



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD

**An Islamic Feminist Reflection of
Pedagogy and Gender Praxis in
South African *Madāris*:**

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Minor Thesis

Submitted in part fulfillment of the degree

Masters in Social Science

Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Humanities

University of Cape Town

September 2013

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Acknowledgements:

In submitting this thesis I would like to thank the following people and acknowledge their contributions to and assistance with my research study:

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Associate Professor Sa'diyya Shaikh, whose kind grace and sublime mind has been an inspiring source of support and encouragement throughout this research process. I am deeply indebted to her for the shared enthusiasm, expert advice and spirit of mutual respect that has contoured our student-supervisor relationship. I am truly grateful to have had the honour and privilege to learn with and from not only a brilliant scholar but an exceptional human-spirit.

Secondly, many thanks to the lecturers and administrative staff in the Department of Religious Studies for organizing and facilitating various research workshops and reading groups. These have been particularly useful in helping to give shape and direction to my research interests. I would like to especially thank Professor Abdulkader Tayob for his guidance in this regard. I also acknowledge and thank the NRF for providing much appreciated funds towards this research.

Thanks to Dr. Zahraa McDonald for sharing many of her valuable insights on this research topic with me through conversations and numerous emails, also for pointing me towards many useful resources and information. Also many thanks to Dr. Fatima Seedat for reading and commenting on the initial draft of this thesis, her feedback was very helpful and much appreciated.

Finally, it is with much gratitude that I acknowledge the mostly invisible yet most vital contribution to this research process, the love, support, inspiration and motivation of my husband Yusuf Patel and my two sons Muhammad and Yaseen. They have not only graciously welcomed this research project as a co-member of our family and into our home but have also generously shared mental space, energy and precious family time towards its progress and completion.

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Abstract:

This thesis explores gender discourses in elementary Islamic learning institutions in South Africa. Informed by a feminist imperative that recognizes education to be both a site for gender struggle and also a tool for change-making, this thesis adopts a feminist pedagogical approach to examine some of the ways that young Muslim girls in South Africa learn about being gendered. Drawing on theoretical insights from feminist post-structuralism, I analyze the contents of a popular learning text that has been developed for young Muslim girls in contemporary South African Deoband madāris (elementary religious schools). My analysis focuses on the intertextual ways that power-relations and gendered positions are constructed within this widely used text. Using an Islamic feminist perspective, this thesis explores how the gendered worlds of young Muslim girls are pedagogically shaped in and through some of the curriculum structures of madāris in contemporary South Africa.

List of Abbreviations:

FPDA	Feminist Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis
KZN	KwaZulu Natal
LMA	Lenasia Muslim Association
MYM	Muslim Youth Movement
TB	<i>Tuḥfatul Banāt</i>
TMS	<i>Tasheel Maktab</i> Syllabus

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Introduction:

Providing elementary religious education to young Muslim children is considered to be one of the most enduring features of the Islamic tradition (Tibawi, 1962:226; Waghid: 1997). The emphasis placed on guiding young Muslim children towards god-consciousness and developing their moral and ethical selves as well as the teaching-learning about Islamic scriptures, practices and rituals during the formative years of a child's life are features commonly found in most Muslim societies and communities throughout history. Although childhood teaching-learning in Muslim societies have contextual variations that reflect specific cultural, political and economic influences; the abiding prevalence of Islamic learning institutions such as the *maktab* pl. *kuttāb* or *madrassah* pl. *madāris*¹ found in most Muslim societies, suggests a shared history of providing elementary Islamic education to contemporary Muslim children (Halstead: 2004; Tibawi:1962;Waghid:1997).

The salience of Islamic childhood education is cogently iterated through various Islamic scriptural teachings emphasizing the importance of education in childrearing and child-nurturing. Three interrelated pedagogical concepts are generally used within education discourses to capture the quintessence of an elementary Islamic education (Halstead, 2004:522). Firstly, the concept *tarbiyyah* meaning nurturing or rearing refers specifically

¹ The term *madrassah* pl. *madāris* usually refers to places of Islamic higher learning and the term *maktab* pl. *kuttāb* refers to places for early and elementary Islamic education. In South Africa however the term *madrassah/madāris* is commonly used to refer to religious schools that many school-going aged Muslim children attend either after normal schooling hours during the late afternoons or during the weekend. It should be noted that colloquially, particularly within the South African Indian Muslim community, the term *madrassah* is more commonly pronounced as *madressa/s*. The term *madrassah* is distinct from and therefore does not refer to what is popularly known as “Islamic” schools in South Africa. The curriculum of *madāris* offer a religion based programme only whilst Islamic schools are independent or partially state subsidized Muslim schools that follow the country's national schooling curriculum and may or may not include a concomitant religious programme. The term *madrassah/madāris* as used in this paper therefore refers specifically to elementary religious education taken during week day afternoons.

to an Islamic teaching and learning methodology of being socialized, typically from early childhood, into a body of inherited knowledge (Waghid, 2011:2). This includes the learning “about” the tenets of the Islamic faith and learning “about” the teachings of its scriptures, i.e.: the Qur’an and Sunnah (Prophetic example). The second pedagogical concept *ta’līm* refers to varying methods of instruction such as rote learning, memorization, diction and inscription. This includes more practical teaching and learning aspects such as reading and writing the Arabic Qur’anic script, the rules and practicalities of ritual worship including learning daily litanies, memorizing parts or all of the Qur’an and certain prophetic sayings and other Islamic dictums. The third concept method that makes up the conceptual triad is *ta’dīb* – which refers to a multifaceted method of teaching, learning, practicing, embodying and guiding children towards internalizing or habituating certain core Islamic values such as virtue, good conduct, morality, piety, and developing an exemplary character.

Although these terms are conceptually broad and fluid, they have been used in interesting and creative (and at times also in very gender-biased) ways within the tradition to help encompass the basic pedagogical aims of an Islamic elementary education. These pedagogical concepts therefore provide the central nexus and framework around which *madrasah* curricula structures and learning texts are developed. In addition to teaching and learning about Islam, *madāris* provide one of the principal socializing institutions for developing, shaping, maintaining and validating young Muslim children’s religious understandings and identities. The role and function of *madāris* within Muslim minority contexts such as South Africa is therefore considered to be particularly salient in terms of understanding how certain Muslim gendered subjectivities are constructed in childhood.

This thesis focuses on gender constructions in Islamic elementary learning institutions in South Africa. Informed by a feminist imperative that recognizes education to be both a site for gender struggle and also a tool for change-making (Briskin & Coulter, 1992:249) this thesis draws on Islamic feminism as well as feminist pedagogy in examining some of the ways that young Muslim girls in South Africa learn about being gendered. I analyze the contents of the *Tuḥfatul Banāt*, a widely used Islamic learning text that has been developed for and is used by many contemporary young Muslim girls in South African *madāris*. In analyzing gender discourses within the framework of elementary Islamic education - this thesis explores how the gendered worlds of young Muslim girls are pedagogically shaped through contemporary *madāris* in South Africa.

i. Research Problem:

Given the historical contexts of colonialism and apartheid within which Islam in South Africa and its related educational institutions developed, the field of elementary Islamic education in contemporary South Africa invariably reflects remnants of this divisive and stratified past. Statistically, Muslims make up less than two percent of the South African population (Vahed 2000:28), as a minority group they are geographically and numerically concentrated into two main groups, Indian Muslims mostly living within the Gauteng, Northern and KwaZulu Natal provinces and Malay Muslims mainly within the Western Cape regions. African and White Muslims are numerically less than these two main groups². Given the deep differences in histories, culture, class and tradition of these

² It should be noted that these types of racial bifurcations and terms such as Malay, Coloured, African or Black that are often used to describe Muslims in South Africa are highly contested, however since these were historical precedents set by an apartheid past, these terms are retained to reflect the realities of racial/ethnic divisions within the South African Muslim community.

various groups of Muslims there is also minimal contact and interaction between them (ibid). This complex segregated legacy amongst South African Muslims is reflected not only regionally along racial and ethnic lines but also in terms of differing ideologies and schools of Islamic thought and forms of gendered praxis.

One of the dominant influences in Islamic elementary education in South Africa, particularly amongst Muslims from the Indian community, is the Deoband educational movement. The Deoband ideology has become a globalized Islamic movement that originally emerged from northern India in the mid nineteenth century³. Generally it has been characterized by an ultra-conservative approach to Islam reflecting pervasive patriarchal attitudes. In South Africa, both historically and presently, many elementary Islamic learning institutions operate under the auspices of the Deoband Islamic educational network. Deoband influenced institutions in South Africa are male dominated spaces where women's presence and voices are often relegated to secondary and less powerful positions than their Muslim male counterparts (Sayed: 2010; Tayob: 1995). Simultaneously and somewhat paradoxically, in these same institutions a number of scholars have illustrated how Muslim females' bodies are often reified as the symbols of the sanctity and purity of Islam (McDonald: 2013; Metcalf: 1990; Winkelmann: 2005). Muslim females are typically represented as holding a precious and lofty status that

³ The Dār al-‘Ulūm of Deoband is a seminary for higher Islamic learning based in North India. It was founded in 1866 by Muhammad Qasim Nanotawi (d.1879) and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (d.1905) at the time of massive anti-colonist uprisings in British India. The Deoband seminary introduced an Islamic educational model that is based on orthodoxy, puritanism and asceticism. As an Islamic reformist movement that sought to preserve the Islamic tradition against western imperialist and British colonist influences the Deoband educational model that is based on a hostel-style seminary with many auxiliary branches in and out of the South Asian regions – has been able to globally expand its influence and export its ideology through creating a wide Deoband ideological network from the thousands of international scholars that graduate from its seminaries annually (Reetz:2005, 2007).

requires separation, seclusion and/or exclusion from public spaces and religious leadership roles. As such they are presented as distinct from and better than non-Muslim females. The curricula structures and the learning content of texts used in Deoband *madāris* often reflect these specific understandings of Islam and gender and as such it provides a complex discursive field for analyzing Islamic childhood pedagogies from a feminist perspective.

Muslim gender activists and Islamic feminist scholars in South Africa, in particular, are noted for their critical engagements with the *'ulamā* class (religious scholars). Deoband scholars form a substantial part of the broader *'ulamā* class in South Africa, who are organized into various bodies that serve as religious authorities and un/official representatives of local Muslim communities. Islamic feminist scholars have challenged the patriarchal interpretations of Islamic texts, teachings and practices of some religious authorities (Jeenah: 2001; Shaikh: 2003, 2007). Dominant understandings of Islamic gendered praxis, they've argued, have been used to justify gender abuses, unfair treatment of wives and daughters and to also delegitimize Muslim women's agency and mobility including their rights to religious leadership roles within the community (ibid).

Islamic feminist scholars in South Africa, in challenging the dominant Deoband structures prevalent in most Indian Muslim communities have however mainly focused their efforts within the *masjid* (communal prayer spaces), in terms of campaigning for gender-equal access to and participation within sacred spaces. More recently feminist scholars have focused on legally challenging Deoband conservatism with regards to having Muslim women's rights to equality within traditional Islamic marriages in South Africa recognized and regulated by the state (Amien: 2010).

Typically, Islamic feminist discourses in South Africa have been concerned about gender issues that relate specifically to Muslim women. Therefore, critical discussions of gender praxis have mainly been articulated about the worldview of Muslim adults. The gendered worlds of young Muslim children in South Africa and the pedagogical structures that help to create and shape this world have received much less academic attention and therefore remains a relatively unexplored research topic.

This thesis responds to the lack of feminist analysis and critique relating to the South African *madrasah* framework and provides an analysis of how children learn about Islam and what it means to be a Muslim and to be a gendered human-being. The central aim of this thesis is to firstly gain a better understanding about how Muslim girls' gendered subjectivities are shaped within the *madrasah* system. Secondly to examine how *madāris* address and respond to some of the more pressing gender challenges facing contemporary young children in South Africa since democracy.

In South Africa, the Ta'limi Board, a division of the Jamiatul 'Ulamā KZN (a network of Deoband scholars and religious leaders based in the KwaZulu Natal province) formulates and regulates the curricula structures, pedagogical methods and learning texts for all of its affiliated *madāris* around the country. The *Tuḥfatul Banāt* is a learning text compiled by the Ta'limi Board specifically for young pre-pubescent Muslim girls between the ages of nine to twelve years old and deals with varied gender issues in Islam. The title of the text literally translated means "a gift or a guide for the daughters of the Muslim community". This text forms an integral part of Jamiatul Ulamā's *madrasah* curriculum, as such it offers some interesting insights into how particularized understandings of Islam are used pedagogically to construct the religious and gendered subjectivities of young Muslim girls

in South Africa. The *Tuḥfatul Banāt* and the pedagogical context within which it is used provide the analytical data for this thesis.

ii. Research Question:

Using feminist analytical tools of intertextuality and discourse analysis as well as other insights drawn from feminist post-structuralist thought, I analyze the pedagogical concepts and gendered themes presented in the *Tuḥfatul Banāt* and ask the following questions: What are the gendered assumptions and claims being made in this text? How are Muslim girls positioned in relation to some of the broader discourses on gender in South Africa? What kinds of power-relations are being produced through these gender discourses within the *madrassah* curricula framework? How are Muslim subjectivities being constructed pedagogically in South African *madāris*? Informed by a feminist pedagogy, an approach which recognizes the contested yet transformative possibilities available in education, my analysis of the *Tuḥfatul Banāt* and the curricula structures of the Deoband educational model is open to ways in which contemporary Islamic pedagogies might simultaneously provide a site for gender struggle as well as offer potentially gender affirming spaces for young Muslim girls in South Africa.

The thesis is presented as follows: I begin by firstly clarifying my particular research positioning and methodological approach and explain how and why it is used in this thesis. In doing so I hope to explicate the rationale for this study and demonstrate some of the ways that this thesis can contribute to the field of Islamic education studies in South Africa and can also help to extend the scope of current feminist scholarship in South Africa. Thereafter I outline the analytical framework around which this thesis is structured and

map out some of the theoretical underpinnings that have informed my analysis of gender discourses in South African *madāris*.

The rest of the thesis is arranged around two main chapters. Chapter one maps out the historical contexts within which Islam and elementary Islamic education in South Africa has developed. Drawing on related research studies that have focused on the Deoband educational model, I discuss some of the current issues related to gender and education in South Africa and look at contemporary *madāris* responses to these issues and challenges, particularly since democracy.

Chapter two provides the analytical component of this thesis. In this chapter I begin by outlining the curricula structures, pedagogical methods and learning content developed by the Jamiatul ‘Ulama (KZN)’s Ta’limi Board to help situate the pedagogical contexts within which the learning text *Tuḥfatul Banat* is used. Thereafter I analyze some of the key pedagogical concepts and gendered themes presented in the *Tuḥfatul Banat*. I focus specifically on the ways that religious gendered subjectivities are constructed pedagogically in the *Tuḥfatul Banāt*. I conclude my thesis with a reflection on some of the ways that the notion of an Islamic feminist pedagogy can be developed further and used as a meaningful strategy for a more egalitarian pedagogical praxis in elementary Islamic education in South Africa.

iii. Methodological Approach:

By focusing on gender discourses in South African elementary Islamic education and by qualifying my “feminist” pedagogical approach as “Islamic”, I am also outlining the parameters around which my thesis is framed. Both approaches are interrelated, my use of

feminist methods are informed by a particular worldview that considers both Islam and feminism to hold reciprocal aims and objectives in terms of thinking about gender. Therefore, feminist pedagogy and how I use the concept in this thesis is not divorced from how I understand Islam and its pedagogical aims⁴.

In positioning my research from both a feminist and an Islamic framework I foreground the view that an Islamic feminist lens can offer valuable insights and constructive possibilities. As an emerging body of interdisciplinary scholarship, Islamic feminists and feminist scholars have been described as “heterogeneous groups of women [who] interact and generate alternative modes of engaging with the Islamic tradition in relation to their lived realities” (Hoel, 2010:2). Despite their multiple articulations, Islamic feminists share a central goal: they are fully committed to uncovering and developing an egalitarian understanding of Islamic teachings and practice.⁵

Feminist engagements within the Islamic tradition have created important pathways for rethinking many Islamic teachings and practices that have unjustly impacted upon the material, intellectual and spiritual lives and experiences of Muslims and Muslim females in particular. This approach includes a critical effort to help redress inequities of patriarchal

⁴ Both Islam and feminism are noted to be highly contested and contestable terms; thus the relationship between the two and how it is used by scholars invariably tends to be varied and shifting. Given the diverse range of understandings of Islam it should be noted that my particular understanding and use of the term “Islam” is but one strand amongst a multiplicity of understandings of Islam. See footnote 7 and 8 of this paper for a discussion of the multiple ways that scholars have understood and have approached the study of Islam. To be clear, my particular understanding of Islam and the Islamic feminist research positioning I adopt in this thesis leans towards the view that considers gender-justice and egalitarianism to be core values within an Islamic worldview. My interpretation of Islamic pedagogic praxis is therefore also filtered through this lens.

⁵ Whilst many Islamic scholars self-identify with the term Islamic feminist, some may use the term Muslim feminist and others may not identify with any variations of feminism at all. Each self-expression points to varying understandings, agendas and strategies that Muslim (male and female) scholars and gender activists employ when engaging gender and other issues in general, but within Islam particularly. See Sa’diyya Shaikh (2003) for discussion on the multiple articulations of Islamic feminisms.

Islamic praxis. Methodologically, Islamic feminists engage various mutually enriching theories to develop more pragmatic and gender-sensitive methods for the study and practice of Islam. However its intellectual and existential commitments remain rooted in and is faithful towards an Islamic worldview. Rita M Gross (1996:16) describes religious feminism as both an “academic method” and a “social vision” and considers them to be interdependent in that both have implications for the study of religion, as well as the communal and personal practice of religion. She however also notes that feminist methods provide important methodological interventions that can have a profound impact upon our “information-gathering habits”.

Given the dearth of feminist research on the pedagogical worlds of young Muslim girls, I consider it necessary to deconstruct the epistemologies of patriarchy within the framework of Islamic childhood pedagogy and to develop gender affirming praxis within the tradition. An Islamic feminist pedagogical approach to elementary Islamic learning, I contend, can provide a valuable contribution to current understandings of gender in Islamic educational institutions in South Africa.

In employing an Islamic feminist methodology I am also concomitantly responding to certain debates within the field of feminist studies. Islamic feminist scholarship does not operate in an isolated academic space but is located within a wider network of intra-feminist debates. Islamic feminists have contributed to the critique of the dominant assumptions about what, how and who represents feminism. Such intra-feminist critiques have focused on challenging certain assertions of universality and commonality of all gendered experiences. These types of critiques are aimed at highlighting how the assumption of a universal female experience privileges the realities of particular groups of

females and marginalizes others. For example, some feminist critiques have noted the “ethnocentric” tendencies (Mohanty: 1990), “political prescriptivism” (Mahmood 2005:10) or “domain assumptions” and “colonizing tendencies” (Arnot 1993:2) that exist within the field of feminist scholarship. By foregrounding the diverse range of pedagogical praxis in South Africa and by resisting certain narrowly defined “feminist” strategies or pedagogical aims and methods, the notion of an Islamic pedagogy as developed in this thesis is one way of contributing to these intra-feminist critiques. I consider this approach to be an important step towards claiming an academic space within the broader fields of feminist educational scholarship that acknowledges an array of eclectic feminist voices and pedagogical praxis, including those located within religious traditions.

In the current geo-political context, with increasing levels of Islamophobia post 9/11, contemporary Islamic feminists’ discourses have become extremely vexed. Islam and Muslim scholarship have become imbricated within these ideological and political conflicts and cannot ignore the many critiques made against Islamic teachings and practices particularly with regards to Muslim females. Moreover public Muslim gender discourses have become even more complex as they are played out in an increasingly globalized media savvy world.⁶

⁶ A typical example of vexed feminist discourses in contemporary Islam can be noted in the recent case of Amina Tyler, a young Tunisian Muslim girl that posted pictures on social media websites of her bare breasts inscribed with the message “*my body is mine not anybody’s source of honour* (in Arabic) and the words *fuck your morals* (in English). Amina Tyler’s protest actions, influenced by the radical Ukrainian feminist group FEMEN, caused a global media frenzy. On the one side of the divide some feminist scholars and gender activists hailed Amina’s “exposure” as a necessary emancipatory and liberatory gesture against Islam’s restrictive and constrictive teachings. On the other side, were those that rejected FEMEN’s methods and some of its subsequent Islamophobic protests in support of Tyler and commented that Muslim women sought emancipation and liberation not *from* Islam rather *through* Islam. See for example <http://rt.com/news/femen-paris-tunisia-president-813/> and <http://jezebel.com/5993775/muslim-women-shockingly-not-grateful-for-topless-european-ladies-trying-to-save-them>. Another recent event that has received much global attention is

Islamic feminist scholars often need to tread through highly sensitized and politicized terrains to produce research that can respond to these gender debates in ways that are not dictated to by certain western liberal expectations of feminist praxis nor constrained by parochial gendered dictates within traditional Muslim scholarship.

By adopting Islamic feminism as both an academic method and as a social vision, I recognize that I assume multiple subject positions within the research process. Such an approach has been criticized by some as having a tendency to blur the necessary boundaries for research objectivity. These criticisms form part of some of the wider methodological debates on research subjectivities within the social sciences more generally and within the field of Islamic Studies particularly.⁷

In these epistemological debates, feminist scholars have substantively challenged certain claims of research objectivity, by contending that all researchers and scholars, including

the shooting of sixteen year old Pakistani gender activist Malala Yousafzai by a Taliban extremist group. The fact that this young activist's calls for gender equality in education has mainly been debated within the western world as a typical example of Muslim girls marginalized positions within Islam whilst ignoring the very real ways that global politics and western nation's foreign policies have contributed to Muslim women's marginalized status – is an apt example of how Islam and Islamic understandings are imbricated within a complex multi-media web that not only polarizes Islamic discourses but also feminists understandings of many Muslim gendered issues. Another aspect that exemplifies the vexed nature of current Islamic discourses is noted in the way that some scholars have responded to debates on whether or not Islamic teachings (*madāris* in particular) are considered to be breeding grounds Islamic fundamentalism and/or nurturing terrorist activities. Yusef Waghid (2011) for example prefaces his book on Islamic pedagogies in South African *madāris* as a response to these debates and as a way to disclaim and disprove the media-fuelled perceptions that Islamic teachings and methods leads to religious extremism.

⁷ Abdul Hamid El-Zein (1977:246) provides an erudite argument against certain claims of objectivity within the study of Islam that has some relevance for how I frame my thesis and the methodologies I employ. His study of the theoretical assumptions upon which many anthropological studies on Islam have been approached exposes how certain scientific methodologies or rather its claims of objectivity - are in fact not very dissimilar to some of the theological approaches to and claims of objectively representing Islam. El-Zein skillfully dismisses the notion that either methodology provides a “more” or the most objective representation of Islam. He cogently suggests that a more appropriate approach would be to acknowledge that claims of being a “disinterested observer” are in fact a scientific fiction and that given the inherent personal and theoretical subjectivities within the research process - it would be more accurate to talk about and validate the multiple possible representations of many *islams*.

feminists and religious scholars, invariably stand in a subjective relationship to their research topics (Gross: 1996; Hoel; 2010; Shaikh: 2007)⁸. Recognizing and disclosing how one's own personal interests and religious values may shape and/or influence one's research is however one of the important ways that feminist methods can intervene in the research process. Feminist methods are considered to be a necessary practice of methodological self-awareness, introspection and honest self-disclosure (Gross 1996: 15). By adopting a method of concerted self-reflexivity and by critically reflecting on how personal investments may shape, direct or limit one's research, feminists contribute to a deeper epistemological clarity and academic integrity.

In outlining my positioning within an Islamic feminist worldview, I do not claim to represent a decisive or dispassionate understanding of Islamic educational practices. However I offer an attentive and gender sensitive perspective on current Islamic pedagogical concepts used in South African *madāris*. Therefore this research thesis hopes to make a contribution towards building a reciprocal relationship within and between the field of Religious Studies and the practitioners of Islamic education within the South African Muslim community.

My research interests are also informed by my own personal experiences in teaching and learning within this elementary educative framework and by the desire to uncover

⁸Talal Asad (1986:2) for example has suggested approaching the study of Islam as a "discursive tradition". He argues that within this discursive framework of studying Islam and Islamic practices - all research approaches or methodologies will, in the final analysis, "be in a certain narrative relation to it". In other words, irrespective if one assumes a supportive, oppositional or even a morally neutral researcher-observer role, whatever the researcher finds or fails to find will invariably be considered a subjective (and also a contestable) representation of the tradition (ibid:17). An Islamic feminist approach, I argue, is therefore considered to be not any more or any less valid method of objectively analyzing particular Islamic practices and understandings.

egalitarian spaces within Islamic childhood pedagogical praxis. Therefore, whilst this research provides mainly a content and conceptual feminist analysis of Islamic gender pedagogies in elementary Islamic education, as part of my conclusion I offer some recommendations for further research study and for developing gender-egalitarian pedagogical strategies within the *madrasah* framework. To be clear, this research makes no claims with regards to actual experiences of Islamic pedagogical praxis since the research study itself did not involve an ethnographic component⁹. Given that this thesis navigates through a relatively unexplored field, the research findings are presented here as a preliminary and an exploratory step towards mapping out the initial contours of an Islamic feminist pedagogy in relation to a particular text used in South African *madāris*.

iv. Feminist Approaches to Pedagogy: Conceptual Underpinnings:

In 1983 Peggy McIntosh introduced a pioneering pedagogical model for re-visioning schooling curricula from a feminist perspective. McIntosh's model proposed five interactive phases that involved challenging the constructions, assumptions, claims and methodologies of traditional educational practices. Her model also proposed a re-visioning of the school curriculum, its pedagogies and learning content to be more gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive (McIntosh: 1983; Briskin & Coulter, 1992: 250; Digiovanni & Liston, 2005:125). Following McIntosh's seminal model in the early 1980s, the notion of a feminist pedagogy has been developed further as an academic approach and a specific method for educational praxis. The term feminist pedagogy used by scholars broadly

⁹ This thesis does not include any interviews or personal narratives or participant and/or observer reports. An ethnographic study involving the lived realities of teaching and learning experiences of young girls ideally needs to occur over a long and sustained period of time. This component would therefore be included in the next level or stage of this research project.

describes firstly, a gender-conscious method of teaching and learning and secondly, a conceptual framework for understanding and critiquing educative practices, curricular structures, pedagogical methods and learning content from a feminist perspective.

Feminist approaches to pedagogy have helped to draw attention to the multiple ways that learning environments are gendered. Learning content and pedagogical methods, in particular, have been identified as being androcentric, reflective of male privilege and are seen as servicing the legitimation thus maintenance of patriarchal forms of dominance and control over knowledge production (Briskin & Coulter: 1992; Digiovanni & Liston: 2005; Macnaughton: 1997; Martin: 1998). Increasingly, feminist scholars are paying more focused attention to the epistemologies of a gendered pedagogy in early childhood and elementary education and have highlighted its broader long term social implications.

For example, Digiovanni & Liston (2005:123-124) have noted that concerns over the differences in educational outcomes for adolescent males and females have prompted feminist scholars to pay closer attention to the ways that decreasing levels of self-esteem in adolescent girls have contributed to unequal educational outcomes. Whilst there are many interrelated factors for lowered self-esteem in adolescent girls, studies have shown that these factors are significantly related to particular pedagogical practices and learning contents that are male centered and also to the simultaneous socialization of girls into traditional “feminine” roles. The point that Digiovanni and Liston make is that the lowering of self-esteem in young girls do not occur precipitously, they claim the “seeds of this decline are sown much earlier”. They have noted the very visible ways that young girls in elementary schools move from being eager and excited learners in the early phases of childhood learning towards having a more controlled demeanor and mannerism that is

almost passive and invisible towards the end of a girl's elementary schooling. For Digiovanni and Liston this change is considered to be a telling consequence of certain traditional pedagogical methods used for elementary learning. Some of these methods include using learning resources such as text books, wall charts, classroom dialogue and other learning media that depict males and/or male perspectives as normative. The presence of girls and girls' experiences are often ignored or are not validated within the elementary classroom.¹⁰ Thus feminist pedagogy, according to them, provides one way to challenge and change the gendered ways that young girls are taught and to also challenge and revise some of the male-biased content of what they learn in early childhood education.

Relatedly, many feminist scholars have problematized the fact that gender differences, particularly the seemingly "naturalness" of bodily differences between males and females often undergird gender inequality in educational praxis. Martin (1998:494- 495) has however argued that very few scholars focus on the ways that early childhood pedagogical practices actually emphasize these gender differences so that such inequalities tend to feel or appear natural. She points to the importance of paying attention to the "hidden" curriculum of elementary schools which control and discipline the bodies, the voices, and attitudes of young children *differently*. This occurs through the everyday movements and activities of learners such as the subjective ways that physical spaces are utilized in schools and how learning resources are used differently for boys and girls.

¹⁰ Although this particular study does not distinguish between learning patterns in same-sex environments and co-ed, other studies by Arnot & Weiler (1993) and Satina & Hultgren (2001) for example have been conducted in girls -only educational environments have drawn similar conclusions. Since most learning programmes and learning resources are typically designed and managed by males, the privileging of male perspectives in education is not necessarily dissipated even in instances where their physical presence may be absent.

According to Martin the gendering of the body in childhood is the foundation upon which further gendering of the body occurs throughout one's life-course. Feminist pedagogy thus provides a strategy to help identify and/or intervene in the pedagogical processes that construct gender differences as being natural which are then used as a justification for unequal or patriarchal educational practices and outcomes.

Briskin and Coulter (1992: 248-249) on the other hand have argued that educative practices that fail to recognize the differences between how and what boys and girls learn often leaves unchallenged other forms of gender bias in education. For example, one of the earliest initiatives introduced in the 1980s to help root out sexism and gender inequality in education was to include female role-models and to eliminate sex-role stereotyping in school textbooks (Fardon and Schoeman: 2010; Jackson and Gee: 2005). However in highlighting the achievements of females in traditionally male dominated areas such as in science, mathematics, technology and sports – the underlying message relayed to young girls (and boys) is that educational success lies in rejecting certain stereotypically feminine roles and becomes achievable through emulating those women who have ostensibly “made it”. In other words, female success tends to be measured by a women's ability to master certain androcentric norms. Undergirding this strategy is the assumption that it is girls ways of knowing and doing that must be changed or is somehow inferior – and it is “males” that are held up to be the model of achievement and girls need to “measure up” to that standard.

Feminist pedagogy from this perspective therefore provides one way to challenge the notion that gender equality in education can be realized or measured through a blurring of gender differences. Instead some feminist scholars have argued that gender equality entails

validating gender differences, acknowledging differently gendered ways of learning and recognizing different representations of educational achievement.

The examples mentioned above reflect some of the issues that feminist scholars of pedagogy have typically dealt with in terms of thinking about and understanding gender in elementary learning. Some of the questions that these examples help raise that are of particular interest to the aims of this thesis, are firstly: how can feminist scholars of Islam engage these or other related gendered issues in elementary Islamic education? For example: to what extent can gender differences, particularly bodily differences be ignored in an Islamic pedagogical framework and what are the consequences of either moderating or even highlighting these differences? How do the particularized understandings of human development and human purposes from an Islamic worldview impact upon the ways that boys and girls learn and how are they reflected within the learning texts used in *madāris*? How are the physical spaces, learning resources and young bodies in Islamic elementary learning environments being gendered? Do Muslim children in Muslim minority countries like South Africa receive dual or conflicting sets of gendered messages from the *madrasah* and their broader social landscapes? What kinds of power relationships are being constructed through the hidden curriculum of Islamic elementary learning institutions, particularly through its pedagogical methods and learning content? Does the hidden curriculum help to service the legitimation and maintenance of male privilege in Muslim societies? And finally, in what ways can elementary Islamic learning be considered or used as an effective feminist tool for challenging some of the dominant constructions of patriarchy in Islam?

These types of questions, I argue, are immensely critical in terms of uncovering on the one hand, the potential seeds of patriarchy and/or the nurturing of patriarchal attitudes in Islam. On the other hand, gender-sensitive and gender-affirming pedagogies in elementary Islamic education can also help to create opportune interventions towards developing a more egalitarian Islamic educative praxis. Both aspects are considered central to a feminist pedagogical approach that recognizes education to be both a site for gender struggle and also a tool for change-making.

Although some recent studies have highlighted certain gender discourses in Islamic education in South Africa (Davids: 2012; McDonald: 2013; Sayed: 2010; Tayob: 2011) they have not however focused specifically on gender in Islamic *elementary* learning and its related pedagogies from a *feminist* perspective. For example: McDonald's 2013 empirical research on a girl's *madrasah* in Gauteng is one the few studies that has explored the theme of gender within the curriculum structures of Deoband institutions, her study however looks mainly at high school learning and not at elementary level Islamic learning. Although her work has not been approached from a feminist perspective specifically, it does provide an excellent analysis of the particular ways that Deoband textual resources are used to shape and inform particular "post-secularist" gendered identities.

Similarly, Sayed's (2010) research in this field has mainly focused on Deoband seminaries in South Africa. Eshak (1995 cited in McDonald:2013) has also conducted research on the history of elementary Islamic learning in South Africa, although I have not been able to source this study directly, it would appear from McDonald's references to this work that gender is not the primary focus of the study. Mohammed's (2012) research on various *madrasah* curricula in South Africa on the other hand does focus on elementary Islamic

learning texts – however her analysis focuses primarily on environmental issues and not on gender. Yusef Waghid (2011) has looked broadly at various pedagogical methods used in contemporary South African *madāris*; he suggests that these methods can be viewed on a scale between two approaches, a minimalist approach (dogmatism and lack of creativity) and a maximalist approach (inclusivity and creativity). Although his work does not deal with gender issues specifically, his study does provide an inspiring lens for thinking about how feminist strategies as a maximalist approach could be incorporated into the *madrasah* framework. David's (2012) study on Islamic education in South Africa, although framed through a feminist lens focuses mainly on Muslim women's religious learning experiences in relation to democratic citizenship. To my knowledge, these are the only research works that have examined contemporary *madāris* in South Africa. Whilst these offer a broad range of varying perspectives about *madāris*, none have explored particular childhood gender concerns and pedagogical issues from a feminist perspective. This thesis therefore draws on feminist understandings of pedagogy in elementary education and analyzes the curricula structures and learning texts used in contemporary South African *madāris*. The analytical lenses I use to examine these structures and the *Tuhfatul Banāt* in particular are outlined hereunder.

v. Analytical Framing:

This thesis draws on a feminist pedagogical approach developed by Judith Baxter (2003) referred to as “Feminist Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis” (hereafter FPDA) to analyze gender discourses in South African *madāris*. FPDA is a research approach that brings together the two fields of feminism and post-structuralism to help construct an analytical framework for thinking about gender discourses in education, particularly in terms of

analyzing the power relations within and between various pedagogical texts. Wright (2000) considers all pedagogical practices associated with schooling as constituting a text. Pedagogical texts refer to pedagogic interactions, curriculum structuring, teaching and learning texts and general classroom dialogue. Pedagogical texts are therefore produced by and through the interactions of learners and teachers and also between learners and the administrators and/or writers of schooling syllabi and textbooks.

The first of the two dimensions of FPDA, i.e.: post-structuralism - draws on the Foucaultian¹¹ view that considers pedagogical texts as discourses that act as a means of organizing power relations between speakers or between authors and readers. Discourse, according to a Foucaultian purview “systematically form the objects about which they speak” (Baxter: 2003; Cannella: 1990; Luke: 1996; Wright: 2000). Therefore, FPDA draws on the idea that educational discourses are “constructive” in that it serves to define, construct and position human subjects within a particular social or educative framework.

This type of discourse analysis begins from a post-structuralist skepticism towards the assumption that human subjects have singular, essential social identities or fixed cultural, social, class or gendered characteristics (Luke 1996:14). Learner and educator subjectivities are therefore not viewed as unitary or singular. Rather a post-structuralist approach holds that in negotiating classroom life, human subjects tend to assume various positions in educational discourses. Together, these available positions offer possibilities for difference, for multiple and hybrid subjectivities. According to Luke (ibid) human

¹¹ This thesis does not engage French scholar Michel Foucault’s theories on education discourses directly rather it draws on certain feminist post-structuralist works and understandings that have appropriated or adapted some of Foucault’ key concepts s related to power relations within the field of gender and childhood education.

subjectivities are actively made and re-made through their textual constructions, interpretations and practices. Therefore in analyzing gender discourses - pedagogical texts cannot be read or interpreted singularly or as stand-alone units.

Pedagogical texts are often made up of recurring statements, claims, propositions and wordings. These recurrent texts, suggests Luke, formulate “intertextual webs” or networks, so the pedagogical texts that are produced within social institutions, like schools (and *madāris*), are not random, rather they are seen as serving a particular institutional function. They are used to position subjects and establish or maintain certain power-relations between and within different subjects within the school’s discursive framework. However a FPDA approach begins from the post-structuralist assumption that pedagogical texts are multidiscursive - in that within the pedagogical relationship or interaction, human subjects are seen as drawing upon various discourses to derive meaning and to act, thus they also tend to be variously empowered and disempowered.

According to Baxter (2003), what an FPDA approach calls for is to pay attention to the ways that different discourses work *intertextually* to position speakers/readers/authors as “variously powerful and powerless”. Therefore in analyzing pedagogical texts from a FPDA perspective the notion of being “powerfully positioned” should also always be open to various interpretations. In other words, a FPDA approach advocates the understanding that power-relations between and within the various discourses within the pedagogical relationship, should be considered from different and/or competing perspectives – thus creating a wider space for asking more compounded research questions, enabling multiple viewpoints on power-relations to be considered in the interpretation of pedagogical texts and allowing researchers to draw more open-ended conclusions from their research data.

The second “feminist” dimension of an FPDA approach privileges the social category of *gender* when analyzing the ways that power-relations are constructed in pedagogical interactions. Baxter (2003) notes that FPDA provides one way to highlight the “continuing ways in which females are constituted as less powerful than males in many educational contexts”, and it can also be used to highlight the reactionary ways that institutional discourses work to produce females as “more subservient” and males as “more dominant”. However, what the “feminist” component of a FPDA analytical framework also calls for is to challenge or to question the perception that girls have always or are inevitably positioned as less powerful or as “helpless victims” within a particular pedagogical discursive context.

The positionings of female learners, from a FPDA perspective, should therefore also be analyzed for the moments within these pedagogical interactions whereby they too are “powerfully positioned”. In other words, FPDA is a method of analyzing gender discourses in educative spaces in a particular way that recognizes education to be a site for gender power struggle whereby girls are often positioned less powerfully than their male counterparts; however it also recognizes that these pedagogical spaces can also simultaneously create instances whereby these same power dynamics are challenged, negotiated and also contradicted.

Thus the post-structuralist turn in a FPDA approach differs from some other feminist methods of analyzing gender discourses within schooling frameworks and curricula structures¹². For example, some feminist critical analysis that rely on Marxist or other

¹² See Moi (1991) and Sadovnik (1991) for examples of feminist approaches to pedagogy that have drawn on structuralist theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Basil Bernstein.

structuralist theories to analyze how learning texts or pedagogies are used to serve particular class and/or gendered interests and to interrogate how male privilege and interests are maintained and reproduced through the schooling curricula structures, such approaches tend to be based upon the inadvertent assumption that pedagogical positionings are relatively fixed and static. Hence gendered positionings are often interpreted as being overly determined by and through the schooling curricula structures. Alternatively, FPDA offers an analytical approach that relies more on a polysemous interpretation of pedagogical texts whereby meanings and material affects are considered to be varying and variable.

Although, as Luke (1996) and Francis (1999) have poignantly pointed out, the post-structuralist turn in discourse analysis does hold certain analytical challenges. If according to the Foucaultian understanding human relations do not exist outside of discourse and if, within the discursive relationship all voices, readings and interpretations are considered to be equally enfranchised, such an approach to analyzing pedagogical texts can also possibly lead to an acritical pluralism and relativism. For instance, if all possible meanings and interpretations are considered to be equally plausible then such an analysis also runs the risk of concealing operational relations of power within the pedagogical relationship (Luke 1996: 18). Paradoxically, this would seem to defeat the main purposes of feminist pedagogy research, which is to identify, challenge and modify dominant power structures in educational frameworks.

Notwithstanding these valid concerns, I contend that the FPDA approach developed by Baxter can provide a useful framework for analyzing gender discourses within a highly complex and multi-discursive field such as South African *madāris*. According to Baxter,

the analytical advantages that FPDA offers when compared to other methods of post-structuralist discourse and textual analysis that are similarly concerned with tracing the binary power-relations within pedagogical discourses such as Critical Discourse Analysis or feminist structuralist methods (Baxter: 2002, 2003; Luke: 1996, 2006), is that it does not consider subject positions within a particular discursive context to be fixed. The FPDA approach does not always position some subjects as dominant and others as subordinate. Baxter notes that FPDA places far more emphasis upon the interplay of multiple and competing voices within a particular pedagogical context and pays more attention to the complexities and contradictions between and within these multiple vocalities. Thus FPDA does not provide an alternative analytical framework for analyzing gender discourses within educational institutions nor does it ignore the structural ways that females are often positioned as less powerful than males; it does however assume that these gendered positionings are not overly determined by and through these structures. A FPDA approach can therefore more accurately be viewed as providing a supplementary tool or an interpretive advantage to compliment the analytical lenses used for understanding gendered positionings within and between various pedagogical texts.

In adopting FPDA for analyzing gendered pedagogies in elementary Islamic education, I am thus able to consider various sets of gender discourses and interpret competing power-relations within these discourses as being fluid and shifting, thereby also allowing me to draw more open-ended conclusions about gendered learning in South African *madāris*. This positioning responds well to my central research aims and strategies for developing an Islamic feminist pedagogy. It facilitates an interpretive flexibility not only for identifying dominant patriarchal thinking in Islamic education but also for identifying the necessary

intervening spaces for introducing creative strategies in and through the *madrassah* framework.

Chapter One

Mapping the Context: Islam, Islamic Education and Gender Discourses in South Africa

1.1) Historical Background:

Historically, varying circumstances have marked the main streams of Muslim presence and of Islam in South Africa. These circumstances have had a considerable impact upon the ways that Muslim gender praxis including the teaching and learning of and about the Islamic faith has developed in South Africa. The very first South African Muslims came to the Cape in the mid-seventeenth century either as slaves, laborers, political prisoners or as exiled royalty from various places along the African and Bengal Coasts and also from the Indonesian Islands. Together with many converts to Islam from the local indigenous communities around the Cape, these early Muslims, usually identified as Cape Malays, formed one of the earliest pedagogical communities of Islamic teaching, learning and practice in South Africa (Shell: 2006; Tayob: 1995).

This thesis however focuses specifically upon the historical landscapes and the gender discourses of Indian Muslims in South Africa and considers the circumstances around which the development of elementary Islamic education occurred particularly in and around the Natal and Transvaal regions (as it was previously known). Indian Muslims are noted to have arrived and thus established themselves in South Africa in two distinctive sub-groups. The first of these groups arrived in Natal as indentured workers from the southern parts of India in 1860, followed closely by a second group of passenger Indians in

1871 that came to South Africa from the northern and western regions of India as traders. The differing political circumstances and reasons for coming to South Africa between the two groups of Indian Muslims, coupled with their economic, class, language, caste and other regional differences had deep rooted and lasting effects upon how Islam and Islamic educational institutions developed and functioned in Indian Muslim communities. The early Indian Muslim community is noted to have established religious institutions that helped to re-create and thus maintain the social dynamics of their lives in India (Tayob: 1995; Vahed: 2001).

Vahed (2001:314) refers to the “Islam of traders” and ‘Islam of the indentured’ to highlight the very different trajectories along which Islam was understood and practiced amongst these sub-groupings of Indian Muslims in South Africa. He notes that due to the straitened socio-economic circumstances under which indentured Muslims (later called Barelwi/Sunni Muslims) worked and lived, it made it difficult for them to practice Islam much less have adequate time or resources to establish *masājid* (places of worship) or *madāris*. However, the arrival of Shah Goolam Mohamed (referred to as Soofie Saheb) a spiritual teacher from India in 1895 had a considerable impact upon the ways that Islam and Islamic teaching and learning institutions formed among the indentured Muslim community. The religious teaching and learning institutions that were developed for and by the indentured Muslims had a strong flavor of mysticism, communal charitable good-will and inter-culturalism (since inter-marriages between indentured Hindus and Muslims were quite common, many Hindu cultural practices were incorporated in the teaching-learning practices of indentured Muslims). According to Vahed (ibid: 322), Soofie Saheb’s integrated methodology was considered to be a typical Sufi educational model of

responding to and being accommodating towards the localized needs of a community and in this way to gradually draw in and educate the community on and about Islam.

The trajectories along which Islamic learning institutions developed amongst the wealthier trader class of Indian Muslims was very much informed by and thus shaped by concerns over maintaining and growing their own business and class interests in South Africa. Tayob (1995:58) notes that prominent and wealthy Muslim businessmen provided the financial and organizational infrastructure for the building of various *masājid* and *madāris* and who also invited religious teachers (mainly from the Deoband seminary in northern India) to service the religious educational needs of the burgeoning Indian Muslim community. In this capacity as employers, the business elite were more influential than the employed religious leaders in determining the nature and structuring of educational institutions. More often than not, *masājid* and *madāris* were built and organized to serve particular ethnic or caste interests of certain business families, this was done through powerful *masjid/madrassah* committees that dictated what, who and how these institutions would be structured and organized.

Within this framework of servicing the class, ethnic and business interests of a few wealthy trading families, the religious leaders that were brought to South Africa from India found themselves in a vulnerable position. In resistance to the financially more powerful *masjid /madrassah* committees, religious scholars or the *'ulamā* soon organized themselves into guilds or *jami'āts* to protect their interests particularly their vulnerability under precarious employment conditions and to establish their own power status based on their Islamic knowledge expertise and as *the* legitimate religious authorities (Tayob 1995:65, my emphasis added).

1.2) The Deoband Footprint in South Africa:

The establishment of the Jamiatul ‘Ulama in the Transvaal and in Natal during the 1950s (Tayob 1995:66) was the result of certain strategic moves and favorable alliances made by the Deoband ‘*ulamā*. The first of these moves relied on creating certain perceptions that ensured the Indian Muslim community remained overly dependent on the authority of the ‘*ulamā* for determining the correctness of their Islamic beliefs and everyday Islamic practices. The framework of the Deoband educational model provided the perfect vehicle to help accomplish this since the Deoband ideology is a self-promoting educational movement that positions itself as being the authoritative conveyors and preservers of pure Islam. Positioned as the official purveyors of pristine Islam and Islamic practices, the footprint of the Deoband ethos was firmly entrenched within the Indian Muslim community through three main platforms, i.e.: the pulpit, the Muslim home and the *madrassah*.

Tayob (1995: 69) notes that one of the ways that the ‘*ulamā* could assert their authority over the powerful *masjid* committees was to condemn certain customary religious practices. For example, their criticism was directed at the minutiae like the audible invocations that were made after the ritual prayers to the embracing of congregants after prayers as well as condemning inappropriate dress or incorrect grooming of male congregants’ facial hair. In other words, as purveyors of correct Islam, the *ulamā* asserted their Islamic knowledge authority and attempted to regulate mundane and detailed aspects of Muslim life.

The Deoband educational model promoted the notion that ‘*ulamā* trained at Deoband seminaries were the legitimate authorities on all religious related matters including Islamic

teaching and learning. This led to a second strategic move of establishing franchises of the Deoband seminary or Darul Ulūm in South Africa. The first such seminary was established in Newcastle (Natal) in 1973. This move ensured that there existed a constant pool of South African Deoband trained *'ulamā* from which the *jami'āts* could draw on for teaching services for their many *madāris* around the country. In this way, prospective students were attracted to study at the local Darul Ulūm since it provided a more cost effective option than studying at seminaries abroad and the *jami'āts* could offer local Deoband graduates lucrative fellowship advantages that ensured their future employment prospects and community leadership positions.

Thus one of the key avenues through which the Deobandis could exert their authority and entrench their own particular brand of correct Islamic practice was through the framework of the *madrasah* coupled with the establishment of localized Darul Ulūms. According to McDonald (2013: 75) the fact that the Deoband *ulamā* in South Africa regulated both the training of teachers and religious leaders through local Darul Ulūms ensured that the spread and reach of Deoband authority was much wider than most in South Africa. By regulating the curriculum, the learning texts and the pedagogical methods of the *madrasah* system, the dominance and authority of the Deoband *'ulamā* extended over the younger members of the community as well; in this way Deoband teachings and understandings were promulgated and reproduced multi-generationally.

Thirdly, a powerful alliance built between Deoband scholars and the Tablighi Jamāt¹³ an influential globalized network of Islamic missionaries, provided the necessary financial

¹³ The Tablighi Jamāt is a missionary movement that was first initiated by the Deoband scholar Muhammad Ilyas (1885-1944) in 1926, the alliance between the Tablighi movement and the Deoband educational

networking arsenal to compete with the financial advantages held by Muslim businessmen and *masjid* committees and other Muslim groups. Yet the Deoband- Tablighi alliance was one that ensured the wealthy Muslim businessmen were not alienated completely since the *jami'āts* relied on the latter's financial support and the material resources as well as their influence to help promote and validate the *jami'āt's* authoritative status in the community.

The missionary efforts of the Tablighi Jamāt whose propagation methods involved visiting the private homes and work places of Muslims and *advising* them about the *correct* or pure Islamic practice (according to Deoband understanding that is) and also inviting the males of Muslim households to join in the Tablighi path ensured that the authority of the Deoband '*ulamā* extended to the homes and businesses of Indian Muslims.

Finally, the Deoband ideology offered a disengaged political model for living Islam in South Africa in ways that appealed to some Indian Muslims in light of their marginalized social positions in a political climate pervaded by apartheid racial separatist laws. Deoband patriarchy provided one way Indian males could deal with the emasculating effects of apartheid structures. The quietest passivity of Deoband Islam had many critics and rejecters particularly amongst the second and third generations of South African born Indian Muslims during the 1970s and 1980s, a period of intense anti-apartheid activism in the country. Nonetheless many Indian Muslims, under the religious leadership of the Deoband '*ulamā*, were for the most part content to remain politically disengaged citizens

movement remains to date one of the most influential globalized religious movements in the world that draws thousands of culturally diverse Muslims together in ways that most other Islamic movements have failed to do. Despite their decidedly apolitical agenda, this partnership is recognized to be one of the major mobilizing and unifying forces in the Islamic world currently (McDonald, 2013:74; Reetz: 2005, 2007).

of South Africa and therefore according to its critics, inadvertently complicit citizens of apartheid South Africa.

Apart from encouraging political passivity within sections of the Indian Muslim community, Deoband conservatism helped to shape particularized forms of gender praxis and also influence the ways that Islamic learning was organized and structured. I now turn to a more detailed discussion of both these dimensions.

1.3) The Deoband ‘*Ulamā* and Gendered Norms within the Indian Muslim

Community:

Some of the ways that Deoband influences affected the religious roles of Indian Muslim women, in particular, also related with the ‘*ulamā*’s condemnation of purportedly *bid’ā* (religious innovation) practices, which included communal religious gatherings such as commemorating the birth of the Prophet Muḥammad or any other mass spiritual celebrations and festivities. The presence of Muslim women at these types of public worship gatherings as well as the more regular ritual prayer spaces of the *masjid* were deemed to be too spiritually distracting for males. The ‘*ulamā*’ attributed the problematic female presence to women’s ritually impure states during menstruation and also to their penchant for personal adornment and sexualizing allure, including among other things their inappropriate dressing, wearing of perfume and make-up (Tayob, 1995: 70). Thus instead of possibly advocating a more appropriate dress etiquette and organizing these gatherings in spatially and sexually less “distracting” ways for both genders, Muslim women were rather excluded completely and their traditional roles within these spaces (which included preparing special meals or offering additional prayers and fasts) were censured and eventually curtailed.

Deoband influences in South Africa helped to project the notion that the sacredness of the home space for Muslim females were equally if not more spiritually beneficial and rewarding. In projecting the notion of the home as a sacred space, Indian Muslim women's social and religious roles became spatially constrained as well as intellectually, creatively and ideologically restricted to the Deoband version of Islamic teachings and practice. The restrictions, exclusions and curtailment on Indian Muslim women's religious public participation was not peculiar to the South African Indian Muslim context rather it reflected the transferal of certain social gendered norms from within the Indian sub-continent to South Africa. Therefore the stereotypical image of Indian Muslim women is usually that of a socially restricted housewife with little or no religious role outside of her domestic world.

The glaring absences of Indian Muslim women from the religious public sphere is however not necessarily suggestive of a Deoband neglect of Muslim women's religious praxis. For many Indian Muslim women, their roles as homemaker, caring for children and attending to large family meal preparations was considered to be a spiritually affirming role and not necessarily one of lack or limitation in terms of differing gendered religious roles within the community. Metcalf (1990:37) for example, in reviewing the Deoband scholar Mawlana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's popular and very influential text the "Behishti Zewar"¹⁴ a Deoband manual for Muslim women living in British India during the early 1900s, suggests that "in a period of alien and disruptive change, [Deoband] reformers were driven

¹⁴ The *Behishti Zewar* is a religious manual for Muslim women and deals with various Islamic rituals, ethical, health, gender, etiquette and other topical social issues. Written in the early 1900s specifically for Muslim women in India living under British imperial rule and under the cultural influences of Christianity and Hinduism, the text remains to this day one of the most popular and influential religious texts amongst many Indian Muslims across the globe. It has been re-printed and translated into many different languages and is commonly presented to young Muslim brides as gift at the time of marriage.

to establish boundaries for beliefs and behavior that would ensure order among humans and between humans and God”. The hierarchal ordering according to Deoband thinking requires women to be subordinate to males, socially but not religiously or spiritually. Thus in projecting the home as women’s sacred space, the religious roles of Indian Muslim women was shaped through and by the rhythms and patterns of her daily life which were considered not as constraining or restricting but rather as “divinely instituted actions and responses” (ibid:33).

A Deoband-practice that *was* encouraged amongst females was the holding of regular females-only gatherings of learning held inside the private spaces of their homes, a practice referred to as *ta’līm* classes that formed part of the Tablighi methodology. Whilst seemingly a very gender-affirming educative practice, Tayob (1995: 70) perceptively notes that in this way “women’s expressions of Islam came under the influence of the Tablighi Jamaat and by extension, remained under the direction of the ‘*ulama*”. Informing Tayob’s sentiments is the fact that the learning that occurred within these *ta’līm* gatherings was limited to using texts and other Islamic literature that was developed and approved by the Deoband ‘*ulamā*. The *Behishti Zewar* is one of the core texts that have been used by Deoband scholars for this purpose.

The influence of the *Behishti Zewar* as a prescriptive Deoband text in helping to shape the religious and gendered subjectivities of many Indian Muslim women is considered to be particularly relevant, since it helps to elucidate the nuanced ways that Deoband texts are used in contemporary times as well¹⁵. Although some scholars (Ansari: 2010, 2012;

¹⁵ The conceptual intersections between the *Behishti Zewar* and the *Tuhfatul Banāt* are discussed in the following chapter of this thesis.

Metcalf: 1990) have lauded the text as revolutionizing the ways that Indian Muslim women have understood and experienced their religious role and functions in a particular context of British imperialist rule – the fact that this text continues to exert much influence over shaping gender norms for Muslims living in very different social circumstances has also been problematized by others (Hassim: 2007; McDonald: 2013; Sayed: 2010). The *Behishti Zewar* is considered to be a key text of the Deoband educational model and it has been used widely within South African homes, female *ta'lim* classes and within Deoband *madāris* and the local Darul Ulūms. As such, it has also been viewed as marginalizing and subverting Muslim women's active religious and social participation and endorsing and sustaining Muslim male dominance within the family home and within the Indian community.

Another way that gender roles were affected by *madāris* regulated under the Deoband *jami'āts*, was the replacement of the traditional but unqualified Muslim female *madrassah* teacher referred to as the “*appa*” with male graduates from Deoband seminaries referred to as *mawlanas* (Sayed, 2010:27; Tayob, 1995: 69). Replacing the teaching services of the unqualified *appa* with the *mawlana*, curtailed one of the few religious roles that Indian Muslim women could more easily assume within a traditional patriarchal community like the South African Indian community.

However, one of the striking features of the Deoband educational model *is* the high priority given to the religious education of Muslim females. In this regard, the Deoband model with its focus on religious female education - provides a refreshing contradiction to what might typically be associated with patriarchal movements and their attitudes towards educating females. One of the more notable efforts made by the Deoband *'ulamā* to redress

the lack of “Deoband” qualified female educators in South Africa was to establish in 1983 the first female Darul Ulūm in Natal to train Muslim females as Islamic educators and scholars. The subsequent spread of female Darul Ulūms throughout the country suggests a growing importance of women as *madrassah* teachers and marks one of the main religious spaces that *have* been created for Muslim women through the Deoband educational model.

Currently, there are a number of female Darul Ulūms established throughout the country which have attracted and continues to attract vast numbers of female students. The establishment of Deoband female seminaries has helped to create a large industry of professional female Islamic educators and scholars in South Africa referred to as *‘ālimahs* (Sayed: 2010). However, their gendered positionings *within* the Deoband educational framework and within the Indian Muslim community require critical scrutiny.

Of particular interest, is to question the extent by which these spaces have served to further confine and restrict the role and function of female Islamic scholars in South Africa to that of a *madrassah* teacher? Particularly in consideration of the fact that a professionally trained Deoband *‘ālimah* holds no other “authoritative” position within the Indian Muslim community except that of an elementary *madrassah* teacher. In other words, despite the large numbers of females that do graduate from the Darul Ulūms in South Africa, their expertise or professional qualifications are not represented in any of the *jami’āt* structures, *masjid* committees, nor do they hold any academic tenure at Deoband seminaries or within

the *madrassah* curricula structures in any decision making capacity except as elementary teachers and in a few isolated instances as principles of girls *madāris*.¹⁶

Therefore a common critique against the Deoband educational model, particularly by gender activists, is that it provides a vehicle for women to internalize and reinforce patriarchal gender roles. The gender roles and stereotypes taught within these institutions sustain an unbalanced gender status quo. In this way, the Deoband educational framework is often viewed as a hierarchal model that reflects and reproduces male superiority and dominance. The underlying objectives behind educating females about their religion, roles and duties within this framework can more accurately be viewed as a controlling apparatus for ensuring continued female subservience to males.

The following chapter wrestles with this concern in more depth and engages the issue specifically from the context of an elementary *madrassah* framework. I draw on related research studies (McDonald: 2013; Sayed: 2010; Tayob: 1995; Winkelmann: 2005) that have interrogated some of the androcentric undertones of the Deoband educational model, although these mainly focus on the Deoband seminary model and not the elementary *madrassah* model. These studies appear to be in a general agreement that the Deoband educational model privileges male authority in Islam, particularly in terms of its hierarchal curricula structuring and the gender-biased learning programme.

In this regard, Sayed's (2010) empirical research – one of the more extensive studies that have been conducted within various Deoband seminaries in South Africa – provides a

¹⁶ Both Sayed (2010) and McDonald's (2013) empirical studies on Deoband female seminaries and *madāris* confirm that although a *madrassah* may have a full complement of female staff members including the administrative staff, their authority within these spaces are limited, in that all Deoband institutions (both male and female Darul Ulūm and *madāris*) are always under the patronage and control of a male.

revealing glimpse into the internal gender dynamics of the Deoband educational model. His study confirms that within the curricula structures of South African Darul Ulūm, female students are not only offered a drastically reduced learning programme in relation to their male-counterparts, but that their bodies, movements, communications and all extra-curricular activities are also monitored and restricted to a far greater degree than male students. Whilst males in Deoband seminaries are groomed to assume various religious leadership roles within their communities, females are groomed to become pious spouses, mothers and home-makers and as such to also serve as community role-models and educators to other Muslim females.

Sayed (2010:36) suggests that the establishment of female seminaries in South Africa since the early 1980s is directly related to the political, social and educational changes that was sweeping across the country during this period, coupled with nation-wide gender justice and equal education campaigns. Sayed's interviews with the founders of some the female Darul Ulūms revealed that one of the major driving forces behind the establishment of female seminaries in South Africa, was not primarily informed by the need to produce more qualified female Islamic educators. According to Sayed's interviewees, the escalation of Deoband female seminaries in South Africa was borne out of the Deoband *ulamā*'s fear of how these political and social changes were re-shaping the educational system and influencing how and what the younger generation of Muslims (girls in particular) were being exposed to in universities and schools. A crucial priority was the protection of young Muslim females from "other" influences in order to ensure the long-term preservation of certain gendered norms within the Muslim family and society at large.

The proliferation of Deoband female-focused seminaries and *madāris* in South Africa particularly since post-apartheid can thus be seen as an effort to preserve the purity of Deoband Islam and ensure that young Muslims females were educated with “proper” Islamic knowledge and to help preserve their “protected” status and positions within Islam. It can also be seen as a strategic response by the Deoband *‘ulamā* to guard against certain challenges upon their authoritative status within the community.

1.4) Challenging the Authority of the Deoband *‘Ulamā* and Creating Alternate

Gendered Spaces of Learning:

Historically, one of the main forms of opposition to and resistance against the doctrinarian Deoband ideology and its influences on gender relations within the Indian Muslim community came from the “Arabic Study Circle”. Formed in 1950 by a group of secularly educated Indian Muslims in Natal (Tayob, 1995:95) the Arabic Study Circle is seen to have introduced certain modernist interpretations of Islam. Some of the group’s activities included inviting progressive international Islamic scholars to lecture forums in South Africa and holding weekly gender inclusive Islamic teaching-learning gatherings for Muslim university students and other like-minded adults. One of the key ideas that the Arabic Study Circle promoted was the notion of a personalized engagement with Islamic scriptural sources. Thus its pedagogical methodologies posed a serious challenge to the Deoband model that stressed and relied upon the belief that the authoritative textual interpretation and mediation of the *‘ulamā* is an essential requirement for correct Islamic praxis.

The establishment of the study circle provided an intellectually and socially engaged space for re-thinking gendered norms within the Indian Muslim community. It offered an

alternative for some Muslim women whereby they could assume a more socially active and public role. For example, the “Women’s Cultural Group” formed by Zulaykha Mayet (b.1923) and a few other women affiliated to the Arabic Study Circle in 1954 has been described as group of Indian Muslim women that were “pushing the boundaries of accepted gendered proprieties” (Waetjen 2009:577). The group’s activities included publishing the internationally renowned cookbook the “Indian Delights”, which although paradoxically also reiterated the Indian housewife stereotype, it created important opportunities for Indian women’s artistic expressions. Other activities included writing and acting in plays and organizing fundraising events. These alternative expressions of and experiences within Indian Islam was however also reflective of opportunities available to a very small segment of the South African Indian Muslim community, that is, Indian Muslim women that had certain class, educational and marital/familial privileges and was not by any means representative of the opportunities or spaces available to most Indian or other Muslim women in South Africa.

These types of alternative spaces nevertheless paved a path for other forms of activism and a more conscious gender-justice awareness to develop. Crucial to this development was the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM), an inclusive national faith based youth movement that mobilized university students and professional Muslims across the country during the 1980s and early 1990s on various political and religious issues (Jeenah: 2001; Tayob: 1995). Besides providing one of the main vehicles for promoting Islamic feminisms in South Africa, the multi-racial and multi-ethnic make-up of the MYM saw a critical broadening of Indian Muslim thinking beyond their own ethnic, race and class concerns. One of the main aims of this movement was to challenge the patriarchal constructions of

Islam and some of the religious gendered norms within the South African Muslim community. As such, the movement posed one of the most vociferous voices in confronting and challenging the authority of the Deoband *'ulamā'*¹⁷.

Some of the main gendered issues that the movement tackled, particularly in the early 1990s coincided with the country's social and political transitioning into democracy, therefore many of the issues they focused on were framed within and informed by some of the broader discourses on social justice in South Africa. Central to these discourses was the campaign for Muslim women's equal access to and participation within the *masjid* spaces. Campaigning for the rights of Muslim women to hold religious leadership positions within the community, particularly in terms of Islamic ritual praxis was taken up as a major issue from which to challenge the Deoband *'ulamā'*. Another key area related to their efforts towards Islamic gender-justice was the campaign to have Muslim marriages recognized and regulated in line with the country's new constitutional- legal apparatus rather than the patriarchal judicial structures of the Deoband *jami'āts*.

However, the impact of these activist campaigns and alternative expressions of Islam on changing dominant gender norms entrenched through Deoband frameworks within the Indian community is subject to debate. Perhaps one way of assessing the impact of Islamic feminisms and gender activism (coupled with other social changes since democracy) on the Indian Muslim communities in South Africa *vis a vis* Deoband influences would be to pay

¹⁷ The commemorative website of the late Shamima Shaikh, one of the leading figures within the Islamic feminist movement in South Africa, documents some of the communications with the Deoband *ulamā'*, see for example <http://shams.za.org/index.php/shamima-s-articles/dialogue-with-the-ulama> these documents provide an apt example of some of the hostilities between the two groups and reflects some of the ways that the Deoband *ulamā'* have typically asserted their authority by demonstrating their own Islamic knowledge expertise and dismissed any alternative interpretations and expressions of Islam as *bid'ā* (innovation).

attention to the religious roles Muslim women have assumed within their communities post-apartheid.

Recent research studies (Dangor: 2001; Davids: 2012; Hassim: 2007; Hoel: 2010; Shaikh *et al*: 2012; Vahed: 2000) have focused on the very visible ways that many Muslim women have creatively navigated the spaces and opportunities created since South Africa's 1994 transition to a democracy. These scholars have illustrated how some Muslim women have negotiated and challenged certain Islamic gendered norms and understandings. We therefore find that a picture of a more religiously engaged post-apartheid Muslim female emerges. Vahed (2000) for example has noted that since democracy many more Muslim women have chosen to wear the face-veil and middle-eastern style long black dresses called an *abāya* as a fashion statement expressing their complex and culturally intersecting identities. Also, Davids (2012) has noted how Muslim women are seen to be venturing into unconventional careers for Muslim women like the hospitality industry where they often need to negotiate between their religious dress and dietary restrictions and the requirements of their jobs. Muslim women are also increasingly becoming more publically visible in the local media industry as television and radio hosts of community religious programmes.

However, what often tends to go unnoticed in these depictions of or foci upon the changing gender roles of contemporary Muslim women within the Muslim community, are the concomitant efforts made by the Deoband *'ulamā* to maintain its influence over defining the religious terms of gendered norms within the community. For example, the extent to which the Deoband *'ulamā* continue to exert its dominance and authority over the "proper" or legitimate religious norms within the community can be assessed by determining how many *masājid* within the Indian Muslim communities currently do accommodate females

within their prayer spaces? Despite almost over twenty years of campaigning for equal access, Muslim women in many areas dominated by the Deoband footprint still do not have *any* access much less equal access to and participation within the *masjid* space. Furthermore, female graduates from Deoband seminaries are absent from religious decision making bodies, their religious knowledge expertise are rarely ever acknowledged or validated within the broader Muslim authoritative structures.

Similarly, although the recognition of Muslim marriages is considered to be a significant move towards democratic participation for Muslims; it has had varying responses from the local religious authorities. This move has been met with much belligerence and opposition from conservative Deoband *'ulamā* in particular. Therefore despite many years of active campaigning for the state's recognition and regulation of Muslim marriages, mainly promulgated through Islamic feminist discourses as a significant step towards ensuring gender-justice and equality for South African Muslim women (Amien: 2010), their efforts have not, thus far, made any significant strides in ratifying the legal status of Muslim marriages.

In reflecting upon the gains and some of the continuing challenges that many contemporary Muslim females in South Africa still struggle with in terms of equally accessing and participating within various religious institutions, including gender equality in prayer spaces, judicial boards, Islamic ritual praxis and educational frameworks; it would appear that despite the many opportunities that democracy has created for many Muslim women to participate equally and fully in various fields, this is not necessarily reflected within the structures and organization of many Islamic institutions. The lack of female representation within many traditional Islamic frameworks and the very visible

absence of egalitarian praxis within most Islamic institutions in South Africa¹⁸, suggests that realizing gender-justice remains as much of a struggle for contemporary South African Muslims as it did for a previous generation.

Thus far, feminist scholars have not actively engaged nor intellectually invested in re-thinking the links between patriarchal gender praxis and the epistemological underpinnings of elementary Islamic learning in South Africa. The very critical role that *madāris* have in helping to shape particular understandings and attitudes of Islamic gender norms therefore have not only been largely influenced by dominant patriarchal structures of the *jami'āts* but they are also currently mainly developed and regulated through these structures.

In consideration of the fact that the social and religious worlds of contemporary South African Muslim children are strongly influenced by the wider gender discourses in post-apartheid South Africa as well as other global influences – the Deoband elementary learning model therefore needs to be critically engaged in light of these changing circumstances. The following section briefly looks at some of the broader gender discourses within South Africa since democracy. I discuss some of the more urgent educational and gender challenges currently facing South African children and consider the role and function of *madāris* in contemporary South Africa in responding to these challenges.

¹⁸ Although there may be a few instances whereby Muslim women are fully and equally involved in the religious structuring and organization of Islamic institutions in South Africa, these instances represent the exception rather than the norm.

1.5) Gender Discourses in South African Education: Post-Apartheid Challenges for

Madāris:

The complexities of the social, cultural and religious worlds that contemporary South African Muslim children live and learn in suggests that the role and function of many present-day *madāris* have needed to adapt significantly since democracy. Post-apartheid educational frameworks are undergirded by a host of constitutional regulations that aim to protect and promote the overall well-being of all South African children, such as ensuring their rights to education, health, safety, equality and freedom from all forms of abuse and discrimination including that of religion, culture, gender and sexuality. *Madāris* in post-apartheid South Africa however are relatively autonomous and self-regulated institutions and have mostly remained structurally and operationally unchanged since democracy. Nevertheless, the lived realities of being a gendered child in a democratic South Africa including the many opportunities and challenges that that reality poses cannot be overlooked or ignored by *madāris*.

Since democracy in 1994, one of the main streams through which South Africa's constitutional vision of ensuring children's gender rights was implemented was through a monumental re-structuring of its educational framework. Underpinned by a legacy of racial divisions, unequal educational opportunities and a high prevalence of gender-bias within school's learning content, the country's national schooling curriculum was completely revised in line with certain constitutional imperatives, a process referred to as the National Curriculum Statement 2005. One of the first steps undertaken to this end, according to Linda Chisholm (2003) the chair of the national committee to oversee this process, was to "cleanse" the existing curriculum of all its racist and sexist elements by re-framing the

pedagogical languages used in schools to represent race and gender. This process therefore required re-writing the entire schooling syllabi and all school textbooks from a more gender-sensitive, non-racist and multi-culturally inclusive perspective. The re-writing process included identifying and problematizing the ways that certain notions of masculinities and femininities are socially and traditionally objectified and identifying related aspects that contribute towards childhood gender injustices. For example, issues related to nutrition, child safety, sexuality, sexual abuse and violence, reproductive health, HIV and Aids were highlighted and addressed within the curriculum planning process.

Although, as Chisholm (2003) notes, that the gender-sensitizing process was not without its critics, mainly articulated from the conservative right and certain religious communities, the inclusion of sex, sexuality, sexual risks and other female sexual health issues, particularly at the elementary phases of schooling was criticized by some as developing “amoral” citizens or as introducing an “ungodly curriculum” (ibid). Considering the structural legacy of an education system that was unpinned by an ethos of Christian nationalism and a past curriculum structure that privileged white males and valorized them as the figures of authority, Chisholm notes that it was not surprising that much of the resistance to articulating children’s gender and sexual rights in this way stemmed from those whose privileges were deemed to be challenged the most by instituting gender-affirming educational praxis.

Organizationally the gender re-structuring process of the national curriculum was able to subvert these fringe voices of patriarchal dissent and the revised National Curriculum Statement 2005 reflects the country’s constitutional aims in terms of ensuring gender equity in childhood education. Chisholm (2003) however argues that gender equity in

education nevertheless still mostly exists at a symbolic level. One of the main challenges for realizing and implementing the precepts envisioned within the revised curriculum lies at the pedagogical interfaces within schools and classrooms. The lack of adequate gender sensitive teacher training and the intersecting ways that pedagogical relations are informed and shaped by certain cultural and/or religious gendered subjectivities and the lack of proper oversight and gender intervention strategies both within and outside of the classroom are some of the main concerns and challenges for gender-justice in elementary education currently.

In agreement with Chisholm's sentiments, Deevia Bhana's (2003) empirical study on gendered teaching discourses in South African primary schools has found that "teaching practices actually work against achieving gender equality". Her research findings suggested that constitutional protection for gender equality in education does not eradicate hegemonic patriarchal discourses that are commonly associated with early schooling contexts. Bhana identified several ways that patriarchal gender discourses occurred within childhood teaching and learning situations. Teachers in her study would routinely stereotype children's behaviors, attitudes and aptitudes biologically. For example, boys were expected to be or were assumed to be biologically predisposed to be more aggressive than girls or to perform better at sports than girls and to be achieve better results in mathematics and science than girls. So despite having a gender equitable teaching and learning conceptual framework, gendered attitudes that position boys and girls differently in problematic ways continue to be perpetuated through pedagogic interactions.

The assumptions of a biological predisposition to aggression in young boys and of passiveness in young girls, if left unchecked at a pedagogical and an epistemological level in primary schools, according to Bhana, is that it contributes to the nurturing of “toxic masculinities”. In a country like South Africa that has one of the highest rates of gender-based violence in the world, the prevalence of such types of patriarchal and patronizing teaching attitudes and praxis confirms that feminist pedagogical interventions in childhood learning are not only necessary but also urgent. Whilst Bhana’s study does not offer any strategies for how the gender equity imperatives of the national curriculum statement 2005 can be pedagogically implemented in primary schools, her study does help to illustrate the ways that certain hegemonic gender discourses in elementary education can impede its realization and also contribute towards naturalizing gender inequalities.

In the light of present social realities whereby there are gross sexual violations against young children and females in South Africa - the efficacy of the current gender affirming, sexual health conscious and liberatory curriculum has drawn much critique. A central concern regards whether or not the country’s educative frameworks have served to improve or protect young girls’ gendered positionings adequately or not? Studies by Moletsane *et al* (2008) on contemporary girlhood struggles in Southern Africa and the related risks of HIV and Aids pandemic that young girls are exposed to, suggest that despite gender-equality initiatives made in education, young girls face far greater challenges than the democratic curriculum can deliver on.

For example, the issue of girls’ safety and sanitation within schools is seen to be perpetuated through certain gender-equal education praxis, particularly in the case of schooling bathrooms and toilets. In most cases boys and girls are assumed to have the

same or equal experiences or needs in utilizing these facilities, therefore no particular or additional provisions are made towards girls' experiences in and of using school toilets. Yet as Moletsane *et al* (2008) participatory research "with" young girls has shown, that using school toilets is one of the most fearful and apprehensive schooling experiences that many young girls face. These fears are related not only to playground rumors but also the very real threat of being raped or molested in school toilets. Their study suggests that in the educational planning process no recognition is given to the fact that boys and girls bathroom considerations are very different. Although this speaks back to the vast economic disparities that still exist within South African education in terms of available resources, it also reflects upon how gender is thought about at an organizational and epistemological level in education. In most cases inadequate privacy, proximity of girls' bathroom facilities to boys and a lack of other sanitary provisions for girls have all contributed significantly to creating a fraught schooling atmosphere for many young girls at all economic levels, but especially to those in under-resourced schools and from poorer communities.

Abrahams *et al* (2006) study on the intersections of sanitation, sexual coercion and girls' safety in schools confirms that these fears and risks are often eclipsed under the assumption that gender- equal educative frameworks do not extend beyond the curriculum. The overall health risks that girls are exposed to, in addition to the risks of sexual violations remains one of the most exigent educational challenges for young girls at present. That many girls in South Africa do not or cannot attend school during their menstrual cycles because they have insufficient sanitary provisions, or cannot afford it, or because of certain traditional, cultural taboos associated with menstruation - illustrates just

some of the ways that young girls are often multiply challenged in educational frameworks (ibid).

Religious and other cultural institutions are often positioned as social vanguards that serve to protect and preserve traditional gender roles within a community. Therefore, the revised national curriculum with its focus on childhood gender-equity and gender rights is seen by some traditional/religious leaders as contributing to a disturbance of established gendered roles and also the perpetuation of sexual violations against young girls. There is a widespread perception amongst many rural and other traditional African community leaders (Moletsane *et al.*: 2008), White Christian conservatives (Chisholm: 2003) Indian Hindu and Muslim communities (Vahed: 2000) and others that certain liberal attitudes in education encourage moral laxity and sexual permissiveness within the present generation of young South African children. For example, some of the democratic policies that have drawn much criticism from religious and other cultural bodies include the rights afforded to young girls to have an abortion without parental consent also the fact that schools are required to accommodate young school-girls that fall pregnant and cannot exclude or deny any girl from continuing their education because of an unplanned pregnancy. However since upholding certain traditional gender norms often entails monitoring and controlling the lives, actions and bodies of girls rather than boys, therefore the ways in which tradition is invoked in post-apartheid South Africa is also very often problematically gendered.

Not surprisingly, a similar fervor and commitment towards aligning the curriculum structures and religious learning programmes to the country's constitutional precepts of gender equity has not been demonstrated by the various faith communities in South Africa,

including Muslims. The efforts made towards ensuring gender-equity within the country's national schooling system are therefore often undermined by some of the religious and influential cultural frameworks that have retained their patriarchal attitudes and structures.

Madāris for the most part have benefited from the protectionisms and freedoms that the constitution affords to religious communities (who are very often also very patriarchal communities) in terms of protecting their rights to religious self-determination. It is within this context of competing gender discourses in a post-apartheid South African education that the role and function of *madāris* has become increasingly salient, particularly in terms of understanding how (or if) *madāris* are able to respond to these shifting understandings of gender roles and education expectations.

Whilst the popularity of Islamic schools that have emerged since 1994 in South Africa suggests that one of the ways that some Muslims have attempted to resolve the tension between the conflicting gender messages of the national curriculum and their faith understandings - was to create "Islamic" schools that have a *madrassah*-like ethos and learning environment (McDonald: 2013; Sayed: 2010; Tayob: 2011). However since majority of Muslim children do not attend Islamic schools, the role and functioning of an after-school *madrassah* in post-apartheid South Africa has gained a renewed sense of relevancy (Vahed:2000).

According to the Deoband '*ulamā*, the role of the *madrassah* in South Africa is considered to be of much more importance to the present generation than it has at any other time before (Jamiatul Ulama KZN, 2012: 2). Describing the current social conditions as being that of *fitnā* and *fasād* (mischief and corruption) the Deoband '*ulamā* see the *madrassah* as

a “means of saving the *imān* [faith] of thousands” and as a way of “reversing the tide of *irtidād* [relegation of faith]” amongst contemporary Muslim youth. The following extract taken from the preface of the current *madrasah* syllabus of the Jamiatul Ulama (KZN) is a telling indication of how the Deoband *ulamā* view the changed and changing circumstances of Islamic praxis for Muslim children in contemporary South Africa (ibid):

The global onslaught upon the ummah is on many fronts. However the most dangerous and unfortunately the most effective is the silent battle that is waged with smiling faces, alluring fashions, deceptive articles and even exciting toys which leave subtle messages in the hearts of our children. Eventually Muslim children, with Muslim names but with western hearts and minds grow up without any spirit of Islam in their lives. Apart from a few practices that they perform in a ritual manner – their lives centre around materialism and chasing fun. The true purpose of our existence in this earth is then completely lost.

From the extract, it would appear that some of the more pressing challenges that contemporary young Muslim children face and that *madāris* need to address are directly related to issues of depreciating moral values in the face of globalization, rampant materialism and current Muslim identity politics. The wide-spread availability of social media that sensualize personal gratification, individual freedoms and promote a general sense of moral frivolity - are all seen as contributing towards a lack of moral values and dissipating spiritual commitments and faith engagements amongst Muslim children. Young children often have easy and unrestricted access to social media and are bombarded by media images within the fashion and entertainment industries that objectify females in very problematic ways. Contemporary South African *madāris* need to deal with issues of diverse and often very conflicting messages of gender roles, sexuality and attitudes towards sexual health, sanitation and other health risks.

Furthermore, the geographical landscapes and social dynamics of the contemporary South African Muslim community have become much more diverse internally since desegregation. This diversity has however not necessarily been embraced with the same level of enthusiasm by all. Internal diversity exposes Muslims to a proliferation of alternate ideologies which poses one of the biggest threats to the dominant positions held by certain *jami'āt* bodies as the authoritative transmitters of Islamic knowledge within the Muslim community.

Other challenges that contemporary *madāris* face include competing with a proliferation of Islamic teaching-learning resources that are marketed specifically at young Muslim children. The commodification of children's Islamic education through the publication of commercialized children's Islamic literature, toys, games, animated Islamic movies, digital and online inter-active Islamic learning programmes, children's Islamic workshops and playgroups. These educative efforts have helped to establish the field of elementary Islamic education as a lucrative commercial industry. These alternate sources of Islamic teaching-learning have also helped to create the perception that traditional *madāris* and its pedagogical methods, including the knowledge expertise or the authority of conservative *'ulamā* bodies as outdated and/or have become redundant for a techno savvy generation of globalized Muslims (Starrett: 1996).

Contemporary *madāris* are therefore tasked with providing a religious learning programme that can respond to and guide young Muslim children towards confidently developing their religious subjectivities in a climate that is fraught with a multitude of competing discourses. The continued growth of Deoband affiliated *madāris* in South Africa since apartheid despite the changing social and educational landscapes of contemporary Muslims

indicates that the Deoband educational model continues to be one of the leading purveyors of elementary Islamic education in South Africa¹⁹. Suggestive in the continued growth and sustainability of the Deoband educational model is the fact that it *is* responsive to current religious education needs of young Muslim children. However, this may also be a reflection of a lack of adequate investments made in the field of elementary Islamic education by other groups of Muslims in South Africa. Deoband *madāris* therefore continue to have a dominant presence and a critical social relevancy in contemporary South Africa. Understanding how Deoband *madāris* in particular have responded to and adapted to the changing social and educational dynamics of gender is therefore considered to be both timely and germane. The following chapter attends to this question in more detail by analyzing the current curricula structures, pedagogical methods and learning texts of Deoband *madāris*.

¹⁹ The Jamiatul Ulama in Gauteng and KwaZulu Natal and the Lenasia Muslim Association (LMA) also an affiliate of the Deoband educational model are responsible for developing and regulating the curriculum structures of most *madāris* around the country, including many within the Eastern and Western Cape regions. See muslimdirectory.co.za and talimiboardkzn.org for an online listing of all current *madāris* in the country. The official website of the Lenasia Muslim Association (lma.org.za) claims to have had over twenty four thousand young learners thus far in its various *madāris*. In addition to this, both the Ta'limi Board as well as the LMA's *madrasah* syllabus have been adopted by the many other independent *madāris* within South Africa as well as internationally.

Chapter Two

Contemporary Deoband *Madāris* in South Africa: Curricula Structures, Pedagogical Methods and Learning Texts

2.1) Discursive Rules and Disciplinary Technologies:

One of the leading and most active Deoband affiliated *jami'āt* bodies in the field of elementary Islamic education in South Africa is the Jamiatul Ulama (The Council of Muslim Theologians) of KwaZulu Natal (hereafter KZN)²⁰. Established in 1955 in Durban, the Jamiatul Ulama (KZN) currently has two main education divisions, the Ta'limi Board and the Sakholwazi Education Trust. The latter division is responsible for regulating a basic Islamic learning programme within various rural communities around the country. This programme has been adapted to cater for language needs of rural African children and their parents that have converted to Islam²¹

²⁰ All information regarding the activities of the Jamiatul Ulama (KZN), the organization and structuring of the Ta'limi Board as well as the entire the Tasheel Maktab syllabus including all textbooks; wall charts; teaching manuals; past examination papers; teacher resources; codes of conduct for teachers, learners and supervisors; teacher's employment contracts; learner report cards; evaluation criteria; daily, weekly and yearly lesson plans; registration forms for learners and affiliated organizations; minutes of meetings and visual slides of *madrasah* teacher training workshops and audio recordings as well as copies of the Ta'limi Board's monthly newsletters are all available on-line from the Jamiatul Ulama (KZN) official websites www.jamiat.org and www.talimiboardkzn.org. All of the above data have been accessed on-line at various intervals between January 2012 and July 2013, additionally certain PDF versions of various documents have been downloaded, thus unless otherwise cited all information mentioned about the curricula structures, learning texts and pedagogical methods have been sourced from the Jamiatul Ulama (KZN)'s official website or from web- links to its affiliated organizations.

²¹ Particularly since post-apartheid, the spread of the Deoband educational model has increasingly grown through its many missionary efforts in rural African townships. The curricula structures of the Sakholwazi Education Trust although not engaged in this paper provides an illuminating perspective of the Deoband educational model that needs to be researched and analyzed further. However, it should be noted that the

The Ta'limi Board of the Jamiatul Ulama (KZN) is however chiefly noted for having developed one of the most comprehensive and widely used *madrasah* syllabus in South Africa referred to as the “Tasheel Maktab” syllabus (hereafter referred to as the TMS)²². Currently, the Ta'limi Board is responsible for the regulation of elementary Islamic education to more than a hundred and fifty *madāris* in and around the KZN and Eastern Cape regions. These *madāris* currently teach Islam to over five thousand young Muslim children aged between five and twelve years old daily from Monday to Friday after their regular schooling hours. In addition to this, there are currently also over a thousand independent *madāris* around Southern Africa and other areas across the world that are affiliated to the Ta'limi Board that have adopted the TMS as part of their elementary Islamic learning programme²³. Organizationally, all Ta'limi Board affiliated *madāris* are regulated through a consultative committee referred to as the *Makātib Shūrah* made up of (male) Deoband scholars and is currently headed by *Muftī* (cleric) Ebrahim Salejee together with the assistance of *Mawlana* Muhammad Ilyas Patel.

A striking feature of the Ta'limi Board and the TMS is that every aspect of the teaching and learning process including all administrative aspects of *madāris* are completely determined and controlled by the Ta'limi Board. *Madāris* in South Africa that have adopted the TMS and are affiliated to the Ta'limi Board are bound by the operational and

Tuhfatul Banāt (the text analyzed in this thesis) has been translated into isiZulu and forms part of the Sakholwazi learning programme as well.

²² The Tasheel syllabus is an early childhood *madrasah* learning programme that has been developed by the Transvaal Jamiatul Ulama; this syllabus has been adapted and incorporated into the Ta'limi Board “Maktab” syllabus.

²³ According to the Ta'limi Board's prospectus because of its wide local and international footprint its learning texts and teaching resources have been translated into many of the local African languages such as isiZulu and other foreign languages such as Russian. Al-Balaagh Publishers is the printing and publishing wing of the Jamiatul Ulama and is noted to be one of the largest publishers of Islamic literature in the southern hemisphere (McDonald 2013:90)

structural rules of Jamiatul ‘Ulama. They have to utilize all the learning texts, teaching resources and pedagogical methods developed by the Jamiatul Ulamā as well as be subject to regular supervision and evaluation by the Jamiatul Ulamā’s Ta’limi Board.

The TMS begins at the pre-school stage or at grade 0 where introductory level Islamic texts called the “Bright Stars” series are taught to children under the age of five years old. The learning programme for grades one to seven (ages six to twelve) consists of the following subjects: *Qur’an /Qaidah* (recitation) *Hifẓ* (memorization) *Duas* (supplications) *Ḥadīth* (prophetic traditions) *Akhlāq* (ethics) *Fiqh* (jurisprudence) *Aqā’id* (doctrine) *Sīrah* (Islamic history). In addition to these there is a practical aspect to the curriculum, whereby Islamic rituals are taught and there is an evaluative aspect whereby all subjects in each grade are examined twice a year either orally and/or in writing by the Ta’limi Board.

In analyzing the contents of the TMS and the pedagogical methodologies devised by the Ta’limi Board, the feature that stands out most prominently is the prescriptiveness of its curriculum. For example, the Jamiatul Ulamā has developed and published an extensive range of learning texts, teaching resources and administrative documents, which are made available to all affiliated *madāris* at a minimal cost. This includes hosting regular compulsory teacher training workshops, the publication of a monthly newsletter and managing an interactive website for all its affiliated *madāris*.

Every lesson within the entire learning programme has a prescribed pedagogical method of how content should (and should not) be relayed to learners. The learning contents of each lesson has an allocated interface time-frame, therefore not only do the Ta’limi Board

provide a yearly and termly lesson plan as part of the TMS, but every minute of every pedagogical interaction within the *madrassah* learning programme is explicitly delineated.

The formal *madrassah* assessments and examinations are set out and evaluated by the Ta'limi Board. Also, teacher's feed-back to learners and their parents including the comments to be made in children's' report cards are also set out specifically in a document that provides a range of approved or prescribed teacher comments. Whilst certain disciplinary measures are prescribed for teachers in dealing with certain incidents of misconduct or other misdemeanors by learners, punishment for these may only be meted by Ta'limi Board supervisors. Furthermore, there are specific rules of conduct in terms of adopting proper Islamic etiquette (that are applicable to all educators, learners, administrators and supervisors) including a strict dress-code, which for example stipulates that neither males nor females may wear jeans or t-shirts. Males are required to wear a long loose fitting shirt and skull-cap and all females (teachers and learners) in addition to wearing long loose fitting dresses are also required to adopt the *niqāb* (face veil) in the *madrassah* environs. However this dress requirement extends outside of and beyond the *madrassah* hours for female educators (referred to as the *mu'allimah*).²⁴ These examples help to underscore a general sense of the prescriptiveness and comprehensiveness that typically characterize the educational discourses of most Deoband *madāris* in South Africa.

²⁴ One of the lectures that were presented at the Ta'limi Board's most recent *madrassah* teacher training workshop held in April 2013 was on the topic of the importance of *purdah* (female seclusion and/or veiling of female bodies including the face, hands and feet) for Muslim females. The lecture presented by *Mawlana* Imtiaaz Kathrada is available on as an online audio link on the website talimiboardkzn.org.

Locating the educational discourses of the *jami'āt's madrassah* framework within a Foucauldian perspective²⁵ of discourse offers me a critical lens to consider the ways that power relationships operate within the *madrassah* framework. Educational discourses are seen to act as a means of organizing power relationships between various subjects within a particular pedagogical context. As Cannella (1999:38) has noted, education discourses both 'reflects and generates power', both dimensions can be observed within the educational discourses of the Jamiatul Ulama. Firstly, some of the dominant discourses that exist outside of the *madrassah* framework, that is, the broader socio-religious norms of the Indian Muslim community are similarly reflected within the *madrassah*. Secondly, the *jami'āt's madrassah* discourses can be seen as *constructive*, whereby the dominant socio-religious discourses within the Indian Muslim community are also re-constructed within and through the *madrassah* curriculum.

Cannella (1999:40) suggests that operations of power, both the reflection and generation of power, particularly within childhood educational discourses, can be succinctly observed from two positions. Firstly, by paying attention to the rules that govern the discourse and secondly, from observing the "disciplinary technologies" that produce the docile bodies that yield to the discourse. Disciplinary technologies refer to those educational practices or surveillance techniques that are used to mold individuals or groups of educational subjects in specific ways. In this regard, the notion of time and space is considered to be essential, since the ordering of time and space within educational frameworks establishes and maintains the hierarchal power relations of pedagogical relationships. This refers to who decides the rules of practice and who are required to follow those rules. Through

²⁵ See footnote 11 for a clarification of how I use Foucault's views on educational discourses in this thesis.

evaluation, monitoring and constant surveillances of these spaces, the proper order or educational hierarchy is maintained. Cannella (ibid) refers to these practices as an “invisible colonization” since bodies, departments, voices and positions are silently controlled and molded by and through the particular rules and standards that are to be observed within a particular educational space.

In Foucault’s view, the rules that govern educational discourses refer to principles of exclusion and prohibition, that is, the rules that determine who holds the exclusive right to speak authoritatively within this framework and it also determines whose voices are to be prohibited or excluded (Canella:1999). These rules are often presented as being true through invoking the natural or the scientific authority, or in the case of Islamic institutions, scriptural authority, hence are unchallengeable or unquestionable. And because they are established as truth, such rules often mask or deny holding any underlying motivations of power.

By presenting themselves as the authoritative purveyors of “pure” Islam within the Indian Muslim community, the Deoband *‘ulamā*’s dominant positions are also firmly (and unquestionably) established within the *madrassah* framework by ensuring that almost every aspect of the curriculum remains within and under their “authoritative” knowledge control. The *Makātib Shūrah* of the Ta’limi Board as the developers, supervisors and evaluators of an extensive *madrassah* framework, therefore serve as *the* authoritative voices both inside and outside of the educational spaces they control. They are able to do this in *madāris* through a strict ordering of how time and space is organized. Also through the learning texts they develop, the pedagogical methods they prescribe and the classroom

interactions they regulate. It includes the ways that the individual bodies and departments of all learners/educators are shaped and monitored within this framework.

In this way the dominant positionings of the Deoband '*ulamā*' are not only affirmed through the *madrasah* framework but are also continuously being re-affirmed through the educational subjects that are produced therein. Of particular interest however, for the purposes of this thesis is to understand the ways in which particularized gender discourses are shaped by and through the Ta'limi Board's *madrasah* curriculum.

2.2) Positioning Gender in Contemporary Deoband *Madāris*:

One of the ways from which gender positionings within the *madrasah* framework can be analyzed is to pay attention to the ways that learning content may differ between what boys are taught and what girls are taught as part of the official learning programme. Also to pay close attention to the underlying gendered messages or the hidden curriculum of the *madrasah* framework. In examining the curricula structures, learning content and pedagogical methods of the Ta'limi Board, there are very few overt indications that would suggest that boys and girls are positioned differently. Generally, elementary *madrasah* classes are co-ed learning spaces and the rules that govern the education discourses within the *jami'āt's madrasah* framework and its disciplinary technologies appear on the surface to be equally applicable to both boys and girls.²⁶ The same subjects and learning texts

²⁶ It should be noted that because the TMS is developed specifically for young pre-pubescent learners and that most children that do attend *madāris* are under the age of twelve years old, the curriculum, unlike that which is usually offered to adolescents or young adults at the Darul Ulūms, is generally understood to be gender-neutral. Although a close scrutiny of the learning content suggests that there are many instances where certain gendered notions are implied or assumed therefore it is to these subtle indications of gender that I pay particular attention to.

from grades 0 to seven are generally taught to both boys and girls, including most practical and evaluation aspects of the learning programme.

However from grade four onwards an additional text, the *Tuḥfatul Banāt* is introduced into the curriculum. Intended to be used specifically by young pre-pubescent girls aged between nine to twelve years old, the *Tuḥfatul Banāt* provides a teaching-learning manual to help young girls prepare for puberty and its concomitant religious obligations. It consists of thirteen learning areas that deal with various issues related to ritual purity, rules for prayers and fasting for females, menstruation, feminine hygiene and other sexual health issues. In addition to this, the text covers certain gender themes or moral lessons for girls that deal specifically with issues such as modesty, spirituality and female piety. It is instructive and important to note that there is no parallel text nor any other similar lessons offered to boys as well. Males are therefore also assumed to be the default “normative” learner that is being addressed in the curriculum and the TB serves as a supplement to attend specifically to girls’ needs. The *Tuḥfatul Banāt* therefore provides an informative window into the pedagogical worlds of young Muslim girls and provides an opportune location from which to analyze specific gender discourses in South African *madāris* from a feminist perspective.

To contextualize the *Tuḥfatul Banāt* (hereafter TB), a point needs to be made about the authorship of Deoband learning texts and the ways in which they are typically used within this education framework. McDonald (2013:77) maps out three types of texts that are commonly associated with the Deoband educational model: a) canonical texts, Islamic scriptures such as the Qur’an and Ḥadīth; b) dogmatic texts, Deoband interpretations of the canon and c) vernacular texts, extensions of the canon and dogma written in common

language that is accessible to laity. The first two types, the canon and dogma are mainly used in Deoband seminaries typically by male scholars. Whilst the latter type, vernacular writings, are mainly used for general public teaching-learning typically at *ta'lim* classes, *madāris* and Deoband female seminaries (McDonald: 2013; Sayed: 2010; Winkelmann 2005). At this point, a pedagogy that is premised on a hierarchal, elite system of knowledge production is already apparent. There is a clear sense that the origin and creation of religious knowledge are monopolized by an authoritative cohort of elite men, and then disseminated, taught and embodied by the male laity and females in general.

Deoband vernacular texts, such as the *Behishti Zewar* (mentioned previously) and the TB are typically used within this framework as training manuals for females to help shape particularized understandings of Islam and gender. The conceptual links between the *Behishti Zewar* and the TB, aspects of which will be pointed out in the next section, demonstrate the re-current and intertextual ways that certain gendered notions are connected and re-connected within the Deoband framework.

The other aspect with regards to the authorship of Deoband *madrassah* texts is that they seldom reveal who the actual author/s of the text are, instead, as McDonald (ibid: 90-91) confirms that “madrassa textbooks are generally authored by an institution and not individuals, with no internal references to the origin of the information”. The TB is authored collectively by the Jamiatul Ulama (KZN) Ta’limi Board however the text addresses young girls in an active voice and gives the impression that the author is a female. Although there is no way of verifying if this is the case or not, given the fact that the Ta’limi Board and its consultative members are exclusively male and that there is no mention of any female members that are affiliated to the Jamiatul ‘Ulamā (KZN) in this

capacity, it would not be unreasonable to assume that the author/s of the TB are Deoband male clerics.

It should also be noted that the gendered positions presented in the TB do not necessarily cite the canonical sources such as the Qur'an, Ḥadīth or the juristic opinion upon which they are based. The authority of the Deoband 'ulamā is assumed to be sufficient proof for the validity any claims the text makes even when they are presented in a conversational style such as in the *Behishti Zewar* and the TB. These claims are typically presented as unquestionable truths and in this way the Deoband 'ulamā are able to assert their dominant positions as the authoritative mediators of the canon.

2.3) The *Tuḥfatul Banāt*: Pedagogical Concepts and Gendered themes:

As noted in the introduction of this thesis, elementary Islamic education consists of three interrelated pedagogical concepts, namely: *tarbiyyah*, *ta'līm* and *ta'dīb*. Broadly defined, these concepts are aimed at linking the content of an inherited body of Islamic knowledge (*tarbiyyah*) to a particular methodology of instruction (*ta'līm*) so that such knowledge is embodied in practice and being (*ta'dīb*). Keeping these pedagogical aims in mind, I focus on three key gender themes presented in the TB, i.e.: the notion of *khilāfah* (agency); the concept of *ṭahārah* (ritual purity) and the notion of *ḥayā'* (modesty). My analysis is framed around the following questions: What kinds of gendered assumptions and claims are being made in the text? What types of power –relations are being produced? How are young girls' religious and gendered subjectivities being pedagogically constructed? To reiterate, my analysis adopts a FPDA approach that considers the *madrassah* space to be multi-discursive and intertextual. Therefore my reading of the TB is open to pedagogies that may

present particular challenges for gender and also offer gender affirming possibilities for young Muslim girls in South Africa.

2.3.1) Becoming *Mukallaf*: Transitioning from Girlhood to Womanhood and its

Agentive Implications:

One of the main topics discussed in the TB is that of *bulūgh* (puberty). A young girl nearing the age of puberty is referred to as a *murāhiqah* and upon reaching puberty she is referred to as a *bālighah* (girl of maturity). Described in the text as “a transition or a crossing over for her from childhood to adulthood” (p3) puberty is usually marked by a young girl’s first *hayḍ* (menstrual cycle). However other bodily changes also mark the transition for girls, including for example, having a sexually arousing dream, falling pregnant before the onset of menstruation or upon reaching the age of fourteen years old (p6). Since the text is intended to prepare the *murāhiqah* and instruct them about what this transition means for Muslim girls, the text deals with various juristic, practical and personal aspects related to religious agency.

Upon reaching puberty, a Muslim girl is said to become *mukallaf* (a responsible and accountable person) therefore one of the foremost consequences of *bulūgh* is that of religious obligation and accountability, For example: lesson two (pp. 6-8) of the TB provides a list of the obligations and prohibitions that accompany puberty for girls, this includes performing the five daily ritual prayers (*ṣalah*); fasting, observing the *hijāb* (head covering /modest dress and dispositions) and observing the laws of ritual purity. Menstrual blood is considered to be an impurity so menstruating girls are prohibited from performing the *ṣalah*, fasting or from touching and reciting the Qur’an. The text notes that neglect of any of these obligations renders one a sinner and it further notes that whilst these are

considered compulsory for the *bālighah* they are equally applicable to the *murāhiqah*. The rules of *hijāb* are particularly stressed upon, for example points 6 and 7 (p7) on the list states:

6. The laws of hijaab (i.e.: to cover the body using loose fitting clothing and covering the face are compulsory in the presence of ghair mahram males (those males whom it is permissible to marry as well as non-Muslims). Therefore, be very particular as to how you dress. Even in the presence of Mahrams (those who one cannot marry) the entire body excluding the hands, face and feet should not be exposed as this is your "Satr". This is recommended, especially in these times of evil and mischief, although not compulsory.

7. If the satr (entire body excluding the face, feet and hands) is exposed, it will lead to sin and the displeasure of Allah. Modesty is half of Imaan [faith] therefore we should be careful as to how we behave around males, especially those ghair mahram (those whom we are allowed to marry) whether they are class boys, neighbours, cousins, etc.

Several interesting points are noted from the gendered ways that the notion of *khilāfah* (religious agency) is discussed in the TB. In the introduction of the text, human beings are described as “Ashraful Makhlooqaat - the best of creations”, and states that because males and females have been created differently “with their own unique physical and emotional characteristics” these differences serve as signs of Allah’s power and greatness (p3). The fact that the *madrassah* curriculum specifically addresses issues related to puberty and its attendant religious obligations and prohibitions for girls in ways different to boys, the assumption is that becoming *mukallaf* is gendered.

Although boys too transition into adulthood by virtue of physical changes to their bodies and are similarly obligated to be responsible and accountable, these changes, unlike for girls, do not limit male religious acts. On the contrary, according to the learning content covered in the curriculum, becoming *mukallaf* for boys extends their agential capacities.

For example, according to the curriculum at the same time that girls are being taught the TB, boys learn about the rules of congregational worship, including the ritual *jumu'ah* (Friday) prayers, the Eid prayers as well as the rules for Muslim burial and funeral prayers. Similarly, whilst modest dress and observing proper etiquette for gender relations are generally equally applicable to both boys and girls, the curriculum does not address these issues in relation to boys' responsibilities. Instead, as noted from the extract above, the maintenance of proper gender relations is established through girls' observance of the *hijāb*.

Becoming *mukallaf* and its associated religious pedagogical praxis provide one of the keys ways that young Muslim girls (and boys) learn about their religious gendered positions and develop their sense of agency. Therefore it is particularly instructive to note how notions of *khilāfah* are constructed within the discursive context of the Deoband *madrassah* framework and to analyze these notions through a feminist lens.

Post-structuralist scholars have critically challenged humanist constructions that consider individual autonomy, freedom, rationality and moral authority to be synonymous with agential capacity. In fact when examining human agency, they argue instead that individuals and their capacity to be and act are in fact limited within the range of discourses available to them (Davies 1991:42). From a feminist post-structuralist perspective, individuals do not stand apart from their social contexts or the discursive frameworks that define and enable particular notions of self. In other words, female agential capacity is understood as being and acting in ways which are made possible to individuals through various competing and intersecting discourses. Therefore, recognizing, resisting, negotiating or confirming certain gendered positions within and between various

discourses is one way that post-structuralist scholars have thought about female agential capacity. Underpinning this understanding of agency however, is the assumption that agency rests upon the desire to be liberated or to act in ways that may contradict, contest or negotiate between various gendered positions. Female agency is therefore closely tied to notions of liberation and desire.

Importantly, the uncritical ways in which agency gets tied to particularized understandings of liberatory desires have also been questioned by some scholars. Saba Mahmood's (2001a, 2001b, 2005) work in this regard is considered to be especially useful, since she not only challenges some of the dominant views of liberation and desire in feminist constructions of agency but she provides a lens for thinking about female agency in ways that recognize different sets of female desires as agential capacity, such as desires of conformity, subservience, passiveness and docility. Mahmood argues that agency is not only manifested in liberatory desires for progressive change but it includes those acts and desires that "aim towards continuity, stasis and stability" (2001a: 212).

Mahmood's argument provides one way of thinking about what becoming *mukallaf* may mean for young girls' in South Africa and how the notion of agency may be understood within the context of the Deoband *madrassah* framework. The literature on feminist pedagogy pointed to some of the ways that biological differences are used to undergird unequal and unjust pedagogical practices. It however also suggested that when biological differences between boys and girls are ignored or is subsumed under the premise of sameness and gender-equality this contributes to a cognitive dissonance and an unembodied learning experience for girls. The concept of *khilāfah* as presented in TB can therefore be considered from both these perspectives.

On the one hand, the ways in which girls and boys are taught about their religious obligations in *madrassah*, the TB can clearly be seen as constructing particularized notions of *khilāfah* that empower boys and girls differently. For males, *khilāfah* entails observing certain religious responsibilities within the public sphere such as congregational prayers; whilst *khilāfah* for females is essentially related to a careful and strict control of her body and her social engagements. These positionings can be considered as reflective of the hegemonic ways that the Deoband *'ulamā* have historically asserted their particularized understandings of gender and have influenced how female religious agency is thought about. These understandings of *khilāfah* therefore reinforce dominant views of which religious roles that females can and cannot assume within the Muslim family and community.

On the other hand, if one were to consider the differing ways that boys and girls learn about *khilāfah* through Mahmood's definition of agency, the gendered positionalities that are being constructed in the TB can also be interpreted very differently. For example, the TB can be seen as projecting female *khilāfah* as a concept that is intimately tied to the female body. Female bodily functions and the restrictions upon the female body are also taught within the curriculum as being part of Allah's plan or as a divine ordering of gendered roles. The changing body of a *bālighah* together with the changing ways in which she is required to control her body, her mobility and her social engagements can therefore possibly be viewed as an embodiment of a particularized form of religious agency. The differently gendered ways of embodying *khilāfah* can be understood as empowering for both and girls but in distinctive embodied ways.

Ansari's (2010) reading of the *Behishti Zewar* provides some interesting insights for thinking about the types of female agentive subjects that the Deoband educational model aims at constructing. Echoing Mahmood's (2001a, 2005) conceptualization of agency to some extent, Ansari suggests that the *Behishti Zewar* (like the TB) can be seen as a manual for producing certain "pious dispositions" in girls. The underlying pedagogical aims are to train females to become more self-reflective about how their bodies and actions correspond to notions of God's will and socializes them into subordination to these notions of divine will. What might appear as female subordination is effectively seen as something that is in reality genuinely empowering. As such, a girl's willingness to submit or conform to the restrictions placed upon her body, movements and social engagements in this framework is one of the ways that female religious agential capacity gets articulated.

These forms of female agency however do not always resonate well with or conform to prevailing feminist understandings of agency. It might be argued that they provide another form of male control given that these notions of divine will are often based on male understandings of the divine. Furthermore, the complicity of females in willingly subordinating to male understandings of divine will often masks the nuanced ways that females assist in upholding patriarchy. Therefore Mahmood's approach does provide an enriching way for thinking about how *khilāfah* can provide a validating form of gender praxis for young girls, as well as create a conceptual space for thinking about agency outside of dominant feminist constructs, however it is my view that how *khilāfah* as pedagogical concept is used in particular context needs to be more critically deconstructed.

The *Behishti Zewar*, for example, was a text produced and used in an anti-colonial context in India. In that specific milieu, the Deoband pedagogical strategy of projecting pious

Muslim females and their pious dispositions in very particular ways was also deeply responsive to the politics of the time. Constructing Muslim women's piety and agency in ways that set them apart from imperialist and other antagonistic influences formed part of the wider Muslim anti-British movement and the Deoband religious reformist strategies in British India. The pedagogical aims of *Behishti Zewar* therefore raise important parallels for thinking about what the TB and Deoband methods of training pious self-reflective female subjects may mean within the present South African *madrassah* context.

As noted in chapter one, contemporary Deoband *madāris* in South Africa operate within a very complex and competitive educative field. Within a broader social context, young females are often problematically objectified in the media. Moreover stereotypes and misrepresentations of Muslim women are often instrumentalized in Islamophobic discourses. In light of such broader socio-political dynamics, the notion of developing a pious female, one who controls her body and movements presents resistance and a challenge to some of the hegemonic discourses on females. Nonetheless, it is important to note that it is an elite group of men that are developing these alternative representations of young Muslim girls and defining their agential capacities.

The Jamiatul 'Ulamā (KZN)'s monthly *madrassah* newsletter the *Al- Maktab* offers some enlightening insights as to how the Deoband 'ulamā have engaged these competing discourses pedagogically. For example, the theme of one issue of the *Al- Maktab*²⁷ deals with the topic "The dressing of a Muslim", it addresses both learners and their parents and warns them not to imitate the dress of *kufār* (non-Muslims) and advises them that the

²⁷ The on-line version of this particular issue does not provide a date or issue number that can be referenced, although PDF versions of all current and previous issues of the *Al Maktab* are accessible from the website.

“garment of piety is best”. What is especially noteworthy is the ways that young Muslim learners are taught to think about piety and how female dressing is one of the most significant expressions of piety that distinguishes her from the “other”.

For example, in one segment of the newsletter learners are asked to submit a project on the topic “The dressing of a Muslim and the evils of western fashion” and they are also offered cash and book prizes as an incentive for producing the best project. In this way, young children are taught to actively reject and resist certain western constructions of female bodies and fashions. These pedagogical methods are indicative of just some of the ways that agential capacities get articulated through and upon the bodies of Muslim children and how these constructions are linked to particularized notions of female piety. Pedagogic practices that create a binary between good Muslims versus the evil West are in fact responding to Islamophobic debates and other constructs of Occidentalism. They therefore provide an interesting perspective for understanding how young girls’ gendered subjectivities and agential capacities get defined and shaped through not only the *madrassah* but also in response to competing discourses within the broader social context.

2.3.2) *Ṭahārah* as Embodied Gendered Praxis and its Social Implications:

Another key theme in the TB is the concept of *ṭahārah* (ritual cleanliness/purity). In addition to what is taught of the subject as part of the general curriculum, the topic of *ṭahārah* for girls, in particular, is covered in nine of the thirteen lessons within the TB. The ways in which the theme is discussed range from legal or juristic requirements, to the very practical and personal aspects, to some biological detailing, to certain psychological aspects and it includes dealing with the spiritual, health and social importance of *ṭahārah*

as religious praxis. Therefore it can be surmised that the concept of *tahārah* provides one of the key ways that young girls learn about their religious and gendered selves in *madrassah*.

Given that females menstruate and give birth and males do not and that menstrual blood in Islam is considered to be ritually polluting, Muslim understandings of *tahārah* are clearly gendered. Particularized understandings of *tahārah* often underpin many patriarchal justifications for Muslim females' exclusions from certain religious practices, such as leading (or even participating) in the congregational prayers, or being part of Muslim funeral and burial rites and other activities like the annual practice of *uddiyyah* (animal sacrificial rites). It includes preventing females from performing certain unrelated religious functions such serving as credible witnesses in certain legal disputes or from officiating over Muslim marital contracts and divorce settlements.

Apart from the fact that menstrual blood is considered to be ritually polluting thus exempting females from certain ritual acts of worship, menstruation invariably also tends to be connected with certain essentializing notions about the innate natures of females and their capacities to act (Katz 2002: 196) . Conceptions of menstruating females are often at the center of how religious gender differences are understood and practiced in Islam. Scholars like Marion Katz (2002) and Denise Spellberg (1996) have illustrated that these gender differences are mostly premised on viewing menstruation as aberrant and linking it to perceptions of female intellectual inferiority and physical weaknesses or females' unstable emotive states and their uncontrollable sexualities. These types of gendered understandings, attitudes and menstrual insensitivities often serve as an ominous

determiner for how young girls' negative self-images of their bodies, sexualities and overall health and religious well-being develop.

Interestingly however, the topic of *hayḍ* and *tahārah* is found to be presented in the TB in very practical, sensitive and positive ways. For example, lesson one (pp.4-5) and lesson three (pp.9-10) discusses the female reproductive system and teaches young girls in detail about what occurs biologically to their changing bodies prior to and during the onset of menstruation. Lesson four (pp.11-13) and lesson eight (pp.22-23) deals with some personal and practical sanitation issues such ensuring that the sanitary wear a girl uses during *hayḍ* is appropriate, how to deal with unpleasant bodily odour during menstruation, how to dispose of used sanitary wear in public spaces and what to do, who to speak to in an emergency situation when bleeding occurs in public spaces and if a girl is unprepared for it. Menstruating girls are also informed that they should not stay away from *madrassah* during this time and are encouraged to participate in all aspects of the learning programme (except from touching the Qur'an and performing the ritual prayers). Similarly, teachers are informed that menstruating girls should not be exempted from any learning activity and the curriculum makes provision for girls in *hayḍ* during examinations/evaluations²⁸.

Lessons five, six, seven and nine deal with legal and practical aspects of purification, that is, how and when to perform the *ghusl* (ritual bath/cleansing) after the menstrual period and how to calculate and keep track of one's menstrual cycles for the purposes of worship. The text provides detailed descriptions of how to monitor the Islamic lunar calendar, how

²⁸ For example, girls in *hayḍ* cannot be evaluated on their Qur'an recitation and certain prayers for the bi-annual exams, so the Ta'limi Board supervisors/evaluators use a specific code (usually a sticker placed next to a girl's name) for noting why such girls have not been evaluated.

to observe the movements of the rising and setting sun for determining correct prayer times and how to keep a personal *hayḍ* diary.

Some lessons in the TB focus on teaching young girls about the importance of and suggest ways of keeping spiritually connected and engaged during the period of *hayḍ*, in consideration of the fact that certain ritual prayers are not performed during menstruation. For example, lesson twelve (pp.31- 33) deals with the issue of “haidh and zikr (remembrance of Allah)”, and claims that: *Women are more easily affected by shaytaan [devil /evil spirit] during their haidh as they are now in a napaak [impure] state. We should therefore take extra precautions during this time of the month by seeking the protection of Allah.* Girls are therefore taught to recite certain litanies or invocations of protection, whilst blowing into their palms and then to spread these invocations over their whole body.

The notion of *tahārah* as a pedagogical concept and a form of gendered praxis can be considered from varying angles. Firstly, the view that menstruating females are to be excluded from certain religious practices is based on certain canonical interpretations or traditional juristic decisions made by male scholars in a particular patriarchal historical context. These types of understandings and juristic decisions have been questioned and challenged by Islamic feminists (Shaikh: 2007; Spellberg: 1996), and such critiques have created important interpretive openings for re-thinking the gendered legacy of Islamic jurisprudence. For example, Islamic feminist scholars have brought to light how certain Muslim juristic conceptions of menstruation are very often linked to patriarchal imaginings of females as demonic, polluted, sexually irrepressible and also mentally and emotionally unstable (Hassim: 2007; Katz: 2002; Spellberg: 1996). Some of these scholars have

convincingly argued that these understandings are not only inconsistent with Islamic scriptural teachings but they also help to undermine the egalitarian message of an Islamic worldview. Notwithstanding the importance of such critiques in identifying the varying ways that conceptions like *tahārah* can be used to position males and females differently, it is also important to consider other forms of gender praxis that tends to be eclipsed by *only* focusing on the negative and limiting aspects of *tahārah* discourses.

For example, teaching young girls to keep a *hayḍ* diary and to be extra vigilant about calculating the prayer times and observing the ritual cleansing of *ghusl* timeously can be seen as one way of training young girls to develop a set of patterned behaviors that intimately connects their natural bodily rhythms and personal hygiene habits to a specific form of religious praxis. In other words, when girls are taught to relate the patterns of their bodily functions to certain cosmological patterns, the notion of *tahārah* as an embodied religious practice can provide a nuanced form gendered praxis that contributes towards helping girls to develop more positive self-images of and relationships with their bodies, sexualities and overall well-being²⁹.

It is important to situate the TB within the broader educational contexts of South Africa, where the failure to address sanitary concerns of girls during menstruation have been identified as one of the key areas that affect the overall well-being of many girls and

²⁹ See McDonald (2013) and Winkelmann (2005) for a discussion on how some Muslim females in Deoband *madāris* have been taught to pattern their behaviors in specific ways and have embodied certain concepts like the *hijab* / *niqāb* as a particular form gendered praxis. Also see Mahmood (2001b) for a similar discussion on the ways that Muslim females have embodied the daily patterns of the ritual prayers as an empowering form of gendered praxis. Ansari (2012) makes a very convincing argument that one of the key aims of the *Behishti Zewar* is to develop a more health conscious female where particular forms of personal hygiene practices or what he refers to as “technologies of the self” are considered to be an expression of Muslim female piety and agency.

contribute to negative body images of themselves.³⁰ It is encouraging to note that *tahārah* as a key pedagogical concept within the *madrassah* framework does not elide the fact that menstruation does pose certain challenges for girls that can affect their learning experiences. Girls' educational challenges are often exacerbated by ignoring their particular sanitation needs and concerns.

The TB therefore addresses these concerns in very practical and helpful ways and girls are taught how to develop important hygiene and other privacy habits. However it is also clear that the text, in teaching these issues, assumes that all girl learners have the same privileges of space and have access to the same resources in order to develop these hygiene and privacy habits. As noted earlier, the TB forms part of Ta'limi Board's learning programme and is taught to young children from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds, however the learner profile that is actually being addressed in the text clearly assumes a particular social class of girls, who enjoy a certain idealized type of home-life and also has other community support structures. For example, girls are instructed to learn about being pious from living with their "dadima" (paternal grandmother) by following her ways (p40). Dadima, is a term that only Indians would use or identify with, similarly an extended family home that includes a readily available pedagogical resource of a "dadima" is typical to a certain generation of Indian Muslims, and not a current reality to most female learners. The fact that the TB has been translated into isiZulu and forms an essential part of the

³⁰ Some of these challenges have been mentioned in chapter one. Also see Kirk & Sommer (2006) study entitled "Menstruation and body awareness: linking girls' health with girls' education" and Maluleke (2003) on "Improving the health status of women through puberty rites for girls" for a discussion on how issues of sanitation and health related to menstruation taboos for young girls remain one of the foremost challenges for achieving female education goals in the sub-Saharan region and other developing countries.

learning programme offered to both young and older females that have converted to Islam in rural African townships is just one of the instances when these types of assumptions and learner profiling within the TB is clearly problematic and non-inclusive of ethnically diverse subjects. Therefore, what is presented as a generic curriculum that can (and is) widely implemented raises serious concerns about the implications of the TMS lack of social inclusiveness and its ability to be adaptable to learners outside of the Deoband Indian community.

Secondly, the ways in which a girl's menstruating state is discussed in relation to *shayṭān* in the TB illustrates the pervasive and uncritical othering of females. The notion of (metaphorically and physically) spreading divine words over one's body, as a form of protection against evil is presented in the text as an enthused gendered way of being spiritually connected to the divine in spite of being in a state of ritual impurity. Implicit in this practice are the assumptions that during *hayḍ* females are not only more susceptible to *shayṭān* therefore requiring additional protection and connection but also that females are inherently deficient when in the state of *hayḍ*. The practice of protecting menstruating females through divine words is therefore not only premised on an opportunity to ensure an embodied spiritual connection but it is implicitly suggesting that such protection is required in order to defend against a female's natural state of heightened vulnerability to evil.

As such, the practical and spiritual connections being made in the text between *hayḍ* and Allah's protection therefore also masks the nuanced ways that female natures get connected to notions of vulnerability, deficiency, evil and temptation.

2.3.3) Embracing *Ḥayā'*: The Gift of Modesty and its Gendered Implications

The third theme presented in the TB is that of modesty or *ḥayā*. Generally understood as a set of social dispositions that inhere within and upon the bodies of Muslim females, the theme of *ḥayā* is covered in various ways throughout the text, however it is dealt with specifically as a concluding lesson in the TB (pp.42-50). The notion of *ḥayā* can be seen as a summation of the main pedagogical aims of the TB and thus provides an apt theme from which to conclude my analyses of how young Muslim girls' religious and gendered subjectivities are shaped through the *madrassah* framework.

Unlike the other lessons in the text which are presented in an engaging but instructional manner, the language in final chapter of the TB is more conversational and earnest in tone. As noted earlier, the impression given is that the author of the TB is a Muslim female who is having an intimate conversation with young Muslim female learners. The segment that precedes this chapter similarly includes a personal letter from an anonymous Muslim "older" sister that is addressed to her fellow young Muslim sisters. The letter advises them to learn from her childhood mistakes about being too distracted by the evils of television and disregarding the pious ways of her grandmother's generation. The "unfortunate sister" informs her young readers that - since she has grown up, she has realized too late and with much regret about her earlier misguided ways.

The segment on modesty is also presented as a personal advisory lesson for young Muslim girls. It addresses the learner in ways that acknowledge the possible fears, doubts and difficulties that a young girl on the brink of adulthood in a complex world that presents her with many alternate and more enticing ways of being female. The young learner is

embraced in a language of confidentiality and concern to help her make sense of these conflicting messages. She is informed that her body is a special gift from Allah which is an *amānah* (trust), a gift that is referred to as her “diamond”. The title of the TB is “A gift for the Daughters of the *Ummah* [Muslim community]” and the title of the concluding chapter, is “A Diamond is a Girl’s Best Friend”. The text suggests that “most women have this dream about owning the most perfect, sparkling, flawless diamond” (p 42), since the changing body of a young girl is actually her “diamond” a divine gift entrusted to her, she is advised to take care of her gift as follows:

Will we not be possessive of it? Will we not want it kept safe and free from flaws at all times? Will we not want it to remain perfect always? Of course we do! How do we accomplish this? We protect it! How do we go about protecting it? Do we not ensure that we place it in a soft, velvet pouch and lock it up in a safe place where no eyes can see it and no hands can touch it? We wouldn’t want any marks or smudges on it, would we? Similarly, our bodies are even more precious than this diamond. Therefore we should protect it even more fiercely (ibid).

The *Behishti Zewar* which means “Heavenly Ornaments” makes a similar analogy between a female body and coveted jewels. Although the jewels of choice are different in both texts; so diamonds are presented as glitzy and glamorous objects desired by women in the contemporary social context, whilst pearls were favored in British India. Both instances reflect how Deoband vernacular texts are strategically used to have wide-spread relevance and contextual appeal. The irony of the “diamond” or pearl ornament analogy however is that whilst it is intended to offer a form of resistance and challenge to dominant discourses that objectify the bodies of females, presenting the body of a Muslim female as a diamond or ornament is simply reiterating the notion that the female body is an object. Thus precious/heavenly or not, the diamond/ornament analogy is just another type of female

objectification that needs to be problematized. Using the analogy of an entrusted diamond, young girls' bodies are positioned in the TB and discussed in relation to a number of other discourses.

For example, the TB begins by addressing the ways that female bodies are objectified in the fashion and entertainment industries. Girls are asked to think about how some female bodies are used for other's entertainment and amusement and to critically reflect on how this relates to a female's dignity, respect and value. The text notes, that Muslim females are commanded in the Qur'an to cover their bodies as an expression of Allah's love and kindness to protect Muslim females. So whilst the text notes that "to us it might seem cruel that Allah is being harsh by commanding us to dress like old ladies, but Wallah [by God]! My sisters, it is not so" (p43). Therefore, *ḥayā* is presented as a girl's garment of protection, it is her dignity and respect that will keep her from being harmed by others or be used to amuse or entertain others.

In dressing like the "women of the west", a Muslim girl invites not only the wrath and anger of Allah, but according to the text once she leaves her home, she invites the *shayṭān* to incite the gazes of men to fall upon her gift and to have evil thoughts about her. Since it is *shayṭān* that beautifies girls in the eyes of men, girls are reminded that this gaze is the cause of *zinā'* (illicit sexual relations) and that the punishment thereof is 100 lashes or stoning to death (p44)³¹. Thus *ḥayā* is also described in the TB as a girl's protection from Allah's wrath to protect them from the punishment of *zinā'*. *Ḥayā* is also described as a

³¹ The punishment of *zinā'* in Islamic law is derived from certain Qur'anic and prophetic prescriptions, adultery and fornication are considered to be one of the most serious offences in Islamic law and therefore invites the most severe penalty if found guilty. However in practice, the application of these laws particularly in contemporary times has been widely debated and contested.

way of keeping *shayṭān* away thereby also protecting men from having wrongful gazes and evil thoughts.

The text also outlines what dispositions are “not” *ḥayā*. It claims that shyness which keeps girls ignorant of important issues related to her body and religious duties, the failure to ask questions and embarrassment at discussing intimate issues – are all types of behaviors that do not constitute *ḥayā* (pp.47-48).

The particular ways that the concept of *ḥayā* is taught to young girls as part of the TB are also iterated through other Deoband texts. For example, the May 2004 issue of the *Al Maktab* deals with the theme *ḥayā* and defines it as “self-shame, modesty and morality”. The failure of contemporary South African Muslim children in developing the qualities of *ḥayā* and the main causes of immorality according to the newsletter are: a) televisions in Muslim homes that expose children to immoral and shameless scenes leading to immorality, as well as claiming that such homes are deprived of the blessings of angels; b) contemporary newspapers and magazines are also identified as a main contributor to immorality; c) lack of *ḥijāb* and *pardah* (female seclusion) and the free-mixing of males and females that fail to protect the honour and chastity of Muslim females and d) the *kufār* who have encouraged Muslim girls to dress indecently and not cover their bodies and thereby causing them to lose their sense of shame and dignity.

From a feminist pedagogical perspective, the multiple ways that *ḥayā* as a pedagogic concept is invoked in the TB raises a number of significant issues. Firstly the kinds of gendered assumptions that are being made in the text are considered problematic not only for what *ḥayā* may teach Muslim girls about gender-relations and social responsibilities

but also for what it fails to teach them. For example, a girl's improper dressing and movements outside her home are noted to be the cause of *zinā*; whilst males (or their gazes and illicit thoughts) are exonerated of responsibility and are presented as hapless against the evil incitements of the *shayṭān*. Girls' bodies, dressing and movements is the central locus around which *ḥayā* gets constructed. This results in the fundamental religious claim that proper social order and gender-relations are ultimately a female responsibility. By controlling and presenting their bodies in very specific ways girls and women serve as social door-keepers for warding off *shayṭān*'s incitements and for not auguring the wrath, anger and punishment of Allah.

Moreover, men in these discourses are also inadvertently presented as weak, subject to uncontrollable sexual desire, and easily tempted to transgress the boundaries of social and sexual propriety. It also promotes an underlying view that male spirituality as lacking, fragile and vulnerable. The notion that certain pedagogical practices contribute towards developing "toxic masculinities" as noted in chapter one, provides a pertinent lens for thinking about the types of gendered subjectivities that are being constructed through the *madrasah* framework. These types of understandings that form a critical part of Muslim children's pedagogical worlds if left unchecked and not problematized at a deeper epistemological level are just one of the ways that *madāris* significantly contribute to the development of toxic and potentially dangerous gender relations within the Muslim community.

The idea that a girl's dignity, honour and shame, and that of society as a whole, rests on her concealing her body from the satanically instigated male gaze, creates the perception that females who do not dress according to specific understandings of *ḥayā* are undignified

or shameless. This is a socially and politically problematic position particularly in light of the current South African context where young girls from all communities, including Muslim girls in *madāris*, are confronted daily to the realities of rape, incest and other sexual violations and abuse. The implications of such discourses are starkly apparent in the 2006 rape trial of South African President Jacob Zuma, where the alleged rape victim's dressing and previous sexual history was used as evidence against her claims of being raped.³² Also, on 30 December 2011 two young girls were molested by a mob at a Johannesburg taxi rank. Whilst the incident was captured on security cameras the incident also drew intense public debate not only about girls' safety in travelling alone but also the role that the victims' mini-dresses played in inviting being dis-respected³³. Similarly, in February 2013 when the young teenage girl Anene Booysen was brutally gang-raped and mutilated and murdered, the fact that she was seen socializing and under-age drinking with her killers drew criticisms about her and her community's complicity in her own victimhood³⁴. Compounded to this, is the problematic ways that Islamic laws of *zinā* are invoked in certain Muslim majority countries, where victims of sexual crimes are often penalized together with the perpetrators of such crimes. Hence there are abusive and deeply unjust social implications of these wide-spread misconceptions that females dressed in certain ways actually instigate sexually violation. As such it is imperative to critically interrogate the teaching to young girls that *ḥayā* serves as a protection against sexual violations.

³² <http://mg.co.za/article/2006-03-21-timeline-of-the-jacob-zuma-rape-trial>.

³³ <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-01-03-premier-condemns-sexual-harassment-at-noord-taxi-rank>.

³⁴ <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-02-28-gender-violence-flowers-in-bredasdorp-and-rape>

The ways that girls' bodies and dressing gets invested in particular notions of family honour and shame within the Muslim community (Hassim:2007) raises serious concerns how such understandings contribute to silencing existing experiences of abuses. Moreover, defining *ḥayā* in this particularized way, results in certain fears of stigmatization that render certain issues like sexual abuse, under-age sex, sexual diseases and teenage pregnancies invisible within the community. It also creates the inaccurate perception that the Muslim community and Muslim girls in particular are protected from or immune to these difficult social problems.

On the other hand, Davids (2012) and McDonald (2013) suggests ways in which the notion of *ḥayā* – in particular contexts may provide a conceptually empowering means of teaching young girls how to cope with some of the morally conflicting gendered messages and intersecting identity discourses that permeate their lived social realities. The very public ways that *ḥayā* gets inscribed upon the bodies of Muslim females – is one way of challenging certain narrowly defined secularist notions of liberation and freedom. Dominant secular discourses might negatively portray Muslim females and their use of *ḥijāb/niqāb* in particular, as regressive, oppressed and voiceless, and juxtapose them to western/secular women represented as liberated and free. Many contemporary Muslim females have rejected the colonizing ways that their bodies/dressing gets appropriated and stereotyped through these discourses.

In August 2013 at the globally televised MTV Music Video Awards, twenty year old singer/actress Miley Cyrus who until recently appeared in the hugely popular Disney children's television programme "Hannah Montana" performed a highly controversial dance referred to as "twerking" to signal her transition from child star to independent

woman artist³⁵. The fact that she performed a sexually suggestive dance on a world stage with a much older male artist and that she was scantily clad and appeared almost naked has sparked a “not unintended” frenzy of world-wide attention. The incident and the subsequent reaction to her performance are both important since they help to illustrate the binaries around which notions of female modesty, liberation and freedom get applied to Muslim women *vis a vis* western/secular women.

On the one hand, as an icon and an ostensible “role model” to millions of young girls around the world Miley Cyrus is portrayed as the quintessential image and standard of western liberation and freedom. As a popular teenage icon, her skinny body, dress or lack thereof, wanton sexual displays and independent lifestyle are presented an idealized (and unrealistic) image that is blatantly marketed to young pre-pubescent girls the world over. This image is commercialized using various paraphernalia such as posters, music videos, teenage bedding, clothing and cosmetic lines. The fact that her body and developing sexuality was used to generate millions of dollars for television and other corporates suggested that in reality she was not genuinely free or liberated. Whilst on the other hand and at the same time, in countries like France Muslim women, in the name of freedom and liberation, are being denied the personal choice to wear a face-veil. The irony of the differing ways that freedom and liberty gets applied to women’s bodies is a crude reflection of the double standards used for females that may resist, reject and challenge these types of gender discourses.

Muslim females are often at the forefront of the changing ways that modesty as an empowered and empowering form of gender praxis is understood. The public face of

³⁵ <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/miley-cyrus-speaks-up-about-vmaw-performance-20130903>

Muslim females that contradict dominant perceptions and associations of the *hijab* are most notable globally in the sporting and artistic worlds. For example, Muslim women have actively campaigned for their right to compete in the recent Olympics games wearing the *hijāb*, Muslim female national soccer teams, rap singers, hip-hop artists, comedians in *hijāb* have all contributed to not only challenging Muslim stereotypes but provide an important voice in exposing the double standards with which certain notions of liberation and freedom commonly get defined. In challenging some of the crude and blatant ways that females are reduced to their bodies particularly within the media, fashion, sport, cosmetic and entertainment industries these alternate public depictions of *hayā* provide a necessary counter narrative to western cultural imperialism. The notion of *hayā* in these contexts provide an affirming form of religious and gendered praxis that may help young girls resist the reductive marketing ploys of these industries.

Finally, the notion of *hayā* can also provide one way of teaching young girls how to foster healthy (future) sexual relationships and attitudes towards sex and sexuality. The risks of adolescent girls and young adult females engaging in promiscuous, exploitative, and gratuitous sexual relationships are often exacerbated by negative or sexualizing portrayals of females in the media. Teaching young girls to recognize that their sexuality and sexual relationships are fundamentally tied to and therefore also submissive to their spiritual selves is an empowering way of developing female sexual agency in young girls³⁶.

³⁶ Islamic teachings are generally understood to be sex-positive - it is also the assumption around which the TB is framed, however the fact that many Muslim women's sexual experiences do occur within patriarchal marriages, where there is more stress placed on satisfying male sexual needs and where the importance of female sexual needs often tends to get subverted – has been problematized by some feminist scholars. See Hoel (2010:210) for example, on how understandings of Islam as a sex-positive religion is mediated and negotiated by Muslim women.

In summation, the three gendered themes presented in the TB, i.e.: *khilāfah*, *ṭahārah* and *ḥayā* provide a succinct window into the various forms of gendered praxis that young Muslim girls in Deoband *madāris* are currently being taught. When considered through the analytical lenses of FPDA, these pedagogical texts can be seen as helping to shape specific notions of female piety, agency, purity and modesty that variously positions Muslim girls, in relation to Muslim males as well as in relation to “other” females. Identifying the competing gender discourses and the multiple positionalities made possible within *madāris* however provides only an initial first step towards fully understanding how young girls’ religious and gendered subjectivities *are* shaped within the *madrasah* framework.

Conclusion:

In adopting a feminist pedagogical approach to explore gender discourses in South African *madāris* and in analyzing the contents of the TB through a FPDA lens, the overarching aims of this thesis is to help map out a possible framework for thinking about strategies for developing an Islamic feminist pedagogy for elementary Islamic learning in South Africa. Using the Deoband educational model as a reference point and also as an initial exploratory first step towards that aim, this thesis has probed two main research questions. Firstly, informed by an understanding that Islamic childhood pedagogies can provide both challenges for gender praxis as well as offer affirming possibilities for more egalitarian Islamic praxis, this thesis interrogated the curricula structures, pedagogical methods and learning texts developed by the Jamiatul Ulama (KZN) Ta’limi Board to understand how young Muslim girls’ religious and gendered subjectivities are being shaped within this *madrasah* framework. The second question around which this thesis has been framed was

to ask how do *madāris* engage and respond to some of the gender challenges that many young children in post-apartheid South Africa currently face?

Reflecting on my data, I offer some of the following conclusions. One of the main findings of my research is drawn from noting the parallels between the TB and the *Behishti Zewar*. That particularized forms of gender praxis that were promoted for Muslim females in the 1900s living in British India are similarly being (successfully and widely) promoted in a twenty first century globalized secular minority South African context is certainly noteworthy. Although the significance of this may be variously interpreted and debated, from an Islamic feminist perspective, I would suggest that it speaks to the importance of and the challenges that the weight of tradition holds for thinking about feminist educative reforms in *madāris*. If understood in light of the rubric under which Islamic education functions, that is, the notion of *tarbiyyah* as a method of nurturing and socializing young children into a body of inherited knowledge, then the preservation of patriarchal forms of gendered praxis through current methods of childhood pedagogy needs to be problematized. That the body of inherited knowledge into which young Muslim children are nurtured and socialized often bears the weight of patriarchy indicates that Islamic feminist pedagogical interventions have to begin at the sources of that knowledge.

In the case of the Deoband educational model, vernacular texts like the *Behishti Zewar* are considered to be especially critical since they play a far more significant role in determining how the notion of *tarbiyyah* is understood and used in South African *madāris* than other canonical sources of knowledge. Therefore, as part of an Islamic feminist pedagogical strategy, all types of vernacular texts (i.e.: not necessarily only those used and developed by Deoband scholars) that are used to mediate the canon and inform particular

understandings of childhood, child-rearing and Islamic education need to be interrogated for their underlying gender biases. My analysis suggests that the tradition can and is being used in varying and variable ways, both to establish and maintain certain male privileges in Islam but also to develop affirming and validating forms of gender praxis. The task of an Islamic feminist pedagogy therefore, is to harness those gender affirming forms of pedagogical praxis and to root out elements of gendered toxicity so that its egalitarian goals can be realized.

Another key finding of this research in terms of understanding the role and function of *madāris* in post-apartheid South Africa and the types of religious and gendered subjectivities that are being constructed through its educational discourses, is that Deoband *madāris* adopt a very pronounced anti-West or an “us versus the *kufār*” rhetoric as part of their pedagogical language. The anti-West rhetoric, as suggested in my analysis, can provide one way of countering the hegemonic ways that western secular cultures are often held up as the standard against which notions of liberation, freedom and autonomy get defined. As noted, the affective consequence of these types of gender discourses is that it tends to also marginalize, depreciate or ignore different or other forms of gender praxis. However, despite contributing to the necessary counter-narrative of Muslim females as helpless, voiceless and oppressed, the spirit within which these counter narratives get articulated are also important to consider. Therefore in reflecting on some of the ways that gender praxis is promoted in relation to the “other” within the South African Deoband *madrasah* framework raises some critical concerns. Foremost, is the fact that whilst girls may be taught to think about what being a gendered Muslim means in ways that distinguishes them from the “other”, it may also fail to teach them what being a gendered

Muslim means in terms of being a *part* of the other. As such it is my view that the Deoband educational model does not adequately respond to current concerns of shaping confident, competent Muslim learners that are also engaged democratic citizens. Given that Deoband ideology originally developed in a particular antagonistic political context, the entire model relies on creating and maintaining clearly defined borders between “us and them”. As such, despite presenting itself as apolitical, at its core the Deoband ideology including its educative methods and pedagogical aims are not only hierarchal but also politically motivated and binary. In light of the contemporary needs of young Muslim South Africans, the Deoband educational model does not address a whole range of possibilities present within the Muslim tradition to present human relations and civilization in more inclusive, mutually cooperative and holistic ways.

The Deoband educational model as analyzed in this thesis suggests that a successful implementation of its *madrassah* learning programme requires Muslim children to position themselves apart from the rest of society, particularly young Muslim girls. The pedagogical language of the TMS because it is steeped in an “us versus them” fails to adequately engage and utilize the democratic frameworks of this country to help foster positive multicultural and inter-faith relationships and develop meaningful citizenry for young Muslim children. Lacking in the TB are lessons that can teach young girls how to contribute meaningfully to society, how to utilize their moral framework, their understandings of *khilāfah*, *ṭaharah* and *ḥayā* for example, as a way building mutual bonds of togetherness with other non-Muslim children in South Africa and the global community generally. A critical aim of developing an Islamic feminist pedagogy is to

consider how certain affirming forms of Muslim gender praxis can be developed to have a broader social relevance and mutual impact.

In conclusion, I contend that developing an Islamic feminist pedagogical framework within the field of elementary Islamic education in South Africa is an endeavor that needs much more intellectual, material and community investments and commitment. Islamic feminist scholars therefore need to work towards building reciprocal relationships between academia, religious authorities, educational practitioners and the Muslim community. In other words, the overarching aim of an Islamic feminist pedagogy is not to develop a narrow or exclusivist theoretical framework of critical thought accessible and relevant only to scholars but to extend their research efforts so that meaningful and positive change can occur through mutual effort and commitment. This thesis hopefully provides an initial first step in that direction.

Glossary:

<i>‘Ālimah</i>	female Islamic scholar
<i>‘Ulamā</i>	Islamic scholars
<i>Akhlāq</i>	ethics
<i>Aqā’id</i>	doctrine
<i>Bālighah</i>	pubescent female
<i>Bid’ā</i>	religious innovation
<i>Bulūgh</i>	puberty
<i>Du’ā</i>	supplication
<i>Fasād</i>	corruption
<i>Fiqh</i>	jurisprudence
<i>Fitnā</i>	mischief
<i>Ghusl</i>	ritual bath/cleansing
<i>Ḥadīth</i>	Prophetic narrative
<i>Ḥalāl</i>	permissible
<i>Ḥarām</i>	forbidden
<i>Ḥayā</i>	modesty

<i>Hayḍ</i>	menstruation
<i>Hifẓ</i>	memorization
<i>Hijāb</i>	modest dress/ head covering
<i>Irtidād</i>	renegade from faith
<i>Jami'āt</i>	collective body/guild
<i>Jumu'ah</i>	Friday
<i>Khilāfah</i>	moral/ religious agency
<i>Kufār</i>	disbelievers/ non-Muslims
<i>Madrassah / pl. madāris</i>	religious school/s
<i>Makātib Shūrah</i>	education consultative committee
<i>Maktab / pl. kuttāb</i>	elementary school/s
<i>Masjid / pl. masājid</i>	space/s of prayer
<i>Mawlana</i>	title for Deoband seminary graduates
<i>Mirāth</i>	inheritance
<i>Mu'allimah</i>	female Islamic teacher
<i>Mufī</i>	title given to Muslim cleric
<i>Mukallaf</i>	maturity

<i>Murāhiqah</i>	pre-pubescent female
<i>Nikāh</i>	marriage
<i>Niqāb</i>	face veil
<i>Qaidah</i>	Qur'anic recitation
<i>Shayṭān</i>	devil/evil spirit
<i>Sīrah</i>	Islamic history (prophetic era)
<i>Ta'dīb</i>	good conduct/ morality
<i>Ta'līm</i>	instruction/ teach
<i>Ṭahārah</i>	cleanliness/ ritual purity
<i>Talāq</i>	divorce
<i>Tarbiyyah</i>	nurturing/religious socialization
<i>Uddiyyah</i>	animal sacrificial rites
<i>Ummah</i>	Muslim collective/fraternity
<i>Waṣṣiyah</i>	last will and testimony
<i>Zakāt</i>	wealth tax
<i>Zinā</i>	adultery/fornication

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