

AMSS 37th ANNUAL CONFERENCE

“Crossing Boundaries: Mobilizing Faith, Diversity and Dialogue”

Hosted By:
The Harvard Divinity School
Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
October 24 – 25, 2008

Abstract Only – Work-In-Progress

“Mutual Guidance? The Geographies of a Historical Tradition”

By: Amina Jamal, Ph.D
(Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada)

As a work-in-progress, this paper attempts to engage with the notion of moral guidance and *community disciplining* that animates many contemporary projects of Islamic reform and renewal. In Pakistan, the Qu’anic tradition of *amr bil maruf wa nahi anil munkir* (commanding good and forbidding evil) has been upheld by the Jamaat-e-Islami (the Party of Islam) and other *Islamist* groups mostly in support of demands for what is deemed *Islamization* of law and society. However, the same tradition has been invoked in fundamentally different ways by Muslim communities in other sites with different implications for self-formation and community construction. Framing it as a practice of *mutual disciplining*, such authoritative scholars as Talal Asad and Saba Mahmood have theorized *Amr bil Maruf* as an anti-secularist process of community building that challenges Eurocentric theories of subject formation. These contested ideas about religious agency and Muslim collective subjectivity emerge as irreconcilable differences between *feminism* and *fundamentalism* both in Muslim women’s scholarship and Muslim women’s political rhetoric in Pakistan. It may be worthwhile to trace the historical processes that structure such differences by constructing genealogies that link the gendered politics of both the *religious* and *secular* to historical transformations and discursive shifts. By developing and deepening this tension, this paper seeks to clear a space for a distinctive South Asian Muslim subjectivity from which Pakistani Muslim women like myself might engage more productively with women activists of the Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan.