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Author(s): Mahjabeen Dhala

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Servant Leadership: Honoring the Labor of Love

*The Women's Studies in Religion Faculty Chair
Lecture, Given on April 28, 2023 at the Graduate
Theological Union*

Mahjabeen Dhala, PhD

*Professor, Graduate Theological Union
Berkeley, California, U.S.A.*

ABSTRACT: Fatima's sermon stands as a timeless testament to the transformative potential of servant leadership rooted in compassion, empathy, and empowerment. By revisiting her discourse, we gain invaluable insights into the ethical dimensions of leadership and the importance of serving others with humility and integrity. This lecture examines the enduring legacy of the sermon of Fatima, delivered in 632 CE by the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, in protest against the confiscation of her lands. Drawing on historical accounts and religious texts, I revisit Fatima's discourse through the lens of servant leadership, drawing parallels between her articulation of leadership and contemporary scholarship on the subject. Through an exegetical analysis of Qur'anic verses and Fatima's metaphorical depiction of a desert caravan, I unpack the key tenets of servant leadership embedded in her sermon. By exploring her portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad (p) as a teacher leader and guardian leader, this presentation highlights the transformative potential of servant leadership rooted in compassion, empathy, and empowerment. Furthermore, it investigates Fatima's critique of power-driven leadership and her advocacy for the recognition of labor, especially by marginalized groups.

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Welcome and greetings of peace! Thank you, Dr. Valerie Miles-Tribble, for that kind introduction – each word of it I will take as a blessing and encouragement. What a day! What a celebration! Thank you, Kristine and Stephanie, for keeping us mindful of our bodies. I invite you to continue to be comfortable in your chair and also feel free to stand up or sit on the floor, whatever ensures and honors your holistic presence. I want to start by giving thanks: thanks to the spirit of love for birthing us into this realm, thanks to the spirit of inquiry that drives our emerging scholarship that was demonstrated so skillfully in today's papers, thanks to the spirit of courage that gives us the determination to agitate systems of supremacy and discrimination as is repeatedly demonstrated by our teachers, our faculty, our mentors, thanks to the spirit of care that supports our meaningful progress towards our goals as we have witnessed in the dedicated service of the WSR students and staff, thanks to the spirit of hope that lifts us up after every setback and empowers our persistence and resilience, thanks to the spirit of justice and inclusion that thrives here at the WSR certificate program and the GTU as a whole, and thank you all for choosing to spend this day with us!

Shortly, we will be celebrating the WSR certificate recipients followed by a delightful reception. But before that, I will invoke yet another spirit, the spirit of patience, because what lies between you and the celebratory conferral and reception is the chair lecture. Yes, you have to get through my talk first!

Overview

My work focuses on resuscitating narratives of premodern Muslim women as theologians, exegetes, and activists. I came

to the GTU as an MA student and continued as a doctoral presidential scholar, completing my PhD in 2021. Presently, I hold the position of Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies at the GTU and serve as chair of its Women's Studies in Religion Program. As a Muslim female religious educator and leader for more than two decades, I have travelled widely, serving Muslim communities in the Global South and North, gaining a unique insight into the trials, triumphs, and tenacity of Muslim women. As the title of my talk states, I will be sharing insights on a unique model of leadership: a people-centered empowerment-oriented approach known as servant leadership. It emphasizes serving others first and prioritizing their needs, which ultimately leads to their growth and development. My inspiration comes from my dissertation research on the seventh-century sermon delivered by Fatima, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad (p).¹¹ The sermon was her protest against the confiscation of her lands by the government of the time. In her sermon, Fatima not only argued for her inheritance but also for her family's claim to succession to the Prophet, making a case for people-centered, service-based leadership. I will start by sharing a short introduction of the sermon, then move on to the two themes that I will focus on: servant leaders and honoring the labor of love. For the first theme, I will talk about Fatima's description of the Prophet as a teacher leader and a guardian leader, arguing that she was articulating a concept of leadership that emerges from the grassroots, leads hearts from hearts, and draws authority from care and love rather than power and force. This approach resonates with what contemporary thinkers such as Peter Northouse and Robert Greenleaf are calling servant

¹¹ "P" is short for "peace and blessings be upon him," an honorary benediction invoked by Muslims alongside the mention of the Prophet's name.

leadership. Then, I will present Fatima’s metaphor for servant leadership, which makes space for the acknowledgment and appreciation of contributions made by minorities of gender, race, and class, and, given the US context, the contributions of immigrant labor to thriving families, communities, and societies. In doing so, I want to honor all labor of love and especially lift up International Workers’ Day, also known as May Day, which is celebrated in most countries on May 1st.

Introduction

Let’s start with a short introduction to Fatima’s sermon.¹² The time is 632 CE and, more precisely, a mere 10 days after the Prophet’s death. The venue is the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina, which was and is a significant landmark for Muslims. The public sermon was a climax of her several attempts at regaining possession of her confiscated property, which included producing testimonials that were categorically rejected and reaching out for community support, which did not materialize because Muslims did not want to oppose the political authority. So that day, Fatima rounded up the women who chose to be by her side, and together, they marched to the Prophet’s Mosque. I am using the word “march” to highlight her intent to draw attention because Fatima’s home was adjacent to the mosque, and she had a door that connected her home directly to the

¹² While the Qur’an is considered the only sacred text by Muslims, Fatima’s sermon holds significance as a counter-narrative from a minority historical perspective, particularly esteemed by Shi’a Muslims, though not to the same extent as the Qur’an. The sermon of Fatima was memorized and orally transmitted intergenerationally by Shi’a elders until its first written rendition in *Balaghat al-Nisa (Eloquence of Women)*, a compilation of selected sermons and poems by women by the ninth-century Persian linguist, Ibn Tayfur. See, Mahjabeen Dhala, *Feminist Theology and Social Justice in Islam: A Study on the Sermon of Fatima* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 5-6.

mosque. So, she could have simply entered the mosque through that private access, but she opted to walk through the crowded city streets and make her entrance from the Mosque's main gate, resembling what we understand now as a protest march. I argue that this choice was her way of raising social consciousness, what the feminist approach calls "making the personal political." Her public march and her public talk must have surely agitated the norms of the then Muslim society. Being the Prophet's daughter, Muslims must have expected her to choose a private entrance, but she chose to be publicly seen and publicly heard! As she began her sermon, her audience might have expected to hear the complaints of a denied female orphan, but instead, what they witnessed was a profound and articulate exposition of Islamic theology, practice, and ethics.

Fatima first produced witnesses to prove her rightful possession of her lands. Here, it is important to note that one of her witnesses was Asma bint Umayy, who was married to the caliph¹³ at that time. She was testifying for Fatima against a man who was not just her husband but also the political authority. This is an exceptionally brave stance for a woman who lived in a society where women primarily depended on men for civic status, social identity, and economic security. When Fatima's witnesses were dismissed, she argued for her lands as her inheritance. It was here that the caliph interjected a hadith;¹⁴

¹³ After the Prophet's death in 632 CE, the Muslims selected Abu Bakr as their caliph who assumed the position of political and religious leader. For nearly forty years both religious and political leadership rested with the caliph until the rise of the Umayyad caliphate that slowly digressed from religious acumen, leading to the rise of theological and jurisprudential schools in the ninth century.

¹⁴ Hadith is a reference to literature compiled a century after the Prophet's death, comprising of sayings and actions attributed to him as narrated by his companions. This literature constitutes an essential resource, second only to the Qur'an, in shaping Islamic doctrine, law, and ethics.

he said that he had heard the Prophet say that God's messengers neither receive nor leave inheritance, their possessions and assets become state property upon death. What started off as a land dispute now took on a theological hue. A hundred years later, Muslim scholars would begin the copious work of collecting, authenticating, and compiling a voluminous canon known as hadith literature, which would include the sayings, actions, and consent of the Prophet as recalled by the early Muslim community. Hadith would serve as a significant resource that would inform and shape disparate renditions of Islamic history, Qur'anic exegesis, and Islamic legal theory. A mere 10 days after the prophet's death, the Muslim community was witnessing a land dispute between the prophet's daughter and the caliph. Matters became theological with the interjection of the above-mentioned hadith by the caliph. In what I read as a critical methodology of challenging hadith with the Qur'an, Fatima called out the caliph by evidencing five verses of the Qur'an, which talk about the inheritance of prophets such as David and Solomon, Zachariah and John, and verses that oblige believers to make wills for the women and men they leave behind. She said, "How could my father have said something that cannot be substantiated by the Qur'an? Where is it in the book of God that you inherit your father, and I don't inherit mine?!"

Fatima went on to describe the unique features of the Qur'an as a code of life and the significance of living by it and warned the Muslims from resurrecting cultural, racial, and gender biases that were the norm of pre-Islamic Arabia. I posit her as a female theologian resisting the government's use of religion to deny her inheritance rights. It is as if she foresaw the plight of Muslim women subjected to honor killings, denied

education, and stripped of their agency in the guise of an imagined religious obligation that has no base in the Islamic sacred text. With much to offer, her sermon remains understudied in mainstream Muslim and Western academia. In the mainstream Muslim world, the sermon is deemed highly charged, and in the Western context, her voice is dismissed as a religious woman not critical enough of her tradition. For my dissertation, I studied her sermon as the voice of a female scholar-activist eclipsed by patriarchal, sectarian, and secular biases.

A Teacher Leader

With that introduction, I want to now move to the first theme of servant leadership that I extract from her sermon. Fatima articulated a servant leadership model and presented the Prophet as a teacher leader and a guardian leader. Let's start with the Prophet as a teacher leader, which seems poignant given that we are gathered here as a learning community fully aware of the role of education in transforming individuals and societies. According to the Qur'an, prophets lead through education, drawing upon their core values and moral distinction to passionately serve others. The Qur'an states, "It is He who sent to the unlettered [people] an apostle from among themselves, to recite to them His signs, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and wisdom" (Q 62:2).¹⁵ According to this verse, the Prophet is a leader who emerges from the people (an apostle from among themselves). The prophetic role includes giving information (to recite to them His signs), deconstructing

¹⁵ All English translations of the verses of the Qur'an referred to in this study are taken from Ali Quli Qara'i's *The Qur'an: With a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation* (London: Islamic College for Advance Studies Press, 2004).

unjust systems (to purify them), reconstructing through education (to teach them the Book), and finally, transforming communities through wisdom.

I read this verse as an exposition of critical features of a prophetic pedagogy: inform, un-form, reform, and transform.¹⁶ To inform includes granting access to education and expression; to unform invites critique of what has come to be understood as normal; to reform refers to the suggesting and sustaining change for the better; and to transform is an invitation to bravely curate a world in which there is room for everyone's world. This prophetic pedagogy resonates with bell hooks' argument for a [holistic and engaged pedagogy](#). In her [Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom](#), hooks focuses on creating a "democratic setting" (hooks, 38) where "student expression" (hooks, 20) is valued and encouraged. Given my training in Islamic theology and feminist theories, my teaching philosophy fuses my understanding of a prophetic pedagogy with critical elements of feminist pedagogy to explore and incorporate a paradigm and practice of learning that is sacred, transformative, holistic, and experiential. I strive to create a humble and collaborative space where students can teach and teachers can learn by sharing lived experiences and honor and acknowledge the minds, hearts, spirits, and "bodies in the classroom" (hooks, 138) to emulate what hooks refers to as a "community" that creates room for "openness and intellectual rigor" (hooks, 40).

¹⁶ Mahjabeen Dhala, "To Teach Like a Prophet: Community Engaged Learning with a Theological Twist," *The Commons*, Association for Public Religion and Intellectual Life (August 2022): <https://www.aprionline.org/to-teach-like-a-prophet-community-engaged-learning-with-a-theological-twist/>.

I will not take up time talking about my specific pedagogical techniques. Instead, I will direct your attention to the following articles that elaborate on how my teaching philosophy and practice are inspired by my interpretation of hooks' ideas. First, a piece co-authored with Dr. Sheryl Johnson titled "Taking bell hooks on Zoom: Embodying Feminist Pedagogy in a Graduate Theological Classroom,"¹⁷ which was among the most downloaded articles published by the *Teaching Theology and Religion Journal*, and second, my essay titled, "To Teach like a Prophet: Community Engaged Learning with a Theological Twist," published by the Association for Public Religion and Intellectual Life.¹⁸

For the purpose of this lecture, I want to circle back to Fatima's iteration of the Prophet as a transformative teacher leader. Her exact words were, "Through my father Muhammad (S), Allah illuminated their darkness, lifted the ambivalence from their hearts, and removed the obscurity from their sights. He rose among people with guidance, protected them from perversion, sharpened their vision away from [spiritual] blindness, guided them to the firm (doctrine) religion, and called them towards the straight path."¹⁹

Through her public protest, Fatima was embodying the Prophet's pedagogy. She was "informing" them of the Qur'anic

¹⁷ Mahjabeen Dhala & Sheryl Johnson. (2021). Taking bell hooks on Zoom: Embodying Feminist Pedagogy in a Graduate Theological Classroom. *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 24(3), 165–174. <https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12593>.

¹⁸ Mahjabeen Dhala, "To Teach Like a Prophet: Community Engaged Learning with a Theological Twist," *The Commons*, Association for Public Religion and Intellectual Life (August 2022): <https://www.aprionline.org/to-teach-like-a-prophet-community-engaged-learning-with-a-theological-twist/>.

¹⁹ Ahmad Ibn Tayfur, *Balaghat al-Nisa* (Qum: Intesharat Maktan al-Haideriyya, 1999), 27, 28.

verses, “unforming” the government’s stronghold by agitating the caliph’s authority, questioning the authenticity of the hadith he associated with the prophet, “reforming” by stirring social consciousness for her cause and leaving behind a sermon as a “transformative” tool for minorities to argue for justice. In doing so, she was presenting herself as the inheritor of the Prophet’s transformational and pedagogical traits. Let’s move on to the idea of a guardian leader.

The Guardian Leader

As was her method throughout her sermon, Fatima built on Qur’anic verses to define the unique characteristics of the Prophet as a transformational teacher and a charismatic guardian. She invoked Q 9:128, which states: “There has certainly come to you an apostle from among yourselves; grievous to him is your distress; he has a deep concern for you and is most kind and merciful.”

An exegetical analysis of this verse reveals five key features of leading with love and care, as manifested through the Prophet’s model of a guardian leader. The first of these features is that he was a human, appointed as Prophet for humanity. Makarim Shirazi, a contemporary Muslim exegete, remarks that the verse states that he was an apostle “from among yourselves” and not “among you” to demonstrate a leader’s ability to empathize with the challenges faced by all human “selves.”²⁰ Here, I will ask you to recall that initial thought of servant leadership emerging from the grassroots. The Prophet shared the hardships of the people and did not

²⁰ Nasser Makarim Shirazi, *Tafsir Namuneh* (LAhore: Misbah al-Qur’an Trust, 1990), Vol. 8:168.

distance himself from them. His house was adjacent to the mosque for easy access in times of peace, and he fought alongside foot soldiers on the front lines during war. Another contemporary exegete, al-Tabatabai, stresses that “yourselves” refers to all humanity regardless of race, ethnicity, or religious and national affiliation.²¹ The Prophet was a guardian leader (*wali*) appointed by the Guardian Creator (*Wali*) for all humanity. *Wali*, in the context of God as the Guardian Creator, gives the sense of creation from a place of love, and in the context of the Prophet as a guardian leader, the word *wali* brings forth the idea of leading from a place of care.

The second feature of the prophet as a caring leader, according to Q 9:128, was that he was moved by the hardships of his people (“grievous to him is your distress”). The people's spiritual, physical, and social challenges mattered to him and deeply impacted his disposition.²² He tirelessly campaigned for the human condition's felicity in this world and the hereafter, patiently enduring the Meccans' rebuke, who devalued his teachings as the whims of a mere poet and associated his victories with sorcery. The Prophet was with his people in all that troubled and distressed them. In his leadership model, they would find support for the marginalized and upliftment of the weak.

The third feature of this compassionate guardian leader was that “he [had] has a deep concern for you [them].” (Q

²¹ Muhammad Husayn Al-Tabatabai, *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Tabligh al-Islamiyya, 2011), Vol. 9:427.

²² Muhammad Ali al-Tabrizi Al-Ansari, *Al-Lum'at al-Baydhā' fī al-Sharh Khutbat al-Zahra* (Beirut: Dar al-Tabligh al-Islamiyya, 2011), 590.

9:128) Shirazi remarks that *harīsun alaykum* denotes the Prophet's enthusiastic eagerness to guide people in all aspects of their personal, religious, and social lives. He was teaching a code of practice for social justice and equity that threatened the majority status quo and their established way of life.²³ Like an empowering teacher, he passionately called for securing the interests of the deprived factions of society, even if it meant disrupting the peace of the powerful elite.

The fourth and fifth features are indeed God's attributes, which the Prophet manifested. Q 9:128 describes the Prophet as "*ra'ūf* and *rahīm* (most kind and merciful)." Shirazi states that in instances where *ra'ūf* and *rahīm* appear separately, it is safe to assume that they generally imply compassion. However, in instances where they appear together, as in Q 9:128, their meanings are nuanced. *Ra'ūf* (most kind) implies kindness towards those who demonstrate adherence and obedience to the prescribed law, while *rahīm* (merciful) implies forbearance and forgiveness towards those who seek to repent after acts of disobedience.²⁴ As both *ra'ūf* and *rahīm*, the Prophet practiced mercy towards those who followed him and those who denied him.

Servant Leadership and the Labor of Love

Having presented the prophetic example of leading by teaching and care, Fatima went on to articulate her understanding of servant leadership. Servant leadership is an approach to leadership that puts the needs of others first and empowers

²³ Shirazi, *Tafsir Namuneh*, Vol. 8:168.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 8:169.

them to achieve their full potential. The concept of servant leadership has garnered considerable attention for its significant departure from hierarchical structures of power. Within academic research, the concept of servant leadership first emerged in the works of the late-twentieth-century scholar Robert K. Greenleaf, who described servant leaders as those who “put followers first.”²⁵ They are ethical leaders who “demonstrate strong moral behavior,”²⁶ empathize with the people, and focus on nurturing and empowering them to achieve their best potential. Servant leaders have been described as altruistic, empowering, and committed to the thriving of their followers.²⁷ In her sermon, Fatima posited the metaphor of a desert caravan, which resonated with Arab lived experiences to explain the concept of servant leadership. She said,

By Allah, had they not rushed to seize the reigns (of the camel) which Allah's Messenger had entrusted to him [Ali], he would have led the caravan beautifully, neither letting the insects bother the ride nor letting the rider be jolted, delivering them to a thirst-quenching and gushing spring with overflowing banks. The caravan would have been pleased to discover many irrigated lands. They would have been empowered by his eradicating of hunger, and by the opening of the blessings of the heavens upon them.²⁸

²⁵ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2018), 348.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 349.

²⁷ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 366-368.

²⁸ Ibn Tayfur, *Balaghat al-Nisa*, 33.

In this metaphor, the camel refers to leadership and the caravan is the Muslim community. Fatima depicted what servant leadership would have looked like if her family had been allowed to hold the reins of government. Being committed to the Prophet's service-based, people-focused practices, they would have ensured security, comfort, a plentitude of opportunities for all, effective deployment of resources, and expert guidance towards abundance. In this metaphor, the leader walks with the caravan, leading them with love and care. The prophet himself was an orphan from the working class. The opposition critiqued his leadership by saying that if God truly wanted to appoint a leader, why did he not choose a rich Arab merchant instead of an orphan who worked for a woman? Nonetheless, the Prophet proved to be a charismatic and authentic leader who made his place in the hearts of Muslims and the annals of history through his dedication to lifting the human condition of his time while remaining humble in his conduct, seldom wielding an authoritarian stance, albeit the Qur'an had awarded him that position.²⁹ Fatima exalted his transformative pedagogy and deep care for the well-being of his community. His methods were humble, emerging from his heartfelt conviction in God and good, and his goals focused on privileging the most denied factions of society. His spiritual, intellectual, and ethical character added a charismatic appeal to his divine mission. Describing him thus, she claimed, "he was my father and not the father of any of your men," making a case for inheriting not just his assets but also his leadership traits.

²⁹ See Q 4:65, "But no, by your Lord! They will not believe until they make you a judge in their disputes, then do not find within their hearts any dissent to your verdict and submit in full submission."

She accused the caliphate of being acutely indifferent to the servant leadership she imagined and described, of seizing a position not meant for them, and of confiscating assets that did not belong to them through ill-gotten power. She called out its power-driven oppression: “You claimed (branded) a camel that was not yours and brought it to a watering hole that did not belong to you.”³⁰ In this metaphor, “camel” refers to the leadership position, and the “watering hole” is a reference to the individual and public assets of the governed people. When the leadership is unjust, it exploits and abuses free access to constructive resources. In her case, the unworthy leadership had usurped her personal assets to advance its corrupt motives.

She warned the Muslims that their inaction against an opportunist authority would deprive them of a prosperous future and make them susceptible to unrest and strife. She said, “Now that you have molested (impregnated) her (the camel), then wait till she brings forth her yield. You will then see that your milking pots would fill up with blood and lethal venom.”³¹ Fatima described power-driven leadership as a kind of molestation of authority and the people’s trust; if the people remained silent, then both the leaders and the followers would be ruined. By protesting publicly, she was doing her part in opposing the government, setting an example for minorities to come.

It is important to note that Fatima’s metaphor for a service-based leadership model reinforces her argument for her right to inherit and lead and also makes space for the

³⁰ Ibn Tayfur, *Balaghat al-Nisa*, 25.

³¹ Ibn Tayfur, *Balaghat al-Nisa*, 33.

acknowledgment and appreciation of contributions made to a thriving society by minorities of gender and class. The labor of women in their roles as mothers, partners, and community service providers, for example, often goes unnoticed and is rarely credited as leadership. I want to share an observation from my twenty-three years of encountering Muslim communities across the globe. In almost every Islamic center I visited, I saw women serving as religious educators and volunteering as youth counsellors, yet religious leadership primarily rests with male scholars. This trend is not due to the paucity of qualified female theologians. Many Islamic seminaries welcome female students, and hundreds graduate each year, but there are no professional positions available for them. Their best prospect, in most cases, is marriage or a voluntary educational position in a community. While I honor their labor of love and care for their communities, it is hard to disregard that these qualified women scholars inevitably find themselves advancing the male-dominated system by working under male religious leadership.

Sadly, the position of Muslim women in the West is not acutely different from their counterparts overseas. There are hundreds of Islamic centers in the U.S. alone, each typically led by a board of trustees, very few of which include women. Also, most Islamic centers here have a position designated for a resident religious scholar. This position is often a fully funded position supported by the congregation. Except for a couple of Islamic centers in England and Canada, I have yet to encounter an Islamic center in the US where the professional position of resident religious scholar is awarded to a female.

In Fatima's protest, we see an example of how women who are articulate, knowledgeable, and charismatic pose a challenge, even a threat, to male power-driven leaders. Besides gendered minorities, other disadvantaged groups are also denied leadership opportunities despite possessing the unique competency of relating to the challenges and concerns of their constituents more deeply than leaders who rise to power solely by their privileged access to education and opportunity. In the servant leadership model, leaders embody and experience their community's struggles and can serve justice at the grassroots level. Fusing the dichotomous functions of service and leadership into a single trait, the servant leadership model recognizes the works of all classes of society as opposed to a model of leadership that only recognizes influential male leaders, who often work for the interests of the elite within society.

Leading through service is the way of God's agents on earth, embodied primarily by women in a household, in a community, in an institution, and in a nation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my academic journey has been dedicated to reviving the stories of premodern Muslim women as scholars, interpreters of religious texts, and advocates for social change. From my beginnings as an MA student at the GTU to my current role as an Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies and Chair of the Women's Studies in Religion Program, I have immersed myself in understanding the experiences of Muslim women globally. Inspired by the leadership model exemplified in Fatima's historic sermon, which was the subject of my doctoral

dissertation and my forthcoming book,³² I am intrigued by the concept of servant leadership that operates from a place of love and care, prioritizing the needs of others for their growth and development. In exploring Fatima's narrative, I highlight the value of recognizing and appreciating the diverse contributions, particularly from marginalized groups, to the fabric of society. As we approach International Workers' Day, I invite you to reflect on the significance of honoring all forms of labor, especially those driven by love and dedication, in fostering thriving communities and advancing social justice.

Closing Remarks

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share the rich yet understudied words of a seventh-century Muslim female scholar activist's renditions of leading with hearts, service, love, and care. In fact, today marks the Islamic date of the destruction of Fatima's grave by Muslim extremists in 1925. Invoking her words today has meant much to me. It has also given me the opportunity to acknowledge the labor of immigrants and minorities, also known as International Worker's Day, celebrated on May 1st. I am also grateful for this opportunity to celebrate the labor of love so graciously demonstrated by the WSR team. Would our steering committee students and faculty please rise, stand tall, and accept this applause that is due to them? And finally, thank you all for your patience and attention. I am done here, folks. I welcome your feedback and questions.

³² See Mahjabeen Dhala, *Feminist Theology and Social Justice in Islam: A Study on the Sermon of Fatima* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).

Mahjabeen Dhala is the Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, where she also serves as director of the Madrasa-Midrasha program and served as the chair of the Women's Studies in Religion program from 2022-24. Her work focuses on resuscitating narratives of premodern Muslim women as theologians, exegetes, and social activists. Her monograph Feminist Theology and Social Justice in Islam: A Study on the Sermon of Fatima was recently published by Cambridge University Press. For her next book project, Dr. Dhala is exploring the lives of early African Muslim women whose narratives remain occluded by patriarchal, sectarian, ethnic, and secular biases of early and contemporary Islamic scholarship.

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