

recognition of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and recognition of international standards of justice. I think that the Afghan constitution stands out for some of these features. I think some of them are worth considering for other Muslim countries as well. But, of course, Afghanistan has not practiced much of what we have done. There has not been an effective government ever since. Much of the Constitution remains. There is no effective rule of law or effective government, unfortunately. I think rule of law is something which is not really quite well-recognised. The sanctity of this principle merits greater visibility, greater commitment and recognition in Muslim countries. We talk about it in the Constitution, a lot of things, fundamental rights, liberties of the people, wonderful chapters in all Muslim constitutions, but how much of it is reality? And I think these are some of the challenges and some of the gains but as I said, these were my experiences some of which are clearly related to circumstances that surrounded us.

As for sovereignty which you mentioned, we had no dispute over this subject in the Constitution of Afghanistan. I know this has given rise to much debate in the Constitution, for instance, of the neighbouring Pakistan, but in Afghanistan, in almost all of its Constitutions, sovereignty (*hakimiyat*) is declared to belong to the people. This is also the position in the current Constitution.

Seminar on Gender and Islamic Legal Reform (Kuala Lumpur, 9 December 2014)

Tengku Ahmad Hazri

On 9 December 2014, IAIS Malaysia hosted two academics from the University of British Columbia, Canada, for the Seminar on Gender and Islamic Legal Reform, namely, Dr Rumea Ahmed (who presented on “Islamic Legal Reform: A View from Within”) and Dr Ayesha Chaudhury (“The Great Muslim Gender Debate: Learning to Disagree Agreeably”).

The challenge of Islamic law reform, claimed Rumea Ahmed, lies in the fact that Islamic law is embedded in a wider realm of ideas. Consequently, law is connected to “rules of concomitance”—to exegesis, to theology, to spirituality, among others—rendering a challenge to a single law to be a challenge to the entire conceptual narrative. A legal ruling rarely applies in a vacuum but instead is arrived at by bringing together suppositions from a variety of parts in the same whole narrative. This can be readily illustrated by tracing the evolution of Hanafi legal thought towards prisoners of war. By strict interpretation of Surah al-Anfal (8:67-69), taking such prisoners is impermissible. But if that is the case, then how

does one explain the Prophet's (peace be on him) decision to ransom prisoners of war after the Battle of Badr instead of executing them as 'Umar al-Khattab advised, citing al-Tawbah to "kill the polytheists wherever you find them" (9:5)? This then moved to the theological issue of whether the Prophet can "sin" (as opposed to a mere mistake or error), and to the question of the possibility of increase or decrease of faith (*iman*).

The conceptual narrative is even applicable in the domain of gender justice. Ayesha Chaudhury contrasted what she called "patriarchal" and "egalitarian" idealised cosmologies which she claimed are responsible behind interpretations of Surah al-Nisa' (4:34), which seemed to allow husbands to beat their wives. Whereas "egalitarian idealised cosmology" depicts both man and woman to be equally connected to God, "patriarchal idealised cosmology" presents a woman's relationship to God as "mediated" by men, specifically husbands. Pre-colonial interpretations of the verse appear to concur in the husband's "privilege" to "discipline" their wives, their differences merely in terms of procedure and extent of harm allowed to be inflicted. But thanks to encounter with colonialism, progressive interpretations of the verse began to emerge. Underpinned by an "egalitarian cosmology", post-colonial scholars now denied that the verse is to be taken literally, so that husbands are not permitted to smack their wives, literally, symbolically or otherwise.

Visit by Professor Tariq Ramadan to Malaysia (29 January 2015 - 1 February 2015)

Tengku Ahmad Hazri

The renowned Muslim public intellectual, Tariq Ramadan, currently Professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies at the University of Oxford, held a lecture tour in Kuala Lumpur from 29 January 2015 to 1 February 2015. Among others he spoke on reclaiming the true meaning of *jihad* at a conference organised by the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM) and on the Qur'an, "The Word and its Signs" at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia (IAMM).

In the latter Tariq restored the true meaning of "*ayat*" as "sign", whose spiritual wellsprings have been obscured by the word's rendition into English as "verse". In reality the Qur'an, as a "school for intellectual humility and spiritual openness" addresses both the mind and heart, thus its significance transcends its rational meanings. Its substance then includes its form, its poetic expression as well as the manner in which it is to be read and recited. The richness of the content of the Qur'an corresponds to the richness of one's experiences: to read the Qur'an is to dialogue with God.