they have been written: as scholarly efforts to substantiate and problematise various standpoints relating to gender equality and justice in the context of Islam. The texts have been subjected to a very thorough process of peer review, in each case involving two international reviewers. This was to ensure that the quality of the research papers fulfilled the journal's standards of academic excellence and met the expectations of the journal's Czech and international scholarly and wider audience. We cannot thank the authors enough for their tireless work and for agreeing to publish their papers in this special edition, the reviewers for their objective scientific assessments, and the editor-in-chief and the deputy editor-in-chief for their generous support and kind patience. It cannot be stressed enough how much we truly appreciate and respect all those involved in the articles' publication process.

In the current atmosphere of Islamophobia that has afflicted us worldwide and that portrays Islam as an evil religion, Muslim men as sexual predators, and Muslim women as victims of patriarchy and misogyny, it is important to emphasise that Muslim women´s voices, actions, and struggles, whether in writing or through their numerous forms of social and political activism, should be recognised for what they are: legitimate expressions of subjectivity and agency grounded in and at the same time interacting with (accepting, contesting, and/or negotiating) particular historical, local, and global contexts, creating, to borrow Arjun Appadurai's terms (1996), various conjunctures and disjunctures.

The quote provided at the beginning of this editorial, which by no means can do justice to the plethora of insights, viewpoints, and scholarly and personal experiences of the contributors, best summerises the gist of what is unfolded before you – a collected volume of work made possible by wonderful and brave women scholars who have grappled with, in one way or another, the questions of women in Islam, with Islamic feminism, with gender and religion, with Islam and modernity, and more. It is to them that we are indebted for the complexity and depth of knowledge they have shared with us and for the uneasy discussion that they themselves had to struggle with while writing their articles. They do not always see eye to eye on the subject and that is just how every scientific pursuit should be. What we will try to do in this editorial is to highlight the discrepancies, disagreements, confusions, frissures that exist in the literature on women in Islam and/or Islamic feminism, while also mending bridges, so to speak, between the various standpoints. The general goal, though, is to remind ourselves that when we 'hear the subaltern speak', to borrow yet another phrase from Gayatri C. Spivak (1988) on issues of Islamic faith, on equality, justice, feminism, etc., one should keep an open mind, as the articulations and understandings of these concepts may vary across cultures and across time. Intellectual and scholarly open-mindedness, while necessary in every scientific debate, is all the more necessary when it comes to debates on such an 'uneasy' topic as Islamic feminism.

One can hardly think of a more controversial research project that one could choose to address. Many believe that Islam and feminism represent binary opposites and mutually exclusive categories, with the former subjugating women to a lesser position in the family and in social matters and the latter advocating for the equality of women and men in all aspects of life. You may ask, how can Islam and feminism even be associated with one another? Can they speak to each other? Some Western feminists charge Islam with denying women's rights. Secular feminists from the Muslim world claim that Islam is patriarchal, misogynist, and responsible for Muslim women's inferior status. Who then are the 'Islamic feminists'? What is their agenda? What is their ontological and epistemological point of departure? Why do they spend their time and intellectual effort re-reading and re-interpreting the Muslim holy text, the Qur'an? What is written in the Qur'an about women that stirs up such heated debates? Does the Qur'an sanction women's inferior status? These questions are truly fascinating and there are no easy answers. If we are to offer a simplified answer, let it be the one that defines Islamic feminists as Muslim women intellectuals and activists who are trying to bridge the faith and practice of Islam with feminism in terms of gender equality and justice, some of whom even claim that they first learnt about gender equality from the Qur'an and only later from feminism.[3]

The aim of the thematic volume at hand, however, is not to simplify but rather to problematise the simple narrative about women in Islam by pointing to different strands of research that have been conducted for many years now that are trying to rehabilitate Islam as a woman-friendly religion and to draw attention to other variables such as the economy, modernity, nation-state building, colonialism, Western intervention, etc., that, rather than religion itself, have been responsible for determining women's choices and re-defining the rules and norms of religious practice, whether in the Muslim world or in the diaspora (Moghadam 2002). It cannot be stressed enough that it is the complex combination of the political, economic, and social factors at play, both on the local and global level, rather then the reductionist, myopic, and Orientalist narrative of Islam (Said 1971), that have shaped Muslim people's lives and served as enabling mechanisms in changing and re-formulating gender norms and attitudes towards women's status and their role in Islam. It is therefore of utmost importance to keep in mind those changing historical and local/global contexts in which those re-definions, re-appropriations, and re-formulations of gender norms in Islam, and consequently of women's rights, should be seen, and that applies for the ages long past as well as for our current times.

We expect that the current issue will provoke discussion and provide much needed

3 'I came to the realization that women and men are equal as a result not of reading feminist texts, but of reading the Qur'an', writes Zora Hesová, quoting Asma Barlas, in her article in this volume.

food for thought regarding Islam and feminism. We want to convince those who might be wavering in their acceptance of the idea that Islam and feminism can and do speak to each other, and if there is one thing we would like you to take away from reading this issue it is the acknowledgment of the wide range and variety of Muslim women's voices and activities that exist, and the recognition of their agency, rather than victimhood and submission, and the legitimacy of their varied standpoints and acts. Perhaps the single most important message of this editorial and of the thematic issue as such, as we see it, is the imperative to resist the tendency to delegitimise Muslim women's positions and to denigrate their intellectual and creative endeavors when these do not fit our own norms of struggle for gender equality and legal, social, and economic justice. We should learn to appreciate the historical and current circumstances in which Muslim women operate, be it on the state, societal, tribal, and/or family level and learn to respect voices of difference that are calling for equality, albeit using different frames of reference than those of our own.

One should also not forget that Islam is not a stand-alone religion. In the past, be it in the time of its inception, throughout the period of colonialism, during the subsequent periods of de-colonisation and later secularisation and modernisation, or in recent years with Western military interventions in the Middle East conflict zones, Islam has not remained static; it has modified itself in relation to its encounters with paganism, tribalism, Christianity, Judaism, Western colonialism, and Orientalism, and later in relation to the programmes of independent nation-state modernisation, secularisation, and, lastly, Western military invasions. All these historical and contemporary factors have shaped, modified, and produced the Islam of today. Encounters between civilisations since mediaeval times in the areas of science, art, literature, music, architecture, and even war and migration have affected people on both sides of the encounter. Samuel Huntington (1997) is mistaken in seeing cultures and civilisations as homogenous and static units. In fact, even positioning Islam and the West as separate units is problematic, as it suggests they stand on the opposite ends of some hypothetical civilisational continuum, while they are in fact interacting with one another and ultimately changing one another, even though it may not always be obvious and/or welcome. Cultural borrowings and hybridisation are part and parcel of all human activity. Every identity and every civilisation has come into existence as a response to previous identities and civilisations, distancing themselves from some of the past elements, but also incorporating many of them, including mores and norms. And Islam, as Leila Ahmed (1991) has so wonderufully shown in her research, has proved very susceptible to incorporating the norms and mores of past cultures (Persian and Byzantine, for instance) that it came to dominate, and this malleability is a capacity of Islam that should be highlighted here because it invites re-negotiations of seemingly 'innate' patriarchal and misogynistic Islamic gender norms,

such as polygamy, harem, veiling, etc. It is this negotiation and contestation over the meanings of key Islamic practices, or at least those considered Islamic, that the authors of the articles in this thematic volume have addressed, in all the complexity required of such an endeavour. The articles in this volume are truly inspiring and very erudite. They reflect a diverse range of approaches and attitudes and the state of the art level of research being conducted on the topic of Islamic feminism.

As for feminism and its efforts to undo patriarchy in many local and global contexts, it provides a useful methodological tool and an analytical approach with which to deconstruct, imagine otherwise, and argue convincingly, with historical evidence, that women have been sidelined, wronged for their acts and doings, and rendered invisible despite their achievements, in both Islam and the West. Patriarchy is not a factor of the Muslim world solely. It is not without interest that Cynthia Enloe (2014) published her pioneering book *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* to highlight the work of US military wives, who have been indispensable to the careers of their husbands, and to acknowledge the public service that they provide, though they remain unrecognised for it. It is perhaps the politics of recognition that Islamic feminists are trying to incorporate into their work, to restore the value and dignity of Muslim women for who they are – mothers, workers, scholars, politicians, and sometimes even warriors.

The first contribution in this volume is by Zora Hesová, who in her article entitled 'Secular, Islamic or Muslim Feminism? The Places of Religion in Women's Perspectives on Equality in Islam' grapples with very difficult analytical questions, namely: What role does religion play in the construction of a feminist perspective in Islam? Can an emancipatory project stem from Islam? Are secular and Islamic feminism opposing or complementary projects? She asserts that 'Islamic feminism is indeed a field in which secular and religious elements constantly interact. A focused look at Muslim feminist writings and strategies will allow to paint a complex picture of religious emancipatory strategies that work variously with secular and religious elements' (p. 27). Hesová reminds us, by drawing attention to the project of WLUML (Women Living under Muslim Laws), that there are 'disparities, local variations and foreign influences in family law applications in the Muslim world' (p. 35). Hesová in her text refers to a Moroccan Islamist feminist Zakia Salime who claimed that women have no problem with Islam but with Muslim men who stole Islam from them (p. 8). Hesová emphasises the importance of using the metholodology of Islamic feminist hermeneutics when studying and explaining the Qur'an by relying on *ijtihad,* i.e. personal deductive reasoning, deriving the meaning of a text through one own's intellectual effort and by applying a gender-sensitive interpretation of the text.

In this regard, it is rather crucial to remind ourselves of those in power who actually did the interpreting of the holy text and in what times. In other words, one needs to take into account the historicity and the implicated power-driven analyses of the

revealed text. If knowledge is power, then those in power (men) have produced knowledge and transformed it into legal practice, privileging the rights and concerns of men over those of women. We have been made to believe that Islam assigned women an inferior status, one where she must obey or otherwise be punished. Archival evidence, however, suggests that many Muslim elite women were actually able to file for divorce, draft pre-marital agreements, and claim their legal rights in inheritance feuds. This evidence of Muslim female activity in the public sphere, their agency, if you will, to act independently during legal proceedings, for instance, highlights significant gaps in our 'knowledge' about Islam and women's role in it.

The method of re-reading and re-appropriation that Hesová emphasises in her text largely resonates with the approach of the other articles submitted in this volume. For instance, in the second contribution, by Zahra Ali, on 'Feminisms in Iraq: Beyond the Religious and Secular Divide', the author delves deeper into the secular/Islamic divide in feminist approaches to religion in the Muslim world by providing an empirical case study from Iraq and from women's activism there and pointing to the different trends of feminisms that exist there. What is especially important in Ali's article is how she draws our attention to the continuum between religion and secularism as opposed to looking at them as two binary opposites, which creates room for various, not always so easily categorised forms of women's activism in the Muslim national context. In this respect, Ali's category of 'in-betweenness' is an important category to consider when trying to grasp the complex relationship between religion and secularism and between Islam and secular feminism.

Ali also introduces the concept of the 'pious modern', which is very relevant to many women's attitudes towards religion and feminism in that it shows the enmeshed nature of the two in the Muslim context, where many Muslim women embrace religion to some degree (for instance, they fast during Radaman and they do not eat pork, but they do not cover their heads and do not go to a mosque to pray), while at the same time are very modern and have modern professions as, for example, doctors or engineers. Where then do we locate Islamic feminism in this complex historical, political, and cultural milieu? It is this very question that Ali is seeking an answer to in her ethnographic work. Her argument that 'Iraqi women's notions of what is pious, moral and respectable are built upon the overlapping of social, political-sectarian, and religious dynamics' (p. 52) is a very important one. There is also the notion of Islamic modernity, which Ali does not specifically address in her text, but which we might like to remind ourselves of here. Islamic modernity is upheld by the newly established Islamic elites, for instance in Turkey. It is represented by conservative Muslim women from middle- or upper-middle-class families and an urban background who live in Istanbul or Ankara but have strong family ties to the rural hinterland of Anatolia. They cover themselves, but at the same time obtain a Western type of education, and most

importantly, they adhere to a capitalist consumer ethos by buying very expensive clothing, thus embracing Islamism and capitalism, the letter being associated with modernity. Turkish scholars Özlem Sandıkçı and Güliz Ger (2007) have wonderfully portrayed this new Turkish Islamic elite's taste for modernity and consumption in their research on the Islamic chic where young, urban, upper class, well educated Muslim women wear visibly expensive clothes, shop in high-end Islamic fashion stores to assert their high class identity status in an urban environment, clearly setting themselves apart from older, less educated and more modestly dressed Muslim women of lower, working class backgrounds and possibly of rural origins.

The third author in this volume is Nafiseh Sharifi with her article on 'The Religious Sexual Education in Post-Revolutionary Iran: Redefining *Tamkin* and the Control of Sexuality', in which she describes, on the basis of her ethnographic research in Tehran, how in Iranian religious sexuology discourse traditional religious rules, such as *tamkin,* the sexual submission of wives to their husbands, are redefined. She provides examples of women attending sex-education workshops organised by clergyman Dehnavi, who also had a live television programme in which he very openly discussed couples' sexual problems and argued that women, too, had sexual needs. She attended several of these workshops herself, where Iranian women were advised, among other things, on how to enjoy sex in marriage without disregarding the 'duty' aspect of it. She argues that 'understanding the changes in the dominant Islamic discourse opens a space for feminist scholars to ask for new interpretations of religious texts and consequently change the legal laws that keep women in a subordinate position' (p. 70). Sharifi talks about the changing norms and discourses of religion and sex in post-revolutionary Iran and says that 'in contrast to the older generations of Iranian women, younger women expect their husbands to respect their wishes and satisfy their [sexual] needs' (p. 80). While *tamkin,* in the new national sex discourse, is still a wife's duty in marriage, women are now also able to enjoy it rather than just endure it. Sharifi therefore calls this practice, by referring to Foucault, as both emancipatory and discliplinary. She thus shows that Muslim gender norms of sexual conduct and women's expected roles in marriage do change over time and also in response to, for instance, the global film industry. She mentions Hollywood films as portraying romantic love between spouses, which show what Iranian women can also aspire for.

The following article is written by Nadia Jones-Gailani and is titled 'Political Embodiments of the *Hijab* in Narratives of Iraqi Refugee Women in Diaspora'. It addresses the multiple meanings and symbols attached to *hijab*, the Muslim female headscarf, among Iraqi migrant women in North America in Detroit and Toronto. This is the only contribution in this volume that addresses the notion of gender and Islam in the context of migration and specifically among the Muslim diaspora in the West. This is very important as it draws attention to how the experience of migration and

living in the West provides a context in which meanings of *hijab* evolve. In Jones-Gailani's words, 'Not only is the *hijab* a religious symbol, it is also – in the words of the women that I interviewed – a form of political activism against what they perceive to be the racialization and marginalization of Muslim women' (p. 85). Jones-Gailani describes how her sister decided to adopt the *hijab* after arriving in Canada, much to her father's chagrin, because he, himself an Iraqi, considered *hijab* to be a symbol of tradition and backwardness, and he asked Jones-Gailani to talk to her sister from the perspective of a feminist, that is, as someone who would be against the *hijab* for representing female oppression. Jones-Gailani discovers that her sister was 'part of a small but growing trend amongst second-generation Iraqi Sunni-Muslim women in her age-group (18 to 29 years of age), who have adopted the *hijab* in North America' (p. 87). In this context, the *hijab* carries multiple symbolism: as a symbol of belonging to a Muslim community and as a sign of piety in a non-Muslim society. *Hijab,* in the Muslim diaspora, is very closely associated with the female body and with the right of women to cover, to preserve their modesty in an alien society, and to bear an identity marker. Jones-Gailani also astutely reminds us of the generational gap in attitudes towards *hijab* in that young Iraqi women have adopted the *hijab* despite the disapproval of their fathers, mothers, and even grandmothers.

For instance, Arlene MacLeod (1993) has drawn attention to a similar phenomenon among young Egyptian women, who, upon joining the labour market and hence entering the public space, adopted the veil in order to feel comfortable, as it stopped them from being preyed upon by Egyptian men. Women entering the public sphere for employment – which is itself a result of migration from rural to the urban areas and is due also to the economic hardships connected with capitalism, where men are no longer the sole breadwinners – has introduced new challenges for Muslim women and their bodies. Some of them have decided to veil as a form of what Hana Papanek (1971) has termed a 'portable seclusion', referring to experiences with wering *purdah* among Muslim women in Pakistan. Similar studies have been conducted among the Turkish migrant diaspora in Germany, the Maghrebis in France, and among the Pakistanis in the UK. *Hijab*, in the West, has become a cultural identity marker, and some Muslim women have decided to wear headscarves both as identity-markers and as a way of securing a comfort zone for themselves in the public sphere.

The research articles are followed by an essay by Ziba Mir-Hosseini on 'The Challenge of Islamic Feminism', in which she describes the possibility of a symbiosis between Islam and feminism rather than what is traditionally (in both the West and the Muslim world) seen as two binary opposites, i.e. you cannot have feminism in Islam and Islam cannot be feminist. Mir-Hosseini introduces the Muslim women advocacy group Mussawah, a global movement for equality and justice in Muslim family law that was launched in 2009 in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia and that tries to rectify patriarchal and

misogynist legal rules, especially as they pertain to Muslim marriage, which is based on verse 4:34 in the Qur'an, in which the authority and power of men is established over women (Mir-Hosseini, Al-Sharmani, Rumminger 2015).[4] Mir-Hosseini argues that terms such as *tamkin* (sexual access), which Sharifi discusses in this volume focusing on the Iranian contextwere defined as a wife's duty in return for *nafaqa* (the man's duty of maintenance). If a woman refused *tamkin,* i.e. was disobedient, she could legally be punished with a beating and/or the denial of provisions. Muslim jurisprudence and notably family law and the personal status code are based on this Qur'anic verse, re-interpretations of which have been the task of Islamic feminists such as Ziba Mir-Hosseini, but also Asma Barlas (2002) and Amina Wadud (1999), among others, who are trying to deconstruct the concepts of *tamkin* and *nafaqa* to allow for a gender egalitarian reading, pointing out that it was the patriarchs of the time who did the translating and implementation of these verses into laws, which should be stripped of their misogyny.

The heightened tensions in the US and Canada since 9/11 mean that Muslims and non-Muslims are constantly being reminded of the differences and unbridgeable divides between them, with the former being represented in the media and the dominant political discourse as barbaric (because Islamic and thus autocratic) which serves as a supposedly moral justification for military actions to 'civilise' Muslim countries' political systems (because bringing democracy) and to 'rescue' Muslim women from the unbearable oppression of their religion and patriarchy. Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) asks the (rhetorical) question of whether Muslim women really need to be saved by white Western men from Muslim men, and calls into question the 'secular-liberal assumption of Islam's patriarchal and misogynist qualities' (Jones-Gailani citing Mahmood [2005: 23] in *The Politics of Piety*).

The migration and life of Muslims in the diaspora, as well as experiences of wars and revolutions, provide significant contexts within which gender and Islam should be studied, as they generate valuable knowledge about changing gender roles, which in turn highlights the fact that gender norms and practices in Islam do change in response to social and political circumstances on both the local and the global level. Just as the Second World War literally propelled Western women into the professional sphere after they replaced men in the military and defence industry and

4 Verse 4:34 reads as follows: 'Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more [strength] than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutely obedient, and guard in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ya fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them [first], [Next], refuse to share their beds, [And last] beat them [lightly]; but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means [of annoyance]: for Allah is Most High, great [above you all].' (Mir-Hosseini, Al-Sharmani, Rumminger 2015: 2).

thus achieved emancipation as a result of their economic independence, refusing to go back to *Kinder*, *Küche*, *Kirche* once the war was over, similarly the Syrian war is now showing us how Muslim women have replaced their husbands, who either died or lost their livelihoods and became refugees, as breadwinners, as they were better able to find jobs in the illegal and informal economy of their host societies than their husbands were, who thus became emasculated. The rising power and agency of Syrian refugee women is a sign of change in the patriarchal family and the social and political relations hitherto prevalent in the Syrian community. This is by no means a trivial matter, as it shows that agency and empowerment go hand in hand with piety and that we should remind ourselves that feminism, as an agenda for gender equality and justice, is not unavailable to women in Islam.

In conclusion, it has been the aim of this thematic volume devoted to Feminist Re-Interpretations of Islam to address the questions of gender and religion in general and of Islamic feminism in particular, and to provide a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon by examining it from an informed historical and local context in order to open up space for the heterogeneity of views, experiences, attitudes, and norms which are part and parcel of this complex relationship. Across various Muslim communities, be they in the Muslim part of the world or in the West, social, cultural and religious habits vary in terms of veiling, polygamy, and the laws of divorce and inheritance, and they should never be assumed to be homogeneous across the entire Muslim world. What we should also take home from this is that secularism and modernity do not stand in opposition to religion and tradition, and that in fact both sides interact, collide, and share similar viewpoints and strategies and should be viewed as thought standing on a continuum, where the identity claims arising from secular and/or Islamic feminism have blurry boundaries. Rather than seeing them as mutually exclusive categories, we should view them as mutually interconnected and as influencing one another, despite the differences that exist between them.

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Gabriela Özel Volfová is a research fellow at the Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences and a PhD candidate at the Institute of Ethnology at Charles University in Prague. She is a researcher in the EU-funded international research project on gendered violence and migration. She has published on Turkish foreign policy, the headscarf affair in Turkey, etc. Contact email: ozelvolfova@orient.cas.cz.

Maria Holt is a Reader in Middle East Politics at the University of Westminster in London. Her research interests includes gendered violence, women and conflict in the Middle East and Palestinian women refugees in Lebanon. She is the author of *Women and Conflict in the Middle East: Palestinian Refugees and the Response to Violence* (I.B. Tauris 2013), and co-author of *Women, Islam, and Resistance in the Arab World* (Lynne Rienner 2013). Contact email: M.C.Holt01@westminster.ac.uk.