Islamic Feminist Imaginaries: Love, Beauty, and Justice

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SHORT BIO

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Keynote:

One of the most profound universal challenges to human beings in the twenty-first century is to enable collective transformations that create nourishing modes of being for all lives and for this planet. We are re- quired, indeed obliged to bring to the table of humanity the very best from each of our distinctive traditions, so that life on earth – human and non-human – can be sustained. In seeking to embody the good, the moral, the just, and the beautiful, in essence the virtuous, there is a need for dynamic and engaged reflections on our living traditions of ethics in response to the problems we are confronted with on a local and global scale.

Any attempt to simultaneously reflect critically on the economies of violence that we are located within, while seeking to invoke life-sustaining and joyful resources of being, requires on the one hand, a critical, clear, and unflinching appraisal of our current challenges, and on the other hand, a refusal to being trapped in the resulting pain – a tough call. However, that is indeed the nature of feminist scholarship. Feminist work is generally a "tough call." As the queer theorist, Sara Ahmed has noted, feminists are often called the

"killjoys," the ones who expose the illusionary nature of happiness sustained through structural inequality.[1]

While there is a moral imperative to be a killjoy in contexts of oppression, calling out constantly against complicity, silence, heedlessness, and illusionary constructs of peace and happiness, epistemically and emotionally it is a heavy burden. This toll is compounded in the current time, when so many people on this planet are materially and psychologically overwhelmed by the socio-economic toll of Covid-19. In the South African context, the weight of the pandemic has been intensified by the impact of the recent violence and anarchy in KZN and Gauteng[2], as well as the racist macho-vigilante murders in Phoenix[3], while on the international stage, we witness the Taliban's seizure of control in all the major cities in Afghanistan, with severe and devastating implications for the rights and integrity of Afghani women. Locally and globally, we are in such a collective state of pain and constriction that any sense of joy and rest feels like an impossible task. Amidst what is feeling unceasingly like a world turned upside down, the call for reprieve and rest is more urgent, but ever more elusive: How might we engage between this rock and hard place? Today I offer a partial reading of the nature of this challenge before presenting some reflections on directions to explore for spiritual sustenance and respite.

A formidable challenge for our age is to replace paradigms of domination with those embedded in reciprocity, mutuality, love, and justice. From Phoenix-KZN to Kabul-Afghanistan, from Minneapolis-USA to Delhi- India, we are acutely aware that the current global political landscape is a stage for toxic masculinities running rogue. Traversing religious and secular spaces, a marked phenomenon of our time is the unapologetic forms of

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1 Sara Ahmed, "Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness," *Signs* 35, no.3 (2010): 571-94

2 Social unrest, purportedly triggered by the imprisonment of the former President Zuma, spread into wide-spread rioting, chaos, and lawlessness in Gauteng and KZN in South Africa from 8-19 July 2021. Social analysts argue that the enduring systemic economic inequality in South Africa, continuing in the post-apartheid era, compounded by Covid-19 and the related loss of jobs, aggravated socio-economics hardships, and the state of chaos escalated quickly, resulting in the death of more than 300 people.

3 See a compelling view on the Phoenix violence by Sarojini Nadar, "A time for collective grief: Reflections on the *Phoenix* Massacre," 29 July 2021, https://mg.co.za/opinion/2021-07-29-a-time-for-collective-grief-reflections-on-the-phoenix-massacre/

rapacious male power. Increasingly, human vices socially manifested as sexism, racism, homophobia, classism, ecocide, and xenophobia, among others, are unashamedly paraded in the varying political theatres of the world, causing tremendous suffering to the vast majority of human beings as well as the destruction of various other forms of life across the planet. Modes of power and authority, exercised in the interests of small male elites, have not only resulted in gross socio-economic inequalities, but also compromised the ultimate survival of the earth.

Ecofeminists have long pointed to the common root of domination, characterising patriarchal capitalist structures that privilege men over women, and exploitative modes of human engagement with the earth, and non-human environments. The enormity of the current ecological crisis bears a painful testimony to the ways in which these masculinist modes of power have caused extensive planetary destruction – climate change is but the tip of the iceberg.

Gus Speth, professor of environmental law, astutely observed in 2013 that the catastrophic ecological state of the world is at its core a spiritual crisis:

> I used to think that top global environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address these problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy…and to deal with these we need a spiritual and cultural transformation, and we (lawyers) and scientists, don't know how to do that.[4]

Speth alerts us that a crucial dimension of the ecological crises is symptomatic of an underlying poverty of human virtue at the collective, political level. Indeed, one of the root causes of the manifold social, political, and ecological disasters which we confront today is our collective spiritual deficit.

[4] Gus Speth, "A New Consciousness and the Eight-fold Way towards Sustainability," n.d. https://earthcharter.org/podcasts/gus-speth/.

There is ample evidence that many prominent contemporary leaders function at the lowest level of human consciousness, embodying negative qualities and vices within communities that have in some way enabled their rise to power. The imperative for social transformation, within which human beings as a collective foster virtue and refrain from vice, is not simply about an individual quest, but has extensive political consequences. If indeed the central root of the problem is spiritual, the cure must also involve inner renewal and modes of personal ethics that manifest in more virtuous publics. While systemic injustice cannot be solely redressed by a revitalisation of individual ethics, nonetheless the renewal of spirituality and the cultivation of virtue remain one crucial component among others, in addressing the social challenges of our time.[5]

A deeper response to the current socio-political crises, therefore, includes attentiveness to the organic relationship between the individual and the society, and the intimacy between the spiritual and the political realms. Indeed, all great prophets, sages, and wise leaders from varied cultures and histories, brought teachings that integrated the cultivation of the inner self in ways that had profound social implications – prophets were often rejected by the powerful elites of their societies, precisely because their revolutionary spiritual imaginaries shifted modes of social power.

Since my approach to religion is one that focuses on the spirit of revolutionary change, it is appropriate to reflect briefly on the idea of tradition. Human beings are as much the shapers of religious traditions as they are recipients of it. The persistent assumption that any religion including Islam is fixed, handed down, and already determined, and that believers should simply submit and follow, is sociologically and historically inaccurate. Any cursory historical appraisal will reveal that religions are not only handed down to people but are also continuously in the process of becoming through

[5] Drawing on Kantian ethics, philosopher Lucy Allais alerts us that in conditions of structural injustice we cannot remedy the situation solely through individual action or virtue, but we require political change. See Lucy Allais, "Deceptive Unity and Productive Disunity: Kant's Account of Situated Moral Selves," in *Kant on Morality, Humanity, and Legality,* eds. Ansgar Lyssy and Christopher Yeomans (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 3.

the lives, ideas, contributions, innovation, reformulations, rejection, embraces, and meaning-making actions of its adherents.[6]

People are sometimes more easily aware of the dynamic nature of religious meaning-making at the personal, individual level. It is often easier to recognise in the context of our everyday experiences that one's spiritual path is influenced by varying experiences. We know that there are times when we encounter our own strengths and gifts beautifully, and yet other times where we have come up sheerly and nakedly against our own weakness and limitation. We might remember times when we have extended ourselves beyond what we thought capable, and other times when we were more constricted and in pain than we had thought we could have borne. We might recall times when we have known our own power to touch another life with love and compassion, and yet other times that we have been so deeply vulnerable, subject to the pain inflicted by another, or incapacitated by the pain that we might have inflicted on another life – we know intrinsically that this range of experiences of ourselves and our world requires dynamic responses from us if we want to grow.

Conscious human beings recognise experientially that the spiritual and ethical path requires presence and responsiveness to the moment, a recognition that for any deeper discernment and cultivation, we must consistently seek to calibrate with the higher qualities and attributes within ourselves. We need a similar sort of awareness and dynamic engagement with religious tradition as it relates to the social sphere, taking seriously the moral agency, responsibility, and accountability that we have as human beings in creating a more just, humane world for all beings – human and non-human.

Some religious people, particularly in times of uncertainty and strained social circumstances, want to relieve their anxiety and insecurity by appealing to an imagined construct of the past that provides clear and undisputable

[6] Shahab Ahmed's *What is Islam*, despite a dismal lack of attention to questions of gender, nonetheless provides an illuminating archive of the dynamic nature of the Islamic tradition and Muslim creativity within tradition over a period of 500 years (fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries) in diverse geographical regions ranging from the Balkans to Bengal. See Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

answers. However, if our relationships to the past do not allow us to dynamically respond to the changing needs of our current social contexts, stagnation, imbalance, and destructiveness will inevitably ensue. In my view, these forms of harm are reflected in religious communities – my own included – when we do not effectively engage contemporary challenges to redress gender, sexual, racial, and environmental justice. It might include, among others, the more obvious cases of unjust marital rights in the family, discriminatory divorce procedures, unfair custody rights, denigrating same-sex sexuality, exploitative racist employment practices, and abuse of the earth's resources, to name but a few.

Responsive to our contexts, it becomes imperative for conscientious believers to engage prevailing interlocking systems of oppression, attentive to what the Qur'an calls the *ayat* or signs appearing on our contemporary horizons[7] – and these signs include our evolving sensibilities of justice. Being enriched by tradition, is to boldly embrace one's own role in creating and crafting contemporary living forms of religion, rather than being hostage to an authoritarian image of the past. As astutely observed by the early twentieth-century reformist Jewish Rabbi, Mordecai Kaplan who highlighted the importance of dynamic Jewish responses to the contextual ethical demands of the time, inherited tradition has "a vote and not a veto."[8]

Islamic feminism proceeds from a vision of an imaginative and lively dialogue between core values of the Muslim past with those of the present, in order to contribute meaningful understandings of Islam in relation to questions of gender ethics and social justice. Reading the contemporary horizons as a believer, I am inspired by a central spiritual teaching at the core of my tradition, the insight that love and justice are integrally connected, that divine love is at the root of all existence and is the ontological or original womb of justice. In this regard, the Qur'an clearly states that the command of God is *adl wa ihsan*, *adl* meaning justice, and *ihsan* – a more nuanced Arabic word

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7 A popular Qur'anic verse (41:53) invites human beings to respond to the social context as part of a response to the Divine: "We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves, till it is clear to them that it is the truth. Is it not enough for them to know that the Sustainer is witness over everything?"

8 Rebecca T. Alpert, "Reconstructionist Judaism in the United States," *The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*, 23 June 2021, https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/reconstructionist-judaism-in-united-states

– best translated in my view as 'goodness' that encompasses dimensions of beauty, love, and virtue collectively. In my analyses, when the impetus for social justice is driven by love, it is at its most potentially transformative and powerful.

Anger is an important and effective reactive weapon that can powerfully ignite justice-based movements. Indeed, the suffering created by the prevailing economies of violence must elicit anger, resistance, and rejection, born of righteous rage. However, anger cannot ultimately nurture the higher. Anger might push some among us to action, but anger does not truly enable growth and expansion. I suggest that for justice to ripen into a truly transformative and sustaining force, it must draw back from that deep current of love, and this is where we dive into for respite, rest, rejuvenation, replenishment, and creativity.

To many people, the term "love" is nebulous and difficult to define. For some people, it is a feel-good emotion or related to a private experience, which is not essentially about social transformation. For others, notions of love have been manipulated theologically and socially to subordinate and even colonise groups of people, purportedly for their salvation. In intimate relationships within patriarchal societies, love is sometimes invoked instrumentally to serve inequitable roles and asymmetries of gendered power. As such, love can be a messy and even an abused concept in our experiences and histories. However, I retrieve and reclaim a vision of love as a transformative political force. Following in the foot- steps of some of the great prophets and social reformers, I focus on love as a universal spiritual legacy of humankind that can potentially calibrate human beings to higher forms of consciousness, heralding nourishing forms of relationality for individual and collective flourishing within a society.

To reflect on the deepest spiritual source of love, there is an evocative Muslim tradition (*hadith qudsi)* in this regard, where God purportedly said, "I was a Hidden Treasure and I loved to be known, so I created the world so that I might be known."[9] Many Muslim thinkers have reflected extensively on

[9] For a discussion of this *hadith qudsi*, see Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 268; and Sa'diyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*: *Ibn 'Arabi, Gender and Sexuality* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 69-76.

this tradition, using it as a starting point for understanding human nature and a relationship with God. Within this religious imaginary, it is a divine yearning, longing, and love to be known intimately that is the very impetus for creation. Love is thus lodged in our innermost beings. It is the original divine imprint on every life – we are all mirrors of a divine love seeking to reflect its "hidden treasure." However, what is this "hidden treasure?" Muslim scholars have understood this to refer to divine qualities or attributes which are embedded in creation as part of our original nature or constitution, the spiritual birthright of every life, and which every human being and all creation have been gifted with.[10] Within the Muslim tradition, the divine attributes that humanity must foremostly embody, are mercy, compassion, generosity, and justice. Here another Muslim tradition (*hadith qudsi*) is helpful in highlighting the appropriate forms of relationality in contexts of need and inequality: God] descends to stand in our place, such that when one of Her servants is hungry, God says to the others, "I was hungry and you didn't feed me" and when one is thirsty, God says to His other servants, I was dying of thirst and you didn't give me water and when another of Their servants was sick, God says, "I was sick and you didn't attend to me." And when those servants ask God about all of this, God says to them, "As for the one who was sick, if you had tended to him, you would have found me with him. And when someone was starving, if you had fed her, you would have found her with Me and so for the one who was thirsty, if you had given them water you would have found Me there" (*Hadith al-qudsi*).[11]

This popular Muslim tradition, with its evident biblical resonance,[12] indicates God's presence among "the least," those occupying marginal and liminal social spaces. Divine love and mercy are such that God partakes in the conditions of one's deepest human needs. Here, each person is compelled to respond compassionately to the needs of those who are weakened through illness, hunger, and thirst. I interpret these conditions of need as both physical and metaphorical – hunger, thirst, and illness include a physical and socio-economic vulnerability, as well as other intersecting axes of social and political precarity, whether it is the result of sexist and homophobic cultures, racism, or any other context of human suffering due to structural injustice. As such, I propose that a response of care, protection,

10 William Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 93.
11 Muhyi al-Din Ibn 'Arabi, *Al-Futuhat al-makkiyya*, Vol. 2 (Cairo: n.p, 1911), 596.
12 See for example Matthew 25:34-45 in the Bible.

and upholding justice towards a fellow human being in situations of oppression, is in effect a response to the divine presence.

Therefore, enacting compassion and justice is not merely an act of extension to another human being, it is an act of connecting with the Divine Beloved. As such, the person who extends to those in need, who acts with fairness and justice in their personal relationships to other lives, is not simply the benevolent person who attends with merciful compassion to a marginalised "other." In fact, responding compassionately to adversities and challenges faced by a poor, hungry, ill, or oppressed person paradoxically provides a fertile opportunity for a fellow human being to encounter the Ultimate Source. Moreover, the oppressed or hungry person is not merely instrumental or an intermediary, but in and through that person's predicament, the Divine as the embodiment of love, is fully present, inviting compassionate and loving human engagements. This reading of the spiritual dynamics within such relationships disrupts and subverts traditional power relationships between giver and recipient, between the powerful and the powerless. In reality, both parties in this relationship give and receive divine mercy – the humanity and divinity of each are tied to the other and everything is an unfolding of divine love.

From this perspective then, love is a radical transformative force that engages the fullness of one's being and extends to other lives and into the realm of society as a means of deep encounter. Love is the primary creative force for existence, and the highest call of human community, and is always intimately tied to justice. This insight also emerges within other religious and ethical traditions pithily captured in the well-known aphorism by contemporary philosopher and social critic, Cornell West, "Justice is what love looks like in public, just like tenderness is what love feels like in private."[13]

The intimate connection between love and justice demands that we rethink models of power, and here feminists have long reflected on the importance of turning away from discriminatory hierarchies towards reci- procity and mutuality. I find a deep resonance between the work of many Islamic

[13] Cited in Takim Williams, "*#in Context: Cornell West*," 22 February 2017, https://www.traffickinginstitute.org/incontext-cornel-west/

feminists who focus on the central religious imperatives that embed love, with justice as an integral ethical imperative, and the emergence of what is increasingly been called "love ethics" or "love politics" more broadly amongst black feminist scholars.[14]

The Islamic philosopher Zahra Ayubi points precisely to this synergy when surveying Muslim love ethics as it takes form among Muslims who are active in the *Black Lives Matter* movement. She describes this emerging current of love ethics as a constructive attempt to create anti-oppressive communities "for the love of the tradition and fellow Muslims with an eye to the future. Muslim love ethics is not just concerned with assigning moral language to women's everyday resistance but is concerned with moral language that characterizes an egalitarian future."[15] Indeed, these moral languages of love and justice are presently taking form in various forms of community-making the world over. I would like to offer examples of two initiatives that I am involved in, which reflect new moral narratives and alternative forms of community, embodying in my view an aspirational "love ethics."

The first example is a forthcoming anthology of contemporary Muslim women's sermons that Dr Fatima Seedat and I conceptualized, titled *The Women's Khutbah Book: Contemporary Sermons on Spirituality and Justice from around the World*. While there is a traditional genre of sermons or *khutbah* compilations within Muslim cultures, these have historically been a male preserve, written and presented exclusively by men. Given the burgeoning spaces of Muslim women's religious leadership and spiritual authority in varied contexts globally, Muslim women are currently producing new and vital bodies of religious knowledge, grounded in commitments of love, spirituality, and justice. Our book, the first of its kind, aims to instantiate, mark, authorise, and celebrate these transformative visions of Islam and inclusive leadership. It includes contributions from diverse women ranging from South Africa to Senegal, Britain, the USA, Pakistan, Egypt, Indonesia, Germany, and Denmark. The collection both continues an established literary tradition of sermon (*khutbah)* compilations in Muslim societies, while fundamentally trans- forming, expanding, and innovating that genre. Further,

[14] Zahra Ayubi, "Islamic Gender Ethics: Traditional discourses, critiques and new frame-works of inclusivity," in *The Routledge Handbook of Islam and Gender,* ed. Justine Howe (New York: Routledge, 2021), 57-67.

[15] Zahra Ayubi, "Islamic Gender Ethics," 65-6.

by locating itself within as established Islamic genre, it serves to simultaneously archive and authorise contemporary Muslim women's spiritual authority. Dynamically balancing continuity and change, this archive reflects a contemporary form of gender-inclusive tradition-making within Islam.

Within the book, Fatima and I bring the insights of these contemporary women *khatibahs* into dialogue with a marginalised historical legacy of insubordinate Muslim women who have actively contested injustice. In this theorisation, we render visible existing histories and spirited feminist legacies within Islam that have often been suppressed or ignored by mainstream patriarchal approaches, and which allow us to expand the notion of what in fact constitutes Muslim "tradition." Resisting gender injustice in this reading of history is an intrinsic part of being traditional. Locating contemporary Muslim women in a robust and powerful historical lineage, we argue that our collective spirited resistance to injustice is both traditional and innovative. In being responsive to the ethical challenges and social issues of our day, it opens up vibrant imaginaries of love and relationality while reframing dominant understandings of the past and reconstitutes the very nature of understanding Muslim tradition.

By making explicit connections between women's diverse experiences and the creation of inclusive epistemologies, the volume expands the horizons for communal and ritual leadership in ways that might have been previously considered unthinkable for many Muslims. The work fits squarely into the mould of a Muslim love ethics that provides new social repertoires, fresh theological insights, and vivifying ethical possibilities in response to contemporary needs. Books of this type that contribute to scholarly writing and activist arenas; that enable innovative theological and social visions which reconfigure the nature of religious authority; that render visible and models diverse subjectivities and human realities; that pivot the experiences of people residing at the margins of community into its centre; and that energise and animate expansive, inclusive, and justice-based visions of religion and tradition, provide resources of respite, rest, and resistance to many within our communities.

The second example of a contemporary Muslim love ethics that I want to invoke is an online Muslim feminist collective that I am a member of. Due to the closure of mosques during the first pandemic lockdown in April 2020, a

group was started by some South African Muslim women, to perform the Friday congregational prayers. The group has since grown into a broader online feminist community which now includes women, children, some men and families from South Africa, as well as participants from other parts of the world. This collective has consciously and intentionally fostered participatory and flat leadership structures, integrating rituals and community-building through creative, inclusive, and socially engaged modes of interaction. Additionally, the group has enabled activist solidarities on social issues arising, as well as enabled collective fora for art, meditation, and other forms of creative expression within this emerging community. Members come from a wide spectrum of interests, lifestyles, age groups, gender and sexual orientations, and professional fields, and a number of congregants are offering their various talents and skills for collective learning and enrichment. Within this group, authority in ritual and knowledge is decentred. Instead, the group enables a plethora of perspectives, experiences, and personalities to have voice within the Friday congregational ritual space, as well as in broader activities undertaken. This feminist collective exemplifies a form of loving community that addresses social and ethical challenges of the day, facilitating more expansive and imaginative spaces for Muslim women's agency and social vision, as well as enabling diverse Muslim identities to be recognised, embraced, and celebrated.

These two examples of love politics that I have discussed above, which are the first *Women's Khutbah Book* and the online Muslim feminist congregation started in South Africa, reveal emerging Muslim feminist communities which are part of a larger global movement towards gender inclusivity and social justice. Increasingly, there appears to be varying kinds of nurturing Muslim feminist collectives emerging within a variety of contexts, while online platforms have enabled wide-ranging solidarities, networks, and a cross-fertilisation of ideas globally.[16] A central resource for both resistance and rest is indeed the creation of a loving and beloved community which

[16] See for example the global reach of the Muslim feminist movement, *Musawah*, whose work involves feminist knowledge-building, international advocacy and capacity build- ing of NGOs, committed to justice and equality in the Muslim family. They hosted a very successful set of webinars during the pandemic that connected Muslim feminist scholars and activists from various parts of the world with audiences, also attending from all parts of the world. See Musawah, "Knowledge Building Research Initiative: Reclaiming 'Adl and Ihsan in Muslim Marriages: Between Ethics and Law," *Musawah*, https://www.musawah.org/knowledge-building/reclaiming-adl-and-ihsan/.

reconfigures power as a radiating circle of enhancement rather than premised on a hierarchical logic of domination. If we are to overcome the dominant modes of toxic masculinity in our world, we must – from diverse locations and orientations – raise prophetic voices of revolutionary love, build alternative forms of communities that reconfigure power and authority, and live our love politics in bold new ways. Without these forms of nourishment and deep connectivity, people cannot genuinely flourish individually and collectively.

I submit that it was precisely such an underlying love politics that was spiritually current for the Women's Defiance Campaign, a campaign that mobilised 20,000 South African women in 1956 to protest Apartheid pass laws, powerfully singing "Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika" (*God Bless Africa*), and "Wathint' Abafazi, Wathint' Imbokordo" (*you strike a woman, you strike a rock*).[17] This inclusive women's collective coming from all races, religions, and class backgrounds, including Amina Cachalia and Albertina Sisulu, Rahima Moosa and Ama Naidoo, Lilian Ngoyi and Helen Joseph, Fatima Meer and Sophie Williams de Bruyn, together embodied a powerful force of spirit and solidarity, embodying a love ethics that envisioned a more inclusive, just world. May we resonate the legacy of all our feminist ancestors and the prophetic revolutionaries of our time, who invite us to the highest within ourselves for the collective good.

In that spirit I would like to conclude with a poem by the inimitable Syrian feminist poet, Mohja Kahf entitled, *The Mihrab of your Mind*:[18]

I'm told that we belong to different faiths
and pray at differing appointed times
to gods of different names
we find comfort in familiar forms,
and each soul melts its candle
alone in its dark night

[17] See Human Science Research Council, *Women marching into the 21st century: wathint' abafazi, wathint' imbokodo* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2000).

[18] Mohja Kahf, *The Hajar Poems* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2016), 95. A *mihrab* refers to the prayer niche at the front of a mosque which provides the direction for prayer.

But I know this: our bodies' shapes divine,
these columns of flesh, this warm breath of heart talk between us,
these contain the covenant
God put at the base of Eve and Adam's spine

This is what religion is.
Its Kaba is the heart
Its prophet, savior, and messiah
is the nobler self
Its scriptures are always written
in the here and now

We are all its chosen tribe
Its miracle is joy, its fruit is gratitude
Its holiest of holies has been placed
in the living church inside my chest
in the mihrab of your mind

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