From home to workplace
Good Muslim women, role-learning and role transference

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Women and female role globally!

I’ve always believed my wife should not work...

She should stay at home and do the cooking, cleaning, ironing, gardening, washing, painting...
Role Construction and Role Transference

- ‘gender is socially constructed ‘as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements’ (West and Zimmerman, 1977, p. 126).

- These social arrangements often reinforce male authority, placing women in secondary, supportive or subservient roles, both in the domestic and the professional spheres, thus influencing role transference from home to workplace.
Role learning / Role transference!

APPROVED BY THE MULLAHS FOR FEMALE DRIVERS
As human beings, we must inevitably see the universe from a centre lying within us ... Any attempt rigorously to eliminate our human perspective from our picture of the world must lead to absurdity.

(Michael Polanyi, 1958, 2)
Bikinis and Burkinis
My research projects with Muslim women:

1. Women principals of women-only degree granting colleges
2. Women VCs in women-only and Co-educational public universities in Pakistan
3. Women Academics progression to leadership positions in case Malaysian universities
4. Women academics at different stages of career in women-only and co-educational public universities in Pakistan (survey questionnaire 490/874 + 40 Interviews)
5. Saudi women educational leaders in higher education (under review)
This presentation draws on two studies: in Pakistan and Malaysia

Project in Pakistan:

- British Academy funded three-year project, which included working with women VCs in Co-educational and women-only public universities in Pakistan.

- A survey questionnaire was administered to all women academics in the four participating universities. The total **sample consisted of 874** women academics, and **490 completed questionnaires were received**
University of Leicester Research Seed funding project in Malaysia

- Data was collected from visits to three Malaysian universities:
  - University of Malay
  - University Putra Malaysia
  - University Utra Malaysia*

Data collection activities included one pre-advertised seminar/workshop per each university

Interviews with nine women academics in senior leadership positions
Malay Muslim Women

• All ethnic Malays are considered Muslim by Article 160 of the constitution of Malaysia.

• The female academics that I interviewed were all Muslims of Malay origin except for one who was married to a Malay bumiputra.

• They all dressed Malay & used headscarves except one.

• Most of them had started covering their heads to emphasise their Malay Muslim identity more recently.

• Muslims are governed by Sharia courts in matters including marriage, inheritance, divorce, apostasy, religious conversion, and custody among others.
**Women in Islam**

- God created you from a single soul and created its mate of the same and spread from these two a multitude of men and women’ (the Quran, 4:1).

- ‘Women have rights over men similar to those of men over women’ (2:226).

- ‘If any do deeds of righteousness, be they men or women, and have faith, they will enter paradise’ (4:124).
Patriarchy co-opted Islam after the death of the prophet - many passages in the Quran were interpreted by patriarchy loosely and out of context, in support of a vicious patriarchal ideology. These interpretations were then handed down to women as God's revealed words. Also, the Arabic language is a very rich language, and thus it is not uncommon to run into sentences that can be interpreted in a variety of ways.

(Azizah Al-Hibri, 1982, p.viii)
Women in the Muslim world …

The status and roles of women in the Muslim world vary considerably, influenced as much by literacy, education, and economic development as by religion. Men and women in Muslim societies grapple with many gender issues ranging from the extent of the women’s education and employment to their role in the family and the nature of their religious leadership and authority in Islam.

Esposito, 2011, 102
A woman cannot be in top leadership role: controversy in Pakistan following Benazir Bhutto’s first election as prime minister in 1988

The efforts on the part of her party members to appease the critical *Ulema* (religious scholars) by stressing the difference between 'head of state' and 'head of government' underline the oppressive force of entrenched patriarchal traditions, powerful gendered discourses and vested interests defining the gender roles.
‘Muslim Women’
Quote from a senior women academic (Pakistan)

‘We have a social set up in which we females are not supported by ‘families’ to be professionals. They don’t value our work or care whether I am in the university or have worked the whole day. But if the same person is a male then they have totally different attitude - even our parents have different attitude’.

‘when they come home family says, oh he is very tired and he can’t do anything else. But when a female goes home she has to cook meals, look after kids and her family members. She is home and now others are relaxed’.
From interview with a Muslim woman academic from Pakistan

She gets up very early; makes some preparations for evening meal before preparing lunch for children/husband to take to work; wakes up children; help them getting ready if they are young; makes breakfast for children; attends husband while he gets ready and then makes his breakfast; attends to breakfast or other needs of other family members living with them; does dish washing and organises house; then gets ready and goes to work; comes back; sorts out children; attends to husband; prepares meals; washing; helps children with school homework; serves evening meal; cleans up kitchen; gets everyone's clothes ready for next day; performs wifely duty; and then sits down to prepare for her next day’s work. ‘I hardly have 3/4 hours sleep’.
Further quotes from Pakistan

‘My husband is very co-operative; he allows me to work at the university’.

‘I have to keep him [husband] happy; give him time. The moment I am home, I am a mother and wife. My husband would never like me to act other than a mother/wife’ (Role).

‘My husband cannot actually help in dishwashing. He cannot help me in the kitchen. This is something very odd, very very odd if he is standing in the kitchen or if he is cleaning house’.

‘Men don’t value our work even when we are in senior positions – they think we are working with few other women. If there is any problem or conflict, he (husband) just says “quit job”’. 
Power of dominant discourse!
Silencing of women!

‘… in mixed professional contexts I have always … tried to put my point of view or my opinion across as diplomatically as possible so that it is not that we are questioning their authority, or that they feel that their authority is being undermined’.

A woman Vice Chancellor Pakistan
‘We are Muslim. Family is first for us women’.

With all due respects …

Are Muslim men exempted from this obligation?

What about women from other backgrounds?
We are equal! Quotes from Malaysia

• ‘We are treated equally. We have no issues with gender’.

• ‘No mention in policies that women could not apply for any post or could not work in any position’.

• ‘No colleague ever complained of any gender related issues in work or career progression’.

But ... (what about the roadblocks!)

• ‘Men with similar qualifications not only move faster towards top position’, they also ‘occupy almost all positions of power’.

• ‘We look after homes and children so men have more time for professional activities’.

• ‘Islam tells us to obey husbands; we look after homes and children’ (Role).

• ‘In Islam women cannot travel without husband’s permission. My husband accompanies me when I have to travel for research’.

Muslim Woman Educational Leader

• When probed, the interviewees emphasised high significance of their responsibilities towards family, and their understanding of religious obligations – being good Muslim women.

• The self-righteousness of good Muslim women signals the seductive power of religion that may pose challenges to debates by **blurring the boundaries between choice and imposition in role learning**.

• Boundaries between cultural and religious are fluid

• Cultural practices are often explained/justified as religious without evidence from Islamic religious texts

• The identities are constructed at the intersections of multiple interacting factors.

• Role learning and role transference are shaped by multiple intersectionalities
Comments/Questions please?

Thank you.