

Islam, Patriarchy, and Feminism in the Middle East

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*The study of women in the Middle East, now well into its second decade, has produced an impressive corpus of papers and periodical articles. For purely practical reasons, this review focuses on writings in English, in a selective rather than all-inclusive manner. The analysis of women in the Middle East has not always been undertaken with reference to Islam, but a significant body of works, influenced partly by the Islamic resurgence, coincident with the rise of the study of women as a separate field, does have reference to Islam. The reader interested in other aspects of recent journal literature may refer to Margot Bradan, "Women and Production in the Middle East and North Africa," (*Trends in History*, II, 3, 1982, 59-88).*

Patriarchy and Islam

A fundamental task of women's studies is to examine religion from a gender perspective. It has been a common-place that Islam improved the position of women, although some scholars have begun to question this. A recapitulation of the argument in favor of improvement appears in Azizah Al-Hibri, "A Study of Islamic Herstory : Or, How Did We Ever Get into This Mess ?" (*Women Studies International Forum*, V, 1982, 207-220). When Islam appeared in the 7th century, it encountered an Arabian tribal system, grounded in patriarchy, which is replaced with a new social organisation based on common belief, *unma*. Al-Hibri advances an original theory that before the advent of Islam, the matriarchal societies of Arabia had been destroyed through a transfer of military technology from neighboring Byzantines and Sassanids. The conversion to Islam brought improvements for women, including new inheritance rights, the reduction of polygamy (to a maximum of four wives), the outlawing of female infanticide, and the right of women to participate in *bai'a*, the selection of a community leader. Lingering vestiges of patriarchy are attributed to the need for compromise. Following the death of Muhammad, however, patriarchal interests reasserted themselves, threatening the rights Islam granted women.

Among the scholars who argue that Islam is inherently patriarchal is Fatima Mernissi. In "The Regulation of Sexuality in the Pre-Islamic Social Order" (*Beyond the Veil : Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society* [Cambridge, Mass., 1975], 29-41) she argues that the patriarchal family, which controlled women's sexuality, became the cornerstone of the new Islamic community that superseded tribal loyalties. She claims that the tribal system had already begun to erode with the rise of mercantile communities cemented by new ties, and that Islam capitalized on this. Women gained new inheritance rights that gave them access to property, but not equally with men. The patriarchal family confined women's power, reducing the potential for disruption. Cases of women rebelling in the new community suggest some

women saw the new religion as inimical to their interests and took active stands on the matter.

Alya Baffoun also argues that Islam is patriarchal. In "Women and Social Change in the Muslim World" (*Women's Studies International Forum*, V, 1982, 227-242), which examines North African Berber societies before and after Islam, she notes that the sexual freedoms women enjoyed during pre-Islamic times were similar to those Mernissi found in Arabia, and that a double standard was absent. With Islam these conditions disappeared and the sexual oppression of women began.

When examining women's situation in societies that Islamized when the religion appeared during the 7th century or soon after, researchers are hampered by a dearth of sources for those distant times. There are places in the Middle East, however, where Islamization has been relatively recent, and where a study of the process with respect to women can be revealing. Darfur, in western Sudan, was only partially Islamized during the 19th century. Lidwien Kapteijns in "Islamic Rationales for the Changing Social Roles of Women in Western Sudan" (paper presented at the Berkshire Conference on Women's History, Smith College, 1984) looks at the implications for women of fuller Islamization, a process that accompanied the spread of commercial capitalism and urbanization into western Sudan from the Nile Valley. At the time, Islamic courts, which served new interests, replaced customary tribunals, before which women had appeared as plaintiffs, defendants, and witnesses in their own right, without the need of male representation, and without the disability that their testimony count for half as much as a man's. Along with the institution of Islamic practices, certain social practices were imposed on women in the name of Islam that were not prescribed by the religion - for example, segregation and seclusion. These features characterized the life of the upper and middle classes in Middle Eastern cities, who did not want and need women to work outside the home. In Western Sudan, the emergence of a new middle class of male traders and state functionaries, in a previously agrarian society where both sexes were primary producers, accompanied the imposition of segregation and seclusion on women.

The way Islam is understood and applied in daily life indicates how patriarchy uses the religion. Erica Friedl in "Islam and Tribal Women in a Village in Iran" (N.A. Falk and R.M. Gross, eds., *Unspoken Worlds : Women's Religious Lives in Non-Western Cultures* [New York, 1980], 159-73) looks at gender differences in the transmission of religion to villagers through proverbs. For men, moral imperatives are outlined in general terms ; for women, there are conveyed in specific terms and keyed to submission to male authority. Both women and men perpetuate the belief that women cannot live up to the moral code, thus necessitating their submission to male authority. Friedl, an anthropologist, is concerned with general norms, but she gives an example of a feminist consciousness when she relates how one village woman asserted that religion as practiced and preached was not made by God but by men to suppress women.

Increasingly, scholars are finding examples of Islamic prescriptions ignored, or of practices condoned or demanded in the name of Islam which are, in fact, not Islamic.

Several studies indicate that Islamic laws of inheritance are frequently not applied in rural areas. In his study, "Women and the Law among the Sinai Bedouin" (paper presented to a colloquium at the Wilson Center, Princeton University, 1983) Frank Stewart observes that Bedouin women normally do not inherit land or livestock. Martha Mundy in "Women's Inheritance of Land in Highland Yemen" (*Arabian Studies*, V, 1979, 161-187) and Vanev (???) Maher in "Divorce and Property in the Middle East of Morocco" (*Man : Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, new series, IX, 1974, 103-122) report that peasant women in the communities they studied in Yemen and Morocco relinquish their lawful land inheritance to male kin. In return, they receive periodic gifts and fall-back security, which makes them less completely dependent on their husbands. Maher suggests that the

higher rate of divorce among rural as opposed to urban women is linked to the lesser dependence of peasant women upon their husbands, leaving them freer to withdraw from marriage.

However, Stewart's research reveals that the authority of fathers and brothers can also oppress or restrict women. Among the Sinai Bedouin he studied, supreme authority over a woman is invested in her guardian, a male relative. In marriage effected under customary law, women become commodities of exchange in male arranged marriage deals whereby men of two families exchange brides. Women do not choose whom they will marry and also may find themselves unwillingly divorced when part of the reciprocal marriage barter breaks down. If Islamic law were applied, women would have a say about whom they married, and divorce would be effected for reasons internal to the marriage itself.

Among the practices and institutions held to be Islamic but which are not required, nor perhaps even condoned by Islam, are segregation and seclusion of women, which have existed historically, and still do in some places, in urban areas of the Middle East mainly among women of the upper and middle classes, although veiling, a distancing device, is practiced by lower-class women as well. Muslim societies took up the practice of segregation and seclusion in the cities of the Byzantine and Sassanian worlds they conquered in the 7th century. Early in Islamic history, these practices came to be associated with Islam. Hanna Papanek has analyzed segregation and seclusion as patriarchal forms of controlling women in "Purdah : Separate orlds and Symbolic Shelter" (*Comparative Studies in Society and History*, X, 1973, 289-323) ; she also discusses how segregation and seclusion are a function of class.

Veiling of the face, a practice that supports the segregation of the sexes, has been enforced on women in the name of Islam, although the religion requires only modest covering of the head and body. Women have sometimes used the veil to their advantage, such as to gain privacy and protection, but this should not obscure the restrictive and controlling functions of the veil. In "Women and Their Affines : The Veil as a Symbol of Separation" (*Man : Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, new series, XIII, 1978, 218-233) Ursula Sharma discusses how the veil depersonalizes women and constrains their power in the wider world.

Women and power

Scholars look at how, within religious systems (which may be patriarchal in varying degrees), women gain advantage. The nature and extent of power they attain varies. In Islam, as in medieval Christianity, an area where women have gained prominence is sufism, that is, mysticism. Annemarie Schimmel in "Women in Mystical Islam" (*Women's Studies International Forum*, V, 1982, 145-152) describes the contributions women have made to the development of the mystical tradition in Islam, as poets and teachers (many revered male sufis had been their pupils) who helped shape the learned tradition of mystical, thought and practice. At the highest plane of sufi thought, gender differences dissolved, and sometimes, mystical practice overrode sex segregation as within the Bektashi order in 13th century Anatolia.

While Schimmel deals with women in the learned tradition of mysticism, Daisy Dwyer examines their influence in the popular sufi tradition, "Women, Sufism, and Decision-Making in Moroccan Islam" (L. Beck and N. Keddie, eds., *Women in the Muslim World* [Cambridge, Mass., 1978], 585-598) examines how women influenced men's choice of sufi orders. Women join orders and make ritual supplications to influence the course of everyday life or to solve daily problems. Fatima Mernissi also takes this up in "Women, Saints, and Sanctuaries" (*Signs : Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, III, 1977, 101-112), another study of women in the Moroccan popular sufi tradition. When women

bring their concerns to sufi shrines, they feel their collaboration with saints gives them power over events at the same time as they gain the support of other women. Mernissi notes the limitations of this power and solidarity, however, which do not find wider expressions.

Women have used religious celebrations to expand their networks beyond the usual kin and class groups. Anne Betteridge in "The Controversial Views of Urban Muslim Women in Iran" (Nancy Auer Falk and Rita M. Gross, eds., *Unspoken Words : Women's Religious Lives in Non-Western Cultures*, New York, 1980, 141-155) sees this in *rowzehs*, the gatherings Iranians women hold in their houses to commemorate the deaths of Shiite martyrs. They listen to a sermon and give a ritual dinner for vows fulfilled, and make new vows. While men scorn these events, women insist on retaining the practice, Betteridge argues, because they do not wish to lose the social mobility it gives them and the chance to win control over their lives through vows.

Another religious ritual, the *mevlud*, the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, is discussed by Nancy Tapper in "Gender and Religion in a Turkish Town : A Comparison of Two Types of Formal Women's Gatherings" (Pat Holden, ed., *Women's Religious Experience* [London, 1983], 71-88). She compares this religious event with a purely secular occasion, the *Kabul gunu* or woman's reception day. On the symbolic level, Tapper finds the *mevlud* more significant, since it calls attention to woman's role as mother, which, Tapper argues, contradicts the notion of male domination. However, papers discussed below show some of the negative implications that flow from an emphasis on the maternal role.

Historically, women have used the courts to protect the economic rights Islamic law grants them, including property and inheritance rights and the capacity to conduct business affairs independently. Judith Tucker's research into 19th-century court records for a province in Egypt show how poor peasant women pleaded cases in court during a time of adversity, when the state through its forced labor removed men (and some women) from their subsistence farms, disrupting agricultural production and family life. In "Decline of the Family Economy in Mid-Nineteenth Century Egypt" (*Arab Studies Quarterly*, I, 1979, 245-271) we learn how women fought for support, child custody, and control of the land. They usually succeeded in gaining support and child custody if meanwhile they had not taken up paid labor. They did not gain control of the land, however, which was *miri*, state owned, and hence not covered by Islamic laws of inheritance. The women could not obtain these lands as men had, under custom, passing them in usufruct from father to son.

Research indicates that urban women, unlike their rural counterparts, have tended to receive their inheritances according to Islamic prescriptions. As do rural women in certain ways, urban women also exercise the right to conduct economic transactions on their own. This is demonstrated by two scholars who examined court records of the late 16th and 17th centuries in Turkey : Ronald Jennings in "The Legal Position of Women in Kayseri. A Large Ottoman City, 1590-1630" (*International Journal of Middle East Studies*, XII, 1980, 245-275). They show that townswomen owned and ran businesses and received their inheritances, including shares of agricultural land ; Gerber also found an example of a village woman inheriting land. Further research may reveal the extent to which these cases reflect broader conditions.

The Islamic resurgence

The veil is a striking symbol of the heightened Islamic consciousness, involving a return to the fundamentals of Islam, which emerged in the Middle East during the 1960s and 70s. The veil ranges in nature from loose garments covering the hair and body to material hiding the face. The face veil was known in the

Middle East prior to Islam and was adopted by the urban upper classes early in Islamic history. Veiling the face, however, is not a Muslim prescription, although it as long been associated with Islam.

Fadwa El Guindi analyzes the move among young Egyptian women to take up *ziyy al-Islami*, "Islamic clothing" as the veil is usually called in Egypt. In "Infatih with Muslim Ethic : Egypt's Contemporary Islamic Movement" (*Social Problems*, VIII, 1981, 465-485), El Guindi notes the general religious revival in Egypt following the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973, the increasing presence of women in universities, especially by the 1970s, and the government's new Open Door Policy, *infatih*, to stimulate massive foreign investment and western-style consumerism, which accentuated class differences. She sees Islamic dress as a cultural and economic defense against western intrusion, which also enables women to move with greater ease in "male" public spaces.

The author argues that the *mitadayyinat*, new, self-consciously religious women who adopt Islamic dress, are part of a move to establish an egalitarian Muslim community. The *ziyy al-Islami*, produced locally and inexpensively, would seem to blur the appearance of class differences among its wearers, but it also heightens gender differences. If the new dress is a strategy for helping women enter "male" public space, as El Guindi asserts, the *mitadayyinat* are acknowledging a fundamental inequality in the definition of that space. They do not perceive that the notion of male public space may be simply a patriarchal construct, nor do they invoke, as they might, the historical model of the *umma*, or the Islamic community of Muhammad's time, when both women and men occupied public space while participating in the social and economic life of the community. Moreover, the acceptance of public space as the male domain defines women, whether veiled or unveiled, as intruders, which, logically, could be used to make women retreat to their "proper" place. In fact, unpublished research in Egypt reveals a trend among *mitadayyinat* university graduates who have specialized in medicine, engineering, and pharmacology, not to seek a career but to withdraw to the shelter of home. El Guindi describes stages of increased coverage in Islamic dress, though, without detailed analysis.

In Iran, rising fundamentalism coincided with the mounting revolutionary struggle against the Pahlavi regime, associated with western imperialism. In the broad anti-Shah coalition, "Islamic" symbols became important signs of solidarity, especially the veil, in this case a head scarf or the *chador*, the all-enveloping black wrap worn by the majority of women in the cities.

During the revolution large number of veiled women appeared in public demonstrations. In "The Enigma of the Veiled Iranian Women" (*MERIP* [Middle East Research and Information Project], XII, 1982, 22-27), Azar Tabari explains that middle-class women who did not veil in every-day life took it up as a political protest in solidarity with women demonstrators for the traditional lower-middle-class who regularly veiled. In assuming the veil as a function of political struggle, however, women lost sight of its potential as an Islamic ideological symbol. With the triumph of the revolution, the veil became an important symbol of the new Islamic state and was soon imposed upon women.

In the 1970s, some women took up the veil as everyday practice. Anne H. Betteridge discusses this in "To Veil or Not to Veil : A Matter of Protest or Policy ?" (Guity Nashat, ed., *Women and Revolution in Iran* [Boulder, Colo., 1983], 109-128). During her research at the provincial city of Shiraz, she discovered middle-class women turning to the veil. This occurred, she explains, in the context of expanding religious education for women, which provided them with a new model that seemed neither reactionary nor imitatively western. Meanwhile, other Shirazi women were also returning to the veil simply as a sign of political protest.

The religious function of women's political activism is illustrated by Mary Hegland in "Aliabad Women ; Revolution as Religious Activity" (Nashat, *Women and Revolution in Iran*, 171-194). Religion both motivated and legitimized the political actions of

village women against the Shah. Hegland remarks that village women voiced revolutionary sentiments influenced by the rhetoric of religious leaders who glossed over gender differences in their desire to incite popular revolution. Janet Bauer in "Poor Women and Social Consciousness in Revolutionary Iran" (Nashat, *Women and Revolution in Iran*, 141-170) says lower-class urban women's participation in the revolution was stimulated by *mullahs*, preachers, who at *rowzehs* held by women extolled the sacrificial virtues of early Shiite women against tyrannical oppression. Bauer argues that the manipulation of religious symbols, together with the particular ways the networks of lower-middle-class women functioned, propelled them into political activity and legitimized their nontraditional behavior.

Some educated middle-class women who joined the revolution had attempted to connect Koranic teaching and socialism in the manner articulated by the Shiite Muslim intellectual Ali Shariati. Women, along with men, conducted revolutionary struggles within the Mujahidin, a leftist Muslim organization inspired by this ideological position. As Eliz Sanasarian observes in "An Analysis of Fida'i and Mujahidin Positions of Women's Rights" (Nashat, *Women and Revolution in Iran*, 97-108), the Fida-i party, a leftist secular group that sees women simply as part of a class formation, has ignored the gender dimension. (Sanasarian is also author of *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran* [New York, 1981]).

The foregoing paper make clear that women's participation in the Iranian revolution could be legitimized on religious grounds ; it was not a radical act. The revolutionary activities of women might have helped give them more sense of their own strength, both as individuals and as a group, as some observers have argued, but it is generally agreed that their participation was basically a nationalist act, which by itself did not politicize women as feminists.

Women were important activists in the Iranian revolution, but what has that revolution meant for them ? In "Women in the Ideology of the Islamic Republic" (Nashat, *Women and Revolution in Iran*, 195-216), Guity Nashat examines the new constitution and policies of the clerical leaders and concludes that the new regime is pushing women back into the home. At the ideological level, there has been a shift away from holding up the model of the Muslim woman as a heroic striver in the national arena. The struggle of the Shiite heroine Zainab, granddaughter of the Prophet Muhammad, following the murder of her brother, Imam Husain, has yielded to an emphasis on the virtues of Fatima as a dutiful wife of Imam Ali and mother of Husain and Zainab.

Earlier Ali Shariati had expounded a broader interpretation of Fatima's deeds, extolling her roles both in the family and in society as a role model for contemporary women. In "Women and the Islamic Revolution" (*International Journal of Middle East Studies*, XV, 1983, 283-298) Adele K. Ferdows contrasts Shariati's more liberal views of women with the conservative, state-supported interpretation of Khomeini.

In her article, Nashat discusses how the ideological construct of the woman of the new Islamic Republic is accompanied by a move to push women out of the work force and back to the home. Tactics include offering incentives for early retirement from government jobs and legal action barring women from practicing has judges. Women see their family roles accentuated, Nashat points out, while their positions in the family are threatened by the Family Protection Act's repeal, which has lowered the legal marriage age for women, placed them as a disadvantage in divorce proceedings, and male polygamy and temporary marriage (*mut'a*) easier for men. Patricia Higgins takes a different position, in "Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran : Legal, Social, and Ideological Changes" (*Signs*, X, 1985, 477-494). She says that neither the Family Protection Act nor the new legislation affected most Iranian women in practice ; however, she overlooks the ideological function of law and the potential for implementation.

The Iranian revolution has also had a conservative impact on the lives of women in the Arab Gulf, observes NESTA Ramazani in

"Arab Women in the Gulf" (*Middle East Journal*, XXXIX, 1985, 258-276). In Saudi Arabia, the strictest country in the Gulf, the triumph of revolution in Iran brought a reversal to the gradual liberalizing trend regarding women. Saudi women, who are still required to veil, did not themselves choose this conservative move. In Bahrain and Kuwait, the two most liberal societies in the Gulf, where unveiling had increased with expanding education and employment for women, during the past two decades, younger women are choosing to return to conservative dress. Ramazani links this with the quest for indigenous identity and the rejection of western influence, but, echoing El Guindi, she notes that women also feel less harassed in public if they veil. Unlike the tendency among many educated fundamentalist women in Egypt, however, to remain at home after graduation, women in the Gulf choose to work.

Ramazani posits and inverse relation between the degree of modernization and the women's turn to fundamentalism. It seems crucial, however, to distinguish between modernization accompanied by certain forms of visible western or new influences in everyday life, as in Bahrain and Kuwait, and modernization virtually devoid of this as in Saudi Arabia. The author rightly stresses that the return of the veil is deeply bound up with the question of identity. The Arab countries of the Gulf find this especially urgent, for their resident populations are at the very least half foreign. The issue of an indigenous identity is equally urgent for both genders. Why women tend toward a conservative style requires deeper analysis. If a woman decides to veil partly on the pragmatic ground of being able to move more easily in "male" public space, that suggests a patriarchal as well as a nationalist impulse at work.

Islamic fundamentalist writings influence some women students from the Gulf, according to Ramazani. Yvonne Haddad analyzes this literature, published in increasing volume from the end of the 1960s, mainly in Cairo and Beirut (until the strife in the middle 1970s put an end to publishing here), in "Traditional Affirmations Concerning the Role of Women as Found in Contemporary Arab Islamic Literature" (Jane Smith, ed., *Women in Contemporary Muslim Societies*, Lewisburg, Pa., 1980, 61-86). She observes that the writers promote an ideology of the differences between the sexes, although most of them claim the sexes are equal, which represents a shift away from an earlier construct of male superiority. The writers extoll the role of woman as wife and mother and the ideal of her restriction to the home, and stress that men are in charge of women and deserve obedience. The rise of this literature, Haddad observes, comes at a time when women are well entrenched in the workforce in the countries where these writers live. Margot Bradan's research on women in Egypt reveals that, as women penetrated the modern labor market in significant numbers, during the 1930s, a surge of writing extolled the cult of motherhood.

According to Haddad, the fundamentalist writers believe women's liberation means liberation from western influence rather than liberation from men. Women must seek liberation within the Islamic community, they argue, but it is a community which they define narrowly for women, claiming that women's roles are divinely (not culturally) constructed. In setting themselves up to interpret women's roles, these men seek to deny women the right of *ijtihad*, independent judgement, which Islam accords believers.

Feminism and Islam

Scholars are being increasingly drawn to the study of feminism, which in the Middle East first appeared during the 19th century. Is feminism indigenous there? Is it a western product? What is the connection between feminism and Islam? Is Islamic feminism possible?

The connection of feminism, Islam, and class is explored by Juan Ricardo Cole in "Feminism, Class, and Islam in Turn-of-the-

Century Egypt" (*International Journal of Middle East Studies*, XIII, 1981, 397-407). In the context of class, Cole analyzes the Egyptian debate about women at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries in the writings of male intellectuals (and one woman). The upper-middle-class men who benefited most from the capitalist transformation that occurred as Egypt was integrated into western markets became proponents of feminism; they believed that as they assumed new socioeconomic roles, they would benefit if women acquired new styles and skills. Grounding their arguments in a liberal interpretation of Islam, the male intellectuals advocated unveiling and expanded education for women. Men of the *petit bourgeoisie*, who did not enjoy these benefits and did not have the same practical incentives for promoting feminism, defending practices like veiling and limited education for women and attacked the feminist view as un-Islamic. Cole offers a compelling analysis of these differing intellectual positions.

Cole finds it ironic that the early feminist literary debate among Egyptian Muslims was conducted almost entirely by men. The near absence of women is not surprising if we recall the relatively few women who were well educated. Despite certain opportunities, women did not have the same access as men to publishing (women's journals notwithstanding). As historians probe the tradition, captured in memoirs, diaries, and personal correspondence, the fuller historical picture and women's role in it will emerge.

That Cairene women in upper-class harems were conducting a feminist debate during the 1890s is demonstrated by Margot Bradan in "The Making of an Egyptian Feminist and Nationalist as Seen in the Memoirs of Huda Sha'rawi" (paper presented at the meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt, Cleveland, 1984). These women developed a feminist consciousness during the socioeconomic transformation of the 19th-century Egypt, when they recognized that changes were not bringing the same benefits to women as to men of the upper class. This disparity and the discovery that Islam granted women rights they were deprived of by social convention (usually justified by appeal to Islam), together with some exposure, through personal contact and accounts in books, to the quite differently ordered lives of European women, gave rise to the feminism of upper-class women. Eager to expand their world and lead fuller lives, the women were not driven by motives of economic gain, unlike the men Cole discusses in his article.

Cole cites the position of the sole woman writer he discusses - Malak Hifni Nasif (known under the pseudonym Bahitha al-Bad'iyya) - as evidence of some solidarity between upper-class male and female intellectuals on the issue of feminism. Bradan's evidence shows that women from the middle class and the *petit bourgeoisie*, as well as upper-class women, became feminists; thus she argues for the existence of feminist solidarity across class lines.

A question of crucial importance is whether feminism is an indigenous creation or a western import. Although it has often been asserted that feminism is a western phenomenon, Bradan's research has led her to the conclusion that feminism arose indigenously in Egypt. Laila Ahmed in "Feminism and Feminist Movements in the Middle East, a Preliminary Exploration: Turkey, Egypt, Algeria, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen" (*Women Studies International Forum*, V, 1982, 153-168) maintains that feminism came to Turkey, Egypt, and Algeria from the West, although she indicates that the situation is different in the Arabian peninsula. She goes on to explain, however, that Egyptian women developed their feminist program within an Islamic framework. Her article is useful for raising comparisons between feminist movements in different parts of the Middle East. Margot Bradan and Eliz Sanasarian undertake a comparative perspective in "Feminist Goals in Iran and Egypt in the 1920s and 1930s" (paper presented to the San Francisco meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, 1984). In both countries, women located their feminism in a Islamic modernist framework, arguing

that Islam endorses women's rights. While feminists had not serious conflict with the *ulemah* in Egypt, the opposite was true in Iran. In Egypt, where the feminists and the state pursued their development independently of each other, feminists could, for example, take the initiative in unveiling, whereas in Iran the vehement opposition of the Islamic clergy prevented women for unveiling until they had state support. The Pahlavi regime mounted a vigorous program of modernization that directed women's development in ways that suited the state. The implications of these respective situations appear in recent developments in the region.

How Muslim women are politicized as feminists has been the subject of analysis. Margot Bradan in "Women, Nationalism and Political Participation in Early Twentieth Century Egypt" (unpublished paper), argues that it was women's exclusion from political rights, following the national independence struggle after World War I in which women played key roles, which politicized a group of upper and middle-class women into feminist activism. The feminism consciousness these women had developed earlier, which made them aware of their rights under Islam, and their practical experience in philanthropy prior to their nationalist work were all integral elements in the process of politicization.

The imposition of the veil by the Islamic Republic politicized some women in Iran and created an independent women's rights movement, asserts Nahid Yeganeh in "Women's Struggles in the Islamic Republic of Iran" (Azar Tabari and Nahid Yeganeh, compilers, *In the Shadow of Islam : The Women's Movement in Iran* [London, 1982], 26-74). Women had participated in the Islamic revolution as part of a broad coalition and not as a separate group with a specific agenda. Forced veiling, which shattered hopes for gains held out by the Islamic revolution, signaled to some women their subordination on the basis of sex in socioeconomic and political life. At that moment, the false sisterhood, as Tabari calls the alliance of middle class and petit-bourgeois women, split apart. Middle-class women began the struggle for a separate women's movement, whose importance in the fight for women's rights became clear with the issue of forced veiling. Sanasarian, in her previously cited paper, "An Analysis of Fida'i and Mujahidin Positions of Women's Rights", commented that neither party, not even the Mujahidin, which has a women's rights position, supported the women's demonstration that occurred when the veil was imposed. In fact, members of both parties urged women to veil - the Fida'i out of respect for the masses and the Mujahidin for reasons of modesty, even though they objected to the principle of veiling by force.

The feminist dilemma is not resolved simply through the creation of separate women's organizations, of course. In her article, Yeganeh examines the ideological and political challenges to Marxist and Muslim feminists. Both, she argues, become absorbed into larger ideologies. Marxist feminists continue to stress the paramourcy of class struggle, while Muslim feminists maintain women's rights will come only with the achievement of a true Muslim society. Yeganeh illustrates fundamental difficulties facing Muslim feminists by examining the Women's Society of the Islamic Revolution, the largest women's organization in post-revolutionary Iran. She distinguishes two tendencies within the organization : one, based on a conservative interpretation of Islam regarding women, reflects a total identification with the state ; the other, resting on the women's own interpretation of Islam, aims to work out a fresh ideological and political critique of women within Islam (which is virtually impossible under the current regime).

Eliz Sanasarian in "Islamic Identity and Political Activism" (*The Women's Decade : 1975-85*, Ruth Ross and Lynn Iglitzin, eds., [Santa Barbara, Calif., 1985]), maintains there is no feminist movement in Iran under the Islamic Republic. She distinguishes two categories of women in Iran : The co-opted women, who go along with government policies, she calls traditionalists ; women, fewer in number but better educated, whom the regime contains, she calls reformists. Focusing on the reformists, she

observes that they accept the state-articulated gender construct of "different but equal" elaborated in the Muslim fundamentalist literature that Haddad analyzes. Sanasarian analyzes the implications of the doctrine of difference. She notes, for example, that women are defined as emotional (men are rational), which in practice leads to their removal from judgeships. Different also becomes separate, and Sanasarian questions if separation has ever led to equality. She rejects the label Muslim feminist, and, subjecting Islamic feminism to close scrutiny, finds basic contradictions that call into question the whole concept.

Islam and Feminism are incompatible, argues Laila Ahmed in her previously mentioned article, "Feminism and Feminist Movements in the Middle East". She says for significant gains to be made the link between feminism and Islam must be severed, citing the example of Turkey - the only country in the Middle East where women have been granted equal rights within the family - which abandons Islamic law in favor of a secular family law code early this century. Fatima Mernissi also discusses the incompatibility of Islam and feminism in "The Symbolics of Femininity Models : *Nuchuz* (Women's Rebellion) and the Issue of Freedom in the 1980s, Islam's Identity Crisis" (paper presented at the Conference on Women, Religion and Social Change, Harvard University, 1983). In Islam, Mernissi notes, while all believers must obey or submit to God, women must also submit to male authority. Therein lies a fundamental contradiction between Islam and women's rights. In the past, Muslim women have mounted rebellion (*nuchuz*) to assert their rights, but, Mernissi argues, these rebellions have been contained as challenges to the very existence of the Islamic community.

The above areas of inquiry will probably continue to command the attention of researchers. Current research indicates that there will be more work done on women's political roles while work will continue on their socioeconomic roles. Women's family roles, sexuality, and the analysis of women's expression through written and oral accounts will likewise continue to be analyzed. Important in its own right, women's studies is integral to our understanding of the entire region.

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Journals consulted

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