

Experiencing Prayer: Interpreting Text and Its Context

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Abstrak

Perlaksanaan solat merupakan aspek penting yang ditekankan dalam keluarga Muslim kerana ia menjadi indikasi kepada individu dan keluarga beragama. Artikel ini mengupas pengalaman harian beragama wanita Muslim barat dalam mempraktikkan kefahaman nas-nas Islam melalui amalan didikan solat dalam keluarga. Secara khususnya, ia meninjau dan menganalisis pendirian dan reaksi wanita Muslim di barat mengenai hadith berkaitan didikan dan asuhan solat ke atas generasi muda Muslim. Kajian yang dijalankan ini menggunakan pendekatan etnografi melibatkan dua langkah iaitu pemerhatian melalui penyertaan dan perbualan dalam kutipan data. Kesimpulan yang diperoleh menunjukkan teks ataupun nas Islam memainkan peranan besar dalam kehidupan harian wanita Muslim di barat. Kajian ini menunjukkan terdapat kepelbagaian pandangan dan sikap tersendiri diambil oleh mereka apabila berinteraksi dengan nas-nas tertentu dalam sumber Islam sesuai dengan konteks kehidupan mereka di barat.

Kata kunci: Solat, teks Islam, persekitaran agama, wanita Muslim barat, Islam di Scotland

Abstract

Performance of prayers are meaningful for the Muslim families as they indicate individuals and family religiousness. This article aims to highlight Western Muslim women religious experience dealing with Islamic texts. It focuses on daily prayer and the process of nurturing this practices in Muslim families. It intends to portray Muslim women's primary concern especially in daily prayers still remained vital in promoting a sense of religious communities among the Western Muslims. In order to understand how Muslim women understand Islamic texts particularly hadith, this article analyse trend and reactions of western Muslim women on the obligation of nurturing prayers among Muslim children based on a selected hadith text. This article is an effort to investigate Islam from within by employing ethnography approaches; specifically participant observation and conversation. This article concludes that Islamic texts play major role in the life of Western Muslim women. In particular it discovers multiple trends of thinking among Muslim women in the Western context dealing with Islamic primary source.

Keywords: Prayer; religious text; religious circles; western Muslim women; Islam in Scotland

1. Introduction

It is argued that Muslims must develop an understanding of Islamic texts and the context in order to stay faithful to injunctions of Islam (Tariq Ramadan 2004). This article seeks to understand and analyse western Muslim women experiences dealing with religious texts in daily life. This article aims to understand Western Muslim women's trends of thinking and their approaches in dealing with the sources, focusing on their dedication to daily prayers. Many attempts have been made to study people's religiousness and their religious commitment. Individuals' religiousness is measured through several ways; individuals' behaviour, religious salience, closeness to God and spiritual supports (Deba Choudhury 2010, p.13). Saba Mahmood (2005) argues that in order to understand Islam as a faith and Muslims religious enmeshment, one must turn to the usual spaces where the Muslims constitute a proper way of living ethically and devotedly. Among of the primary areas to be investigated are the ritual observances such as prayer and fasting, body and protocols of public conducts like the way they dress and eat. This article focuses on teaching of daily prayers observances among Muslim families in Scotland.

2. Religious Gatherings in Western Setting

Body or embodiment has become a significant topic of theoretical discussion within social scientific writing as well as within debates on qualitative research methods. Sophie Gilliat-Ray (2010 (a), p.413) cites Campbell (1998, p.58) who stated that:

While people understand their experiences in organisations through discursive mediations, they remain bodily present and are active experiencers of the everyday/night world from their various locations in it. Indeed, where one stands determines what one experiences, shaping to an important extent what can be known.

As for Campbell embodiment carries a dynamic meaning and may indicate their experiences, knowledge, social condition, status and so on. Gilliat-Ray asserts that many recent works on people reflect on the body as 'a dimension of qualitative fieldwork practice' (2010 (a), p.414) either by the subjects or the researchers. Recent studies on Muslim women's piety elsewhere obliquely list a variety of forms of embodiments in piety cultivation processes. For an example, pious Muslim women in Dahiyya, Lebanon do not shake hand with their counterparts (Lara Deeb 2006). As for Muslim women participants in the circles in Scotland, they are aware of a form of piety embodiment they carry in public and especially for those who wear headscarf or any Muslim dress. During the above discussion, the women were very aware of their Muslim identity through adoption of veiling or wearing modest dress. Therefore they need to pay extra care of their acts in public as they expressively become the faces of Islam. Realising the fact that they have responsibility to be good example of Muslims in their own families and neighbourhoods, some Muslim women create and join religious circle and Islamic courses. Some of them took proactive step from their circle by setting up a woman group. From there, they designed other activities such as charitable activities, knowledge and talks to mosques open day events in which garnered many participants and visitors to the events.

Muslim women particularly have adopted a variety of strategies to resist their subordination (Hamayun Ansari 2004, p.283). One of the strategy is by collectively setting up and operating groups or organisations; political or non-political, official or non-official. They have also become interested in looking for their future through religious organisations. Additionally they made effort to address their problems and rising demand for education and public services (Ansari 2004, p.286). Jorgen S. Neilson (2001, pp.166-176) also states that the generation of young Muslims are consciously undertaking the analysis of Islam and its cultural expression necessary for Islam to remain meaningful to them and to their children in turn. They are those who are born or grown up in Europe, had been through a European system of education and had experienced the wider society positively as well as negatively as part of the western society. I found that the women in my study realized the challenges they had to overcome. In fact, they reversely deal with them through seeking positive opportunities. For an example, in the above conversation and the discussions that followed from it, the women in the religious circles underline about their social responsibility to represent Islam in more active and positive ways in the neighborhoods. Sitting in their circles made me realise the vast of contents of Islamic knowledge they explored. They autonomously selected the topics and resources for their gatherings. At this point, they showed their monopoly and authority in their discussions of knowledge. Their remote relationship with the male authority signals their freedom in addressing issues on Muslim women closely related to their life in the West.

Schirin Amir-Moazami and Jeanette S. Jouili (2006) observe a significant relationship between knowledge gathering and religious authority in European setting. They concentrate on the way in which Western Muslim women in France and Germany engage with religious authorities and their discourses situated within the religious fields in which they are involved. They noticed that the aims of women's engagement in the process of acquiring Islamic knowledge is to cultivate a pious self and at the same time this aim is coupled with a sense of responsibility towards the construction of a virtuous community. The involvement of Muslim women in transmitting Islam both on an informal and an institutional level implies a certain shift in traditional male dominated authority structures. The women also showed that an increased awareness of the importance of religious authorities, both for their daily life and within the Muslim community. This religious awareness is crucial for processes of achieving piety and making reform at the individuals, families and communities levels (Amir-Moazami and Jouili 2006, p.620).

Tina Gudrun Jensen (2010, pp.1152-3) argues that the context of Islamic classes offered to the Muslims in Denmark mosques, not only portray a kind of religious development but they reflect new forms of Muslim religiosity in Danish religious field. In her study on Danish Muslims' religiosity, Jensen observed many Islamic classes take place within diverse Muslim settings. In describing a weekly women's circle whose members shared their religious experiences and inter-subjective realities, she notes that the women she observed would interpret and discuss through references to the Qur'an and the Hadith (i.e sayings and tales of Prophet Muhammad). They taught each other Islamic concepts applied in their real life situations. The women would instruct each other in ritual practices such as the physical movements and Arabic words they said during daily prayer (Jensen 2010, p.1164).

Studies have highlighted the centrality of Islam has in the lives of British Muslims (Mohe 2011, p.140). It was suggested that Muslim women in the UK in particular are embracing Islam in different ways; adopting modest clothing, as well as learning and understanding the Quran, and seeking Islamic knowledge to maintain religious identity. The similar trend is visible among Scottish Muslim women especially those who participated in piety activities in their local mosques or elsewhere. For many Muslim families, their homes are sites for the performance of religious rituals and obligations like the five daily prayers. Islamic teachings are narrated, conveyed and passed on from fathers or mothers to their children. Islamic teachings are referred to the lessons of Islam such as the lessons about pillars of faith and Muslim rituals like prayers. Through this process, children consciously and unconsciously learn traditions and observances, and in that way developing a Muslim moral habitus. Gilliat-Ray 2010 (b) states that:

The central role of women in family life gives them a pivotal role in the religious nurture and education of future generations; it is they who usually help young children learn how to undertake ritual washing before prayer, and how to perform the prayer themselves. (Gilliat-Ray 2010 (b), p.138)

In this article, I highlight a scenario in a religious gathering organised by local Muslim women association. It is about the reactions of three women; Maryam, a 30-something stay at home mother and an Arab by origin, Shadiyya, 40s a mother of four children who is a regular participant in religious circles and Islamic events at her neighbourhood and Nada, a full-time postgraduate student and a mother of two. Nada is an Asian by origin and Shadiyya is an Egyptian. All of them has been living in Scotland for more than fifteen years.

The question of 'how to pray' and 'how to teach our children to pray' turned the religious circles I observed into a sphere for Muslim mothers to share their thoughts on how to bring up their children as devout Muslims. They realised that in order to attain that aim they needed to be devout mothers first. Grounded in the use of Islamic texts, the women reveal that in finding their options, they are aware of the everyday challenges of Muslim mothers and use holistic approaches as guidance. In Scotland, I could see Muslim women collectively lead the way in that process. The role of Muslim women especially the mothers are obvious in their conversation. In Islamic texts, the role of the mother is highly regarded. Maryam asked the speaker that day, a simple question about how to teach prayer to her children. The talk that day was about raising Muslim children in the west and it was organised by Maryam's local mosque. She was one of the event committees.

2. Methodology

Mahmood (2005) underlines there has been a growth of frequent religious gatherings among Muslim women and formation of autonomous movements among Muslim women inside and outside the mosques across the globe. Participation in religious circles exclusively for women who want to learn more about Islam is a new form of piety expression found in European context (Sara Silvestri 2011, Gilliat-Ray 2010 (b) and Jensen 2011). Yet, the writers have not treated the emergence of this kind of religious development in much detail. In fact, systematic research of those study circles has not yet carried out (Gilliat-Ray 2010b). This is the gap that this article wants to fill in. Additionally, Gilliat-Ray (2010b) highlights that a new field of contemporary hermeneutic enquiry is emerging in which Islamic identity and intellectuality are being shaped by current transnational, cosmopolitanism and diasporic reality and Muslim women study circles are important sites where the women as active agent of change involved in textual re-interpretations of religious sources and social advocacy. As a researcher who originated from the East, I am very keen to understand how Western Muslim women in their real-life setting in the West involve in textual interpretation of Quran and Hadith and maintain

faithful to Islam. The religious circles and gatherings were selected as research settings as they open opportunities to observe Muslims observances systematically.

Participation observation and follow-up conversations are the main approaches used in collecting data. This article argues that researching Muslim piety requires direct observation and participation. In other words, the researchers need to be present at the settings and observe the participants' performances as well as their verbal dispositions. Participant observation is unsystematic and unstructured approach (Patrick McNeill and Steve Chapman 2005) yet it offers many advantages. It gives the researcher an intuitive, insightful and intellectual grasp of "the way things are organized" in the setting, "how people relate to one another" and "the ways in which social and physical boundaries are defined" (Stephen L. Schensul *et. al.* 1999). The follow-up conversations commonly informal. They took place mainly at local mosques and at respondents' homes. The length of the conversations depended on the availability of the respondents. They often lasted between 40 minutes and an hour and a half. In many cases, I would conduct repeated conversations with several individuals. I often discovered that the respondents preferred to have the informal conversations carried out in the company of their family or friends. To some extent, this resulted in interesting consequences and ideas showered by many other people.

Almost once a week, a number of Muslim women across Scotland humbly gather at their local mosques or elsewhere seeking religious knowledge. They attend to listen to religious talks, acquire new knowledge that presented by invited speakers, female teacher or from the members of their groups themselves. This encounter within the small context of religious gatherings across Scotland is akin to the general snapshots of new religious development among European Muslim women in recent works. There has been a growth of frequent religious gatherings among Muslim women and formation of an autonomous movement among Muslim women inside and outside the mosques in the West (Silvasteri 2008, Gilliat-Ray 2010 and Siraj 2011).

3. Prayer to the Women

One of the most common descriptions of the state of being pious is through constant practising of daily prayers (See Mahmood 2005 and Riaz Hassan 2008). The performance of prayer itself, either in private or in public, is a sign of obedience. Mahmood (2005, pp.122-126) highlights a close connection between the performance of prayer, the quality of being close to God, individual daily activities. Mahmood (2005, p.123) recommends a deeper analysis should be made about prayers by examining its fundamental aspects such as the religious incumbent requirement that makes Muslims want to demonstrate their devotion, Islamic virtues and the attitudes that Muslims must apply in the performance of the act such as sincerity, humility, fear and admiration. She also includes knowledge of prayer as a vital aspect in the cultivation of piety through intense training. I found these recommendations to be very important and in fact, the women I met during my fieldwork in Scotland from 2006 to 2010 were leading their ways in their piety cultivation process. In this article, prayers, which are the heart of Muslim piety observances received further attention by my respondents.

Afzal Ur Rahman (1979, p.238) indicates that obedience (*ibadat*) is the main source of piety. One form of obedience is prayer, which reminds Muslims of the glory of God and their accountability for each of their actions. Through constant contact during prayers, a servant may reach the stage absolute piety (*taqwa*) (Deeb 2006, p.169). Again this illumination provides another description of piety which is associated with the performance of ritual observances. To attain the state of piety, Deeb (2006, p.169) has argued that one has to fulfil two conditions. First, devotion to God must be displayed through acts of worship and second, these acts must be performed individually and/or in public. Deeb provides other examples piety through *muamalat* (mutual reciprocal social relations) and classifies these acts as public piety. From Deeb's point of view, piety is not static. It can be expressed in various ways including through distributing food to the poor, collecting donations for the disadvantaged and praying and fasting in the month of Ramadan, fulfilling the rituals of pilgrimage, doing charity, wearing modest clothing, smiling and greeting passers-by, attending religious activities and many other good acts.

It was Saturday morning 2007. The talk was about raising Muslim children in the west. Right after the talk, the speaker, who is a doctor by profession opened to the floor for further discussion and questions. Maryam ended the silence from the floor when she started asking the first question: "Raising children in the west for me is really a huge challenge. I want to know what is the best way to teach our children to pray?".

Maryam, who came to Scotland at the end of 1990s, is a mother of four children. She usually attended religious circle at her local mosque.

Shadiyya, who suddenly commented as if she wanted to add what Maryam had just said. “Every Muslim must pray five times every day and the prophet had reminded every parent about this obligation ... he also set the rules for punishment. The prophet said: “Teach your children how to pray when they are seven years old. If they abandon the prayer when they are ten years old, you can scold them.” Having heard the first two questions, the speaker responded:

Sister, let us first ponder the hadith that you just mentioned. We often look at hadith of the Prophet as a set of rules rather than seeking the practical approaches and the essence of his teaching in dealing with human being. Let us read the hadith again. Our Prophet said: Teach your children to pray when they reach seven years old and if they leave the prayer without any excuse when they are ten years old, you may discipline them.

Maryam listened attentively. Although the speaker remarked on what Shadiyya just said, his explanation related directly to her question. The speaker further pointed out:

The hadith plainly tells us that if we want to teach our children to pray, we need to start the lessons from their childhood. The sooner we train them, the better results we may get. I don't think our children will easily leave their daily prayer when we as their parent truly obeyed the Prophet's advice and started prayer lessons as early as possible like when they reach four years old. I don't think our children who are ten-year-old would take their prayers for granted because we have trained them for so many years. Our problem today is that we as Muslim parents do not teach our children to pray properly from their childhood and today we want to scold them for leaving prayers. We say this is how the Prophet taught us on how to deal with ten-year-old children who intentionally leave their prayer. Sadly, we did not follow what the Prophet had taught us to do from the beginning ... Worse become worse is when we as parents do not pray regularly. Our children look at us as their role models. They are following us.

Literally, the woman who quoted the text of the hadith appeared to focus on physical punishment on the children who disobey the command of five-time daily prayers. The speaker however, urged his audience to re-ponder the hadith by highlighting the wisdom behind training children for prayer since their childhood. Rather than stressing the punishment for negligence that is against the child protection law in the country, the speaker focused on the main point addressed by the Prophet.

The central highlighting of the hadith is that prayer is a comprehensive training process and that it is the role of the Muslim parents to create, instil and nurture a prayer routine in their children's religious practices. In this case, the speaker appeared to concentrate more on the element of '*malaka*' (Mahmood, 2005, p. 137) or developing habitus (Gilliat-Ray, 2010, p. 138) among Muslim individuals in the performance of obedience than on the punishment aspect. Malaka, which has often been translated as habit, is an inner quality developed from piety, a cultivation process as a result of “outer practice which makes practice a perfect ability of the soul of the actor” (Mahmood, 2005, p. 137). In describing malaka and the result of the highest degree of faith and perfect submission, Mahmood (2005, p. 137) cited Lapidus (1984, pp. 55-56) who stated that:

[Malaka] is the acquisition, from the belief of the heart and the resulting actions, of a quality that has complete control over the heart so that it commands the action of the limbs and makes every activity take place in submissiveness to it to the point that all actions, eventually, become subservient to this affirmation of faith. This is the highest degree of faith.

Repeated performances of worship entail moral virtues such as honesty, modesty and obedience. The hadith indicates that obedience in fulfilling a prayer command needs an ample instruction and a certain period of time. The sooner the parents begin to train their children, the better consequences they may obtain. Therefore, a virtuous habit such as obedience in prayer is acquired through repeated virtuous habits, assiduous practice, discipline and length of time. The speaker believed that in creating the habitus of prayer, two elements are vital: parental roles and early childhood training. Both are mentioned in the hadith text above to have greater influence on Muslim children's religiosity compared to training that are devoid of the two elements, for example, parents who do not properly train their children how to pray since their youth. Regarding the punishment, interestingly the speaker argued:

I think it's very wrong to say that as parents we have the right to scold our children ... the Prophet never give that right to any irresponsible parent who neglected their responsibility from the beginning. What about the rights of the children to have proper lessons from their parent before setting up the punishment?

The conversations above have underlined the efforts of Muslim women in narrating, conveying, discussing and passing of teachings of prayer obtained from their circles to Muslim children and others. It was through this process that their children consciously and unconsciously learn the traditions and observances and develop their Muslim identity and moral habitus (Gilliat-Ray, 2010, p. 138).

Muslim homes are the sites for conveying cultural knowledge, religious teaching, history, identity and language to young generation and their mothers are often central to this process (Gilliat-Ray 2010, p.137). Additionally, Maumoon (1999) asserts that 'the dominant discourse within Islamism emphasises motherhood as a religious duty and a special privilege of women.' Reflecting one of their major roles as Muslim mothers, I found that the women I met at those gatherings discussed how to train their children to pray abidingly. Since prayer is an important pillar in Islam, they paid extra attention to prayer practice. For them daily prayers is their direct connection with Allah. It was clear from the conversations, they often quote religious texts like hadith as guidance in order to strengthen and validate their arguments and ideas. The way they converse the texts in their conversation portray an interesting picture of their daily approach in dealing with the texts.

4. Contemporary Trends of Thinking in Dealing With Islamic Texts

Ramadan (2004) classifies the presence of six trends among Muslims in dealing with their primary texts while Hassan (2008) grades them into four orientations: apologetic, wahabism, salafism and salafabism. Apologetics attempt to defend and salvage Islamic faith and tradition by emphasising the compatibility between Islam and modernity while adopting pietistic fictions about the supremacy of Islamic traditions (Hassan, 2008). Additionally, apologetics claim that Islam liberated women, formed democracy, endorsed pluralism, protected human rights and introduced social welfare earlier than the west (Hassan, 2008). The apologists believe that Muslims lost their pride and power under the yoke of western colonialism because they neglected the true Islamic practices (Hassan 2008).

The first trend of thinking according to Ramadan (2004) is practised by those who follow scholastic traditionalism and refer to scriptural texts characterised by a strict and exclusive reference to a certain school of jurisprudence (madhab). The second trend is adopted by those who apply salafi literalism, insist upon reference to the Islamic texts but "forbid any interpretative reading" (Ramadan, 2004). Those who take this strict approach identify themselves as salafi for their devotion in following the salaf (the Companions of the Prophet and the first three generations of pious Muslims). This trend is akin to Hassan's (2008) description of wahabism that resists the indeterminacy of the modern age. This ideology was founded by Muhammad Abd al-Wahab (d.1792), who sought to rid Islam from deviations and influences originated from mysticism, intercession, sectarianism and rationalism. For the wahabis, the Islamic purity is reclaimable with a literal implementation of Islamic texts and through a strict adherence to correct ritual practices. To them, sacred texts is the only source of legitimacy. Therefore, any kind of rational thinking independent of Islam texts is considered as a form of idolatry.

The third trend in Ramadan's list believes in the vitality of *ijtihad* at any time or place. Those who adopt this school regard themselves as salafi reformists. To them, the Salaf are their point of reference. Yet, the use of reasoning in critical treatment of Islamic texts is crucial as the salaf live and encounter with modern challenges in everyday life. This trend of thinking advocates a kind of interpretive community in which Muslims need to return to the Islamic texts, interpret them in light of modern needs without being bound to the interpretations of earlier generations. Hassan (2008) perceives salafism as intellectual response developed in postcolonial Muslim societies. Unlike wahabism, salafism is not hostile towards sufism, mysticism and Islamic juristic tradition. Additionally, salafi intellectuals are eager to demonstrate Islam as a faith that compatible with modernity.

Ramadan (2004) details the fourth trend of thinking as political literalist salafism, an offspring of literalist salafism that exclusively adopts the reading of the texts with special "political connotation concerning the management of power" such as the caliphate, authority and law. Yet, Marranci's (2007) research on understanding the radical views of young Scottish Muslims should not be taken for granted. In particular,

salafibism's followers adopt an anti-interpretive literalist approach. Islamic texts are exploited to affirm their reactionary power. They struggle for the establishment of an Islamic state.

The fifth trend according to Ramadan (2004) is liberal or rationalist reformism trend, which is an offspring of the westerners' thought who preach religion as something spiritual and private. In the west, followers of liberal or rationalist reformism advocate integration or assimilation of Muslims through complete adaptation of the western way of life. To them, the Quran and Hadith along with their interpretations are not suitable references for human behaviour and social conduct. To some of them, any display of distinctive clothing that might be related to seclusion or fundamentalism is opposed. Some debate the bias interpretation of Muslim women in the Islamic texts. They reject the interpretations made by past traditionists and exegesists and instead, demand other interpretations that free Muslim women from ill treatments in their religion.

The last trend listed by Ramadan belongs to the sufis who regard the Islamic texts as the ultimate points of reference in their religious exercises, meditations and activities. Unlike the political literalist salafis, the sufis use the texts to encourage inner awakening under the guidance of *shaykh* (leader) and by following certain paths (plural *turuq*, singular *tariqa*). According to sufi teachings, Islamic texts have deep meanings and require time for meditation and understanding. During my fieldwork, I met several circles that were involved in text reading activities. They often read *burdah*, praising the prophet before and after each session.

5. Discussions and Analyses

Grounded in the use of Islamic texts, the following discussion reveals how the women dealt with religious sources in order to find out the best guidance that can be used to nature their family's observances. While the hadith plainly highlights the punishment that can be followed in rectifying situations of disobedience, the speaker posed an interesting stand for not taking punishment as his option. In fact, the speaker strongly criticised that scolding children for their negligence as invalid. He claimed that the Prophet never gave that right to any irresponsible parent who neglected their responsibility from the beginning. His disapproval on the punishment alternative does not indicate his reluctance to follow the hadith of Prophet Muhammad. In fact, he attempted to rectify the idea of following the text within the context of training and cultivating faith among young children in Muslim families.

The answer he gave to the women was not a customary answer that I often heard when I attended Islamic talks given by Muslim scholars elsewhere. His response reflected the context where he lives and his professional background as a paediatrician physiatrist who is familiar with children's emotion and development. His highlighting on the prayer pedagogy rather than the discipline provided new insight to another participant, Nada, 30s a regular participant in her religious circle. Having heard the answer from the speaker, in a follow-up conversation after the event, Nada commented:

Punishment was the first thing that came to my mind when I think of the hadith. I never pay much on the teaching aspect and the length of time that parents should allocate in giving prayer lesson to children. I thought punishing children is part of *sunnah* ... I totally disagree with corporal punishment. I often question about it. We all know that physical punishing is against the law. I used to question why Islam is so hard to apply here. Why there are so many contradictories between Islam and the west. Now I can understand ... Listening to what the speaker said, the real wisdom of hadith is about giving proper religious education to our children since they are small. By giving proper religious education we have saved them. This is our priority.

What could be possible explanations that can be derived from the responses of these Muslim women from that event? First of all, Maryam seemed to reiterate what she and her friend had already discussed in their religious circle earlier. Yet, her question there, where the number of audience was more than the number of her circle participants had re-stressed the importance of daily prayers to Muslims and the need for every Muslim family to pay much attention in nurturing their children's religiosity. Her question was simple; however, it indicates that the Muslim women's primary concern especially in daily prayers still remained vital in promoting a sense of religious communities among the Muslims (Hassan, 2003, p. 46 and 2008, p. 68). As frequently addressed by the women in their weekly circles, consistency and frequency in performing prayers are meaningful for the Muslim families as they indicate individuals and family religiousness.

Nada's comment and the remark from Shadiyya revealed further evidence that religious observance is not only about rituals but is strongly grounded in the knowledge of Islamic texts such as the hadith texts. It

is through further discussions and debates that the Muslim women obtained their knowledge and new understanding of the texts they discussed.

It is important to note here the close relationship between belief, practice and texts – all of which are interwoven in the process of cultivating piety in the Muslim families. Presence of a few trends mentioned is detected by analysing how the women approached the Islamic texts. For example, Shadiyya who highlighted the hadith's text followed by her agreement to punishing children aged ten and above for leaving the daily prayers is akin to the trend of literalist salafism. A possible explanation for her approach to religious texts can be recognised through her response to Maryam's question. In her attempt to join the discussion, she highlighted the text of hadith on teaching prayers to children. Her highlighting on that particular hadith indicated her knowledge on hadith texts. The question that arisen was why she mentioned that hadith. She might have brought other narrations on recruiting young Muslim to prayers since youth if she knew them. Her precise conclusion regarding the right of a Muslim parent to discipline their children who purposely abandon prayers stresses her main understanding of the lesson that is apparently derived exclusively from the verbatim translation of the hadith text.

According to Ramadan (2013), there is an urgent need to return to “the texts and the modalities of their reading and interpretation in the light of the environments in which they were revealed” (Ramadan, 2013). More concentration on the texts without looking at cultural situation of the time and comprehending what the texts refer to or understanding which issues were involved in what are being said may lead to adopting a literalist approach that camouflage the wisdom of the prophetic teaching itself. Obliquely, Nada knew the hadith as well. In fact, she admitted of having accepted the hadith lesson almost similar to Shadiyya. However, her deviancy on the ruling of physical punishment towards Muslim children had put her to question the compatibility between Islam and the west. Ramadan (2004) devotes an attention to the changes that has already been adapted by the Muslim women in the west.

There are clear signs today, particularly among women, that things are changing and that more and more Muslims are aware of the challenges they have to confront. To remain Muslims in the west is a test of faith, of conscience, and of intelligence.

Furthermore, Ramadan (2013) explains that in order to extract principles and objectives of the teaching of Quran and hadith, every Muslim must look at the relationship between the texts and the contexts. Focusing only to the texts or contents of the texts is likely to restrict the message and higher objectives of the texts.

The relationship between Texts and contexts must be studied and this will enable us to extract principles and objectives. Texts do not speak by themselves and teachings are both synchronic and diachronic. The relation to time is crucial, the relation to the context is imperative. A literalist reading cannot account for those evolution dynamics and their tense relation to time and environments. Specialising in the contents of Texts alone, as is required of *fuqaha* (experts in jurisprudence) as a priority, is likely to restrict both the substance of the message and its higher objectives. Some existing Texts are sometimes read and interpreted without considering chronology and context, thus it becomes impossible for some scholars to dare express clear legal opinions in the light of higher objectives (Ramadan 2013, pp.1-2).

It seems possible to explain here that Nada's new insight on the hadith's lesson was due to her earlier disagreement on the punishment aspect, and the speaker's enlightenment effectively suited her point of view. However, as she mentioned, rather than focusing on the punishment option, she has obtained a new perspective which is obviously the objective of hadith itself, that is the application of effective and complete step-by-step training of prayer that is based on the ages of Muslim children. Nada's reflective comment after listening to the speaker has enlightened new insight and sensitivity that could be taken by a Muslim woman in following what hadith is. Her view indicated what stands she adopted before and after having knowledge and argument on the same text of hadith.

Most of the trends of thinking highlighted by Ramadan (2004) and Hassan (2008) consider Islam and the west as opposing to one another except of those who regard themselves as salafi reformists. We could notice an alteration in Nada's stand and perspective from following the literalist approach to accepting the latter. Yet, Nada claimed herself as neither a literalist nor a salafi reformist. She is only a Muslim mother who was keen to seek knowledge to increase her and her family's devotion. As obvious in the preceding discussion, Nada understood that the desire to pray does not come naturally but it must be created. If Shadiyya assumed

that prayer can be created through setting a punishment, Nada believed that sincere desires of praying or the ability of the young Muslims to stay obedient can be created through a cumulative training process, a process that had been underlined by Mahmood (2005). Yet, as we have clearly witnessed here, a training or teaching without proper knowledge is ineffective and impermanent, and incomplete understanding of religious texts may lead to returning to religion without proper understanding.

6. Conclusion

This article has addressed the use of Islamic texts among the women in their gatherings provides an evidence of their perspectives and approaches in dealing with Islamic texts. It has showed much attention and strong emphasis of Muslim women in the west in returning to their primary sources in order to nurture piety observances among themselves. This article also has emphasised and analysed the trend of thinking among western Muslims on particular religious issue based on their understanding of Islamic texts. The multiple ways of understanding of the texts present differences of ideas, stands and interpretations among the Muslims. In order to understand those stands, further discussion and analyse should be explored to recognise factors that influenced those differences.

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