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## Chapter 1

### Hearing the Cries of Islam's Oppressed Women

#### The Cries of Oppressed Women

Everywhere we travel, Muslim women, young and old, whisper heartbreaking stories to us about their difficulties being a woman in a Muslim-majority country. We have heard from the disheartened and terrified teacher who was accused of being an atheist because she was exploring the possibility that God creates through evolutionary processes; her father, in front of eight local imams, told her that he would kill her if she continues talking about evolution; surrounded by nine threatening men, she meekly complied. We recall the desperate wife whose husband beats her daily because he thinks the Quran not only condones, it promotes wife-beating. We have heard from the battered Egyptian woman whose father, uncle, and then brother slammed her head in a heavy wooden door when she stopped wearing hijab; she is grateful to them for not killing her. And we remember the recent college graduate who, after receiving a full scholarship to study for a Ph.D. in Germany, was told that her brother would kill her if she left the country (unless she married a man first and he agreed to let her travel); she faces the tragic situation of marrying a man of her father's and brother's choosing and hoping he will let her study abroad. And we read in the paper of honor murders, of the stoning of adulterers, of female genital mutilation, and women confined inside their clothing and home. All in the name of Islam.

Oppressive Muslims, in the name of Islam, are destroying true faith in women.

I<sup>1</sup> was a victim of that oppression. As a young girl, when I decided to seriously practice Islam, I convinced myself that God wanted me to live a contained life within my home. Although I could meet my girlfriends at home, I thought that I should be excluded from everyday life and men (except for the men in my immediate family). As a university student, I even considered quitting my education because I had to study with male students and professors; I determined to become an "obedient wife" instead. I had already accepted that God had permitted husbands to beat disobedient wives. And I came to believe, even as a successful student, that I lacked the capacity, like all women, to do the things that men can

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<sup>1</sup> Feryal Taslaman.

do. I did not shake hands with strange men, did not look at them in the eye, and did not stay in a room alone with a man. In short, I accepted my invisibility.

I mistakenly believed that total submission to men comes from total submission to God. I had started to think that if this is what God wants me to do, I will do it no matter what to gain His approval: whatever God wants, I will do.

But then I read the Quran.

God wants Muslims to base their beliefs and practices ultimately on the Quran, God's final and definitive revelation to the Prophet. And in the Quran, I read that God does not want blind submission, rather God wants submission formed by questioning and thinking.

So I started a new life directed by the Quran. I continued my education at the American University D.C. in the United States, then earned my MA and Ph.D. degrees at Istanbul University in Political Science. And twenty-one years ago, I started working as Director of a major construction and shipping business in Turkey, making me a working woman in a field full of men in a Muslim-majority country.

Since Turkey does not enforce *sharia* law, Turkish women have easier lives than Muslim women in other countries that do—Turkish women can drive, wear blue jeans, and keep their hair/head uncovered. We are allowed full admission to the public square, can be educated at the highest levels, and can attain the highest occupations and government positions in the land.

Yet Turkey maintains remnants of Islam-endorsed mistreatment of women; there are people—women and men alike—who believe that women are deficient compared to men. It can be exhausting to compete and live in such a male-dominated world. Many Turkish women have failure to thrive.

But life is much worse for women in other Muslim-majority countries that enshrine *sharia* law like Saudi Arabia, for example, or Afghanistan.

So I am not alone.

We meet women from different Muslim-majority countries and talk about their religious beliefs, practices. We told them about this book and asked about the difficulties they face in their countries.

One of them sent a very private and poignant e-mail:

*Dear Feryal,*

*I hope you're enjoying your trip.*

*About what we were talking at dinner,*

*Why most of us do not pray?*

*We (females) grow up ashamed of our gender.*

*We start our lives listening to words like "Do not speak," "You must be home within twenty minutes after the end of your classes/work," "You cannot go out at night unless accompanied by one of your brothers," "You can no longer go to school, you are an adult now so you must get married and start having a family," and many more statements only because we are girls.*

*I know girls who could not go to school because they got their period.*

*I know girls who were forced to be married.*

*I know girls who got beaten because they talked to boys.*

*Being a girl here means you have to stay in the box that other people made for you just to stay alive.*

*It means not sleeping for days when you hear about an "honor crime," knowing that you could be that victim anytime.*

*and it is all in the name of Islam*

*We (girls) grow up hating how Islam discriminates against us, questioning every belief we have.*

*We start looking for answers,*

*But then we get stuck in an endless, inescapable loop.*

*Most of us get depressed, become atheists, or get lost in big sins,*

*Just to prove a point that we have a bigger purpose than obeying men and having their children.*

*But we do not get to choose; we are not allowed to make any choices, like travel or live in our own house.*

*A girl can spend her life dreaming about and despairing of things that will never happen.*

*Many girls can not see this as a problem because they are programmed to think of themselves as less than men.*

*Rich girls, who often can make choices, ignore the problem*

*And then there's us—those who suffer without hope trying to be treated as a complete human.*

*It is a long e-mail. I sent it maybe because telling you the problems we suffer is a part of the solution.*

*Thanks for listening.*

Most Muslim women face similar dispiriting and dehumanizing burdens.<sup>2</sup> In the name of Islam, women are physically harmed, psychologically damaged, sociologically isolated, and economically disadvantaged. And driven to despair and away from true faith.

In this book, we will show that the Quran, with a single powerful voice, affirms the full and equal flourishing of women. So the women-denigrating and women-silencing burdens imposed on Muslim women as religious obligations are incompatible with Islam properly understood, while Muslims, mostly men, have instrumentalized and weaponized the tradition to oppress and exploit women, the Quran stands clearly opposed to such injustices and abuses.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Quran to the Rescue**

Ironically and sadly, as a “traditional Muslim woman” who did not think for herself and did not read the Quran, I<sup>4</sup> once contributed to that world. In the beginning, as a Muslim woman who started reading the Quran and thinking deeply about its verses. **I heard, loud and clear, God's astonishing and refreshing and liberating message of equality and flourishing for women in the Quran. I now work together with volunteers to re-shape Muslim society, along with Quranic lines, towards full human participation and flourishing for everyone—men and women alike together.** For those who are not familiar with Islam and the Quran, we will briefly introduce the Quran and the other texts that have informed Islamic thought.

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<sup>2</sup> There are many, but not the majority, Muslim women who are working hard and without obstacles to attain Quranically-endorsed flourishing at all levels.

<sup>3</sup> We will quote from interviews from our co-produced documentary, “Islam and Women,” and from private messages, on the hardships, these anti-Quranic burdens impose on Muslim women.

<sup>4</sup> Feryal Taslaman.

### *Muhammad and the Quran*

Islam was revealed in the Arabian Peninsula to the Prophet Muhammad (570-632) through Archangel Gabriel over a period of 23 years beginning in 610, concluding with the death of the Prophet in 632. Islam affirms God's revelation to a host of prophets, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Jesus. The Quran, Islam's holy book, is the last book to be revealed, and thus, Muhammad is the last of the Prophets.

The word "Quran" means "recitation," and indeed, from the very first day of its revelation, it has been read, memorized, recited, and copied by many Muslims. And when Muslims pray every day, they recite precisely the same lines, verses from the Quran, all over the World. For example, in the morning prayer, all the Muslims recite:

All praise is to God alone, the Lord of all the worlds,  
The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful,  
Lord of the Day of Judgement!  
You alone we worship, and You alone we ask for help.  
Guide us to the straight way;  
The way of those whom You blessed; not of those who have deserved wrath, nor of the strayers. (Quran 1:1-7)

1.5 billion Muslims recite this passage of the Quran in every prayer every day.

### *The Authority of the Quran*

In the Quran, God makes three important proclamations about the Quran.

First, *God will preserve the Quran:*

We<sup>5</sup>, indeed We, it is We who have sent down the Message, and indeed it is We who will preserve it. (Quran 15:9)

After the Prophet passed away, the entire Quran was written down and memorized by hundreds of people, preserving the text and keeping the order of the chapters (*surahs*) in the same arrangement since the days of the Prophet. Although it has been almost 1400 years since the Prophet's revelation and although there have

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<sup>5</sup> "We" refers to God in the Quran.

been many different sects and disputes in Islam, there has never been a single dispute over the text of the Quran.

Second, *the Quran is complete*:

We did not leave anything out of this book. (Quran 6:38);

The Muslims are responsible only from the Quran and will be judged by it alone in the Hereafter, so there is no need for secondary sources. All the requirements, provisions, and the prohibitions to be a devoted and pious Muslim are listed in the Quran in detail; nothing is left out as the above and the below verses state.

Third, *the Quran is fully detailed*:

We have given them a book that is fully detailed, with knowledge, guidance, and mercy for the people who believe. (Quran 7:52)

Finally, and most importantly, *the Quran has supreme authority on Islamic belief and practice*; all matters of faith must ultimately be based on the Quran.

Shall I seek anyone but God for judgment when He has revealed to you this book, fully detailed. Those who received this revelation know that it has been bestowed from your Lord. Do not harbor any doubt. The Word of your Lord is complete. (Quran 6:114-115)

All judgment rests with God alone. (Quran 12:40)

Therefore, like all the issues of being a devout Muslim, the issues affecting women—obligations, bans, and beliefs—should also be determined ultimately by the Quran.

### *Quranic Silence*

Issues on which the Quran is silent—which we call “*conscious silence*”—are or should be left to the discretion and conscience of the individual believer, unlike the obligations like fasting during the month of Ramadan or pilgrimage to Mecca which are clearly explained in the Quran. However, the Quran provides few details regarding the daily lives of Muslims, such as how to govern a state, what to wear, or how to design their homes. The Quran’s silence which



we call “conscious silence” on such issues was intentional. It leaves the initiative to Muslims to determine their proper application in their own contexts and time. Conscious silence on these matters permits Muslim’s adaptation to the 7<sup>th</sup> as well as to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, to republics as well as to kingdoms, to nomadic tribal tents as well as to apartments in modern cities, to traditional dresses as well as to blue jeans etc. without contradicting the principles of the Quran. Since the Quran does not favor republic over monarchy or oligarchy (except it gives principles like being just, consultation and merit based delegation), jeans over lederhosen<sup>6</sup> or poncho<sup>7</sup> over skirt, Muslims can easily adapt to different types of governments, dress codes and cultures without ignoring Islamic requirements. The same is true for house decorations. Since the Quran is silent on interior design, Muslims can choose to decorate their homes either with a vintage sofa or a contemporary chair or a divan. So anything that is not mentioned in the Quran is left to the Muslims to decide:

O you who believe, do not ask about things which, if revealed, might cause you hardship. If you ask about them while the Quran is being revealed, they will become obvious to you. God has absolved them. God is Forgiver, Compassionate. (Quran 5:101)

Of course, some theologians *have* spoken on matters on which the Quran is silent. It must be noted that claims about Islam on which the Quran is silent have often negatively impacted the lives of women like excluding them from education and consequently from working and earning their lives, enslaving them to their husbands, and enabling them to live invisible lives.

Given that the authoritative Quran is complete and fully detailed, how did commandments and proscriptions *not included in* the Quran come to “re-shape” Islam? More problematically, given the authority of the Quran, how did provisions that *contradict* the Quran come to define Islam?

### *Hadith*

Although the Quran was the only written religious source during the time of the Prophet, immediately after his death, things allegedly said and done by him began to be reported among the Muslims as “*hadith*.” Over several generations, the hadiths—alleged reports of the sayings and actions of the Prophet—were collected and compiled and argued over, taking final form

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<sup>6</sup> Lederhosen: Knee-length leather trousers traditionally worn by men in parts of Bavaria, Switzerland, and Austria.

<sup>7</sup> Poncho: A sleeveless garment with unsewn sides, traditionally worn alongside the Andes Mountains in South America.

two or three centuries after the death of the Prophet. The *hadiths* came to be treated almost as sacred as the Quran; next to the Quran, they formed the authoritative backbone of Islamic life and jurisprudence.<sup>8</sup>

Given their late arrival, it is difficult to determine which of the hadiths transcribed hundreds of years after the Prophet were true and which were fabricated. Moreover, by then, Christian, Jewish, and other converts to Islam had incorporated their prior beliefs, cultures, legends, rituals, and traditions into the body of Islam in the form of “hadith.” By attributing one’s hadith to the Prophet, these beliefs and practices gained acceptance as part of Islam.

In order to imbue such beliefs and practices with authority, hadiths are often claimed to be revealed by God; as such, they are sometimes equated with verses of the Quran. So many hadiths are considered sacred, taken as reliable reports of the Prophet’s words and deeds.

Sadly some hadiths clearly violate the completeness of the Quran: (i) **some hadiths claim commandments or prescriptions that are not in the Quran like excluding women from education or working; and (ii) some claim commandments or prescriptions that contradict the Quran like the stoning to death punishment for the adulterers.**

Here is an anecdote of how easy it was to fabricate hadiths. Al-Isbahani, compiler of *al-Egani*, a 20 volume collection of 10<sup>th</sup>-century poems and songs, recounted a conversation between a poet and a powerful man. The powerful man, an Omayyad elite, offered the poet 4,000 dirhams to fabricate a poem that would “date” from the times of the Prophet and would

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<sup>8</sup> A note of caution concerning hadiths: neither the Prophet nor the Rashidun caliphs (The first four caliphs after the death of the Prophet; Abu Bakr, Umar ibn al-Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan, Ali ibn Abu Talib), all of whom knew the Prophet personally and who had been in his company for years, wrote down any “*hadiths*.” Moreover, they forbade others from writing hadiths and destroyed those that had been written. After the death of the Prophet, the first caliph Abu Bakr assembled the people and told them: You are recounting various hadiths from God’s Messenger. Because of this, future generations will find themselves in even bigger disagreements. Do not recount any hadiths from God’s Messenger. To those asking you to recount hadiths tell them: God’s Book is with us, do what it permits, and do not what it forbids. (Zehebi, *Tezkiretü’l-huffaz*, I, 9).

The second caliph, Umar’s approach, was even stricter than Abu Bakr. Seeing the upsurge in hadith writing during his caliphate, he wrote to the companions of the Prophet in other cities, asking them to burn all of the hadith collections in their possession. (Ibn Sa’d, *et-Tabakatü’l-kübra*, V, 143.)

The third caliph, Uthman, threatened Abu Hurairah and Kab, who recounted many hadiths, with exile. (Ramehürmüzi, *el-Muhaddisü’l-fasil*, 544; Suyuti, *Tahziru’l-havas*, 156-157).

The fourth caliph, Ali, wrote: “Those who have hadith pages in their possessions should destroy them because following the hadiths would ruin people.” (Ibn Ebi Şeybe, *el-Musannef*, V, 314; Ibn Abdilberr, *Cami’u beyani’l-’ilmi ve fazlih*, I, 271). Anticipating the damage that fabricated hadiths could wreak on Islam, those closest to the Prophet were vehemently opposed to their transcription. Moreover, they opposed the reporting of hadiths at a time very close to the Prophet, when it would have been more difficult to make false claims about what the Prophet had said or done.

During the Omayyad period (661-750), the major hadith collections had not yet been compiled but in the Abbasid era (750-1258), the founders of the four major schools of canonical law (Abū Ḥanīfa (699 – 767), Mālik ibn Anas (711-795), Idrīs al-Shāfiī (767–820) and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (780–855) formed their sects.

praise the Omayyad dynasty. He asked the poet to state that he had heard it from Ibn-i Thabit, the official poet of the Prophet. The poet replied that he was afraid to create lies concerning the Prophet, yet he proposed instead to have heard it from Aisha, the Prophet's wife; the powerful man refused.<sup>9</sup>

Another fabricated hadith is also a good example of how those with political and economic power can and did influence and changed "Islam" to their own advantage. The alleged hadith both in *Sahih al-Bukhari*<sup>10</sup> and *Sahih Muslim*<sup>11</sup> claiming that "the Prophet, said, *The (Muslim) rulers are to be from Quraysh*" was apparently fabricated by Qurayshi rulers who wanted to keep the power of caliphate in their own monopoly.

### *Hadith transmission*

It is impossible to determine which of the hadiths transcribed hundreds of years after the Prophet are true and which are fabricated. Indeed, contemporary hadith scholars routinely offer proof that political authorities fabricated hadiths to strengthen their positions or further their interests.

A host of psychological studies carried out during the past century demonstrates that narratives transmitted orally end up distorted, even though only brief time lapses. For example, Ulric Neisser and Nicole Harsh asked a group of people, just one day after the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger, with whom and where they were when they heard about this and what they were doing at that moment. Two and a half years later, they asked the same questions to the same individuals (to those they could reach). The average rate of accuracy, when compared to their previous answers was less than three on a scale of seven. But what is worse, when they were asked about their confidence in the vividness of their memories, they averaged 4.17 over 5. The majority of the answers given just *two and a half years* after the incident were different from the original responses, yet the respondents were nearly certain that their answers were the same.

If such grave errors can be made in such a short run during the transmission of oral history, how dependable are statements allegedly transmitted orally over several centuries? Since the hadiths were compiled hundreds of years after the Prophet, there must have been a chain of five or six generations between the time of the Prophet and the transcribers of the hadith. How can

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<sup>9</sup> Ebu'l-Ferec el-Isbahani, el-Egani,I,72.

<sup>10</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari: is a collection of hadith compiled by Imam Muhammad al-Bukhari, which is recognized by the overwhelming majority of the Muslim world to be the most authentic collection of reports of the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad. It contains over 7500 hadith (with repetitions) in 97 books.

<sup>11</sup> Sahih Muslim: is a collection of hadith compiled by Imam Muslim, which is accepted to be one of the most authentic collections of the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad. It contains about 7.500 hadiths.

one reasonably decide if someone is trustworthy based on lengthy transmission-chains beginning with long-dead people?<sup>12</sup>

We can divide the hadiths into two groups: i) Hadiths that are consistent with the Quran, reason, and nature; such hadiths can be taken as historical facts to understand the era and conditions of those days. Indeed, we will take some of these as historical examples. ii) Hadiths that are inconsistent with the Quran, reason, and nature; such hadiths cannot be accepted as reliable or valid. We call these “fabricated hadiths” since the Prophet could not have said or done anything that contradicts the Quran.

Since, for Muslims, the authority of the Quran is ultimate and final, Muslims should reject any hadith that is inconsistent with the clear teachings of the Quran.

### *Hadith and women*

The Quran affirms that all Muslims, male or female, are created equal, and there is no gender-based discrimination in respect to being a devoted Muslim. Whatever is expected from a male Muslim, the same is expected from the female.

Muslim men and Muslim women, believing men and believing women, obedient men and obedient women, truthful men and truthful women, patient men and patient women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, fasting men and fasting women, men who guard their chastity, women who guard their chastity, men who remember God frequently and women who remember God frequently- God has prepared for them a pardon and an immense reward. (Quran 33:35)

And the believers will be judged and rewarded or punished according to their deeds only, their gender is irrelevant.

I will not waste the work of any worker among you, whether male or female. You are one of another. (Quran 3:195)

However, following the death of the Prophet, misogynistic attitudes returned. Many Muslims adopted and endorsed practices that belittled women. These cultural norms led both to the sequestering of women within their homes and the belief that women’s primary duties are to obey the commands of men. Such misogyny infiltrated Islam mostly through fabricated hadiths

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<sup>12</sup> Since the authors of famous hadith books like the *Kutub al-Sittah* rely mostly on oral statements, the number of hadiths that were written down at the time of the Prophet is very small in the proportion of the total number of hadiths.

in the form of “the Prophet said/did that....” that falsely attribute beliefs/practices to the Prophet. By the third century of Islam, when the major hadith books were compiled, this female-belittling, female-denigrating culture had been widely accepted as Islam.

By inserting these additions into the tradition as “hadiths,” theologians had the chance to present their own personal interpretations as universal religious truths. In some cases, they have offered interpretations that contradict the Quran. Such insertions into Islam say less about the Quran and more about the (usually male) theologian’s attempt to create a religion that favors the political elite (usually men) or their own desires (that is, the desires of men).

Historically, Quran interpreters are all men, including the founders of canonical law schools, the writers of hadith books, the founders of the most major sects. Most of these men fill in the Quran’s conscious silences with hadiths and traditions that favor men. Such self-proclaimed authorities (again almost all men) claim the right to fill in the silence, always in favor of men. For example, some hadiths insist that a woman can visit her parents only when permitted by her husband (though the Quran extolls believers- men and women alike- to care for their parents). **A hadith in Al-Fataawa al-Kubra, states that Umar ibn al-Khattaab (the second caliph after the Prophet) said: “Marriage is slavery for women, so be careful with regard to whom you give your daughter for enslavement.” So a woman is like a slave or prisoner of her husband, and she cannot go out of his house except with his permission, whether her father, her mother or anyone else tells her to do that.<sup>13</sup> And 3:375 in Al-Adaab al-Shar’iyyah it is reported that, “it is haraam (religiously forbidden) for a woman to go out of her husband’s house without his permission, except in cases of necessity.”**

Other practices are even more vile, such as those that claim that a woman is an object for sale to a man (the buyer). Consider how the 13<sup>th</sup> century Al-Muhaqqiq al-Hilli’s book *Sharayi’ al-Islam* describes marriage: “Marriage is a contract, the object of which is the domination of vagina.”<sup>14</sup> A 14<sup>th</sup> century Maliki scholar wrote that when a woman gets married, she sells her genital organs in exchange for marriage.<sup>15</sup> Abu Hamid al-Ghazali compared women in marriage to female slaves, whose sexual services were reserved for their husbands; in his “Rights of the Husband” chapter of *Adab al-Nikah*, he wrote that a woman should obey her husband and should not go outside her home: “It is enough to say that marriage is a kind of

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<sup>13</sup> Al-Fataawa al-Kubra 3:148.

<sup>14</sup> Muhaqqiq Hilli, *Sharayi’ al-Islam*, 428; quoted by Ziba Mir-Hosseini, in *Towards Gender Equality: Muslim Family Laws and Shariah*, p.29.

<sup>15</sup> F. H. Ruxton, *Maliki Law*, 106; quoted by Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Towards Gender Equality: Muslim Family Laws and Shariah*, p.29.

slavery where a woman is her husband's slave. She is bound to obey her husband and fulfill his every wish that is not sinful... The Prophet has stated that a woman who has won the approval of her husband will go to Paradise."<sup>16</sup> Throughout Islamic history, the sale of a woman to her man, requiring total obedience to husband (as one might think a recently purchased slave owes his master), has been presented as a religious duty.

Although there were a few female theologians in the first years of Islam, as time went by, women were quickly excluded from social life, including access to an education. As a result, Islamic scholars interpreting Islam were exclusively male. As expected, male-elevating approaches reigned supreme. Such men's judgments concerning women were shaped not by the Quran but by how *they* viewed women within their societies and cultures.

How, then, could canonical law develop in such an anti-Quranic way that belittles women, ignores their rights, and makes them slaves of their husbands?

First, no doubt, the patriarchy of those days' ideological, sociological, and political structures influenced interpretations of theologians. Second, male theologians favored their own gender (hence their own interests) while interpreting Islam. Consequently, Islam ended up with male-fabricated, male-favoring laws that reflected the desires and interests of men rather than God's revelation. As time passed, those misogynistic customs, marriage structures, and gender ideologies were "sanctified" and included within the rules of canonical law.<sup>17</sup> Women, within the system created by male theologians, were limited to living within the walls of their homes, satisfying their husbands and caring for their children; education was permitted only insofar as it could make them better wives.

### *The argument of the book*

Male-created and male-dominated theology and canonical law have led to claims that Islam demands that women be the obedient and subservient slaves of men and that husbands have the right to dominate their slave-like wives. The important issues concerning relations between husband and wife have been interpreted in ways that favor men and then incorporated into "Islam." I<sup>18</sup> was once held captive by these views and the limited life they offered for women. Indeed, I was only too eager, out of my misplaced understanding of submission to God, to submit myself to my husband. Reading the Quran liberated me.

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<sup>16</sup> Imam Ghazali, *The Proper Conduct of Marriage in Islam* (Adab an-Nikah), p.89; quoted by Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Towards Gender Equality: Muslim Family Laws and Shariah*, p.30.

<sup>17</sup> Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Towards Gender Equality: Muslim Family Laws and Shariah*, p.33.

<sup>18</sup> Feryal Taslaman.

In each of the following chapters, we will first present the Quran's glorious vision of inclusion and flourishing women, and second, reveal the roots of the "Islamic" mistreatment and miscalculation of women. We will, then, reject such religion-infused misogyny by showing their inconsistency with the clear teachings of the Prophet.

## Chapter 2

### Creation

My grandmother was a devoted Muslim who tried to meet the requirements of her religion. She used to pray, fast, never lied, as far as I<sup>19</sup> know, helped the needy, protected the peaky, she was just and merciful to everyone, etc. She married my grandfather when she was 16 (my grandfather was 35). She was a very loyal wife. She never worked outside of her home. All she did throughout her life was to take of her children (she had 6) and keep her house tidy. She fed them three times a day, cleaned, washed, ironed, and went to bed barely around 10 o'clock every night after serving the dinner and cleaning up the kitchen. She never left home without telling my grandfather. She only went to her next-door neighbor, who had a similar life as my grandmother for a cup of Turkish coffee every day after cleaning the home and just before lunch. As far as I can remember, that was the only time she spent for herself. She never disobeyed him. (Please do not misunderstand. My grandfather was a polite and decent man. He was never rude to my grandmother, but that was the lifestyle they saw from their parents and cultures, and they just followed their traditions.) Whatever my grandfather said was like a law; it had to be followed since he was the head of the family. No surprise that she used to call her “master” instead of calling him with his name. Even though they loved and respected each other, this was their relationship. One day, I asked my grandmother why did she always try to please my grandfather, and she told me that she had heard a saying from her own grandmother that woman was created from man to serve men and to make life easier for them! My grandmother was a stereotypical woman of her age.

The Quran states that man and woman were created from one kind (*nafs wahida*) or species and gives no reference to any priority among genders. So we read in Quran 7.189: “It is He who created you [all humanity] from one kind (*nafs wahida*), and created from it (*nafs wahida*) its mate...” Moreover, each person was created, without exception or regard for gender, with the express purpose of loving and serving God.

Unlike Jewish and Christian creation stories, the Quran does not claim that woman was created from Adam's rib. Indeed, Eve, who factors so prominently in the Jewish and Christian creation stories, is never mentioned in the Quran. For example, in the pre-Islamic Jewish and Christian traditions, we hear: “woman was created from and for man” (so a woman’s duty is to secure her spouse’s happiness), and “it was Eve’s fault that Adam (man)

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<sup>19</sup> Feryal Taslaman.



sinned” (so women are primarily responsible for and the sources of evil). Moreover, many pre-Islamic cultures also claimed that women had to be controlled because they are the “source of all evil.” As a result, women were treated as second-class beings with the devious potential to divert men from the true path.

Although these claims are not found in the Quran, they quickly infiltrated Islam, restricting women and transforming them into veritable slaves of men. How, without any Quranic support whatsoever, did Muslims come to adopt these woman-denigrating beliefs?

### *Creation of Woman*

Creation narratives often shape misogynistic perceptions of females. For example, the Jewish and Christian narrative that Eve was created from Adam’s rib supported belief in the deficiency of women due to their allegedly lower ontological status; because of this deficiency, women should be placed under male tutelage. For example, in the New Testament, we read:

Man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man (I Cor 11:8-9).<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, this narrative and its misogynistic consequences negatively influenced Islamic thought.

Does this narrative accord with Islam?

If the Quran is the ultimate source of Islam, then, as argued in chapter 1, any belief contrary to the Quran is wrong. And the Quran does not claim that woman was created from man. It states, instead, that man and woman are created from the same kind (*nafs wahida*). So, the Quran is clear—woman was *not* created from man (and so women are not created for men).

Yet the belief that woman was created from man found its way into “Islam” through fabricated hadiths. In the Hadith, collected 200-300 years after the death of the Prophet, we find narratives of woman’s creation from man:

“Treat women well, because woman was created from a rib. The most crooked part of a rib is its upper part. If you try to straighten it up, you will break it; if you let it be, it will always be crooked. Then treat women well.”<sup>21</sup>

“God created Eve from Adam’s rib.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See also Genesis, 2:18-24.

<sup>21</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, “Enbiya”, 1, “Nikah”, 80; Sahih Muslim, “Rada”, 59,60,65; Jami’ at-Tirmidhi, “Talak”, 12; /bn Majah, “Taharet”, 77; Darimi, “Nikah”, 35; Ahmed b. Hanbel, al-Musnad, XV, 321, 494, XVI, 276, 499.

Imam-i Tabari: “In other words, he created his wife Eve from the same kind. he created Eve from his rib for sure.”<sup>23</sup>

Adam was placed in Paradise. He wandered about by himself without a companion with whom he could find consolation. It happened that upon waking up after having fallen asleep, he saw another creature beside him of his kind. “Who are you?” he asked. “A woman,” she said. He asked her the reason for her creation. The woman said, “I have been created to comfort you.” When angels asked Adam about the woman, he said that he had named her Eve because she had been created out of a living creature.<sup>24</sup>

Not only does the Quran not claim that Eve was created from Adam, but Eve is also not mentioned in the Quran at all!

Most importantly, *man and woman*—the Quran is clear—are *created from the same kind*, not one from the other. So woman was not created from man (and so not created for man).

Moreover, the Quran, neither states nor implies that women are created *for* men. Rather, the Quran states that all people are created *for* God alone (Quran 51:56). Neither woman nor man exist for each other; the only reason for their existence is for God.

Although the belief that Eve was created from Adam’s rib is not mentioned in the Quran, it was taken into “Islam” by male scholars to create the impression that women are second-class creatures compared to men. Yet, as we shall see, the Quran states clearly that both woman and man have been created from the same kind (*nafs wahida*).

### *Origins of Humanity*

Not only does the Quran not claim that woman was created from man, it expressly states that both man and woman have been created from one kind (*nafs wahida*) or species. In this section, we will explain what is meant by “creation from one kind” (*nafs wahida*). Consider the Quran 4.1:

O mankind! Be conscious of your Lord, who has created you out of one kind (*nafsi wahidatin*), and out of it (*minha*) created its mate (*zevceha*), and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women...

While “...who has created you out of one kind (*nafs wahida*), and out of it created its mate (*zevc*),” has been interpreted to mean Eve’s creation from Adam’s rib, there is no reference in

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<sup>22</sup> Firuzabadi, *Tenviru’l-mikbas min tefsiri Ibn Abbas*, 485.

<sup>23</sup> Taberi, *Tefsiru’t-Taberi*, XVIII, 478.

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Kesir, *Muhtasaru tefsiri Ibn Kesir*, I, 54

the Quran to Eve's creation from Adam. Yet being created from "one kind" (*nafs wahida*) suggests both man and woman's creation from the same "kind".

Indeed, other verses in which the word *nafs* (kind) is used show that in the above-mentioned verse *nafs* means "species":

From His signs is that He created for you mates out of your kind (*nafs*<sup>25</sup>) so that you may reside with them, and He placed between you affection and compassion. In that are signs for people who think! (Quran 30: 21)

And God has given you mates of your kind (*nafs*) and has given you, through your mates, children, and grandchildren, and has provided you from the good provisions. Will men, then, [continue to] believe in things false and vain, and thus blaspheme against God's blessings? (Quran 16: 72)

Indeed, God bestowed a favor upon the believers by sending them a messenger from amongst themselves (*nafs*), reciting His signs, causing them to grow in purity, and imparting unto them the divine writ as well as wisdom – whereas before that they were indeed lost in error. (Quran 3: 164).

The expressions "your kind" and "themselves" in the above verses show that all the mates, companions, and the prophets are of the same kind (same species). Therefore, if we interpret *nafs* as "species" in 4.1, which is often presented as proof of the creation of Adam's wife from Adam, we should reject the creation of woman from Adam. The expression "O Mankind" is addressed to all humanity, not Adam, thus underlining God's creation of all people from *nafs wahida*. Therefore, it cannot mean the "creation of woman from man." Moreover, if the verse had referred specifically Adam as generally interpreted, then "*nafs wahida*" should have been preceded by "el" article to underline the reference was "Adam."

The expression *nafs wahida*, which is found in five verses of the Quran, never refers to Adam. For example, in the following two verses, *nafs wahida* means something like "from the same species":

It is He who has created you out of one kind (*nafsin wahidatin*), and out of it brought into being its mate, so that he may find comfort with her. And so, when he has embraced her, she conceives a light burden, and continues to bear it. Then, when she grows heavy, they both call unto God, their Lord, "If You indeed grant us a sound child, we shall most certainly be among the grateful!"

And yet, as soon as he has granted them a sound child, they began to ascribe divinity to other beings beside Him. God is above what they set up as partners!  
(Quran 7:189-190)

God, we read, creates both man and woman out of the same "kind" (*nafs*); Adam was created out of *nafs*, and his wife was created out of the same stuff as well, translated "it" here

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<sup>25</sup> Technically, the Arabic term in each of these three surahs is *enfusikum*, a derivative of *nafs*.

(referring to *nafs*). God creates all humankind from “one kind,” again we read, to “find comfort” in one another.<sup>26</sup> As such, *nafs wahida* refers to the human species in general.<sup>27</sup>

In summary, according to the Quran, woman is not created from man. Indeed, the Quran teaches that both sexes are created from the same stuff (*nafs wahida*). Therefore, the claims that woman was created from and for man and that woman should be subjugated to man contradict the Quran.

### *Woman and Original Sin*

According to Jewish and Christian traditions, Satan first deceived woman (Eve), and then she persuaded Adam to disobey God’s orders. Some Christians hold that due to this “first sin,” women are the “gateways of Satan to humankind;” thus, for centuries, women have been demeaned and diminished as the primary source of wickedness and seduction.

Although the narrative of the first sin is based on the Old Testament’s *Book of Genesis*, the New Testament’s *Book of Romans* has shaped belief in “inherited sin.” According to this belief, Adam’s sin is inherited by all of his children, who are born with this sin.<sup>28</sup> Our only salvation from sin lies in the mediation of Jesus. The Church’s narrative of “the Fall,” which begins with Adam’s sin, is merged with its narrative of redemption involving the crucifixion of Jesus, which atones for the sins of humanity.<sup>29</sup>

The Jewish and Muslim faiths, on the other hand, reject the Christian belief in the transfer of the “original sin” by inheritance from generation to generation. However, for our discussion, the inheritance of the “original sin” is not at issue. Rather, we are concerned with the influential narrative in which the original sin was born from a woman’s seduction of man. As the seducer of man, woman, so it is claimed, should be subjected to man’s continuous guardianship, woman, according to this narrative, is the prime mover of evil. The Quran, on the other hand, states that Satan deceived both Adam and his wife (thus causing their expulsion from Paradise).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The same statement is used in Surah 30- Rum: 21 also.

<sup>27</sup> For more information look also: Caner Taslaman, Can a Muslim be an Evolutionist? p. 77-102.

<sup>28</sup> Jewish tradition, on the other hand, rejects both the idea that one is born in sin and the idea that people are intrinsically evil. True enough, certain parts of the Pentateuch and the Old Testament (it should be kept in mind that Christians as well consider these texts part of their own Holy Scripture) state that children cannot be held responsible for the sin of their parents. Old Testament, Deuteronomy, p.24,16; Ezekiel, p.18,20. Islam also rejects the concept of “inherited sin.”

<sup>29</sup> Just like many sects of Christianity, Orthodoxy also denies the inheritance of sins.

<sup>30</sup> Amina Wadud, Quran and Woman, p.25; Asma Barlas, Believing Women, p.138.

But Satan tricked both, and he brought both of them out of from what they were in. And so We said: "Down with you, some of you enemies of one another, and you will have a residence on earth, and enjoyment for a while. (Quran 2:36)

Thereupon Satan whispered to the two to make them conscious of their nakedness, of which they had been unaware, and he said: "Your Lord did not forbid you from this tree lest you two become angels, or lest you live forever." (Quran 7:20)

In its mention of the first sin, the Quran never refers solely to the woman. According to the Quran, the Fall almost always involves Adam (not his wife):<sup>31</sup>

But Satan whispered to him, he said "O Adam, shall I show you the Tree of Immortality, and a kingdom that never decays?"

And so the two ate from it; thereupon, they became conscious of their nakedness and began to cover themselves with the leaves of the garden. Thus Adam disobeyed his Lord and fell. (Quran 20:120-121)

Since Satan (not Adam's wife) whispers to Adam, Adam "disobeyed his Lord and fell." This text rejects the attribution of the responsibility for the original sin to woman. Therefore, the claim that women, due to their committing the first sin, are tarred with that sin has no basis in the Quran.

A so-called hadith, sadly, directly rejects the Quranic claim that Satan tempted both man and woman:

"If it had not been for Eve, women would never have betrayed their husbands."<sup>32</sup>

This hadith affirms both anti-Islamic views we have been discussing: women are alone responsible for the first sin, and sin is transmitted from generation to generation.

Many sermons by orthodox Imams present women as devil's gate to mankind and warn Muslim men to beware of their deceits. A 20-year-old girl had written to us after hearing one of these sermons and asked why God had created her in such an evil character.

*Dear Dr Taslaman;*

*I am not sure whether my e-mail finds you or not, but I just want to share my disappointment with my religion with you as a young Muslim girl. I am 20 years old. My parents are very*

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<sup>31</sup> Hülya Terzioğlu, *Maturidi'de Kadın Algısı*, Gökkuşbu, İstanbul, 2018, p.28.

<sup>32</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, "Enbiya", 1, 25; Sahih Muslim, "Rada", 62, 63; Ahmed b. Hanbel, *al-Musnad*, XIII, 402, 504, XIV, 250, 253.

*oppressive, that I become a devoted Muslim. Actually, that is also my hope; to become a devoted Muslim. As you know, the traditional wing of Islam makes us not to think but to obey without questioning. But as a member of the young generation, I always look for reasonable answers and try to read and think as much as possible. That is why I always surf on the internet (that is also how I found about you, through Dr. Taslamán's English account). But two days ago, as I was searching about women in Islam, I listened to an Imam who was claiming that women were the gateways for the devil to human's soul. I was really shocked and disappointed to hear that. How can this be true, or is this true? If so, why has God created me in such an evil character? Please tell me that is not true!*

*May God be with you*

*Miss Frankenstein*

All these claims contradict the clear teachings of the Quran.

And none can carry the burden of another, and even if one weighed down by his load calls upon another to help him carry, nothing might be carried (by that other), even if it be one's near of kin. (Quran 35:18)

that no one can carry the burdens of another; (Quran 53:38)

and nothing shall be accounted to man but what he has strived for; (Quran 53:39)

Since the Prophet cannot make statements that contradict the Quran, attributing the statement, *"If it had not been for Eve, women would never have betrayed their husbands,"* to Muhammad slanders the Prophet.

Some Muslim "scholars," influenced by Jewish and Christian traditions, incorporated these anti-Quranic views into "Islam." They accused woman of being the original sinner who led Adam astray; woman then is the sole culprit for the expulsion of humankind from Paradise. Since all women inherit the first woman's seductive powers, women must be ruled by men to prevent them from "leading humanity astray" again! This anti-Quranic narrative has, for most of Islamic history, wrongly excused men for their subjugation of women.

Such beliefs underlie claims that women are inferior to men and, as such, are prone to sin and seduction. The Quran, however, states or clearly implies that men and women are created equal. For example, the Quran holds that men and women are equal in their capacity to reason. Moreover, according to the Quran, the value of people depends on their deeds and piety, not on

their sex. Indeed, the Quran does not ascribe superiority to any tribe, nation, race, inheritance, or sex--only deeds and piety differentiate people before God.

O, men! We have created you all out of a male and a female and have made you into nations and tribes so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all aware. (Quran 49:13)

As for anyone - be it man or woman - who does righteous deeds and is a believer – We will give him a good life, and We will reward them in accordance with the best that they ever did. (Quran 16:97)

As we wrote at the beginning, God created each person, male and female alike, with the purpose of loving and serving God.

### CHAPTER 3 WOMEN THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Many societies throughout history have discriminated against women: women have typically been subject to their fathers until they get married, to their husbands after marriage, and—if their husbands precede them in death—to their sons or other male guardians until the end of their lives. Women were often denied the rights of men, including the rights to participate actively in social life, own property, be educated, or occupy administrative positions, etc. In some contemporary societies, these beliefs persist. In many places around the world, many women still live their lives under the shadow of men and cannot escape subjugation to their fathers or husbands.<sup>33</sup>

Gender inequality, even more vicious than described above, was also dominant at the time the Quran was being revealed. The Quran, however, ushered in many improvements in the status of women. In this chapter, we shall first briefly evaluate the situation of women before the Quran to better appreciate the differences created by its revelation. Later, we will clarify the rights and freedoms granted to women by the Quran. At the end of this chapter, we will discuss how the lives and status of women worsened following the death of the Prophet Muhammed.

#### *Pre-Islamic Days*

In the most ancient times, in hunter-gatherer tribal groups, the differences between genders were negligible. However, the situation changed drastically with the abandonment of nomadic life forms at the advent of settled life during the agricultural revolution around 10,000 BCE. The rise of animal raising and cultivation of crops saw the diminishment of women in the provision of food as gatherers;<sup>34</sup> also, men, whose physical strength was greater than that of women, acquired more power as these societies found themselves caught up in wars. “The growth of complex urban societies and the increasing importance of military competitiveness further entrenched male dominance and warrior cultures favoring male dominance consequently emerged.”<sup>35</sup> In this

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<sup>33</sup> Economic dependency, as many claim, cannot be the sole explanation of this because even in some countries deemed “developed”, we find unequal pay between the sexes; women often find it more difficult to find employment, and – because of lower salaries – are less able to acquire property, etc. *An Economy that Works for Woman*, [www.oxfam.org](http://www.oxfam.org),

[https://d1tn3vj7xz9fdh.cloudfront.net/s3fs-public/file\\_attachments/bp-an-economy-that-works-for-women-020317-en-summ.pdf](https://d1tn3vj7xz9fdh.cloudfront.net/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp-an-economy-that-works-for-women-020317-en-summ.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> Fatmagül Berktaş, *Tek Tanrılı Dinler Karşısında Kadın*, p.44.

<sup>35</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, p.12.



new order, men cultivated the land, bred animals, brought food, fought wars, and provided security, which, in turn, elevated men to a superior status, with an accompanying gain of more rights. For example, according to early Assyrian law (the oldest known written codification of laws), men had the right to govern and punish women. Such laws granted husbands the right to pull their wives' hair, cut their ears, and break their teeth with hot bricks if necessary. During this period, the tradition of sequestering women within the walls of their homes began to spread.<sup>36</sup> Married women were required to cover their heads in society, and if they did not comply, they were coated in tar, and their ears were pierced and tied back as punishment.

In ancient Egypt, women were in better condition than any of the other major ancient civilizations. They were considered equal to men in front of the law and had the right to own property. They were accepted as parties of agreements. They could also make a will and inherit property. Royal women had important roles and power as the wives of the sovereign. They also had a chance of becoming Queens themselves like Hatshepsut (1458-1479 BC) and Cleopatra (69-30 BC). However, in ancient Athens, considered the cradle of civilization, women spent their lives sequestered within the boundaries of their homes, subject to the guardianship of their fathers, husbands, or sons.<sup>37</sup> By the time they reached twelve or thirteen years of age, girls were expected to get married but were not allowed any say in the choice of husbands. Marriage was conditional to the father's permission, and divorce was a right granted only to men. Only sons could inherit.<sup>38</sup> While girls could inherit if there were no sons, the right to manage their inheritance was granted to the woman's husband or male guardian, not to the woman.<sup>39</sup> Men and women led separate lives in separate spaces and -- while men had the right to walk freely in public spaces -- "respectable" women stayed at home, carrying out domestic chores, such as childcare and other mundane work. Even at home, they were allotted living spaces that lacked contact with public spaces. Women were allowed to socialize only with their very closest male kin. Work or chores that had to be carried out outside the perimeters of the home would generally be assigned to slaves and servants. A woman's class was visible by her skin tone; that is, if a woman was tanned from contact with the sun, they were of a lower class, while upper-class women had white skin that resulted from her seclusion. On those few occasions, when a woman would leave the confines of her home (such as attendance at a religious ceremony), she would always be accompanied and could not be seen in the company of other men. A woman's

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<sup>36</sup> Asma Barlas, *Believing Women*, p.170.

<sup>37</sup> Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, p.16.

<sup>38</sup> Beyza Bilgin, *İslam'da Kadının Rolü, Türkiye'de Kadın*, p.16.

<sup>39</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, p.28-29.

most important duty was to bear children. The most desirable qualities for girls were silence and obedience.<sup>40</sup> And women did not have any political rights, and no matter how noble they were, they were still not allowed to participate in political matters. On the other hand, women from low-income families could go out more easily, because they contributed to their families' upkeep by working outside.

Women who lived on the Indian subcontinent could neither inherit nor divorce. Women's property was managed by their fathers before marriage, by their husbands after marriage, and by their sons during their widowhood. The custom of the immolation of widows upon the death of their husbands lasted for thousands of years in this region. Women who managed to evade immolation were ostracized by society to the degree that they were not even allowed to attend their children's marriages. The situation in China was similar to that of India. As in many other cultures, women in China were also subject to the guardianship of their fathers before marriage, of their husbands following the marriage, and of their sons after the death of their husbands.

Many misogynistic practices found their ways into the Jewish and Christian traditions. We will not try to determine which of these practices were later additions to the original Jewish and Christian belief systems; we will leave this to Jewish and Christian theologians. We shall limit ourselves to a few examples of their adopted misogynistic elements. For example, Jewish tradition contends that woman was created ontologically inferior to man and caused man's expulsion from Paradise by seducing him. In traditional Jewish culture, women are excluded to a large degree from participation in social life; they are denied a great part of the rights and freedoms enjoyed by men: women are considered to be a danger for men; and, finally, it is claimed that a woman's primary duty is to support her husband. The fact that Orthodox Jewish males begin the day by praising God for not having created them as women is a rather striking custom showing how little women are valued. The Talmud, an important source for the majority of Jewish society, includes many misogynistic interpretations. Some rabbis claim that women were created with a lazy, envious, arrogant, gluttonous, gossipy nature prone to magic and witchcraft. According to Yichud Laws, a man cannot be in the company of a girl older than three and a woman cannot be in the company of a boy older than nine; husband and wife, mother and son, father and daughter, grandfather and granddaughter, grandmother and grandson are exempt from this ban. It is not acceptable for a man to be in the same place with two women, not of his family. A woman cannot stay in the same house with a stepson older than nine and a man with a stepdaughter older than three, etc.

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<sup>40</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, p.28-29.

In its early days, Christian practice did not differentiate between women and men, but as time passed, this situation gradually changed, and women began to be perceived as second-class members of society. Perhaps as it became established, Christianity began to absorb the practices prevalent in the areas of its expansion. During the years of Jesus, and those immediately following his death, women played crucial roles in the expansion of the belief and were as active as those of its male followers. The New Testament relates that women were among the original 72 disciples,<sup>41</sup> including, for example, Jesus's mother Mary, Mary Magdelene, and Mary and Martha. These women accompanied Jesus as he went from town to town, communicating his message. We know from the New Testament that there were also many other converted women whose names have been unfortunately lost to history.<sup>42</sup> In the early days of Christianity, women served as assistant priests, hosted masses in their own homes, and served as missionaries.<sup>43</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, in *Lost Christianities*, rejects misogynistic narratives in the Pauline epistles. Paul was a convert who played the biggest role in shaping early Christianity. Women were much more active in Paul's church than commonly believed, but as time went by, anti-women strictures were added in Paul's name.<sup>44</sup> These later additions ended up excluding women from the church's public sphere completely. As such, there was a gradual decline in the leadership roles afforded women in Christian life. Women who, when Christianity was expanding within the Roman Empire, had played active roles in the dissemination of the new religion's message and participated in religious and social affairs side-by-side with men, began to lose these rights in 391 when Christianity was established as the official, state religion. As Christians gained dominion over the Roman state, they began to sequester women in their homes and to exclude them from public spheres under the influence of the Roman culture. Consequently, the Church began to acquire a male-dominated structure. Within this context, Church fathers such as Tertullian, Ambrose, and Augustine perceived women as inferior creatures and described them as devilish creatures who are the cause of sin and immorality. Tertullian (160-220) called women the "devil's door" to humankind. He also claimed that women should not speak in church and should not carry out the functions of priesthood. Ambrose (337-397) considered women to be the cause of men's deviation from the right path and claimed that men were created superior to women. Saint Augustine (354-430), who said that he could not figure out why woman was even created, claimed that it would have been much better if another male kind had been created to

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<sup>41</sup> Reza Aslan, *Zealot*, p.97.

<sup>42</sup> New Testament, Matthew, 27:55,56.

<sup>43</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, p.166.

<sup>44</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, p.39.

assist men rather than women whose duty was to assist men. He was willing to concede that, in this case, it would have been impossible for new generations to be born, so woman had to be created. The 6<sup>th</sup> century Synod of Mâcon's debate whether or not women had a soul shows how the medieval Church approached the female sex.

Throughout early human history, even if there were short-term partial ameliorations and exceptional situations, women's status seldom changed: they remained under male tutelage, and their main duties were seen as the bearing and raising of children and obeying their husbands. This was the situation in 610, when the Quran began to be revealed in the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean areas, regions that were also home to Jewish and Christian communities. Since Islam adopted many practices of the Jewish and Christian traditions in identical or similar ways, Jewish and Christian traditions played an important role in the shaping of Islam's erroneous perception of women.

Although upper-class women of Arab societies of those days enjoyed a certain degree of respectability, the birth of a baby girl was not well-received. Girls were considered to be unsubstantial creatures, and their feeding, raising, and protection were viewed as burdens on their families. The fact that girls were not allowed to fight or carry out economic activities were among the reasons why girls were not preferred. Sometimes newly born baby girls were buried alive to avoid those burdens. Since men took part in battles, seized booty, and protected property, men alone had the right to inherit.<sup>45</sup> Since women had no share in those activities, they had no share in the inheritance; moreover, women themselves were perceived as part of the inheritance.<sup>46</sup>

The Quran, sent at a time and place where conditions for women were horrible, rejected the prevailing views of women's denigrated status, rights, and freedoms. The Quran guaranteed women rights and freedoms in both religious and legal spheres, freed women from the strictures of their born social class, and stopped them from being men's de facto slaves. This constituted a very major revolution.

### *Women in the Quran*

After the Quran was revealed, male superiority was abolished, and women and men were united under the titles of "believers" and "Muslims." The common Quranic expression "*ya eyyühellezine amenu*" ("those who believe") encompasses all believers, women, and men, old

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<sup>45</sup> Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, p.134.

<sup>46</sup> Asma Barlas, *Believing Women*, p.170.

and young, Arabs and non-Arabs, black and white; consequently, the Quran addresses all believers without distinction. As such, the status of believing women is the same as that of believing men, and all that is promised to believing men is promised to believing women. For example, the virtues required to be God's beloved servant mention both sexes:

Muslim men and Muslim women, believing men and believing women, obedient men and obedient women, truthful men and truthful women, patient men and patient women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, fasting men and fasting women, men who guard their chastity, women who guard their chastity, men who remember God frequently and women who remember God frequently- God has prepared for them a pardon and an immense reward. (Quran 33:35)

Faith, obedience, patience, charity, chastity, etc., are required equally of all believers, men, and women alike. If women and men were radically different, as some think, there would have been different rules and requirements for the two sexes. Instead, in the Quran, God does not distinguish between women and men when he exhorts believers to reason, think, and meditate, or lists such compulsory rituals as prayers, fasting and the pilgrimage, or explains moral virtues like being just, compassionate and trustworthy, or again orders people to be patient, pronounce God's name frequently and be virtuous. Expressions addressed only to women or only to men make up less than one percent of the Quran. For example, the requirement for divorced women to wait for three menstruation cycles before they can marry another (to prevent confusion in the paternity of the child), is a requirement only for women.

The Quran, which describes women and men as each other's "friends" (*awliya*), shows no preference for either sex. In the following verse, the Quran asks them to support each other for good and against evil.

The believing men and believing women are friends of one another. They advocate virtue, forbid evil, perform the prayers, practice charity, and obey God and his Messenger. It is they upon whom God will bestow his grace: verily, God is almighty, wise! (Quran 9:71)

Apart from these, there are women in the Quran mentioned as symbols of morality, devotion, piety, wisdom. For example, the Queen of Sheeba is described and celebrated as an intelligent and impartial ruler, endowed with great political skills in governing her kingdom, Moses's mother and Pharaoh's wives are symbols for resistance to tyranny, Jesus's mother Mary represents a devoted woman full of piety<sup>47</sup>, daughters of the Prophet Shoaib are symbols

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<sup>47</sup> Asma Lamrabet, *Women and Men in the Quran*, trans: Muneera Salem-Murdock, Palgrave Macmillan, Switzerland, 2018, p.30.

of virtue, etc. But still, in spite of the abundant Quranic evidence to the contrary, some have claimed that Islam does not address women and that most verses are written for men and even favor men.

One reason for male-favoring readings of the Quran is (maybe willful) ignorance of Arabic grammar rules. As in many other languages, Arabic requires the use of a masculine pronoun both when addressing a mixed male-female group and a male-only group. On the other hand, female pronouns are used when addressing a female-only group. So the claim that only men are being addressed when the Quran uses a masculine pronoun for general address violates Arabic grammar. For example, the masculine pronoun used when speaking of “those who believe” encompasses all believers, female or male. When men alone are being addressed, we find the expression, “men who believe,” and when alone women are addressed, feminine pronouns are used. Consequently, it is obvious that whenever such distinctions are not made, all believers are addressed.

Restricting such general commandments to men would erroneously free women from many Islamic obligations because most of such verses use masculine pronouns. For example, Quran typically uses the masculine pronoun when making commandments like carrying out ritual prayers, fasting, not cheating, and acting in a just manner. Yet nobody claims that these are obligations only of men. In other words, the claim that the Quran addresses only or mainly men is baseless. The Quran addresses all believers—men and women alike—equally in the eyes of God.

### *Women’s Gains with Islam*

Women’s active participation in daily life was particularly encouraged by the Prophet Muhammad, and when we look at the first periods of Islam, we see that women were active in every sphere of life (in opposition to today’s “husband-submissive Muslim women”). With the advent of Islam, women, independent of their families or social statuses, were accepted as full members of society, gaining -- both religiously and legally -- rights and privileges that had previously been reserved for men. They could legally receive their husbands’ or fathers’ inheritance and were no longer seen as a part of the inheritance to be shared. Women could make their own decisions in matters like marriage or divorce, could receive their own bridal gift (*mahr*)<sup>48</sup>, had the right to manage their own property, and had the freedom to live without being

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<sup>48</sup> Mahr: A Quranic requirement to be given to women upon marriage.

subject to any man; in short, women acquired the freedom to manage their own lives without a man's intervention. Women, in short, acquired the right to enjoy all rights and freedoms within the newly formed society of which they had become full members, without any discrimination based on their sexes.

In the days of the Prophet, many Muslim women were active alongside men, often in leadership positions, actively striving to advance Islam.<sup>49</sup> This should not be surprising because the Quran contains no statements against woman's active participation in all of life. Thus, during the time of the Prophet and of the Rashidun caliphs<sup>50</sup> who succeeded him, it was not uncommon to encounter women poets, scholars, legal experts, religious leaders, nurses, doctors, or even warriors.<sup>51</sup> During the time of the Prophet, many women were active in manufacturing, commerce, agriculture, and calligraphy.<sup>52</sup> Women regularly took part in collective rituals in the mosque that was the center of public life; they were active in commercial affairs and earned money; they served as teachers of both women and men; they helped warriors behind the lines; they took on such active responsibilities as tending the sick and wounded, and they even fought bravely in battlefields.

The first wife of the Prophet and the first Muslim, Khadijah, was a wealthy merchant and was very active outside her home. Born into the Quraysh tribe, which ruled Mecca, she was a respected figure in the society. After inheriting her wealth, she continued to conduct trade and hired Muhammad to manage her business. Although she was older than him and had children from her previous marriages, they got married, and Muhammad lived monogamous until her death in 620 when he was 49 years old, which falsifies the claims that he was a womanizer. Khadijah was the financier of the Islamic movement in its early years. She was together with the Prophet when he was struggling to deliver Islam's message when he was being insulted and excluded from society. She stood by him like a rock. She definitely was not invisible in Islamic society, which was newly shaping. On the other hand, a woman's being the first Muslim and the first financier of Islam is also important to show that both spiritually and financially, she was a strong woman, unlike the Muslim woman's image of today.

For the other women in the Muslim community, Zaynab bint Jash, a wife of the Prophet, was a tanner. The Prophet commissioned Shifaa bint Abdullah, a female companion of the

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<sup>49</sup> Asma Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims*, p.190.

<sup>50</sup> Rashidun Caliphs: The first four caliphs after the death of the Prophet (Abu Bakr, Umar ibn al-Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan, Ali ibn Abu Talib).

<sup>51</sup> Azizah al-Hibri, *Islam, Law, and Custom: Redefining Muslim Women's Rights*, p.5.

<sup>52</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, "Nikah", 106; Sahih Muslim, "Selam", 34, "Talak", 55; Ahmed b. Hanbel, *al-Musnad*, XXV, 494, XLIV, 502; Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam*, p.83.

Prophet, to teach his wife, Hafsa bint Umar, to read and write.<sup>53</sup> Al-Shifaa bint Abdullah which meant “the healer,” also practiced medicine. Women like Aisha, Hafsa, Umm Salama, (all three are Prophet’s wives), Karimah bint Mikdaal, Umm Kulthum, and Aisha bint Sa’d were literate.<sup>54</sup> (We deem it important to underline these examples in response to those claiming that it is useless for women to be literate). Rufaida Al-Aslamia was the first Islamic female surgeon and nurse. Women—Safiyah, Atikah, Hind bint Harith, and Kabshah bint Rafi—were poets. Women served men as barbers.<sup>55</sup> Umm Waraqa, another female companion (*sahaba*) of the prophet, was very active in social life. Since Umm Waraqa knew the Quran better than all the men in her household, she was, with the Prophet’s approval, the prayer leader in her home.<sup>56</sup> In other words, during the time of the Prophet, women were not excluded from any trades and professions; women worked in every area and did not hide from men.

Muslim women also fought alongside men on the battlefields. For example, women took part in the Battle of Uhud. Umm Umarah, who provided water to the thirsty, advanced towards the heart of the battle. Umm Umarah also took part in the battles of Hunayn, Hudaibiyah, and Khaybar; when other Muslims fled the battlefield, she held her ground and protected the Prophet.<sup>57</sup> She lost a hand while fighting in the Battle of Yemame, together with Abu Bakr, the first Caliph.<sup>58</sup> Umm Sulaim fought alongside the Prophet.<sup>59</sup> Aisha, the Prophet’s wife, took part in many battles with the Prophet.<sup>60</sup> During the Battle of Uhud, Aisha and Umm Sulaim served behind the lines.<sup>61</sup> A group of female companions of the Prophet joined the army besieging Khaybar and served behind the lines as well.<sup>62</sup> And Umm Athiyah joined the Prophet in seven battles.<sup>63</sup>

Prophet also consulted women and followed their advice. For example, some Muslims reacted against the Treaty of Hudaibiyah in 628, stating it granted too many advantages to the

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<sup>53</sup> Ahmed b. Hanbel, *al-Musnad*, XLV, 46; Ibn Ebi Şeybe, *el-Musannef*, V, 43.

<sup>54</sup> Belazüri, *Fütuhu’l-büldan*, 454, M.Tayyib Okıç, *İslamiyette Kadın Öğretimi*, p.23-24.

<sup>55</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, “Hac”, 125; Sahih Muslim, “Hac”, 154-155.

<sup>56</sup> Asma Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims*, p.191, Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, p.177.

<sup>57</sup> Vakıdı, Ebu Abdillan Muhammed b. Ömer b. Vakıd el-Eslemi, *el-Megazi*, thk. Marsden Jones, I-III, Beyrut, 1989, III, 902-903.

<sup>58</sup> Asma Afsaruddin *The First Muslims*, p.71.

<sup>59</sup> Zehebi, *Siyeru a’lami’n-nübelâ*, II, 204.

<sup>60</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, p.54.

<sup>61</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, “Cihad”, 64, “Menakıb”, 18, “Megazi”, 18; Sahih Muslim, “Cihad”, 136.

<sup>62</sup> Sahih Muslim, “Cihad”, 135.

<sup>63</sup> Sahih Muslim, “Cihad”, 142; Ibn Majah, “Cihad”, 37.



enemy. Saddened by their negative reaction, the Prophet followed the advice of his wife<sup>64</sup>, Umm Salama to conciliate the tension between the Muslims.

During the many discussions held following the death of the Prophet, Aisha was asked for her religious interpretations of disputed matters. Ibn-i Ata, for example, stated, “I often witnessed even the most senior companions of the Prophet consulting Aisha about religious matters. Amongst all people, Aisha was the most knowledgeable about canonical jurisprudence, and her judgments were the most appropriate.”<sup>65</sup> For example, Safiyya, who died in 670, had willed 1/3 of her estate to her Jewish nephew. When an argument ensued as to whether or not to obey her will because of the nephew’s religion, Aisha was consulted. Aisha’s interpretation that the will was deemed valid.<sup>66</sup> In addition to her religious erudition, Aisha was also a good poet and knowledgeable on legal and medical matters.<sup>67</sup> Aisha never refrained from criticizing and debating with those with whom she had differences of opinion, men or women alike. For example, she disagreed on political matters with Ali, the fourth caliph after the Prophet, and she had differences with Abu Hurairah, whom she accused of having transmitted erroneous hadiths.<sup>68</sup>

It should also be noted that Aisha commanded an army--something extraordinary even today—and waged war on the caliph Ali, whom she accused of injustice. Before the war, she delivered speeches in mosques in which she voiced her opposition to Ali and, as noted, gathered an army against the caliph. A large number of people joined Aisha, and she established a base for her army in Basra before going into battle. Not only did she speak directly to men, but she also attracted hundreds of men to her cause, men who fought under her command. This example shows how active and influential women could be in those days. Throughout history, only a handful of women affected state matters assembled an army, and lead a rebellion, as she did.

When the first caliph, Abu Bakr, felt that his end was approaching, he entrusted the management of his charitable funds and property to his daughter Aisha, even though he had sons. The second caliph, Umar, entrusted his copy of the Quran to his daughter Hafsa, rather than to his sons. Shifaa bint Abdullah was appointed by caliph Umar as an overseer of the

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<sup>64</sup> After the treaty, the Prophet told the Muslims to shave their heads and sacrifice an animal, but none of them complied with him. Saddened, he went to his tent and told this to his wife, Umm Salama. She then told the Prophet not to worry and to shave his own head and to sacrifice before everyone else. As he did so, his companions, seeing him, followed.

<sup>65</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, p.70.

<sup>66</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, p.73.

<sup>67</sup> Ebu Nuaym, *Hilyetü'l-evliya*, II, 49-50; Ibn Abdilber, *el-İsti'ab fi ma'rifeti'l-ashab*, IV, 1883; Ibn Hacer. *Tehzibü't-Tehzib*, XII, 435. For more information look also: Nevzat Aşık, *Hz. Aişe'nin Hadisçiliği*, 27. vd.

<sup>68</sup> Asma Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims*, p.161.

marketplace of Medina (something like the mayor).<sup>69</sup> When Umar tried to limit the amount of the bridal gift (*mahr*), a woman criticized him for trying to introduce something that was not in the Quran; he conceded that the woman was right and changed his mind. Again during the reign of caliph Uthman, Umm Haram joined her husband Ubade b. Samit on a naval campaign to conquer Cyprus.<sup>70</sup> Zaynab, the granddaughter of the Prophet, was active in politics throughout her life and criticized the Omayyad ruling elite. She was vocal in her criticism of governors during speeches she made in mosques, and she organized protests along these lines.<sup>71</sup>

In summary, the Quran does not limit women's active participation in life. Moreover, during the first days of Islam, women were active in social life, were educated, worked in many jobs present in their time, and acted together with men. Today, unfortunately, many limit women's right to an education, reject women's rights to hold administrative positions, and exclude women from working with men, thus from the public square. They do this in the name of Islam.

### *Degeneration*

Islam granted women rights and freedoms regardless of their social statuses or families that up to that time had not existed; women attained a status where they could marry whomever they wished, receive an inheritance, acquire property, get an education, work, receive a bridal gift (*mahr*) and even join men in battlefields. But the status of women began to change following the death of the Prophet. By the time of the Omayyad dynasty, women began to lose the rights granted to them by the Quran, as society returned to pre-Islamic times. As Islam expanded over a vast area in a short period of time, the Quranic reforms for women clashed with the cultures of societies that had only recently converted to Islam. As a result of these clashes, new hybrid cultures were born. Thus, the misogynistic cultures of newly conquered areas (like the Byzantine and Sassanid cultures) arose under the guise of "Islam."<sup>72</sup> Once these misogynistic traditions penetrated Islamic culture and were accepted as rules, they became identified with Islam, viewed thereafter as immutable commandments.<sup>73</sup> In addition, as male-centered interpretations of scholars specialized in hadiths and canonical jurisprudence assisted this gradual return of the old,

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<sup>69</sup> Asma Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims*, p.40; Dilaver Selvi, *Delil ve Örnekleriyle Kadın ve Aile İlmihali*, p.240.

<sup>70</sup> Sahih Muslim, "Cihad", 160.

<sup>71</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, p.192.

<sup>72</sup> Melanie P. Mejia, *Gender Jihad: Muslim Women*, p.3.

<sup>73</sup> John Esposito, *Women's Rights in Islam*, p.99.

misogynistic order, women lost the rights that they had won.<sup>74</sup> The following hadith in Sahih al-Bukhari, recounted by Abdullah bin Umar explains the situation perfectly:

During the time of the Prophet, we would refrain from rebuking or hurting women because we were afraid that a verse about us would be sent. Following the death of the Prophet, we stopped refraining from this.<sup>75</sup>

By the time of the Abbasid dynasty, women had been excluded from many areas of social life and had been condemned to live within the walls of their homes. Seclusion of women from society, imprisonment in homes, large harems, face veils for women were all examples of how Sassanid and Byzantine cultures influenced Islam.<sup>76</sup> While the first Muslims were influenced by Islamic and Arab cultures, subsequent Muslims were influenced by the cultures in the newly conquered areas. As a result, Muslim societies incorporated the cultures and traditions of societies that had only recently converted to Islam.

One might claim that although the status of women worsened after the period of the Prophet, Muslim women still had more rights than the women of many societies of those days. For example, Imam Shafii (767-820) reported that women in Madrasas educated him.<sup>77</sup> Abu Jaffar Tabari (839-923) contended that women could serve as judges in all trials. A woman was appointed as chief of the Divan-ı Mezalimi<sup>78</sup> during the reign of Muktedir (895-932); she would receive public complaints every Friday and immediately express a judgment and sign a decree.<sup>79</sup> Fatima El Fihri (800-880) founded possibly the first university of the world in 859 in Morocco; students traveled from all over the world to study Islamic Studies, astronomy, languages, and sciences. Lubna of Cordoba (d: 984) was an Andalusian intellectual, poet, and mathematician of the second half of the 10th century. She was also the secretary of the Caliph of Cordoba. Mariam al-Asturlabiyy, a 10<sup>th</sup>-century scientist, is linked to the design astrolabes, an astronomical and navigation instrument used to predict the position of the sun, moon, planet, and stars. Suyata al-Mahamili (d: 987), who studied in fields such as management, philosophy, an expert in Arab literature, hadiths, and jurisprudence as well as arithmetic and calculations. Wallada bint al-Mustakfi (994-1091), who was the daughter of an Umayyad caliph, was recognized as a brilliant poet even among her male peers. Ibn Asakir (1105-1175), a historian and hadith expert, wrote

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<sup>74</sup> Zainah Anwar, *Islam and Women's Rights*, p.2.

<sup>75</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, "Nikah", 80.

<sup>76</sup> John Esposito, *Women in Muslim Family Law*, p.11.

<sup>77</sup> Azizah al-Hibri, *Islam, Law, and Custom: Redefining Muslim Women's Rights*, p.41.

<sup>78</sup> A court, where serious political offences are tried.

<sup>79</sup> Justice Ameer Ali, *history of the Saracenes*, p.199-202, Asgar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam*, p.93.

that some Muslim women were educated as men and were even scholars and that he had attended the lectures of 80 different female scholars.<sup>80</sup> Notwithstanding these examples, the period of the Abbasids, which is considered the “Golden Age” for Muslims, was not a “Golden Age” for women in general, but a period in which there was a further tightening of restrictions over women.

Societal perceptions of women worsened over time. Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111), an influential Islamic scholar of the Seljuk era, insisted that women should be under the absolute command of their husbands<sup>81</sup> and be subject to them<sup>82</sup> because otherwise, he argued, they would make it impossible for men to carry out their social and religious duties. He also claimed that restricting women’s “destructive force” was important from a societal perspective because women, who had evil characteristics, were the most destructive factors threatening a Muslim society.<sup>83</sup> According to him, society could survive only by encouraging man’s superiority and the sequestering of women. He also said that keeping women and men apart was important for the sake of society, because if an unwed man and a woman were to come together by themselves, the devil would be their friend and this would inevitably lead to misconduct<sup>84</sup>. In his famous *Ihyau Ulumi’d Din*, Ghazali, one of the most important Islamic philosophers, described the duties of a Muslim woman in the following way:

“She should live in the deeper recesses of her home. She should not leave her spindle from her hand. She should not come and go from her house too frequently. She should limit her conversations with her neighbors and should visit them only when necessary. When her husband is away, she should safeguard his honor and property. In all her activities, she should strive to make her husband happy. She should betray neither her husband nor his property. She should get permission from him before leaving the confines of her home. Whenever she does go out with his permission, she should hide her charms in rags. She should prefer side streets rather than busy districts and market places. She should refrain from making her voice heard and from revealing herself to a stranger. She should conceal her presence from someone she thinks knows her or from someone she thinks she knows. She should strive to complete her domestic affairs but should not neglect her prayers and fasting. When a friend of her husband knocks on her door, and her husband is not at home, she should not even ask who is at the door, and she should not enter into a conversation with him. She should do all this for her own sake and her husband’s honor.”<sup>85</sup>

While Ghazali was a genius, like other philosophers such as Aristotle, who lived hundreds of years before him and who considered women a distorted version of men, he also disparaged

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<sup>80</sup> Azizah al-Hibri, *Islam, Law and Custom: Redefining Muslim Women’s Rights*, p.41.

<sup>81</sup> Imam Gazali, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn (The Revival of the Religious Knowledge)*, Vol. 2, p.147-148.

<sup>82</sup> Imam Gazali, *Kimiya-yi Sa’adat The Alchemy of Happiness*, p.223.

<sup>83</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p.32-33.

<sup>84</sup> Jami’ at-Tirmidhi, “Rada’”, 16, “Fiten”, 7; Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p.42.

<sup>85</sup> Imam Gazali, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn (The Revival of the Religious Knowledge)*, p.171.

women. Identifying Ghazali's views with Islam, has likely damaged more women than those of other misogynistic philosophers.

When speaking about women, the famous statesman and political scientist Nizamülmülk (1018-1092) (a contemporary of Ghazali) says of women that "their minds are deficient..."<sup>86</sup> Since this is the way women were perceived by high-level state officials and by influential thinkers, one can see how these fabrications gained credibility among Muslims, in clear opposition to the Quran.<sup>87</sup>

Yet even in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, some exceptional women managed to overcome such obstacles and rise to active and prestigious positions within society—positions like teachers of canonical jurisprudence, preachers, poetesses, viziers, and counselors. For example, some important hadith compilers in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries were educated in madrassas by women (1211-1282):<sup>88</sup> Ibn Hajar al-Asqalan (1372-1449) had 53 female teachers, and Al-Suyuti (1445-1505) had 33. Historians Al Dhahabi (1274-1348) and Abu'l-Fida (1273-1331), received their diplomas from the hands of female scholars.<sup>89</sup> During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Turkish women in Anatolia, nomads, and city-dwellers alike did not hide from men; they served the guests, went out to see off guests, and receive their well wishes and gave out presents.

However, in the *Kutadgu Bilig*<sup>90</sup>, the first general advice book in Turkish, it is said: "My Friend, let me tell you my final word; it would be better if the baby is not a girl and if it is, it is better she does not live."<sup>91</sup> During the enthronement ceremony of Alaaddin Keykubat (1190–1237), women were not seen in public, and they watched the proceedings from the windows of their chambers.<sup>92</sup> In his *Ahkâm al-Nisa*, Ibn al-Jawzi (1126-1200), a scholar of canonical law, summarized women's ideal behavior: women should only go out if absolutely necessary and only with their husband's permission; when out, women should wear their oldest clothes, walk on the least busy roads, shun crowded places, and being careful not to be heard by men. Why? Because, he writes, once a woman leaves her home, the devil immediately begins to accompany her.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Nizamulmülk, *Siyasetname*, p.194-198.

<sup>87</sup> Emre Dorman, *İslam Ne Değildir*, p.575.

<sup>88</sup> Azizah al-Hibri, *Islam, Law, and Custom: Redefining Muslim Women's Rights*, p.41.

<sup>89</sup> John Esposito, *Women's Rights in Islam*, p.105.

<sup>90</sup> Kutadgu Bilig: It is written by Yusuf Has Hacip, an Uyghur Turk in the 11th century to address to his sovereign Tagbac Bugra Han.

<sup>91</sup> Beyza Bilgin, *İslam'da Kadının Rolü Türkiye'de Kadının Rolü*, p.103.

<sup>92</sup> Beyza Bilgin, *İslam'da Kadının Rolü Türkiye'de Kadının Rolü*, p.103.

<sup>93</sup> Asma Afsaruddin, *The First Muslim*, p.160.

After the death of the Prophet, many rights of Muslim women were lost. During the days of the Prophet, women participated actively in life, worked in all areas, and fought in battles. Women could become doctors or merchants and had the freedom to manage their own lives. The abolition of these anti-Quranic rights could have been achieved only through the corrosive return of cultural practices and the lamentable influence of religious scholars like Ghazali.

## Chapter 4

### After the Prophet

Many non-Quranic beliefs that infiltrated Islam are treated as sanctified, often negatively affecting the status of women within society: “women are dangerous,” “women are born with a natural tendency to sin.” The belief that women are “the devil’s entrance into the human soul” led to depictions of women as the devil incarnate. Many Muslims believe in the validity of these statements, just like Mohammed Al-Kaneeny from Egypt. He supports the idea that women do have a tendency to do evil, and men should be very careful not to be deceived. That is why he says man and woman should never be left alone unless they are married or members of the immediate family. They should not mingle with each other. Otherwise, according to him, Satan’s presence is unavoidable, which would result in great sins. When asked, where he got this information, he gave a reference to the hadith below:

While he was at an assembly conversing, the Prophet saw a beautiful woman, and he immediately went home to his wife Zaynab, as she was tanning leather and had sexual intercourse with her. He then went to his Companions and told them: The woman advances and retires in the shape of a devil, so when one of you sees a woman, he should come to his wife, for that will repel what he feels in his heart.”<sup>94</sup>

Although the Quran warns believers that property, titles, and fame can lead people astray, it never states that a certain sex cooperates with the devil.

Your worldly goods and your children are but a trial and a temptation, whereas with God, there is a tremendous reward. (Quran 64:15)

But God says that irrespective of their gender, the faithful will be rewarded according to their closeness to God and their piety.

As for anyone - be it man or woman - who does righteous deeds and is a believer – We will give him a good life and We will reward them in accordance with the best that they ever did. (Quran 16:97)

But in the eyes of those who have attained to faith and have always been conscious of Us, a reward in the life to come is a far greater good [than any reward in this world]. (Quran 12:57)

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<sup>94</sup> Sahih Muslim, “Nikah”, 9; Abu Dawood, “Nikah”, 44; Jami` at-Tirmidhi, “Rada”, 9.

Yet the identification of the woman with the devil, with evil, and with seduction encouraged practices of excluding women from concourse with men. As a result, women were prevented from securing education and excluded from the public square. Sadly, many women were simply sequestered within the confines of their homes.

### *Education and Social Life*

In 610, Prophet Muhammed received the first revelation through the archangel Gabriel in a cave called Hira, near Mecca. There are many verses in the Quran which emphasize the importance of knowledge and it promotes all the believers to think and reason with no distinction of sexes. But unfortunately, the followers of the Quran totally disregarded this order and distanced themselves from knowledge, and science by some *fatwas*<sup>95</sup> of mostly male theologians, which had the worst impact on women by excluding them from social life and education.

Although the Quran never mentions preventing women from actively participating in life or denying their right to education and to work, in many Muslim-majority countries, women are totally excluded from society. A young Afghani woman who asked to stay anonymous due to possible threats from the Taliban told us that Islam was introduced to Afghanistan with a promise of equality of sexes. But as soon as the Taliban gained control, they avoided women from getting an education even though before them, there were women lawyers, doctors, nurses, and teachers in the country. Now women can not go to schools and have an education and are confined to their homes except some small private lectures where they are taught how to be a good wife and a good Muslim. She told in tears that it was not only the right to an education they lost but everything regarding being human. Women have to be silent all through their lives. But on the contrary, as mentioned above, Muslim women during the time of the Prophet worked in whichever field they wished, were encouraged to receive education and were not subject to anyone. Unfortunately, after the death of the Prophet, women lost their freedoms: they were excluded from the public sphere; their education was neglected, and they were obliged to live within the walls of their homes. Their loss of freedoms can be attributed to fabricated commandments that became part of Islam. The following are examples of such fabricated hadiths:

Do not let women sit in visible spots and do not teach them to read and write. Teach them to sew and, in particular, the Surah Nur.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Fatwa: is a legal opinion in Islamic Law given by an Islamic jurist.

<sup>96</sup> Taberani, *el-Mu'cemül-evsat*, VI, 34; Hakim, *el-Müstedrek 'ale's-Sahihayn*, II, 430.



The women came to the Prophet and said: “Oh God’s Messenger! Men will be rewarded with Heaven since they go to *jihad*; what shall we do to gain the same rewards? The Prophet answered: “Those of you who stay at home, will have the same rewards of those waging holy war in the name of God.”<sup>97</sup>

Although there are prominent Islamic theologians like Averroes (Ibn Rushd, 1126-1198) who supported the education of women on the basis that they are intellectually equal to men and if they are not, they would be a burden to society and cause poverty,<sup>98</sup> staying at home, doing only domestic chores, and striving to please their husbands are presented as the most valuable merits for Muslim women. Thus, they were prevented from going out and, among many other things, receiving an education because it was believed that if they knew how to write, they could use this skill for unlawful (*haram*) communication with men. This led the scholarly vocation to be exclusively male, just like the Islamic law interpreters and interpretations.<sup>99</sup> And women who did not receive an education could not work and guarantee their economic freedom just as the women under the Taliban rule. Although in general women under the Taliban are not allowed to get an education, there are a few who still work in specific sectors like the health care sector (since male doctors are not allowed to treat females, women doctors and health care personnel are needed) but they are not allowed to work with their male colleagues. And since they are not free to advance in their education, they can never earn their lives properly. Thus they were forced into economic dependence; they end up being subject to their husbands to survive.

The Quran, on the other hand, claims that learning elevates believers and that learning is required to stand in awe of God. And education is the process through which a person learns.

Or one who devoutly worships throughout the night, prostrating himself or standing up, ever-mindful of the life to come, and hoping for his Lord’s grace?" Say: "Can they who know and they who do not know be deemed equal?" [But] only they who are endowed with insight keep this in mind! (Quran 39:9)

...Of all his servants, only the endowed with knowledge, respect God truly. God is almighty, much-forgiving. (Quran 35:28)

So educating all believers is a Quranic ideal.

Yet fabricated hadiths mitigate against the Quranically-demanded education of women, claiming that women should not be allowed to learn how to read and write even though there are

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<sup>97</sup> Bezzar, *el-Bahru’z-zehhar*, XIII, 339.

<sup>98</sup> Catarina Belo, Some Considerations on Averroes’ Views Regarding Women and Their Role in Society, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol:20, 2009, p.10.

<sup>99</sup> S. Frederick Starr, *Lost Enlightenment*, Princeton University Press, Oxfordshire, 2015, p.26.

hadiths claiming just the opposite. If a provision will be reached from the hadiths for the right to education for women, why just use the ones banning them from education, and not the other ones? As there are many hadiths saying that in the Prophet's time, women like Rafidah Aslamiyah, Umm Muta, Umm Kabsha were experts in medicine and surgery, Kabshah bint Rafi, Hind bint Harith, Atikah were known for excellence in poetry<sup>100</sup>, Aisha, Prophet's wife, was the most educated person in Islamic jurisprudence, etc., how come exclusion of women from education can dominate? Such fabricated hadiths keep women uneducated, restrict them to domestic activities such as sewing, housework, childcare, and sever their ties with the outside worlds. Consider this quotation from a book written for women:

Not every kind of education is useful for everybody, nor is it needed by all... Women should be educated and gain experience in matters like marriage and familial order, childcare and education, domestic chores, general health care, religious obligations, support of ill, poor or otherwise needy people, and first aid in case of natural disasters or war.<sup>101</sup>

While such an education would outfit a woman to be queen of her castle, subject always to her king, it would preclude her being a merchant, engineer, architect, archaeologist, or sociologist.

Yet, again, the Quran affirms (as early Islamic communities demonstrated) education and full participation in public life for all.<sup>102</sup>

And thus does their Lord answer their prayer:

And so their Lord answered them: "I will not waste the work of any worker among you, whether male or female. You are one of another. For those who migrated, and were expelled from their homes, were persecuted because of Me, and fought and were killed- I will remit for them their sins and will admit them into gardens beneath which rivers flow- a reward from God. With God is the ultimate reward." (Quran 3:195)

The Quran, which never discriminates between men and women, does not forbid women from playing active roles in all areas of life.

### *Leadership Roles*

Benazir Bhutto (1988-1990, 1993-1996) in Pakistan, Megawati Sukarnoputri (2001-2004) in Indonesia, Tansu Çiller (1993-1995) in Turkey, Mame Madior Boye (2001-2002) in Senegal, Khaleda Zia (1991-1996, 2001-2006) and Sheikh Hasina Wazed (1996-2001, 2009-present) in

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<sup>100</sup> Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam*, p.82,83.

<sup>101</sup> Dilaver Selvi, *Delil ve Örnekleriyle Kadın ve Aile İlmihali*, p.32.

<sup>102</sup> Ali Osman Ateş, *Hadis Temelli Kalıp Yargılarda Kadın*, p.142-145.

Bangladesh, Masoumeh Ebtekar (1997-2005) in Iran, Cisse Mariam Sidibe (2011-2012) in Mali, Atifete Jahjaga (2011-2016) in Kosova, Ameenah Gurib (2015-2018) Mauritius, and Halimah Yacob (2017-present) in Singapore are the most recent female presidents, prime ministers or vice presidents in Muslim majority countries despite the belief in fabricated Islam that women can not hold political positions because they are deficient in mind and are controlled by their emotions thus they are unsuitable for government positions. Even though there had been many women political leaders in Muslim countries, there are people who still believe that women cannot govern because they are “controlled by their emotions rather than their minds”, just like Hassan Hamedy from Syria. He thinks that women cannot be judges, ministers, or administrators. But what is worse, women like Fatma Ahmed from Iraq also support this idea, accepting that they, as women, are deficient compared to men. Fatma has made herself believe that if God had created her deficient, she has to accept her condition and live a life controlled by men whom she believes to be much wiser than herself. But the point she misses is that although she claims to be a Muslim, she has never read the Quran and thus does not know what God really wants from Muslim women. She does not know that there is no ban on the Quran for the education of women. But fabricated hadiths, despite no mention in the Quran, reject the woman’s right to hold leadership positions. Such alleged hadiths have prevented women, in the name of Islam, from holding leadership positions. Consider:

“A community that will entrust its affairs to women will never recover.”<sup>103</sup>

“If you let the management to women, then under the ground would be a better place for you than the above.”<sup>104</sup>

Some scholars attribute the first hadith to the Prophet after he heard that the Persian sovereign Kisra had passed away and that his daughter had been enthroned in his place.

This hadith—“a community that will entrust its affairs to women will never recover”—appeared right after the Battle of Jamel,<sup>105</sup> the first civil war, the first disorder (*fitnah*) among Muslims.<sup>106</sup> And this first civil war was blamed on a woman—Aisha, the Prophet’s wife!

After the murder of the third caliph, Uthman, in 656, Ali was elected as the fourth caliph. Aisha led a group that criticized Ali for not doing enough to apprehend Uthman’s murderers.

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<sup>103</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, “Megazi”, 84, “Fiten”, 17; Jami` at-Tirmidhi, “Fiten”, 75; Nesai, “Adabü’l-Kudat”, 8.

<sup>104</sup> Jami` at-Tirmidhi, “Fiten”, 78.

<sup>105</sup> The Battle of Jamel: a battle fought between Ali ibn Abu Talib, who was the cousin and son-in-law of the deceased Prophet, and also the fourth Rashidun Caliph and A’isha, widow of Prophet Muhammad to avenge the death of the third caliph Uthman who had recently been murdered.

<sup>106</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, p.50; Asgar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam*, p.77.

Aisha's objection, allied with her army, precipitated the war. Aisha traveled to Basra with her army and held meetings and gave speeches in mosques for additional support. Many companions of the Prophet from the Quraysh tribe<sup>107</sup> supported Aisha, and no one objected to her, nor did they stop supporting her due to this hadith.<sup>108</sup> Aisha lost the battle against Ali. Within the context of a costly civil war, Abu Bakra "miraculously" remembered the hadith stating that women should not hold leadership positions.

One wonders, if this hadith was authentic, why none of the companions or Abu Bakra himself failed to mention it when they first heard about Aisha gathering an army! Here is a more plausible explanation: this hadith was fabricated for political reasons. Although they accused Aisha of igniting the first serious disagreement and eventual war within Islam, as the Prophet's wife, she could not be criticized directly. Yet her opponents could use this hadith to accuse her and thus attack her indirectly.

Many fabricated hadiths instruct Muslim men to disregard women's ideas since women cannot advise wisely:

"Consult women and do the opposite of their advice."

"Always disagree with women, for that is the most auspicious thing to do."

"You will always regret it if you comply with women."

Of course, if these hadiths are to be taken as genuine, women should never be entrusted with leadership positions (or even the care of children). Ali Osman Ates, a contemporary hadith scholar, argues that both the meaning of those hadiths and their transmitters are not to be trusted.<sup>109</sup> Most importantly, these hadiths are contradicted by the Quran and by other hadiths in which the Prophet consults his wives and follows with their recommendations.

The Quran neither states nor implies a commandment banning women from leadership positions.<sup>110</sup> The Quran, for example, praises the Queen of Sheeba for her administration and political decisions, which spared her people from a useless war. When the Quran does critique a bad leader, it is always directed at men (such as the pharaohs); no female leader is ever criticized.

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<sup>107</sup> The Prophet's tribe.

<sup>108</sup> Abu Bakra said to have recounted this hadith, remained neutral during this battle and chose not to criticize her. Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam*, p.77.

<sup>109</sup> Ali Osman Ates, *Hadis Temelli Kalıp Yargılarda Kadın*, p.99-101.

<sup>110</sup> Asgar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam*, p.76, Amina Wadud, *Quran and Woman*, p.89.

The Quran clearly requires the appointment of the most competent people to leadership positions, independent of their gender:

Indeed, God commands you to delegate the responsibilities to those who are qualified and judge between people with justice. It is always excellent what God instructs you. Indeed, God is ever-hearing and seeing. (Quran 4:58)

### *Travel*

Years ago, when I<sup>111</sup> was not married, I wanted to go to Mecca for *Hajj*. I got the visa forms from the Saudi Embassy in Istanbul. I started filling them out, and then I saw that I was not allowed to enter the Saudi Kingdom since I did not have a male guardian who would travel with me to Mecca. I was confused. I called the Embassy and asked what that meant. The person on the other side of the line told me that since I was not married and younger than 40 years old, I had to have a male immediate family member (either my father, my uncle, my brother or my husband) to take me there; otherwise, I was not permitted to travel to Mecca. I was shocked. I asked the reason, and the male voice, on the other side, told me that it was an Islamic requirement that women were not allowed to travel alone. That was the first time I ever heard such a requirement. In the end, I persuaded my father to come with me, and I was permitted to go to Mecca.

The interpreters of Islam have generally permitted (with some reservations) a Muslim woman to travel short distances alone, but only after obtaining permission from her husband. However, according to most traditional interpretations, a woman who travels any great distance must be accompanied by a man of her family (like her father, brother, husband, son, or uncle). For example, it is claimed that the Prophet had said,

“It is not acceptable that a woman believing in God and the Day of Judgment should embark on a trip of three days or longer without being accompanied by her father or son or husband or brother or by other men, whom she cannot ever marry according to Islamic regulations.”<sup>112</sup>

We also read:

“It is not acceptable that a woman believing in God and the Day of Judgment should travel to a distance of one day and one night, without being accompanied by a man, whom she cannot legally marry.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Feryal Taslaman.

<sup>112</sup> Sahih Muslim, “Hac”, 423.

<sup>113</sup> Sahih Muslim, “Hac”, 421; Jami` at-Tirmidhi, “Rada'”, 15.

The distance to which a woman can travel without being accompanied by a male relative is generally accepted to be a maximum of 90 km from her home; disobeying this provision is *haram* (forbidden).

If we accept the general rule that anything not prohibited by the Quran is permitted (this principle derives from verses like the 101<sup>st</sup> verse of the Surah Al-Maidah), then the lack of a travel ban in the Quran is sufficient to maintain that women are permitted to travel by themselves. Moreover, in the days of the Prophet, women traveled anywhere they wished. There are, for example, many stories of women migrating from Mecca to Medina (a distance much greater than 90 km). The Prophet never criticized women who traveled alone this long-distance; indeed, they were always praised for bearing the hardships of travel. If traveling more than 90km without a male relative was forbidden for Muslim women, how could the Prophet herald women who traveled alone!<sup>114</sup>

Because of this fabricated ban, Muslim women face difficulties even today. Women who do not have a male relative to accompany them are denied the right to pilgrimage to Mecca, which is a religious duty for all believers. Consider a hadith used to support this ban:

When the Prophet said: “No woman should travel except with a male relative,” a man stood up and said: “O Messenger of God, I want to go out to fight, but my wife wants to go for Hajj.” he said: “Go out for Hajj with her.”<sup>115</sup>

Contrary to this ban, the Quran says that “*Pilgrimage ... is a duty owed to God by all people who can undertake it* (Quran 3:97).

Since the Quran places no limits on women’s freedom to travel, banning travel unless accompanied by a man was fabricated to subjugate women to men. Of course, given dangers like banditry, a *recommendation* that women not travel alone may have been issued as a precaution. However, Muslims should never elevate prudential recommendations or historical customs from a certain stage of history to religious commandments concerning the entire community of all ages. Women, like men, are free to travel wherever and whenever and with whomever they wish.

### *Exclusion from Mosques*

Even though half of the Muslim community in the world is women, they are not treated equally to men in respect of being “believers”. Zariah Batma is a Moroccan student living in Istanbul.

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<sup>114</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, “Menakib”, 15.

<sup>115</sup> Sahih Bukhari, “Nikah”, 110, “Cezaü’s-Sayd”, 24, “Cihad”, 139, 178; Sahih Müslim, “Hac”, 424.

After being convinced that Friday prayer<sup>116</sup> is mandatory for female Muslims also, she decided to go to the nearest mosque the following Friday. In Turkey, like most of the Muslim majority countries, Friday prayers are believed to be mandatory only for men (which is not true), and women are banned from entering the mosques during the prayer. Anticipating that it would be hard for her to enter the mosque when Muslims are called to prayer (since mosques are usually filled up with men for the Friday prayer), she went earlier and found a place in the women's section. But once the *azan*<sup>117</sup> was called and men started to come in, it was apparent that they were disturbed by her presence. Sometime later, one of them came and told her that she should not be there but be in her home. She pretended not to hear him. Later, another one came and almost insulted her by saying that she was causing a disturbance in the Muslim community and should leave the mosque immediately. By then, she was feeling very uncomfortable both from the insults and glares, but the final breakdown came when a man told her that she was a Mossad agent and was trying to cause dispute in Islam. She left the mosque in tears.

Historically, Muslim women have been banned or at least discouraged from taking part in prayers together with the rest of their community. Since, so the story goes, the best place for women is their homes, they should pray at home instead of a mosque. The exclusion of menstruating women from mosques and other religious duties likewise further distances them from places of worship. The following fabricated hadiths support this prohibition:

“A woman's prayer in her home's courtyard is better than her prayer in a mosque, her prayer inside her home is more virtuous than the one in the courtyard, and prayer in the inner chamber is more virtuous than the one in the open sections of her home.”<sup>118</sup>

“A woman is a man's dignity and honor. When she goes out, the devil will accompany her. It is at home that she is closest to God.”<sup>119</sup>

Yet there is simply no Quranic justification for excluding women from mosques and collective prayers. Moreover, sequestering women in their homes contradicts both the Quran and common practice during the days of the Prophet. At that time, all believers--female and male-- assembled at the great mosque in Medina, the center of religion, education, and social life. At the great mosque, they would pray and socialize together. Women took part in festivity prayers, in Friday prayers, in regular prayers, and in every collective ritual alongside men. Women listened to the

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<sup>116</sup> Friday prayer: is an Islamic ritual performed in congregation every Friday in the mosques and it is mandatory for all Muslims to attend.

<sup>117</sup> Azan: Islamic call to prayer.

<sup>118</sup> Abu Dawood, “Salat”, 54.

<sup>119</sup> Ibn Huzeyme, *Sahih*, III, 93; Taberani, *el-Mu'cemü'l-evsat*, III, 189, VIII, 101.

Prophet's sermons and took part in debates held on these occasions; they freely expressed their views on religious matters. There was no distinction between women and men in these practices.<sup>120</sup> Hadiths that describe women and men together in mosques and collective prayers dramatically outnumber the hadiths that exclude women from their worship of God. See, for example:

Aisha had said: "One night after performing my *isha* prayer in the mosque, I returned home after the Messenger of God. he asked me where I had been. I told Him that we were listening to one of his companions, reciting the Quran in the mosque and that he had a beautiful voice. After hearing this, the two of us went back to the mosque and started listening to him together. The Messenger of God turned to me and said, he is Salim, a slave freed by Abu Huzayfa."<sup>121</sup>

"The Prophet reserved one of the three doors of the mosque in Medina to women so that it would be easier for them."<sup>122</sup>

"The Prophet was sensitive towards the needs of women with children in the mosque, and if he heard a child crying during prayers, he would shorten prayers."<sup>123</sup>

During the Rashidun dynasty, women attended mosques just like men:

Umar's wife joined other members of the community for *fajr* and *isha* prayers in the mosque. When she was asked why she went to the mosque for her prayers, despite the fact that her husband did not approve it due to his jealousy, she replied: "Umar cannot ban me from coming to the mosque because the Prophet had said, "Do not ban women from going to the mosques."<sup>124</sup>

It is even said that his wife was in the mosque praying when Umar, the third Caliph, was assassinated.

During a Friday sermon, Caliph Umar tried to put a cap on bridal gifts (*mahr*). He was challenged by a woman, who stood up in the middle of the mosque and pointed out that his proposal violated Islamic law. He conceded, and his proposed policy was never carried out:

She said: "Oh, Umar, you do not have the right to do this because, in the Quran, God says, "Even if you have given loads of bridal gift (*mahr*), do not take away anything from it." Upon which he said, "Umar was wrong, the woman is right."<sup>125</sup>

According to this hadith, we can infer:

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<sup>120</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, p.72.

<sup>121</sup> Hakim, *el-Müstedrek 'ale's-Sahihayn*, III, 250.

<sup>122</sup> Abu Dawood, "Salat", 17.

<sup>123</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, "Ezan", 65.

<sup>124</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, "Cuma", 11.

<sup>125</sup> Tahavi, *Şerhu müşkili'l-asar*, XIII, 57.



- Women participated in collective rituals such as the Friday prayers.
- Women were allowed to object during collective rituals like the Friday prayers.
- Women’s objections were accepted by high-level leaders like the caliph.
- Since the woman’s physical description is described, women did not conceal themselves with coverings while in mosques.

Therefore, we should reject fabricated commandments that forbid women from collective rituals or for publicly expressing their views.

The Quran demands that all believers—men and women alike—participate in compulsory Friday prayers; it makes no distinction between women and men:

O You who believe! When the call is made for prayer on Congregation Day, hasten to the remembrance of God, and leave all worldly commerce: this is for your good if you but knew it.

And when the prayer is over, disperse freely on earth and seek to obtain [something] of God’s bounty; but remember God often, so that you might attain to a happy state! (Quran 62:9-10)

Sequestering women at home and preventing them from going to mosques and from taking part in collective rituals has nothing to do with the Quran and Islam.

### *Source of Temptation*

Abu Hanzala, a so-called Imam, declares in his channel on Youtube that women are the biggest and most dangerous temptations created in the world for men. Muslim men should be aware of this and take the necessary precautions not to be deceived. They should avoid eye contact and should avoid being alone with them if they are not immediate family. But the biggest burden is on women since they are the source of temptation. They should not leave their homes unless it is urgent, and if they have to go out, they should get permission from their husbands. When outside, they should prefer deserted routes as much as possible. You might expect to hear such statements a couple of years ago or in a witch hunt society, but it is unimaginable to hear such claims in our modern age through Youtube. But this so-called Imam preaches a fabricated Islam to his followers and advises them how to suppress the temptation of women as if the relationship between the sexes is a war declared against women.

From an Islamic perspective, everything we face in life is a part of our trial in this world. In this context, our possessions, status, and even our children can lead to “temptation” (*fitna*) if not used properly. For example, the Quran states that Muslims should give some of their possessions to

the poor and the needy. However, for those who do not distribute enough of their possessions, those possessions may turn into a source of “temptation.” In this context, even children may be a source of temptation if they lead their parents astray:

...and know that your worldly goods and your children are but a trial and a temptation and that God possesses an immense reward. (Quran 8:28)

Your worldly goods and your children are but a trial and a temptation, whereas with God, there is a tremendous reward. (Quran 64:15)

Moreover, women can surely tempt men, and vice versa, men can tempt women.

Although everything can become a temptation to us, fabricated Islamic tradition reserves the concept of temptation for women who are considered as sources of evil. Consider a fabricated hadith attributed to the Prophet:

“I left behind no temptation more harmful to men than women.”<sup>126</sup>

But women are not especially liable to tempt; the greatest temptation is different for everyone. Some are tempted by possessions, pride, or family, some by laziness. The opposite sex, of course, can tempt us; for men, women may be a source of temptation, and for women, men can be. However, declaring that women are only the sources of temptation (and blaming their seductive powers rather than men’s weaknesses), as some traditionalists do, is a grave error, one not permitted by the Quran.

*Prostration before Husbands*

*Dear Dr Taslaman,*

*Salamun Alaikum*

*I am 21 years of a Muslim girl who recently got engaged. Me and my family try to live following the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammed (BPU), Sunnah, and the Quran. Being a devoted Muslim is very important to me. That is why I was very happy to accept Faisal’s marriage proposal, who is also a very devoted and pious Muslim. We talk with Faisal on the phone for hours, about the future, our family, and our children... One day when we were talking on the phone again, he told me that the wives should obey their husbands to a degree that they should even prostrate themselves in front of them if it was possible. I was shocked when I heard that. It was soooo the*

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<sup>126</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, “Nikah” 18; Sahih Muslim, “Zikir”, 97; Jami` at-Tirmidhi, “Edeb”, 31.

*opposite of what I had learned until then because we only prostrate in front of Allah. I did not say anything to him since I really trust his religious knowledge, but I felt really odd. Then I checked the Islamic literature, and I saw the hadith:*

*“If I were to command anyone to make prostration before anyone besides Allah, I would have commanded the wife to prostrate before her husband. A woman does not fulfill the right to her Lord unless she fulfills the right of her husband.”<sup>127</sup>*

*I could not believe my eyes. How could a Prophet (PBU) who is full of love, mercy, and compassion ask women to be the slaves to their husbands? Please help me? Is this the attitude Allah wants from women when they get married? If so, I really do not want to get married.*

*Your sister*

*Mariam Hamid*

This is a mail we received from a Muslim girl who tries to live according to Islamic traditions but who also thinks. She knows that such a strict monotheism as Islam, telling women to prostrate themselves before their husbands—that is, prostrating themselves before something other than God—is blasphemy of the highest order, but she still hesitates. Such a misogynistic practice is deeply contrary to the Quran and reason alike.

The transmitter of this particular hadith, Abu Hurairah, who has been widely criticized for his trustworthiness, is the source of this hadith and for many other misogynistic hadiths. In terms of sheer numbers, Abu Hurairah is the number one hadith transmitter. No one else even can come close to him, not even the wives of the Prophet. Yet, Izzudin Ibn-ul Esir (d: 1233), in *Usdul'l-Gabe*, wrote: “Abu Hurairah is the most disputed companion of the Prophet. There is nobody else disputed as much as him.”<sup>128</sup> The third caliph Umar appointed Abu Hurairah governor of Bahrain and then dismissed him for abuse of authority; when Abu Hurairah returned home, some of the money he brought back was confiscated for it was unjustly earned.<sup>129</sup> Ibn Sad’s *Tabakat* recalls that Abu Hurairah himself said that Umar had called him, “Enemy of God and his Book!”<sup>130</sup> Umar was not alone in his criticisms; many people close to the Prophet criticized Abu Hurairah for the hadiths he had recounted.

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<sup>127</sup> Jami` at-Tirmidhi, “Rada”, 10; Abu Dawood, “Nikah”, 41; Ibn Majah, “Nikah”, 4.

<sup>128</sup> Mahmud Ebu Reyre, *Kimliđi ve Kişiliđiyle Ebu Hureyre*, p.38.

<sup>129</sup> Mahmud Ebu Reyre, *Kimliđi ve Kişiliđiyle Ebu Hureyre*, p.86-88.

<sup>130</sup> Ibn Sa’d, *et-Tabakatü'l-kübra*, IV, 335.

This hadith reported by Abu Hurairah, which tells women to prostrate themselves before their husbands contradicts the following verse of the Quran:<sup>131</sup>

Now among his signs are the night and the day, as well as the sun and the moon. If it is truly Him you serve, do not prostrate to the sun, nor the moon but to God who created them. (Quran 41:37)

The Quran, the prime source of Islamic monotheism, explicitly condemns prostration before someone or something other than God and commands people to prostrate before God only.

### *Hell*

Another fabricated hadith recounted by the unreliable Abu Hurairah is as follows:

The Messenger of God went out to the *musalla* (prayer place) on the day of Eid al-Adha. He passed by the women and said, 'O women! Give charity, for I have seen that you form the majority of the people of Hell.' They asked, 'Why is that, O Messenger of God?' he replied, 'You curse frequently and are ungrateful to your husbands.<sup>132</sup> I have not seen anyone more deficient in intelligence and religious commitment than you. A cautious sensible man could be led astray by some of you.' The women asked, 'O Messenger of God, what is deficient in our intelligence and religious commitment?' he said, 'Is not the testimony of two women equal to the testimony of one man?' They said, 'Yes.' he said, 'This is the deficiency in her intelligence. Is it not true that a woman can neither pray nor fast during her menses?' The women said, 'Yes.' he said, 'This is the deficiency in her religious commitment.'<sup>133</sup>

According to this hadith, the Prophet himself declares that women constitute the majority in Hell because they curse frequently and are ungrateful to their husbands. Even though this hadith is accepted to be authentic, it derives women in such a hopeless situation that they start to believe that whatever they do, it will be almost impossible for them to go to Paradise when they die. Amina Kovačević, an 18 years old university student in Bosnia, sent an email to us asking what to do after hearing this hadith. She wrote that if she ever got married, it would be impossible not to complain or not to argue with her husband all through her life, which would cause her to go to hell for being ungrateful towards her husband. On the other hand, if she did not get married, she would have a higher chance of going to paradise. She wrote she had two choices in front of her, one was to stay faithful and not to get married, and the second was to stop being faithful and

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<sup>131</sup> One source of this mistake involves presenting womanhood as evil by its very nature. By proclaiming women by nature evil, it becomes easier to believe them to be the greatest source of temptation. Yet one can believe women are, by nature, evil only by rejecting the teachings of the Quran.

<sup>132</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, "Hayiz", 6; Sahih Muslim, "Iman", 132.

<sup>133</sup> Jami' at-Tirmidhi, "Iman", 6; Muslim, "Iman", 132.

getting married. Such misogynistic hadiths may result in people's especially girls' being led to unfaithfulness.

Again (and again and again), we should evaluate this hadith within the framework of the Quran. The Quran does not say that women are more liable to Hell for being ungrateful towards their husbands. Admonitions about Hell, in the Quran, are never addressed to a particular sex, they are addressed to everyone, man and woman alike:

Indeed! Those whoever commits misdeeds, and becomes besieged by his mistakes- these are the inmates of the Fire, wherein they will dwell forever. (Quran 2:81)

And on the Day of Resurrection, you will see those who told lies about God with their faces blackened. Is there not a place in Hell for the arrogant? (Quran 39:60)

Neither Paradise nor Hell is reserved for certain genders. Both are attained by the same sorts of deeds (or misdeeds), regardless of gender.

Moreover, the claim that women are the majority of Hell because they are ungrateful to their husbands, again, attributes a divine status to men that is completely out of place in Islamic monotheism: God, according to the Quran, is the only One to whom Muslims should be grateful:

So remember Me, and I shall remember you, and be grateful to Me, and do not deny Me. (Quran 2:152)

And when your Lord proclaimed:” If you give thanks, I will grant you increase; but if you are ungrateful, My punishment is severe.” (Quran 14:7)

This fabricated hadith claims that the essential religious obligation of women is to obey and satisfy their husbands, thus conditioning their entry into Paradise upon their husbands' approval. One might imagine that people inclined to enslave women to their husbands would have fabricated such hadiths, putting anti-Quranic conditions for Paradise and Hell into the mouth of the Prophet, conditions that are not present in the Quran and even contradict it.

### *Deficient in Mind*

After the Taliban rule in Afghanistan, Gulpari Nuristani knew that it would be hard for her to get a regular education, but she wanted to learn as much as possible before she was forced into a marriage which is the fate of the 1/3 of the girls under 18 in the region she lives. Her father supported her desire, but since they were very poor and the closest school was at the next village, the only education she could get was the classes held by the *imam* of her small village. Girls and

the boys were in separate classes, and they were taught different topics. Girls' education focused on the things they were expected to know: Islamic requirements, house chores, how to raise children, and how to be a good wife. But Gulpari wanted to learn the things taught to boys. When she complained about this to her mother, she told her that she did not have the capacity and intellects as the boys, and she should be happy that she is getting an education at all. Her mother's approach was compatible with the fabricated hadith that women are created deficient in both intelligence and religion.

‘This is the deficiency in her intelligence. Is it not true that a woman can neither pray nor fast during her menses?’ The women said, ‘Yes.’ he said, ‘This is the deficiency in her religious commitment.’

Even though there are Islamic theologians and thinkers like Al Cahiz (781-868) and Averroes (Ibn Rushd) who advocated the opposite, we witness many people who scorned and despised women. Despite Cahiz's claim that “neither us nor any sound person can say that women are superior to men or inferior” and Averroes' belief that women share the same kind or species with men and women are rational in exactly the same degree,<sup>134</sup> fabricated hadiths like above spread the belief that women were created deficient. Yet the Quran itself does not describe women as deficient in intelligence and religion. So the claim that the Prophet said that women are deficient in mind and faith is a slander to the Prophet. In the Quran, believers are told to reason and to use their common sense—without gender distinction.

In this way, God makes his messages clear to you so that you might use your reason. (Quran 2:242)

No human being can ever attain to faith except by God's leave, and it is he who lays the loathsome evil upon those who will not use their reason? (Quran 10:100)

As we have seen, verses aimed at believers are never addressed solely to men, but at all believers, male and female alike. All believers—men and women alike—are equally equipped by God with the tools necessary for discerning God's messages and attaining faith. All believers—men and women alike—are equally equipped by God with reason. In the Quran, no verses either assert or imply that women have limited reason, which is supported by the final findings in neuroscience as well. The general belief that there are differences in the structures and capacities

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<sup>134</sup> Catarina Belo, Some Considerations on Averroes' Views Regarding Women and Their Role in Society, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol:20, 2009, p.7,8; Averroes' Commentary on Plato's Republic, First Treatise, trans. Rosenthal, p. 165.

between the male and female brains is refuted with the results of the studies showing that our brains are the product of the lives we live, experiences we have, and our education, occupations, sports, and hobbies. Being male or female does not have a specific effect.<sup>135</sup>

Finally, and this gets to the heart of Islam, religious responsibility—the acquisition of faith, the understanding of God’s revelation, acting in accord with God’s demands—depends on reason. If women were limited in reason, then their degree of religious responsibility would also have been limited! As such, it should be easier for such defective, non-culpably inadequate people to get into Paradise. However, nobody, including those claims women are deficient, have continued their argument, saying that due to their deficiencies, women have fewer religious responsibilities.

### *A Dog, a Donkey, and a Woman*

The same Abu Hurairah astoundingly claims that a prayer may be broken by a dog, a donkey, or a woman if they pass in front of the praying people:

The Messenger of God said: “Prayer is broken by a woman, a donkey, and a dog, but something like the back of a saddle protects against that.”<sup>136</sup>

Women are considered on a par with donkeys and dogs. The association with dogs is especially vicious because, according to some hadiths, black dogs are the Devil himself in disguise.<sup>137</sup> Through this connection, women are more than belittled—they break the prayers of righteous men. It is said that upon hearing this hadith, Aisha exclaimed:

“Are you likening us to donkeys and dogs?” For God’s sake, many times did the Prophet pray when I was lying between the direction of the Kaaba and Him. In those cases, I would not move so as not to disturb him, and he would still continue praying.”<sup>138</sup>

The Quran, for its part, tells believers—men and women alike, to carry out their ritual prayers with care and reverence. The Quran never states or hints that prayers will be broken if something or someone passes in front of the praying believer.

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<sup>135</sup> Gina Rippon, *How Neuroscience is Exploding the Myth of Male and Female Brains*, New Scientist, 28, Feb., 2019; For more information see also Gina Rippon, *The Gendered Brain, The New Neuroscience that Shatters the Myth of the Female Brain*, Penguin Random House, London, 2020.

<sup>136</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, “Salat”, 103, 106; Sahih Muslim, “Salat”, 265; Abu Dawood, “Salat”, 110; Jami’ at-Tirmidhi, “Salat”, 253; Nesai, “Kıble”, 7.

<sup>137</sup> Abu Dawood “Salat”, 112.

<sup>138</sup> Sahih Muslim, “Salat”, 270; Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, p.70.

Hadiths which claim that women are deficient in reason and religion, break prayers, and are the majority in Hell have all been recounted by the same unreliable person: Abu Hurairah. Abu Hurairah was accused of being a liar during his lifetime, was criticized by the Prophet's wife, and was punished by Caliph Umar. Perhaps, in addition to Abu Hurairah's tenuous relationship with the truth, he also had psychological problems concerning women. Although we cannot peer into his psyche, we can know, based on the Quran and reason and human nature, that his misogynistic hadiths are fabricated, and have no place in Islam properly understood. Islam properly understood, Islam as given in the Quran holds that men and women are equally endowed in reason and religion, entrusted by God to understand the message of the Quran and follow its dictates (to either Paradise or Hell).



## CHAPTER 5

### MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY

In the Quran, marriage is portrayed as reciprocal love and compassion between husband and wife:

They are a garment for you, and you are a garment for them. (Quran 2:187)

Marriage, in the Quran, is pictured as God-given tranquility, with husband and wife mutually relating to one another in affection and mercy. The wife “fits” her husband like a perfectly-tuned garment—she encloses him, warms him, shelters him and cares for him; yet, the husband equally “fits” his wife like a garment--he encloses her, warms her, shelters her and cares for her. Compassion-motivated care and mutual concern are the roots of the husband-wife tranquility envisioned in the Quran; God planted love and compassion, we read, out of which tranquility grows and blossoms.

But in the years following the death of the Prophet, mutual love and compassion are increasingly replaced by obedience and subservience, and all on the part of the wife. Mutual satisfaction held together by love is replaced by a vicious master-slave hierarchy enforced by punishment (fear). So we see the Quranic ideal of tranquility quickly strangled on such infertile soil.

Muslim women gradually began to lose their previously granted Quranic rights and equality. As misogynistic practices began to return, women were sequestered in their homes and required to obey their husbands and satisfy their husbands’ desires. Muslim societies began to treat women as slaves to their fathers before marriage and to their husbands after marriage. As alleged “commandments of Islamic law,” women were religiously obliged (pressured) to obey these commandments, resulting in the enslavement of woman by man.

Our unmasking of roots of this anti-woman mentality showed that the many misogynistic “commandments of Islamic law” regarding marriage and divorce are inauthentic cultural insertions into the Quran’s text. As such, the fabricated misogynistic hadiths attributed to the Prophet lack Quranic support.

How, then, did such hateful misconceptions about women gain acceptance as “Islam”?

### *Marriage and Divorce*

The Quran states that women have the right to marry or divorce of their own free will; women need not, should not, subject their rights to marry or divorce to the will of their fathers or husbands or other male guardians. So, according to the Quran, women, and men are have equal rights to marriage and divorce. Yet in some Muslim majority countries, women are not allowed to marry the person of their choice, underage girls are forced into marriage with much older men, and women are not allowed to divorce, no matter how miserable their marriages are—and in the name of “Islam.”

While some cultures require securing permission from one’s family to get married, this is not a Quranic requirement. A mature woman, like a mature man, is permitted to decide who she will marry. Both potential spouses—male and female—can ask the advice of their families, guardians, and friends. Some might, then, decide not to marry because of their family’s oppositions. However, the Quran is clear: the decision to marry should be undertaken freely and of one’s own accord.

In the Quran, married couples enjoy a God-given tranquility, relating to one another in affection and mercy (Quran 30:21). But such love-drenched tranquility could scarcely attain if the relationship were to exclude the will of the wife while recognizing only the will of the husband.

Of course, tranquility, affection, and mercy may disappear even in the best of marriages, so husband and wife may decide to separate. Although the continuation of the marriage is the Quranic ideal, the Quran does not prohibit divorce. Sadly, while “Islamic” divorce proceedings in many Muslim majority countries allow a husband to divorce his wife with a simple statement, a woman wishing to divorce her husband must obtain her husband’s approval for divorce (*khul*).<sup>139</sup> In this system, a woman will face great difficulties in gaining her husband’s approval, and most of the time, she will have to forfeit great amounts of money and property to purchase her freedom. In these sorts of situations, the husband has the right to reject the amount offered and to request a much higher payment. If the woman cannot convince her husband to divorce through “*khul*,” then the case ends up in a tribunal (usually of men), which she has to convince of her grievances. This can take

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<sup>139</sup> *Khul/Muhalea*; While the literal meaning of the word *khul* is to “remove a dress, undress; separate,” within the context of canonical jurisprudence it is used to describe the way a woman ends her matrimonial ties by paying her husband a certain amount to convince him to grant the divorce. Since it requires a mutual agreement, this process is called *muhalea*. See Fahrettin Atar, “Muhalea,” *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, XXX, 399.

years; during this time, the wife is often forced to live a miserable life.

Although the Quran does not grant the right to divorce only to husbands, some Muslims nonetheless claim that women have no right to divorce. Let us remember once again that everything that is not forbidden in the Quran is permitted. So since the Quran does not forbid women from divorcing their husbands, women are permitted to do so. That is, women have the right to divorce their husbands.<sup>140</sup>

### The Bridal Gift (*Mahr*)

While a bridal gift (*mahr*) is required of all Islamic marriages, a dowry is not. Payments are made to the bride from the groom. The bridal gift (*mahr*) is a form of wealth-creation for the bride, establishing the woman's financial independence. If the husband were to divorce the wife, she would be able to keep her bridal gift (*mahr*).

During a great part of history, many women who wish to divorce because of mistreatment or incompatibility continue with their marriages for fear of being impoverished. To save women from the devastating consequences of impoverishment, the Quran introduced a bridal-gift system in which the husband pays a bridal gift (*mahr*) to his future wife upon marriage; the woman, then, and can do whatever she wishes with her bridal gift (*mahr*). The bridal gift (*mahr*) strengthens the economic condition of women, preventing financial oppression within marriage and impoverishment upon divorce. There are lots of advantages for the women if a good amount of *mahr* is given to her by the marriage contract. For example, Salma Khalil from Jordan did not want to ask for a high amount of *mahr* before the wedding. She really loved her fiance Ahmad and did not think at all that someday they may want to get a divorce. But her grandmother insisted on a three-bedroom apartment for a *mahr* for her granddaughter since the

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<sup>140</sup> Some use the expression “the man in whose hand is the marriage contract foregoes it” in the following verse to prove that only men have the right to divorce:

If you divorce them before having sexual intercourse with them, but you have already agreed to the bridal gift (*mahr*), give them half of what you specified unless they forego the right or the man in whose hand is the marriage contract foregoes it. But to forego is nearer to piety. And do not forget generosity between one another. God is seeing everything you do. (Quran 2:237)

However, this verse is not about the right to divorce but the payment of the bridal gift (*mahr*), which a future husband pays to his future wife. The verse says that if a couple divorces before the consummation of the marriage, half the agreed bridal gift (*mahr*) must be paid to the woman. Moreover, the woman has the freedom to forego this amount if she wishes. Since the discussion here is the bridal gift (*mahr*) paid by the man, then “the man in whose hand is the marriage contract” should be interpreted as the man in whose hand the “bridal gift” (*mahr*) is not the right to divorce, which is not mentioned in the verse at all.

husband to be had enough resources. Salma felt very ashamed as she remembers now. Talking about financial matters before the wedding was very inappropriate for her. But the grandmother insisted. Because she was the oldest person in the family, no one wanted to upset her and, a three-bedroom apartment was set as a *mahr* for Salma. Years later, after they had two children, Salma and Ahmad decided to get a divorce. Through the divorce process, which was very tough, Salma understood the value of her three-bedroom apartment she got as a *mahr* with the insistence of an old experienced woman: her grandmother.

The Quran commands a bridal gift (*mahr*):

And give the women [upon marriage] their [bridal] gifts (*mahr*) graciously. But if they give up willingly to you anything of it, then take it in satisfaction and ease (Quran 4:4).

Determining the amount of the bridal gift (*mahr*) is central to a marriage's reciprocal agreement. Since the Quran does not specify the contents of the bridal gift (*mahr*) or its material value, it may consist of a modest present like a ring, or something extremely valuable, like an apartment. If an agreement cannot be reached, the marriage contract may be stalemated.

Since marrying couples are not thinking about divorce, they often ignore the future financial ramifications of it. And also, in many societies talking about money is considered indecent before marriage. In general, the husband who holds all the financial power gains an advantage from such ignorance and propriety. And women with little financial power may find themselves disadvantaged at the outset. By introducing the bridal gift (*mahr*) at the very start of a marriage, making it obligatory, and leaving decisions about its amount to the bride and the groom, the Quran aims at guaranteeing the financial wellbeing of the woman both during the marriage and after divorce.

Since it is paid directly to the women, Quranic bridal gift (*mahr*) practices confirm that women have the right to own and manage property. Since the bride, not her family, receives the bridal gift (*mahr*), she is fully in control of that which belongs to her.

### *Male Superiority*

Male superiority has been introduced into Islam with fabricated hadiths and misinterpretations of some Quranic verses. Quran 2.229 is a good example: "it is not lawful for them to conceal what Allah has created in their wombs." The verse goes on, stating that "husbands have a degree (*daraja*) over them..." While the text speaks of "former husbands," over the years,

“former husband” has been interpreted as “men” and “them” as women in general. The verse thus transmogrified into “men have rights/authority over women,” degenerating into a proof-text for the superiority of men over women. But one cannot understand the *daraja* over “them” without reading it in its context.

The complete verse is as follows:

Divorced women shall wait by themselves for three menstruation periods. And it is not lawful for them to conceal what God has created in their wombs if they believe in God and the Last Day. Meanwhile, their husbands (*buletu-hunne*) have the better right to take them back if they desire reconciliation. And women have rights similar to their obligations, according to what is fair. But men have a degree (*daraja*) over them. God is Mighty and Wise. (Quran 2:228)

When read in the context of the verses preceding and following the above verse, we see that the issue taken up is divorce. The word “*buletu-hunne*” makes this clear—it means “former husbands.” So the verse is not speaking of men in general but specifically of the former husbands of divorced women. Moreover, “them” repeatedly refers to recently divorced women who find themselves in the waiting period (*iddet*)—the period following a divorce in which a woman cannot marry. So rather than speaking of men and women in general, the text speaks very specifically and only of recently divorced husbands and their recently divorced wives (in the waiting period before they can lawfully remarry). Consequently, in context, the verse resists any general conclusions about the general and superior authority of men over women. Again, in context, the text speaks only of recently divorced women and their recently divorced husbands.

According to the Quran, women must wait for three menstruation cycles for the divorce to be finalized<sup>141</sup> (Quran 33:49). After this period, if a woman is not pregnant, the marriage is over. If the recently divorced woman were indeed pregnant, she must wait until the birth of the baby to finalize the marriage (Quran 65:4). A divorced woman cannot marry another man during her waiting period (*iddet*); at the end of this period, she is free to marry if she so wishes. This practice prevents confusions on child’s paternity.

While a recently divorced woman cannot marry another man during the waiting period, she *can* marry her former husband. This permission grants a “priority” (*daraja*) to the divorced husband with respect to marrying his former wife; he is granted a priority, not over his former

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<sup>141</sup> In cases when there has been no sexual intercourse between the couples during the marriage, women do not have to wait at all.

wife, but he has a priority over other men. The text is stating the Quran's preference of the biological father to raise his child within the context of a two-parent marriage. Why might recently divorced husbands have a right over other men to their former wives? This right encourages both husband and wife to give their marriage another chance. But granting a marital priority to the former husband to remarry his wife (assuming both concur) does not support the superiority of men over women in general. Indeed, the verse is simply reaffirming the sanctity of marriage, especially when children are involved. It is better; the Quran is saying if both biological parents raise children within the context of a tranquil marriage.

### *Husband as Guardian*

Certain expressions in the 4:34 of the Quran are important for understanding claims concerning relations between husband and wife.

Men are the protectors and maintainers (*qawwamune*) of women, as God has given some of them an advantage (*faddala*) over others, (*ala badin*) because they spend out of their wealth abundantly. The good women are obedient, guarding what God would have them guard. As for those from whom you suffer from discord, advise them, abandon them in their beds, and separate them; if they obey you sincerely, seek no way against them. God is sublime, Great. (Quran 4:34)

Some claim that *qawwam* means men's superiority over women, translating the text in a way that indicates a hierarchical relation between husband and wife. For example, Mohammed Ali from Syria says, "It is not permissible for a wife to disobey her husband's orders. She has to obey him and execute his orders and has to prepare food for him. Noor Mohammed from Jordan says, "The wife must obey her husband. A virtuous woman is a woman who pleases her husband, obeys him when he gives orders. Mohammed Al-Kaneeny says, " In Islam, if a woman does not obey her husband, she is called rebellious. If her mistreatment is proved, she can get a divorce by giving up all her rights".

People like Mohammed Ali, Noor Mohammed, and Mohammed Al-Kaneeny, and many more think that men are in a superior position of authority over women because God has advantaged them and disadvantaged women in Muslim majority countries. They believe that these advantages, built into the nature of each man and each woman, give men the right to control and demand obedience from their wives. And, if the woman should not obey, the Quran requires the man to beat (strike, scourge, etc.) the woman until they submit, as they should, to the superior man.

The biased translations provide constant reminders that all translations are interpretations, often reflecting the prejudices of their (male) translators. A more careful analysis of the Arabic, within the context of the entire Quran, would preclude such tendentious and women-harming interpretations. Let us take our analysis term by term.

While *qawwam* derives from the root *qaim*, which means “to stand,” it is also used in a financial sense. For example, 4:5 of the Quran states:

Do not give the immature your money which God has entrusted to you for support (*qiyamen*). But provide for them from it, and clothe them, and speak to them with kind words. (Quran 4:5)

Quran 4:5 says that God has handed the financial responsibility of the immature over to certain responsible people who support (*qiyamen*) and provide for them. The point seems to be that since the immature are incapable of handling their own money, God assigns some people to care for them financially.

A financial understanding of *qiyamen* in 4:34 is required because we read, God demands that men abundantly spend out of their wealth. So, in 4:34, *qawwamüine* is best understood as “supporting financially, guarding financially”—men, who have the means, should financially support their wives. In context, it simply does not mean the men are in charge of women, are by nature better than women, or excel women. It does seem to affirm that during the Prophet’s time, men were considerably more economically advantaged than women.

Muhammed Asad, a prominent 20<sup>th</sup>-century Muslim theologian, also interprets *qawwamüine* in 4:34 in a financial sense; it does not support the hierarchical superiority of men over women. Also, Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), who is a very well known Egyptian author, educator, and Islamic theorist, confirms that this verse should be read in the light of the conjugal institution and affirms that it refers to financial responsibility. Mohammad Abduh says that the *qawwamüine* accorded to the husband is not because he is a man; rather, it is based on his ability to manage financial resources of the household, for its maintenance.<sup>142</sup> Al-Tabari (839-923), an early Islamic historian and Quran interpreter, also reads the verse as referring to men’s financial duties vis-à-vis women and not to their ontological status as males.<sup>143</sup> Interpreting *qawwamüine* as “men’s superiority” or “head of the family” ignores the context of the term entirely. It is saying this: in the male-dominated culture of the day, one which economically favored men over women, men should financially support women.

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<sup>142</sup> Asma Lamrabet, *Women and Men in the Quran*, trans: Muneera Salem-Murdock, Palgrave Macmillan, Switzerland, 2018, p.125.

<sup>143</sup> Asma Barlas, *The Believing Women in Islam*, p.187.

Such expressions point to social and economic realities more than asserting commands or prohibitions. If men are economically advantaged, which they were then and often are today, they are economically responsible for sharing their wealth with their family. But if the economic needs of a family can be satisfied by a woman but not by a man, then the woman will be *qawwam* in that family. And if both the woman and the man can satisfy these economic needs, both will be *qawwam*. Since the verse assigns *qawwam* to those in certain financial conditions, whoever satisfies those conditions will be *qawwam*. Whomever God has granted financial advantage over others is *qawwam* and must generously share their wealth with their family.

### *Obedience*

According to the Quran, obedience to God is our highest good. The Quran requires obedience to God and God alone. Throughout the Quran, *qanete* means “obedience,” “submission,” or “devotion” to God:

Guard your prayers, and the middle prayer, and stand before God in devotion (*qanite*). (Quran 2:238)

They are the patient, and the truthful, and the reverent (*qanite*), and the charitable, and the seekers of forgiveness at dawn. (Quran 3:17)

Abraham was indeed an exemplary vanguard in his submission (*qanite*) to God, a monotheist who never worshiped idols. (Quran 16:120)

And Mary, the daughter of Imran, who guarded her womb, and so We breathed into her of Our Spirit, and she believed in the truth of her Lord’s Words and his Books and was one of the devout (*qanite*). (Quran 66:12)

Muslim men and Muslim women, believing men and believing women, obedient men and obedient women (*qanitati*), truthful men and truthful women, patient men and patient women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, fasting men and fasting women, men who guard their chastity, women who guard their chastity, men who remember God frequently and women who remember God frequently- God has prepared for them a pardon and an immense reward. (Quran 33:35)

*Qanite/qaniten/qanitati* describes people who obey God, are devoted to God, remember God, submit to God, and stand before and with God.

However, some claim that *qanitatun* in 4:34 requires women to obey their husbands based on this portion of the text:

The good (*salihatu*) women are obedient (*qanitatun*), guarding what God would have them, guard.



But the word *Qanitatun*<sup>144</sup>, which derives from the root *qanete*, means “to submit,” “to obey,” expressing a strong and sincere loyalty and obedience. The verse says, “good (*salihatu*) women are *qanitatun*.” The important question then is: Does the good woman obey her husband or God?

Again, taking the Quran as a whole, *obedience to God*, not one’s husband, makes a woman good. As such, *qanitat* in 4:34 must mean obedience *to God* (not to a husband). After all, unlike God, a husband might demand inappropriate behavior; sheer obedience to such a husband would not make a woman good. So the good woman of 4:34 is faithfully obedient to God, guarding, as the verse says, what God demands of her.

### *Wife-Beating*

In the preceding two chapters, we focused on the first half of 4:34. The interpretation of the second half of the verse is likewise historically problematic.

Domestic violence is surprisingly common in all around the world; be it a Western country or a Muslim majority one. Statistics show that 1 in 3 women experience some form of physical violence by an intimate partner.<sup>145</sup> But there is a difference in understanding between the cultures on domestic violence. In Western culture, it can never be argued that it is a right given to men against women. When men beat up their wives, it is something to be criticized because it is wrong. But in Islamic culture, by misinterpreting a Quranic verse, men generally agree that God has given them the right to beat their wives to discipline them. What is worse, this belief is commonly acknowledged among women as well. Sabiya Farhan from Syria says that the man has to beat his wife if she is mistaken or if she rejects sleeping with him to discipline her. But she emphasizes that the beating must be soft, nothing like torture. Zahra El Houssine from Morocco says, of course, a man can beat his wife if she does anything wrong like not pleasing God or him because the wife has to obey her husband. Noor Mohammed from Jordan adds, “In Islam, there are steps that a husband

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<sup>144</sup> If we interpret “*qanitat*” as obedience “to husband,” then how shall we interpret 33:35, which mentions not just “obedient women” (*qanitati*) but also “obedient men” (*qanitine*). If we were to interpret this obedience as the one owed by one gender to the other, then would not the “obedient men” mentioned in 33:35 also refer to the obedience owed by men to their wives? No theologian has attributed this erroneous meaning to that word, but part of the same theologians claimed that what was meant in 4:34 was the “obedience owed by a woman to her husband.” We once more witness the effect of the gender of theologians and of canonical law and hadith experts that happen to be all men.

<sup>145</sup> National Statistics, [ncadv.org/statistics](http://ncadv.org/statistics).

can follow to punish his wife. For example, he forsakes her in the bed, which means sleeping beside her but not talk to her or not having sex with her. If his wife still persists and does not obey him, he can use the last solution, which is a non-intense beating. Since Islam is the only religion that guards women's rights, it considers the beating solution as the most aggressive way in case it is needed."

Because of a mistranslation of a verse, there is a general tendency of seeing wife-beating as a Quranic right given to men as below:

But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance - [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them.

Many claim that this verse permits husbands to beat their wives. We, however, would translate the passage, in fidelity to the Arabic as:

As for those from whom you suffer of discord/separation (*nushuze-hunne*), advise them, abandon them in their beds, and separate (*vadribu-hunne*) them; if they obey you, seek no way against them.

The debate over the permission to beat one's wife concerns just two words: *nushuz* and *daraba*. Let's focus on *nushuz* first.

While we translated *nushuz* as "discord/separation," it is generally understood as a kind of disobedience or disloyalty. So, if one's wife is disobedient or disloyal, according to this general understanding, he can beat her. Is such a translation faithful to the entire scope of the Quran?

We see *nushuz* used for men in the same surah, 4:128:

If a woman fears discord/separation (*nushuzen*) or estrangement from her husband, then there is no sin for them to reconcile between themselves, and reconciling is good. Souls are prone to jealousy and selfishness, yet if you do what is good, and beware, God is Cognizant of what you do. (Quran 4:128)

Suppose *nushuz* does mean "disloyalty," as claimed by many interpreters. According to Quran 4: 3, a woman or a disloyal man (that is, is an adulterer or adulteress) cannot get married and, if married, must be divorced by her/his spouse. But Quran 4:128 commends reconciliation, not divorce. Indeed, none of the Quranic references to *nushuz* mentions divorce. We can safely conclude, then, that in 4:128, as in the rest of the Quran, *nushuz* does not mean disloyalty.

Moreover, *nushuz* can also mean "stand up" as in 58:11:

O you who believe! When you are told to make room (*enshuzu*) in your gatherings, make room (*enshuzu*); God will make room for you. And when you are told to disperse, disperse so that God elevates those among you who believe, and those given knowledge. God is fully aware of all that you

do. (Quran 58:11)

The Prophet's friends are told to "make room," in other words, to "stand up (*nushuz*) and change place." So, taking the Quran as a whole, the word *nushuz* means both "standing up to change place" and "discord."

Therefore, in the context of Quran 4:128, *nushuz* likely means something like "changing marital status" (where discord has caused one spouse to "stand up and move"). So, 4:128 is saying that when a spouse fears the other's discord/separation, both should work towards reconciliation, working together for the peace that keeps marriages together and flourishing.

Let us now return to Quran 4:34:

As for those from whom you suffer of discord/separation (*nushuze-hunne*), advise them, abandon them in their beds, and separate (*va-dribu-hunne*) them; if they obey you, seek no way against them.

Following the general impetus of the Quran, we take *nushuz* to mean, as seen in the above verses, discord/separation (not, as often construed as disloyalty or disagreement). Moreover, in the text, there is no gradual escalation of steps from admonishment to separation of beds to beatings (which you find in many translations). Moreover, following the impetus of the Quran, we read this passage in the context of reconciliation, not punishment, of working together for the peace that keeps marriages together and flourishing. Indeed, the following verse (4:35) recommends additional solutions for the discord: arbiters, representing the husband and wife, can help them to reconcile. Taken together, Quran 4:34-35 offer a set of recommendations for achieving marital reconciliation. Each person is free to choose what they believe will work best since in the verse, there is no gradual succession in the options, and spouses can follow any of the alternatives in a very flexible way.

The most controversial term of this verse, of course, is *daraba*, which has been widely translated as "beating." However, "separating spaces" is a much more faithful translation. *Daraba*, as you might expect, has several meanings in Arabic, ranging from "leaving a place and embarking on a trip" to "beating." Its more than fifty occurrences in the Quran reflect these very different meanings.

In most languages, a word can have different meanings. For example, the word "nail" in English can mean both the hard part on the tip your fingers and sharp metal pieces used in construction and, idiomatically, the recipient of harsh criticism ("we nailed him to the wall"). We can understand the meanings of such ambiguous words only by looking at the immediate context in which they are used. If the immediate context fails to clarify the meanings, the next

step is to look at the overall context—the text in its entirety—and then decide on the most appropriate meaning. Let us now apply this method to *daraba* in the 4:34.

Let us suppose that the immediate context—which speaks so clearly of reconciliation and justice—is ambiguous. This is a big claim. It is hard to imagine how beating one’s wife, in an already troubled marriage, could possibly conduce to reconciliation. While such punishments may cause the wife to fear leaving her husband, they scarcely conduce to the marriage described in the Quran as giving tranquility, relating to one another in affection and mercy (Quran 30:21).

Let us turn, then, to other passages in the Quran in which *daraba* or its variants occur. In Quran 37:93, *daraba* clearly means “to strike”:

Then he turned on them, striking (*darben*) with his right hand.

It frequently means “giving an example:”

God does not shy away from giving an example (*yadribe*) of a mosquito or anything above it... (Quran 2:26).

*Daraba* also means “withhold” or “keeping away:”

Shall We keep away (*nadribu*) the reminder from you, because you are a transgressing people? (Quran 43:5).

And *daraba* frequently means “leaving a place, embarking on a trip, moving away”:

When you travel (*darabtum*) in the land, there is no blame on you for shortening the prayers, if you fear that the disbelievers may harm you. The disbelievers are your manifest enemies. (Quran 4:101)

In summary, *daraba* in the Quran can mean both “striking/beating” and “distancing the spaces between.” However, when *daraba* means “striking,” it never describes one person hitting another; indeed, the Quran forbids personal vengeance. Moreover, when one person hits another, different words are used: *wakazehu* for when Moses hit an enemy (Quran 28.15), and *sakkat* for Abraham’s wife hitting her face with her hand (Quran 51.29).

In addition, we read that Quran 24:6-9 does not permit husbands to physically abuse their wives even if they have caught them in the act of adultery. So, rather than thinking that 4:34 approves a husband’s beating his wife in a case of discord, we should think that it proposes

distancing the spaces between the couple before a divorce.<sup>146</sup> But, again, if one reads 4:35 immediately after 4:34, one will see clearly that the Quran endorses reconciliation over a divorce.

Since the Prophet himself is always our best example, we can look to his life as well for how to understand Quran 4:34. In Quran 33:28, God advised the Prophet to divorce his wives if they are pursuing “worldly lives and its vanities” (not beat them). The Quran advises more generally that Muslims should act praiseworthy (*maruf*), both in marriage and in divorce (Quran 65:2). So, rather than prescribing violent punishment of the wife in cases of marital discord, *daraba* should be interpreted as creating a distance between husband and wife (always with the hope of reconciliation).<sup>147</sup>

### *Sexual Slave*

As expected of hadiths constructed by men who assert that women’s obedience to their husbands is a religious obligation, we find hadiths constructed by men who assert women’s complete submission also on sexual matters. The following hadiths are attributed to the Prophet:

“The Messenger of God said: I swear to God that if a woman does not comply when a man calls her to his bed for sexual intercourse, God will make her suffer until the husband is satisfied.”<sup>148</sup>

Reported from Abu Hurairah:

“The Messenger of God said: If a man calls his wife to his bed, and she refuses, and he spends the night angry with her, the angels will curse her until morning.”<sup>149</sup>

And in some canonical jurisprudence texts “marriage” is defined in the following way:

“Marriage is an agreement reached between man and woman that enables man to benefit from woman.”<sup>150</sup>

People like Saeed, Amira, and Hussein. Saeed Aiad is an Egyptian who studies in Istanbul told us that he believes that women must be fully obedient towards their husband’s sexual desires because he knows a hadith that says, “All the angels will curse a woman if she does not satisfy her husband in bed”. Amira Al Mutairi from Kuwait confirms that there is a hadith which says

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<sup>146</sup> Kuran Arařtırmaları Grubu, *Uydurulan Din ve Kuran’daki Din*, p.247-248.

<sup>147</sup> Kuran Arařtırmaları Grubu, *Uydurulan Din ve Kuran’daki Din*, p.247.

<sup>148</sup> Muslim, “Nikah,” 121.

<sup>149</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, “Bedü’l-halk,” 7; Muslim, “Nikah,” 122; Abu Dawood, “Nikah,” 41.

<sup>150</sup> Mehmet Okuyan, *Kadına Yönelik Şiddete Kur’an’ın Bakışı*, p.110.

if a wife angers her husband, the angels keep cursing her until the morning. That is why all the wives should obey their husbands, satisfy them, and be obedient. Hussein Yassin from Syria also says that a wife's duty is to satisfy her husband; otherwise, he would have the right to satisfy his desires somewhere else.

Contrary to these statements in hadith literature and canonical jurisprudence, the Quran defines relations between spouses as mutually "giving tranquility to each other." Compare the tender and mutually affirming sentiments of the Quran with the vicious and male-centric sentiments of the above hadith:

From His signs is that He created for you mates out of your kind so that you may reside with them, and He placed between you affection and compassion. In that are signs for people who think! (Quran 30: 21)

Permitted for you is intercourse with your wives on the night of the fast. They are a garment for you, and you are a garment for them... (Quran 2:187)

Marital relationships, in the Quran, are marked by love, compassion, and mutual respect. The Quran elegantly describes, in the context of intercourse, each spouse welcoming and warming the other like a custom-made garment. Each satisfies the other—tranquility. The Quranic marriage ideal then is a mutually respectful, mutually loving, heaven-like tranquility.

The hadiths above, however, reek of punishment and power and coercion. Instead of the attractive power of compassion and respect of which the Quran speaks, the hadiths speak of compulsion and anger and (the man's) benefit. The hadiths elevate the man and the man's pleasure, all the while denigrating the woman and the woman's pleasure. Punishment is possible only for the woman, which God himself inflicts.

Such vicious hadiths are at the root of the hadith's deepest problems—they were constructed by selfish men who would debase our noble religion to satisfy their wishes and desires. The power of these vicious fabrications is increased by false attribution to the Prophet.

But Islam properly understood and fully informed by the Quran, does not view the wife solely as a means to her husbands' pleasure (under fear of punishment). The Quran, rather, sees marriage as a tranquil place for husband and wife alike, built upon mutual respect and compassion.

### *Paradise and Approval of Husband*

According to Islam, one must, first and foremost, submit to God and obey God's commandments. There is nothing more essential than this. Every Islamic denomination without exception approves of this fundamental belief. And the Quran is clear—gaining God's approval based on one's submission and obedience to God is the sole basis of securing one's place in Paradise. However, some hadiths claim that a woman will go to Heaven if she wins the approval of her husband. Consider the following hadiths:

“A woman who dies with the approval of her husband shall enter Paradise.”<sup>151</sup>

Conditioning a woman's entry into Paradise on her husband's approval, would mean the enslavement of women to their husbands. According to another hadith recounted by Ibn Abbas, the Prophet said,

“Shall I tell you the most precious luck a person can have: A good wife; when her husband looks at her, she makes him happy, when he orders something she obeys and when her husband goes away she keeps her virtue.”<sup>152</sup>

While having an obedient wife may be precious luck for a man, it can be vicious luck for a woman. Husbands can be difficult to please; some mistreat their wives. Such husbands may never be satisfied with their wives, no matter what they do. Conditioning a women's chances of going to Paradise on any husband's satisfaction is contrary to the Quran, reason, and human nature. The only good Muslim—male and female alike—is the one who pleases Allah:

O, men! We have created you all out of a male and a female and have made you into nations and tribes so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all aware. (Quran 49:13)

### *Child Marriage*

Every year 12 million girls marry before the age of 18 across the countries, and cultures which makes 1 in 5 girls marry underage in the World.<sup>153</sup> Although it is practiced around the World, Islamic provisions come forward when the issue is child marriage. In Nigeria, for example, even though it is banned, 17 % of the girls in the country and 48% of the girls in the Muslim

<sup>151</sup> Jami` at-Tirmidhi, “Rada’,” 10; Ibn Majah “Nikah,” 4.

<sup>152</sup> Abu Dawood, “Zekat,” 32.

<sup>153</sup> Child Marriage around the World, <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/where-does-it-happen/>.

dominated regions are married before the age of 15<sup>154</sup> which makes almost half of the girls. This approach is not widespread only among the Muslims in Nigeria. Nadima Hamoudi from Iraq claims that women can get married at the age of nine since the Prophet married Aisha when she was 9. Hassan Hamedy from Syria also confirms the Prophet Muhammed's marriage to Aisha when she was 9 and thus concludes that child marriage is permissible in Islam. Hassan Ali from Egypt complains from the Egyptian laws which forbid underage marriages because he says; Islam gives permission for early age marriages. Adapting laws other than the *sharia* law is blasphemy according to him and must be punished. Imama Zahid tells her story as a victim of underage marriage, "When my father passed away, I was young and my mother re-married. She was not getting on well with her new husband, thus forced me to marry when I was 12 to a 32 years old man. The first years were like a nightmare. But then I got children and got used to living with misery. I do not know what happiness is."

The claim that Islam permits the marriage of underage girls, as evidenced by the practice of the Prophet, is a widely held misconception. This view is based on fabricated, women-denigrating hadiths. For example, a hadith claims that the Prophet married Aisha when she was six and consummated the marriage when she was nine. The claim to underage marriage is also based on a misconception of the Quran. However, a careful and unprejudiced reading of these relevant verses will show that the Quran does not approve of child marriage; indeed, the Quran firmly opposes child marriage.

The proof-text for child marriage in the Quran is:

Test the orphans until they reach the age of marriage (*iza belagu en-nikaha*). If you find them to be mature enough (*rushden*), hand over their properties to them. And do not consume it extravagantly or hastily before they grow up. The wealthy guardian shall not charge any wage, but the poor guardian may charge equitably. When you give them their properties, you shall have witnesses. God suffices as Reckoner. (Quran 4:6)

This verse prudently instructs us not to give the properties of orphans to them until they reach the "age of marriage" (*iza belagu en-nikaha*), that is, until they are mature enough to dispose of their properties responsibly and have attained to mental maturity (*rushd*). The Quran sets a parameter –the "marriage age"—to prevent marrying before that age, to those who are not mature enough to dispose of the properties responsibly (let alone get married). Although the Quran does not mention the specific age for marriage, the occurrence of this

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<sup>154</sup> Nigeria: Child Brides Facing Death Sentences a Decade after Child Marriage Prohibited, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/mar/11/the-tragedy-of-nigerias-child-brides>.



expression is sufficient to warn against underage marriages. The term *rushd* (mental maturity) suggests another criterion that must be met before returning the property to orphans. So to responsibly care for their properties, orphans must reach both the “age of marriage” and “mental maturity.”

Since the institution of marriage also has a financial aspect, the bride-to-be must be mentally mature enough to determine the proper amount of her bridal gift (*mahr*). This is no small matter—she must be mentally mature enough to choose her husband freely, to determine what resources she might need to govern a home, and, if divorced, to calculate what she will require financially in the far off future. Such matters cannot be entrusted to someone who has not attained mental maturity. It is wrong, according to the Quran, to force someone who lacks mental maturity to discuss and decide on such matters. So the claim that Islam approves of child marriage is roundly rejected by 4:6 in the Quran. A child, who has neither reached the age of marriage nor attained mental maturity, can be forced into marriage only in clear violation of the Quran.

Attempts to legitimize marriage with underage girls have also been made possible by misinterpreting to the following verse:

As for those of your women (*nisa*) who have reached menopause, if you have any doubts, their waiting term shall be three months and also for those who do not menstruate (*lem yahidne*). As for those who are pregnant, their term shall be until they give birth. Whoever fears God- he will make things easy for him. (Quran 65:4)

Some translated the expression “who do not menstruate” (*lem yahidne*) in this verse as “who have not yet menstruated” thus claimed that this verse says that girls, who have not yet menstruated, can get married. Note well: the verse does include the term “yet.” In Arabic, “*lem ma*,” not “*lem*,” means “yet.” So “*lem yahidne*” means “who do not menstruate” means something like “women who do not menstruate as a general condition.” Such women should wait three months in cases of a divorce. Finally, *nisa* means “women”, not “young girls.” When the Arabic is clarified, the verse clearly addresses women who do not menstruate, *not* young girls who have not yet menstruated.

To be completely clear, the Quran permits marriage only for those who have both reached the age of marriage and attained mental maturity. Girls and boys who lack both attributes cannot get married.

So hadiths that claim that the Prophet married to Aisha when she was six also contradict this clear teaching of the Quran. Since the Prophet was both the preacher and

enforcer of the Quran, it is unthinkable that he would behave contrary to the Quran's orders.

Such a vile hadith likely arose from some man who had wanted to legitimize (by implicating the Prophet) his marriage to an underage girl.

The Quran rejects the underage marriage of girls. That's as clear as we can say it. According to the Quran, only those who have attained both the "age of marriage" and "mental maturity" can get married. Moreover, it claims that the Prophet married a six-year-old girl slander the Prophet. It is inconceivable that the Prophet, who enjoined people to live according to the Quran and who lived himself accordingly, should have acted so blatantly contrary to the Quran.

### *Polygamy*

When a Malaysian Muslim man who wanted to keep anonymous told us about his happy polygamous marriage, we decided to include him in our book to show that when applied justly, it can actually work. Because almost all the stories we heard had unhappiness in them. When he decides to get married to his second wife, he talks to his first wife, and with her approval, he gets married again. Now that he has two wives, three children, and two homes, he spends one night with one spouse and the one night with the other (never forgets the order), whatever he buys for one wife, he also buys for the other, in other words, he tries hard to be just as the Quran orders. But not all polygamous marriages are practiced like this.

There are many misconceptions about polygamy in Islam. These misconceptions are typically due to misunderstanding the differences between "commandments," "recommendations," "prohibitions," and "permissions." For example, ritual prayers are commandments of Islam and, as such, place a moral and religious demand on every Muslim. Giving alms in secrecy is a recommendation; it is encouraged but not required. Eating pork is a prohibition—no Muslim should eat pork. On the other hand, eating cheesecake or a lizard are not banned; thus, they are permitted; the decision to eat either one of them depends on the person's own choice. Polygamous marriage, in Islam, is permitted, as well; it is not commanded, and so it need not be practiced by every Muslim. It is not even recommended; people may or may not choose to practice it, just as they may or may not choose to eat cheesecake or lizards. And it is not prohibited; a Muslim man is allowed to marry more than one woman. So polygamous marriage is permitted in Islam. That means that it is entirely left to the discretion of the parties involved whether to practice it or not. Sadly, many who attack Islam based on polygamy assume and

even insist this practice is a commandment or recommendation of Islam. But it is not; it is merely permitted (again subject to wise judgment and special circumstances).

The Quran addresses issues that people face in very different ways at very different times and in very different cultures and social structures. 21<sup>st</sup>-century modern industrial society is very different from a 7<sup>th</sup>-century agricultural society. Times of war are very different from times of peace, times of plenty different from times of famine or drought. Etc, etc. So the Quran speaks very broadly and simply, leaving a great deal to each person to discern its application to his or her particular time, place, and circumstance.

Because the Quran aims to adapt to different times and environments, the number of prohibitions is very small. And everything not been banned by the Quran is permitted; if it is not prohibited, then it is permitted. For example, before eating cheesecake or lizard meat, a Muslim need not find a Quranic verse that states very clearly, “eating cheesecake and lizard meat are permitted;” if they are not prohibited, then they are permitted. Of course, we now know that eating too many sweets can be dangerous for human health; so, though, eating cheesecake is permitted, one might judge it imprudent for one to eat cheesecake. And many find eating lizards disgusting, so although eating lizard meat is permitted, they might avoid it. The fact that eating cheesecake or lizards is permitted by the Quran does not mean that people must or should eat them. They are neither commandments nor recommendations. As permissions, it is left to individuals to decide.

Similarly, according to the Quran, men are permitted to wear either a robe or a suit or a kimono or jeans or a kilt; since none of these is prohibited, they are all permitted. And even though wearing a kilt, kimono or jeans may be criticized in some cultures, violating cultural norms is not tantamount to being prohibited in the Quran. Where the Quran is “silent,” Muslims are free to act as they wish because the Quran has not prohibited them.

The same goes for polygamous marriage. Since it is not prohibited, polygamous marriage is permitted. And since it is not commanded, it is a personal choice. Being permitted, however, does not mean that something is commanded or favored or promoted.

We said that according to the Quran, polygamy is permissible because, in certain circumstances, polygamy can ensure the flourishing of needy women. For example, in societies with a dearth of males as a result of wars or other calamities, polygamy ensures the survival of those societies possible and prevents women from being destitute. Even in such cases, polygamy is neither a commandment nor a recommendation, but it is permitted and could be a good choice for the people involved. It is naïve and anachronistic to expect all

cultures at all times to be shaped according to the standards of the 21<sup>st</sup> century post-industrial societies. It is wrong to criticize Islamic permissions through the lens of this own particular culture and time frame.

Additionally, the Quran, by requiring justice and equality, makes entering into a polygamous marriage more difficult than entering into a monogamous marriage:

And if you have reason to fear that you might not act equitably towards orphans, then marry from among women such as are lawful to you - two, or three, or four: but if you have reason to fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness, then marry one - or those whom you rightfully possess. This will make it more likely that you will not deviate from the right course. (Quran 4:3)

This passage warns against the exploitation of orphans, in context, either women whose parents have died or widows. Given the verses preceding and following this verse, it warns against those who might wish to squander the property of orphans, since there is nobody who would safeguard them: it is wrong to marry orphans to exploit them for their property, which they have inherited either from their parents or late husbands<sup>155</sup>. So, if a man wishes to enter into a polygamous marriage to an orphan, he can neither loot their property nor treat them as a piece of property. He must esteem and treat them as he does (or should) his favorite wife. If he cannot treat them with equal respect and dignity, then he should stick with one wife.

It may, of course, be a great good for an impoverished orphan in a society with a dearth of economically advantaged males to enter into a polygamous marriage. It may be her only economic hope. But the Quran's strict rules, favoring as always justice and equality, would prevent the preying of opportunistic men upon such desperate women.

So, again, although polygamy is permitted in Islam, it is not promoted. Precautions and conditions for being just in polygamous marriages have been suggested to the Muslims.

The Quran defines marriage as an institution in which the couples share tranquility and compassion. They care for each other. They are each other's partner to share the difficulties and pleasures of this temporary world. But in fabricated Islam, marriage is described as an institution in which the women are the servants, even the slaves of men. They must live their lives only to please and satisfy their husbands so that with their husband's approval, they can enter into Heaven! This perspective contradicts the Quran in which the genders are treated equally, and marriage is a harmonious institution of equals.

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<sup>155</sup> In Arabic, the word "orphan" is not only used to describe those whose parents have died but is used for widows as well.

### *Female Genital Mutilation*

Female genital mutilation (FGM), sometimes called “female circumcision,” is widespread in Muslim-majority countries like Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. It is estimated that the numbers of circumcised women range between 100 to 200 million women globally. The operation, performed between the ages of infancy and adolescence, involves cutting a portion of the female sexual organ, usually the clitoris, with instruments like knives or razors. The larger the excision, the greater the chances of harm to the women. However, even the smallest excision can cause infections, chronic and lifelong pain, infertility, and even death. In addition to the physical damage, female circumcision also leads to grievous psychological problems. The World Health Organization (WHO) and many other health organizations have issued strong statements warning that this operation is harmful to women’s health.

It is widely believed that female genital mutilation is peculiar to Islam. Many people attack Islam through documentaries and social media for this supposedly “Islamic” practice. However, In Africa, the practice is not restricted to Muslim women; the practice has been, is being, inflicted on Christian girls and girls of many other faiths as well. And the practice predates both Christianity and Islam; the study of mummies has shown that this practice existed in ancient Egypt. Moreover, while 55% of Christian women in Niger have been circumcised, only 2% of Muslim women had undergone this surgery.<sup>156</sup> These facts accumulate to warn us against associating this practice with Islam alone. It derives not from the Quran but, rather, from the culture and traditions of these areas. And this vicious cultural practice has been incorporated into a wide variety of very different religions.

Since many people associate this vicious African cultural practice solely with Islam, and since it disproportionately harms Muslim women in our day, we will examine it from a Quranic perspective.

The foreign and harmful cultural practice of female genital mutilation found its way into some people’s understanding and practice of “Islam” through, as we have come to expect, fabricated hadiths. For example, one hadith has the Prophet speaking to Umm Athiya, who performed female circumcision in Medina; after stating that FGM is allowed, the Prophet advises:

“Do not cut too deep, because not cutting too deep will provide more pleasure for both the woman

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<sup>156</sup> Female Genital Mutilation, A Statistical Overview and Explorattion of the Dynamics od Change, [https://www.unicef.org/cbsc/files/UNICEF\\_FGM\\_report\\_July\\_2013\\_Hi\\_res.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/cbsc/files/UNICEF_FGM_report_July_2013_Hi_res.pdf).

and her husband.”<sup>157</sup>

As a result, some schools of Islamic thought treat the practice as obligatory and others as highly recommended. Following in the pleasure-denying mode of this hadith, Abdulhalim Hamid (d:1905), in *A Woman's Duties to Her Spouse According to Islam*, claims that the circumcision of a woman is an embellishment because the operation increases the beauty of her face and tames her instincts.<sup>158</sup>

Female genital mutilation is a vicious and harmful cultural practice that predates Islam. This Quranically-foreign cultural practice was incorporated into Islam through fabricated hadiths. It has no place in Islam properly understood.

### *Menstruation*

Rayan Mubarak from Sudan feels sad when she remembers the first time she had her period. As a kid, she used to spend time in the mosque with her family. Her grandmother used to go to the mosque frequently for the prayers, and Rayan loved accompanying her. When she was 13, she had her first period, which made her feel awkward because her mother told her that she had grown up when she learned about her period. She did not quite understand what that was supposed to mean. What was different from the day before, she could not figure out. The next day, she told her mother that she was going to the mosque with her grandmother as usual. But her mother told her that since she had her period, she was not allowed to enter the mosque or to hold the Quran until she was cleansed. She remembers that moment very clearly, the sadness she had, the disappointment she lived. She thought she was dirty, and there was no way she could be clean until the bleeding went away. She could not understand why God made her dirty, why God created her deficient.

Many Muslim thinkers and traditions claim that Islam forbids menstruating women from going to mosques, fasting, performing ritual prayers, or touching the Quran. Such restrictions are not to be found in the Quran. The sole prohibition in the Quran concerning menstruation is a ban on sexual intercourse during menstruation (a prohibition for both women and men):

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<sup>157</sup>Abu Dawood, “Edeb,” 179. Abu Dawood himself, after having recounted this hadith adds that its credibility is dubious. Everybody, who has somehow shown interest in the history and method of hadiths, knows that in *Risale ila ehli Mekke fi vasfi Sünenih* that he wrote to present his *Sünen*, Abu Dawood stated that whenever he could not find a credible hadith on a certain subject, he used hadiths of dubious credibility.

<sup>158</sup> Abdülhalim Hamid, *İslam'da Kadının Eşine Karşı Vazifeleri*, p.12.

And they ask you about menstruation: say, “It is painful, so keep away from women during menstruation. And do not approach them until they are cleansed. When they are cleansed, approach them in the way God has directed you. “God loves the repentant, and he loves those who keep clean. (Quran 2:222)

If God had commanded menstruating women not to touch the Quran, go to mosques, pray or fast, he would have declared this clearly (as he did with intercourse). Since the Quran does not prohibit the prayers and fasts of menstruating women, a Muslim cannot claim that they are forbidden. And whatever is not forbidden is permitted. So menstruating women are permitted to pray, fast, attend mosques and touch the Quran.

Consider ritual prayer—in which Muslims stop whatever they are doing, bow down, and turn their faces to God. For the Muslims, such ritual contact with God is so important that they cannot stop praying even in war or when traveling under the threat of bandits (they are, however, allowed to shorten prayers until the danger passes). So we read:

But if you are in danger, pray walking or riding, and when you are again secure, bear God in mind - since it is he who taught you what you did not previously know. (Quran 2:239)

When you travel in the land, there is no blame on you for shortening the prayers, if you fear that the disbelievers may harm you. The disbelievers are your manifest enemies. (Quran 4:101)

If prayer is so important that it cannot be suspended in such dangerous situations, women should not be denied ritual access to God just because of their normal, monthly blood flow.

It should be noted that the Quran does permit sick people to postpone their fasting until they feel better (Quran 2:185). So women who suffer during menstruation thereby are permitted by the Quran to fast when they are feeling better. That, of course, is their free choice.

But the Quran rejects any wholesale, ban on menstruating women going to mosques, reading the Quran, fasting and praying. According to Süleyman Ateş, former Chief of Religious Affairs in Turkey:

“Nobody can ban anything that is not banned by the Quran. Claims contradicting the Quran cannot be accepted as hadiths. Traditions regarding women in menstruation have been presented as Islam in the form of hadiths. If these claims had had a credible basis, the Quran would most certainly have had a statement concerning the fact that menstruating women could not carry out these rituals.

On the other hand, the Quran states that Muslims should not have sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman; why then it does not say that about a menstruating woman’s other religious obligations like she cannot pray, fast during this time? Or is it that, according to God, sexual relations are more important than prayers, fasting, or reading the Quran? We should relinquish

these kinds of views and practices contrary to the Quran and return to the Quran and practice what the Quran says.”<sup>159</sup>

Whatever is not forbidden is permitted. The Quran does not prohibit menstruating women from praying, fasting, or attending worship. So, according to Islam properly understood, menstruating women are permitted to pray, fast and attend worship—that is, Muslim women, like all believers, are enthusiastically granted shame-free access to God through prayers and fasting and worship.

### *Stoning Adulterers*

Adultery is forbidden for both man and woman. Stoning is the punishment, according to “Islamic” law. It is done by putting the adulterers in a hole in the ground and then throwing stones at their heads until they die. This is how Hassan Ali from Egypt describes how the punishment of stoning practiced. Sadly, this description is put into practice in Afghanistan. A 19 years-old woman, Rokshana, had been forced to marry against her will and fled with another man. The couple was caught two days later, and the Taliban leader of the village ordered that Rokshana be stoned to death for adultery. The sentence was executed by putting Rokshana in a hole into the ground, only her head poking above the surface. The men around her began to pick up rocks and hurl them at her from a close range. It was really unbearable to hear her cries in agony<sup>160</sup>. In July 2001, Maryam Ayoubi, aged 30, was reportedly stoned to death in Evin Prison in Tehran, Iran.<sup>161</sup>

The stoning to death of adulterers—men and women alike—is one of the most controversial issues concerning Islam. Although it is not a “woman only” issue, we have decided to include it in our book because of the criticisms it attracts.

According to the claims of canonical jurisprudence texts, stoning should be carried out with stones the size of chickpeas (which means that the person will be killed slowly after much suffering); a guilty woman should be half-buried during the stoning, while a man should be standing. But we are not here to praise hadiths or jurisprudence texts. We follow the Quran. So let’s immediately get to the point: the stoning to death of adulterers is not mentioned in the Quran; indeed, this practice contradicts the penalty described in the Quran

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<sup>159</sup> Süleyman Ateş, *Kur’an Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 8, p.17.

<sup>160</sup> Woman Stoned to Death in Afghanistan over Accusation of Adultery, <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/11/04/asia/afghanistan-taliban-woman-stoning/index.html>.

<sup>161</sup> Iran and Executions by Stoning, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/56000/mde130012008en.pdf>.



for adulterers. So, while nothing more needs to be said to a Muslim, we will continue for a bit longer.

Like every other religion, Islam forbids sexual relations between unmarried people. However, the penalty for adultery in the Quran is not stoning to death, but “a hundred lashes (*celde*)”:

The adulteress and the adulterer—whip each one of them a hundred lashes (*celdetin*), and let no pity towards them overcome you regarding God’s Law, if you believe in God and the Last Day. And let a group of believers witness their punishment. (Quran 24:2)

“*Celde*” refers to lashes that only hurt the surface of the skin, not dig deeper, thus avoiding damage to internal organs (which why “*celde*” is used instead of “*asa.*” “*minsee,*” which mean “stick” or “club”). And, since the verse requires a group of believers to witness the punishment, the aim of the punishment the infliction of bodily damage but rather to expose the shame of the sinner. Also, the verse warns the believers not to feel pity for the adulterers while lashing them.

In the Quran, the punishment of adultery requires the testimony of four eyewitnesses (Quran 24:4); a sentence of adultery cannot be granted with fewer than four witnesses. But securing four eyewitnesses to an adulterous act seems unlikely, especially when, according to the Quran, you cannot enter another person’s home without permission to enter (Quran 24:27-28). And adulterers do not typically permit visitors to enter their homes! So the Quran is saying that an act of adultery will be punished only when it is committed openly. On the very rare occasion when adultery is openly committed, the Quran requires an open punishment (with reeds, not stones).

Stoning to death was introduced into Islam through fabricated hadiths, notwithstanding a great deal of opposition. Consider just one fabricated hadith in which Aisha says:

“The verse of stoning was revealed, and it was written on a paper and kept under my bed. When the Messenger of God passed away, and we were preoccupied with his death, a goat entered and ate away the paper.”<sup>162</sup>

According to the hadith, a stoning verse had been revealed to the Prophet but had been eaten by a hungry goat, and so was lost (until “she” recalled it). Such a fanciful scenario flies in the face of the many faithful who had memorized the Quran before the Prophet’s death. Moreover, the goat story contradicts, for example, Quran 15:9, which promises that the

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<sup>162</sup>Ahmed b. Hanbel, *al-Musnad*, XLIII, 342; Ibn Majah, “Nikah,” 36.

Quran will be preserved. Finally, this fabrication asserts a commandment that contradicts commandments in the Quran. But the Quran will not be contradicted.

We conclude repeating our argument: the stoning to death of adulterers is not mentioned in the Quran; indeed, this practice contradicts the penalty described in the Quran for adulterers. Nothing more needs to be said to a Muslim.

### *Slavery and Sexuality*

When the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIS) ruled the owners of women slaves can have sex with them, they backed this *fatwa* with alleged hadiths referred to the Prophet Muhammed. Ashwaq Haji Hamid, a Yazidi girl, became a sex slave when she was only 14<sup>163</sup>, Nadia Murad, Nobel peace prize winner was sold in a sex-slave market<sup>164</sup>, another Yazidi girl who wanted to remain anonymous became pregnant after being raped as a sex-slave, and when she attempted to escape, she was captured and raped again by six men. After that, she was repeatedly sold and raped by groups of ISIS fighters. The more time she was sold, the more her monetary value declined. She was told over and over again that ISIS fighters were simply implementing the Prophet Muhammed's *sunnah* (law)<sup>165</sup>.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, when the Quran was being revealed, slavery was common in Mecca, Medina, and in many parts of the world. People were enslaved for many reasons, such as not being able to pay their debts or as a result of wars. But while slavery was common, enslaving free people was not permitted by the Quran, no matter what the reason was. And for those who were already enslaved, the Quran aimed to free them gradually. For example, the Quran prescribes atonements for many mistakes; one of the main ways to atone for a sin is to free a slave:

Never should a believer kill another believer, unless by accident. Anyone who kills a believer by accident must set free a believing slave, and pay compensation to the victim's family unless they remit it. If the victim belonged to a people who are hostile to you, but is a believer, then the compensation is to free a believing slave. If he belonged to a people with whom you have a treaty, then compensation should be handed over to his family, and a believing slave set free. Anyone who lacks the means must fast for two consecutive months, by way of repentance to God. God is All-Knowing, Most Wise. (Quran 4:92)

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<sup>163</sup> Former Yazidi Sex Slave Faints While Confronting Her ISIS Rapist on Iraqi TV,

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/former-yazidi-sex-slave-faints-while-confronting-her-is-rapist-on-iraqi-tv/>.

<sup>164</sup> I was an ISIS Sex Slave, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/oct/06/nadia-murad-isis-sex-slave-nobel-peace-prize>.

<sup>165</sup> The Sex Slave Trade of the Yazidi Women by ISIS, <https://www.insideover.com/women/the-sex-slave-trade-of-the-yazidi-women-by-isis.html>.

The Quran advises freeing slaves as atonement for accidental killings (4:92), estranging one's wife (58:3-4), and for not keeping an oath (5:89). If any new slaves were not taken (as ordered by the Quran), these atonement practices alone might have eliminated slavery completely.

But the Quran has additional commandments for freeing slaves in the Quran (9:60; 2:177 and 90:12-16). By offering the "freeing a slave" as an atonement for many wrong behaviors, by demanding the freeing of slaves under other conditions, and by not permitting taking new slaves by stating that Muslims should free the prisoners of war at the end of the war with or without a ransom, the Quran draws a road map for the Muslims to abolish slavery.

When you encounter those, who disbelieve, strike at their necks. Then, when you have routed them, bind the captives securely. Then either release them by grace, or by ransom when the war ends. Had God willed, He could have defeated them Himself, but He thus tests you by one another. As for those who are killed in the way of God, He will not let their deeds go to waste. (Quran 47:4)

If the Quran's commandments and recommendations of freeing the slaves after the battles and as acts of charity and atonement had been followed, slavery as an institution would have been banished from Islamic societies no later than the first centuries of Islam. Sadly and in violation of the Quran, they did not. Since some Muslims considered slavery legitimate, it persisted in the Islamic world.

Female slaves turned into concubines, became sex-slaves under the so-called "Islamic Law." Yet the Quran forbids sexual intercourse outside of marriage (and offers no alternative, such as "sexual intercourse without marriage"). In cases where men cannot marry free women due to a lack of funds, the Quran advises them to *marry* believing slaves.

Whoever of you cannot afford to marry free believing women; he may marry one of the believing maids whom you rightfully possess. God is well aware of your faith. You are from one another. Marry them, then, with their guardian's leave, and give them their bridal gift (*mahr*) properly- they being virtuous women who are not in fornication, and secret love affairs. And when they are married, and later become guilty of immoral conduct, they shall be liable to half the penalty to which free married women are liable... (Quran 4:25)

So while they may marry believing slaves, they are not permitted to have intercourse with them without marrying them.

And marry the singles among you and those among your servants and maids. If they are poor, God will enrich them from His bounty. God is All-Encompassing, All-Knowing. (Quran 24:32)

And also, we read from the above verse that for those who are not free, be they slaves or prisoners of war, marriage is required for sexual intercourse.

Though the Quran forbids it, 4:3 of the Quran has been distorted to justify intercourse with unmarried concubines:

And if you have reason to fear that you might not act equitably towards orphans, then marry from among women such as are lawful to you - two, or three, or four: but if you have reason to fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness, then marry one - or those whom you rightfully possess. This will make it more likely that you will not deviate from the right course. (Quran 4:3)

Our reading, based on the Arabic and the rest of the Quran, holds that those who cannot be equally fair towards all his wives should marry one or marry one of the women “they rightfully possess,” that is, a female slave. In many translations, we read that such a man should “...marry one or be content with those you rightfully possess.” Yet “be content with” is not in the original Arabic, and such translations ignore the unmentioned verb, “to marry.” Canonical jurisprudence professor Dr. Abdülaziz Bayındır explains as follows:

According to Arabic grammar rules, the hidden verb of the sentence is “to get married,” which is in the first sentence of the verse. Two words attached with the conjunction “or” cannot have two separate verbs. But some scholars have added the verb “to be content” to the second word and distorted the structure of the sentence. This is nothing but distorting the meaning of the verse. It is impossible to attribute this meaning to this verse because the expression “*ma meleket eymanu-kum*” (whom you rightfully possess) follows the verb “*wahideten*” (marry), thus requiring marriage with the enslaved women also.”<sup>166</sup>

The text in Arabic, is clear: those who cannot care for more than one wife are permitted to marry either a woman or one of their believing slaves. This text does not permit men to have sex outside of the sanctified context of marriage, even with a slave or concubine.

By encouraging the freeing of slaves as atonement for various sins and forbidding the collection of new slaves, the Quran clearly aims at freeing all non-free people. The Quran rejects the enslavement of people—at the end of a war, prisoners should be freed either in exchange for ransom or no ransom whatsoever. And again, according to the Quran, one can have sexual intercourse with women slaves or prisoners only by marrying them, and one must not have sexual intercourse with them without their consent; female war prisoners cannot be turned into concubines and sexual slaves.

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<sup>166</sup>Abdulaziz Bayındır, “Savaş Esirleri ve Cariyelik,” *Kitap ve Hikmet*, Number: 11, 1-11.

### *Virgins in Paradise*

It is believed that in the afterlife, if a Muslim man goes to heaven, he will be rewarded with beautiful virgins; *houries*, as sexual partners. *Houries* are one of the main objectives for Muslim men to strive for paradise; to have 72 beautiful women who are virgins and stay virgins all the time. This belief is so strong that even some male suicide bombers who hope to go to heaven (because they are martyrs) blow themselves up with a dream of having sexual intercourse with 72 virgins waiting for them in the gardens of Paradise. In an Al Qaeda manual found in Mohammad Atta's suitcase, who is one of the *jihadists* who blew up the World Trade Center in 9/11, it was written that his heavenly brides (*houries*) were waiting for him in Paradise.<sup>167</sup>

Well, does the Quran state anything about sexuality in Paradise and whether or not there will be sexuality or about "*houris*" being a sexual reward for men? The clear answer to these questions is "No." The Quran does not speak either of sex or virgins (*houris*) awaiting men in the afterlife. It is possible that we will have sexuality in paradise since verses in the Quran state that all desires will be satisfied once we are there (41: 31 and 43:71). However, given that people will be recreated in the afterlife (46:61), it is also possible that we will no longer have sexual desires. We only know this: in the afterlife, all of our desires will be met.

The Quran also says that in the afterlife, there will be more blessings than in this world (76:20) but that no one can know the exact nature of those blessings. So those blessings must be narrated by "comparisons" (*teşbih*) (3:7), indirect hints of what the afterlife might be like in terms that finite humans can understand. But we should not take those comparisons literally.

As for the "*houris*," they are believed to be rewards, sexual partners for men in Paradise. Yet the word "*houris*" is neither feminine nor masculine; it is gender-free. According to the Quran, *houris* will be coupled (*zevvecnahum*) with people in Paradise (44:54, 52:20). But there is no reference to sexual coupling. Indeed, the same word (*zevc*) is also used for the coupling of souls (81:7) and for gathering people in groups in the afterlife (56:7); "*zevc*" in those verses is not associated with sex. Why insist then that the "*houris*" mentioned in the Quran are "sexual partners" for men while they could also very well be the friends, servants, or guides of all the people in Paradise since the word is neither a feminine word nor bears any sexuality. Besides, if God had wanted, he could have used words like "*lamese*" which has sexual meaning to describe the relations with "*houris*." Considering

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<sup>167</sup> Kanan Makiya, Hassan Mneimneh, Manual for Raid, New York Review of Books, January 17, 2002, p.1-13.

that there is no such clear statement, we should reject the belief that Paradise is a sexual haven for men which is in total contradiction with the spirit of the verses of the Quran stating that in the afterlife everybody in Paradise (not just women or just men) will be compensated for their acts. The best stand in terms of the word “*hourī*” would be to say that their functions have not been described in detail in the Quran and answer the question “what is their function” with “we do not know.”

It is believed that in the Quran, there is a reference to “virginity” and thus to sexuality in Paradise. Three verses have been quoted to confirm this: 55:56, 74, and 56: 36. In the 56<sup>th</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> verses, it is said that in the gardens of Paradise, there are mates to whom neither a man nor an invisible being has ever touched. However, nowhere else in the Quran has the expression “*yatmishunne*” in the verse, which means “contact, touching,” been used for sexual intercourse. To express sexual intercourse, words like “*lamese*” (5:6), “*eta*” (2: 222), “*messe*” (2:236, 237), “*başera*” (2:187) are used in the Quran. This being the case, would not it be better to interpret the 56<sup>th</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> verses as “not owned by anyone else or untouched” with no reference to sexuality since there is nothing openly expressing “virginity”?

And for 56:36, although it has been translated as “...having resurrected them (*houris*) as virgins”, “*hourī*” is not in the original Arabic. 56:34 talks about “high raised couches” in Paradise, and 35 tells that “We have created them a new creation.” We differ in the interpretation of the 36th verse with most of the interpreters. According to Arabic, as in English, some nouns are referred to as “she.” Thus, we believe that the word “*ekbar*” in verse 36 refers to the “couches” in verse 34 rather than “*houris*,” which, again, is not in the Arabic text. So instead of concluding that “*hours* have been resurrected as virgins” in Heaven, we believe that translating the 36<sup>th</sup> verse as “they (couches) have not been used before” is a more reasonable translation.

The Quran’s comparison of the “*houris*” to “pearls” in 56:23 has been interpreted with sexual connotation as well. But in the Quran, children in the afterlife (*vildan*) have also been compared to pearls (76:19). Presumably, there is no-one who would interpret child-pearl comparison with sexuality. Similarly, the word “*gilman*” in 52:24, which is used for “youngsters,” has been compared to “pearls,” but this also has not been interpreted with sexuality. This being the situation, how can we state that the word “*hourī*” implies sexuality? (The “ruby” and “coral” comparisons in 55:58 should also be evaluated within this framework.)

The word “*kevaibe etraben*” in 78:33 is another term that has been misinterpreted with a sexual connotation. That verse is usually translated as “And full-breasted (*kevaibe*) maidens of equal age (*etraben*).” First, let us state that the usage of the words “*kevaibe*” and “*etrab*” are the same for both masculine and feminine forms; in other words, these words cannot express femininity. The word “*etraben*” means “well-matched, suitable, of the same age.” On the other hand, one of the meanings of the word “*kevaibe*” is “roundish.” These two words have been translated mostly as “full-breasted” with additions to the verse words like “maidens” and “breasts.” But without those additions, it would be more appropriate; to interpret the 33<sup>rd</sup> verse with reference to the grapes in the previous verse (32<sup>nd</sup> verse) rather than to maidens, which are not even mentioned in the verse. So the right interpretation would be it is “the grapes that are round (*kevaib*) and well-matched (*etraben*)”<sup>168</sup>

In summary, not only does the Quran not provide any explicit statement on whether or not there is sexual life in the afterlife, there also is no clear statement on whether or not “*houris*” are the sexual partners of men. Words like “*houris, kevaib, etrab,*” which are mentioned in the relevant verses and which are generally interpreted with sexual references, are used for both feminine and masculine forms; thus, there is no reason to perceive them as prizes reserved for men only. Fabricated hadiths have played a great role in the shaping of the “*houris*” perception, which has no basis in the Quran, together with the male-centered interpretations. It is clear that when those wishing to provide an androcentric structure for both this world and the Hereafter could not find what they were looking for in the Quran tried to shape this perception using fabricated hadiths and misinterpretations of the verses.

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<sup>168</sup> Unpublished Quran exegesis notes of Prof. Mehmet Okuyan.

## Chapter 6

### Socio-Economic Issues

In 632, the revelation of the Quran ended with the death of the Prophet. The socio-economic reforms the Quran introduced were revolutionary, especially for women who, until that date, were typically believed to hold a status lower than men. Women were considered equal to men, could own property, could marry and divorce, and could work where they pleased (alongside men). Sadly, after the death of the Prophet, the rights and freedoms given to women began to deteriorate, and women ended up in a worse situation than before because of the revival of the old traditions and newly introduced misogynistic practices. Muslim women were again forced to live invisible lives within their homes, with no right to property, education, inheritance, etc. But to see what Islam promises for women, the Quran must be read carefully and unbiased.

#### *Isolation*

In Quran 3:195, God commends both males and females who migrated to Medina and were persecuted for their religious beliefs. Muslim women, who endured the same hardships as men, were not required to seek permission from their husbands before fighting for God. All believers—men and women alike—were praised for their courageous behaviors:

And so their Lord answered them: “I will not waste the work of any worker among you, whether male or female. You are one of another. For those who migrated, and were expelled from their homes, were persecuted because of Me, and fought and were killed- I will remit for them their sins and will admit them into gardens beneath which rivers flow- a reward from God. With God is the ultimate reward.”

God Himself commends the labors “of *any* worker among you, *whether male or female.*” God likewise rewards anyone, male or female, who courageously fought and died on the side of God. There is no mention of anyone—male or female—first securing permission from their spouse to fight and die for God’s sake.

Yet, Islamic tradition would come to deny a woman the freedom even to visit her sick father or attend his funeral, without her husbands’ permission:

“A man told his wife not to go downstairs to the premises where her father lived. When her father fell ill, the woman wished to go down to take care of her father and then sent a message to the Messenger of God explaining the situation. The Messenger of God ordered: “Obey your husband.”



And the father died. Then the woman asked the Messenger of God's permission to attend her father's funeral. The Messenger of God once more ordered, "Obey your husband." Later, he let the woman know: "As a prize for your obedience to your lord (husband) God has forgiven your father."<sup>169</sup>

According to this hadith, the woman is not even allowed to walk down a flight of stairs to care for her dying father (unless she first secures the permission of her husband)!

As noted, God condemns the fabrication of obligations that contravene the Quran. And the Quran repeatedly states that Muslims should care for their parents (none conditioned on securing her husband's permission). Such a fabricated requirement stands condemned. Indeed, God Himself, to whom obeisance is solely due, rigidly requires all believers without condition to care for their parents:

Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be good to your parents. If either of them or both of them reach old age with you, do not say to them a word of disrespect, nor scold them, but say them kind words. (Quran 17:23)

Say, "Come, let me tell you what your Lord has ordered: that you associate nothing with Him; that you honor your parents; that you do not kill your children because of poverty. We provide for you and them. And do not approach immoralities, what is apparent of them, and what is concealed. Do not kill the soul which God has sanctified- except in the course of justice. All this he has enjoined upon you so that you may understand." (Quran 6:151)

According to the Quran, even the Prophet does not know who is going to end up in Paradise or Hell. So how can a hadith claim that the father was forgiven due to his daughter's obedience to her husband? This is a final reason to reject this hadith.

Say, "I have no control over any benefit or harm to myself, except what God wills. Had I known the future, I would have increased the good, and no harm would have touched me. I am only a warner, and a herald of good news to people who believe." (Quran 7:188)

### *Testimony*

Under the *Hudood* laws of Pakistan, proof of rape requires the testimony of four male witnesses and testimony of women does not carry any legal weight according to the *Sharia* law in the country, which says that two women's testimony is equal to that of one man's. This means that women, even if a victim of a rape, cannot testify on her behalf, and unless she can find four male witnesses, the rapist goes free. She cannot prove she was raped no matter what. Moreover, many women who are unable to prove they are raped have themselves been charged with adultery. Majeeda Mujis, an 18-year-old girl, was abducted by men, and repeatedly raped by her abductors

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<sup>169</sup> Imam Ghazali, *Ihya'e Ulum-ed'Deen*, Vol. 2, p.147-148.

over a month's period and was finally turned down to police. Although she filed a complaint against her abductors, police charged her with illicit sex, imprisoned her, and men went free because she did not have four male witnesses to testify for her.<sup>170</sup>

Traditional Islamic culture includes provisions concerning women's testimony that are not revealed in the Quran. It holds that, in family matters like divorce and marriage, the testimony of two women is equal to that of a man; women are not allowed to testify at all in criminal cases like theft and murder; some sects claim that women cannot testify in cases of adultery. But the Quran neither states nor implies that a woman's testimony is either deficient or unacceptable. Consider a case in which a man claims that his wife has committed adultery:

And as for those who accuse their own wives but have no witness except themselves, let each of these (accusers) call God four times to witness that he is indeed telling the truth, and the fifth time, that God's curse be upon him if he is lying.  
But all punishment shall be averted from her by her calling four times to witness that he is lying, and the fifth time, that God's curse be upon her if he is telling the truth. (Quran 24:6-9)

The husband, we read, testifies four times that he is telling the truth, and then asked to call God's curse upon himself if he is lying. If the wife does the same—swearing four times that she is telling the truth and then calling God's curse upon herself if she is lying—her testimony overrules her husband's. Worth noting: the woman's testimony concerning adultery is permitted, and her testimony is superior to that of her husband.

In cases of adultery, the Quran requires four witnesses, but none of a particular gender (Quran 24:4). In divorce cases, two witnesses—regardless of gender—are required to prove that the divorced woman is not with a child (Quran 65:2). Since the Quran makes no gender distinctions in these matters, women's testimony is equivalent to that of men.

Misconceptions about the value of women's testimony derive from 2:282 from the Quran, which actually concerns long-term financial debts:

O you who believe! When you borrow debt among yourselves for a certain period, write it down. And have a scribe write in your presence, in all fairness. And let no scribe refuse to write, as God has taught him. So let him write, and let the debtor dictate. And let him fear God, his Lord, and diminish nothing from it. But if the debtor is mentally deficient, or weak, or unable to dictate, then let his guardian dictate with honesty. And call to witness two men from among you. If two men are not available, then one man and two women whose testimony is acceptable to all—if one of them deviates (*tedille*), the other will remind her the truth. Witnesses must not refuse when called upon. And do not think it too trivial to write down, whether small or large, including the time of payment. That is more equitable with God and stronger as evidence, and more likely to prevent doubt—except in the case of a spot transaction between you—then there is no blame on you if you do

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<sup>170</sup> Double Jeopardy, Police Abuse of Women in Pakistan, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1992/pakistan/>.

not write down. Have witnesses if you trade also, and let no harm be done to either scribe or witness. If you do that, it is vileness on your part. And fear God. God teaches you. God is aware of everything. (Quran 2:282)

Testifying for crimes like theft or murder are generally based on eye-witness accounts. The witnesses are not there voluntarily. Those committing these crimes will mostly try to deny their actions. That is why eye-witness testimony is precious. Disallowing female eye-witnesses, who make up half of the population, would create serious problems in convicting the guilty. Rejecting the testimony of one or more women who have witnessed, say, a theft or a murder, when there are no male witnesses, is contrary to reason and the Quran. Moreover, the Quran says Muslims—men and women alike—should “not lie and should be honest when testifying” (Quran 25:72; 75:33).<sup>171</sup>

But witnessing long-term financial debts is done by invitation, and it is voluntary. We understand from the verse that in cases on loan transactions, witnesses could be endangered and even harmed. And if witnesses fear for their lives, they may refuse to testify since it is a voluntary testimony. That is why the verse commands the scribe and the witnesses not to refuse their duties and then prohibits “harming either the scribe or the witnesses.” Because of the chance of harm, physically stronger men rather than women are preferred. In situations where a witness could be harmed, the responsibility to testify is reserved for men.

The verse continues: “...If two men are not available, then one man and two women whose testimony is acceptable to all—if one of them deviates, the other will correct her...” Two women who stand together can resist possible threats. Including this additional threat: a woman who contradicts a lying man may be subject to stress and pressure from the testifier. On the other hand, if there are one male and two women witnesses, the three witnesses can share responsibility. Moreover, when one man and one woman testify in the same way, and there is no dispute, there is no need for the other woman to testify. The second woman’s testimony is needed only when there is a disagreement between the male and female witnesses.

Some have translated “if one of the women *deviates* the other will correct her” sentence in the verse as “if one of the women *forgets* the other will remind her.” We prefer “deviates” because, throughout the Quran, the word *dalle* means “deviating,” not forgetting. And since pressure on witnesses is mentioned various times, it ascribes a mistake in the first woman’s testimony to pressure.

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<sup>171</sup> We have noticed how those not willing to accept the testimony of women in certain areas, are willing to accept the testimony of female hadith narrators, without distinguishing between genders.

Stating that the testimony of one man is equal to that of two women or that in some cases, women cannot testify at all, is contrary to the Quran. Only in cases of long-term loans, where harm to witnesses seems likely, is more responsibility granted to men.

### *Property*

Women throughout history, on the other hand, have been prevented from owning property and, even worse, treated as the property of either their fathers or their husbands. But the Quran has granted women the right to own and manage property. Indeed, the Quran granted women the right to property in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, an astounding twelve centuries before the US and Great Britain did.

The Quran's permission for women to own and manage property is assumed in its requirement of all Muslims to donate some of their property to the needy. Charity is not a male-specific obligation (neither are ritual prayers nor fasting); all believers are required to share with the poor. This act of piety is possible only if a woman owns property and can dispose of it as she chooses. Receiving a bridal gift (*mahr*) before marriage and shares in inheritance shows that women can own and manage their own properties freely.

According to Islam, women can work, earn money, acquire property, and manage their property freely. Historical sources from the first days of Islam report that many women were engaged in commercial transactions independently of their husbands.

### *Inheritance*

Women in pre-Islamic Arab traditions seldom had the right to an inheritance; it was typically apportioned among the male survivors since the inheritance laws financially dispossessed women. For example, a new widow was considered part of the estate, just another object to be claimed by the male heirs.<sup>172</sup> An inheriting male from her husband's side who was first to cover her with his cloak arrogated the executive right to marry her together with her share in the inheritance. This could even be her stepson. But if she managed to escape to her tribe before the arrival of the inheritor, then both the woman and her property would revert to her tribe.<sup>173</sup> Even worse, the woman lacked the social power to object to such an arrangement.

Daughters of the deceased often found themselves in such dire situations also. They could both be prevented from receiving a share of the inheritance *and* be sexually exploited and

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<sup>172</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, p.121.

<sup>173</sup> Al-Tabari, *Tefsiru't-Taberi*, VI, 524-526.

mistreated. The guardian could force the prettiest one to marry him, thus controlling her share of the inheritance and, at the same time, avoiding the payment of bridal gift (*mahr*). But if the girl was not pretty enough, the inheritor could prevent her from getting married and take her property.<sup>174</sup>

But the Quran commands the safeguarding of the rights of orphaned girls and guarantees a women's share in the inheritance.

The right to inherit and control property as they see fit protects women from financial impoverishment and social devastation. Just inheritance laws, then, can prevent financial impoverishment and social devastation. The Quran steps in at this point. By granting women the right to receive an inheritance, it seeks to prevent the expropriation of their property. By granting women the right to manage their own property, the Quran seeks to ensure financial stability if they should divorce. Finally, by banning the exploitation of orphans, the Quran introduces major improvements in the statuses and living conditions of women. In every case, the Quran seeks to disable the cultural conditions and practices that undermined the financial well-being of females.

How could one then, all this notwithstanding, claim that the Quran has not granted enough rights to women by a reference to 4.11 of the Quran?

God decrees a will for the benefit of your children; the male gets twice the share of the female..." (Quran 4:11)

While, *prima facie*, this verse seems to value women at 50% of men, it must be read within the social context of the Quran as well as within Quranic bridal gift (*mahr*) practices. First of all, the Quran is not gender-based in distributing inheritance. For example, if both parents of the deceased are alive, both parties receive the same amount. In addition, at the time of the Quran, and in most societies today, men carry the burden of supporting their families; the father is legally bound to meet the expenses of the children. According to the Quran, if a couple divorces, the man is obliged to pay for the expenses of the children and the mother as long as lactation continues.

Divorced mothers shall nurse their infants two full years if they so wish. The father shall provide the mother's food and clothing equitably... (Quran 2:233)

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<sup>174</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, 124.

Finally, sons have the additional expense of paying a bridal gift (*mahr*) upon marriage, which is an extra financial burden compared to daughters who are the receiving side (if married).

Despite all these, the Quran provides great flexibility as far as different situations and conditions are concerned. Thus, it is always possible for someone to will an equal inheritance to his/her sons and daughters.<sup>175</sup>

O you who believe, witnessing a will when one of you is dying shall be done by two equitable people among you... (Quran 5:106)

It is decreed that when death approaches, you shall write a will for the benefit of the parents and relatives, equitably. This is a duty upon the righteous. (Quran 2:180)

In making a will, then the righteous parent, sensitive to circumstance and personality, will be guided by equity and wisdom.

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<sup>175</sup> We should underline an important difference between the revealed Islam and the fabricated Islam. Even though the verses of the Quran offer recommendations for the distribution of an inheritance, precedence has been given to the will. Traditionalists have tried to annul the right to make a will mentioned in four verses of the Quran through attributing a fabricated hadith to the Prophet as if he had said: "There is no need to a will." In this case, not only a fabricated provision is added to Islam through hadiths, but the verses of the Quran have been nullified by them. Understanding the precedence of the will is of fundamental importance for the understanding of this frequently debated topic.

## CONCLUSION

In almost every period of history, women have been disadvantaged. They were often subjected to the orders of their fathers until they got married, husbands after getting married, and sons or other male guardians during their widowhood. Even today, women around the world are deprived of the same opportunities enjoyed by men; for example, even though women do a great part of production in the world, they continue to accrue fewer assets than men. Conditions of women in the world are unfavorable independently of Islam.

On the other hand, women in Muslim societies enjoy no better and often worse conditions than their counterparts in the rest of the world. Indeed, Muslim majority countries are noteworthy for the fact that women have many fewer rights than men.

We have systematically rejected such misogynistic intrusions into Islam through our fidelity to the Quran and its remarkable vision of equality, mercy, and tranquility. We also have tried to show how misinterpreted Quranic verses and fabricated hadiths have enabled the disenfranchisement of women.

While the Quran is Divine, its interpretations are not; they are man-made (which contributes to the problem). Male interpreters who are tainted by their prejudices and desires, by the values of the societies they live in, by their positions within existing political structures, by attitudes towards social demands and expectations, and by their private and often selfish interests and beliefs, created a misogynistic system that enjoys a great authority in Muslim societies.

In addition to misogynistic interpretations, the writers of the most famous hadith books, the founders of the canonical jurisprudence schools, have all been men. These men unmistakably favored their own gender by hadiths and misinterpretations, presenting women's obedience to men as one of the main obligations of religion. As a result, they turned women into de facto slaves of men.

We unmasked a series of highly influential but no-less fabricated hadiths that denigrate women and construct a misogynistic narrative. For example, hadiths that state that a woman cannot visit her sick parents without her husband's permission violate the Quran's compassionate demand to care for our parents. Hadiths that state that the Prophet claimed that most people in Hell will be women violate the Quran, which tells that even the Prophet does not know who will be in Paradise. Hadiths that prevent a woman from entering places where men work or forbid women from receiving an education, oppose the Quran's descriptions of women participating and learning alongside men. And hadiths that claim

women are deficient in mind and religion oppose the Quran's consistent claim that men and women are equally endowed by God to use their minds to achieve their own destinies. The Prophet cannot have said anything contradicting the Quran.

Our overriding principle has been to ground ourselves on the Quran. A clear understanding of the Quran reveals, we have argued, the kind of flexibility and openness that exists in the Quran. On matters on which the Quran keeps silent, individuals are granted, by God, the freedom to fill those blanks. While this interpretive freedom has made it possible for the Quran to adapt over a long range of time to very different cultures, some scholars resist: they seek to fill up those "conscious silences" of the Quran in ways that satisfy their own desires or increase their own power and position, thus cluttering Islam with many superstitions.

Please note: we are not asking Muslims to submit to "Western, liberal, Enlightenment" values and arguments. Any addition to Islam in the name of either tradition or modernity is unacceptable. The Quran alone is our authority, one that surpasses tradition and Modernity. As such, we affirm that God's authority is superior to the authority of any human-made tradition.

We simply call all of our Muslim brothers and sisters to the Quran and accept it with absolute confidence in all matters about Islam. And then seek to understand the Quran's remarkably merciful and liberating teachings on women, one's that our tradition has sadly departed from.

We would be very happy if the contents of this book were to contribute to the correction of misconceptions and harms in the name of Islam related to women. Throughout the book, we have tried to show that the Quran sends its message of compassion and justice and equality to the women of the 21<sup>st</sup> century just as it did the women of the 7<sup>th</sup>. But to understand this, we must also understand the misogynistic accretions in the name of Islam, which have nothing to do with the Quran. We have aimed at the truth, as presented in the Quran. If any of the ideas or arguments we have presented do not accord with God's words as found in the Quran, please reject them. Only God knows the truth about all things.



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