

Muslim Women: Between Cliché and Reality

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Clichés about the Orient and Oriental women, which imposed themselves with considerable force on the popular imagination, have been perpetuated in Europe since the Middle Ages. The projection of evil onto marginal or ineffectual groups within a society has always been an easy and useful method for making scapegoats. Jews in Medieval Europe were stereotyped and tried for a number of fictitious crimes such as poisoning wells, killing children for their blood and crucifying and cannibalizing their victims. Along the same lines women were associated with the devil and regarded as enemies of the Church, hence the witch-hunts that tried women for sexual voraciousness, cannibalism and consorting with evil spirits. The projection of evil onto an alien culture was also a distinctive aspect of medieval Europe's intolerance,¹ due to its ignorance of such cultures.

At the time, the Islamic state was the ogre that threatened not only Europe but also Christianity as a religion and a civilization: considered anti-European, it was posing a cultural, religious, political and military confrontation to the West. The Prophet Muhammad was ridiculed in the most noxious manner and was described as a lecherous arch-seducer who utilized God to justify his own sexual indulgences. Gerald of Wales wrote in the 12th century that the Prophet's teachings concentrated on lust, and were thus particularly suitable for Orientals since they lived in a naturally hot climate.² Such concepts, whose popularity was transmitted from one generation to the other, were simultaneously associated with the misogyny inherent in the European psyche. Consequently, Muslim women were doubly demeaned as Orientals and as women.³

Sir Richard Burton's licentious translation of the 'Arabian Nights' gained great popularity in 19th-century Victorian England and was regarded as a high literary work. In it he portrays the cunning Sheherazade who utilizes her knowledge and education to save her life for 1001 nights by recounting an unending sequence of erotic tales to her king and keeping his curiosity alive. It should be mentioned that the original text is nothing but oral folklore traditions from India, Persia, Iraq, Syria and Egypt recorded in a vulgar vernacular to appeal to the common prejudices

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among the illiterate masses to whom they were recounted as inferior entertainment. Arab historians such as Al-Mas'udi referred to them in that manner in *Muru' al-Dahab*, and Ibn al-Nadim in the 10th century considered them of no literary value beyond that of being popular among the illiterate.⁴

Other Oriental women who gained iconic value in Renaissance art and 19th-century painting, literature and music were: Cleopatra coming down the Nile on her barge drenched in perfume to seduce Mark Antony, and the wicked and exotic Salome shedding her veils to be rewarded with John the Baptist's head on a tray. Orientalist painters, including Jean-Léon Gerôme, John Fredrick Lewis, Jean Lecomte du Nouy, Eugene Delacroix, Luis Riccardo Falero and Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, among scores of others, depicted countless scenes in which half-naked Muslim women in harem quarters reclined in a stupor on cushions, danced voluptuously in royal courts, exhibited erotically in slave-markets, and slumped against each other in Turkish baths, unclothed, like chunks of fresh beef in a butcher's window. Unlike her European sister, the nude Muslim woman emerged in Orientalist art outside mythology and was placed within a definite milieu that, in the mind of the artists, gave her a realistic character that appealed to the bourgeois public. Yet, strangely enough, the women in those paintings hardly ever looked foreign, and closely conformed to European standards of beauty: pale skin, light-coloured eyes and blond or light chestnut hair. On the other hand, the villain in Orientalist paintings was almost always depicted as very dark or even black. Yet there was one small detail that the public seemed to ignore. European artists who visited Muslim countries had absolutely no access to the baths and harems of the East and had probably never encountered an unveiled Muslim woman let alone a naked one. Many of them had not even been to eastern countries; they were armchair painters working in their studios in Paris and London, assisted by props from the East. However, they succeeded in propagating the most widely spread clichés portraying Oriental women through literature and art as evil, uninhibited and profligate sex objects whose sole aim in life was to seduce and satisfy the illicit desires of the Oriental male and, later, European male travellers. Hence every Muslim woman was a seductress of sorts.

Prior to the 17th century, western concepts of Islam derived mainly from accounts by travellers and crusaders, and developed from the deductions of clerics' readings of poorly understood Arabic texts. Gradually thereafter, through the 17th and 18th centuries, readings of Arabic texts became slightly less obscure, and the travellers rendered what they perceived, which approximated more closely to the interpretations that Muslim men provided them with regarding their own customs and experiences. Male travellers to Muslim societies had extremely limited access to women, and the explanations and interpretations they brought back, insofar as they represented a native perspective at all, essentially gave the male point of view on whatever subject was discussed and comprehended by the travellers themselves. By the 18th century the western version of women's status in Islam, which was drawn from such sources, was closer to the aggressive chauvinist interpretations of Islamic patterns of male dominance. Meanwhile, it often garbled and misinterpreted the specific content and meaning of the practices described. At times it also represented the Islam practised in contemporary Muslim societies that the Europeans encountered,

and in some countries ruled over, as the true and only possible interpretation of the religion.⁵

Consequently, a second image of Muslim women emerged in the West – of an ignorant and repressed woman whose Islamic culture, based on the religion, forced her into servitude behind the veil. Her father, husband or brother was responsible for her. He had the power to physically mutilate her, and prevent her from leaving her home to be educated, earn a living or choose her partner in marriage. She could not assume public office, pursue a profession or have a say in any matter related to her destiny. Her role was confined to procreating, raising a family behind closed doors and slaving to serve her husband and/or other male relatives. Once more Islam itself was being attacked; this time as a backward, repressing and cruel religion which subjugated half of its followers by keeping them in seclusion. This gave civilized Europe or the West an added legitimate reason to colonize the Islamic Orient and introduce ‘civilization’ to its natives through deculturizing them and forcing them to westernize. In a handbook for missionaries entitled *The Story of Islam*, written by Theodore R. W. Lunt who was Assistant-secretary of the Church Missionary Society for Work Among Young People in London, and published by the same society as late as 1909, the author states that: ‘Because the Moslem’s view of God is out of focus, discoloured, distorted, and false, therefore his view of man is false and out of focus too’.⁶ While he wrote on women:

And the blackest of all the blots which besmirch the name and memory of Mohammed was his teaching about Woman and relations with her. True, his teaching may have been in advance of what was commonly accepted by the Arabs of his day, but he left her still the chattel and not the companion ‘meet’ for man. Women were to him an inferior grade of beings, whose sole destiny was to serve their husbands and be the mothers of children . . . He gave ‘divine’ sanction to a Mohammedan to have four wives and as many concubines as he could afford, to beat them when they displeased him, and divorce them if he wished.⁷

As a result of such ideas, the subject of women emerged as the centrepiece of the western account of Islam in the late 19th century, when Europeans began to install themselves as colonial powers in Muslim countries. This new centrality that the issue of Islamic women came to occupy in the western and colonial narrative of Islam seems to result from the fusion of the old narrative of Islam as the enemy of Christianity and the broad all-purpose narrative of colonial domination regarding the inferiority of all other cultures and societies, in relation to European culture. Finally, and somewhat ironically, came the language of feminism that was evolving in the West with particular vigour during this time.⁸ Meanwhile:

the colonial powers, especially Britain, developed their own theories of races and cultures and of a social evolutionary sequence according to which middle-class Victorian England, and its beliefs and practices, stood at the apex of the evolutionary process and represented a model of the ultimate civilization. In this scheme Victorian womanhood and mores pertaining to women, along with other aspects of society at the colonial centre, were regarded as the ideal measure of civilization. Such hypotheses of European supremacy that legitimised its dominance of other societies were soon confirmed by ‘evidence’ gathered by missionaries and others.

This same emergent anthropology along with other sciences of man simultaneously served the governing British colonial and ethnocentric order in another internal project of ascendancy. They provided evidence corroborating Victorian theories of the biological inferiority of women and the naturalness of the Victorian ideal of the domesticated female role. Such concepts were politically useful to the Victorian institution as it faced mounting vocal feminism. Ironically, at the time when the Victorian male establishment was developing theories to challenge the claims of feminism, ridiculing and rejecting its ideas, it took the language of feminism and redirected it in the service of colonialism towards others and their cultures. The idea that other men in societies beyond the borders of the 'civilized West' aggrieved and mistreated women was to be used, in the rhetoric of colonialism, to render morally justifiable its project of undoing or eradicating the cultures of colonized peoples. Because the Islamic world was regarded as an enemy (or the enemy) since the Crusades, colonialism had a rich vein of bigotry and misinformation to draw on.^{9 10}

Identifying the Muslim woman

At this point one should look at the facts that identify who is a Muslim woman and what rights and duties her religion accords her. Until Islam came in the 7th century AD, the status of women in the pastoral tribal society of the Arabian Peninsula was that of an object or a beast of burden (although there were certain rare incidents during the first Jahiliyya period preceding Islam when the tribe was attributed to the mother). She was exploited for sexual pleasure, childbearing and the execution of menial jobs that men refrained from performing. She was considered part and parcel of man's possessions to the extent that after his death she became part of his inheritance and was allotted to one of his inheritors, as a share of his possessions. Meanwhile the attitude of women in general towards their servitude was one of total submission. They neither knew a better way of life nor had the opportunity to compare with others of their gender who had rights and privileges. The status of women throughout the Middle East was no better than that of Arab women.

Rights

After the coming of Islam, for the first time women were given equal rights with men in all areas except inheritance. In the family sphere a woman was not only given the right of consent to marriage but her consent became a condition for the validity of the nuptial contract into which she could put any condition she wanted, including prohibiting her husband from taking a second wife. Any breaking of the terms in the marriage contract would automatically annul the marriage. Even if the woman was not aware beforehand of her right to set out her conditions in the nuptial contract, and she discovered it only after the contract was drawn up, she could make up for it by adding whatever she wished later on. With a contract, the consent of both parties is essential for its validity. There was one occasion on which the Prophet Muhammad permitted the annulment of a marriage when the woman told him that

her father had forced her into matrimony, and another when she was given the right to add her terms to the contract after the marriage had already been consummated.

A woman's marital rights and duties as a wife and mother were defined. Respecting her was a binding duty on the husband, who was obliged to provide her with the three basic needs: food, clothing and shelter according to her social status before her marriage. If he failed to provide her with one of the three, she had the right to divorce him. Her children were obliged to obey and respect her as a mother. If a wife, for example, came from a family whose women did not breastfeed their children the husband was obliged to provide a wetnurse for her. As a daughter she was saved from infanticide, which had been the custom among pre-Islamic societies. She was given the right to inherit and to appropriate, and was the only custodian of her property with no interference from her family, including her husband. Her civil and religious rights and duties were equal to those of men.¹¹ The Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet urged both men and women to seek education on equal terms. The Prophet's wives and daughters were not only knowledgeable in matters of their religion but were also referred to as authorities to interpret religious traditions and instruct the Muslims in matters of faith.¹² Islam gave women the right to political participation, to hold public office and conduct lawful debate, fraternizing and practising all the professions that were open to men, including war. The Prophet himself used to take one of his wives with him every time he went on campaign. Qur'anic verses on equal rewards of labour show that men and women are equal before God in the matter of reward, when they are equal in their work. There is therefore no difference between them in regard to humanity, and no superiority of one over the other in work.¹³ Since the early days of Islam, women took part in war and commerce, practised nursing and medicine, and instructed the people privately and in mosques. The Prophet's first wife, Khadija, was a merchant who employed the Prophet himself.¹⁴

The high status that a Muslim woman attained during the first century of Islam and in such a short period of time was achieved through learning. Encouraged by the Prophet and his companions she educated herself in the principles of her religion, understanding her full rights and obligations and putting them into practice. She covered all kinds of knowledge, be it religious, literary, humanities, law, medicine or sciences.

Polygamy

There are two topics in Islam that seem to be of particular interest to the West and which put Muslims on the defensive. The first is polygamy and the second is the veil for women. Islam did not invent polygamy. Judaism allowed men to have an unlimited number of wives according to their income. Both David and Solomon had hundreds of wives and concubines despite the fact that they were both prophets. The Old and New Testaments did not forbid polygamy, which was practised until the 16th century. In 1531 the Anabaptists openly preached at Munster that he who wants to be a true Christian must have several wives. When the Thirty Years' War significantly reduced the population in Central Europe, the Frankish Kreistag at

Nuremberg passed a resolution in 1650, after the Peace of Westphalia, that thenceforth every man was allowed to marry two women.¹⁵

The Mormons in the USA regard polygamy as a divine institution, and practised it until the 1970s when they were forbidden to do so by civil law. In certain regions in Africa, such as among the Zulus, where polygamy is considered a social necessity, it is still allowed by Christian missionaries.

What Islam did was regulate polygamy by restricting it to four wives; each having equal family and inheritance rights. However, polygamy in Islam can only be practised under certain conditions, such as illness or infertility of the first wife, and the death of men in war resulting in their decreased numbers. Yet, the principal condition is equality in the husband's treatment of his wives. If a man cannot abide by this condition, then he is allowed only one wife.¹⁶ The Qur'anic text states: 'You will not be able to deal equally between (your) wives, however much you wish (to do so)' (Qur'an IV: 129). Hence a number of jurists interpreted the text in practice as a recommendation of monogamy.

A woman inherits half the share of a man, a law that seems unfair. Yet it was decreed because a man is always financially responsible for supporting his close female relatives: wife, mother, daughter and/or sister, aunt, cousin (in the absence of a closer male relative), while a woman is free to dispense her money and property the way she desires. If she spends on herself or her immediate family (husband and children) from her personal wealth, it is considered a debt that the husband has to repay. However, if a woman wishes to be financially independent and absolves her closest male relative from supporting her, then she is also free to do so.

The veil

Despite the various interpretations regarding the veil and seclusion of women in Islam, there is no clear text in the Qur'an which imposes either of them on Muslim women. The Qur'an itself does not mandate that women should be completely veiled or separated from men, but tells of their participation 'in the life of the community and common religious responsibility with men to worship God, live virtuous lives, and to cover themselves or dress modestly'.¹⁷ During pilgrimage to Mecca, which is one of the five pillars of Islam, both men and women perform their rites without being segregated. Moreover, it is mandatory that a woman's hands and face should be uncovered during pilgrimage and also during the five daily prayers.

Social status of women under Islamic law

During the life of the Prophet in Mecca and Madina, women contributed to the social and economic life in their societies, enjoying social power, visibility and freedom. Thus they were quite active throughout the early decades after the coming of Islam. The Arabs who emerged out of the Arabian Peninsula following the Prophet's death in 632AD, to conquer new lands including most of Byzantium and all of the

Sassanian Empire, soon became a minority and were influenced by the practices of the conquered peoples. Examples of such practices include the form of government which the Abbasids adopted from the Persians, and social practices previously common in Byzantine, Syrian and Persian societies, such as the seclusion of women, which applied only to the upper-class urban Muslim woman during the Umayyad (661–750) and Abbasid (750–1258) centuries of Islam.¹⁸ Thus, generally speaking, the status women enjoyed at the beginning of Islam was afterwards undermined and women were restricted behind closed doors.

The subordination of women and the discrimination practised against them is the outcome of the gradual evolution of social and economic conditions that had been in existence in the Middle East since neolithic times. The growth of urban life which first appeared in Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq) accelerated the existing division of labour between women and men which had previously allowed men an increasing role in their agricultural societies as breadwinners and a source of revenue, thus consigning women to dedicate more time to childbearing and domestic activities. Urban life further downgraded women's social and economic authority, cultivating a development in outlook that held them to an inferior position.¹⁹

Islamic law is derived from three sources: the Qur'an which Muslims regard as direct Divine Revelation, the *hadith* which is the sayings of the Prophet, and the *sunna* which is the traditions and practices of the Prophet. Being sacred, the Qur'an left no room for change or human tampering. However, the authenticity of both the recorded sayings and traditions of the Prophet, which were written down at least a century after his death, were challenged from the beginning. Islamic jurists developed arguments that justified the more restrictive provisions by disputing that even though the Qur'an did not require them, the Prophet's enactment of them should give them the force of law. Consequently, *shari'a*, the religious law that derived from these sources, was also treated as infallible. The gradual restrictions placed on women's public role, their exclusion from the major domains of activity in their society and the controls imposed on them were the combined outcome of the worst features of Mediterranean and Middle-eastern misogyny, with Islam interpreted in the most negative way possible for women.²⁰ One should keep in mind that all the jurists were men and each interpretation followed the intellectual capacity of the person interpreting the Qur'an. For example, a man's degree above a woman is because of his responsibility to support her and the family. His responsibility for being the breadwinner has been dictated by the difference in nature between the two. Man being physically the stronger, he is more capable of working. The natural difference between man and woman does not mean the former is better than the latter, it just means that they are different; for in the eyes of God both are equal in humanity. Al-Qurtubi (died in 1272) was a 13th-century progressive scholar and juror living in Cordoba, the capital of Arab Andalusia and centre of learning and enlightenment. He attributes this degree of elevation to the financial obligation that a man carries towards his female relatives and states that once the man ceases to fulfil this responsibility then his elevated degree, *qiwama*, automatically ceases. Meanwhile Isma'il Haqqi al-Brusawi (died in 1724), from the Ottoman province of Anatolia, explains *qiwama* as a biological phenomenon: a man has a beard while a woman has not, and this gives him advantage over her. This is but one example of

the importance attributed to the person interpreting the Qur'an and how much repair or damage he or she can do.

By the 19th century the status of Muslim women in all Islamic countries was far inferior to that at the beginning of Islam in the 7th century. Bizarre restrictions had developed which further oppressed them. These restrictions fostered a number of clichés and fallacies, the most harmful among them was the assumption that women were physically and intellectually inferior to men, which necessitated their total dependence on their opposite gender. This led to the worst in religious malpractice. One such malpractice not only ignored a woman's consent in marriage but also forced her into marriage by the consent of her closest male relative. Another refused her the right to divorce her husband regardless of the cause. A third one segregated the two sexes and forced women to cover their faces in public. A fourth refused her education, and so on.

However, the picture is not all bleak. During the Umayyad, Abbasid and Fatimid (909–1171) dynasties and in Islamic Spain (711–1494) women attained a high level of education and were well versed in jurisprudence, history, philosophy, astrology, literature and music, among other sciences and arts. A considerable number of Muslim women throughout history played important roles in public life and were rulers in whose name coins were struck. Among such are two queens in Yemen, Asma' and her daughter-in-law Arwa who reigned in the 11th century; the Fatimid Sit al-Mulk in Egypt in the 11th century; Shajarat al-Durr also in Egypt in the 13th century; Sultana Radiyya in Delhi in the 13th century; five Mongol Khatuns who were heads of dynasties in the 13th and 14th centuries; and in South-east Asia seven sultanas reigned in the Indies, three in the Maldives and four in Indonesia during the 14th century.²¹

In general, the status of Muslim women began to deteriorate after the political and economic climates in their own countries worsened in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, causing social degeneration and intellectual stagnation that furnished the ground for misinterpreting religion and manipulating it to alienate women from society. Yet in spite of regression a medical school to train women doctors was established in Cairo in 1832²² when the first public high school for women in the United States was only opened in 1824.²³

Eventually the encroachment of western economics that brought social changes to the Islamic world, the adoption of ideas of liberty and equality borrowed from the French Revolution by Muslim intellectuals at the end of the 19th century, and the birth of the concept of nationalism among young Muslim leaders affected men and women on many levels of complexity. Male intellectuals began calling for the emancipation of women, and for the first time in history women found their cause at the centre of national demands and began to play an active and positive role. Social and political reformers in Egypt and Turkey insisted that the veil be removed and more freedom be granted to their female partners, and women's right to vote became part of central political issues.

Since the 1960s a new political, religious and social movement has begun to grow throughout the Islamic world, and since the Khomeini revolution in Iran in 1979 it has been spreading like a bush fire. The movement became known as 'fundamentalist Islam'. Fundamentalism is a term that originally refers to evangelical Protestant

movements in the USA, based on primary biblical sources; yet once the western media had inaccurately glued it onto political Islamic movements, the press in the Islamic world soon adopted it too.

Post-1967 Islam

Political Islam began in Egypt in 1928 when Hassan al-Banna (1906–49) founded the Muslim Brotherhood to free the country from British colonial rule. However, so-called fundamentalist Islam only gained momentum after the 1967 Arab–Israeli war and the calamitous defeat that the Arabs experienced. At the time, the general atmosphere among the masses, particularly in the Arab world, was one of deep disappointment in their leaderships. Thus far, every politician and military general had lied to them and deceived them; there remained only one reliable power to trust who did not and, more important, *would not* betray them, and that was God. So people turned to religion as a refuge from their depressing and frustrating political and physical reality, seeking answers for their unresolved doubts and questions. The success of the Khomeini revolution in Iran was instrumental in strengthening and spreading Islamic fundamentalism throughout the region.

Like Jewish and Christian fundamentalist movements, Islamic fundamentalism has many sects and divisions within it, according to each faction's interpretation of the religion. The outward principles of such movements are obvious – mainly to attain justice by implementing religious precepts in daily life; while the ulterior motive in general is to manipulate religion in order to gain political power. Thus Islamic fundamentalism has served many, including the West, in spite of claims to the contrary. The traditional enmity to Islam was revived after the demise of the Communist bloc as the new threat to western civilization; hence the portrayal of Muslims as oil suppliers, terrorists and bloodthirsty anti-western fanatics that surfaced in the western media. Consequently, the issue of Muslim women was once again brought up in the western press. New clichés circulated based on films such as *Death of a Princess* and others. The veiling of women occupied centre stage. This time the veil that has been either forced on or wilfully adopted by contemporary women is totally different from the veil of the early decades of the 20th century that women fought to take off. Today's veil (*hijab*), which leaves the face and hands exposed, serves several purposes: abiding by what some women believe to be religious orders, as protection against sexual harassment at work, and as a money saver among low-income groups, especially female university students where peer pressure to follow changes of fashion usually runs high: veiled women do not need to go to hairdressers or wear up-to-date clothes. Most importantly, it began as a form of asserting a contemporary Muslim woman's identity and a symbol of resistance to foreign culture and the West which has been assailing and degrading her own civilization, religion and sexuality.

Yet, what is of concern to educated Muslim women is not the *hijab*, but the *niqab*, the veil that entirely hides a woman, leaving only a small slit to see through. It imposes on her a new kind of seclusion that is difficult to define. The wearing of this kind of veil, although not widespread, seems to be on the rise, especially among

university students from lower-income classes. However, because of its recent popularity, especially after the war in Afghanistan, there have been no surveys or studies of such a regression. Yet, it could be the outcome of the rise in Islamic fundamentalism caused by the discrimination and double standards practised in international politics towards issues pertaining to Islam in general, and the Arabs in particular.

The beginning of the 21st century finds Muslim women in high as well as low positions, from prime ministers to street sweepers. However, there are two points that should be taken into consideration.

The first is the vastness of the Islamic world. It covers a geographic landmass that extends from the Atlantic Ocean to Sub-Saharan Africa, to the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula, to Central and South-east Asia. This alone makes it impossible to generalize about all Muslim women, about whether they are or are not emancipated. For example, the difference between Tunisian women and those in Saudi Arabia is absolutely incomparable. In Tunisia women have attained total and absolute equality with men in every sphere of life since the 1950s, while a Saudi woman is not allowed to take a taxi without being accompanied by a male relative. Yet, with the spread of education and the increase in means of communication, changes are taking place everywhere with varying degrees. The solution the West supports is that Muslim women should adopt a western culture and way of life in order to be emancipated. But how could the substitution of one culture for another be brought about not only for the people of an entire society but the peoples of numerous societies?²⁴ And what if the majority of these women do not want to be emancipated in the western sense of the word?

The second point is that we live in a male-dominated world. Men are the ones who set and break the rules. The fact that any achievement for women, not only in Islamic countries but also throughout the world, has got to be either granted by or forcibly taken from men is enough proof of international male dominance. Every day for centuries Jewish men repeated this prayer: 'Blessed art thou O Lord our God King of the Universe, who hast not made me a woman'.²⁵ From the Book of Genesis comes: 'In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee' (Genesis 3, 16).

However, nothing should discourage women from fighting for their rights. If today the future is theirs, one day the present will be theirs. In Theodore Roosevelt's words: 'We see across the dangers the great future, and we rejoice as a giant refreshed . . . the great victories are yet to be won, the greatest deeds yet to be done'.

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Notes

1. Rana Kabbani (1986: 5).
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
6. Theodore R. W. Lunt (1909: 129–30).
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 131–2.
8. Rana Kabbani (1986: 150).
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 150–1.
10. Although we in the Islamic world have been the victims of such a discourse, in general it is a common trend among the peoples of the world to stereotype, put down and even dehumanize the ‘other’, though in varying degrees. This becomes more intense when a level of conflict exists between two groups. Admittedly, the discourse presented by the powerful and the dominant gets higher circulation and credibility on the international level than that presented by the weak and the subjugated. Still, all peoples are to a degree guilty of negatively portraying the ‘other’ or that which is not part of ‘us’.
11. Wijdan Ali (1983: 90–5).
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 3–5.
13. See the Qur’an: III: 195; IV: 32 and 124.
14. Wijdan Ali (1983: 24–8).
15. *Polygamy in Islamic Law*, copyright © 1998 Dr Jamal Badawi.
16. Wijdan Ali (1983: 64–6).
17. John L. Esposito (1994: 5).
18. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
19. Guitty Nashat (1993: 5).
20. Leila Ahmed (1992: 128).
21. See Fatima Mernissi (1994).
22. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
23. Letha and John Scanzoni (1976: 22).
24. Leila Ahmed (1992: 128–9).

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