ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN

The Qur’an, Islam’s holy book, changes women’s status considerably from that of...
The creation of the female is attributed, along with that of the male, to a single soul (4:1) from which the other is created a couple (4:1). Another verse declares: “Allah created you from dust, then from a little fluid, then He made you pairs” (35: 11). Thus, the Qur’an grants both sexes equal spiritual status. Men and women are equally accountable to God for their faith, actions, and moral behavior (33:35). However, such equality is not reflected in the social sphere. The Qur’an greatly advanced women’s status in the pre-Islamic (j il yah) period. Before Islam, both polyandrous and polygamous marriages were practiced, and matrilineal, uxorilocal marriages in which the woman remained with her tribe and the male either visited or resided with her were quite common. Many women selected and divorced their own husbands, and women were neither veiled nor secluded in wars alongside men. As Leila Ahmed observes, “these practices do not necessarily indicate the greater power of women or the absence of misogyny, but they do correlate with women’s enjoying greater sexual autonomy than they were allowed under Islam” (Ahmed, 1992, p. 42). Islam took away polyandrous marriages, and limited the number of female spouses to a maximum of four (Qurn 4:1) as early Arabian Muslims gradually moved from a matrilineal to a patrilineal society. The pre-Islamic practice of female infanticide was outlawed by the Qur’an (81:8–9). The dower (mahr), which in pre-Islamic times was paid directly to a woman’s male guardian (wal), was now made payable directly to the woman (4:3), who was also given the rights to inherit property (4:7).
concubines as they can afford (“their right hand may possess”) (4:3). Men may marry any of the women of the ahl al-kitab (peoples of the Book) (5:5) whereas women may marry only Muslim men (again, not a Qurnic injunction, but a traditional stipulation). Conjugal relations are forbidden with menstruating women (2:222), and otherwise, conjugal relations are permitted at will (2:223). Disobedient wives are subject to a graduated set of measures interpreted as ranging from admonishment to beating, depending on how the term conflict arise between the couple, then an arbiter from each one’s kinsfolk should be appointed to attempt a reconciliation. Men who forswear their wives must wait four months during which they may change their minds; however, if divorce is determined as a course of action, then women must wait a term of three menses to ensure that they are not impregnated, in which case the husband is recommended to take them back (2:227). Should divorce nonetheless proceed, the wife is entitled mutually agreeable, while she nurses (65:6).

**WOMEN IN MUSLIM CULTURE.**

Contemporary Muslim scholars such as Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas suggest that one should distinguish between Islam as religion and the differing cultural contexts in which Islam was revealed, institutionalized, and practiced. Islam as a religion refers to regulations pertaining to piety, ethics, and belief. These spiritual aspects of Islam are considered duties of worship (ibadat (u l) of the faith, and include cardinal beliefs in Allh’s uniqueness, the final prophecy of Muammad and obligatory practices such as prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. On this religious level, men and women are moral equals in the sight of God. Evidence for this is found in numerous Qurnic verses (2:187, 3:195, 4:1, 4:32, 9:71–72, 24:12, 30:21, 33:35–36, 40:40, 48:5, 57:12), which render the only distinction between women and men to be their piety (Islam as a culture refers to the ideas and practices of Muslims in the context of changing social, economic, and political circumstances. People not only worship God but also interact in social relationships contracts, trade, fight, arbitrate disputes, collect taxes, and so on. Collectively, these constitute the fur (the branches, or “superstructure”). On this cultural level, women have not been treated as men’s equals. Such inequality has evolved largely as an artifact of the preferences and actions of
patriarchal authorities after the Prophet's death, including a number of rulers and administrators, most jurists, and some intellectuals. In many instances, their patriarchal “readings” of the Qur’anic text were driven by the cultural contexts supplied by the expansion of Muslim rule over former Byzantine and Sassanid territories, where patriarchy was already a well-established form of social organization. Such authorities justified this system of inequality by drawing upon commentaries on certain verses of the Qur’an, with local practices, which were then inscribed into Islamic law. For instance, one of the earliest Qur’anic commentators, al-abar (d. 923 C.E.) imported the biblical account found in Gen 2:20–22 in which the woman was created from Adam’s rib, hence making the creation of the female secondary and in service to the male in contrast to the Qur’an’s more egalitarian assertion. He also draws upon traditions that blame the woman for Adam’s downfall, despite lack of evidence for the woman’s responsibility in the Qur’an, rational and more morally reprehensible differentiation then became the basis for personal laws developed by the legal schools. Thus, a number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century political leaders, government bureaucrats, intellectuals, and a minority of ulam (religious scholars), believe that the Qur’an itself does not support later categorical claims that justify women’s inequality in Islam.

Qur’anic verses do assign women’s testimony half the value of men’s; permit men to unilaterally divorce their wives; deny women custody rights over their children after they reach a certain age; permit polygyny; and favor men respecting inheritance. However, stipulations in the Qur’an itself and existing legal principles adduced by jurists may be invoked to maintain that, since the social, cultural, and economic context of those verses has changed, the sanction for gender inequality is no longer legitimate. For instance, scholars such as Wadud-Muhsin argue that “each new Islamic society must understand the principles intended by the particulars... which were manifestations particular to that [that is, seventh-century Arabian] context” (Wadud-Muhsin, 1994, pp. 9–10).

Contemporary woman-friendly scholars support their arguments by reference to the holy text itself. For instance, Allah says in the Qur’an that a people’s condition will not be changed until they change what is in themselves (13:11). According to contemporary scholars, this verse, as well as a sound tradition ascribed to the Prophet stating that “as for matters of your world, you know better,” calls upon...
Muslims to use their intrinsic endowment of reason to maximize their welfare. Thus, it would be offensive to human reason to accept gender inequality when Allah enjoins the spiritual equality of all Muslims; moreover, Barlas argues that God cannot be accused of misogyny or maltreatment of women, which can never be justified on the basis of God's self-revelation, the Qur'an. Jurists have over the centuries employed a number of legal devices that vindicate the use of reason in pursuing the welfare of Muslims, including:

1. public interest (al-maslahah al-mursalah).
2. The common expression, "necessities make permissible what are forbidden" (application of discretion (istihsan) in reaching a ruling. Careful attention to lexical meanings of a term also suggest that a Qur'anic verse such as 4:34, which says that men are preferred over (qawwamna ala) women are a support to women, and the term understood as "beating," may also be understood as "setting an example." In addition, such scholars argue, it must be determined whether a Qur'anic verse has placed a limitation on itself; for instance, 4:3 makes polygyny applicable only to (female) orphans under one's care, not to all Muslim women. Moreover, not only does the Qur'ān make polygyny conditional on equitable treatment for all wives (4:3) but explicitly asserts such treatment to be impossible (4:129).

Many Muslims claim that the Qur'ān and mandate veiling and seclusion. However, some scholars believe such arguments are tendentious. Of the seven Qur'ānic verses using the word "veil" (revealed at Mecca (7:46, 17:45, 19:17, 38:32, 41:5, 42:51), and none of them refer to veiling Muslim women. The seventh verse (33:53), revealed at Medina, requests male guests to address the Prophet's wives "from behind a something of them. Although the verse does not pertain to Muslim women in general, some Muslims argue that what applies to the Prophet's wives, exemplars of chastity, inheres all the more for Muslim women, on the assumption that they are less chaste. The ijāb in the verse is clearly intended to be a curtain rather than a head-covering, and may have led to the seclusion of the Prophet's wives. However, medieval Islamic commentators coupled this verse with verses specifying general Muslim women's clothing (24:30–31), in which women are asked to draw their scarves (khumr) over their bosoms (juyb) times to emulate the cultural tradition of veiling and seclusion observed by Byzantine and Persian upper-class women.
his Asb b al-nuz l, and others maintain should cover both head and bosom was free women and slaves. The story is to slave for wearing such a scarf. Thus, so to distinguish free women from slaves. contemporary times has eliminated th

In contemporary times, the veil has made exhortation to take it on as a sign of thei their proud identity as Muslims in a po of faith may be understood in part as a ever-globalizing American culture, pre British identification of Muslim backwa women has, in a reverse move, made ve signifier of all that is forward in Islamic mind and her morals rather than for the allowed women to enter the public spl previously male-dominated spaces, whe boardroom. With steady increases in w more women enter the legal and publi barring women from assuming equality apparent than in countries such as Iran parliament question attitudes and law Pakistan, where challenges to legal reg being vigorously voiced.

The Qurʾān does not support or asse can women be judged less rational, mo the basis of the Qurʾān. Certain ad the Prophet regarded women as incapable the veracity of a number of these trad later generations to justify restrictions: ad ths offer evidence that the Prophet opinions seriously. Ibn Qanbal, founder that at least one woman, Umm Waraq prayers for her household by the Prop
demonstrate women's important and respected role in Muslim life, as reflected in the story of an older woman who corrected the authoritative ruling of the second caliph Umar ibn al-Khattāb on the dower. Women prayed in mosques unsegregated from men, and were involved in the transmittal of *ad ths* (Ibn Sa’d, the famous early biographer, records seven hundred cases of women who performed this important function). Biographies of distinguished women, especially in the Prophet's household, show that women behaved autonomously in early Islam. Available are Khadijah, the Prophet's first wife; his youngest daughter; Zaynab, his granddaughter; and Fatimah bint al-Fath, known to give sanctuary (*jiw r*) to men and engaged in commercial transactions, and wealthy women in the Islamic medieval period patronized large-scale architectural projects. Like men, women were encouraged to seek knowledge, which, indeed, they pursued in the Prophet's own home, and women have been identified as instructors and pupils throughout Islamic history. The Prophet's favorite wife, Fatimah, was a well-known authority in medicine, history, and rhetoric and is noted for the number of a source.

As to politics, the Qur’an refers to women who pledged the oath of allegiance (*bay ah*) independently of their male kin. Women choosing to make such pledges, as did, occurred at al-Aqabah, al-Ri’wn, and al-Shajarah. Caliph Umar appointed women to serve as officials (*mutasibs*) in the market of Medina, and anbal jurisprudence upholds the qualifications of women to serve as judges. Examples of women's involvement in politics as well as governance are found in almost every century, among the most notable being Sitt al-Mulk (tenth century), the ulayd queen Sayyidah al-Furrah (eleventh century), Shajarat al-Durr and Radyah Sultānah Sulayma (both thirteenth century), the Indonesian queens of Aceh (seventeenth century), and various female Muslim heads of state in the contemporary period in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia.

**ROLE AND STATUS IN VARIOUS MUSLIM LANDS.** The seclusion and confinement of women's significant change until the early twen
modify personal status law have been made since then. These include the Ottoman Empire (1917), Algeria (1984), Egypt (1939, and 1976), Iran (1967, 1975, and 1976), Kuwait (1982), Morocco (1974), Sudan (1915, 1927, 1932, 1933, and 1975), Tunisia (1956, 1957, 1964, 1966, and 1981), and Turkey (1924).

Before the early twentieth century, the state left control over women and the family in the hands of patriarchal kinship groups and to Islamic law, of which conceptualized the law based on sexual differences. In contrast to its highly interventionist behavior in Islamic civil, the very risky enterprise of tampering with personal status regulations, the very core of Muslim (masculine) identity. The patriarchal control of women's behavior and the family unit were central to the construction of this identity. Ultimately, however, the state's reluctance began to give way, not least because of the pressure brought to bear by women's groups under the leadership of prominent women in countries such as Egypt and throughout the Ottoman Empire, and also as a result of pressures to modernize the economy.

In the past, inquiries into the role of women often overemphasized the content of sacred texts, assuming these texts were the driving force behind people's behavior. In reaction to this "essentialist" approach, some scholars have stressed the relevance of conditions in "civil society" (for example, class differences) for understanding women's subordinate status. More recently, it has been suggested that neither the "sacred texts" nor the "civil society" approach are in themselves sufficient to explain the content of personal status legislation at any given time because they ignore the state's autonomy in pursuing its own economic and political agenda in this area.

For instance, the state has broadened its base of support by enfranchising women, in the process weaning them away from the kinship groups that traditionally have controlled them and redirecting their loyalties to itself. Iran and Turkey at various times in this century exemplify this pattern. However, in doing this the state risks the growing disenchantment of more traditional Muslim scholars, who generally view such developments to be "anti-Islamic." Thus, the state may attempt to conciliate such groups by enforcing modesty codes or curtailing...
women's public presence. Post-1979 Pakistan and Iran, and Egypt after 1985, provide relevant examples of such conduct.

In balancing the conflicting demands of women and traditionalists, the state has generally followed a cautious policy of reform. Such reforms have made polygynous marriages more difficult or abolished them outright (notably in Turkey, Tunisia, and Syria); permitted wives to sue for divorce, especially in cases of cruelty, desertion, or danger; provided women with the right to contract their own marriages; required husbands to find housing for a divorced wife during her custody over children; increased the minimum marital age of spouses; limited the ability of guardians to contract women in marriage against their wishes; provided opportunities for minor girls wed against their wishes to abrogate their marriages upon reaching majority; enhanced the rights of women in regard to child custody; and allowed women to write clauses into marriage contracts limiting their husbands' authority over them, for example, by his ex ante grant to his wife of the right to divorce him.

ASSESSMENT.

The Qur'an improved women's status relative to the pre-Islamic period by emphasizing the ontological and spiritual equality of women and men. Although certain social and economic regulations in the scripture seemingly favor men, the conditions prevailing at the time of the revelation, which seemed to justify such inequality, have lapsed. The Qur'an itself provides mechanisms for a fresh interpretation of women's roles and status. Twentieth-century reforms in personal status law, achieved through recourse to such instruments and arguments, have gradually moved in the direction of gender equality, but a certain degree of backsliding has occurred as a consequence of the rise of ideologies reinscribing patriarchal control over women's dress, comportment, and desired equity before the law in a platform that includes a sometimes unyielding, even violent, confrontation with the state (itself at times co-opted) and reformist groups.

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WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

Although women and men are assigned the same religious duties and promised the same spiritual rewards in the Qur’an, social conventions, illiteracy, and Islamic requirements of ritual purity have all tended to restrict women's access to many aspects of Islamic religious life. These restrictions are not uniform across the Muslim world, and neither are women's responses to them. Regional variations in women's religious lives have not been sufficiently documented to make it possible to provide a truly balanced description of women's religious observances. Furthermore, social changes in this century have radically altered the situation of women in society, opening new opportunities for women in the religious domain as well.

WOMEN AND BASIC ISLAMIC OBLIGATIONS

Although women are expected to perform the five daily prayers and the Ramadan fast, they may not pray, fast, or touch (or even, according to some interpretations, recite) the Qur’an during menstruation or postpartum bleeding. According to hadith, the exemption during menstruation denotes women's religious deficiency (just as the devaluation of their legal testimony, worth only half that of a man, denotes their mental deficiency). Women are rendered much more susceptible to ritual impurity than men, not only by menstruation and childbirth but also through their contact with young children, who may soil them. Although not required to fast while pregnant or nursing a baby, many women do observe the fast during these times, either totally or partially. Days of fasting that are missed because of these exemptions must be made up for later.
Congregational prayer is said to be twenty-seven times more meritorious than prayer performed alone, and *ad ths* from the Prophet enjoin men not to forbid women from praying in the mosque. Still, otherHadiths from the Prophet's day, women performed the dawn prayer in rows behind the men, and, according to *ad ths* theoretically, all contact between the sexes was avoided. During the caliphate of Úmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634–644), women prayed in a separate room of the mosque with their own imam. Previously the mosque as well, but Úmar forbade women from gathering in the mosque after the Prophet. Al-Ghazâlî justified this by claiming that widespread moral deterioration made public spaces unsafe for any but elderly women, encouraging women not to leave their homes for any reason.

Ethnographic studies from a number of different Islamic countries indicate that women are commonly regarded as the initiators of illicit sexual relationships, and their presence in public is considered a source of temptation and social discord. The exclusion of women is thus considered necessary to preserve the holiness and dignity of religious ceremonies. For instance, the Friday noon prayer in the mosque is mandatory for men, but not for women, and young boys were allowed to be present in the mosque. Although many mosques have segregated areas, separate rooms, or balconies, mosques were once male spaces to which a proper woman did not go. The Islamic resurgence that has swept the Muslim world since the 1970s, enlisting women's active involvement, has helped change such attitudes. Most recently-constructed mosques provide considerably more space for women than earlier ones. However, the actual spatial arrangement of the architecture reinforces women's marginality to life in the mosque, often isolating them in areas where they cannot see or hear the imam or preacher.

In the pilgrimage to Mecca, on the other hand, Islamic law stipulates that women not veil their faces during the pilgrimage. This integration of the sexes also occurs during festivities at saints' shrines, indicating that at the loci of most intense holiness, gender barriers collapse.
Women have always played a role in the transmission of religious knowledge. The role of ʿAʾishah, Muḥammad's youngest wife, was particularly important that Muḥammad is said to have told the Muslims they would receive half their religion from a woman. Muḥammad himself provided religious lessons for women, although later Muslims often complained that education would be used by women for unholy ends. Literacy was a rare achievement for women in later medieval Muslim society. Throughout Islamic history, some daughters of wealthy families have been favored with a private education, while women were excluded from formal educational institutions and even supervisors of educational establishments. Ibn Taymīyā (d. 1328) lists two women among his teachers, and some female descendants of the Prophet, such as his granddaughter Zaynab and his great-great-great-granddaughter Nafsah, are recognized as women of learning and wisdom, as well as piety. Although schools for girls in subjects such as midwifery, crafts, and housekeeping skills opened in the nineteenth century in many countries, and since independence secular education has been made available to girls as well as boys throughout most of the Islamic world, religious education has lagged behind. Occasionally, women have become recognized as distinguished religious scholars through their writings alone, without attending institutions of higher Islamic education. ʿAʾishah ŠʿAbd al-Raḥmān Nasser's revamping of the Islamic University of al-Azhar, a College for Girls was opened in 1962, and graduates in the field of religion have been employed as teachers in religion classes in public schools. Al-Azhar began a limited program to train women as preachers in 1988. Women are not generally deemed fit to teach men, so it is assumed that these women are being trained only to serve women's religious needs. In Iran, religious schools in the holy city of Qom were opened to girls in 1976. However, private education and apprenticeship has produced innumerable women who serve as Qurʾān reciters in both Sunn and Shīʿa communities, and as leaders of women's gatherings to commemorate the martyrdom of the imams among the Shīʿa.
Mysticism is by definition a sphere that depends more on individual reputation for holiness and receptivity to spiritual impulses than on literacy and institutional certification. It is therefore not surprising that Sufism has been more open to women than have the more legalistic and scholastic dimensions of Islamic religious life. The most famous woman is Rābi'a al-'Adawīyah (d. 801), credited with introducing the concept of selfless love into Sufism. Her poems of love for God have inspired mystics to the present day, and her tradition depicts her outwitting her male colleagues. She is listed alongside male biographical dictionary, because “God, she is a man and one cannot any more call her a woman” (Ar, p. 40). Rābi'a is not unique in tradition. Javd Nurbakhsh has translated into English the brief biographies of some 124 women, including Fimah of Nishapur (d. 838), who was described by Dhū al-Nun al-Mir as the highest among the fs of his age. The great mystic Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240) lists two women among his teachers and claims that the most perfect contemplation of God for a man is in woman.

In spite of its greater hospitality to female participants, tradition is not uniform in its praise of women. Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) scarcely speaks of women in the mystical path except as assets or obstacles to the spiritual life of men. This tradition recommends marriage, in imitation of the example of the Prophet, but al-Hujwirī (d. about 1071) held celibacy to be the ideal, declaring that all the evils in the world had been caused by women.

Celibacy and rigorous fasting were practiced by many early fs. In addition to aiding in the training of the soul and spiritual concentration, these may have been tools for women to avoid ritual impurity—refusing intercourse and childbirth through celibacy, preventing menstruation by fasting—and thereby guarantee uninterrupted access to God.

Shaykhī shaykhs were the most effective religious teachers in Muslim society and often served as popular counselors and healers, so it is not surprising that they touched the feminine world more than the mosque-centered sphere of religious scholars. Some shaykhī shaykhs in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods admitted women into their orders, although their participation in the orders and in distinctive ritual of chanting the names of God with special breath control and movement, was controversial. Women sometimes founded retreat houses for men as a pious act. Annemarie Schimmel documents an Anatolian woman of the late
fourteenth century who was head of a retreat house for women was established in Cairo in Mamlk times in honor of a prominent woman, Zaynab Fimah bint Abbs (late thirteenth–early fourteenth century), and according to Ibn ajar al-Asqaln, there were women shaykhs and scholars of the law, most of them divorcees, who lived in extreme abstinence and worship in hospices. In contrast to early Sufism, it seems that in the later medieval period only women who had already completed their duty of marriage were free to devote themselves.

Moroccan and Algerian orders frequently have women's auxiliaries with female leadership, and in many countries women's organizations with female leadership complement those of men. In contemporary Egypt, however, concerns with propriety in the face of reformist criticisms of female membership by the Supreme Council of orders, a government-sponsored body. Women nonetheless continue to participate in many Egyptian orders. Some women participate to both men and women, or as heirs of were shaykhs. In this latter case, the deceased's eldest son, although actual daughter. In some Egyptian orders, women may participate in dhikr, but in many orders, and in society at large, women do not expose herself by rising to join a dhikr. But more often women participate silently, sitting among the observers. When women do participate in dhikr, they are rarely as vocal as men, and use smaller, more contained movements. This is in marked contrast to Sh commemorative assemblies in Iran, in which the women are said to be more emotionally expressive than the men. Women seem to be caught between competing social norms that say, on the one hand, that they are more emotional than men, and, on the other hand, dictate that they suppress all public displays of emotion.

In Egypt, and probably in other places as well, some feel that once they have entered into the spirit, they may transcend the barriers of the flesh; “male” and “female” become meaningless categories. In such a state they may exercise freedom in interpersonal relations between the sexes, a sanction considered shocking to the society at large. Women are sometimes criticized as immoral for the way in which men and women mingle at their ceremonies, and women sometimes avoid saints'-day celebrations because
SAINTS AND SPIRITS.

Whereas ordinary mosques are usually regarded as male spaces, saints' shrines are traditionally open to women. Saints are men and women who are popularly recognized as wal's (friends of God). They are believed to be able to intercede with God on behalf of the faithful, and miracles occur at their hands. After their deaths, their tombs or reputed tombs become shrines and places of refuge for their devotees and other troubled individuals. Saints are champions of the downtrodden, and because their rituals require no education, women are frequently able to plead with the saints on their behalf. Fatima Mernissi wrote that saints’ shrines in Morocco are more like a social space for women than a religious space where prayers are made, and that male visitors may feel like intruders. This is not the case in Egypt, where it is considered appropriate to pray, and where women are seldom in the majority. Women are indeed very much in evidence in Upper (southern) Egypt, where women feel free to sit in the vicinity of the tomb, and in some shrines special rooms are designated for women. The country's most important shrine of all, that of the Prophet's grandson Usayn, does not allow women to enter after sunset.

Some shrines cater specifically to women's needs, such as fertility. In India, some Muslim saints' shrines are designated as women's shrines, while others are for men. In Iran and Iraq, Shī women visiting the tombs of the martyred imams acquire a prestige similar to those performing the pilgrimage. The great saint's-day festivals (mawlids) that commemorate particular saints' deaths, form the major focus of devotion in Egypt, as devotees travel from one festival to another, setting up hospitality stations and performing ceremonies. The mawlid of Sayyid Ahmad al-Badawi in Tanta, in the Egyptian Delta, the entire floor of the vast mosque associated with his shrine is transformed into a campground inhabited by a crowd of men, women, and children, without any segregation of the sexes. The activities at saints' shrines are a popular target of reformist criticism, and frequently the presence of women is considered inappropriate, both for considerations of modesty and because the Prophet allegedly prohibited women
from visiting tombs. The practice of saint-shrine veneration has its defenders, however, who rely on the same type of scriptural sources used by its critics. Regardless of this criticism, the visitation of saints’ shrines has formed an essential component of the religious lives of women all over the Muslim world.

Women in many countries participate in spirit possession cults such as the North and East Africa and the *bori* of West Africa. These cults are based on the assumption that both physical and emotional illness may be caused by spirits, whose anger must be appeased through the hosting of a feast and the performance of dances peculiar to the spirit in question. Although the cults are non-Islamic in origin, the scripturally endorsed belief in spirits and their effects on humans make Islam a hospitable environment for the introduction and spread of such cults. Public troupes singing praises to the Prophet and some of the spirits are those of great Muslim saints. Women’s criticism of the *z r* cult in Egypt has been vociferous enough that even illiterate women are aware of it.

**TWENTIETH-CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS**

Religious reformers of all types have criticized the saint cult as idolatrous and the spirit cults as un-Islamic. The hue of illegitimacy has been cast over the very aspects of Islamic religious life that have traditionally been most open to women. In his book *The Emancipation of Women* (1899), the Egyptian judge Qsim Amn (d. 1908) urged that women be educated in order to dispel the myths and superstitions they supposedly perpetuate among the young, and the Syrian-born writer Rashid Ri’i (d. 1935) urged in his journal, *Al-manr*, that women be integrated into orthodox religious life, as they were in the days of the Prophet. Throughout the twentieth century, independently founded Islamic voluntary associations have assumed the task of providing religious education for women, in addition to offering courses in literacy and crafts. The Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna in Egypt, had a women’s auxiliary, the Muslim Sisters, which never succeeded on the level of its male counterpart. Zaynab al-Ghazl founded the Muslim Women’s Association in 1936 as an Islamic response to the Egyptian Feminist Union. Today there are approximately fourteen thousand Islamic voluntary associations in Egypt,
and many of them offer religious classes for women. In addition, many government-operated mosques offer religious lessons to women. In many cases, the teachers are themselves women, although male teachers continue to predominate.

The university-centered Islamist movement that has swept the Muslim world since the 1970s has garnered the support of many women as participants and propagandists. Women in the movement wear a loose-fitting garment that covers the entire body except the hands and face, which had been an anomaly when it appeared in the early 1970s. This became the uniform of the aggressively religious woman. These women are usually well educated, often in the most prestigious university faculties of medicine, engineering, and the sciences, and they pursue an education and career in the public sphere. Whereas other women are frequently harassed in public places, such women are honored and even feared. By the late 1980s, this dress became the norm for middle-class women who do not want to compromise their reputation by their public activities. Boutiques offer Parisian-style fashions adapted to Islamic modesty standards, thereby subverting somewhat the original intent of the movement.

Despite the high visibility of female participants throughout the Muslim world, it espouses a conservative ideology regarding women's social roles, idealizing their importance as mothers and stressing allegedly innate gender differences that make work outside the home unsuitable for women. This rhetoric, both incorporatist and exclusionary, may appeal to women who are doubly burdened when they take on jobs out of economic necessity, and feel degraded by their "public" conditions. The Islamic movement also encourages women to struggle on behalf of Islam as their counterparts did in early Islam. The contradictory rhetoric of the Islamic movement has been particularly effective in Iran, where women have been incorporated into a nationalist movement through symbolic appeals to female purity, while at the same time employment and educational opportunities for women have been curtailed. The movement also restricts modesty norms, and the rank-and-file of the Islamic movement includes many women, although its leadership remains largely male. Zaynab al-Ghazal of Egypt is one of the few women to attain prominence as an Islamic activist.


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  translations from a variety of primary sources relevant to the
Women Living under Muslim Laws (WLUML) is an international support and solidarity network of Muslim and secular feminists who link with other women's networks to advance the human rights of women in the Muslim world. Although several such transnational feminist networks exist today, WLUML was the first to emerge, in 1984, in response to concerns about changes in family laws and growing Islamist movements in the countries from which the founding members came.

The group came together on the initiative of Marieme Helie-Lucas, an Algerian citizen and lecturer at the University of Algiers who left for Europe in 1982. This was a time of transition in Algeria, from the era of Arab socialism under Houari Boumedienne (who had died in December 1979) to a period of economic restructuring under Chedli Bendjedid. The new government also was drafting a patriarchal family law that alarmed many women and led to the formation of an Algerian feminist movement.

In July 1984, nine women—from Algeria, Sudan, Morocco, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Mauritius, and Tanzania—set up an Action Committee of Women Living under Muslim Laws to critique patriarchal family laws and growing fundamentalism. By early 1985, the committee had evolved into an international network of information, solidarity and support, and Helie-Lucas became the guiding light behind the WLUML network. Individuals and groups associated with the network have included Farida Shaheed and Khawar Mumtaz of Pakistan.

Valerie J. Hoffman-Ladd

WOMEN LIVING UNDER MUSLIM LAWS

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Since the first planning meeting in July 1986, WLUML has linked women across the world who are active in their local and national movements but who meet periodically to reach consensus on a Plan of Action that guides the network's activities for the next five to seven years. Key strategies are information dissemination on discriminatory laws and violations of women's human rights; campaigns on specific cases that include petition drives and action alerts; and a variety of publications.

WLUML typically engages in grassroots networking but occasionally attends international conferences. The UN's World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna, Austria, in 1993, was the first UN conference that WLUML officially attended, and it did so largely to raise awareness at the women's tribunal about Islamist violence against Algerian women. WLUML also participated in the 1994 UN conference on population and development, held in Cairo, Egypt, where it joined other feminist networks in criticizing efforts by the Vatican, conservative states, and Christian and Muslim fundamentalists to remove references to women's reproductive rights in the conference declaration.

The Koranic Interpretation by Women project was launched in Lahore in 1990 and entailed an independent reading and interpretation of the Qurn, existing Islamic laws. The multi-year project, in which Sisters in Islam were especially active, culminated in a 1997 book—*For Ourselves: Women Reading the Qurn*—to increase awareness of the misapplication of Islamic law in the Muslim world. Sections deal with interpretation and jurisprudence; “the foundational myths” and the controversial “Sūrat al-Nisā’” (Qur‘ānic chapter 4 on women); women in the family; women in society; and recommendations for action and strategies. A subsequent related project produced *Knowing Our Rights: Women, Family, Laws, and Customs in the Muslim World*. In November 2002, WLUML expanded its work through a Web site called *Fundamentalisms: A Web Resource for Women's Human Rights*, a joint initiative with the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID). WLUML also continues to reach its vast network through periodic electronic dispatches, which summarize news, information, appeals, and alerts—in English and French—pertaining to women in the Muslim world and beyond.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


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Valentine M. Moghadam

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