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ABSTRACT ONLY – WORK IN PROGRESS

“Religious Femininities, National Sovereignty and
the Global War on Terror: Pakistan’s Lal Masjid Movement”

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The focus of this paper is the Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) movement that came into international visibility in 2007 when armed men, women and children occupied the oldest mosque in Islamabad, refusing to surrender until the Pakistani government met their demands. The siege culminated in a bloody confrontation, with the Pakistani army bombarding the mosque in a public spectacle symbolizing the state’s commitment to fighting militancy in all its forms. A notable aspect of this movement was the emergence of fully-veiled women activists affiliated with Jamia Hafsa - the women’s seminary located inside the Lal Masjid - who participated in very public forms of protest to demand new systems of governance premised on a purist interpretation of Islam. Situating this movement within a nexus of geo-political dynamics shaping the contentious US-Pakistan relationship since September 11th 2001, I will examine the new types of religious femininities articulated in and mobilized through the Lal Masjid movement. Drawing on public speeches, radio and television interviews, and written testimonies of women leaders of this movement, this presentation will illuminate the ways that these religious femininities engage, challenge, and intervene in hegemonic discourses on the Global War on Terror (GWOT). How, for instance, do women of Jamia Hasfa invoke the various overt and covert wars that constitute the GWOT to mobilize their constituency and push their vision of an authentically Islamic nation? How does their vision, in turn, challenge the default positioning of the Pakistani state as an extension of the US in its War on Terror (WOT)?