ān, it has been argued, as part of its program to encourage national



Figure 5. An entrant in an Qur'ān recitation competition in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, 1992.

Photo: H. Kartomi

female, male or mixed *jepin* (*zapin*) dancing, which is also likely to have been transplanted from the Arabian Peninsula, probably from the Hadramawt in Yemen (Nor 1993).

Both the dance and the music have developed distinctive regional styles in such areas as Palembang in South Sumatra and Semarang in north-coastal Central Java. A group of *orkes gambus* artists of Arab descent whom the author recorded in 1988 in the village of Sungai Baia in 8 Ilir, Palembang, contained five female singers who sang alternate solo and chorus sections. They were accompanied by male musicians playing a *gambus*, two violins (*biola*), a bamboo flute (*seruling*), a frame drum with jingles (*zap*), a skinless frame drum with jingle (*tambrin*), a large, deep-sounding cylindrical drum (Arabic, *hajir*), a small gong, and for the brilliant loud sections, a set of three *kitipung*, also known as *marawis*. They accompanied groups of (i) female *rodat* singer-dancers kneeling in a row and performing movement and body percussion routines e.g. with the odd-numbered girls raising their arms and clapping and their even-numbered neighbors bending forwards; (ii) mixed-couple *jepin* (*japin*, *zapin*) dancers; and (iii) female *serapal anam* artists, with their solo singer alternating with a response chorus to sing the praises of Allah and the Prophet. Sometimes the same female group sang to their own *rebana* (frame drum) accompaniment. The girls wore traditional South Sumatran dress of a long blouse (*kebaya panjang*) and a *kain* (wrap-around skirt) and they covered their hair with a *jilbab* (Muslim head scarf).

In contrast, a *gambusan* group whose songs the author recorded in 1970 in Miroto village, near Semarang, featured a pair of female singers wearing a traditional Javanese short blouse (*kebaya*) and *kain* with their hair arranged in a bun, as was common before the Islamic resurgence which began in the early 1980s. The women took turns to sing the solo vocal part in a medley, opening with a song that requested Allah's blessing and followed by a song which (they said) was

recitation and its religious meaning at functions and on the media.

Another important home-grown musical genre is the *orkes gambus*, also called *samroh* (from Arabic *samar*, night entertainment), which produces gambusan music. Led by a *gambus* musician playing a 6–7 double-course, fretless stringed lute similar to the Arabic *qanbūs* and *ūd*, an *orkes gambus* accompanies a singer of Islamic texts along with other musicians, who alternate between soft sections – led by the *gambus* and *biola* (violin) – and very loud, fast sections with brilliant drumming on a set of small, double-headed, cylindrical drums called *kitipung* or *marwas* (Arabic, *mirwās*, pl. *marāwīs*). This music is regarded as having an Islamic flavor partly because its instrumental components are believed to have been transplanted from the Middle East. For that reason, it is one of the few genres that were allowed to be taught in Islamic boarding schools in the archipelago from the 1930s. In some areas, the *orkes gambus* accompanies

of Egyptian origin but which they sang with *cengkok Jawa* (Javanese-style melodic ornamentation). Several songs began with the Muslim salutation *Assalamualaikum* (Peace be with you), accompanied by male musicians playing a *gambus*, violin, three frame drums (*tambrin*), and a very loud, small cylindrical drum (*ketipung*). Like the *marawis* in Palembang (and Riau and elsewhere), the *ketipung* played alternating soft, slow sections and very loud, fast sections. There were no dances.

Closely related to the *orkes gambus* is the *orkes Melayu*, an ensemble that has traditionally accompanied secular Malay songs and couples or group dancing (*joget*), with the dancers performing intricate movements with the hands and fingers, and stepping routines. The ensemble contains some instruments of an *orkes gambus*, but it is sometimes reduced to a violin and frame drums only. The female (or less often, male) solo vocalists sing Malay quatrains (*syair*, *pantun*) about such topics as romantic love and beautiful scenery, and they also frequently contain a moral or Islamic message.

The largely female Islamic genre, *nasyid*, emerged in Sumatra and Malaysia just before the Second World War (Chopyak 1986, 130–31). The term derives from the Arabic *nashīd*, meaning a religious song, which performers like to trace back to a song from the Middle East, and especially to the verse *thola'al badru 'alaina* (finally the moon has arisen among us), which many think was sung in the Prophet's presence when he first arrived in Medina (Barendregt 2006, 40). From the 1960s, Indonesian students and others in the Middle East brought back *nasyid* cassettes to their home areas, e.g. in North Sumatra, including the city of Medan and the Mandailing area, and in Java, where female and male groups adapted them for their own purposes. The texts praise the Prophet or deal with other religious or secular themes, and their Arabic-influenced melodies are sung by a lead vocalist and response chorus who accompany their singing by rhythmically beating their *rebana* (see Figure 6).

The female role in the musical arts of the Malay world

Besides promoting select arts with a Islamic theme, including the pan-Islamic art of Qur'ān recitation and *qasida* singing, the palaces of the former Sultans throughout the archipelago promoted a defined group of arts with a syncretic Malay *adat* combined with Islamic flavor which remain part of the identity of the "Malay world" (*alam Melayu*) to this day. At baby thank-givings, weddings and other celebrations in such former royal seats as Riau-Lingga, Siak, Serdang, Deli, Langkat and Pasai in Sumatra and Sambas and Pontianak in West Kalimantan, artists of both genders



Figure 6. A group of female *nasyid* singer-dancers accompanying their performance with frame drums (*sampring* and *bemercing*, with jingles) and a *mambo* drum in Sabadolok village (near Pakantan), Mandailing, in 1971.

Photo: H. Kartomi

present performances of music, dance and theater with a syncretic *adat*-Islamic flavor. These genres include solo vocalists singing Malay songs accompanied by an *orkes gambus* or an *orkes Melayu*; *jepin* (*zapin*) dancing accompanied by an *orkes gambus*; improvisatory response-singing of Malay quatrains on love and other themes; and *rodāt* sitting song-dances.

Jepin (*zapin*) is a syncretic Malay-Arab dance tradition that is indigenous to the Malay-speaking world. It is usually accompanied by a solo singer and *gambusan* music, often including an Indian harmonium. The dance emphasises footwork and a four-beat count in each dance phrase. In orthodox areas it is traditionally danced by all-male couples, as it is still on Sumatra's northwest coast. In other areas, women were not allowed to dance *jepin* until the 1950s, when a new form of *jepin* dancing in mixed couples with stylised flirtatious movements but no physical contact was popularized. The new style was influenced by traditional Malay mixed-couple *joget* dancing and Latin American dance movements that were used in pre-war, Malay-language theater forms (such as *bangsawan*), dance halls and cabarets, and appeared in several Indonesian and Malay movies. A *zapin* prototype was probably transplanted into the Malay world from the Hadramawt in the nineteenth century or earlier (Nor 1993). In Palembang to this day, some Hadramawt descendants perform *jepin* dancing that resembles aspects of *zapin* from the Hadramawt itself.

Also widespread in parts of Sumatra and Kalimantan are two sitting song-dance genres based on Sufi *dhikr* practices, with a row of women singing texts in Malay quatrain verses and performing body movements, though they are traditionally performed by groups of men only. They include *rodāt* (Figure 7), which involves the vigorous singing of devotional texts, repetitions of the most beautiful names of Allah, and (especially in the fasting month), *barzanji* poetry about the Prophet's birth. Another genre is *serapal anam* (lit., holy Prophet), in which singers also perform songs of praise to the Prophet, with melodies set either to Western diatonic or Arabic *maqam*-related tonal palettes. Competing groups often take turns to ask and answer questions or solve riddles about religious or secular matters, such as poverty and homelessness.

In some areas (e.g. in Lahat and Pagaralam, South Sumatra), all-female teenage couples dance in Malay *joget* style to the singing of *serapal anam* texts, accompanied by a *biola*, *suling*, *terbangan* (frame drums) and *geundrang* (cylindrical drums).

To this day artists in the former Malay sultanates show great pride in their royal Muslim heritage, including the art forms that were promoted at the Sambas and Pontianak palaces. They cite Sultan Syarif Muhamad al-Kadri VI (who died in 1946) who was a



Figure 7. A *rodāt* performance in Sungailiat, Bangka Island, 1994.

Photo: H. Kartomi

particularly generous patron of the *jepin* dances, the latter being performed by female or male artists with an accompanying ensemble of a nine-string *gambus*, three *tahar* (frame drums) and six *beruas* (Arabic *marāwīs*, small hand drums). Devotional *zikir* sessions were regularly held for men and *qasida* sessions of songs of praise for women. In the latter, the female soloists and responsive chorus played their own small *rebana* in a pavilion attached to the oldest mosque, which, according to a local *silsilah* (royal family tree), was a gift from the Sultan of Siak in 1845.

The Malay palaces also supported the Malay theater forms of *Abdulmuluk*, *bangsawan*, *mendu*, and *komedie stambul*, with some plots adapted from Middle Eastern stories such as *The Thousand and One Nights*. They included female and male singers of Arab-influenced melodies with *gambusan* accompaniment, and variants of the *gambusan* ensemble. The palaces also sponsored comedy song-dance routines involving responsive singing of Malay poetry by female-male couples, such as in the eastern Acehese *biola Aceh* (Acehese violin) genre (Figure 8).



Figure 8. A female and a male comedian-singer in a *biola Aceh* performance accompanied by a *biola* player, Lhokseumawe, Aceh, 1982.

Photo: H. Kartomi

New creations (*kreasi baru*): example from West Kalimantan

Beginning in the 1950s and developing momentum from the 1970s, national and regional offices of the Indonesian government's Department of Education and Culture encouraged artists to create new music and dance and theater based on traditional forms. They included the introduction of newly choreographed movements in standing position within Aceh's sitting dances, such as the *ratôh duek* song-dance.

New female dances based on *zapin* steps with traditional *gambusan* music were developed from the 1980s and 1990s in such Malay-speaking areas as Riau and coastal West Kalimantan. For example, the female choreographer Dra Hajja Noeraini Jamil, director of Sanggar Nurcahaya Hidayah (Rays of the Heart Studio), developed several new dances in Pontianak, West Kalimantan. Like a few outstanding women in other government arts administrations, she was rewarded for her artistic leadership and contributions by being given employment in the Pontianak branch of the Department of Education and Culture office, and her dance school and troupe were often chosen to perform at government functions.

Among her choreographed dances with an Islamic flavor is the *tari bui haji ke Mekah* (the pilgrims to Mecca ribbon dance), based on the traditional *tari bui* (ribbon dance), in which female dancers hold the ends of ribbons attached to a pole while dancing traditional *joget Melayu* move-

ments around it, twisting the ribbons to signify the torture of a traitor by a former king in a local legend. Its perceived Islamic flavor is based on the *maqam*-influenced sung melodies, insertion of Islamic phrases in the song texts, the *gambusan* accompaniment, and the Muslim costumes worn, with *jilbab*, *kain* (long wrap-around skirt) and *kebaya panjang* (long blouse) covering most of the body. The *beruas* drums play a prominent role in the fast, loud sections that alternate with soft, slow sections.

The 1980s saw the development of another choreographed "new creation" dance by Noeraini Jamil – *tari kembang manggar dan syair* (*manggar* flower dance and poetry) – in which a pair of female vocalists spontaneously exchange verses in Malay *syair* or *pantun* quatrains while the dancers perform *jepin*-based movements, circling around the dance leader, the *syèh*. The male musical ensemble comprises a *gambus*, violin and accordion which follow the vocal melody heterophonically, while the quadruple-metered rhythmic and colotomic musical structure is produced on a large and a small *tahar* (frame drum), long and short double-headed drums (*gendang panjang*, *gendang ketipung*), and a small gong.

Performances of a modern version of the *tari rebana* (frame drum dance) for a row of female dancers holding or playing small *rebana* is popular at life event and holy day celebrations, and at festivals and government functions in Pontianak. On some occasions, as at the Governor's New Year's Eve party in 1993, the dancers performed suggestive hip movements that are not allowed in traditional contexts.

Many male and female groups perform the new creations at the competitive arts festivals, which are organized by local governments with religious input and advice from the local Council



Figure 9. A female *zikir maulud* performance at the Festival of Islamic Knowledge and Culture in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, in 1993.

Photo: H. Kartomi

of Ulama, who serve with arts leaders on the panels of judges. For example, at the Festival Ilmu Islam dan Budaya (Festival of Islamic Knowledge and Culture) in Pontianak in December 1992, female groups performed a selection of the dances mentioned and even one of the normally male art-of-self-defence displays – *silat jepin bui*, after which another group of girls kneeled in two parallel rows and sang unison *zikir maulud* (Arabic, *mawlid*), songs of praise that men usually perform to celebrate the Prophet's day of birth. In these *kreasi baru* items, the women were free by definition to be creative and to adapt the previously male-only forms *silat* and *zikir maulud* for their own purposes (see Figure 9).

Mass-mediated popular Islamic music Indonesia has a 40-year-old tradition of popular songs with Islamic-related texts. The general interest in popular music of all kinds with texts in the natio-

nal or a regional language grew enormously after Suharto took power from Sukarno in 1965. Some genres are performed by female singers and frame drum players and others by male singers and instrumentalists who play mixed traditional and western popular instruments such as electric guitars and drum kits. The repetition of stanzas and tunes by a solo singer and response chorus is a standard feature of the performance style in both the traditional and the modern Muslim genres.

Traditionally, several anonymous singers rotate to sing the solo part, but in modern commercial practice, a star singer usually emerges. An example of a female star who sang religious and secular songs in a major regional language, Minangkabau (Minang for short), is the *pop Minang* singer Elly Kasim, who sang with *gambusan* ensembles and popular bands from the early 1970s.

The late 1960s saw the development of a syncretic *gambusan*-based popular genre with a female Islamic aura called *qasidah modéren* (modern *qasidah*) or *qasidah rebana* (*qasidah* with frame drum accompaniment). Their song texts aim to uplift people to the moral and spiritual standard of Islam. Mostly the singers and optional *rebana* players are female, though there are many male and a few mixed groups as well. Despite the name of the genre, the Indonesian language song texts are not in the spoken or sung textual form of the Arabic *qaṣīda*; they comprise 15–25 lines of verse which contain much repetition (Arps 1996, 399–400). Texts may include the beginning of the confession of faith, the giving of alms, the love of Allah, the need to follow the Qur’ān devoutly and spread Islam, proper behavior between the sexes, as well as other themes (Arps 1996, 404).

The songs, which adopt the standard international popular song structure and duration (3 to 5 minutes), are sung by lead vocalists who take it in turns to sing the solo parts, alternating with choral responses and instrumental sections. Usually the songs have an Arabic *maqam*-sounding melody and ornamental style. Sometimes the female soloists and chorus members accompany themselves on their *rebana*, as in *gambusan* and several other traditional Islam-associated genres, though some young groups have a popular band accompaniment featuring the *dangdut* rhythm in a swinging rhythmic style.

In the 1970s, countless professional and amateur women artists attached to mosques, banks, and other organizations formed groups, released audio cassettes, and took part in contests and festivals. By the 1980s the genre had spread nationwide through massive audio cassette sales and had entered the world music market (Arps 1996).

The title of a famous *qasidah modéren* song that mixes *gambusan* and rock styles is *Perdamaian* (Peace), released by the all-women Nasyida Ria group of Semarang around 1982 (Ira Record KMB078). Their singing is usually accompanied by guitars, mandolin, flute, violin and frame drums or drum kit. However, from the 1980s modernist Muslims have regularly criticized such groups as Nasyida Ria for singing texts in which the *dakwah* message was not prominent enough, for the erotic swinging of their hips, and for wearing clothes that did not cover their bodies according to religious requirements. They were in fact accused of entering into “an arena of sin” (*arena maksiat*) (Arps 1996, 407).

Also from the early 1960s, a new genre called *dangdut* was founded by its male star performer, Rhoma Irama, whose professed aim in writing his texts was to promote *dakwah* and human rights. He and his lead female singer, the “Queen of Dangdut” – Elvy Sukaesih – sang religious-oriented texts about Islam and secular texts about such social problems as poverty, romantic love, and other themes. Named after its strong fourth and first beat (rest-rest-*dang-dut*) rhythm, where *dang* and *dut* represent different drum sounds, *dangdut* songs are minimally accompanied by electric guitars, synthesizers, and drum kit, and the musical style is a fusion of *orkes Melayu*, Indian film music and rock (Frederick 1982, 124). From the 1990s, *dangdut* was thoroughly adapted to the media and big business, becoming an extremely popular social trend involving dance, film and fashion.

The late 1970s saw the general quickening of Islamic awareness and the rapid growth of the Islamic middle class, with its own social aspirations, consumerism and cosmopolitan lifestyle, accompanied by the media adaptation of syncretic traditional-popular genres with a Islamic theme or flavor, much of it targeted at Muslim youth and young women (Arps 1996). Live and virtual audiences enjoyed listening to female, male or mixed singers and choruses who performed the songs in an Islamic style – wearing modest Islamic dress and behaving with the correct degree of restraint. Their popularity was spurred on by skyrocketing cassette sales, promotion by the commercial mass media, and participation by groups of artists in countless festivals and contests, most of which were organized at the local, regional and national levels and some at the international level. The rise of thousands of private radio stations from the early 1990s only added to the popularity of leading artists and groups, female and male.

The main musical component of this emergent civil Islam has been *nasyid modéren*, a reborn form of traditional *nasyid*, but with both religious and secular texts. Like most Indonesian Islamic popular music, the genre shows Middle Eastern features, including Arabic modes (especially *maqam hijjas*) and the echoing of instrumental phrases with vocal ones. Thus, *nasyid modéren* and other popular songs can be referred to either as *Islami* arts if they have a *dakwah*-oriented text and performance style, or as “arts with an Islamic flavor” if they have secular texts that include Islamic phrases and a modest performance style and demeanor. *Nasyid* groups at religious schools, mosques, secondary schools and universities sing songs in Indonesian about religious or moral topics. Usually a solo vocalist and an a cappella group perform coordinated body movements or dance as they sing, either unaccompanied or to their own frame drum accompaniment. In the 1980s, some groups experimented and created syncretic *nasyid-dangdut* items. Female and male stars perform in international popular styles, accompanied by a mix of Indonesian instruments (e.g. *gambus*, *rebana*) and Western popular instruments (e.g. electric guitars and drum kits). Female artists were frequently criticized by modernist Islamic groups for their perceived immodest dress and overt sensuality. The Jakarta-based Bestari Nasyid group and the Bandung-based Dawai Hati group are among the most prominent female groups, judging by their cassette and VCD sales. At competitions female and male groups appear in separate arenas, and mixed ensembles are normally taboo.

The Asian monetary crisis in 1997 and Suharto’s fall in 1998 were followed by a drastic

drop in cassette production and sales of popular music (Sen and Hill 2000). The political reform movement (Reformasi) triggered reactions from radical Islamic students and other groups who wished to promote political Islam and establish public norms of behavior based on religious morality. The movement was accompanied by the expansion of Islamic-related popular culture, including musically syncretic Indie songs expressing the moralistic, religious aspirations of the Reformasi movement, performed either by all-female or all-male groups. Female artists were required to wear demure, Arabic-inspired modern dress with head coverings, and to match it with demure body language. Various styles of popular songs with religious texts became best sellers from around 1999, as the music industry began to recover.

Especially from the late 1990s and early 2000s, such “respectable and orderly” female *dangdut* artists as Evy Tamala, Ikke Nurjanah, and Iis Dahlia regularly appeared in the media, especially during the fasting month. They released albums of *dakwah*-oriented songs that combine some characteristics of *dangdut* and *qasidah modéren* styles (Barendregt and Zanten 2002, 78–79). For example, the female pop star Ita Purnamasari, who is a member of the most successful *nasyid modéren* group –SNada (*Senandung Nada dan Dakwa*, Humming a melody and spreading Islam) – sang a range of overtly religious songs in Indonesian, English, Mandarin, and Japanese (Barendregt and Zanten 2002, 78–79). Other female stars who have released albums of religious songs include Novia Kolapaking (also an actress) and Yuni Shara. The world music industry opened up a small part of the global market for these and other Indonesian pop singers.

As sales of pre-recorded music videos exploded in Indonesian artistic and commercial circles, strong public criticism of the behavior of some female singing stars emerged. The most controversial star in the early 2000s was Inul Daratista. Born into a poor family, she became a superstar through commercial videos of her erotic, gyrating dance movements and distinctive singing style; and she became the topic of many talk shows on the media. Heavy censure of her style by the Indonesian Council of Ulama invited a backlash from the public, which suggested to some commentators that a strict, censorious attitude to artists was not popular. Meanwhile, popular music with a *dakwah* theme, such as the *qasidah modéren* numbers performed by the Nasyida Ria group, continued to exemplify the popular representation of modern Islamic music in contemporary Indonesia.

Conclusion

Research into the history of female contributions to the arts in Indonesia is still in its infancy, though it has been shown that women have creatively developed at least one major song-dance, Aceh’s *ratéb meuseukat*, over the past century. When contradictions between men’s and women’s accounts of the history and ownership of such genres appear, women argue cogently that their alternative views need to be considered and that the true extent of their contributions to the arts must be properly acknowledged.

Indonesian women’s participation and creative leadership in Muslim music and dance, including the traditional, new and popular, have been growing exponentially, especially in urban environments. Although it is rare for women absolutely to reject existing gender ideologies,

they are constantly reinventing their roles and the family via artistic representations of Islamic womanhood. Behind the hegemonic discourse between modernists and traditionalists, the changing life scenarios offered to women through education, careers and artistic performance are contributing to an ongoing empowerment and renegotiation of their position in the religious sphere and society at large, with the result that many women have become active as choreographers, performers, composers and arts administrators. The many festivals and contests of the Islamic arts since the 1960s have encouraged women to work towards higher and higher performance standards, and even to present new versions of some formerly male-only forms, such as *zikir maulud*. As increasingly knowledgeable interpreters of Islam themselves, women have been gaining the confidence needed to express themselves and their changing religious, social and artistic roles in many genres of the performing arts.

Margaret Kartomi

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Theater: Plays by Women Playwrights, Directors, and Producers in Islamic Cultures: India

Introduction

There has recently emerged a corpus of critical work that pays attention to women playwrights, directors, and producers. These include Vasudha Dalmia's *Poetics, Plays and Performances: The Politics of Modern Indian Theatre* (2006), which devotes one full chapter to playwright-directors of the 1990s in North India; Aparna Dharwadker's *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory and Urban Performance in India Since 1947* (2005); Betty Bernhard's and Kailash Pandya's recorded interviews (1998) with several contemporary playwright-directors from different regions of India; and the National School of Drama's journal *Theatre India*, which devoted a special issue in 2001 to "Women Directors' Directions." Such attention is warranted not just as an acknowledgment of women's contribution to theater; it also redresses the neglect imposed upon them in theater history.

Dharwadker highlights such neglect with reference to the Sangeet Natak Akademi's two-week festival of contemporary theater organized in New Delhi in 1989 (in commemoration of the centenary of the birth of independent India's first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru). The festival became an important moment for enabling the "formation of the new national canon" of modern Indian theatre by representing plays that had "already achieved a degree of canonicity" (Dharwadker 2005, 27–28). However, while the festival was noteworthy with regard to the formalistic, linguistic, thematic and temporal range of plays, it was also notable for "the imbalance of gender" (Dharwadker 2005, 49). Paying close attention to the program's list of practitioners, Dharwadker observes that "with the solitary exception of the Marathi director-actress Vijaya Mehta, all practitioners ... [were] male" (49). "This apparent absence of a single major woman playwright in contemporary India, despite the presence of several successful women directors and a rapidly expanding sphere of feminist performance" according to Dharwadker, "suggests an unusual relation between gender, authorship, textuality, and performance" (49).

Along with Dharwadker's study, the critical works already referred to attend to the heterogeneous strands of the theatrical work of women practitioners who revive historical stories, unpack and re-present figures from mythological stories (such as Sita from the *Ramayana* and Draupadi from the *Mahabharata*), explore the various uses of the body, foreground genres such as art and music to present different aspects of women's identities – as wives, daughters, and courtesans – and highlight social problems related to dowry, abuse, and other forms of victimization. While questions of theater's relationship to colonization, its role in nationalist struggles, its relationship to the Western canon and European theaters and conventions in India (realism and the proscenium theater), and to traditional popular forms such as Nautanki, Tamasha, Jatra, and Bhavai, for example, have constituted the mainstay of the debates about theater amongst practitioners, playwrights, and critics, women practitioners and playwrights have often complicated these issues in terms of their outcomes and effects on women.

These critical works, however, celebrate the achievements of women playwrights and directors in the post-independence period, and particularly from the 1980s onwards. An impor-

tant reason for this is that women's contribution during the earlier phases was shaped primarily by their roles as actresses, rather than as writers and directors of plays (see *Theatre India*, Special issue on "Women Directors" 2001). There is ample scholarship that collectively testifies to the presence and centrality of actresses in sustaining urban, courtly, and popular theaters from the mid-nineteenth century well into the twentieth century. Documented examples include the famous nineteenth-century Bengali actress Binodini Dasi (in Rimli Bhattacharya's introduction and translation of Dasi's autobiographical narratives in *My Story and My Life as an Actress*, 1998), the Nautanki actress Gulab Bai (Mehrotra 2006), who later on went to found her own theater company, Parsi theater actresses (Gupt 2005), and courtesans attached to the courts of kings and princes, who have been recorded in history (Oldenburg 1990), along with historical fiction such as Vrindalal Varma's novel *Jhansi ki Rani, Laxmibai* (1961), which characterizes an actress named Motibai as a major figure. The presence of women as actors and organizers of plays finds further attestation in the records of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), the first activist organization of its kind to be formed on an All-India basis in 1943, which saw the involvement of women who went on to achieve established theatrical careers: Dina (Gandhi) Pathak, Zohra Segal, Tripti Mitra, Ismat Chughtai and Sheila Bhatia, among others.

As playwrights, women contributed to Indian theater by writing plays in regional and vernacular languages. Tutun Mukherjee's *Staging Resistance* (2005), an anthology that brings together selected plays in English translation from both colonial and post-independence periods, provides an invaluable archive of this rich history spanning Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Panjabi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu theater. Mukherjee's anthology, along with autobiographies, and fictional and critical work, suggests women's extraordinary contribution to modern drama and its various forms and traditions through themes that foreground feminist concerns by exploring mythological stories and legends, revisiting historical moments, and analyzing social issues through proscenium, experimental, folk, popular and activist theater.

The colonial period

Prominent "among the first few women to have written plays at the beginning of the twentieth century" (Mukherjee 2005, 31) was Swarnakumari Devi (1855–1932). Her repertoire includes two comic farces entitled *Paak Chakra* (published 1904) and *Koney Badal*, with *Paak Chakra* enjoying a performance at the Star Theatre in Calcutta. In Maharashtra, women playwrights of the early twentieth century include Hirabai Penneka who wrote *Damini* and *Sangeet Jayadrath Vidamban* in the 1910s. Other playwrights include Muktabai Dixit, whose plays *Jugar*, *Saunsaar* and *Avaliya* appeared in the 1950s. In the North Indian belt, Muslim writers Rasheed Jahan and Ismat Chughtai wrote one-act plays that rendered visible the domestic lives of middle-class Muslim women. Writing under the influence of the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA), formed in 1936 in India, and situating their plays within the context of educational and social reform movements of the time, which provided an environment for subjecting orthodox social attitudes to scrutiny, Jahan and Chughtai made the effects of familial and community relations on women within the private domain of the home a prominent concern in their plays. The dialogism of the

dramatic form gives their characters individual voices through which they assume the power to comment on and bring alive for their readers/audience the lived experiences of women, question practices such as arranged marriage, childhood marriage and unwanted pregnancies and connect these individual issues to the public domain of politics wherein the debates on reform were taking place. Thus, in their plays, domestic interiors are configured in such a way that instead of being seen as spaces of restriction and confinement alone, they become sites where debate and argumentation is possible. To this end, the dialogues are rendered in colloquial speech that attempts to capture the nuanced lives of women and is recognizable by the reader/audience.

Focusing on the particular concerns of women also signals a critical contribution to the energy that women activists had brought forth in the public sphere by joining political campaigns, forming organizations such as the All India Women's Conference and the All-India Muslim Women's League and participating in literary-cultural movements such as the PWA and the IPTA. The achievements of middle-class women who were contributing to the revolutionary potential of political and nationalist movements and organizations were thus complicated by Jahan's and Chughtai's focus on aspects of women's lives that remain mysterious since they are relegated to the realm of the private. Jahan's notable plays were *Aurat* and *Behind the Veil: A one-Act Play (Parde ke PEECche)*. Chughtai's plays, namely *Dheet*, *Fasadi*, *Intikhwab*, *Banne* and *Saamp* have been collected in a volume titled *Fasadi (The troublemaker, 2003)*.

Transitioning into the post-independence milieu: the 1950s and beyond

As India transitioned into independence in 1947 and was partitioned into the two nations of India and Pakistan, many theater activists found the theme of Partition a relevant one. Chughtai's play *Phani Banke* about the Partition was performed by the IPTA in Bombay and its surrounding regions and Sheila Bhatia organized songs and plays in Panjabi, Hindi and Urdu within the vicinity of Lahore to spread messages of peace and communal harmony. Bhatia's work thus foregrounds a careful intertwining of political activism and performative practices in which folk songs continued to play a central role in establishing instant communication/connection with ordinary people. Constituting, in her words, "the basis for all my performances" (Kaushal 2000, 106, translation mine), Bhatia's songs kept evolving in accordance with the themes of the plays. Thus the direct influence of colonial ruptures and pressing political concerns of the day spilled into Bhatia's work and her own aesthetics of theater. The cross-border migrations caused by the Partition brought Bhatia to Delhi where she made a career as playwright-director through her involvement with the Delhi Arts Theatre and also with the National School of Drama, and where she devised a style of drama that came to be known as the "Punjabi Opera." After moving to Delhi, Bhatia organized plays such as *Raja te Gori Sarkar* (Raja and the white government) and *Azadi* (Freedom), a musical play based on seven or eight songs that attempted to understand the violence of Partition. Bhatia thus belongs to what may be identified as the first generation of women directors who entered the theater in the 1950s and continued their involvement in subsequent decades. Acknowledging the significance of the IPTA to the development of her theater, she ultimately dissolved her connections to the IPTA and developed her own style that combined

poetry, music, song, mime and movement. Although she is credited with the production of about 50 "operas," her landmark production in Panjabi theater is considered to be *Heer Ranjha* (1956).

The 1950s was also important for other developments in the realm of theater, developments that opened up new spaces and opportunities for women, especially in urban contexts. The decade saw the establishment of the Sangeet Natak Akademi (Academy of Music and Dance-Drama) in New Delhi and the Rashtriya Natya Vidyalyay (National School of Drama), also in New Delhi. Two other theaters initiated by women were also set up during this decade: Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya's Indian National Theatre and Begum Qudsiya Zaidi's Hindustani Theatre. Vijaya Mehta, whose involvement with theater began in the 1950s, took Marathi theater to new heights in subsequent decades and became a founding member of the group Rangayan with playwright Vijay Tendulkar and famous theater personalities such as Arvind Deshpande and Shreeram Lagoo. Other prominent Marathi directors included Sudha Karmarkar, Sai Paranjpe, Pratima Kulkarni and Jyoti Subhash. Karmarkar's directed work for the professional stage includes *Nabheecha Dhalala* (1961), an adaptation of Albert Camus's *Caligula*, *Mandarmala* (1962), a musical written by Vidyadhar Gokhale, which enjoyed more than 200 shows, *Yamala Jevha Dulki Leegte, Pati Gele Ga Kathewadi*, and numerous others.

As in the case of Bhatia, one of the distinctive features of the work of many playwright-directors was a creative use of "folk" theaters and legends through which they addressed social issues. Some of the earliest experiments with folk theaters had been attempted by the IPTA in the 1940s and 1950s; their mandate was to return to a creative revival of folk dramas and suffuse them with revolutionary energy, anticolonial messages, and references to workers' rights. In one such experiment, Dina Gandhi (later Pathak) contributed through a Bhavai play about war-time problems that plagued urban workers, and "introduced a new character, Rangli, in place of the male Ranglo" (Ahuja 2001, 14). The inspirational lessons of the IPTA were to prove fruitful and Dina Gandhi and her sister Shanta played a pioneering role in the "return to roots" movement of the post-independence period, particularly from the 1960s through the 1980s, when the "roots" movement resulted in the resurgence of indigenous forms such as Yakshagana, Tamasha, Ras Lila, Nautanki and Bhavai in urban theatrical contexts. This was accomplished through Dina Gandhi's co-directed play *Maena Gurjari* (written by Rasiklal Pathak), which, presented in the folk form Bhavai, took Gujarat by storm and was mounted at the National School of Drama in 1980 under the direction of Bharat Dave. And in the 1970s, Shanta Gandhi created a production of Bhavai in Jasma Odan, which was also presented at the Festival of India in London. According to Chaman Ahuja, the use of folk theater and "the creative utilization of Bhavai in *Jasma Odan* and *Maena Gurjari* served as a model for almost the whole of India" (Ahuja 2001, 15). Significantly, these plays foregrounded female protagonists, something that had figured little even in activist organizations such as the IPTA.

Others who carved out a space for traditional dance and dramas in Gujarat are Mrinalini Sarabhai, a famous Bharat Natyam dancer, who opened the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts in 1949 and who was also involved in directing plays there. "As a director of plays, her most glorious moment was when she produced a great Sanskrit classic, *Swapanvasudattam*, in English,

for American audiences at the Institute of Advanced Studies in Theatre” (Ahuja 2001, 17). Mrinalini Sarabhai’s daughter, Mallika Sarabhai, a renowned dancer-director continues the work started by her mother and performs scenes from Hindu mythology in order to provide an interpretive feminist slant to mythological stories.

The intensification and consolidation of feminist energy in the 1970s and 1980s also shaped the formation of several activist theater groups which brought women’s struggles to the streets, reflective of ongoing social concerns that were commensurate with those addressed by the feminist movement of these decades. In this, they showcased the effects of social practices such as dowry payment. Of note among the activist groups that brought women’s issues to the streets were Theatre Union in Delhi, and Jana Natya Manch (also known as Janam, meaning birth), co-founded in 1973 by Safdar Hashmi and Mala Hashmi, also in Delhi. These groups operated under the dynamic leadership of several female activists (Anuradha Kapur, Rati Bartholomew and Maya Rao in the former and Mala Hashmi in the latter), many of whom co-scripted, devised and directed plays about social practices and policy issues that affected women, workers and other segments of the socially marginalized populace. Inspired by the IPTA, Janam has become one of the most important organizations for popularizing street theater through plays that deal with contemporary issues, democracy, freedom and cultural rights, and continues the work envisioned by Safdar Hashmi, who was killed during a performance of *Halla Bol*, a play about workers’s rights, in 1989.

In Gujarat, Aditi Desai threw the limelight on women’s issues through her play *Stree Savdhaan* (Woman, beware) and Hiren Gandhi created theater to make people aware of issues pertaining to women, children, youth, violence, and communalism. Many, like playwright and writer Kusum Kumar, also included, in the 1970s, themes pertaining to *dalits* (people who have been subjected to historical and ongoing forms of social discrimination on account of the caste system). In her play *Suno Shefali* (Listen Shefali, 1978), the theme takes on a gendered dimension. It tackles the subject by portraying an understanding of caste politics from the viewpoint of Shefali, a young *harijan* (a term used by Gandhi which has been replaced by *dalit*) girl who refuses to marry her upper-caste lover Bakul when she realizes that Bakul and his politician father only want to turn her into an object of their charity so that the father can secure his political standing in society. Music, songs, and improvisation have often constituted important elements of the plays performed by these groups; also important is a conscious attempt to resort to theatrical idioms and practices such as folk conventions and songs that are integral to communities of women.

Playwright-directors: post-1980s period

Even though Dharwadker identifies Bengali and Marathi as the “top tier” of languages in which modern urban theater exists and Hindi among the “second,” according to Kirti Jain, a director and Professor at the National School of Drama, New Delhi, the Hindi region has produced the greatest number of women directors, many of whom are also playwrights. They include Mridula Garg, author of *Ek Aur Ajnabi*, Shanti Mehrotra, known for *Thhehra Hua Paani*, Irpinder

Puri Bhatia, author of *Balam Jee Tum Aagey*, Mein Peechay and Kusum Kumar, who has written seven full-length plays such as *Dilli Ooncha Sunti Hai* (Delhi is Hard of Hearing), *Om Kranti Kranti* (Holy Revolution), *Sanskar ko Namaskar* (Goodbye to Rituals), *Ravan Lila* (The story of Ravan), and *Pavan Chaturvedi ki Diary* (The Diary of Pavan Chaturvedi), ten one-act plays and two street plays, all of which have been staged by different professional and amateur groups and three of which have been made into telefilms (Mukherjee 2005, 119). Recognized for her landmark contribution to theatrical practices is Tripurari Sharma, who teaches at the National School of Drama and whose repertoire includes *The Wooden Cart*, a play about lepers, *Traitors*, a play about Anglo-Indians, and *Bahu* (Daughter-in-law, 1979), a play with which she launched her theatrical career, as well as a number of children’s plays.

These playwright-directors have focused on what Jain identifies as a “process-oriented” approach. Tripurari Sharma, for instance, has conducted workshops with marginalized groups. Anuradha Kapur has experimented with gender subversion in her direction of *Umrao*, the tale of a courtesan based on Mirza Muhammed Hadi Ruswa’s nineteenth-century novel, for the theater group Vivadi in 1993 (performed in Delhi, Calcutta and Bombay); *Sundari*, based on the autobiography of Jaishankar Sundari, a legendary actor who became famous for playing women (which was performed in Delhi in May 1998 and later toured all over India); and Brecht’s *The Job*, based on Brecht’s story about a woman who impersonates a man and takes up the job that her husband had been offered before he died (which opened in Bombay in January 1997).

Similarly, Amal Allana engaged in issues of gender-subversion in *Himmat Mai*, which cast a male actor to play the role of Mother Courage, and thereby proposed a rethinking of questions relating to the social performance of gender. Kirti Jain finds the experimental nature of Allana’s works especially visible in her casting a male actor (Manohar Singh) as Mother Courage in her production of *Himmat Mai*, an experiment that threw up issues about “how to portray a woman, what constitutes feminine, what are these stereotypes, how to break them” (Jain 2001, 24). Other major productions by Allana include Satish Alekar’s *Begum Barve* and Girish Karnad’s *Naga-Mandala*, in which, unlike *Himmat Mai*, the “transitions from a male to a female identity become important dramaturgical moments articulated through theatrical means” (Allana 181).

Such varied approaches have resulted in myriad experimental and aesthetic forms that disrupt the linear structure of the “well-made” play. Thus Anuradha Kapur’s plays draw heavily on the visual traditions of painting and music which function as parallel texts, interrupt the theatrical narrative, and seek to prevent a privileging of a singular narrative, theme, or form. Anamika Haksar’s experiment in her famous production of *Antaryatra*, an exploration of the journey of women (the wife, the courtesan, the ascetic), involves multiple narratives through a simultaneous performance of actions that foreground a “journey into the inner world of these characters” (Jain 2001, 25). Haksar also explores the diverse yet interrelated layers of power relations in *Raj Darpan*, a play whose script, in search of colonial attitudes and their influences in the postcolonial present, evolved through discussions with students. Overall, as Jain surmises, these directors created plays that are open-ended and multi-layered and do not necessarily lead to resolution. “The emphasis here is more on the process, hence on exploration, rather than on

the end product” (Jain 2001, 27).

Sharma returns to the history of the courtesan in her play *Azizun Nisa: San Sattavan ka Qissa* in order to recover the neglect that has been imposed upon the courtesan-soldier in the 1857 mutiny. The first performance of the play was on 27 March 1998 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of International World Theatre Day and to celebrate 50 years of India’s independence in 1997. Notable playwrights from other regions include Nabaneeta Dev Sen (b. 1938) from Bengal, an academician and writer of short stories, fiction and travelogues, whose play *Medea*, published in 1993 and performed several times thereafter, received, along with two other plays, the Sahitya Akademi Puraskar (Mukherjee 2005, 32) and Usha Ganguli, a famous stage artist, activist and director who runs her theater group “Rangkarmee” and performs Hindi drama in Bengal. The range of Ganguli’s directed plays includes the Hindi version of Ratnakar Matkari’s *Lok-Katha* (1987), Elkunchwar’s *Holi* (1989), Arnold Wesker’s *Roots* (as Parichay, 1978), Ibsen’s *Doll’s House* (Gudia Ghar, 1981), and Mahashweta Devi’s *Rudali* (1993), *Mukti* (1999) and *Himmat Mai* (based on *Mother Courage*, 1998). According to Dharwadker, “Ganguli has earned the titles of ‘angry woman’ and ‘iron lady’ as well as a reputation for fashionable slogan mongering, but her engagement with feminist causes and also with broader issues of citizenship in the nation-state and the world presents a major alternative to the literary contract” (Dharwadker 2005, 117).

Among those writing plays in regional languages are Jameela Nishat, known for her *Purdah* in Dakhni Urdu, a play in which she raises concerns about the lives of Muslim women, Volga, a feminist writer in Telugu whose plays serve as a forum for advocating women’s rights, and Catherine Thankamma, who has distinguished herself in Malayali theater by directing award-winning plays. Additionally, Mamta Sagar has made a notable contribution to Kannada theater through plays such as *Rajakumaari Kathe* (2001), *Chukki Chukki Chandaki* (1993), *Ondu Raatriya Kathe* and *Mayye Bhara Manave Bhara* (The swing of desire), and also directed Jamila Nishat’s play *Purdah* in 2001. C. S. Laxmi or Ambai and V. Padma (also known as Arasu Mangai) address feminist concerns in Tamil. A theater activist, Padma describes the purpose of her plays as follows: “I am a feminist and like to explore women’s issues in my plays. Both gender and our language – Tamil – are important to me. I make a conscious effort to take up women’s issues and in Tamil, to make the audience understand. Language extends into a theater idiom and questions of identity” (cited in Mukherjee 2005, 430).

Other directors who have made a seminal contribution are Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry from Chandigarh who runs her group “The Company” and includes urban actors and naqqals, the traditional impersonators of Punjab, and Nadira Babbar, a theater and film actress who started her theater group, Ekjute, in Mumbai, which showcased its first production *Yahudi ki Ladki*, in 1981, in the tradition of the Parsi theater. Lilette Dubey, an acclaimed film actress and television artist has made her mark directing English language theater and founded the Theatre Action Group in Delhi. Even though English language drama remains marginal by comparison to theater in the regional languages, several playwrights have written and produced plays in English over the last several decades. Among the earlier English language plays are Bharati Sarabhai’s *Well of the People* (1943) and *Two Women* (1952), which straddle the worlds of pre and post-independence

India and Dina Mehta’s *Mythmakers* (1967), which won the Sultan Padamsee Playwriting Prize in 1968.

As well as plays such as *Getting away with Murder*, *Sisters Like you* (1996) and *One plus one makes nine* (1984), other award-winning plays by Mehta include *Tiger Tiger*, based on the life of Tipu Sultan, which also won the Sultan Padamsee Playwriting Prize in 1978 and *Brides Are Not for Burning* (1993), which won a BBC prize. Other playwrights such as Poile (Ambika) Sengupta further contributed to English language drama in the 1990s through plays such as *Keats was a Tuber*, short-listed for the British Council International New Playwriting Prize in 1997, *Inner Laws* (1994), *A Pretty Business* (1995), *Dream-Makers of Calcutta* (1998), *Collages* (1998), *Samara’s Song* (1999), *Alifa* (2001) and *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni* (2001). Indian English drama, especially by a woman playwright, found new prominence with Manjula Padmanabhan’s play *Harvest*, about organ trade, which won several awards including the 1997 Onassis International Cultural Competitions Prize for Theatrical Plays. Since 1997, the play has had an expansive audience base in the West and the Anglo-American academy through performances and inclusion in important collections such as Helen Gilbert’s edited anthology, *Postcolonial Plays* (2001). Following the success of *Harvest*, Padmanabhan went on to author *Lights Out* (2000), *Hidden Fires* (2003) and *Mating Game* (2004).

Along with critics, most feminist theater practitioners from varied regions, who also write about theater and the place of women in it, have observed that the shifts in women’s roles from being primarily actors and occasionally playwrights to becoming directors in the post-independence phase has remained uneven and dependent upon the cultural specificities and pressures of particular regions. While making such observations, theater practitioners applaud others’ and their own contributions. Anuradha Kapur, playwright-director and academician and present Director of the National School of Drama, has recorded her own interventions and that of her group (see *Theatre India*, special issue). Critic Vasudha Dalmia credits women directors of the 1990s, largely from North India and Delhi, as “prising open” (2006, 314) the categories of “nation and nationalism, tradition and roots” (313), categories which by the 1990s had been appropriated by conservative ideologues. Dalmia commends them for working with “very different experimental idioms” to provide “avant-garde” (314) engagements with notions of identity and gender at a time of rising religious majoritarianism.

Such experiments were at best self-reflexive and emerged from theatrical innovations that were to depart from the achievements of earlier directors, which, according to Kirti Jain, were primarily at the level of themes rather than at the level of theater. According to Jain, “It is only in the 1990s that several women directors emerged with a different approach to theater – in its structure, aesthetics, characterization and treatment. It almost seems from the works of these directors that a different language of theater is in the making” (Jain 2001, 23). Such experimentation has been reflected in Jain’s own production of *Aur Kitne Tukde* in 2001, which deals with stories about women who were abducted during the 1947 Partition and is based on Urvashi Butalia’s seminal work, *The Other Side of Silence. Voices from the Partition of India* (2001).

Conclusion

The overall achievements of women playwrights and directors, playwright-directors and director-actors lies in the innovations they have brought to theater. Not only have they creatively altered the received wisdom of legends and mythologies (foregrounding, for instance, Sita from the *Ramayana* as a woman with a voice, rather than as a victim), they have also altered the normative expectations of the audience. In addition to directing their own plays and those of others, they have brought a form of interculturalism that engages the work of European playwrights on Indian stages and renders them visible through local idioms. Examples of such work include Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry's *Yerma*, Amal Allana's *Himmat Mai*, and Anuradha Kapur's *Romeo and Juliet* (1995), among numerous others. Many practitioners have also given theatrical form to autobiographical stories of men and women, and critical and fictional writing, and forged important transnational partnerships and coalitions in the United Kingdom, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and other Asian countries in a bid to foreground an intercultural theater that continues to make productive inroads into modern Indian drama and theater.

Nandi Bhatia

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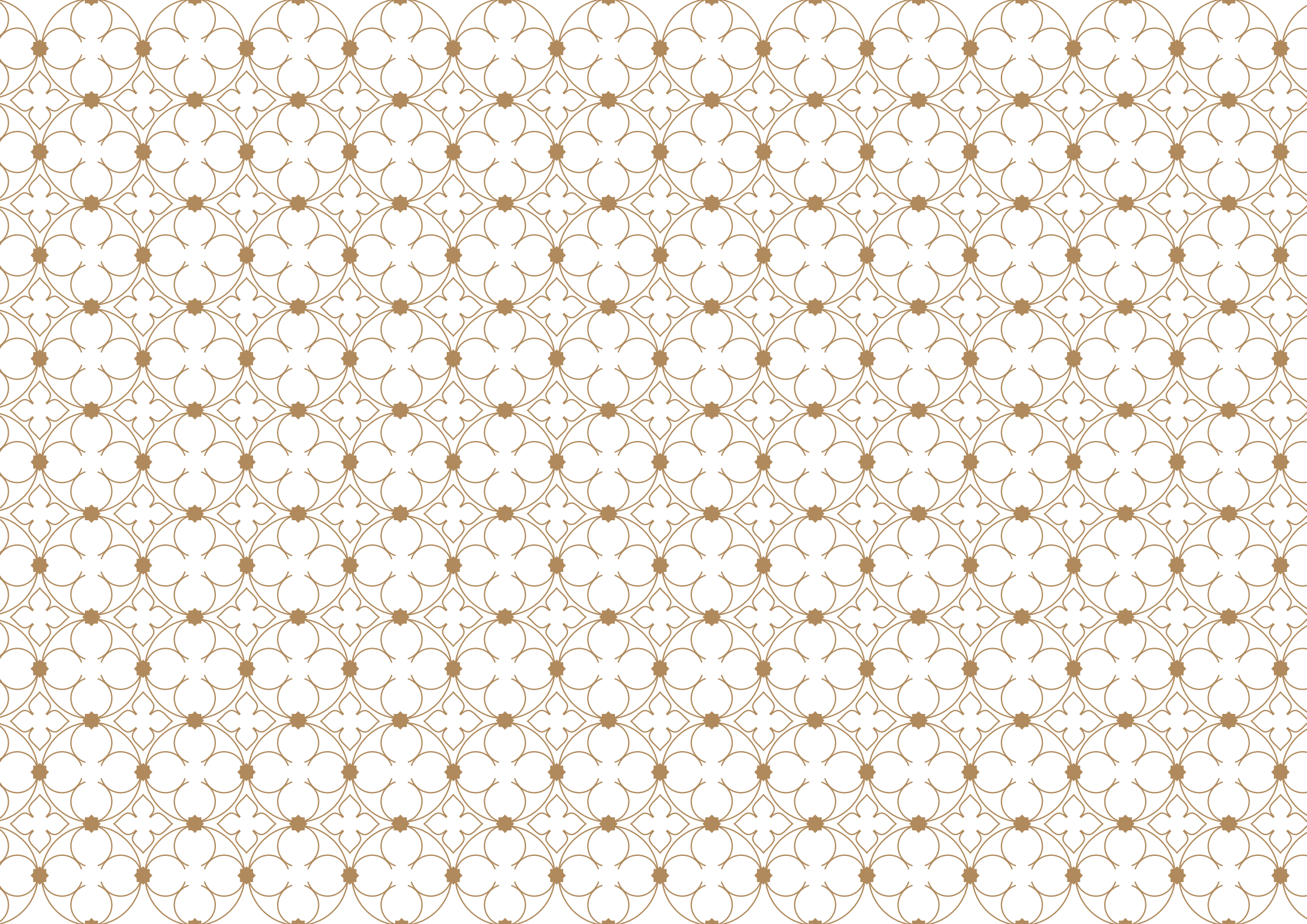
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