Woman as Symbol: A Perspective on Islamic Self-Understanding

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Artium in Ethics at the Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys

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Potchefstroom

August 2003

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Abstract

Women's status in Islam is at the centre of socio-political debate, not only between 'East' and 'West', but amongst Muslims themselves. Furthermore, it is not only Islamic societies that are struggling with the question of women's status in religion, but other religious traditions as well. Women are caught up in this struggle, having to negotiate their identity between religious narrative and everyday life. This study sets out from the assumption that understanding others is enlightening to an understanding of firstly, oneself and secondly, the socio-historic forces that impact on personal identity formation. Therefore the aim of this study is to analyse how women function as symbols of Islamic religion, and whether there are similarities in the Islamic response to Christian views on women.

Chapter one provides an introduction to the questions challenging religious communities today. It sets out the framework of the study and clarifies the methodology of a cross-religious investigation.

Chapter two discusses conceptualisation of persons in religion, and what it implies for articulating meaning. It also explains how persons function at a symbolic level.

Chapter three describes how stereotypical notions of persons are formed by the interaction of histories. It views the varied sources of ethical knowledge as factors that inform inter-religious dialogue. These aspects create ambiguity for one religion's perception of another. In this instance it focuses on the perceptions of Christianity and Islam respectively, finding the philosophical approach of ethnohermeneutics appropriate for this study.

Chapter four sets out concepts of person informing an Islamic anthropology. The objective of this section, as indeed for the whole study, is to present conceptualisation of persons from Islamic points of view, and not just from a Christian, or humanist ethical, point of view. These Islamic concepts are then correlated in chapter five, to the ontological basis of identity from the religious text. This chapter draws on the image of Eve as presented in the religious traditions of Islam. It infers that extra-Qur'anic sources were appropriated for assumptions of women's inferiority in Islamic traditions, comparing it with Eve's image in Christianity. The section points out that androcentric hermeneutics are not exclusive to Islam, but play a role in Christian traditions as well.

Chapter six concludes the study by confirming the androcentric hermeneutic informing women's status in religions. It explicates the construction of women's identity as an assumption of the natural deficiency of women based on biology that can be countered by her biology. The ideal of women's capacity as mothers is presented by the respective religious traditions as a role model to counteract the deficient nature found in the image of Eve (chapter five). This study views the essentialising of woman as temptress and mother as an archetypal myth that informs women's religious identity, that is not explicit in the religious text. *The section proposes that a holistic approach to the gendered existence, and relations between genders, provides a more positive approach than focussing on religiously constructed one-dimensional character-types.*

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Why is there a need for a discipline like Gender Studies? One would think that humans have sorted out this essential existential component of human interrelation throughout the millennia. But judging from issues that make the news daily, gender relations – the relationship between man and woman – is still a battlefield.

Two cases made headlines in South Africa in the year 2002: the Amina Lawal 'Stoning Case' in Nigeria[1] (Robinson, 2002) and the debate on female leadership in the Gereformeerde Kerke van Suid Afrika (Reformed Churches of South Africa - RCSA). This debate was presented before the Synod of the RCSA, 2002/03[2], and the request for allowance of female leadership was denied. These two cases highlighted questions about the condition of human interrelations in contemporary society.[3] Many Christians view Muslim women as unilaterally oppressed and voiceless in contrast to what Christians proclaim to be their freedom in Christ. However, the outcome of the 'women in leadership issue' before the Synod of the RCSA of 2003 presents an example of assumptions of female identity, which make the freedom of Christian women conditional.

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[1] Up-to-date details of the case can be found on Amnesty International's website at http: //web.amnesty.org/pages/nga-010902-background-eng

[2] Widely reported in the South African Afrikaans print media.

[3] In Amina's case the focus of comparison is the singling out of the woman in the adulterous relationship for punishment. The aim is not to comment on the legal method and principle of stoning as a form of punishment, but rather to pay attention to the Islamic lawmakers and their method of interpretation.

This response bears certain similarities with instances of misogyny in Islam. There is one common denominator in particular: the assumption of women having an inherent lesser value. This paradoxical conclusion leads to a question of how to understand people who are different from ourselves in whatever respect: gender, religious affiliation, political orientation, and so forth. It is an ethical question, since it deals with the essence of human value and ideals.

An understanding of women as being of lesser status[4] constitutes a hierarchical worldview. This stands in contrast to the egalitarian model proposed by humanist discourse for democracy and human rights as entrenched in the Charter for Human Rights in the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights (hereinafter referred to as 'The Charter'). It proposes a worldview based on equality and freedom of speech for all before the law. Although these religious traditions are often not direct representatives of religious freedom, they subscribe to the principles of human rights through other representative bodies, e.g. the International Association for Religious Freedom and other members of NGO committees.

The question is raised of how these two traditions accommodate discrimination in their respective traditions, but subscribe to the humanist value of equality of gender. How does a religious tradition provide the impulse for discrimination when this prejudice is found by the majority of its adherents to be in contrast to 'authentic teaching' and 'genuine values'? (Joint Statement, 2003: item 12, par. 5):

> "If women are to help themselves and their sisters, as well as contributing to society as a whole, they must be freed from constraints and ill-treatment that are often nothing to do with the authentic teaching of their religion or the genuine values of their traditional culture."

Such discrimination is found to be 'pseudo-religious or pseudo-traditional' (Joint Statement, 2003: item 12, par.1), witnessed in countless cases of 'female genital

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[4] According to Weberian understanding: "We understand by 'status' the probability that certain social groups receive positive or negative social *honor*. The chances of attaining social honor are primarily determined by differences in the *styles of life* of these groups, hence chiefly by differences of *education*. Referring to the preceding terminology of forms of authority, we may say that, secondarily, social honor very frequently and typically is associated with the respective status group's legally guaranteed and monopolized claim to sovereign rights or to income and profit opportunities of a certain kind. Thus, if all these characteristics are found, which, of course, is not always the case, a 'status group' is a social group through its special styles of life, its conventional and specific notions of honor, and the economic opportunities it legally monopolizes" (Weber, 1946: par. 104).

mutilation, discriminatory and disproportionate punishments for women, neglect or abandonment after widowhood or divorce...sexism in Christian churches.'

These practices impact on women's identity in many respects, of which the religious and psychological effects are immense. The effect of discriminatory treatment is evidenced in the video *'Hoor haar stem'* (Hear her voice)[5] of women relating their experiences in the RCSA. These women felt led to a specific service through the moral exhortations of their religion, believing that they are thereby complying with a life-code extolled by their faith. By prohibiting this service a cognitive dissonance is created for the adherent whereby not the practice, but the faith, is questioned. It is either accepted blindly as an incoherent principle, or lost. If the woman's voice is not heard on issues directly affecting her faith, her identity stays superimposed instead of being a reflection of inner conviction, which seems to run against the rationale of belief. An Islamic example of the psychological disfunction that imposed identity may cause is poignantly told in *The Impact of Fanatic Religious Thought: A story of a young Egyptian Muslim Woman* (El Saadawi, 1997: 100-107).

These witnesses of women's religious experience in Islam and Christianity constitute subjective interpretation – the primary hermeneutic. It does not reflect an abusive attitude of men as the secondary hermeneuts of women's identity, or the inaccessibility to legal recourse, and other resources. Is this what the religions of Islam and Christianity envision for women? What possible value could the institutionalised inequality of women have in contemporary society? If the problem is indeed one of exegesis, what hermeneutic may then be proposed for the explanation of gender relations in the life of Faith?

1.2 Problem statement

The purpose of this study is to investigate the basis of the singular, similar conceptualisation of women in an Islamic tradition. It seeks to identify the hermeneutic of gender in these traditions and the possible symbolic value this conceptual formation

[5] Video presented to the Synod of the Reformed Churches (2002/03).

carries for personal identity in contemporary society. It also attempts to provide an alternative view for the understanding of the bodies of gender.

The foregoing discussion of the status of women in two religious traditions raises questions that require further investigation.

To shed light on these issues this study will pay attention to the following:

1. What does Muslim identity imply for males and females and does it differ from Western and Christian ideas on identity?
2. How does conceptualisation contribute to stereotypical notions about persons?
3. What is the conceptual basis of identity formation in Islam?
4. How has female identity been constructed from the Scriptures of Islam i.e. the Qur'an and its interpretation?
5. What is the impact of the Islamic construction of female identity on the social reality of Muslim women and is there a correlation between Islamic and Christian conceptualisation of women?
6. Are there alternatives for understanding gender in religion?

1.3 Aim

The aim of this study is to determine the function of the conceptualisation of women in religion. Conceptualisation can be observed in the external manifestations of a given religious tradition that assists in the description of that religion. Lott (1988: 16-37) suggests eleven 'dimensions' as criteria for the comparison of traditions with their different forms:

1. ritual
2. mythical
3. dogmatic
4. social
5. ethical
6. experiential
7. organic structure
8. dynamic process

9. symbolic
10. aesthetic
11. central role of the sacred object/Focus

For the objectives of this study, the focus will fall on the symbolic dimension, although the others will be touched upon to a larger or lesser extent.

The specific aims of the study are:

1. to determine the meaning of person in Islam for males and females, and how it differs from Western and Christian ideas on identity;
2. to create awareness of stereotypical notions contained in gender and non-members of one's faith;
3. to investigate the conceptual base of identity formation in Islam;
4. to review the hermeneutic shaping the construction of female identity from religious texts and their interpretation;
5. to present the ideals of personhood extracted from the scriptural analysis;
6. to determine how Islamic conceptualisation can lead to better understanding of the status of women in religion;
7. to propose an alternative for understanding the gendered body.

1.4 Central theoretical argument

The central argument of this investigation is that the conceptualisation of women carries a symbolic function in Islamic religious experience and that the phenomenological discussion thereof will lead to a better understanding of the role and status of women in the Islamic traditions.

1.5 Methodology

For the achievement of the aims of this study the following methods will be applied. Firstly, for the analysis and interpretation of the concept of person and phenomenological issues in this study, the hermeneutic approach of Lott (1988) will be

used. Lott (1988: 10) suggests the following factors, amongst others, for the understanding of phenomena in any religious tradition:

1. members of the specific tradition's understanding of the meaning of their religion must be taken into account for the achievement of systematic comprehension. Exegesis from the Islamic point of view will be included for the fact that the exegete identifies him/herself with Islam:

> "...if we are to understand a religious tradition, then whether our primary intention be to understand a religion's historical development, or its social or psychological or ethical dimension, the ways in which people of that tradition have expressed their understanding of the meaning of their religion is essential in the process by which we arrive at any systematic understanding" (Lott, 1988: 10);

2. that dogmatic systems cannot be viewed as the basis of a tradition's social structure in a simplistic way, but rather as part of a complex relational system. The belief-systems and related theologies are systematically related to the matrix of meaning within the tradition. It forms the centre and focus of the tradition's social and cultural life. This is true even of a society like Afghanistan under the exiled Taliban regime:

> "Thus the professed conceptual systems of any tradition, even when proven to be the official formulations of a minority elitist group, must be taken into account if there is to be a comprehensive understanding of that tradition" (Lott, 1988: 11);

3. that the primary task of any theology is most probably the communication of meaning to those within the tradition as well as non-members. People communicate on many more levels than the verbal, and conceptualisation fulfils its most important role here as meaning communicator (Lott, 1988: 11).

Secondly, for the study of identity, more specifically female identity, Islamic concepts of person will be studied as episteme of thought on gendered existence.

4. to determine the origin of gender arrangements in Islamic practice, the scriptural themes of Creation and Fall will be compared according to descriptions in the Qur'an, the Bible, and interpretative texts;

5. the characterisation of womanhood will be studied from insights gathered from other disciplines e.g. literature studies and anthropology:

> "...the dynamics of religion should be investigated from the perspective of the disciplines appropriate to these dimensions of human existence. No one will dispute that at various behavioural levels such studies are essential to the task of understanding the life of religion in all its diversity" (Lott, 1988: 156) .

6. the implications of the constructed religious identities for women will be deduced from a literary point of view, since the interpretation of women's nature and human standing have been focalised as character types.

1.6 Tentative chapter divisions

1. Introduction
2. Conceptualisation of person
3. Stereotyping as conceptual communication
4. Islamic concepts of person
5. Scriptural identity and gender arrangements
6. Conclusion: Women's mythic identity

1.7 Schematic presentation of the correlation between 1.2, 1.3 and 1.5

Problem statement	Aim and objectives	Methodology
How is Islamic person-hood understood in relation to non-Muslim views?	The main aim of this study is to ascertain the conceptual base of Islamic identity.	The role of conceptual-isation in religion will be analysed according to the principles for cross-religious investigation as laid out by Lott (1988).
How does conceptual-	To create an awareness	An understanding of gender

isation create a stereotypical notion of gender and non-members of one's faith.	of stereotypical notions of gender and non-members of one's faith.	and 'otherness' is presented by considering the criticism of feminists and others.
What are Islamic concepts of person?	To view how conceptual-isation forms Muslim self-understanding.	Conceptualisation will be viewed from Islamic sources.
How is female identity constructed from Islamic scriptural sources?	To derive the episteme of thought on female identity in Islam.	The themes of Creation and Fall as foundation of gender arrangements will be compared according to the Qur'an and Bible.
How does Islamic and Christian construction of identity compare?	To ascertain the her-meneutic base of gender arrangements Islamic and Christian societies.	The identity construction will be analysed from a literary point of view.
How does an under-standing of Islamic construction of identity assist in understanding another religion's identity construction?	To determine the value of a consideration of cross-religious investigation of an ethical theme.	Feminist and other post-colonialist discourse, will be used to determine the appropriation of women's identity in Islam and Christianity.

Chapter 2

Conceptualisation of person

2.1 Introduction

Defining the concept 'person' is fraught with difficulty, compounded by our understanding of who *we* are and what the people around us understand themselves to be. However, if we want to talk about a person's role and status in life, the value of that person in their specific context needs to be established. Sanders (1990: 55) concludes that classifying the entity 'person' is of considerable social and moral significance: "If an individual human being lacks, or has in an insufficient degree one or more of the defining characteristics of the concept person, it follows that he or she is not, or is less of, a person and need not be treated as such". He (1990: 59) then proposes that one way to look for, and find the uses of the concept of person within a particular culture might be 'to inquire after the ideal, or ideals, of personhood which happen to exist within that culture.' These ideals must be reinterpreted in terms of contemporary reality, which derives from the ethical and/or juridical context, 'with the stress on the one hand on the unique and irreplaceable value of the person and on the other hand upon the responsibility the person has for his and her actions and its consequences' (Oosten, 1990: 26).

It is apparent that the ethical and juridical dimensions, function within a distinct reality or recognised practice. Max Weber (1946: par. 2) defines this practice as "the economic ethic of religion: The term 'economic ethic' points to the practical impulses for action which are founded in the psychological and pragmatic contexts of religions." According to Weber the idea/s behind practice merely serve/s as the tool of knowledge. Practice is therefore shaped by the reality of economics, of which religion is but one element: "Of course, the religiously determined way of life is itself profoundly influenced by economic and political factors operating within given geographical, political, social, and national boundaries" (Weber, 1946: par. 3).

Considering the above, this study views conceptualisation in religion as

1. an ideal of personhood;
2. belonging to a specific context i.e. culture, space, and time;
3. functioning within a distinct historical dynamic, currently defined as globalisation[6].

Conceptualisation of the person is part of the hermeneutic process of interacting with the world in an introspective way. It cannot always be subscribed to the directives of a specific grouping or factor. Therefore it is essential to view the conceptualisation process as functioning within society as a whole. Weberian understanding of any phenomenon requires the characterisation of the structure of domination (hierocracy) in identifying the influences upon the conceptual process in society (Weber, 1946: par. 102). Davies (1988: 70) is in accord with this assumption for analysis of Islamic processes. She views the identification or consideration of the social strata as essential to a correct analysis of Muslim revival movements:

> "The history of these initiatives cannot be examined in purely social terms... However, the role of revival movements in Muslim civilisation can be evaluated only when the hierarchy of Islam is shown to be central to their analysis."

Apart from the individual's personal attempt at meaning formation, the identity of 'person' is therefore distinctly connected to the society within which it finds itself. A study of the person will necessarily require reference to the incumbent society or cultural milieu. Oosten (1990: 30) proposes that a historical review of the development of the concept 'person' in relation to the society in which it functions, would give us a better understanding of the ideological functioning of the concept, 'i.e. the ways in which it was and is used to legitimise existing social practices.'

2.2 Social reality of Muslim women

The two examples mentioned in the introduction to this study give some indication of the limitation of women's rights in two religious traditions. But what is the situation in other historical contexts and how general is the disregard of women's rights in Islam? The realities faced by women in Muslim society is a vast subject. The diversity of this

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[6] Globalisation as used throughout is understood as the international experience of pluralism, technological en economical inequality, political and military superiority of superpowers, and increasing secularisation of society.

topic is being presented increasingly as the multicultural society becomes aware of the nuances and distinctions within other cultures. Muslim women are, however, portrayed in the western media as monolithically oppressed and as having no rights, regardless of the cultural community she belongs to. The editors of *Women in Muslim Societies* (Bodman and Tohidi, 1998: 16) concede to the varied nature of Islamic communities but point to the fact that Islamism has a 'political, authoritarian, and ideological dimension' regarding women's behaviour:

> "Although no one summary can possibly include the many nuances of Islamism in its various contexts, its effects on women possess remarkably common patterns. Society is sharply segregated into male and female, with male adherence emphasised by beards and feminine sexuality totally obscured. Roles, too, are clearly defined: the man is the family provider and the sole source of authority, the woman the homemaker and nurturer of traditional values in future generations."

It is apparent that conceptualisation of women have played a socio-political role. John Esposito points to the various ideological influences on women's Islamic status in the introduction to *Islam, Gender, and Social Change* (Haddad, 1998: i):

> "The Arab world and the broader Muslim world have struggled to redefine women's role in society and, in the process, to identify continuities as they seek to reconcile tradition and modernity. On the one hand, as Arab nations and leaders struggled to modernise, often drawing inspiration from the West, they had to overcome the force of tradition, which was regarded as an obstacle to change. Arab reformers of every stripe and shade have recognised the need for modernisation and change...On the other hand, Arabs of many different orientations have remained cognisant of, and have had to contend with, the role of religion as a source of transnational Arab identity and unity, a source of legitimacy and popular mobilisation".

The ruling by the High Court of Bangladesh where *fatwas*[7] are prohibited as they are mainly used to discriminate against women, serves as an example of the treatment meted out to women in some Muslim societies:

> "Dozens of fatwas are issued each year by the rural clergy... usually against women who assert themselves in public and family life. They impose flogging and stoning, and other humiliating sentences such as shaving of heads, insults and beatings. They are also often invoked in... their execution (Amnesty International (1), 2001: 1).

Another example is this overview by Amnesty International (2) (2001: 1):

> "If a woman in Pakistan fails to prove she didn't consent to sexual relations with a man, she can be accused of *zina* (fornication), an offence punishable by stoning to death or public flogging. In some countries, women cannot go to court in person – their male relatives are supposed to represent their interests. Women in Saudi Arabia who leave their home to seek help from the police run the risk of arrest for being in public unaccompanied by a male relative."

These are extreme cases, but they are proof of the excesses that religious interpretation may lead to. A declaration by the Muslim Women's League of the USA explains it as follows (Muslim Woman's League, 2001: 1):

> "The most severe manifestations of punishment affect only a small percentage of women, even though the notion of family honour and shame is extremely important in most communities of the Muslim world."

It is therefore clear that Muslim women are conceptualised in a like-minded manner, varying in degrees from community to community.

Religion has, sometimes unfortunately, acquired the role of cultural bastion along with a given culture's heritage and language. These elements of identity need to be asserted in the pluralistic society of the Global Village. Sanders' established the correlation between esteem of person and the treatment afforded them (2.1 above).

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[7] *fatwa* = A published opinion or decision regarding religious doctrine or law made by a recognized authority, often called a *mufti*. Collections of such decisions form a code of precedents which guide Judges in the exercise of the law. (Glassé, 1989: 125)

The above description of the treatment of women provides ample basis to conclude that Muslim women do not enjoy the same status as men. How these concepts function within the Islamic worldview is deduced from analysis of the interaction of Muslims with each other and their surrounding social environment by establishing Islamic concepts of person.

2.3 What is a person?

The importance of the concept of person is central to the understanding of human identity. How it is conceptualised depends on a whole range of factors emanating from the historic context one finds oneself in:

> "The concept 'person' plays an important part in our culture[8]. We can find it in, for instance, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as set forth by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948. In article 3 it says: 'Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person' and in article 6: 'Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law'. The concept 'person' is used to indicate the human individual to whom certain rights can be assigned and who may be held responsible for his actions." (Oosten, 1989: 25)

According to Kippenberg (1990: 2), Mauss assumes that intercultural aspects of the concept of person are found in every language and culture in the words 'person' and 'self', and is further explained by Lukes as a 'structure of beliefs' or thought concerning the person or self that are fundamental, universal and essential, but that take on different forms in different contexts. In the view of Lukes (Kippenberg, 1990: 2), this statement must be interpreted as a hermeneutic task "to read and interpret the explicit and implicit ideas of different cultures as versions, or perversions, of some... core notion or deep structure."

The challenge in the determination of Islamic identity is firstly, to not only define it in terms of western concepts, but to find the implicit meaning of person in non-western Islamic societies. The second challenge is to find similarities and differences to the

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[8] Oosten argues that the concept of person is closely linked with generally accepted Western ideologies, so that it cannot simply be applied to non-Western cultures (Oosten, 1989: 26-33).

western concept of person, and thirdly to interpret it accordingly (Kippenberg, 1990: 2). The *Gröningen Working Group for the Study of Religious Symbols* constructed the following general assumption for the conceptual base of identity formation:

> "Every individual obtains self-awareness only by being an object to others: the individual both internalises the attitudes of other people towards him [her][9] as social relations and presents himself [herself] to others through means provided by the culture to which he [she] belongs. This distinction between social role and the culturally determined symbolic presentation of the self, is an important starting point for research on the concept of person" (Kippenberg et al, 1990: 3).

This research will therefore centre on a comparative study of collective implicit notions of person in Islamic culture and on how Islamic Scripture and tradition inform these notions. Furthermore, it explores how these notions are applied to women in identity construction and whether it corresponds to Christian notions of women.

2.3.1 Conceptualising as theological articulation

Conception of one's religious identity plays a role in communicating the understanding of the significance of life here on earth to fellow believers and others whom one encounters daily. Affirmation of devotion can be articulated concretely through the appropriation of symbols and ritual, for instance the Roman Catholic habit or Islamic *hijab*. The consideration of the symbols of another tradition may be viewed as similar to looking at a piece of art and interpreting its meaning(s). One can never be exactly sure that one's understanding thereof is exactly what the artist intended, but the visual impact 'increases our integrity by forcing us to confront an external reality that is beyond us' (Hopkins, 2003: par. 54).

2.3.1.1 Theological articulation in a pluralistic world

For a valid interpretation of the expression of Islamic ideas and/or symbols, the importance of basing an investigation in the social/cultural background of the religious

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[9] Own insertion.

tradition, cannot be overstated in the pluralistic world of today. This is also of importance for the interaction between religious traditions:

> "Probably the most pressing issue in theology today concerns the grounding of theological articulation in that creative cultic matrix of myth/symbol/ritual in interaction with its broader contextual life. A second issue of great importance is how any distinct theology is to be articulated in relation to the plurality of religious traditions and theological systems in the midst of which it exists." (Lott, 1988: 9-10)

In this study we are focussing on one aspect of religious symbolism - conceptualisation through gender arrangements. However, evaluation needs to take into account that conceptualisation occurs in any or all of the dimensions of a tradition, but functions within a complex whole. Zebiri (1997: 230) explains this as 'an internal logic binding the various elements together' and points out that it presents an obstacle to the outside peruser. These obstacles could lead to conceptualisation being wrongly interpreted in the application of different criteria for the evaluation of religious phenomena. According to Zebiri (1997: 23) this is the reason why Muslims and (specifically) Christians often talk past each other:

> "For Muslims, religion incorporates not just faith, ritual and ethics but also culture, government and law...Similarly, doctrine is seen as having different roles in Islam and Christianity. For Muslims it is something that is revealed directly by God in human language...For Christians, it is more often seen as an inevitably flawed human attempt to express eternal truths in a language accessible to the intended audience..."

The various traditions therefore may each present the same symbolic conceptualisation, but with differing content. This complicates direct comparison in order to obtain the theological principle at hand. It is therefore essential to obtain the intended meaning of a concept from and for its community.

The impact of religion lies in its capability to serve as source of general albeit distinctive conceptions of the world, the 'self' and the relationship between these two, consequently providing what could be called a model of reality. This model is used as a point of reference to make sense of daily reality, not only by the group, but the individual as well. At the same time this model of reality is a guideline or program for actions in

certain situations. This program amounts to the ethos of a society (Kuiper, 1990: 35). The model must therefore be clarified before coherence to the model can be evaluated.

These issues raise questions about the validity of observing or studying one religious tradition from the perspective of another. One can ask: what is an acceptable 'science of religion' and what is the relation of faith to the study of a religion[10], since both the student and the studied present their own model of reality. Zebiri (1997: 11-12) remarks that an element of subjectivity is inevitable but desirable, as the active engagement of the personal qualities of the researcher may be seen as preferable to an attitude of cold detachment or illusory claims to objectivity. She suggests the intermediate position posited by Charles Adams 'drawing attention to the need to combine a sensitivity to the feelings of others with the need to be true to one's own best insights, holding the two factors in tension' (Zebiri, 1997: 12). In fact, objectivism has been exposed by the combating-stereotypes disciplines as a fallacy:

> "There are contemporary critics of (neo)positivism – phenomenologists, symbolic interactionists, ethnomethodologists, structuralists, deconstructionists, critical theorists, postmodernists...who oppose simplistic notions of objectivity. They take issue with the assumption that data is 'there' to be read by observers who use a method embodying a form of reason that incorporates detachment and distancing and that brackets emotion, passion, and commitment" (Farganis, 1989: 211).

The criticism against objectivism then is that it creates categories that exclude 'others' from participation. This study makes the assumption that the current reality of a pluralistic society asks a non-exclusionist response that does not necessarily change the conceptual task, but rather provides new sources for the study of phenomena. Lott (1988: 229) is of opinion that plurality has 'provided traditions with more easily available resources for their task of interpreting visionary meaning in response to changing human contexts.' The result of a cross-religious[11] investigation could possibly lead to

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[10] These questions are the central argument of Lott (1988) in his book *Vision, Tradition, Interpretation* and are fully investigated therein.

[11] "cross-religious" used in the sense of "cross-disciplinary".

the enrichment of one's own understanding through the appropriation of new imagery into one's own interpretation. Furthermore, it may not only enhance one's own tradition, but also lead to a better understanding within the studied tradition:

> "...While every theologian's perspective is shaped by a faith-commitment and this does provide an integrated grounding from which to systematise consistently... the other tradition can also come to function at that visionary level in the theologian's consciousness... providing new directions for the tradition's own central perceptions. And there is also the possibility... that the theologian's understanding and exposition of the other tradition may be accepted by representatives of that other tradition as an authentic contribution to interpretation of their faith" (Lott, 1988: 231-232).

The process of cross-religious enquiry does not necessarily implicate a syncretism or absorption of one by the other, which is resisted by both Muslims and Christians. It must be accepted that there are irreducible differences between Islam and Christianity, the denial of which may lead to a new paternalistic attitude:

> "While the recent move towards more irenical attitudes may be regarded as an improvement on past polemicism and more conducive to cordial interfaith relations, the attempt to bring harmony where dissonance has prevailed may be prone to its own distortions. The rejectionism of the past may be replaced by an acceptance which fails to acknowledge difference in the 'other', which in turn becomes a more subtle form of 'cultural imperialism' (Zebiri, 1997: 13).

Mutual enquiry and understanding is the premise of the preamble to the constitution of the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies (CIPSH) under UNESCO:

> "Expressing the belief that it is necessary to promote, with a view to a comparison of the results obtained, an interpenetration of the various branches of research which constitute philosophy, humanistic studies and kindred branches of knowledge;
>
> Considering that a detailed comparative study of civilisations will show the wealth and dignity of each national culture, and in consequence, its right to universal respect;

> Convinced that a better knowledge of man, of his instincts, his manners and customs, and of his behaviour, individual or collective, is indispensable to a closer understanding between the peoples, since it brings to light the accord of man's essential aspirations, while at the same time it absolutely condemns racial prejudice;
>
> Bearing in mind the desirability of furthering wherever possible, the moral and spiritual unity of mankind;
>
> Wishing to develop the co-operation, on an international scale, of philosophy, humanistic studies and kindred branches of knowledge, and to encourage research by means of an appropriate body" (Geertz, 2000: Appendix).

2.3.2 Conceptualisation as meaning communicator

Religion is but one aspect of existence. However, it can be a determinative in communicating the meaning of life to its adherents and the outside world. The conceptual process facilitates communication, which is crucial to understanding religion (Lott, 1988: 119). Conceptual formulation is part of a greater process intending to embody the central vision of religion. This entails the perception that is created by the concept, for adherents as well as non-adherents. Lott (1988: 108) calls this process an 'interdependence of perception and conception, of 'faith' and 'belief' in the religious life'.

The pre-conditions for the authenticity and integrity of the interpretation process is that 'theology remains rooted in the primal vision and continues to be oriented towards that central point' (Lott, 1988: 108). As a result, interpreting a phenomenological concept does not necessarily imply the re-interpreting of the core vision (Allah), or the original annunciation (Qur'an). It is rather a new reading of the original intention of the conceptual formulation, for example: what was the original role and function of *hijab* and how is it implemented today? This reviewing process is often confused with re-interpretation of the core-vision of the tradition, which will lead to the adaptation of the revelation to the needs of the religious community.[12]

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[12] Darlene Juschka (2001: ix) relates this adaptation to women and feminists who seek to re-appropriate religions for their own use. She also points to the importance of establishing the social fabric out of which a religion originates: "...This kind of positioning tends to approach the religion as an idealised *sui generis* object that has fallen from the sky and then has been polluted by patriarchal and androcentric concerns. In other words, the religions are often dealt with as if they had emerged from a void and are thereafter sullied by the social body that was/is, more often than not, patriarchal. This seems rather a naive way of engaging religions, since religions are both in and of the social, and

On the other hand, Lott (1988: 108) concedes that it is possible for theologies to distort their primal vision by failing to find appropriate conceptual expression and that this may be due to the history of their tradition. Conceptual expression is found, amongst other things, in the symbols of a religion. Lott (1988: 119) sees the determination of the role of symbolism in a tradition as essential to the understanding of a religion.

Symbols are intrinsic to religion in all its diversity. Anthropologists like Clifford Geertz talk of religion as a 'symbol-system' (Lott, 1988: 33). It is furthermore evident that the exact role of the symbol as meaning communicator to the participants of a tradition is complex. No one meaning can be deduced from any symbol, but no conceptual scheme can escape the symbolic undercurrent thereof (Lott, 1988: 34). It is therefore accepted that Islam, even though being weary of graven images, contains symbols to facilitate meaning communication.

2.4 Symbol as conceptual expression

Symbols are intrinsic to religion in all its diversity. However, they are not static in that the visual presentations of symbols reflect historical developments of the tradition. For instance, the symbolic dimension of religion suffers in the puritanical movement as it is often seen as frivolous (Lott, 1988: 35). Islam is iconoclastic by nature, the cause thereof most likely to be found in its forming years and the break with the *jahaliyya*[13] era. Likewise, the Reformed tradition has tried to steer clear of the proliferation of 'graven images' since the Reformation and renunciation of Roman Catholicism. These issues beg the question as to how the adherents of Muslim and Christian traditions give expression to this inherent need for the symbolic as religiosity and the conceptualisation process has become irrevocably connected to each other:

> "...our humanness and religiousness are now so closely bound up with these noetic/verbal powers of communication that our religiousness and the conceptualising process are inextricably linked for us" (Lott, 1988: 11).

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therefore will always, and already, reflect the mores, ideas, concerns, orientations, and ethos of the social body they emerge from or are adapted to."

[13] *Jahaliyya* = (from *jahil*, "ignorant", "untaught"). The "time of ignorance" or period of Arab paganism preceding the revelation of Islam. (Glassé, 1989: 204)

The symbols that conceptualise religious identity are representations of collective images. These collective images take the form of ideas or archetypes that represent the ideals of the community. Without these ideals human existence becomes meaningless. In the words of Carl Gustav Jung (1964: 89):

> "Man positively needs general ideas and convictions that will give a meaning to his life and enable him to find a place for himself in the universe...It is the role of religious symbols to give a meaning to the life of man."

How humans conceptualise the meaning of life is the core of myth, the genre wherein archetypes are described and expounded. The symbol represents the archetype, which is 'the confluation of image and emotion' (Jung, 1964: 96). But who produces the symbol and ascribes its meaning?

> "When we attempt to understand symbols, we are not only confronted with the symbol itself, but we are brought up against the wholeness of the symbol-producing individual" (Jung, 1964: 92).

For instance, the assumption of the inclusiveness of a term such as 'individual' is questioned by 'combating-stereotypes' projects such as feminisms and otherness studies. The symbolism of a religious tradition attempts to convey the intention of the annunciation. Interpretation of the intention establishes the meaning of the symbol. But who interprets the intention? Are women allowed into the interpretation process or do they designate the symbol to be appropriated? These are the questions prompted by limitation of women's input into the religious knowledge production process.

For theological interpretation to be authentic and for the avoiding of distortion, coherence must be established. It is in this aspect of coherence that evaluation is applied i.e. with which episteme of thought does the conceptual model comply? Is it consistent with the principles of the thought model? Lott (1988: 108-118) distinguishes 5 'kinds' of coherence:

1. a religion's key perceptions and its conceptual system should cohere in the sense of being seen as fundamentally commensurable;
2. coherence of the central Focus of the vision, even though transcendent, with all other cosmic existence;

3. coherence in the inter-relationship of concepts and their implications within a belief-system if it is truly to be a system;
4. forging of a coherent system of complex conceptual and trans-conceptual forms of expression of the tradition;
5. a coherence of life-practice with the doctrinal system.

Points 1 and 2 are understood as matter of fact for the Muslim. Points 3, 4 and 5 are of significance here: 3 is concerned with the forms of theological expression - myths, symbols, parables, images, metaphors, analogies; 4 is where a key-analogy or key-concept is used to effectively unlock the meaning of the central vision, and 5 constitutes a description of the life-practice and religious activities associated with it. Applied to Islamic conceptualisation in gender arrangements, it would constitute an understanding of the following:

1. Islamic concepts of person;
2. Woman's identity as construed from tradition, for which the sources are the Qur'an and *Sunnah*;
3. Woman's role and status in the Islamic community compared to that of other women.

Lott (1988: 115) states that the 'intention of the myth' and 'meaning of the symbol' as well as the perception behind them are essential to the reflective process, which in turn will lead to 'recovery, perhaps the replacing, certainly the re-interpretation, of the myths and symbols so essential to vision-expression'.

This study will evaluate the coherence of the above three points within the framework suggested by Davies (1988: 54-55) as three dimensions for the achievement of an intellectual structure of understanding of Islamic concepts:

1. the concepts *fitrah*, *khilafah*, and *din* – 'the origin and derivation of which give them their particular definitions and their own inherent logic';
2. the history of interpretation (Focault's archaeology of knowledge). This entails the considering of concepts as they have been 'apprehended through the interpretative agency of human thought and action, through their employment by people in society, both in the overtly intellectual sphere and in their more diffuse institutionalisation in the organisation of society';

3. the situational context of the present. "The contemporary perspective evaluates, determines, selects; it is a partial and particular operation rooted in the potential of both past and present...".

The hierarchical relationship that operates in each dimension must be recognised (Davies, 1988: 55). Muslims argue that a crucial difference between Western and Islamic point of view lies in this relationship. Western scientific endeavour claims to be objective, neutral and abstract, whereas Islam views its hierarchical basis as being the Unity of God *(tawhid)* and that 'all the concepts we deploy must be seen as integrative agents in search of Unity' (Davies, 1988: 58). This study agrees that Islamic knowledge production has a different basis than that of Western objectivism. But questions the hermeneutic effect of relating all knowledge to the tawhidic paradigm and how this hermeneutic construction impacts on symbolic presentation in religion.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has sought to explain what conceptualisation entails and how it functions as definer of personal identity in religions. It has alluded to problems with defining the concept of person and the various factors that impact on people's understanding of one another. The understanding of religion as a symbol-system points to the dangers of misinterpretation of symbols in religion, which the following chapter seeks to address.

Chapter 3 explores how stereotyping has influenced dialogue and understanding between Islam and Christianity, and furthermore between the genders in the respective religions. This serves as a background to the consideration of Islamic concepts of person in Chapter 4 and the interpretative basis of gender in both Islam and Christianity, which is expounded in the remainder of this study.

Chapter 3

Stereotyping as conceptual communication

3.1 Introduction

Thinking in concepts involves the ascribing of a mental image to an abstract idea in order to make it comprehensible. The construction of that mental image is complex and the factors that determine it are informed by a multitude of elements, differing from person to person. These elements determine our hermeneutic base. Depending on our relation to the object observed, we categorise it as an 'own' or an 'other.' This categorisation of objects is the foundation of stereotyping.

Edward Said argued in *Orientalism* (1978) that the West stereotyped Islam, providing impetus to a host of other studies analysing stereotyping. Lila Abu-Lughod (2001: par. 3) is of the opinion that the first studies inspired by *Orientalism* was a closer focus on gender and projects of domination.

> "It is an axiom of feminist theory...that all generalisations about 'people' are suspect. The divisions in our society are so deep, particularly the divisions of race, class, and gender, that many feminist theorists would claim that talk about people in general is ideologically dangerous because such talk obscures the fact that no one is simply a person but instead is constituted fundamentally by race, class, and gender" (Jaggar, 1989: 157).

So what's wrong with stereotyping? It is the one-dimensional attribution of a concept, in this instance, to people, which disregards the multifaceted diversity of those people. The horrific effect of stereotyping can be seen in the historical phenomenona of Slavery, Nazism, and Apartheid. These ideologies excluded human groups on principles of otherness: being black, Jewish, brown-eyed, and so forth. The variance in practical application between these ideologies is often one of scale and not of horror.

What hermeneutic allows the disregard of another's human dignity? Snyman (2001: 3) argues that exclusion policies, like Apartheid, are the result of objectivism: "By

objectivism I mean the idea that knowledge exists independently of human perception...It is a truth that exists outside the human mind and can be grasped by the mind on the condition that the mind shed its prejudices or subjective feelings." Objectivism is the rationalisation strategy proposed by Weber (1946: par. 77) that explains his economic ethic of religion: "...we mean the economic rationalisation of the type which, since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, has come to dominate the Occident as part of the particular rationalisation of civic life." Weber (1946: par. 80) understands 'rational' as a synonym of 'systematic arrangement'. Throughout this study we will attempt to show how gender has been systematically arranged as a product of the rationalisation of society, which could only be derived from stereotypical notions of gender.

Our study is concerned with two aspects of stereotyping: that between religious traditions, and that between men and women. However, both these aspects are influenced by ideological factors ranging from the purely political to the sociological and psychological. These ideological factors are currently related to effects of globalisation on society. The first ideological units to take into account for a discussion of Islam and Christianity, is the rhetoric of East and West.

3.1.1 A history of stereotypes

The stereotypical attitudes between East and West can be traced to portrayals as far back as the Greco-Persian encounter in the fifth century BCE. Athenian views of the Persians were negative and reflected their assumption of cultural supremacy. This attitude was absorbed through European scholarship, who considered the Greeks to have had the best culture 'and there was simply nothing that other civilisations could add' (Lendering, 2003: par. 5).

Islam is often grouped with the Eastern cultures, but generalising about the East is equally invalid to an understanding of Islam as 'the Muslim world has itself different distinct individualities' (Kraemer, 1960: 100). Discourse from Western and Islamic points of view however, rely on assumptions that either the West or Islam can be understood as ideological units. For example Huntington in his widely published *Islam and the Clash of Civilisations* (1993) polarises Islam against the West as being two types of opposing civilisations. Furthermore, the 'West' as collective other to the Muslim World,

is also an unsatisfactory category. Kraemer (1960: 103) chooses this term when describing the modernising process that was introduced to non-western cultures and points to the historic notions connected to the term:

> "It is essential for the understanding of the effects and the reactions of the Western Invasion in the Muslim World, and its interactions, to keep in mind the cardinal significance of the fact that to the old core of the Muslim world (Near and Middle East, North Africa)[14] the "West" has meant always, in a far more stringent sense than for the other Eastern civilisations, the "Christian West", and that it has always regarded and known this "Christian West" as its enemy, its opponent."

The term 'West' is further problematic as it understates the differences among a number of Western countries, as was evident in the USA-France differences of opinion to the War in Iraq (2003). The 'West' was a political notion created by the Cold War, wherein the Soviet Union was the ideological enemy of the West (Ahrari, 1997: 3).

Events like the Afghanistan Campaign (2002), the War in Iraq (2003), and the Amina Lawal stoning-case in Nigeria (2002) have impacted on Christianity as part of the pressures of living in diverse societies, and have elicited response from Christians. This response is often based on the one-sided view of Muslims as aggressors. Kate Zebiri (1997: 1) explains Muslim views on the phenomenon of current Western interest in Islam as a phobia:

> "Muslims living in the West have recently coined the term 'Islamophobia'. It gives a name to what is perceived to be a multi-faceted phenomenon, most immediately visible in the negative images of Islam portrayed in the Western media..."

Islam is perceived as a major threat to the Western democratic paradigm (Ahrari, 1997: 2). But the need to address certain ills in our society necessitates an acknowledgement of our interconnectedness, in the shared Global Village:

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[14] This remark is also indicative of the distinctions within Islam by referring to "the old core".

> "Of these the most obdurate are the ones that are about human misery emanating from poverty and economic backwardness. Solutions to such problems are not going to be found by building cultural hamlets surrounded by walls that are aimed at keeping non-Westerners, Muslims, Confucians or orthodox Christians out" (Ahrari, 1997: 6).

Not least of our problems is the denigration of women in various communities and its implications for the future welfare of society.

3.2 A humanitarian ethic of gendered identity

This study wishes to investigate the ethical implications of the religious limitation of women's rights within the human rights debate, as explicated in the Charter for Human Rights and the Beijing Declaration on Women's rights (1995) within the preamble on religious rights[15]. These views are summarised by the Commission for the End of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, United Nations, 1997: 1) as follows:

> The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women places special importance on the participation of women in the public life of their countries. The preamble to the Convention states in part:
>
> "Recalling that discrimination against women violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity, is an obstacle to the participation of women, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries, hampers the growth of the prosperity of society and the family and makes more difficult the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity."

This assumption of the role of women in society is the basis of evaluation of women's lives in various contexts around the world. Yet these humanitarian principles are not the sole source of women's identity. What are the sources of ethical interpretation and

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[15] Article 18: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. (United Nations, 1948: 1)

knowledge production of women's identity, and for our purposes, women who abide by a religious moral basis?

3.3 Sources of ethical knowledge

3.3.1 Interpretation

The interpretative process functions on primary and secondary levels (Syreeni, 2001: par. 4). Primary hermeneutics is the understanding of myself from the 'inside'. However, 'I' cannot know 'you', the Other, from the inside; therefore studying 'you' consists of secondary hermeneutics. The secondary hermeneutic is then reflected through various factors: "I have become a *subject*; yet through me others – my parents, teachers, beloved ones and friends, even those I dislike – are indirectly speaking, thinking, and acting" (Syreeni, 2001: par. 3). The secondary and primary hermeneutic intertwine upon a matrix, forming a construction of beliefs about personal identity – who and what one perceives oneself to be in relation to the outside world.

3.3.2 Physical knowledge

One's perception, however, is not only informed by intellectual endeavour, but is experienced in the corporeal body through seeing, hearing and sensing. The ontology of the corporeal body, which is critiqued as inadequately treated in Heidegger's philosophy, is developed by Merleau-Ponty as an ethical task:

> "By navigating between these dualisms [of traditional metaphysics e.g., subject and object, mind and body], Merleau-Ponty opens the door to understanding our capacities of the body as ethical tasks. That is, understood ontologically, the body is a means for overcoming egoism and opening to the ontological depth of others" (Carey, 2000: 24).

All ethical and moral knowledge is therefore interpreted through experience by the physical senses. Current worldly space is viewed in terms of globalisation, wherein foreign elements are on our doorstep and confront us with strange customs and norms. The complexity of acceptance of multiculturalism with one's own ethical principles is demonstrated in the discourse of female genital mutilation (FGM), and other

tribal/traditional practices. The acceptance of plurality is critiqued as necessitating a compromise of established mores and prinicples:

> "Multiculturalism argues that all cultures are equal expressions of our human variety. In fact, some diversity adherents even portray traditional cultures as superior to our crass western ways. Colourful ethnic attire and interesting cuisines do have a certain cachet when seen from a distance. But when the reality of women's brutal oppression world-wide is considered, multiculturalism can be seen as a fraud. Indeed, it supports the continuation of the monstrous crimes against women by its "celebration" of traditional cultures while ignoring the dark side" (Walker, 2003: par. 1).

Experience of these alien ways in the shared physical sphere forces us to consider assimilation or rejection, which is reliant on oppositional binary terms of 'us' and 'them'.

3.3.3 Temporal knowledge

Through globalisation cultures are experiencing alienation from themselves and threat from alien cultures. Globalisation is also perceived as an arrival of the future, with technological advances being forced into our frame of reference as basic necessities; you need a cellular telephone to be in constant contact with the world, and without e-mail you are considered illiterate. Although this process is associated with the English language, it produces discontinuity even for 'English' communities:

> "The new kind of globalisation is not English, it is American. In cultural terms, the new kind of globalisation has to do with a new form of global mass culture, very different form that associated with English identity, and the cultural identities associated with the nation-state in an earlier phase" (Hall, 2000(a): 27).

Stuart Hall (2000(a): 32) terms the second phase of globalisation the 'global post-modern' wherein capitalism has mutated into a global celebration of differences; the representation of the marginalised: "Paradoxically in our world, marginality has become a powerful space" (Hall, 2000(a): 34). The value of the marginalised is often presented through a discourse of reliving an influential past.

A localised example of the complexity of this identity forming process is nowhere more acute than in the re-defining of the (white male) Afrikaner in post-Apartheid South

Africa. The Oppressor - reformed to one of the colours of the Rainbow-nation - has become one of the marginalised, ethnic minorities, but is not recognised by Affirmative Action, which seeks to address previous inequalities. This has resulted in a minority grouping of Afrikaners resorting to extremism - political, religious, and otherwise, presented here as an example of the 'return to old'. Historically there was a strong bond between Afrikaner politics and religion, but these groups are infusing this ideology with renewed vigour:

> "Between the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, which left the Afrikaner destitute and powerless, and the climax of Afrikaner nationalism in 1948, the image of Israel as an elected people provided solace to a rejected group of people ill at ease with their political existence. Their situation was vulnerable and perceived to correspond to that of the Israelites. Survival could only be ensured by keeping God's commandments" (Snyman, 2001: par. 26).

Hall (2000(a): 35-36) means this return to the previous identity is a characteristic of many threatened communities, and should be understood as such:

> "The face-to-face communities that are knowable, that are locatable, one can give them a place. One knows what the voices are. One knows what the faces are. The recreation, the reconstruction of the imaginary, knowable places in the face of the global post-modern which has, as it were, destroyed the identities of specific places, absorbed them into this post-modern flux of diversity. So one understands the moment when people reach for those groundings, as it were, and the reach for those groundings is what I call ethnicity."

Likewise Islam has its Golden Era: The time of the Prophet and the denouncing of the time of *jahiliyya*.

In this way beliefs about person are based upon past history, current actions, and future ambitions. Religious identity is strongly informed by the history of the tradition, which in turn orientates the actions of the present towards the ideals of the future. "...we may define *identity as the memory of its attributions.* In its historical aspect, religion is essentially *a chain of memory...*" (Syreeni, 2001: par. 11). Still, if understanding of this memory is not infused with the practicality of daily reality, our religious identity becomes a relic, that is either valued in opposition to the world, or relegated to a certain category of our existence without having any significance for daily life. That is, my religious

identity puts me apart from the world and is therefore in confrontation with it, or I practice the religious habits as a superstitious remainder of an earlier spiritual memory contained in the leftover symbols.

3.3.4 Spiritual knowledge

To be religious then imparts to the believer a symbolic lineage. The lineage entitles us to a certain heritage. It also places on us the responsibility to interpret the lineage into the current context: "As we include former generations – and texts – in our transcendental identity, we also participate in these past lives and become guilty of the 'forefathers' sins' (Syreeni, 2001: par. 12). Pluralistic existence entails the creation of an ethos wherein previously excluded categories may co-exist while maintaining the authenticity of their respective identities. However, no ethical category of person is acceptable to the faithling[16] as authentic if it is not based in the revelatory text of the given religious tradition. This study therefore advances from the Scriptures of these religious traditions as the ontological basis of identity formation of the person.

Eric Lott (1988: 22) views the function of Scripture as 'the early repository of the creative matrix of mythic and symbolic imagery of the concerned tradition.' Scripture, however, is not merely the repository, but also the episteme of thought about established mores and relevant issues, as argued by Shlomo Biderman (1995). The spiritual foundation for principles of successful selfhood of the individual and the community are found in the religious revelation as presented in its text, imbuing Scripture with a unique role and function in human life: the uniqueness of Scripture 'is its ability to affect human life to an extent that no other literature has achieved' (Biderman, 1995: 104). The ontological role of Scripture is at the heart of the scientific versus religious row in the modern community. It plays out as a focus on the public over and against the private role of religion.

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[16] Faithling = understood as a category of religious humanity, being derived from, and founded in a particular Faith. Compare with 'earthling' as an inhabitant of the earth.

3.3.5 The religious worldview

The worldview[17] of a religion is integral to adherents of the religion for the purposes of constructing an identity as it 'generates an entire view of the world, a definition of the people of God, ideals for the way of life, and those systemic visions are part and parcel of what they say in detail' (Chilton, 2003: par. 6). Kvam (1999: 2) finds the role religions play in the formation of human identities 'crucial' as 'it [religion] purports to describe a sacred cosmos and to locate individuals within that cosmos.'

In the instance of gender relations, we want 'world' to mean the relationships between the people living on this earth. These relationships imply how we see our 'selves' in relation to *each* other and *them* other. The relevance of presentations of identity to the globalising society is central to acts of discrimination. This is illustrated by reports of Amnesty International (2002: par. Human Rights and Personal Identity):

> "Around the world, people suffer human rights abuses not because of what they do but because of who they are. Discrimination is an assault on the very notion of human rights. It systematically denies certain people or groups their full human rights because of their identity or beliefs."

Women's position in the global village seems especially precarious according to Amnesty International (2002: par. Women's Rights):

> "Our report Broken bodies, shattered minds, which attracted world-wide attention, exposed the widespread torture of women and girls, fed by a global culture which denies women equal rights with men, and which legitimises violence against women. Often the perpetrators are agents of the state and armed groups, but frequently they are relatives, employers or members of the community. For many women, home is a place of terror".

The question arises of how religion has played a role in constructing women's identity in response to these worldly pressures. It is apparent that women are conceptualised as symbolic of a certain cosmic order and how the religion understands its role in the world

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[17] The term 'worldview' must not be confused with 'worldly view'. It is rather meant as how the religions perceive the projection of their image into the world. Even the term 'world' needs further elaboration these days as it cannot just be understood as the geographic sphere we habituate in the universe.

as a relationship with its Creator. This does not mean to say that theology is the sole basis of all gendered interpretations. Rather, it is to reflect on how reliable the reasoning of a religious basis for gendered relations has been in two diverse traditions. How do you word an investigation of someone else's life of which you have no physical experience, and no intrinsic knowledge?

3.4 Identity of religious others

Starting with the broad base of inter-religious relations, namely Christian-Muslim dialectic in contemporary society, it is found to be mainly political: "A religious tradition and the identity it implies are not immutable. *The very essence of identity is its capability of defining its past in relation to present experiences and future expectations*" (Syreeni, 2001: par. 14). For the past few decades the Iranian-American dialectic has been played out internationally, with the Iranian clerics openly branding America in religious terms as Satan. America more recently retorted with the term 'Axis of Evil' (North Korea, Iran, and Iraq). Although the religious base of nationalism is strongly contested by Americans (Stille, 2003: par. 27), these interacting forces have impacted on Christians and Muslims in various contexts.

The present context wherein interaction is being pressured upon Muslims and Christians is the Global Village. The South African situation entails the institution of democracy in 1994 after years of struggle between polarised races. The nationalist white government had a strong Christian base and Muslims, in South African demographics, mostly belonging to the previously oppressed 'coloured' races. The Apartheid nation is a prime example of religious roots of nationalism which 'begins with an act of demonising a religious 'other' and creating a sense of community by defining an 'us' and a 'them' (Stille, 2003: par. 9). The Christian white minority, having to acknowledge or deny their participation in Apartheid, is left with the collective moral guilt of being the oppressor. These groups are still in a re-orientation process that requires the establishment of identity to various sides: identifying, or not, with one's race, culture, and religion as part, or not, of the previous dispensation of inequality. However, the process cannot only be a 'now' as opposed to 'then' dialectic, it also involves the consideration of contemporary dynamics in the world at large.

A further factor is the various aspects of modernisation. Kenneth Cragg (1968: 8) suggests that 'man must re-assert himself within the technological process'. Cragg's statement includes all humans, irrespective of religious tradition, nationality or geographical location, implying that both Muslims and Christians are confronted and need to grapple with new and unknown facets in everyday life. An example of Christian experience is that of the Church in England. Byron Evans (2001) states that church attendance in the UK and Europe is declining and views this as a result of secularisation. He further asserts that political secularisation has led to the privatisation of religion and confines it to the individual. Gerald Hughes (2001) is in accord with Evans in his treatment of postmodernism, which according to Hughes has led to deconstruction of the Self and the demise of the Great Narratives. He argues that the concept of virtual reality means 'we can tell our own story without it having to cohere with any other' (2001) reducing all differences to the same level.

One result of the abovementioned political rhetoric and response to modernisation, is increased religious fundamentalism.[18] The religious person seemingly re-interprets or discovers conceptualisation to reflect the central vision of a tradition in order to confirm its hegemony in response to continual societal change:

> "One of the things that often distinguishes religious groups from other ideological groups is our commitment to personal introspection. We struggle not only to examine the socio-economic structures that create and entrench oppression but also to examine our personal roles in, as well as reactions to, them" (Esack, 1999: 2).

This assumption is true for both Islam and Christianity[19], as for all other religions. However, there is a lack of understanding between the various religious traditions for each other's struggles with the process of modernity, as Kate Zebiri (1997: 2) surmises: "It seems that the communications revolution has not necessarily made for more effective communication, and that the information explosion has made it possible to

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[18] R. Scott Appleby and Martin Marty (2002: 16) argue that the term 'fundamentalism' is not satisfactory, although widely accepted as descriptive of religious awareness.

[19] This introspection has been a feature of many Christian discourse in South Africa since the end of Apartheid and more so as a result of the revelations coming from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

know more *about* each other selectively, without knowing each other." This also holds true for understanding each other's presentation of person, or self.

It is apparent that the meaning of the concept of 'person' differs from Western to non-Western/Islamic societies. For the West, since the Renaissance, the ideological foundations of society have developed in a humanistic and individualistic direction, influencing a similar understanding of the concept 'person'. This is also true for most western-Christian[20] societies. Muslims criticise the application of a conceptual framework that has been formed in western cultural terms to non-western peoples. Davies (1988: 28-50) shows how applying western anthropological conceptual formulations led to a colonising attitude in the West. She (1988: 28) further argues for an Islamic frame of reference and purports that only then can dialogue have any prospect for mutual interest and stimulation. How then, do Muslims understand personhood, especially in relation to western thinking? How are we to relate to these concepts in an effort of mutual understanding?

This study therefore endeavours to understand the concepts and conceptualising process of Muslim selfhood as it relates to the general process of asserting a religious identity in postmodern society. Conceptualisation of the person should inform us about ideas inherent to Islam as an ideological system and about the categories that are employed to construe the person as an agent of action and motivation (Jensen, 1990: 178).

3.4.1 A hermeneutic of cross-religious study

The importance of inter-religious dialogue has been found central to a formation of international best practices to 'overcome the ignorance and arrogance about each others' cultures and religious identities' (Joint Statement, 2003: Item 11, par. 4). Our understanding of the 'other' needs to be informed, and expressed, in the 'other's' terms of reference. Working from the minimum expectancy, it should make open dialogue accessible, and at the maximum level perhaps invite an honest search to mutual

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[20] Meant as a category of Christianity within the western paradigm, in contrast to Christianity of, for example, formerly colonised peoples, who are likewise struggling with the dominance of western-based ideology. Not meant as the West being a Christian society.

understanding. It seeks to formulate minimal criteria 'for legitimating discursive and political practices: criteria which are not exclusively practice immanent, but in part meta-practical' (Geertz, 2000: par. 51).

Armin Geertz (2000: par. 75) devises a term for the study of religion which seeks to understand an-other's religion, namely 'Ethnohermeneutics'. This is defined as an attempt to present the 'middle position' or 'third logic'. Philological exposition of the other religion's texts, which has been the main endeavour of the past century, is often discredited by the studied religion as not being representative of 'reality', or 'the real truth'. Geertz (2000: par. 78) combines two perspectives in order to 'correct the 'fictive' product of the philological analyses':

> "1) the reflections of the student of a religion, and 2) the reflections of the indigenous student of that religion. Two hermeneutic endeavours brought together, but located in personal, social, and historical contexts. The end product, however, will be greater than the two."

It is therefore a typical etic investigation in the sense that Clifford Geertz has meant the term (Geertz, 2000: par. 79):

> "The etic perspective involves the explanation, interpretation, and understanding in relation to on-going interests in the global and comparative study of religion. These include...interests in the origins, causes, structures, functions, theoretical objects and the meanings of religion."

The 'on-going interest' with which this study relates, is the effect of globalisation on the religious worldview, i.e. being the demise of the meta-narrative. This study seeks to take into account the shortcomings of postmodernist critique, which relativises all knowledge through the paradigm of the demise of the meta-narratives. It therefore seeks to contain the original historical source of inspiration for the subjects of the Islamic and Christian worldviews as an honest conversation with Islam in reflecting on itself. The study is part of an attempt to emancipate the meta-narrative of humanism, from its pre-deconstructionist construction, so that our analysis does not recede to an anti-humanist discourse. Therefore normative guidelines have to be retained or redefined in terms of the understanding reached from analysis. Failure to provide conceptual coherence will lead to a rejection of the project as unrelated to 'reality'.

Annemiek Richters (*In* Geertz, 2000: par. 46) refers to the Focaultian and Derridan paradigms as once again excluding 'other's' from the discussion:

> "On what other grounds," she asks, "than humanism (moral or otherwise) can powerless people struggle against relegation to the prisons of race, colour and nationality into which antihumanism locks them?"

Richters also (*In* Geertz, 2000: par. 47) points out the irony of the feminist situation after Deconstruction:

> "Doesn't it seem a curious coincidence that with women finally bringing claims forward, eager to change the reality that confines them, we are being asked to accept that there is no longer such a thing as reality, or else that reality is always in flux? At last women are formulating theories about the world and, voila! doubts arise about whether the world can, or even should be theorised about anyhow."

Therefore this study analyses the role and status of women in religion from a women's rights point of view as set out in the formulations of the United Nations Charter for Human Rights and CEDAW (3.2 above).

The current reality of postmodern-globalisation asks an investigation that seeks to understand those who differ from us, while self-critically reflecting on our own usage and understandings of ethical issues. It has already been ascertained that such an endeavour may be termed 'Ethnohermeneutics' (3.4.1 above). However, the reflection required by this process needs to be philosophically structured.

Existential phenomenology provides the framework for such an enquiry through two principles: Firstly, to be open to others as co-participants in the event of Being *(Ereignis)*: "Full participation in this event requires one to be open to others in their ontological depth. That is, we must allow others to reveal themselves fully without imposing our prejudiced ideas of who or what they are, or what they will say, upon them" (Carey, 2000: 26). Secondly, it facilitates resistance of enframing *(Gestell)*, which may be understood as the foundational principle of exclusion: "We enframe ourselves by limiting our experience to relationships of power and control and by fostering habits of thought and behaviour which render us mere instruments of an economic system" (Carey, 2000: 26).

The need is for others to emerge in their ontological depth which develops in us a disposition characterised by 'letting be', described by Heidegger as *Gelassenheit* (Carey, 2000: 27). The concept of the meaning of Being combats nihilism and hyper-consumerism by developing a capacity to respond to other's needs; then only are we living an ethical life.

3.5 Summary

It is clear from the above that contact between Islam and Christianity has led to serious, often not unfounded, negative images of each other. The humanitarian ideal, which requires peaceful co-existence, asks an understanding of other people as a whole, and not in terms of a singular defining attribute. Therefore the various realities faced by people may be sought by an inquiry into their identity, as identity relates to the entire context of a person. This requires a consideration of the historic development in tradition and the defining of identity through that specific religious worldview, not only applicable to ourselves, but to those who differ from us. This openness and understanding is what is required by the hermeneutic of cross-religious study, namely ethnohermeneutics.

The following Chapter therefore deals with Islamic concepts of person in order to establish the specific Islamic understanding of the nature, role and status of persons in this religion. These concepts, although primarily derived from the religious text, reinterpret the text through the constant process of applying the text to contemporary living.

Chapter 4

Islamic concepts of person

4.1 Introduction

Islamic existence in the world enjoins upon its adherents a worldview that is fully defined as a Unity in God *(tawhid).* Gendered transactions are structured distinctively herein and reflect Islam's understanding of its role in the world. How are these views correlated to the physical and temporal realm defined as the 'Global Village'? How does the Islamic worldview impact on the local component in relation to this global orientation? For the purpose of this analysis evidence is based on Muslim explication of these terms wherefore the format of this chapter relies heavily on word-for-word quotes from Muslim interpretation.

4.2 Islamic worldview of *tawhid*

Islamic distinction between the genders must be viewed within the conceptual framework of the Qur'an, which is *tawhid* – Unity. The nature of God and Creation is unity and 'all the concepts we deploy must be seen as integrative agents in search of Unity' (Davies, 1988: 58). All Islamic ritual and service are part of the existence in *tawhid*: "All the acts of ritual service *('ibadat)* and all of life that we seek to make dimensions of service, must be viewed in terms of the 'whole', which is the oneness of Allah *(tawhid)* and the struggle to actualise it on earth" (Esack, 1999: 26). Therefore even diversity or dichotomy can be analysed from the standpoint of *tawhid*:

> "This proposition is far more extensive than the familiar statement that Islam views all of existence as a unity by virtue of all things having a common origin in the purposeful and intentional will of the sole creator, God. The *tawhidic* conception of creation is dynamic and integral; it expresses unity by integrating and relating origin to the on-going processes of existence, constantly being unfolded in necessary relationships, and the objective of existence where both origin and processes achieve their completion" (Davies, 1988: 116).

The role of *tawhid* in Muslim life is pervasive and constantly strived for in the quest to 'generate a balanced understanding' (Davies, 1988: 117). Masudul Choudhury (2000: 8) asserts that *tawhid* is the epistemology of all Islamic endeavour. He extends the meaning of Islamic unity to incorporate any difference in Islamic method or viewpoint as 'merely various approaches to the same goal'.

Tawhid then implies that all Islamic phenomena and praxis need to be viewed as part of a consonant whole. Choudhury's understanding in this instance is problematic as other Muslim discourse points to the localised differentiation within Islam. For instance, Al Faruqi (2003: par. 3) criticises the approach by non-Muslim, and 'especially Western anthropologists', which she says treats 'each variation within the Muslim World as equally valid'. Her explication of the role and status of women in society calls for a Qur'anic basis, instead of an Islamic, or Muslim, description. I agree with Al Faruqi's premises of a return to the textual signatories, but find her disregard of the relationship between an ingrained history of Islamic interpretation and the text of the Qur'an problematic. Likewise Davies (1988: 118) finds western anthropology lacking in order to deal with Islamic diversity, as it sees society as a 'bounded systemic whole'. How this differs from Islam's understanding of Unity is not quite clear.

Nevertheless, ascribing all existence to one concept does not necessarily intend an inflexible, fixed view of society. Davies (1988: 118) is of opinion that this concept is exactly what is needed to accommodate all human diversity[21]. Therefore a study of the

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[21] There is ample evidence in postmodern society, at least academically, that previously defined and set societal constructs are questioned and continually redefined or reconsidered. Oosten's (1990: 31) criticism of Hubbeling's approach to the concept of person serve as an example: "His approach bears the mark of the Western philosophical tradition, so that it is imbued with the ideology of enlightened Christian humanism, liberalism and individualism..." The awareness of ideological impact on worldviews is perhaps best illustrated in the media coverage of the War in Iraq

concepts informing Islamic identity are sought in Islamic/Qur'anic terms of reference. Davies (1988: 87) finds the concepts *fitrah, khilafah* and *din*[22] to define the full implications of human origins and existence. These concepts explain the source of human origin and the enduring relationship of humankind with its source, which is the primary understanding of *tawhid*:

> "Creation entails more than mankind's possession of a common origin, common biological form and common nature; it requires that all knowledge, enquiry and speculation be structured by a relationship with God" (Davies, 1988: 87).

The concepts *fitrah*, *khilafah*, and *din* are interconnected and mutually defining. Davies (1988: 88) views them as various dimensions reflecting human existence as a 'consonant conceptual totality'. A consideration of these concepts should be informative about the Muslim's perception of identity and how it needs to be applied to the Islamic worldview.

4.3 *Fitrah*

Fitrah is the innate created nature of all humans seeking the transcendent. The Qur'an is seen as guidance to true humanness, because 'What makes a man inhuman is going against his primordial nature *(fitrah)* by forgetting that which the Qur'an is the reminder of: his dependency on Allah' (Jensen, 1989: 190). Glassé's (1989: 127-128) definition of *fitrah* is connected to a perfect created state of humankind before the Fall:

(2003). South African media reports tried to convey statistics and views by both American, British, and Arabic sources. It culminated in the removal of the American news network CNN.

[22] The Arabic meaning and explanation of the words will be given under each heading.

> "The primordial man, a harmony between man, creation, and God, such as existed between God and Adam in the Garden. Islam sees itself as the restoration of the religion of Abraham *(millat Ibrahim)*, which itself is a reconsecration and a prolongation of the religion of Adam as primordial man after his fall, and reconciliation with God. The concept of *fitra*, the primordial norm, is at once the measure of truth in our actions and being, and at the same time the quality of harmony between the cosmos and ourselves. It corresponds exactly to the Hindu notion of universal *dharma*, or to the Chinese *Tao*".

The importance of understanding the conceptual basis of *fitrah* is corroborated by Muslim opinion. Ba-Yunus (1981: 39, footnote 5) notes that the Qur'an describes Islam as 'the *din al-fitrah*', which he translates as 'the religion of [one's] nature'. Yassien Mohamed (1996: 187) espouses *fitrah* as the key concept to the development of an Islamic psychology as it supplies a spiritual consciousness to the existence of humankind. Qur'anic function of *fitrah* in human existence is referred to in Surah 30: 30:

> "So set thou thy face steadily and truly *(hanifah)* to the Faith: (Establish) God's handiwork according to the pattern *(fitrah)* on which He has made *(fatara)* mankind: No change (let there be) in the work (wrought) by God, that is the standard Religion *(din)*: but most among mankind understand not."

Here *fitrah* is connected with the true religion of Abraham *(millat Ibrahim)*, who was the first *hanif* (Surah 2: 135)[23]. Davies (1988: 91) purports that *fitrah* is an acknowledgement of one's origin as a covenant between God and every created individual. This binds all humankind collectively to heed the purposeful nature of our creation:

> "The *fitrah* is aware of its own existence as a process capable of completion, that completion being the fulfilling of its debt to its Lord and Creator, and its ultimate return to God" (Davies, 1988: 88).

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[23] The word *hanif* occurs twelve times in the Qur'an, two of these instances being of the plural *hunafa*. The basic usage is that in Surah 3: 67, where it is said that Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but a *hanif*, a *muslim*, not one of the 'idolaters'. "...the word is connected solely with Abraham himself or with the 'religion of Abraham' as that is conceived in the Qur'an and as applying to Islam, contrasted with Judaism and Christianity as well as with paganism." (Watt, 1970: 15)

In this respect *fitrah* is compatible with the Judaic and Christian ideas of a purposefully, created people. Where this concept departs from comparison is in its assumptions of the act of creation as a covenant between God and his creation and the nature of humankind: "Denying the very idea that human beings carry the burden of 'original sin', Islam describes Adam and Eve and their progeny as being capable of conforming to, as well as deviating from, the Divine law out of their own power of decision" (Ba-Yunus, 1981: 30).

4.3.1.1 Personal fitrah

Fitrah may be described as an innate, spiritual sense of discernment possessed by all human beings. Nowhere are distinctions in the amount or measure of *fitrah* that is awarded to different human beings, wherefore it may be viewed as a genderless and equal concept. This innate ability of humans enable them to 'read' revelations that occur naturally and also implies a Created longing for the transcendent aspect of life. The implication is that an individual chooses to conform to this innate sense, the purpose of Islamic religion, or defy it. How does Islam envision the realisation of the transcendent quality of human life? Stated differently, how does one fulfil the requirements of Islamic religion?

The tawhidic focus is on the Unity consisting of dualistic forces that need to be balanced to attain the ideal. Ba-Yunus (1981: 30) proposes an Islamic sociological model based on the ideal type, 'against which all Muslim societies as well as Muslim minorities are judged as to their degree of congruence to Islamic ideology'. To this end Ba-Yunus (1981: 35) is against a sociology of religion, as it removes the epistemological function of religion as a catalyst of any sociological action. He asserts that all religions must develop religious effects as ideal-types for societies to study, in order to measure their degree of congruence to the religion. However, he does not give an idea of who develops these ideal-types in the religions, which leaves the question of women in the decision making apparatus of Islam open.

4.3.1.2 Fitrah *for the community*

Davies (1988: 90) qualifies the application of *fitrah* in the service of social organisation[24] on grounds of Surah 30: 30:

> "...when it is exercised in full consciousness, it enables mankind to organise the social and cultural facets of life into an harmonious balance based upon a proper recognition of necessary relationships. In addition it entails the notion of a discretionary power to order social and cultural existence in consonance with the purpose of creation."

Islamist interpreters find this highly individual process of personal discernment under the auspices and service of the community of believers *(ummah).* The nature and character of the individual is subsumed into the identity of the collective. To Davies (1988: 89), it is the 'logical implication' of the conceptual framework of *fitrah*, i.e. that the ideal setting for the individual is in a grouping where the inherent cultural and social capacity finds specific formal expression. This would entail that the Scriptures of Islam must serve as a basis for actions by the Muslim, which requires support from a communal base: "The challenge is to take the Qur'an and Sunnah as the bases for his social and individual life so that he may live in harmony with his *fitrah* and become liberated from the spiritual and social alienation of the modern world" (Mohamed, 1996: 188)[25].

Religion affords the adherent a revelational referent for guidance in life, which for the three monotheistic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are contained in their respective Scriptures. Scripture attains its specific character from its revelational context. Although revelational knowledge is contained in Scripture, the scriptural

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[24] Termed by Ba-Yunus (1981: 30) as the 'natural law of human interaction'.

[25] These Islamic concepts may be appropiated in modern disciplines such as Psychology. Abdul Hamid Al-Hashimi (1981: 49) sees the process of psychological healing as a return to the state of *fitrah*. This serves as an example of the contribution of Islamic concepts to modern disciplines. However, a clear understanding of these concepts is a prerequisite for application. Al-Hashimi (1981: 49) points to the lifelong process, and guidance for the attainment of understanding: "There are in the psyche inborn (or innate) inclinations adaptable for goodness and truth. It is only through careful and patient care, from the moment of birth until death, that those inclinations can be cultivated and developed."

referent guides adherents to observe affirmation of the annunciation or further guidance through the life situations surrounding them. Davies (1988: 90) categorises revelational guidance for human actions and relationships into three types:

1. the signs (*ayat*) inherent in creation;
2. *fitrah*, a sign and message to the self-aware, self-reflecting person;
3. the direct messages from God granted to the various prophets through human history.

It is clear that the human discernment defined in *fitrah* extends the application of a Scriptural basis for human endeavour, which is the Islamic equivalent of wisdom. The three types of revelational referents interact in application so that they are delimited by each other, for instance hierarchies and phenomena as they occur in nature provide creative guidelines for personal discernment. The Qur'an expresses this revelational quality of nature in Surah 30: 24: "And among His Signs, He shows you the lightning, by way both of fear and of hope, and He sends down rain from the sky and with it gives life to the earth after it is dead: Verily in that are Signs for those who are wise".

The sacred knowledge obtained through consideration of the various revelatory processes is what forms the *fitrah*, enabling human discernment. The foundation of *fitrah,* being humankind's purposeful creation, affords humans a specific status. This status is not an absolute position in and of itself. In Davies' (1988: 92) opinion, it is defined by relationships and 'having consequences for the operation of the network of relationships that is the setting of human existence.' This status is termed *khalif* of God.

4.4 *Khilafah*[26]

Davies (1988: 88) defines *khilafah* as 'human trusteeship as God's vice-regent on earth, we see as the dimension of the operational defining human status and rights.' The pivotal Biblical thought of humankind created in 'the image of God', does not figure explicitly in the Qur'an: "'After Our likeness' is language which Islam instinctively avoids" (Cragg, 1968: 42). Glassé (1989: 84) gives the definition of *khalif* or *khalifah* as follows:

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[26] *Khilafah* = office of *khalif*. "Vicarship, deputyship; succession; caliphate" (Cowan, 1976: 257)

> "*Khalifah* ('successor', 'substitute', 'lieutenant', 'viceroy'). The Koran (2: 30) refers to Adam as the embodiment of the *fitrah*, or primordial norm, and as the Caliph, representative or vicegerent *(khalifah)*, of God on earth. Hence man in his real nature, and not his fallen one, is cast in the role of viceroy to God. The Prophet, however, was the Caliph of God in the Adamic sense, although his successors could lay claim to the title only insofar as they were his representatives..."

The definitive Qur'anic reference is found in Surah 2: 30*:* "Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: 'I will create a vicegerent *(khalifah)* on earth...'"[27] The Qur'an makes a further injunction upon the angels to prostrate *(sajada)* before Adam in verse 34 'indicating that the Divine lordship itself is in some sense staked in the human role' (Cragg, 1968: 28). The conclusion is that to question either the sovereignty of God or the human as His creation, is against the Qur'anic imperative. "At all events, man's dignity stands through Divine counsels: to contest the one is to decry the other" (Cragg, 1968: 28).

The viewing of *khilafah* as trusteeship calls forth the responsibilities and duties implicit in the terms of a trust. Kenneth Cragg (1968: 27) cites an example of 'dominion status' from British constitutional law as not being politically derived, but 'they are Biblical and theological and concern an interchangeable concept of God and man.' He (1968: 42) views Islamic *khilafah* as a parallel of the Judeo-Christian tradition: "In effect the caliphate of the Qur'an is the dominion of the Bible..." If the concept functions correctly, Cragg (1968: 27-50) argues that the rightful recognition of *khilafah* is the antidote to humanity's dispossession and alienation of the secularising forces of modernity. *Khilafah* is thus the uncontested dignity of humankind, which is exactly the aim of the United Nations Charter of Human Rights (Working Paper: C):

> 27. Human rights are universal, not international. Racial, ethnic, religious, or sexual differences allow for unity and diversity, equal dignity and differences of identity.

Davies (1988: 92) understands both genders being endowed with the rights and responsibilities of being a *khalifah*:

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[27] Kenneth Cragg infers that the three major religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, hold that man is *"the true dominion-holder in the earth."* (Cragg, 1968: 3)

> "The status of all mankind, men and women, is as the *khilafah*, the vice-regent of God upon earth".
>
> And again elsewhere:
>
> "There is a right to fulfilment of the biological, material, social, cultural and spiritual dimensions of human existence upon earth, and to that end the whole of created nature can be husbanded and employed. Since all men and women are *khilafah* there is a basic equality in their rights of access to and enjoyment of the bounties of earthly existence." (1988: 93).

The concept *khilafah* is therefore in essence a relational one, pointing to the relationship of humankind with God and with each other within Creation. These relationships are defined and ruled under the Shari'ah: "...the fundamental human rights of man in Shari'ah rest on the premise than (sic) man is the *Khalif* of Allah on earth and hence the centre of the universe" (Doi, 1984: 422). *Khilafah* entails the responsibility of humans to utilise resources with care, as the trustee is held accountable for its trust, being the basis for the return to God (Surah 64: 7). Both the status of trusteeship (*khilafah*) and faculty of self-awareness (*fitrah*) are evaluated on the Day of Judgement in terms of the operational process of a life of submission (*islam*):

> "The substance of ultimate Judgement is how mankind in the business of living integrated the principles of their relationship to God, their rights and duties to the rest of created nature, the physical environment and its flora and fauna, into a coherent and rightly-guided way of life" (Davies, 1988: 95).

Khilafah is therefore the conceptual referent for individual Muslim identity. However, it has been pointed out that Islamicists view Islamic identity as relational, guiding all actions of the individual Muslim. Submission (*islam*) is therefore attained when the individual subordinates his or her interests to the greater good of the community. Davies (1988: 104) even says that 'Life as an individual is impossible from an Islamic perspective, life is a relational term that connects us both to other human beings and to God.' In order to fulfil life, that is attaining a transcendent quality, individual Muslim identity requires social organisation (*ummah*). In Islamic terms humankind is *khalifah*, using the faculty of *fitrah* to discern between right and wrong. Both these aspects are regulated through, and finds expression in, the *din* (Davies, 1988: 91).

4.5 *Din*

Davies (1988: 105) is of the opinion that it is impossible, from an Islamic point of view, to conceive of a group of people that do not have a system of social organisation, 'for that is inherent in our definition of mankind'. She views *din* as an integration of *fitrah* and *khilafah* to this end:

> "The prime definitional connotation of *din* is as an operational process of social and cultural life, a total way of life. It is the term denoting the system where the capacities of *fitrah* are given particular expression and the status and rights of the *khilafah* are incorporated and institutionalised as the routine practice of human interrelationships" (Davies,1988: 97).

In terms of operation (praxis) therefore it is seen as submission (*islam*), which results in servanthood (*'ibada*). Surah 6: 161-163 makes the implications of submission clear:

> "Say: 'Verily, my Lord hath guided me to a Way that is straight, - a religion of right, - the path (trod) by Abraham the true in faith *[hanif]*, and he (certainly) joined not gods with God.' Say: 'Truly, my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death, are (all) for God, the Cherisher of the Worlds. No partner hath He: This I am commanded, and I am the first of those who bow to His Will *[muslim].*"

All roles and functions of humankind are contained within the primary role as servant of God: In the first place, *fitrah* is the interpretative principle: "The epistemological implication of *fitrah* recognises the function of spiritual consciousness, realised through the organs of the heart and intellect so that man may fully embody his roles as *khalifah* and *'abd* (servant) on earth" (Mohamed: 1996: 97). Secondly, submission *(islam)* is seen as the balancing factor in all relationships within creation and applicable to all endeavours of daily life:

> "...not as abstract, purely spiritual matters but as powerful, pragmatic, social, cultural, ecological, scientific and technical intellectual referents. The objective and potential of the *din* is achieving an ideal society as a system of practical action that allows the individual security, contentment and fulfilment of all the dimensions of his being without harmful conflicting pressures." (Davies, 1988: 100)

Doi (1984: 427) likewise describes man's main function as that of servant of God *('ibad Allah)*and extends its application to relations between Muslims and non-Muslims:

> "Muslims are not supposed to consider themselves as the 'lords of the population of the globe' as they are not *arbis Romanus* but merely 'Servants of Allah' *(ibad Allah)* and even as rulers, they [are] merely the custodians of Allah's property and not the absolute owner because everything existing in the heavens and the earth belong to Allah."

Servanthood *(ibada)* implicates submission not only to God, but also to each other in the community of God, as expression of the ultimate Submission. Qur'anic identity thus implies that all who submit in servanthood by way of *din* are equal before God. Yet allowance is made for distinctive traits and talents among people. In addition to the diversity of languages and colour of race, specified in Surah 30: 22, the heterogeneity of mankind is expressed as all deriving from one pair in Surah 49: 13:

> "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)."

These distinctions are subject to the relational nature of the social structure of the community (*ummah*): "It is the total context of the Islamic perspective, the *tawhidic* paradigm, that generate the definition of community as a moral entity..." (Davies, 1988: 129). This is part of the role of Islamic ritual and practices – not only reasserting community and support but also strengthening the *muslim* (man who submits) and *muslima* (woman who submits) in their covenantal task.

> "In the yearly cycle Ramadan is the spiritual home for the Muslim...Yet I am aware that all rituals and religious practices can become so social and cultural that they can be stripped entirely of the true awareness of Allah that is meant to accompany them and towards which we are supposed to move, and so there is something beyond all the rituals, religious practices and sense of community. Thus as I set out on my travels again I must be guided not only by my compass but also by the ever present stars above, the Spirit of Allah blown into all of us at the time of the creation of humankind" (Esack, 1999: 37).

The rights and responsibilities of all Muslims are equal within the concepts of *fitrah* and *khilafah.* Jane Smith (2002: 3) is of the opinion that the first-time reader of the Qur'an might be surprised to find that it is 'generally a very egalitarian document'. Men and women can be seen as of equal standing in nature and existence as well as in responsibility for transgression. Each needs to strive toward full submission (*islam*) to God's will by exertion in servanthood (*ibada*).

4.5.1 *Din* in Contemporary Life

Perhaps in no other age has the ethical aspect of society been in more disarray, ethics becoming situational instead of heteronomous. Humankind's technological advancements alienate persons from a purposeful existence. But of most significance to the religious consciousness, is the 'impact of the enlarging competence of man upon traditional attitudes to God' (Cragg, 1968: 174). I quote Cragg (1968: 174) at length in his poetic appropriation of the images of Creation and contemporary life's attitude towards them:

> "Today's reader of the Book Job has good reason to be dubious about the arguments of heaven which once seemed so devastating against the patriarch. 'Have you entered into the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?' Indeed, scoured them with submarines, churned them with depth charges and charted them on maps. 'Have you entered into the storehouses of the snow?' Antarctica is crossed by sledge and tractor, by man and machine, and Everest is climbed. 'Who has divided a watercourse for the overflowing waters...to testify the waste and desolate land?' the architects of the Tennessee Valley Authority and the makers of the High Dam at Aswan. 'Knowest thou the time when the wild goats of the rock bring forth? do you observe the calving of the hinds?' We do indeed, and from our telescopic lenses transfer the knowledge to a million television screens. 'He saith among the trumpets, Ha! Ha!' This kind of cavalry steed has long been obsolete in warfare and lives only in nostalgia. [Quoting from Job 38: 16, 22 and 25 and 39: 1 and 25].

The ethical implications of our actions have been reduced to being in the service of empirical knowledge: "The new capacity to do what we will has to be reciprocated by the untrammelled right to do so" (Cragg, 1968: 184). The moral individuation of

contemporary society removes accountability away from the individual to institutions of society, and with it a sense of community.

However, the necessity of principles and codes for behaviour is easy to grasp and in fact a natural tendency of the human order: "...we find a dependence within our very independence, a constraint within our true liberty, a presence that abides in the very assumption of its absence" (Cragg, 1968: 186). The Muslim code to counterbalance the disruptive forces of the multicultural nature of globalisation is *din* – religion. The title of Farid Esack's (1999) book summarises the quest of Muslims world-wide, regardless of cultural affiliation: *On being a Muslim. Finding a Religious Path in the World Today.*

Based on the acceptance of human diversity in Surah 5: 51 above as part of the order of creation, *din* incorporates two codes of human behaviour: divine guidance or law (*shir'at;* same root as *shari'ah*) and the 'open way' or way of life of a specific community (*minhaj*) (Davies, 1988: 102). There is an analytical distinction between *din* as mankind's enduring relationship with the Creator and *shari'ah*, which contributes to and generates further definitions and analytical categories for Islamic societies.

This orientation of *din* allows individual identity to be constructed in compliance with the rules of Islam *(shari'ah)* as well as the cultural, anthropological indicators of human existence: "It is through the specifics of our sense of identity in one human group, our nation or tribe, that we come to recognise our relation to universals and are helped to reflect upon the true significance of what is universal" (Davies, 1988: 104). Cultural diversity within the ambits of Islam is therefore acceptable and explained through this understanding of the religion.

Despite the equality contained in the theological principles, Islamic feminism points out that the egalitarian ethic of Islam is obscured by gender arrangements (Javed, 1994: 1). Islamic gender arrangements, indeed the hierarchy of Creation, seems to indicate a structural formation with Allah at its apex, men in submission to Allah, and women in submission to men, etc. These arrangements are reflected in the social reality of many Muslim women.

4.5.2 *Din* Opposing Immorality

The effect of globalisation and postcolonial dynamics in world politics have propelled the Islamic worldview to one of binary opposites, not least informed by the exposition of the Ayatollah Khomeini's dialectic of the '*dar al-Islam*' (Realm of Islam) as having to oppose the '*dar al-Harb*' (Realm of War)[28]. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 placed the USA and Islam into opposing ideological units, notwithstanding the fact that Iranian Islamism is considered heretic by the majority of Sunni Muslims. This situation has since been exacerbated by, amongst others, the demise of the Soviet Union, ethnic conflict involving Muslims, like that in the Balkans, and most notably the events of September 11, 2001, and its aftermath. This globally dualistic condition has affected local application in the gendered existence. How much clearer can one's submission to God's moral injunctions on humans be expressed than covering oneself from head to toe, in contrast to Western expression of freedom of expression, epitomised in the graphic depiction of the female body and sexuality?

In its effect, globalisation is a result of any situation where cultural strangers meet. It can therefore be said to be as old as humankind itself. In the Old Testament multiculturalism, and the awareness of cultural otherness is first evidenced in the sons of Eve and Adam. Abel, the pastoralist's sacrifice is accepted, while Cain and his vegetarian sacrifice is not (Gen. 4: 4). Globalisation is thus part of a much longer history than modernity wishes to acknowledge: "we suffer increasingly from a process of historical amnesia in which we think that just because we are thinking about an idea it has only just started" (Hall, 2000(a): 20).

The historical encounter between Islam, Christianity and Judaism during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, or Islam and the West during the Crusades, are then also aspects of globalisation, as was the encounter of Canaanite peoples by the Israelites after the Exodus. The processes that formed knowledge in those times identify the processes that inform our knowledge now. The knowledge gained from these encounters are what forms and re-forms our identities: "I talk about identity here as a point at which, on the

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[28] Of course in Khomeini's time (1902-1989) world politics was less dualistically positioned in terms of Islam; with the Soviet Union still existant as the main opposition to the USA.

one hand, a whole set of new theoretical discourses intersect and where, on the other, a whole new set of cultural practices emerge" (Hall, 2000(b): 42).

4.6 Summary

The search for the meaning of life by religious persons is mainly concerned with the *how* and the *why* of human existence, and the implications thereof for the relationship with God and fellow man,[29] or creation. The investigation of Islamic concepts above revealed that there is no discrimination or distinction between the sexes in terms of their innate nature, dominionship on earth, or religious responsibility. These ideas are derived from the sources of ethical knowledge, which for the religious person, is centred on Scripture.

However, Scripture is not the only basis for interpretation of human existence. Human understanding is related to its time and space through the historic context of each interpreter. It is a product of knowledge available at the specific time and location of enquiry. It is also sensed and imbibed through an acknowledgement of one's spirituality, the source of which is the religious text. The next chapter explores the description of human origins and the interpretation thereof throughout the ages. It seeks to ascertain how the religious ideals of personhood, proposed by Sanders (2.1 above), were constructed for women through interpretative history.

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[29] On the term 'man' and the equivalent term 'human being' Praetorius argues that it is ambiguous as an apparently 'gender-neutral' concept, but that it is often employed to hide androcentric ideas: *"The man is abstracted into an apparently universal sexless individual, in which women can be included or not according to their interest in the statement. The world is construed as a kind of pyramid whose point is occupied by the man who has been universalized into the 'human being"* (Praetorius, 1998: 81). I therefore choose the term 'humankind' in most instances.

Chapter 5

Scriptural identity and gender arrangements

5.1 Introduction

Human nature, masculine or feminine *fitrah*, human dominionship *(khilafah)*, and the status conventions of formalised religion *(din)* all have their foundation in the respective Scriptures of Islam and Christianity. Nearly all these aspects are developed through the acknowledgement of createdness and fallenness. These two issues define human relationship with God and are derived from their description in the Scriptures.

The ontological use of the narratives of origin – Creation and 'Fall' – have not lost their significance for structuring identity, and therefore gender relations, in modern society. Just as they were appropriated in the previous historical contexts of pluralism, these scriptural signs and the history of their interpretation bear on our current identities. Our current context of politicised gender has asked of Christianity and Islam to explain their characterisations of woman: "...at certain historical moments, we have to use the signifier. We have to create an equivalence between how people look and what their histories are" (Hall, 2000: 53).

This section attempts to establish the role and function of Scripture for an understanding of how Scriptural signs are appropriated in human existence. An analysis of the interpretation of the themes Creation and Fall throughout tradition shows how such appropriation has taken place.

5.2 Scriptural knowledge production

Scripture constitutes the knowledge of revelation accounted in various forms and genres. This knowledge not only entails the revelation of the Sacred Focus (Lott, 1988: 36), but contains ritual, doctrinal, ethical and perhaps other dimensions relevant to the life of the believer. The knowledge attained from Scripture is seen, by both Eastern and Western

traditions, as light (Biderman, 1995: 1); knowledge having driven away the darkness of ignorance. Scriptural knowledge thus helps the believer to understand her and his role and function in life in a specific way, exhibiting the epistemic role of holy texts in human life.

Biderman (1995: 102-103) presents the following eight assumptions of the epistemic nature of Scripture as methodological foundation, rather than a theory, of Scripture:

1. Scripture has an epistemic function. Its role is to provide knowledge and to supply the means by which knowledge is justified.

2. The epistemic framework that Scripture provides is meant to give the believer a world-view, to portray a total picture of facts along with their interpretation and significance.

3. This world-view includes cognitive claims, which refer to states of affairs in the world (including those that are subject to standard epistemological procedures or evaluations).

4. However, in contrast to standard propositional knowledge, Scripture uniquely, and perhaps strangely, includes both propositional knowledge and values, norms, commands and so on, and it provides knowledge not only about what is observable, but also about the mental picture of the individual: the individual's thoughts, memories, drives, and emotions.

5. Propositional and non-propositional knowledge are entangled in religion, without any well-defined lines of demarcation. In this sense, knowledge-claims that are issued by Scripture are total.

6. Consequently, the justification of these knowledge-claims cannot restrict itself to the standard, empirical ways by which perceptual and inferential knowledge is justified.

7. The justification of scriptural knowledge claims is by appeal to the authority of Scripture. Relying on authority for justification seems inevitable, because of the entanglement of propositional and non-propositional that rules out the use of standard epistemological justifications. Justification by authority is an indirect procedure in which Scripture is taken to include the *evidence* for the truth of its

knowledge-claims. The result is that the declaration of the authority of Scripture amounts to declaring the validity of the evidence it provides.

8. The intricate ways by which Scripture is dealt with in religions – from commentary to ritual, from blind faith to speculative theology, from recitation to physical act of worship – should be understood as moves taken within the epistemological arena: by these moves, knowledge is offered, evidence is provided, and authority is dealt with.

These points argue that the philosophical conception of Scripture is based on the essence of the revelation, in other words, what it means for the life of humankind. It is not an enquiry into the way it was revealed (Biderman, 1995: 11). It is essential to remember that the revelational text is 'by' and 'from' the religious tradition, indicating not only the propositional requirements for the community, but applying its conceptual basis from the community. In this sense the Qur'an is a product of Arabian origin. Islam understands Arabic as a sacred language.

Further, the enormous diversity of topic and variety of content of religious Scripture is an indication of the close relation between the Scriptures in religious traditions and the community 'that grants it their status' (Biderman, 1995: 13). Scripture is the foundational text that establishes the general outlines of the religious construct and 'to some extent points the direction of its future development' (Neusner, 2000: 453). It may thus be described as guidance, providing the parameters and direction of application for individual, as well as corporate, identity of the faith community.

As a norm for meaningful human life, Scripture appeals to the transcendent dimension of humanity. Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1981: 10) describes the transcendental dimension as an inexplicable reality and one of the differentials between humans and animals:

> "Unlike the history of galaxies or seemingly of hippopotami, the history of men and women and children is that movement through time and space of persons for whom time and space constitute only part of the truth about their living, their being. Every work of art has a timeless dimension: it is the more compelling, the greater be the art. Every human life has a timeless dimension, the more salient the more truly human the person. Human history is the arena of the interplay between the temporal and the timeless – between the mundane and the eternal, the transcendent, or however one wish to call it. Human beings are self-transcending beings – a perplexing fact, admittedly; indeed, mysterious: yet an observational fact, nonetheless."

This transcendental quality of humanity is not appreciated in modern discourse: "the enduring liberal humanist penchant for understanding both religion and mysticism to be exclusively private matters of the heart" (McCutcheon, 2002: 231, *see also* Smith, 1981: 10; Choudhury, 2000: 22). The invasion of modernisation and multi-national corporations replacing the existing order does not only have material consequences. The adherents of the religious traditions experience erosion in the globalising process, not only of their national identities, but also of their spiritual identity. After all, to the believer the role of Scripture is not simply a matter of reference, but rather a matter of essence for human existence. It is not merely the justifier of human actions and norms, but the epistemological source of thought and deed, even in the socio-political arena. Therefore an epistemological study of an aspect of religious life cannot be initialised from any other source but from its Scripture (Biderman, 1995: 13).

The Scripture of a religion is the consistent and continuous source of reference to provide guidance of unity in a disjointed world, even as a contradictory case in point for the non-believer.[30] Muslims might object to the use of the literary designation of the Qur'an as 'Scripture'. The Qur'an is rather viewed as a 'revealed book', therefore not written, but forever existent in Heaven. However, the use of the term 'Scripture' is used *ipso facto* for the literary source of Christian and Muslim existence, not intending to dispute the origins thereof. Yet Muslim understanding of the origin of the Qur'an is illuminating for Muslim

[30] In this respect even the 'Jesus Seminar' that disputes the Divinity of Christ is still focussed on the Bible in its search for a new hermeneutic to contemporary challenges.

conception of the authority of their Scripture in life. A comparison with the appropriation of Christian scriptures might be more illuminating: The authority of the Bible for the Christian is explained by Leatt (1986: 290) as an ideological tool called the 'Word of God' theology:

> "The Word may simply be incorporated into an existing ideology and greatly reinforce it. Alternatively it may displace the ideology but take over its function of justifying the vital interests of the group in question. The underdog may, for instance, be eager to identify with Israel in its struggle for liberation from Egypt. When his fortunes turn and he finds himself in a dominant position he may still want to identify with Israel – but now in its conquest of Canaan...In short, the Word itself becomes ideological."

The Muslim understanding of the 'unwritten' Qur'an implies that every literary sign has divine implications, and is therefore the starting point of any reasoning or ideological formation.

5.2.1 Comparing Scriptures

On the applicability of comparing Islamic and Christian (and for that matter Jewish) Scripture, Qur'anic revelation contains an assumption of knowledge of the Scriptures of Jews and Christians. The Qur'an presupposes to some extent a basic knowledge of Biblical stories in its hearers as it does not claim to be doctrinally original, but a culmination of the revelations to the Jews and Christians (Zebiri, 1997: 16). It contains characters and events that are familiar to Jews and Christians: "Before the Qur'an ends, it has touched upon Adam, Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood, Abraham and his sons Ishmael and Isaac" (Neusner, 2000: 454). How these similarities are appropriated and portrayed thus present us with the Islamic interpretation of God's revelation:

> "...the Biblical stories in the Qur'an are generally told for a reason: sometimes as *ayat*[31], 'signs,' or, more commonly, as *mathani*, 'punishment stories' about the consequences of ignoring prophets..." (Neusner, 2000: 454).

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[31] *ayat*: Signs of God as reflections of Divine Unity in the order of things (Choudhury, 2000: 332).

Bible-related traditions are of historic importance to Islamic scriptural commentary and furthermore, it reveals the essentially Islamic focus and character of Muslim interpretation in these instances[32] (Stowasser, 1994: 4). The description of water from the rock at Horeb in the desert (Ex. 17: 1-7) quoted in Surah 20: 60 is one example of the synthesis of Arabian tradition, Biblical knowledge, and Islamic revelation: "And remember Moses prayed for water for his people; We said: 'Strike the rock with thy staff.' Then gushed forth therefrom twelve springs. Each group knew its place for water. So eat and drink of the sustenance provided by God, and do no evil nor mischief on the (face of the) earth." The meaning of this *ayah* is elaborated in the Yusuf 'Ali edition in footnote 73, connecting the twelve springs with a tradition about the number of tribes of Israel: "The gushing of twelve springs from a rock evidently refers to a local tradition well known to Jews and Arabs in Mustafa's time."

The identity of Muslims are thus closely linked to that of Jews and Christians: "In so far as one can trace within the Qur'an the progressive consolidation of Islamic religious identity, it is inextricably linked with the religious identity of others, notably Jews and Christians" (Zebiri, 1997: 16). During the formative process Islam and Christianity were confronted with similar political and sociological challenges, as is the case once again in the current process of globalisation. It is obvious that the fledgling faiths did not share the same demographics, or cultural origins. Any generalisation of similar social aspects, such as gender relations, is therefore an oversimplification of the development process. However, the essence of the challenges faced by the new faith communities consists of vying with old traditions to proclaim a new message. This message was not met with favour by either the establishment or the political powers that be. On the terrain of gender relations, it therefore needs to establish the 'new' religion's understanding of this sociological aspect, which does not necessarily imply a sociologically new understanding thereof.

Conversely, in its treatment of common themes such as gender and relationships, Islamic interpretation may be viewed as commentary on the Bible. Consequently, Islam becomes part of the exegesis of the Bible in the same way that the New Testament

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[32] Muslims incorporate this comparison or reference in their explication of qur'anic text as in the translation of the Qur'an by Yusuf 'Ali, for example the footnotes to Surah 3: 183, where he refers to Leviticus 9: 23-24.

(Christianity) may be viewed as exegesis of the Old Testament (Judaism). Therefore Islamic views on gender may point out the hermeneutic base of gender arrangements in both the Islamic and Christian traditions. It should be made clear that the commonality is not in the revelation, but in the interpretative process applied by the adherents of these faiths. The quest of the investigation is for the intermutual aspect of human views on gender and the way in which they are addressed from Scripture. As such the themes Creation and 'Fall' are analysed from Muslim interpretation of the Qur'anic description and compared with Biblical interpretation. But first it is necessary to set out what is understood by the term 'Islamic Scripture'.

5.2.2 Islamic Scripture

Islamicists usually take care to point out that they subscribe to a specifically Islamic conceptual framework, whether it be sociological, theological or any other discipline (*see* Davies, 1988: 56; Al Faruqi & Naseef, 1981; Zebiri, 1997: 230). The Islamic conception of knowledge is that it is 'contained in the revealed words of God and in the sayings of the prophets and other specially gifted men' (Watt, 1973: 63). The primary source of reference is the Qur'an. John Bowker (1970: 99) explains that the Qur'an forms the basis of all Islamic life and thought, but that Islam is not limited to the Qur'an:

> "This does not mean that Islamic life and thought is confined to the Qur'an, since Islam, like any other religion, has its own principles of continuity and development as it moves on in time and confronts new and previously unforeseen situations. But it does mean that Islam is grounded in the Qur'an..."

Normative ideals for Islamic identity or personhood will therefore be found in the precepts of the Qur'an. The normative ideals are then interpreted through the *Sunnah* – normative practice of the Prophet: "These reports of deeds or sayings of the Prophet are held in such esteem within orthodox Islam that they serve as a 'second Scripture' after the Qur'an (Kvam, 1999: 160). *Sunnah* was established during the first centuries of Islam and is found in the *Hadith* (transmitted tradition) texts. Therefore, when speaking of Islamic Scripture, both the Qur'an and *Sunnah* carry equal interpretative weight. As a result a description of Qur'anic gender relations must be related to its practical application through the *Sunnah*.

Extensive studies on the sources and context of *Sunnah* have been undertaken by amongst other Barbara Stowasser (1994), Fatima Mernissi (1991), and Amina Wadud-Muhsin (1992). The broad consensus is that the Qur'an relates an egalitarian view of women in terms of their faith, but that later interpretation has elaborated on, and incorporated extra-Qur'anic ideas of women into tradition. How these ideas were included into the Islamic frame is not only informative about the social arrangements of the time, but are also informative about the presuppositions and assumptions of the Qur'anic interpreters. This is also the case for Christian interpretative endeavour, because hermeneutics is a historical and contextual enterprise (Syreeni, 2001: par. 1). It therefore becomes clear that, unless the scriptural referent and the doctrinal conception cohere, the religious construction of identity tells more about the premises of the hermeneut than it says about the scriptural norm.

The conceptualisation of women presents a common point of reference against which to ascertain what power structures in Islam and Christianity formed their respective understandings of the world, and what the role of their Scriptures are within this process. The social arrangement of gender, though reflected in Scripture, is not presented as a topic *per se*, but needs to be extracted from representations of women in the primary texts. The following section deals with the Scriptural description of human origins and relation to God.

5.3 Cosmic ontologies

As pointed out by feminist writers, the narratives of origin have been the primary allegation for misogynist assumptions in Christianity (Bal: 1986; Hassan: 2000; Kvam, 1999: 1). Through commentary on Genesis 1-3, orthodoxy 'found in the creation account a hierarchical universe that subordinated women to men' (Kvam, 1999: 108). Tremper Longman III (2001: 65) notes that the Bible itself interprets these narratives as the origin of strained relations between the sexes. This study concurs with the assumption of the editors of *Eve and Adam* (Kvam, 1999: 2) on the sociological applications of the narratives of origin:

> "...gender is a social construction and...communities of faith use sacred texts to give cosmological grounding to their notions of social order. As sociologist Peter Berger noted in his classic study, *The Sacred Canopy,* "Every human society is an enterprise of world-building...Institutions, roles and identities exist as objectively real phenomena in the social world, though they and this world are at the same time nothing but human productions."

In Gen. 3: 16 disharmony in gender relations is prophesied: "The Bible traces destructive power struggles between the genders back to the Fall and the rebellion of humans against God himself". The question arises whether the Qur'anic account concurs with the Biblical one to support instances of misogyny in Islamic life? And how are the characters constructed to inform these assumptions? Characterisation as a literary enterprise calls for a literary classification of notions of woman contained in the mythic identity.

The narratological approach opens up an understanding of the characterisation of women and men through Scripture. The analysis of the religious construction of the image of womanhood will rely on Mieke Bal's (1985) explication of the construction of female identity from the text as it stands in a literary linear reading. Her narratological approach explicates a character construction for men and women, which has attained mythic proportions in sexist ideology. The explication of this mythic identity exposes the extraordinary force of myth in human life as a regenerative hermeneutic mechanism. If Gerald Hughes (2001: par. 3) is correct in thinking that the Great Narratives have died (3.4 above), it certainly does not mean that mythic understanding does not still pervade the thinking of the modern mind. To elucidate Bal's appropriation it is first necessary to understand the scriptural indicators of human creation.

5.3.1 Creation

As in the Biblical account of Gen. 2: 7-23, the Qur'an describes humankind as a direct creative act by God. Humankind is formed from clay, with the inbreathing of life by God:

> "We created man from sounding clay, from mud moulded into shape; and the Jinn race, We had created before, from the fire of a scorching wind. Behold! thy Lord said to the angels: 'I am about to create man from sounding clay, from mud moulded into shape. When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him" (Surah 15: 26-29).

Riffat Hassan (2000: 3) analyses the creation of man and woman as described in the Qur'an as follows[33]:

> "In the 30 or so passages pertaining to the subject of human creation, the Qur'an uses generic terms for humanity and there is no mention of Eve. The word 'Adam' occurs 25 times in the Qur'an, but it is used 21 times as a symbol for self-conscious humanity. Here it is important to point out that 'Adam' is a Hebrew word (from 'adamah', meaning 'the soil') and it functions generally as a collective noun referring to 'the human' rather than to a male person[34]. In the Qur'an, the word 'Adam' mostly does not refer to a particular human being but to human beings in a particular way".

Davies (1988: 89) agrees that Adam is an allegory used throughout the Qur'an to refer to the collective origin of all humankind. The characters are neither defined with specific cultural functions or social roles at that time (Wadud-Muhsin, 1992: 26). Qur'anic humanity is therefore a unitary creation and there is no reference in the Qur'an to a secondary creation of women (or Eve) and neither is the woman named. The unitary creation of mankind is described as being from one person *(nafs)*[35]:

> "O mankind! Reverence your Guardian-Lord, who created you from a single person *(nafs)*. Created of like nature his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women. Reverence God, through Whom ye demand mutual (rights) and (reverence) the wombs that bore you: for God ever watches over you" (Surah 4: 1).

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[33] For a comprehensive list of all instances referring to the Creation of humanity in the Qur'an, see Kvam, 1999: 179-184.

[34] See also Bal 1985: 320-322 on the name 'Adam' being a pun for *adamah*.

[35] *nafs:* Corresponding to the Hebrew *nefesh*.

The Qur'an even-handedly uses both feminine and masculine terms and imagery to describe the creation of humanity from a single source: "That Gods original creation was undifferentiated humanity and not either man or woman (who appeared simultaneously at a subsequent time) is implicit in a number of Qur'anic passages" (Hassan, 2000: 3). Woman and man's equal origin from the one 'soul' verifies the female's innate capability equal to the male's. Her *fitrah* cannot be inferior to the male's as they both derive from the same spiritual entity. Amina Wadud-Muhsin (1992: 26) argues that this Creation of the one pair supports the major Qur'anic principle of *tawhid* – the Unity of God: "Philosophically, since all created things are paired, He who is not created is not paired: the Creator is One."

The first Biblical reference that could be construed as an indication of the difference in status between men and women is in the account of 'the Fall'[36], in Gen. 3: 16: "The subordinate role of woman seems to be the result of the Fall rather than creation" (Zondervan, 1977: 951). The significance of the narrative of Eve and Adam for their progeny is epitomised in the following quote:

> "While the extent to which Eve's story influenced the women of the writer's own society is uncertain, the degree to which it shaped her daughters' lives in the centuries that followed is legendary" (Kvam, 1999: 20).

Is the Qur'anic account a countertype of the Christian understanding of 'the Fall'?

5.3.2 'This woman you gave me'

The Qur'anic fall of mankind, in contrast with the Biblical narrative (Gen. 3: 1-24), describes the event of 'the Fall' in egalitarian terms as seen *inter alia*, in Surah 2: 36 (*see also* 7: 19-25; 20: 121):

> "Then did Satan make **them** slip from the (Garden), and get **them** out of the state (of felicity) in which they had been..."

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[36] Christianity has developed a doctrine of 'the Fall'. Simplistically viewed it is the result of the first human couple eating the fruit and consequently plunging 'humanity into sin and strife' (Kvam, 1999: 4) after being perfectly created by God.

The Qur'an consistently refers to the actors in the event in the plural personal pronoun 'them' in all instances. Man and woman are on equal footing concerning their status as created beings and in their responsibility for the break in relationship with God. As a matter of fact the one time that anyone is singled out for blame, it is Adam in Surah 20: 115-121. The Qur'anic version of the story rather emphasises individual responsibility (Wadud-Muhsin, 1992: 26).

There is thus no evidence for a Qur'anic Fall-origin to the status of women. The Qur'an evidently views the Biblical narratives of Creation and Fall as reflecting an egalitarian status of women and men as it does not relate the Biblical accounts to issues of gender privilege (which it does in other, specific instances e.g. circumstances of divorce, inheritance etc.).

5.4 God, human and creation: the tripartite relation

As a created being, humans view themselves as standing in relation to God. The relationship demands certain rights and responsibilities from the person, requiring persons to assess their identity correctly. In terms of Qur'anic identity in relation to God, Cobus Naudé (1967: 78-79) presents the following summary of human creational status as opposed to other creatures:

1. humans are in an honorary position to the rest of creation (Surah 90: 4);
2. the whole of creation is focused on 'Man' (Surah 78: 6-8; 55: 3-8) to serve as warning for humankind (Surah 88: 17-20);
3. God has appointed warners (scribes) to write up all 'Man's' deeds, for which they are held accountable on the day of Judgement (Surah 86: 6; 53: 44; 85: 10-13);
4. God has absolute authority over his creation and he is in the position to create better beings to replace unworthy ones (Surah 70: 39-41).

Concerning the aim of Creation, and human existence within Creation, Naudé (1967: 147) concludes:

1. it is to serve God (Surah 51: 56; 36: 22);
2. in order to praise him (Surah 56: 74; 3: 191);
3. for which He will demand accountability from all humans (Surah 76: 2).

Creation enjoins the realisation that all existence must be related to God: "...it requires that all knowledge, enquiry and speculation be structured by a relationship with God"

(Davies, 1988: 87) The aim of Creation and the relationship between God and woman and man are Qur'anically expressed in inclusive egalitarian terms using the term *'insan* for 'man/humanity/humankind' in each instance. Surah 9: 71-72 seems to summarise the duties and reward for all humans and further expressly shows the inclusivity contained in the term 'believer'. The text specifies men and women using the terms *mu'minuna* (male believers) and *mu'minat* (female believers):

> "The believers, **men and women**, are protectors, one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practise regular charity, and obey God and his Apostle. On them will God pour his mercy: for God is exalted in power, Wise. God hath promised to believers, **men and women**, gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein. And beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of God: that is supreme felicity."

The inclusivity is extended to unbelievers and other transgressors in the punishment of their evil deeds, as in Surah 9: 68:

> "God hath promised the Hypocrites, **men and women**, and the rejectors of faith the fire of Hell: therein shall they dwell. Sufficient is it for them, for them is the curse of God, and an enduring punishment."

Creation is thus viewed as a product of divine initiative and needs to be acknowledged through human acts, which for the religious person, constitutes worship *(din)*:

> "Not only does the Qur'an emphasise that righteousness is identical in the case of man and woman, but it affirms, clearly and consistently, women's equality with men and their fundamental right to actualise the human potential that they share equally with men" (Hassan, 2000: 4).

5.4.1 Diversity in unity

The Qur'an specifies humankind as a unitary creation, but distinguishes that a pair is derived from the single entity (Surah 30: 21). Although there is no priority mentioned in the creation of men or women, "...it is obvious they have been intentionally created for a necessary relationship with each other, and through this relationship the existence and survival of the human race is secured" (Davies, 1988: 83).

The relationship between the two entities of the pair may be deduced from descriptions in the Qur'an. Amina Wadud-Muhsin (1992: 29) concludes that the Qur'an does not support a specific and stereotyped role for its characters, male or female. She distinguishes three categories of female roles in the Qur'an:

1. A role which represents women's social, cultural, and historical context – without compliment or critique from the text;
2. A role which fulfils a universally accepted (i.e. nurturing or caretaking) female function, to which exceptions can be made – and have been made in the Qur'an itself;
3. A role which fulfils a non-gender specific function, i.e. the role represents human endeavours on the earth and is cited in the Qur'an to demonstrate this specific function and not the gender of the performer, who happens to be woman.

A distinction of roles is indeed permitted, as in Surah 6: 165:

> "It is He Who hath made you vicegerents *(khilafah)* (inheritors) of the earth: He hath raised you in ranks, some above others, that He may try you for the gifts He hath given you..."

Cragg (1968: 31) takes this verse as an indication that 'all are alike in status, though differing in their quality.' This permits a difference in status between man and woman, slave and free, citizen and *dhimmi* and so on, although these distinctions are not explicitly referred to in this instance. However, distinction between the rights of men and women are expressly stated in Surah 2: 228:

> "...And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree (of advantage) over them. And God is Exalted in Power."

This verse is situated in a section dealing with the specifics of divorce, and should be read as rights pertaining to divorce. The clearest distinction between roles are rather found in Surah 4: 34, indicating economic position and responsibility in gender relations:

> "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what God would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next) refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them[37] (lightly); But if they return to obedience, seek not against them means of annoyance: For God is Most High. Great (above you all)."

The Qur'an does not make any distinction between man and woman in terms of their creation or relationship to God (Surah 33: 35), but the difference is in the relationship towards society and each other: "The rights and responsibilities of a woman are equal to those of a man, but they are not necessarily identical with them. Equality and identity are two different things, Islamic traditions maintain – the former desirable, the latter not" (Al-Faruqi, 2001: 3).

5.4.2 Cultural diversity

Davies (1988: 104) sees a distinction of rank in the creation of male and female to be in the service of procreation of the human species. Surah 5: 51 is significant in its implications for Islamic social structuring, but specifically for the operational referents of Muslim life (Davies, 1988: 101):

> "To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the Scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what God hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If God had so willed, He would have made you a single People, but (His Plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute."

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[37] *dharaba* in I stem formation = "strike, hit", in IV stem formation = "leave, forsake, desert, avoid" (Cowan, 1976: 538-539). If considered that *hamzat-ul qat* might have been ommitted in transmission, the IV stem formation seems most likely.

This verse points to the two referents: law, *shari'ah* and an open way of life, *minhaj* (3.2.1: par. 4). *Shari'ah* being the Islamic law guiding and regulating all Muslim activity and *minhaj* being the laws and customs of the cultural context of one's existence (Davies, 1988: 102). The text makes a clear statement, namely that Islam is the basis of all understanding for Muslims in relation to other communities of faith (Christians and Jews in this context), and that discernment must be applied by judging the conduct of these communities. The Qur'anic message is that social and cultural life is a 'moral and ethical domain' that integrates 'the biological with the spiritual, the material with the moral, the individual with the collective, the collective with the transcendent' (Davies, 1988: 107). This goal is ultimately achieved through the concept of *tawhid* (unity).

Islamic praxis in society may therefore be viewed as a commentary on non-Islamic communities, of which the construction of gender roles forms part. As theological articulation it is a confirmation of the Islamic message and a critique of secularising forces in society. However, the construction of gender roles has differed over the ages in Islamic history, the development of which sheds light on hermeneutic principles that are applied today:

> "By following Sunni Islamic exegesis through the Middle Ages to the modern and contemporary periods... the importance of the female symbol in the Islamic formulation of self-identity [is] a matter vastly different in the classical period from what it became in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (Stowasser, 1994: 9).

Reflection on the development of the social arrangement of gender lays bare the hermeneutic intention, though the intention is always part and parcel of the historical context.

During their respective formative periods, Christians and Muslims were confronted with multiculturalism, just like we are today, albeit it of a different character. However, Elaine Pagels (*In* Kvam, 1999: 9) cautions that "we must always remember that 'symbolism is not sociology'. By this she meant that Biblical interpretations do not have necessary social applications .. The dialectic between the social construction of religion and of society is a complicated process". Even so, it is the premise of this study that it is the task of the interpreter to set norms for differentiating between believer and non-believer.

This happens on a level that non-participants can comprehend, so that it communicates meaning.

5.5 Development of gender arrangements in tradition

Despite the entirely equal status granted to women in terms of their Creation and status, Muslims believe, together with Jews and Christians, that 'Adam was God's primary creation and that Eve was made from Adams rib' (Hassan, 2000: 3). In all three monotheistic traditions this process is reflected in three 'key theological assumptions' (Hassan, 2000: 3) about men and women drawn from the Creation and Fall narratives:

1. God's primary creation is man, not woman, since woman is believed to have been created from man's rib, hence is derivative and secondary ontologically;
2. woman, not man, was the primary agent of what is generally called 'The Fall,' or man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, hence 'all daughters of Eve' are to be regarded with hatred, suspicion, and contempt; and
3. that woman was created not only *from* man but also *for* man, which makes her existence merely instrumental and not fundamental.

The origin of human gender relations in the Qur'an do not shed any light on the derivation of an unequal status of gender. Woman's faith is regarded as equal and rewarded as such. Who constructed the hierarchical arrangement then, and how was it constructed to be accepted by all, women and men, within the faith community?

5.5.1 The Eve of tradition

The extra-Qur'anic writings, reflecting non-Qur'anic assumptions of gender, may be grouped into three interpretative genres: formal exegetical commentary, folklore, and mystical contemplation (Kvam, 1999: 158). These readings present interpretations of Eve that 'probe, amplify, and also obscure many of the Qur'an's distinctive renderings of Eve' (Kvam, 1999: 158). For instance, Al-Kisa'i in the 11th century AD, contains traditions from the legends of popular culture rather than from schooled literature (Kvam, 1999: 159). Ibn 'Abbas contends that Adam was initially created with an extra *crooked* rib and that Eve was formed from this rib during Adam's sleep (Naudé, 1967: 193-194). Most of the traditions brought together by Tabari blame the woman for the Fall 'as it was the majority opinion of theological experts by Tabari's time that it was only

through the woman's weakness and guile that Satan could bring about Adam's downfall' (Stowasser, 1994: 29). These traditions report Adam as being under either the influence of wine given to him by Eve (Hawwa), or sexual desire for her, or being commanded by her (Stowasser, 1994: 29).

Furthermore according to these traditions God's curse on the man is in terms of his labour and relation to the earth, while the woman is cursed personally: "Were it not for the calamity that afflicted Hawwa', the women of this world would not menstruate, would be wise, and would bear their children with ease" (I: 529 *in* Stowasser, 1994: 30). Hawwa is also excluded from repentance and ensuing forgiveness in certain views:

> "The woman – in the Qur'an a participant in human error, repentance, and God's challenge to recover human pristine innate nature *(fitrah)* through struggle for righteousness on earth – had become Satan's tool and was seen as afflicted with the curse of moral, mental, and physical deficiency. Conversely the man, in the Qur'an her partner and spokesman, now alone embodied the human conscience, was aware of his error, and repented; free of God's curse, he was forgiven" (Stowasser, 1994: 30).

Neither the portrayal of the creation of Eve as secondary to Adam nor the woman's responsibility for 'the Fall' has any basis in the Qur'an. However, the scripturalist referent is interpreted in a widely divergent manner in classical Muslim interpretation. Is it perhaps a product of Bible-related sources? What was the socio-historic concept of women in the understanding of the men who formed the knowledge of Islam?

5.5.2 Interpretation and the development of tradition

The sociological impact of religion is that it is mandated to reflect the ideals for life, as set forth in its revelation. Gender relations, like any other doctrinal aspect, also needs to reflect to the believers, as well as the non-believers, how the faith community understands their place in the universe. A comparison of processes in Christian and Islamic history point out the influences on the interpretive enterprise of fledgling religious societies.

The socio-historic context of the developing Christian community is based within the Jewish and Greco-Roman world of the early Christian era. Paul exemplifies the multi-

cultural feature of the contemporary time as a 'man of two worlds' (Barclay, 1958: 9). Paul identifies wholly with both the Jewish community (Rom. 11: 1) as well as Greek society, under control of the Romans (Acts 25: 9-12). In this way the Bible reflects on the sociological phenomenon of gender relations through the (time-bound) author. Wayne Meeks (*In* Kvam, 1999: 109) indicates that 'in the Pauline school women could enjoy a functional equality in leadership roles that would have been unusual in Greco-Roman society as a whole and quite astonishing in comparison with contemporary Judaism'. However, the understanding of conversion as being a 'new creation in Christ soon became a metaphor for the unity of the community of believers and less as a term for the individual's experience of redemption' (Kvam, 1999: 109).

Krüger (2002: 182) expounds the root causes of the development of prejudice against women in the early Christian community in his article. He points to the integration of Greek and Roman societal norms, which were overall androcentric patriarchalism. Greco-Roman influence resulted in an attempt to 'create a synthesis between Christianity itself, patriarchal Roman Law and culture, and, lastly, ancient Greek philosophical thought as represented by Plato and Aristotle'. These views incorporated Plato and Aristotle's misogynistic views of women, which was transferred onto Roman Catholicism:

> "Catholicism reads a premiss for the derogation of woman into the Biblical description of the Fall that is related to the premiss upon which Plato based his own derogation of woman: her sexuality and the sexual desire which she arouses in man" (Krüger, 2002: 183).

Protestantism rejected many other doctrines of Roman Catholicism, but the corruptible nature of woman was carried over unchanged:

> "Luther perpetuated the negative view of the sexual relationship as held by Plato and his Catholic followers: Luther regards marriage as pertaining to the 'external', the non-spiritual, and one of 'damnable concupiscence" (Krüger, 2002: 197).

Kvam (1999: 108) points out that there were orthodox and alternative views on gender relations, and the basis of their interpretation of women's status:

> "Though the egalitarian model had its advocates, particularly in the earliest Christian communities, for the most part the New Testament authors and Fathers found in the creation account a hierarchical universe that subordinated women to men."

The early Islamic period falls into the medieval period of Christian and Jewish interpretative history (600-1500 CE). Islam was the inheritor of the ages with its conquests into Europe and Spain. Phillip Hitti (1970: 580) saw scholastic endeavour as the crowning glory of the Iberian encounter:

> "Here they formed the last and strongest link in the chain which transmitted Greek philosophy, as transmuted by them and their Eastern co-religionists, to the Latin West, adding their own contribution, especially in reconciling faith and reason, religion and science...It is to the eternal glory of medieval Moslem thinkers of Baghdad and Andalusia that they reconciled these two currents of thought and passed them on harmonised into Europe."

Medieval interpretation of women's origin and nature 'signifies both a social base of gender inequality and also the existence of structures (such as a clerical institution with legislative or juridical powers) bent on its preservation' (Stowasser, 1994: 28). Although Stowasser is talking about the Islamic milieu, the condition of Christianity in Europe is not much different. The medieval period in Christianity was further characterised by the struggle for supremacy between the Eastern (Byzantine) and Western (Roman) Church. This indicates the power struggles impacting on ordinary believer's lives and the ideologies that informed them. Whatever the origin of prejudice, the story of Eve points to the symbolic value of the creation narrative for individual identity and human relations:

> "Extraneous detail transmitted in *Hadith* form and frequently originating in the Bible and Bible-related sources not only fleshes out the story but drastically changes it, especially with regard to the woman's role. In that the first woman stands for her sex, she is a religious symbol that serves as model 'of' as well as 'for' the value structure of the community of its formulation" [38] (Stowasser, 1994: 28).

5.5.3 From Genesis to Paul to the clerics

Christian hermeneuts read the Genesis narratives through the lens of the New Testament, the lens being a unified Biblical world (Kvam, 1999: 4). Typology is integral to the construction of New Testament characters. Adam becomes a type in that he brought death onto all of humanity through his sin (Rom. 5:14), whereas Christ brings salvation to all through his redemptive work (1 Cor. 15:22). In the same way the female characters have also been type-cast. The role that New Testament descriptions of Eve has played on the development of gender relations has been fundamental, as for instance 1 Tim 2:11-14:

> "Women should learn in silence and all humility. I do not allow them to teach or to have authority over men; they must keep quiet. For Adam was created first, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and broke God's law." [39]

Mieke Bal (1985: 318) argues that the gender biased hermeneutic is a circular chronology of evolutionary patriarchy. She expounds through a linear, literary reading of the Biblical narratives how 'the Fall' is retrospectively projected onto the Creation narrative. It evolved into a character-image of Eve, to end up in Paul's statement in 1 Tim. 2: 11-14. Bal (1985: 318) views the subservient status of women as being a myth that emerged by the collocation of 'the emergence of the female body in the narrative

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[38] Stowasser (1994: 28) points out that Islamic modernists 'have denied the authenticity and doctrinal validity of what they viewed as medieval extraneous interpretive 'lore', while re-emphasizing the Qur'anic notion of the female's full personhood and moral reponsibility'.

[39] Vergeer (2002: 684) argues that Paul reflects Jewish-Hellenistic thinking concerning women of the contemporary Ephesian society. The Creation and Fall motive as applied in 1 Tim. 2: 13-15 does not indicate the recreated position of women in Christ, but rather describes the milieu wherein women have to function as bearers of the Gospel (Vergeer, 2002: 685). It is thus not strictly 'Paul's statement' but Paul's reflection on society of the day. I mean the key to understanding the function of women in this verse is indicated by the words 'I [Paul] do not allow them...'

signs and the assumption of the moral corruption of the character endowed with that body'. Paul's interpretation of the role of women in the Biblical section is informative of the evolution of misogynistic views in patriarchal societies, which Bal (1985: 319) terms the retrospective fallacy:

> "He [Paul] endowed the named character [Hawwa/Eve] with those features the combination allowed him to draw from the previous story which nourished that contempt for women, namely, the 'secondary' creation of her body and the 'first' disobedience in her action. He fixed them together as if they belonged to the same being, unproblematically. In the case of a development story, however, starting at the end means losing sight of the development. In the linear reading, the self-evidence of those features is questioned by the very concept of development" (Bal, 1985: 337).

Classical Muslim interpretation (5.5.1 above) reflects the same interpretative process, from Muhammad's life to *tafsir* (exegesis), as that from Genesis (bypassing Song of Songs) to Timothy. As in the Christian tradition, variants in Islamic understanding of this issue is important in that it shows that there are alternative ways of interpreting the text. Sufism, the mystical dimension of Islam, presents one such an example in its break with orthodox conventions about women (Kvam, 1999: 160)[40]. Leila Ahmed (1992: 100-101) points to some of the implications of this variant reading:

> "...there were ways of reading the Islamic moment and text that differed from those of the dominant culture and that such readings had important implications for the conceptualisation of women and the social arrangements concerning gender."

Ibn al-Arabi (1165-1240), one of the great Sufi mystics, describes the relationship between man and woman as a result of Creation as one of mutual longing and equitable treatment: "Then God drew forth from him a being in his own image, called woman, and because she appears in his own image, the man feels a deep longing for

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[40] Although women were afforded a different status in Sufism, it was still not always appreciated by their male counterparts, and the female Sufis were often seen as a distraction to males in their 'mutual search for gnosis' (Bodman, 1998: 12). The development of convents, especially in the Indian sub-continent, allowed women to play a greater role in pursuing the mystic path (Bodman, 1998: 12).

her, as something yearns for itself, while she feels longing for him as one longs for that place to which one belongs" (*In* Kvam, 1999: 200).

Amina Wadud-Muhsin (1992: 2) argues that traditional Muslim interpretation (*tafasir*) had different objectives in mind but had the same approach, namely an atomistic methodology: "They begin with the first verse of the first chapter and proceed to the second verse of the first chapter – one verse at a time – until the end of the Book. Little or no effort is made to recognise themes and to discuss the relationship of the Qur'an to itself, thematically." Whatever the method, general medieval interpretation has constructed a mythic heteronomous character-image of female nature. It is a construction of the medieval mind as reflected in the opinions of knowledge-formers in Christianity and Islam.

5.5.4 The *hadith* paradox

Islamic construction of female identity was enabled by the expositions in *hadith* material, where the extra-Qur'anic data has been incorporated. The process contains an ironical twist, which is being explored:

> "On the one hand, these narrations set forth many hierarchical assumptions and prescriptions for gender relations, as seen in the statements attributed to the Companions...On the other hand, the chain of transmission for a number of these reports concludes with the name of a woman" (Kvam: 1999: 161).

One example of the importance of female narrators is that of A'isha, Muhammad's favoured wife, and daughter of the Prophet's companion, Abu Bakr: "A'isha was at the centre of the decisions and actions that formed the original community. As the original narrator of a vast number of hadiths, she was given the epithet 'Mother of the Islamic community *(umm al-ummah)*" (Walker, 1999: 55).

The irony of women's role in transmission of *hadith* affects the *raison de etre* of female Islamic participation. The literary historical assumption of *hadith* is that it 'does not date from the time of the Prophet but from after the death of the last of the Companions of the Prophet *(al-sahaba)*. In its structure and content, it reflects the needs of particular interest groups in the emerging Islamic community (Elias, 1997: 216). It presents an important understanding of the acceptance of women in the early Islamic community:

> "As Ahmed points out: 'The very fact of women's contribution to this important literature indicates that at least the first generation of Muslims and their immediate descendants had no difficulty in accepting women as authorities" (Kvam, 1999: 161).

Some of these same hadiths were employed in the patriarchal project of the later Muslim hermeneuts to disqualify women's authority on religious matters.

5.6 Summary

The above exposition of the narratives of origin and their interpretative history leads to a conclusion that the medievally constructed assumption of the moral corruption of the female body is a mythic, and not revelatory, matrix in both Islam and Christianity. Bal's (1985) analysis of Gen. 1-3 indicates that the basis of this myth lies in the rhetoric of domination and rationalisation, not in the Created female character. Furthermore, the analysis of Islamic sources establishes an inconsistency between Qur'an and traditional explication of both the text and women's status in the early Islamic community.

The assumption of the inferiority of woman has led to another hermeneutic similarity between the religious traditions of Islam and Christianity, which confirms women's religious identity as a mythic ideal-type. Women are part of the same faith communities that deem them ineligible for an equal standing with males. How is the fallen counterpart of the male believer then included into the salvific enterprise of religion? A construction of action is supplied by both traditions drawing from the same existential base, whereby women may be redeemed to inclusion in the Faith.

The following chapter brings the discussion of the construction of female identity to conclusion by looking at the model of ideal women in Islam. The redemptive model confirms the assumption of the corruption of the first woman previously explicated (5.3.2 above). This model strengthens the beforegoing analysis of a mythically constructed identity for women.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Women's mythic identity

6.1 Introduction

This study has endeavoured to explain how conceptualisation of person is applied to female members of Islamic traditions. It showed how conceptualisation of persons, specifically women, is a product not only of religious import, but sociological impetus as well. During the course of this explanation the difficulties of a cross-religious investigation were highlighted and the assumptions of generalising about others were defined as stereotyping. Although it is incumbent to remember that religions cannot be compared as merely various types of the same 'thing', evaluation of others needs to consider the similar processes at work in human existence. The study used similarities of experience, such as globalisation and traditional gender arrangements, to create a platform for evaluation. The Islamic concepts of person *fitrah*, *khilafah*, and *din* provided the epistemological base of the understanding of personhood in Islam. The investigation further established the incoherence of current status conventions in Islam from Scriptural indication, as well as pointing to religious application of notions of gender.

This chapter establishes the construction of Islamic female identity to comply with the prescriptive ideals of tradition to further comprehend women's conceptualised identity in Islamic traditions. Just as typology is the key to understanding the mythic identity of corrupt Eve, so typology provides the model for restoration: "Jesus was the second Adam who righted the sins of the first man. Who, then, might serve as the 'second Eve,' to right the sins of Adam's mate?" (Kvam, 1999: 4). Christians turned to Mary, Mother of God, Muslims sacralised the honour of the mother drawing on the example of the 'Mothers of the Believers' of the first Islamic communities (Stowasser, 1994: 115).

This chapter concludes by explicating how the assumptions of perfect motherhood are employed to symbolically portray religious compliance. An analysis of the role of symbolism in religion is given first, establishing the principles for defining a signatory as a symbol. Thereafter women's understanding of the role of motherhood, as it features

during the birthing process, is presented. Herein lies a possibility for understanding and reappropriation, not only of the symbolic function of women in religion, but the spiritual content of human, manly and womanly, existence.

6.2 Religion as a symbol-system

The explanation of human origins and their relationship to the rest of Creation found in the Scriptural signs have been seen to be of integral importance to religious identity. The relating of woman's current status and role to the Scriptural referents points to the epistemic role of Scripture in human life (5.2 above): "The events and the people they describe, the things that happened in the mythical past, serve believers as a sort of allegorical code for living in the present" (Hammond, 1971: 258). These beliefs have to be reflected in the set of actions or ritual observances of the faithling, underpinning the significance of belief to their existence. Symbols are the main form wherein this significance can be related to others.

6.2.1 Woman as Symbol

Islamic traditions have developed an ideal-type of women along with the ideal-type of society that they expound in their respective ideologies. In the Christian tradition we find Mary, the Virgin Mother, as the anti-Eve correction of femininity[41]:

> "Jesus calls his mother 'Woman,' which early Christian tradition saw as an allusion likening her to the first woman, Eve. In God's plan, Mary, by her faith, reversed the failure of Eve and so became the new 'mother of all the living.' Through the centuries the stories of Cana and Calvary have led Christians to seek Mary's intercession with her Son and to rely on her as a mother with compassion for those in need" (Hoagland, 1988: par. 6).

In Islam motherhood is posited as the highest ambition of the Muslima through a singular attribute of domestication as the sole sphere of women. This can be witnessed on various apologetic Internet sites explaining women's status in Islam (*see also* Moghadan, 1988; Al-Faruqi, 2001; Shehadeh, 2000).

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[41] See Kristeva, J. 1986. Stabat Mater. (*In* Suleiman, S.R. 1986. The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives. p. 99-118.)

Christopher Witcombe (2003: 2) provides the rationale for women as symbol when he disagrees that fertility goddesses of ancient times necessarily belonged to the exclusive female sphere: "These images are regarded not so much as representations of women *per se* but as allegorical figures or personifications of the idea or concept of fertility. The woman herself is unimportant; it is what she represents that is significant." This assumption is indicative of the construction of female religious identity even today - the woman is signifier of the identity of the community.

As an example of this construction of identity we may consider female parenting. Any young mother, supposedly in any society, knows the fear of being branded a 'bad mother'. This epithet implies that there is a standard of 'good mother' and 'bad mother'. However, the label is arbitrary and no mother has ever received the instruction manual to qualify as a 'good mother'. It is an elusive quality of identity assigned and defined by a complex construct of tradition and stereotypical assumptions of woman as the carrier of morality.

6.2.2 The Mother complex

With mothering as with religious identity, women carry the responsibility of signifying the family and/or community. Nancy Huston (1995: 710) expounds the connection between the function of mothering or potential mothering and the moral construct women wittingly or unwittingly find themselves in:

> ".. they over millennia have been construed as, and felt themselves to be, the guardians of the morality of the species. Not that they make the laws, of course...their morality is supposed (and assumed) to be innate, natural and everyday, like their maternal instinct and indeed indissociable from it. Mothers are supposed (and assumed) to be, if not gentle, at least protective, nurturing of life. Moreover, they are expected to transmit clear ideas about right and wrong to the children whose lives they nurture."

The female characteristics that eco-feminists have expounded as an epistemology of a non-dualistic worldview once again enforced an ideal-type of women as being nurturing and caring: "The Goddess's Image contains within Her an assumption (PATTERN) of wholeness, of the oneness of mind-body and earth, of a nondualistic, co-operative, caring way of being in the world" (Wilshire, 1990: 105). Although the characterisation of

Nurturer is not invalid for women, it is certainly one-dimensional. Even if it is in an effort to restore women's worth to the human condition, it treats woman as an object once again:

> "Maternity – the entire complex of pregnancy, childbirth, and child care – has been one of the most vexing and provocative challenges for feminist thought and practice. In much of the feminist literature that criticises constructions of the maternal, there is an often well-founded undercurrent of suspicion regarding the 'ideology of sacred maternity' – an ideology that sacralises motherhood at the expense of women's subjectivity" (Klasses, 2001: par. 2).

Clearly motherhood has been thrown to-and-fro through the ages by various ideological processes: denatured by gynaecology, reviled by first stage feminists, sacralised by religion and tradition. Viewing women as mothers, or potential mothers, places women into an objective sphere which enables typecasting. The standard is 'Mother', whereby certain characteristics are favourable or unacceptable, depending on one's criteria for 'good mothers'[42]. One effect is that a sound education in 'scientific' matters is deemed not essential for girls, while good moral values – proper dress, humility, servility – are of cardinal importance. The one-dimensional view of Mother creates an identity that is superimposed onto the individual existence and ambitions of women.

The tension caused by an imposed identity is that it disregards the uniqueness of the self, which is multi-dimensional. It typecasts a person into a stereotypical, albeit ideal, frame causing an incoherence in the unique existent life.

6.3 Myth Informing Identity

I take issue with Cixous' (1996: 6) statement that the myth 'only dies with the people who express it and whose contradictions it serves to resolve'. It is at the least a misjudgement of myth and at worst a gross underestimate of the power of myth. Myth is part of the personal mental construct of Misoneism: holding on to yesterday as a known in the face of the ever-changing unknown. It is the central belief that what went before

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[42] Perhaps this view provides a key to understanding the generally strained relations between mothers and their sons' wives.

must have been better than what is now. The myth therefore does not die with the people who express it, but rather re-originates in the mind as a constant relating of the self to life experience: "The past is not waiting for us back there to recoup our identities against. It is always retold, rediscovered, reinvented. It has to be narrativised. We go to our own pasts through history, through memory, through desire, not as a literal fact" (Hall, 2000(b): 58).

The idealisation of childhood, and with it motherhood, is an evolutionary perfect state that wants to be re-achieved. The problem with being removed in time and space tends to make us get an 'overall' view, as time and retrospection have allowed us to iron out some of the inconsistencies and contradictions:

> "...when I was a child, it was much more integrated.' And so, eventually, some of these great collectivities are rather like those people who have an activity of historical nostalgia going on in their retrospective reconstructions. We always reconstructed them more essentially, more homogeneously, more unified, less contradictory than they ever were..." (Hall, 2000(b): 46).

6.4 Myth creating symbol in the global village

In a pluralistic world, technologically shorn of its rituals and symbolism, postmodern humankind is seeking to re-establish ritual and rite to reflect personal identity. Stuart Hall (2000(b): 43) argues that our search for identity is important to our own self-conceptions, for which the fixed conceptual cognition is simply to put us at ease:

> "Increasingly, I think one of the main functions of concepts is that they give us a good night's rest. Because what they tell us is that there is a kind of stable, only very slowly-changing ground inside the hectic upsets, discontinuities and ruptures of history. Around us history is constantly breaking in unpredictable ways but we, somehow, go on being the same."

Women and men unite in their search for the most apt symbol. The notable role of men in the struggle for identity consists of political and military conflict expressed in various ways from fraternal gangs in Cape Town, to flying aeroplanes into the World Trade Centre, and the suicide-bomber in Palestine. How shall women show their religious commitment, their valour in the rejection of secularism? The noblest effort to equal the

suffering of men in war is the woman in childbirth. Nancy Huston (1985: 131) explicates the rationale of rites of passage for girls and boys in most societies as founded on the epistemology of war and childbirth (boys preparing to become men through acts of war and girls preparing for marriage):

> "The analogy between war and childbirth hinges on what might be called reciprocal metaphorisation. It is impossible to determine whether men decided to confer social prestige upon labor pains so that women might partake, at least to some extent, in the glory of battle – or whether, conversely, they strove to invent for themselves a suffering as dignified, as meritorious and as spectacular in its results as that of childbirth. Although childbirth indubitably has biological precedence over war, neither phenomenon can be said to have symbolic precedence, and therefore only the *interaction* between the two can be the object of analysis.

The valorisation of childbirth is not necessarily an imposed construction, but one that women have appropriated for themselves as well. Militant feminism uses this construct to exclude men in their ideology, which has also become physically possible with scientific methods of reproduction.

6.5 The ideal woman in the unjust society

The collision between modernisation and religious traditions has impacted on women's lives, in some cases to the point of affecting their health: "The contradictions in roles and expectations in many cases appear to be taking a toll on women's lives, sometimes leading to psychological dysfunction at all levels of society" (Haddad, 1998: 10). However, the disparity between women's acceptance as full members of their faiths from the Scriptural signs and the functional status afforded them in the religious traditions exposes, not the Scriptures as bases of discrimination, but rather the hermeneutic used to extrapolate the relationship between members of the religion. This hermeneutic posits woman as an object of the faith; incapable of formulating the precepts of revelation, but good enough to teach it to the children.

The singular hermeneutic reflected by the gender arrangements of Islamic traditions is objectivism (3.1 above). Objectivism has its base in the Cartesian dualisms of object and subject, mind and body, rational and irrational, etc. Objectivism, in the global post-

modern, is likewise at the base of religious fundamentalism. The fundamentalist reduces experiences of difference to the object 'other', without regard to the interconnectivity of human action, especially in the political domain.[43] Therefore the subjective contribution to a situation is not acknowledged, and the defining of the other is open to own interpretation. Furthermore, the differentiated and categorised other is *necessary* to the fundamentalist project: "An outstanding characteristic of fundamentalism is that it cannot function without an intense and hateful confrontation with a self-defined enemy – hence its militant onslaught" (Vorster, 2002: 121).

This study explored women's status in Islamic traditions as symbolic of the Islamic order through discussing gender arrangements as a socio-religious phenomenon. A phenomenological examination describing the structures of experience as they present themselves to consciousness without recourse to theory, deduction, or assumptions from other disciplines, such as the natural sciences, presents a balance between Materialism and Spiritualism. It incorporates a holistic view of humans as spiritual and material embodiment.

The essence of existential phenomenology is that people mean something with their actions and behaviour and in so doing convey meaning to other people. Seeking the meaning of existence of the individual person occurs in interaction with his and her fellow-human in the network of worldly transactions (Rossouw, 1987: 99). Likewise human inventions, habits and patterns of interaction have a life-orientating relevance to the quality of reality (Rossouw, 1987: 107). Phenomenological thought shifts the focus of a descriptive investigation from the exterior causal relevance of facts in the so-called objective world, to the routine ways in which people interpret and re-interpret their

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[43] I add a qualification to objectivism, which I term confessional objectivism. It is found in the practice of religious persons who acknowledge their 'bias' by presenting knowledge confessionally, that is, they usually initiate their discourse with 'I believe in (for Christians) the Bible as the Word of God, and (for Muslims) *'bismillahi rahman rahim'* (In the name of God the Beneficent, Most Gracious). The rhetorical effect is that it functions at an ideological level, which, not least, provides the authorisation of the discourse that follows the appellage (*see* Scripture as base of knowledge production 5.2, point 7). The effect of this rhetoric device is threefold: Firstly, it enframes the discourse presented in a format that inhibits its critical reviewing. Secondly, it provides the receiver with a ready-made set of identifications, which call upon the adherent's religious training. Thirdly, it provides the justification to disqualify knowledge that is not presented in this frame.

existence subjectively (Rossouw, 1987: 108). Phenomenology has at heart to acknowledge the uniqueness of every life as a multi-dimensional whole, instead of the phenomenon as an objectified, fragmented issue.

6.6 Unique lives

Individualism is entrenched in humanistic discourse, spearheaded by the United Nations Charter for Human Rights with the terminology 'each person has the right to'. However, writers from the 'developing' or 'Third World' countries point to western assumptions in this terminology and are in fact suspicious of such apparently inclusive, and or neutral, words. Nawal El-Saadawi (1997: 185) describes the appropriation of modern political appellages used by oppressive institutions: "[In Egypt during] the sixties and seventies when dictatorship and the police state hid behind a screen of words such as 'democracy', 'welfare', and 'peace'.... The problem with 'individualism' is that it is seen to remove the necessary relational, and therefore gendered, aspect of people's lived experiences.

Adriana Cavarero (2000: ix) finds the relational aspect of life integral to *all* people's search for meaning. She supplies a model for the understanding of human interaction, which she terms 'the interaction of unique existents'. It is an assumption of the uniqueness of each life that is not represented in the term 'individual' 'championed by modern political doctrines' (Cavarero, 2000: ix). Cavarero (2000: 88) is critical of the philosophies of the Individual, or 'Man', as put forward by Aristotle and Hobbes, dissolving the nature of the single into 'the political principle of equality'. Instead she proposes an acceptance of the relational aspect of human life and the epistemic value thereof for human existence: "The fact is that human beings live together. Whether natural or artificial, their community is involved with a problem of acting and of living together that cannot refrain from taking the other into consideration".

All human identities, Muslim, Christian, woman or man, are played out in a unique existence for which a relationship with others is a pre-condition. Identities are a narration of the 'self' (communicating meaning) to the necessary others encountered in mutual existence: "...this desire [to be narrated] leads to a constitutive exposition of the self to the others, for we can only come to know our life-story by being exposed to others. And this 'exposition'...is above all *political*" (Cavarero, 2000: xvii). Cavarero's

view of identity is the 'narratable self' (2000: ix), proposing a new altruistic ethic (2000: 92) 'defined'[44] as follows:

> "What we have called an altruistic ethics of relation does not support empathy, identification, or confusions. Rather this ethic desires a *you* that is truly an other, in her uniqueness and distinction. No matter how much you are similar and consonant, says this ethic, your story is never my story. No matter how much the larger traits of our life-stories are similar, I still do not recognize myself *in* you and, even less, in the collective *we*. I do not dissolve both into a common identity, nor do I digest your tale in order to construct the meaning of mine. I recognize on the contrary, that your uniqueness is exposed to my gaze and consists in an unrepeatable story whose tale you desire. This recognition, therefore, has no form that could be defined dialectically; that is, it does not *overcome* or *save* finitude through the circular movements of a higher synthesis. The necessary other is indeed here a finitude that remains irremediably an other in all the fragile and unjudgeable insubstitutability of her existing. Put simply, the necessary other corresponds first of all with *you* whose language is spoken by the shared narrative scene."

The dignity of the 'other' and the respect that is afforded to the person comes from the realisation that he and she cross our path in the Greater Design of life: "To recognise the other as a unique treasure from Allah is perhaps the finest gift that we can offer another person" (Esack, 1999: 68).

This is the ethic proposed by this inter-religious study for the evaluation and consideration of co-faithlings and those subscribing to different faiths. It is an attempt to hear and see the 'other' in an effort to raise the consciousness of one's own human experience and how we relate to the transcendent aspect of our lives.

> "In recognising the otherness that pervades my 'self', I step outside of the ego's tendency to totalize the other and into an ontological horizon from which I can understand, feel with and for, and relate to, the other." (Carey, 2000: 40).

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[44] The point of this explanantion by Cavarero is exactly that 'Man's search for meaning' cannot be stereotyped by a definition.

From the understanding of the unique existent's desire to be narrated, we conclude that all people – women and men – seek to be understood in their fullness and resist a one-dimensional description of themselves; this is the importance of Heidegger's attempt of Being-a-whole (1962: 279).

6.7 The body as a whole

Women's yearning to be released from objectivism may be seen in the increasing movement to home-birthing. It is an effort of the woman to reclaim control over her needs during birthing, from the mechanical control processes of the biomedical fraternity. The spiritual content of the birthing process is undeniable, as there is a 'truth' rooted in the birthing body, which cannot be escaped (Klasses, 2001: par.5). It must be clearly understood that the birthing process is not necessarily viewed by all women as a religious experience, or a confirmation of her womanhood. It is a complete complex constructed from natural and cultural impulses, but its value lies in the subjective experience of each unique existent, and then, for our purposes, the religious dialectic of producing life.

The key to understanding is nestled, ironically, in Eve's hand, who relates her birthing experience of Cain – after the 'curse' of her reproductive activities – as an experience of God: "I have produced (*qaniti*) a man with the help of the Lord (Yahweh)" (Gen. 4: 1)[45]. This is a Biblical indication that women can experience spiritual clarification in their bodies, through the creative act (Eve is the only human who can *qanah* 'create'; an activity which is the sole terrain of God). The sense of wholeness between body and spirit attained in the moment of presenting new life provides an example of embodiment that transcends the Platonic dualism of body vs. soul. Extending Eve's character as a woman standing in a relationship with God shows how selective the objective hermeneutic is – Gen. 4:1 has been there all the time alongside Gen. 3:16.

In case this unity between body and spirit seems like an issue irrelevant to, or unattainable by males due to the female imagery, Seamus Carey (2000: 33) provides another example outside Western philosophical tradition found in Taoism and

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[45] The imagery in this text is immensely rich, a further element being Yahweh as midwife.

Buddhism. This image illustrates the appropriation of bodily wholeness as a male component: "...the guiding assumption in these ancient traditions is that the world and all of its constituents consist of matter *and* spirit, immanence *and* transcendence, mind *and* body."

This notion is exemplified in the martial artist's cultivation of athletic performance in contrast to modern athletes' focus on the body as a 'machine-like thing': "In contrast, the goal for the martial artist is the cultivation of the whole person culminating in *samadhi* or 'no-mind', which involves a deep awareness and integration of the relationship between *Qi*-energy and the emotional-instinctual activities of the body" (Carey, 2000: 37). Of course this study does not propose the cultivation of Eastern techniques to attain full humanity, it is meant as a phenomenological example of male wholeness, which might be explored – phenomenologically.

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