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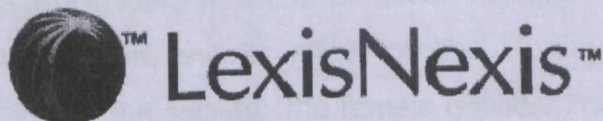
Human Rights and Multiculturalism

Universalism and the Law of Sport: Muslim Women Negotiating Sports Leadership

Presented by

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UNIVERSALISM AND THE LAW OF SPORT: MUSLIM WOMEN NEGOTIATING SPORT LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Managing sport today is a serious business, and various rules of law as well as governance policies are being devised as such. Modern sport always insinuates the Modernity Agenda (Hargreaves 2001) while King (1995) suggests that the term 'modernity' have always been linked to the Enlightened 'West'. The West continued to exert global (economic) power long after the fall of the Empire through 'neo-liberalism' (Chong 2005). Few societies had resisted the transition to Modernity as fervently as the Muslim. Modern sport poses challenges to Muslim athletes, in that it conflicted with Muslim practices (Haji Omar 2000). Women issues on the other hand took shape amidst the typically patriarchal policy development processes, whether it is within the religious, socio-legal, cultural, economic or political context. In the study of women movements, few could draw much attention and intrigue more than the study of Muslim women. The image of a veiled woman, literally separated and sheltered from the rest of the world is perhaps the most common association any non-Muslim would made of a Muslim female. This paper would focus on the place of women in Muslim societies more broadly and in selected geopolitical context such as Malaysia, the effect of this western idealism, including sport law, on Muslim women themselves when discussing about their experiences engaging in sport (Sfeir 1985; Haddad 1998; Hargreaves 2001; Walseth 2003). The discourse would also draw on the literatures of the socio-legal position of women in the West as comparison (Rippenburg 1998; Stowasser 1998; Roded 1999).

INTRODUCTION

This article looks at the interrelation between modern sport, the law that governs modern sport and its effect on the Muslim society, in this case a particular section of the society; the female gender. Focusing the discussion on women is deliberate, as Muslim women continues to be viewed with a mixture of interests

and apprehension by the West, as evidenced by the proliferation of works on the subjects, both by Muslims and Non-Muslims. The most visible feature of a Muslim woman is the wearing of the veil, a choice that some writers (Mernissi 1991; Moghissi 1999) claim as a political symbol rather than a very individualized and conscious expression of personal freedom. Wearing the veil in these 'modern' times is like trying to preserve antiquated customs, claimed some of the critics of the veil. The debate continues today and the choice a Muslim female make in relation to what she chooses to wear still intrigue us. The article will start off with the brief discussion about the theories in relation to universalism. Next, it will look at how universalism affected the Muslim society, particularly, Muslim women through one of its manifestation; modern sports. The following discussion is on modernity and the position of sport law within the concept of universalism. It must be pointed out that the discussion of Muslim women in this article is confined to Malaysian Muslim unless otherwise stated.

UNIVERSALISM AS A BY-PRODUCT OF MODERNITY & MUSLIMS

Habermas (1985) contends that the very idea of modernity is tied intimately to the development of European art while Tibi (2001) argues that the map of the modern world was in fact, shaped by European expansion. The so-termed 'New World' was determined using the European and Western gauge; modernity, which includes the processes of globalization and universalization, two distinct processes that are often overlooked and confused with (Albrow 1997). What is considered 'modern' in particular according to Hamilton (1992), are summarized in four broad areas of intellectual approaches; anti-clericalism, pre-eminence of empirical, materialist knowledge, enthusiasm for technological and medical progress and lastly, a desire for legal and constitutional reform. The anti-clericalism stance, basically maintains that the Church (especially the Catholic Church) has no place in the march to progress agenda envisioned by the modernists. Religion is synonymous with 'ignorance' and 'superstition'. In place

of the Church, science is considered the salvation of human sufferings, the dire change that is needed urgently, to propel mankind to a rational and progressive state. The new system of beliefs gradually replaces the 'traditional' system in much parts of the Western world, assuming the view that it is a natural, rational thing to do and those parts of the world that did not embrace the same view is, therefore, not enlightened, 'traditional' sometimes bordering to 'backwardness'. Eisentadt (1966) in (Kiely 1998) defines modernity as

The process of change towards those types of social, economic and political systems that have developed in Western Europe and North America (Eisentadt, 1966:1)

Eisentadt's definition suggests that to be 'modern' and 'developed', nation states or societies must initiate a changing process that replicates the social, economic and political systems such as those in place in the Western world. What Eisentadt did not mention was the packaged-deal that comes with 'modernity', which includes among other things, capitalism (Giddens 1990), industrialization (Giddens, 1990:59), rationalization (McClennan 1992) and secularism (Hamilton, 1992:36). Universalism is also being touted as the by-product of 'modernity'. Thus far, the notion 'modernity' only appears to be confined to the Western philosophies. The question at this point would be, could the notion 'modernity' embrace any scientific culture other than the Western culture and claims it to be also, modern? Bauman (1987) cited in (Hamilton, 1992:367) raises his concern that

With pluralism irreversible, a world-scale consensus on world-views and values unlikely, and all extent *Weltanschauungen* (world-views) firmly grounded in their respective cultural traditions; communications across traditions becomes the major problem of our time. This problem does not seem temporary anymore; one cannot hoped that it'll be solved 'in passing' by a sort of massive conversion guaranteed by the unstoppable march of Reason. Rather, the problem is likely to stay with us for a long, long time.

Could a Muslim society be considered a modern society in the light of what Hamilton (1992) had earlier described? Waardenburg (1996) observes that in many Muslim countries, rational modernity started in the 19th century (Egypt, Turkey, Tunisia and Iran) and there from spread out to the rest of the Muslim world through colonialization. The impact of rational modernity, until then a close link with colonialization, continued to be felt in those countries long afterwards. The post-colonialism rational modernity Waardenburg claims has grown more detached from specifically Western value. One of the manifestation of a transcendental universal values shared by many parts of the world is of course, sport.

UNIVERSALITY OF MODERN SPORT: WOMEN IN SPORT

Sport in its informal, unstructured forms, be it individual or collective activities has been documented throughout the history of many ancient cultures and societies. Bandy (2000) indicates that these activities are more akin to physical recreation than sports as an endeavor it is known today, claiming also that such endeavor is actually "a creation of the nineteenth century". This is not to say however that sport as an activity is virtually non-existent prior to 19th century and the Enlightenment Era. Through archaeological findings we now know that ancient form of sports existed within a particular society as a reflection of the economic, social, political status and geographical locality of the society itself, most often closely related to religious rituals and celebrations. This sport spectacle is known as the Ancient Olympics.

Although initially the sporting spectacle began as a pagan ritual in honour of Zeus at the great temple in the middle of a religious sanctuary, it attracted delegations from every corners of the Greek world, ranging from priests and priestesses, athletes and merchants all thrown together at Olympia, at the confluence of the rivers Kladeos and Alpheios, the site of the first Olympic games in 776 BC. Everybody wanted to be a part of that religious festival and by 600 BC athletic events were included such as the pentathlon, boxing, wrestling, horse races, foot races and others. Warring city-states would ceasefire under the sacred truce *Ekecheiria* as a gesture of reverence and to allow the games to continue unhindered. The importance and economic significance of the rituals were clearly manifested through the depiction of the immense size of the Olympic stadium with a seating capacity of 40,000. The games also attracted spectators and participants from the Greek colonies around the Mediterranean Sea, an early demonstration of colonial hegemony through sports. Under Alexander the Great and the Romans, the sport were allowed to continue flourishing and were even plagued with symptoms of modern day sport paradoxes such as commercialization and sensationalism that eroded the value system and religious significance of the games. The games were ended by the decree of the Christian Emperor Theodosius I in 393 AD and the Olympic complex were ordered destroyed by Theodosius II circa 426 AD, the final chapter of the ancient games firmly sealed (Jackson 2001).

The modern Olympic was the brainchild of a French patrician, Baron Pierre de Coubertin. The initial idea for de Coubertin's Olympic revivalism stemmed from a project to incorporate sport and physical activities into an educational system, his concern for the physical condition of the youth and their ability (or inability) to face the challenges of life and finally, his own passion and fascination with the success of the Ancient Greek in combining sports activities with religious rituals that resulted into the growth and strength of a city-state civilization. Through his

idealism and tireless efforts, the first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens in 1896. He presided over the IOC until 1925 and died in Geneva in 1937. To de Coubertin, the Olympic movement has been a long and difficult journey and will continue to face challenges in order to perpetuate, when in 1920 he stated with a foresight;

Olympism is a silent mechanism whose wheels do not creak and whose movement never stops, despite the fistfuls of sands people casts at it, as persistently as ineffectually, to try to prevent it from working (Durantez 1997)

The Olympic Movement today is facing tremendous challenges and changes and displayed an amazing ability to adapt successfully to the different requirements of the times it was operating in. As an international sport organization it had evolved into powerful, multinational sport supremacy. In the international sport scene, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) as a sport organization and the Olympics as the product has been in existence for more than a century and had firmly entrenched itself as a major sporting institution. So much so, that the IOC and the Olympics are sometimes viewed as *THE* international sport itself.

Fay (1998) considers two factors when attempting to define what international sport is:

- a) The degree of regularity with which action by an organization is focused on international activity
- b) The context in which a person or organization operates within the sport enterprise.

Both two factors appears to be in congruent with the activities of the IOC, in fact the second factor seems to deal more with the structure of the global sport industry. While the IOC are quite clear cut a case, Fay cautions the relative

difficulty of determining or assessing an organization that is engaged in international sport but operates "almost exclusively in one nation or are only occasionally involved with international athletes or clients". As a crude description, international sport could be seen as a forum where national sport interface with other national sport in the spirit of continuous sportsmanship. This discussion of international sport naturally follows closely the course of modernity. In ancient times, no such concept was evident, except maybe the later ancient Olympiads when it was opened to the Romans and the Greek colonies (non-Greek) (Hernandez 2002). Hernandez goes on further to illustrate the international sport scenario in **Figure 1**.

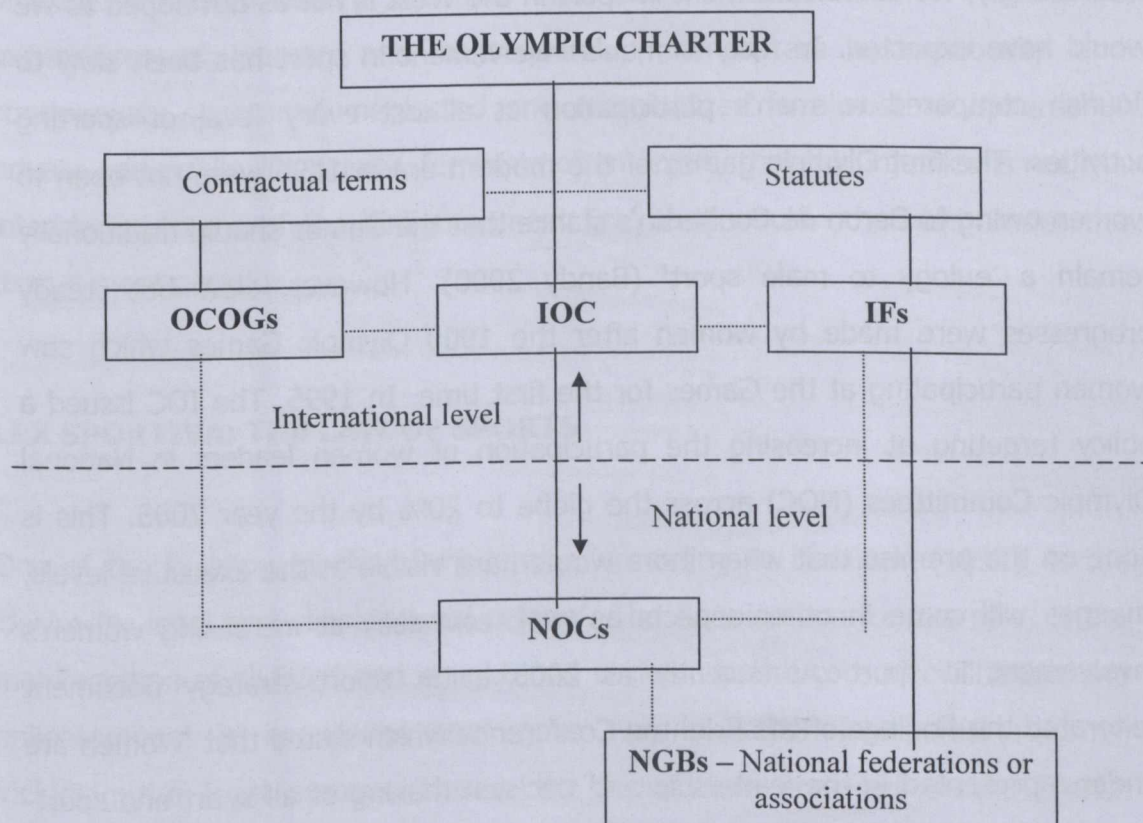


Figure 1: Hernandez's Theoretical Structure of the Olympic Movement in International Sport. Source: Hernandez, R.A. (2002) *Managing Sport Organizations*. Champaign, Ill. Human Kinetics. p.9

Roche (2000) states that international mega-events, in this case the Olympics, 'played an important role in the development of both national and international politics and culture in the West from the late 19th century'. Similarly, Rowe (2003) argues that the phenomenon of sport (in this instance, the Olympic movement) has been consistently presented as a prime instance of the gathering force of globalization and universalization, especially by extending, reconfiguring and replicating national cultural (typically Western) practices as a global phenomena (Rowe 2003).

A different picture is presented when it comes to women participating in sport. Interestingly, women involvement in sport in the West is not as developed as we would have expected. In fact, women's involvement in sport has been slow to flourish compared to men's participation at almost every level of sporting activities. The first Olympic games of the modern era in 1896 were not open to women owing to Baron de Coubertin's stance that the Games should traditionally remain a 'eulogy to male sport' (Bandy 2000). However, slow but steady progresses were made by women after the 1900 Olympic Games which saw women participating at the Games for the first time. In 1995, The IOC issued a policy targeting at increasing the participation of women leaders in National Olympic Committees (NOC) across the globe to 20% by the year 2005. This is done on the premise that when more women are visible at the executive levels, changes will come in other aspects as well, especially at increasing women's involvement in sport. As recently as 2003 a UK Sport strategy document reiterated the findings of the Brighton Conference which stated that 'Women are under-represented in the leadership and decision making of all sport and sport-related organizations' (White 2006). The 21st Century seemed to hold more promises of changes to come for the benefit of women in sport. However, available data indicate little change in sports governance.

Perhaps what we are seeing in sport is the reflection of what happens outside the world of sport. Modern Western society ironically, still saw women being oppressed and discriminated against, and modern men and women reacted with varying degree of intensities towards the situation. One such reaction is the development of feminist theories that seek to challenge the equity of the modern social order, which had apparently failed, according to the advocates of the movement, to provide a solution to the problem of oppression. The term 'feminist' was first used in the West in the 1890s (Elliot 1998) to describe an alternative political strain that seeks to depart from the mainstream, ultra-misogynistic and capitalistic, 'modern' political, sociological and economic theories. The movement's major critique of the modernity project is that in the process of modernization, 'mankind' had failed to consider and include the experiences of women and consequently, women are systematically and continuously oppressed, neglected and marginalized in almost all spheres of private and public life. Surely, feminists often argue, that this injustice is not the intended outcome of the 'Enlightenment Era' as it would otherwise render the term a mere paradox.

LEX SPORTIVA: THE LAW OF SPORTS

One of the building blocks of modernity, according to Hamilton (1992), is the 'desire for legal and constitutional reform'. The Renaissance for example, is the manifestation of civilized and enlightened society. At the core of civilization and enlightenment is knowledge that gave way to other intellectual reforms, including the legal system. This is the foundations that led to the French Revolution in the 16th century. Clearly, law plays an important part in societal reform. It governs every aspect of a human life, in the shape of divinely-ordained or the creation of the human mind.

Modern-day sport has not only generated into a multibillion-pound industry, it has also, alongside the path of universalism, metamorphosed into a higher, more complex socio-cultural and political phenomenon. It is by now obvious that sport changes as society changes; any variation of the latter would affect the former. Sport is probably the most discussed, read about and viewed aspect of society (Lumpkin 1998). Sport is an all-pervasive entity that influences almost every aspect of our daily lives (Krane 1998). The sports business with its multiple segmentations such as sporting goods, professional sports, sports support businesses, sports media, recreational activities and other segments amounted to US\$324 billion worth of industry according to the *SportsBusiness Journal* in 1998 (Parkhouse). Having said that, it is only natural that the long arms of the law also stretches into the realm of sport.

Sport Law as a legal discipline is a fairly new development. Hassim (2005) contends that the discussion that led to the existence of 'sport law' began in North America as recently as the late 1970s. In the UK, the establishment of British Association for Sport and the Law in 1993 mirrored their North American counterpart (The Sport Lawyers Association) in the effort to advance and ensure ethical practice of sports law. It has been argued that the term sports law does not denote a new branch of law such as cyber law. Rather a more appropriate term would probably be the 'legal aspects of sports' which indicate the application of various pure legal rules and disciplines to sports-specific situations. Interestingly Wikipedia defines sports law as

...an umbrella term used to describe the legal issues at work in the world of both amateur and professional sports. Sports law overlaps substantially with labor law, contract law, antitrust law, and tort law. Issues like defamation and privacy rights are also an integral aspect of sports law. The area of law was established as a separate and important entity only a few decades ago, coinciding with the rise of player-agents and increased media scrutiny of sports law topics. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sports_law)

This simple definition points to the second argument that projects sport law as an amalgamation of various legal disciplines that is applicable to sport specific

situations. Using this definition, it may be possible to conclude that almost every legal discipline could be applied to sport, including constitutional and human rights issues. Apart from the applicability of pure legal theories and principles to sport-specific situations, there is a growing *corpus legis* on sport itself as evidenced by the promulgation of the American Title IX 1972 (which deals with gender equity & equality) and The Amateur Sports Act 1978. In Malaysia, the Sport Development Act 1997 as well as various corresponding regulations has also been enacted, pointing to the emerging importance and emphasis given by the law-makers to sports.

Compared to other jurisdictions, sport law in Malaysia is underdeveloped, although the courts have been faced with and decided upon sport-related cases as evidenced in the Malayan Law Journal. A brief glance through the Malayan Law Journal cases from 1933 to 2007 will reveal that there are only 183 cases that was recorded to have 'sport' in its body of text out of which about 35% are not directly linked to sport. 37% of the cases reported are grouped under the headings of contract/commercial law, 17% on administrative law, 7% in relation to employment issues while the remaining 3% is criminal matters. Malaysia has not also, to date, have any specific professional governing body for sports law or lawyers.

Another growing area of contention with regard to sport law is human rights issues in relation to sports participations, particularly the unequal access to sports between male and female. This is exemplified with the difference in winning prize and endorsements values as well as funding for male sport which is typically higher than female sport. In North America, this issue has been raised more than thirty years ago which prompted the law-makers to promulgate Title IX laws. The law stated that for every public institution that received public funding, it would be illegal for the institution to discriminate sport participation based on gender which may result in the withdrawal of federal funding for the

institution. This type of procedural law is referred to as affirmative action laws and was instrumental in monitoring equal access to sport among collegiate athletes in North America. There is no parallel legislation in Malaysia, although the prohibition from discrimination based on gender is firmly entrenched in the Federal Constitution.

The issue at this juncture is, while western women in general is struggling to gain equal access into sports through participation and leadership, the fate of groups such as Muslims and especially Muslim women were even more marginalised if we are to look at the international sport scenario, partly due to the universalistic, Eurocentric approach of modern international sport itself.

ISSUES OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN MODERN SPORT MOVEMENT

On to the subject of sport, Islam had always viewed health and physical movement as undeniably important to the well-being of human, both physically and spiritually. The Prophet Muhammad was known to involve himself in a game of wrestling. He was also known to favour "My healthier, stronger people over my weaker" and is a stickler for personal hygiene. One prophetic tradition narrated that "...If it is not an overt burden to my people, I would sanction the brushing of the teeth before every prayer..." A general glance at the Five Pillars of Islam would reveal that two of the Pillars are concerned with health and human movement. The Pillars are the obligatory five times a day prayers (human movement) and the fasting in the Muslim month of Ramadan, from dawn until dusk (bodily health). Apart from the spiritual nature of the prayers, the substantial acts of prayers are physical in nature, and could be says as the simplest form of exercise where everyone could do it, five times a day, for approximately ten to fifteen minutes each time. Fasting, for example, as well as functioning as a lesson in humanity, has been scientifically known to detoxify and reenergize the biological function of the human body, after one whole year of rigorous activities.

Sport is therefore an activity permissible in Islam, although Abdalati (1975) did attach some considerations a Muslim must take into account before involving with any sporting activity. Contemplation to engage in any sport activities must be made in relation to Islamic principles, for example Muslim must not expose their modesty in revealing sport attires. Islam has specific guidelines on what is considered modest attire and what is not. This may appear to be nonsensical to a Non Muslim but to a Muslim there is an underlying wisdom to the principles if one so chooses to seek for it, or would just rather adhere to the principles and accept as Divine Ordination.

The Quraan and the Sunnah are abound with references to sport. It must be pointed out however that although sport during the times of the prophet and modern, Western sport activities are in vastly different formats, the principles, goals and spirits of sport for Muslims ought to remain the same. In the Quraan, in Surah Yusuf verse 17, the brothers of the Prophet Yusuf were saying their father, the Prophet Ya'qub

“O father, we went racing with one another” (12:17).

The term 'nastabiq' in the original Arabic clearly refers to a type of competition the brothers claimed they participated in (Hendricks 1998). In the collection of Hadiths of both Bukhari and Muslim, it was recorded that when the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) entered Madinah after the Hijrah from Makkah, the Ethiopians celebrated his arrival with a display of their prowess at spear throwing. The Prophet himself was, as mentioned earlier, an excellent wrestler by the fact that he had beaten Rukana, the master of wrestling at the time. It is also fascinating that as a result of his defeat, Rukana embraced Islam.

On the other hand, 'Modern sport' has been argued to be the one of the derivative of the Universalist agenda. Modern sport came to the Muslim communities through colonialization and subsequent 'modernisation' attempts

(for example Malaysia and Brunei under the British and Indonesia under the Dutch). While making outstanding progress in other public spheres such as administration and commercial sectors, the participation of Muslim women in sport is, by Western standard, dismal and uneven (Sfeir 1985). Many studies in this area are dedicated to finding out the 'constraining' factors that Islam/Muslim communities have over Muslim women. To date, literatures on Muslim women are admittedly expanding (Mernissi 1991; Karim 1992; Khan 1995; Moghissi 1999; Kaya 2000; Charrad 2001; Cooke 2001; Mojab 2001; Mir-Hosseini 2003) as are the literatures on Muslim women in sport (Sfeir 1985; Daiman 1994; Benn 1996; Ishak 1996; Knop 1996; Ibrahim 1997; Hargreaves 2001; Brownfoot 2003; Walseth 2003). It must be pointed out however, that the bulk of the studies cited on Muslim women in the Middle Eastern countries (especially Egypt, Turkey and Iran).

In a recent study by Walseth and Fasting (2003) on Egyptian women interpreting Islam's view on physical activity and sport, what constitutes women (or feminists) movement in Muslim societies (in their case, Egypt) could be generally categorised into three;

- 1) Muslim feminists
- 2) Islamists feminists
- 3) Secular feminists

Walseth further summarizes that especially in Egypt, feminism movements in Muslim society are while rather complex, they do share certain similarities

What they have in common is the struggle for Muslim women's rights. Simplified one can say that secular feminists have a secular interpretation of Islam as the point of departure. Muslim feminists have a modern interpretation of Islam as the point of departure and Islamic feminists have a fundamentalistic interpretation of Islam as a point of departure.

Muslim and Islamic feminists differ from western feminists and other secular feminists because they are looking to Islam for arguments and answers. (p. 47)

The complexities mentioned by Walseth and Fasting in their study could well be rooted in the huge geographical, cultural and political diversity (some even termed it as divide) within the Muslim societies and the Muslim world. Additionally, the intricacies of interpreting the sources of Islam (and the Sharia'); the Quraan, The Prophetic Traditions (Al-Hadith) and other secondary sources that were often socio-culturally influenced should also be taken into consideration. The realities of Muslim women's lives are intertwined within these circumstances and must be addressed accordingly.

The changing political borders and the after-math of universalism processes poses further dilemmas for nation-states with predominantly Muslim population to maintain the Sharia' as the law of the land against the onslaught of post-colonialist, western legal systems. In fact, the legal system is where most of the gender battles in Muslim societies were fought. In many Muslim nation-states, the constitutions are legacies from the Western imperialists and Islam is often relegated to the position of 'Official Religion' (such as the case of the Malaysian Constitution; Article 2 which proclaims in effect that Islam is the Religion of the Federation although other religions are not hindered from being practiced) with no real legal jurisdiction over the lives of Muslim. The only space where Muslims would be able to draw from the Sharia' directly would be in personal laws matters. This basically means and includes the law relating to Muslim marriage and divorce, settlement of divorce (property), guardianship of infants and children, conversion and other non-public matters. Interestingly, Muslim women are unsurprisingly, most affected by the administration of this selective version of Islamic personal laws and many Muslim women (and feminism) movement in Muslim societies (a vast number of works had documented the 'plight' of

predominantly Middle Eastern Muslim societies) stemmed out from the reaction of Muslim women over the 'injustices' they suffered under the law.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

According to Hendricks (1998), sport in Islam has a number of very specific functions. Firstly, it has a military function whereby the discipline of sport may be harnessed to prepare an individual for the task of fighting a legitimate battle. Allah says in Surah Al Anfal, verse 60;

Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war (8:60).

Secondly, it has a social function to bring people together that is in keeping with one of the chief purposes of Islam and that is to foster a spirit of mutual love, cooperation, respect and friendship amongst all member of society. Thirdly is the recommended attempt at developing mastery and control of the self. While to win may be may be a commendable achievement, in Islam to overcome and conquer the lower self is even more commendable. Fourthly, the relationship between the body and the soul is looked upon as important in Islam. A healthy body can act as nothing less than a healthy home for the numerous challenges and demands upon the soul. That is why a companion of the Prophet, Abu Darda' explained "I entertain my heart with something trivial in order to make it stronger in the service of the truth" (Hendricks, 1998).

In terms of participation in modern sport, Islamic jurists differ in the rulings; where some would allow conditioned participation while others prohibit it altogether. Some jurists opine that if participating in modern, Western sport is emulating the infidels and is accompanied by a multitude of immoral factors; such sport is not permissible in Islam. Participation, spectatorship and association in any way with these kinds of sporting activities are not permissible. Another type of juristic

opinion is that as physical fitness and health consciousness is emphasised in Islam, sport is permissible under a number of conditions;

- 1) The attire conform to the regulations under the Islamic Law
- 2) The involvement does not make him negligent of his religious obligations
- 3) He does not become the cause of others neglecting their religious duties
- 4) Intermingling of sexes does not take place
- 5) The intention is pure, i.e. to strengthen the body in order to do well in the path of Allah (Jihad fi SabiliLah).

Another opinion is that any activities that are done for no purpose other than to pass or waste the time, those activities are considered as of no importance or values and should not be encouraged, as the mind of Muslims will become idle with no academic or physical stimulants. However if the object of the game organised is to cheer oneself up and remove weariness or to gain strength, it shall be permissible with the condition that there should be none of those acts that have been prohibited by the Islamic law.

Clearly, for Muslim women to engage in sports there are various considerations that must be taken beforehand. To a Muslim, Islam is a complete set of beliefs where every matter in a Muslim's life is provided with Divine guidelines through the Quraan and the Sunnah. To a Westerner, it may sound constricting and confining and that Muslim has no freedom to do whatever she chooses to do. To a Muslim, life is balances that must be weigh in very carefully. Muslims have a set of priorities in Life and to be successful in this life is a matter of successfully balancing life priorities.

In a study by W. Radzi (2006) which highlighted the experiences of Malay Muslimin and Muslimah athletes in elitist, competitive sport describes that although the setting of the sport is steeped in Western conception and ideals,

Malay Muslim athletes appears to overcome the odds of preserving the Malay Muslim identity while at the same time participating in the event, in particular, the 22nd SEA Games. The experiences illustrated in this project vary considerably. Some Muslim athletes claimed that they do not face much difficulty adjusting him/herself in a regional/international event while others struggled in order to be able to still compete without compromising their faiths in the process.

These differences of difficulty level faced by the respondents could be attributed to many factors; level of Islamic education, family background and many others. One thing is clear however, that a Muslim athlete could not tolerate the total abandonment of Islamic principles and belief system while competing in an international event. What this means basically, is that a Muslim athlete would still want to carry out his/her religious obligations even where the situation is not conducive for such activities?

When these interests clash (Western Ideals versus Islamic Principles) it results in the dilemma faced by the Malay Muslim athletes. Should they follow one and abandon the other? Any which way that the athlete decide, it does not give athlete, any piece of mind. More often than not, the pressure is heavier on the Western Ideals side, in the form of rules and regulations that binds the athletes, and so forces the athletes to conform, whereas the Islamic principles would just remain as an abstract object in the heart of the athletes. The question at this juncture would be; why must there be choices to be made? If modern sport is a right for everyone to participate, why is it a difficult experience for Muslims? The onus is on the organizing committee of sport events to create a conducive environment for athletes from any religious affiliations and background to participate. After all, is it not the core definition of universalism? The acceptance of the difference and diversity by everyone.

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