

Chapter 9

Breaking Silence Through Gender Jihad: Muslim Women and the #MeToo Movement

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of the #MeToo movement many Muslim women are naming their abusers now—both in the US and internationally. First, it has opened the door for re-studying the orientalist approach to portraying Muslim women's bodies, and to challenge and critique the idea that Muslim women's complaints against Muslim men complicate race relations in the aftermath of the war on terror in the US and France. Second, this movement has created such movements as the #MosqueMeToo movement and has given birth to a very needed phase of Public Feminism that criticizes Muslim patriarchy. This chapter critically analyzes several documentaries and fictions written and directed by Muslim women and argues that this movement gives an opportunity to Muslim women to speak out against their abusers; it has given freedom to councilors in faith-based institutions and other not-for-profit organizations to talk about sexual assaults—a much needed community service that was previously unavailable.

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INTRODUCTION

There is no place in paradise for a black woman. – Nawal El Saadawi, *She Has No Place in Paradise* (1987)

Feeling dirty, used-up, useless, broken—it's such a part of survivor's lives.
– Sohaila Abdulali, *What We Talk about When We Talk about Rape* (2018)

To be female is to be human. Those who act like I must be something else in order to merit full human status implicate themselves by implying that 'man' is actually the same as human, such that being a female is dehumanizing. Women have consistently shown the moral fortitude to live as Muslims despite the absence of recognition of our full humanity in Islamic thought and practice. I have fought in the gender jihad to affirm both for myself and for other females, that being who we are is exactly what we were created to be. I could not be more or less than female. This is my humanity. – Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (2006)

The #MeToo Movement, which was created by the Black feminist activist Tarana Burke in 2007, has taken the media, business, and film world by storm. More importantly, the aftermath of the movement has been felt in local communities and among women of color and women belonging to different religious groups; many of these women are naming their abusers now—both in the US and internationally. The #MeToo Movement has given Muslim women (the author understands that there are intersectionalities among different groups of Muslim women and that Muslim women are not a homogenous group) the opportunity to advocate on behalf of themselves and each other. However, some women still are not talking about their assaults, as talking about sexual assaults in their own community can be stigmatized or considered as shameful. In the past, many Muslim women, particularly Muslim women writers, have come forward to talk about their conditions, yet these writers were highly criticized and seen as native informants or as imperial feminists catering towards imperialism. They were accused of creating images of Muslim women that contributed to the Western readers' projected image of their community and of Muslim men as backwards and as oppressors, respectively. Writers like Nawal El Saadawi, in her 1982 book

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