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**Abstract Only – Work in Progress**

“US Muslim Women’s Movements and the  
Politics of Islamic Feminine Hermeneutics”

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This research examines Muslim women’s grassroots organizations such as: The Peaceful Families Project; and *Karamah* (Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights) as organizations that cross transnational boundaries in their efficacy and empowerment of Muslim women. These organizations educate women in Islamic jurisprudence so as to initiate change from within Muslim women’s own spiritual and cultural contexts. As an Islamic women’s movement, which started in the early nineties by a Lebanese woman and scholar Prof. Azizah al-Hibri of the Law School of the University of Richmond, VA, *Karamah* encapsulated the close interrelationship between Islamic women’s political movements and their physical mobility. On the political level, *Karamah* gained national and international recognition through its insistence on giving Muslim women the knowledge of their equitable rights in Islam, and the tools to challenge societal, patriarchal practices against women through the reinterpretation of Islamic scripture. On the personal level, the organization redefines the concept of women’s mobility by offering an annual summer Law and Leadership Program designed to instill leadership qualities in Muslim women. Women from various Arab and Muslim countries travel to Washington DC to participate in this program. Rediscovering their God-given rights in Islam, and empowered with a strong sense of sisterhood, participants enact political and social changes upon their return to their communities. In this manner, Arab women’s activism comes back full circle since the proposed change unfolds from the inside and is not imposed by outside liberal entities often perceived to be an extension of Western, colonial powers. In this manner, *Karamah* looks to the future through the eyes of human rights activists and scholars who seek to transcend the exclusionary pitfalls of both Muslim male dominance and orientalizing Western perceptions of Muslim women’s subjectivity. This grassroots organization fights its battles in both the US and the Middle East and has proved its efficacy in bringing together Arab women jurists and leaders through workshops and lectures in such Arab countries as Jordan, Egypt, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. *Karamah*’s founding ideals - education, dialogue, and action can counter the dangerous and destructive effects of ignorance, silence, and prejudice - find their everyday domestic and global application through the field work of its members. Through internships and

advocacy work in Muslim communities in the US, the Middle East, and Africa, *Karamah* and The Peaceful Families Project members address issues as varied as human rights abuses, domestic violence, divorce, child custody, and women's leadership. These organizations seek legitimacy by working from within Islamic jurisprudence and by focusing on human rights violations within the private and domestic sphere of Muslim women so as to empower their voices in the public sphere, thereby resurrecting the glory of, to use Fatima Mernissi's words, the "forgotten queens of Islam." The geographical spaces conquered due to the enactment of these religious and legal journeys, claim more than personal and private spaces for these Arab Muslim women, rather they open up political and cultural spaces for the entire Arab society as well. Virtual and real *networks* are created in the process of reclaiming the religious feminine voice, as Asma Barlas puts it, from the patriarchal tradition of Islamic hermeneutics and jurisprudence.