Founded in 1998, the Institute encourages interreligious dialogue throughout the world through exchanges among seminaries, colleges, universities, and learned societies. It has developed strong cooperative ties to the Vatican, the World Council of Churches in Geneva, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Ibn Khaldún Society, and ecumenical organizations in Europe, Africa, Asia, and South America.

CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM
AN INTRODUCTION TO ISLAM FOR JEWs

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Part V

Women: The Most Vexing Question

Men and women who surrender to God,
men and women who believe,
men and women who are truthful,
men and women who are steadfast,
men and women who humble themselves,
men and women who give in charity,
men and women who are abstinent,
men and women who stay clean,
men and women who are busy praising God,
they will be forgiven.
God has prepared a rich reward for them (Sūra 33:35).
What Does Islam Teach?

Irreconcilable Answers: Jamila or Jemima?

Religious tenets are almost invariably matters for dispute, but some are more controversial than others, and within Islam, those concerning women are clearly among the most fraught. There are some who allege that Islam is one of the most repressive religions as far as women are concerned; others argue that this perception is mistaken, and results from ignorance, misunderstanding, or prejudice. Irreconcilable views regarding women are found among Muslims themselves. Some project their religion as the epitome of women's rights and gender equality; others become apostates to protest what they regard as Islam's negation of women's rights. Many women leave Islam because they find it intolerable, and at least as many convert to Islam because they believe it is the ideal religion for women.

The issue is even more perplexing because women who join Islam often do so for diametrically opposed reasons. Some believe that Islam, rightly understood, elevates women more than any other religion. Others convert because they prefer confinement in the home and a position of childlike dependence; they wish to opt out of the rat race of modern
life, even if doing so means acceptance of polygamy and the veil. Many of these are well educated, professional women; their catchword is "shelter" and their arguments constitute a counterrevolution to feminism. It is difficult to imagine viewpoints more divergent than the two extremes found among female converts to Islam. Each camp, of course, claims to have the right understanding.

Interestingly, two prominent figures on opposing sides of this divide are Muslim women converts from Judaism. Margret Marcus from New York did not find Orthodox Judaism sufficiently patriarchal; therefore, she married Yusuf Khan, a married Pakistani Islamist, to demonstrate her support for polygamy. In Lahore, now known as Maryam Jamila (Jameelah), she collaborated with the Islamists' chief ideologue, Mawdūdi, in producing jihadist books that make even Khomeini and Usama Bin Ladin seem moderate in contrast. Her books are illustrated with the photo of a fully veiled woman, under which is written "The Author." Mainstream Muslims dismiss her as deranged, but her many books are still being sold at the Islamic Center of Southern California in Los Angeles and at Islamist establishments all around the world.

On the other end of the continuum is Jemima Goldsmith, a close friend of the late Diana, princess of Wales. Jemima mar-

1 There are now so many Western converts to Islam, especially women, that they can no longer be considered marginal. The number of German women converted to Islam, whether through marriage or not, is no less than the number of Muslim immigrants—2 million. A majority of these women, however, reside in the countries of their respective husbands. Several convert women have assumed important roles in the community, such as Emine Erbakan, the German sister-in-law of Necmettin Erbakan, the former Turkish prime minister who heads the (now banned) Islamist Welfare Party. Emine organizes the women of party members in Germany and acts as a spokesperson to the media.


ried Pakistani cricket star Imran Khan. She too lives in Lahore as a devout Muslim, but of the mainstream type. Islamists vilify her as a Jewish infiltrator, but most people adore her. Despite his popularity as a cricket superstar, Imran Khan failed to win a National Assembly seat. Jemima Khan would almost certainly win a seat if she were a candidate. Mainstream Muslim women love her because she is modern, goes unveiled, and yet knows how to stress Muslim identity.

Jemima and Jemima stand at opposite ends of the spectrum. Here are two Jewish women who joined Islam, each one married to a Khan in Lahore (with little difference in social class between their husbands), yet they appear to belong to two different religions, so great is the difference between their respective positions.

All across Africa, from Ghana to Kenya, thousands of women with Muslim names like Saadatu and Salima angrily reject the religion into which they were born, complaining that "it is because of Islam that dad left my mom." Their fathers had several wives and frequently married and frequently divorced. Since there is no provision for alimony and child support, the divorced women and their children suffer considerable privation.

An examination of church registers in the United States reveals that every year at least a hundred women from families of Muslim immigrants convert to Christianity. Many do

3 The religion page in the Saudi-financed daily newspaper Al-Sharq Al-Awsat is generally more Islamist than Islamic in outlook, and yet it carried a feature on Jemima Goldsmith-Khan that extolled her as an exemplary Muslim woman, whereas her husband did not get such high marks. See Imam M. Imam, "Jemima Tackles the Cultural and Social Differences Between her Life Before and After Islam," Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 21, 1999, p. 14.
so because they feel that in their community there is no religious life for them comparable to what Muslim men experience in the mosques.

Attending the mosque is obligatory for men, but not for women. The idea is not to exclude women from worship but to offer them a dispensation because of their demanding family obligations: minding the children, preparing food, maintaining the home, and so on. The results of this dispensation have varied, and the behavior of Muslim women diverges from place to place. In some countries as many women attend mosque as men, though the women sit separately, usually in the back rows. In other countries women are virtually excluded from the mosque, and meet separately for prayer sessions in private homes.

In most Sufi circles men and women pray together, and many times women predominate in number. In some countries, such as Egypt, there are female preachers, but they preach only to women and children. In the year 2000, a program was launched in Cairo to increase the number of female preachers, and there is no scarcity of women wishing to take up this task. Whether the program will work and what its consequences will be have yet to be seen. Just as ultraorthodox or fervently religious Jews refuse to believe that women should be ordained as rabbis, Muslim fundamentalists see the very idea of female preachers as absurd.

Enlightened Muslims often say that the practices conformminded women rail against are un-Islamic, however widespread they may be. “Real Islam is different,” the argument goes. Others accuse the protesting women of being rebellious, spoiled by the temptations of corrupt societies or lured into error by Christian missionaries.

Given the enormous divergence of views, many believers feel dejected and some have given up. Is it impossible to obtain a clear picture from the Islamic sources? What, then, is the true teaching and the wrong practice, or the right practice and the wrong teaching?

**BETWEEN NORMATIVE ISLAM AND MUSLIM INTERPRETATIONS**

Sociology uses the term *normative* to designate tenets that find the largest degree of acceptance, or, to put it the other way around, that encounter the least disagreement: What constitutes normative Islam? The essential principles include believing in the One God, His angels and prophets, revelation (the Qur’an), the Day of Judgment, the hereafter, and the basic ethical principles (justice, love for peace, truthfulness, solidarity, altruism, charity, kindness, etc.). None of these elements can be deemed superfluous, no matter how dexterous the interpretation.⁴

There is, of course, much more in Islam’s Holy Scripture, and no less than 85 percent of it is open to interpretation. Because so much is in dispute, Islam has spawned seventy-three different sects. Scarcely 15 percent of the revelation can

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⁴ There are widely different concepts of God among Muslims (from the totally transcendent to the purely immanent) as well as a thousand and one images of the angels. The crucial point is that one cannot ignore the issue of God and the angels and still be a Muslim in the religious sense. The believer has to come up with something, some notion of God and the angels, however individualistic; otherwise he or she could just as well be a Buddhist.
pass as normative Islam, including two points concerning women: (1) their spiritual equality with men, and (2) the demand that they wear the type of dress traditionally called decent, modest, or “covering,” that is, not sexually provocative. The dress code is stated unambiguously; there is no room left for dissent. In fact, the text states explicitly that except for the face, hands, and feet, the entire body is to be covered; there is no question of miniskirts or even short sleeves (Sûra 4:128).

A number of women's issues are open to dispute in the Qur’an, such as the question of inheritance and of a woman's legal status (sometimes half the value of a man, sometimes only a quarter). Although the discussion of these details fills legal tomes, it can be reduced to one question: Does Islam place woman under the tutelage of man? The answer in the shari'a is yes. It establishes a principle called qawwûlûn and also wisâya, which defines men as the guardians of women. A woman remains a dependent all her life and never becomes a full person. She is unable to get a passport in her own name but only as “daughter of,” “wife of,” or “widow of.” If she has been widowed, she falls under the tutelage of her son or another male relative.

While many, including some Muslims, find this rule degrading, there are women who embrace it. They do not translate the term wisâya as “tutelage” but rather as “protection,” and they appreciate the safety it implies. (Etymologically this interpretation is far-fetched. There are many other words expressing “protection,” whereas wisâya clearly means tutelage, guardianship, and mandate.)

Women are by no means treated as nonentities in Islam, but the Qur’an entrusts leadership to men because men are “a degree above them” (Sûra 2:228). Compared to other patriarchal systems, Islam’s is relatively benevolent because it emphasizes that with regard to most of life’s circumstances men and women are equal and should treat each other with respect.

Muslims who feel uneasy about the treatment of women usually employ one of two different rationales in approaching the issue. One seeks to moderate certain rigors by dint of evasive, watered-down interpretations. For instance, the passage that allows husbands to beat their wives in case of disobedience (Sûra 4:34) is sometimes explained as implying only a spanking. Others go as far as to maintain that the word daraba, which in Arabic means, plain and simple, “to beat,” can also mean something very different, such as minting a coin. Feminists will hardly be happy about this metaphorical interpretation. The idea of men “shaping their character” would be repugnant to them.

The other approach is to accept the facts and acknowledge that “to beat” means just that rather than “to caress.” Since permission for the husband to discipline his wife is part of the wisâya principle (man’s tutelage over woman), the only way out of the dilemma is to come to grips with the teaching itself. Once the principle of wisâya is reinterpreted so that it can be dispensed with on the practical plane, everything else will fall into place.

\[\text{Some use the term normative in a different sense, but that discussion is not pertinent here.}\]
A common attitude among educated women with a liberal bent of mind is simply to stipulate that Islam teaches this or that favored idea or practice. They assert, usually with genuine conviction, that certain things are Islamic teachings, but their interpretations are often little more than wishful thinking. Loyal to their inherited faith, they long for an affirmative view of their identity within it, and so much is positive in Islam that it is tempting to discard the rest as an inauthentic excrescence.

Certainly it is arguable that much in the practice of Muslim peoples can safely be called un-Islamic even though it is presented as Islamic. This applies to the position of women more than to any other aspect of Islam. A number of practices that have come to be seen as typically Islamic may actually be in blatant contradiction to Islamic teachings. The early and idealized Muslim community was a protest movement against a society that was enormously disadvantageous to women, characterized by frequent divorce or, rather, the peremptory repudiation of wives. This situation made the Prophet proclaim that “among all the permitted things, divorce is the most hateful in the eyes of God.” Many Arab societies have returned to “the good old days” before Islam (the stigmatized era of jāhiliyya, or “barbarism”), at least as far as divorce (repudiation) is concerned, with men having the power to impose their wishes, unfettered by law or custom.

Aside from the relatively thin basis of normative Islam, an ethos with regard to women is deducible from the Prophet’s life and his views as expressed in conversations with his Companions. He emerges from the Scripture as a kind family man and a typical “daughter father,” his sons having died in infancy. Much in what he did and said makes emancipated women feel comfortable with him. The positive image is so strong that it is hard to accept the apparently negative points as authentic, because they appear incompatible with the rest.

In some biographies of the Prophet from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the founder of Islam looks like a paramount chief with some two dozen wives and concubines. Some European attacks on the Prophet as profligate may have been prompted by such biographies. These documents reflect the values and attitudes of the period in which they were written, as well as the worldview of the authors, rather than those of nascent Islam. A good analogy would be the portrayal of Charlemagne as a womanizer by some medieval biographers, not because he was one, but because they wanted him to resemble King David. Some Muslim biographers departed from earlier images of Muhammad by describing him as an amorous chieftain because in their time that was a positive value. Biographies of the Prophet written in the twentieth century present him primarily as a social reformer. While this image, too, is an idealization, it is more in tune with the original sources.

The selective approach adopted by liberal Muslim women might carry greater religious authority if it were based on a better knowledge of the historical development of Islamic thought. Few of the Muslim women who interpret their religion as enlightened and humane distinguish between the

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4 See M. Sādiq Fahnūf Al-Mālikī’s edition of Yūsuf ibn Hasan ibn ‘Abdīl-Hādí Al-Hanbali, The Book of the Prophet’s Ancestors (Damascus, 1994). The seventeenth-century original version was based on an older work by an unnamed author. The text, so far available only as a piece of art (calligraphy), has recently been translated and is expected to be published in 2001.
Islam they encounter when opening the Qur'an, the primary source, and the Islam enshrined in the sharī'a, which is more than just traditional law. For radical traditionalists, and especially Puritan extremists such as Afghanistan’s Tālibān (and similar groups), the Qur'an serves as little more than a text for recitation, a source of magical incantations. The radical traditionalists are not taught to interpret Scripture independently. They do not believe in exercising independent judgment; they are trained, instead, to see Islam through the lens of the sharī'a.

From the viewpoint of Muslims who read the Qur'an with an independent spirit, a Muslim woman can be just like any other modern woman with conservative values and a conservative affect. Their image is of a woman who is a little old-fashioned in her style of dress and behavior, with a family life similar to that of a practicing Orthodox Jew or traditionalist Catholic. At the other end of the spectrum are the Tālibān-type traditionalists who learn through the sharī'a; in their eyes women are simply inferior to men. They start segregating boys and girls in the nursery and believe it is harmful for females to learn more than prayers.

Some women scholars make a distinction between Islam per se and Islamic tradition; they hold the latter responsible for distorting the former. However, the term Islamic tradition is amorphous. There is much in Islamic tradition that is not part of the sharī'a, and the sharī'a is much too concrete a phenomenon to be subsumed under so general a concept as tradition. The sharī'a is only one of about a dozen strands in Islamic tradition, though certainly a major one. One of the few female theologians of Islam, Pakistani-born feminist

Rif'at Hasan, professor of religion at the University of Louisville in Kentucky, argues that “it is inappropriate to speak of ‘the Islamic tradition’ as if it were unitary or monolithic. Its various components need to be identified and examined separately before one can attempt to make any sort of generalization on behalf of Islamic tradition as a whole.”

A STRAIGHT MESSAGE FROM CONFLICTING SIGNALS

In the course of countering Western criticism, Islamists are fond of insisting that their family relations are more affectionate and stable than is generally the case in Western societies. Many of their publications emphasize this aspect through illustrations, including cartoons. The Islamist family is presented as a unit bound together by love and devotion. Shaikh 'Omar 'Abdu-r-Rahmān, the leader of the Gamā'a Islāmiya terrorist organization in Egypt, is a case in point. He is portrayed as an affectionate husband and father, and his wife is anything but a nonentity; one might even call her his coworker.

However, many other Islamist husbands are excessively authoritarian, and their severe family life is devoid of any perceptible affection; in many instances the husbands even eat separately from their wives and children. They explain this behavior as dictated by religion. Thus we are presented with the puzzling phenomenon of a culture with a kaleidoscope of attitudes, each presented as truly Islamic. What we

have is the usual range of attitudes found in any society, reflecting human nature in its recurrent variations. What is distinct here is the religious frame of reference to which almost everybody resorts, and that frame of reference is anything but uniform. The diversity of interpretation seems to make Islam almost indefinable, at least as far as its position regarding women is concerned.

Some of the justifications Islamists offer for their attitudes toward women and the family look flimsy to scholars with an in-depth knowledge of Islamic history. There is unanimity among the Prophet’s biographers that he was so indulgent with his children that they literally climbed all over him while he was performing his ritual prayers. He had nothing of the forbidding austerity that characterizes the many traditional households where there is no interaction between husband and wife except for sexual relations, and no emotional bond between father and children, hardly even any communication. In some of these settings the emotional bonds may actually be strong, but they cannot be openly expressed; tradition demands their suppression.8

People of different temperaments and inclinations stress different aspects of a religion’s teachings; as a result, views emerge that are almost mutually exclusive and crudely reductive. For some, women are only half a man or less; they are to be firmly under the control of men, and through a good beating, if necessary. In their view, the prime purpose of woman is to serve man’s “comfort” (sexual needs), which may require him to have four wives at a time, divorce them, and marry another four, as well as keep an unlimited number of concubines (sexual slaves).

For others, there is only one woman to one man; their relationship is one of equality and harmony, with partnership in God-fearing righteousness being more important than sexual gratification, as stipulated by the Holy Writ (Sūra 4:24 f.). Whatever part of the revelation appears to conflict with this idea of what constitutes the right bond between wife and husband they regard, and reject, as highly exceptional, restricted to some particular historical situation, time-bound and not eternally valid, unlike the basic ethical principles. For example, the spanking is symbolic, not corporeal. Again, because there is no authority or mechanism (i.e., no papacy) to decide in favor of one or the other approach, the controversy rages on.

Many take issue with the Islamic vision of paradise because men are promised virgins to be their sexual playmates. “Wrong,” say some Islamic scholars; the reference is to their spouses, who shall be young again. “Nonsense,” say others; the virgins of paradise are rewards; the greater the merit, the larger the number.9

Is the Qur’ān contradictory? It speaks of the equality of the sexes in one passage, but makes woman subordinate to male

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8 The syndrome of traditional relationships between spouses and between parents and children is the topic of an extraordinarily humorous and yet tender novel (largely autobiographical) by a Moroccan candidate for the Nobel Prize in literature: Driss Chralbi, Mother Comes of Age (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1984). The original title is La civilisation, mère! which could be rendered as “Lock, Mother, this is civilization!”

9 See ʿAbdulīlā Ṭāzām, ʿUḥūd al-aḥlāf (Peshawar: Al-lajn日产 N-ridaytu l-irābīya, 1990). This book, written in Arabic, is about the Arab volunteers who died while fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan. The title means “Lovers of the Virgins of Paradise,” meaning that those who were martyred fighting the enemies of God are now richly rewarded with numerous virgins in heaven.
authority in another. It extols the affectionate partnership of the sexes in marriage in one place, and seems to envision woman as man’s sexual commodity in another (Sūra 2:223, “Your wives are your arable land, which you may plow when and how you please”). Yet the Qurʾān is emphatic in stressing that there is no moral difference between man and woman:

People who do something good, man or woman, and have faith, We [God] will give them a new life, a good. life, pure. We will reward them according to the good. they have done (Sūra 16:97).

But the Qurʾān also declares that legally a woman is only half the worth of a man (Sūra 4:11 f.).

Some scholars see these seeming contradictions as a reflection of the differences in the societies that responded to the revelation, differences between the Arabian towns of Mecca (where the Prophet grew up) and Medina (where he later settled) in the seventh century. Some of the muḥājirūn (Muslim refugees from Mecca) worried that their womenfolk would be “spoiled” by the manners of the women in Medina, who were less submissive. Mecca was more urban, while the populace of the oasis town of Medina was more rural. Even contextual studies do not provide all the answers, however. The uninitiated reader of the revelation is still confronted with opposing statements that are not easily reconcilable.

Is it impossible, then, to give an authoritative answer to the question about Islam and women? The differences both in Muslim attitudes toward women and in the understanding of Islam’s teachings can be mind-boggling. What can one say when somebody demands: “Tell me in a few sentences what is the position of woman in Islam,” or “What does Islam teach concerning women?” Without making at least two dozen significant qualifications, any attempt at answering this question would be foolhardy.

We are confronted with a paradox because the Qurʾān is more explicit on the position of women than the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, or the scriptures of several other religions. Confucius, for instance, found the subject so vexing that he gave up the attempt to issue guidelines. The Islamic revelation says much about women. Sūra 4, one of the longest chapters in the Qurʾān, is entitled “The Women,” evidence of the centrality of the topic. But, in a nutshell, what does the Scripture really tell us?

One possible answer was given by the reformist theologian Mahmūd M. Tāḥā (d. 1985), who put all the “positive” statements into one drawer (Mecca) and the “negative” ones into another (Medina), declaring that the Medinese part was only for a bygone age.

Another possibility is to accept the apparent contradictions as such, take direction from the positive portions, and leave the rest to allegorical interpretation, as has been done by many believers throughout the ages. The positive statements are an inspiring reality, enunciating equality of the sexes and a position for women in tune with present-day notions of human rights.

Even among the most progressive Muslim scholars, few would say that at its inception Islam did not bring about an improvement for women or that its views are reactionary in toto. In the 1990s it was reported that in some rural areas of
China peasants were killing their baby daughters, usually by burying them alive. No fewer than five thousand such cases became known, and how many were unreported? In other words, in some societies daughters are still considered a disposable burden, as in ancient times. Exactly the same was done, in the same manner and for the same reasons, in Arabia in Muhammad’s time. The Prophet succeeded in stopping this jähiliyya custom completely—no mean achievement. Some of the most moving passages in the Qur’ān are devoted to the subject:

When one of them is told that it is a baby girl he looks unhappy and feels bad. He is so embarrassed by the bad news that he tries to hide, thinking whether to keep the child and suffer the contempt or bury it in the ground. What a terrible decision! (Sūra 16:58–59)

[On the Day of Judgment] The question will be about the baby girl who was buried alive: For what crime was she killed? (Sūra 81:8–9).

In later history, however, the introduction of Islam among non-Muslim peoples did sometimes result in disadvantages for women. For critical Muslim scholars, the task is to reemphasize the initial impulse in favor of women’s rights so as to bring Muslim societies in tune with their original ethos. The next step would be to admit that the advent of Islam did not bring about an all-comprehensive revolution in favor of women as some apologists would have us believe, although it did represent a historic step forward.

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Gender or Sex?

GENDER SEGREGATION: RATIONALES AND IMPLICATIONS

The Arabic terms hijāb or khimār, the Persian châdor, and the Persian/Urdu parda literally mean “curtain” and are usually translated as “veil,” though they may actually denote a scarf. But these terms have a broader meaning: they stand for gender segregation with all its ramifications. For instance, how many miles is a woman allowed to travel without a male guard? Mahjubah (“The Veiled Woman”), an English-language women’s magazine produced by the “mullacracry” in Tehran, instructs its readers “How to Lower Our Gaze.”

Since the end of the nineteenth century, gender segregation has generally been on the wane, but some traditionalists are seeking to revive it and are enforcing stricter forms. In Afghanistan, for instance, the Tālibān has not only prohibited white socks as sexually provocative but has also introduced separate footpaths for men and women, even though women are allowed to leave the house only in emergencies. In Algeria FIS stands for Front Islamique du Salut (Islamic Salvation Front), but people have come to read it as Femmes Interdites de

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Sortir ("women are not allowed to leave the house"): In Saudi Arabia the highest religious authority ruled that baby girls should not play with dolls representing males.

The Islamic vision of a happy people living in a harmonious society is built on the conviction that such happiness is conditional upon sexual orderliness. "Marriage is half the religion," the Prophet is reported to have said. Contrary to Hinduism, Islam is emphatic that widows and divorcees should remarry, and the quicker the better. Following this reasoning, people should be prevented from breaking the rules. There should be no sexual enticement, no temptation.

There is no unanimity of opinion as to whether men or women are the principal seducers. Volumes have been written on the negative image of woman as temptress in Islamic culture, but just as much on woman as the rock of stability, resisting the male's uncontrollable libidinous appetites. Muslim reformers point to the many disadvantages of gender segregation and argue that people should be educated in such a way as to make them behave responsibly in a gender-integrated society. There is a great deal of idealistic literature on this topic. It has become customary for members of the new generation to complain in private conversation about "gender apartheid." The male translator of a famous woman writer in Pakistan may discuss some questions with her in the privacy of her home—in the presence of her husband, of course. But if he comes across her in the shopping center he is not supposed to greet her but to look the other way.

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In the transition from a gender-segregated society to a mixed one many people lose self-control, and the result is sexual harassment on a scale unimaginable to Americans. In some present-day Muslim societies, it appear as if innumerable demons have been let loose after centuries of confinement. The ones who suffer most are working women, a relatively new, currently small, but growing sector of the population. One might reason that this situation should pose a special challenge to religious groups eager to make social reality conform to Islamic ideals. Some stiff groups do indeed work hard to bring about a change of attitudes, though as yet with limited success.

Islamists, predictably enough, allege that it is all the fault of the evil West; and they are not altogether wrong. But the much-maligned TV-imperialism is not the only factor to blame, and perhaps not the primary one. A major cause is the rich nations' sex tourism. What Buddhist Thailand is to male sex tourists, Muslim Morocco has been to female sex tourists for decades. Of late, Morocco has come to share this honor with Tunisia, Gambia, Kenya's Muslim coast, and several other places. The effect on the local men's attitudes toward women is devastating. Since many make a living from "accosting" the tens of thousands of single women who descend every year on their bazaars and beaches, "sexual harassment" has become not just an ingrained attitude, but the art of the trade.

The problem with the Islamist solution is that unveiled women become targets of harassment even more because, according to the logic of the veil, it is all the fault of the victim and none of the aggressor's. The fact that the decrease in the
number of unveiled women means that greater harassment is directed against veiled women does not go unnoticed, but it is not taken as a serious challenge to the Islamist principle.

Taking the veil does not provide the wearer with full protection against sexual harassment, but it reduces the problem considerably in some places, at least for a time. It is also argued, in its defense, that the veil relieves women of the costly competition in fashion that used to be a curse for middle-class women in Iran before the revolution, and continues to be so elsewhere. This obsession with fashion reached grotesque proportions at universities like 'Ain Shams in Cairo, where female students would wear European high boots on the hottest summer days. Islamist garb is simple, egalitarian, and cheap because it is produced in Islamist factories and distributed almost free of charge, as a form of proselytism. The Islamists exploit to the fullest the general malaise and profound cultural anxiety created by the emerging gender integration. Western analysts adduce all kinds of reasons for the rise of Islamism, but rarely examine the gender issue, despite the fact that Islamist literature is more than 50 percent about sexual order.

As in Orthodox Judaism, the restrictive regulations in Islam concerning relations between men and women are predicated less on the assumed inferiority of women than on the perceived necessity of order. Both regard abstinence as an aberration. "Sex, yes, but rules and regulations are to be strictly observed: nothing premarital, nothing extramarital!" This is not to say that the patriarchal family structure does not aim at control. However, Westerners often think in terms of hierarchical power, whereas on the Muslim side the issue is viewed from a purely sexual perspective. This distinction underlies many misunderstandings between Western feminists and Muslim women, so much so that many dialogue attempts founder because the partners talk at cross-purposes.

For instance, the establishment of "women only" universities in several countries was welcomed by some Western feminists, but for reasons different from those of the Arab women concerned. In the Muslim world the creation of universities for women is not so much motivated by the idea of helping women achieve self-realization as by the necessity of a sober, desexualized atmosphere conducive to serious academic pursuits. Support for same-sex institutions does not arise from the fear that young women will run faster than young men or outperform them academically; the fear is that mixing could lead to unhappiness and suffering in this world and damnation in the next.

Others desire separate hospitals. Strangely enough, in much of the Muslim world there are relatively fewer women's clinics than in the West, but this is primarily a byproduct of a less-developed medical system due to the poverty of those areas, and is not a reflection of religious ideology. In some countries, such as Pakistan, hordes of young men throng the hospitals because they are among the few places where they can get close to women. While this is annoying enough for doctors and patients, for nurses it can become torturous.3

3 In her UNESCO project on "The Empowerment of Women in South Asian Muslim Societies," Professor Rifat Hasan (University of Louisville, Ky.), has the fate of nurses on her priority list.
The difference in perspective between radical feminists in the West and radical segregationists among the Islamists was illustrated at a meeting of an Islamist organization addressed by a member of the Jordanian parliament, Bassâm Al-`Ammûsh. Veiled and seated in the back rows, a third of the participants were women. When some of them wished to pose questions, `Ammûsh requested a vote to determine whether they should be allowed to come to the microphone, like the men, or submit their questions in writing because sawtu l-mar`a `awrâ ("the female voice causes sexual excitement"). The vote was in favor of written questions only, but it would be a mistake to assume that this was about degrading or silencing the women. The women present were mostly university graduates, had their own printed program and speakers, and were treated with respect. They were not suspected of being evil temptresses. It was the men who were seen as the weaker sex; it was the men who needed protection against their own evil inclinations. Remarkably, this incident did not occur in the heart of Arabia, but in the American heartland, in 1994, at a regional convention of the Muslim Arab Youth Association (MAYA) in Detroit.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the "scarf controversy" made headlines, especially because of the ban on its use in French schools and the violent demonstrations in Turkey, where the government adamantly maintains the prohibition against the veil that accompanied the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Much has been written on the subject, but unfortunately the most incisive discussion, by Yolande Geadah, is currently only available in French.

After two years in her native Egypt, the Canadian author returned to Montreal and was shocked to be confronted by the same veil controversy as in Cairo. This prompted her to write a book in which she analyzed the reasons for the spread of the veil or scarf (both are subsumed under the Arabic term hijâb) with all its ramifications. The present triumph of the scarf is dumbfounding to many observers, Muslim and non-Muslims alike, and her book was met with a sigh of relief by Muslim women and men around the world for its thoughtful treatment of the subject. Many Muslims feel steamrollered by media that focus on bigotry and the upsurge of anti-Western fanaticism but rarely mention the resistance to this new type of totalitarianism. Yolande Geadah entitled her book Veiled Women: Unmasked Fundamentalisms. The author's insider analysis of the multiple pressures that force women under the hijâb gives the book a lead over many other writings on the subject.

Geadah observes that Islamist propaganda has caused many people to consider only veiled women virtuous, while unveiled ones represent the West's evil influence and are thus immoral. Behind all of this is the spiritual arrogance of the Islamists, who are the self-appointed judges of what is moral and immoral. They are not arbiters but controllers. The kind of veil and the behavioral norms that they decide are Islamic do not emanate from any strand of tradition, nor are they a matter of free choice from the rich historical legacy. Rather, they are prescribed by Islamists who believe they have the authority to regulate social behavior.

The dictates result in an ageless form of human folly: an increase in hypocrisy. People's conduct does not become any more virtuous, since there are numberless ways of making a mockery of the veil, which is also worn by prostitutes. While the enforcement of veiling does not reduce promiscuity, it invariably diminishes truthfulness and helps propagate a culture of cheating and dissimulation, as well as one of intolerance. The women who most vociferously claim that the veil was their free choice also tend to be the ones who exert the most pressure on others to follow their example.

Among those refusing to take the veil there is usually less libertinism than among many of the veiled ones. Unveiled women feel obliged to prove the veiled ones wrong, and to do this they adopt more and more conservative attitudes and are exceptionally vigilant regarding their public conduct.

A common way of achieving Islamist supremacy is by making women believe that the veil will save them from eternal damnation. Wearing the veil is not just a means to an end (banning immoral conduct) but a virtue in and of itself, while going unveiled is sinful per se, no matter the circumstances. This teaching is highly persuasive to a large number of women, but it engenders confusion and cynicism with others.

In addition to promoting the veil through propaganda and religious casuistry, traditionalists often impose it by brute force. Incidents of zealots spraying acid on unveiled women—and the authorities not taking stern measures against such terrorism—have caused thousands of women to veil themselves to prevent physical injury. Public abuse, even of elderly women, meets with little resistance from a public afraid of reprisals. At a bus stop in the middle of Cairo, in broad daylight, a young girl accompanied by her mother was raped by two individuals while their accomplices kept the crowd at bay. When the culprits went to trial, their defense team of prominent lawyers was paid handsomely by an Islamist political party. The case received wide publicity, and the fact that the rapists went free gave a tremendous boost to the cause of the zealots. This is but one of many instances where the Egyptian state failed to provide justice to victims of such "holy terror."

Geadah generously concedes that in terms of personal safety she still feels safer in Cairo than in certain neighborhoods of New York or Montreal. The same could not be said about many cities in the Arab world—and certainly not about Pakistani cities like Karachi and Lahore. There are streets where no woman can venture out at all, whether unveiled or veiled, unless she is heavily guarded.

Geadah was shocked to observe that Egyptian society, otherwise known for its tolerant cosmopolitanism, is undergoing a transformation toward narrow-mindedness and fanaticism. Al-Banna, the founding father of the Muslim Brotherhood Party in Egypt, a precursor to Islamist organizations across the globe, used to condemn the superstitious practices of popular religion. A new generation, hailing from more rural origins, is steeped in this backward culture of superstition. To make matters worse, the Islamist Muslim Brethren has entered into alliances with radical traditionalist groups. The result is an upsurge of belief in demons (jinn) that seems
bizarrely incompatible with the existence of a substantial secularist intelligentsia in Egypt, including a broad class of advanced scientists.

The jinn, who are repeatedly mentioned in the Qur'ān, can be good or bad spirits. The good ones were made famous by the fairy tale Aladdin's Lamp. In popular imagery, however, the jinn are more often than not evil spirits. Generally speaking, the belief in jinn has diminished, especially among the educated class, just as the belief in angels has lost much of the fascination it used to possess before human beings learned to fly. However, Shaikh Gaddu-I-Haqq (d. 1998), a rector of the traditional Al-Azhar seminary, ruled that doubting the existence of jinn is tantamount to apostasy, a ruling that had disastrous consequences for Egypt's intellectual life. As for women, it meant further buttressing of the veiling campaign, because women who refuse the veil are considered by the fundamentalists to be possessed by jinn. Where people have a strong faith in jinn, exorcism becomes an urgent necessity. Thus the veil becomes a form of exorcism. If women proffer a rationale for their refusal, they become apostates.

Anti-Islamists, both Muslim and non-Muslim, are tempted to ban the veil or scarf because of its political symbolism. Not taking any measures against it means allowing the zealots to continue their campaign of indoctrination and intimidation. But banning poses a tricky dilemma: It is an infringement upon human rights, an antidemocratic measure that turns the aggressors into victims. It also drives some conservatives into the arms of the Islamists.

Quite a few Muslim women don the veil or scarf as a matter of genuine free choice, among them college students whose mothers do not wear it and who advise them not to put it on. The young women use the veil as a means of keeping men at bay, a signal that they are not available for easy sex. Like Orthodox Jewish young women and conservative Christians, they intend to stay virgins till marriage, and the scarf symbolizes this conviction. A ban on the scarf forces these girls into the Islamist camp even though they may loathe it. Such girls may be strongly opposed to the Islamists. It is no exaggeration to say that the Islamists are not unhappy when the hijāb is banned, because on a tactical level it serves their purposes; the ban has become the zealots' best weapon because it allows them to pose as democratic defenders of human rights.

The French case is particularly illustrative, not only because the scarf controversy rocked the country for months, but also because of the way it started. Two Moroccan girls came to school one day wearing scarves and were ordered to remove them by the principal. Outside France it was wrongly assumed that this incident was the bigoted action of a French racist, but the reality was quite different. The principal is from a French-speaking island in the Caribbean, a black man with a strong commitment to multiculturism. There are thousands of Moroccan women in France who wear traditional dress, and had the girls come to school dressed in Moroccan style, it would never have occurred to the principal to prevent them from doing so. The two sisters, however, put
on what has become a kind of Islamist uniform, something that distinguishes Islamists even in large crowds of traditionally dressed Muslims, whether in Morocco, Egypt, Turkey, or elsewhere (in South Asia the dividing line is less clear). The Islamist dress is not one of the traditional or regional costumes. A comparison might help to explain the point: In Germany and Italy, as in every country, there have always been people wearing brown or black shirts, but these were different from the party shirts worn by the Nazis and the Fascists.

An outsider may not notice the symbolic differences in the tying of the scarf, whereas many Muslims can tell from the scarf whether the wearer is an Arab (Sunni) and a pro-Iranian Islamist. Nowadays parks in Germany tend to be crowded with picnicking Turks, usually sitting in a circle. One circle may be made up of mainstream Muslims, steeped in their rural traditions, another may consist of the common run of Turkish Islamists, a third may belong to Khomeinist-inspired Islamists—and all can be deduced from the type of scarves the women wear and the way they tie them.

The principal of the French school knew that the girls' father had recently joined the Islamists and was now imposing the party line on his daughters. That is what the principal objected to, and it is the same objection most teachers elsewhere have as well, not only in France and Germany, but also in Tunisia and Turkey, Kazakhstan and Kirghizistan. Hassan II of Morocco prevailed upon the Islamist father to moderate his shrill tone, for which the king was cursed in the Islamist press. In the meantime there are many more such cases in

France and a dozen European countries, and little hope that the dispute will ever end.

TRENDS OF CHANGE

An overview of the current situation of women in the Islamic world reveals very disparate trends. Within such a vast realm, developments are naturally uneven, making it difficult to discern general currents. The situation differs from country to country, and in many countries there are striking variations from region to region, aside from the usual differences among ethnic groups and social classes, as well as between urban and rural populations. Urban women are by no means always freer than rural ones; in fact, it is often the other way around. In some places nomad women enjoy greater freedom than peasant women, and sometimes the reverse is true. There are also the political vicissitudes that impel or impede the emergence of female emancipation. In some countries where women had made significant headway, such as Iran and Sudan, they have suffered dramatic reverses; while in some very traditional societies, such as Morocco and Oman, there has been marked improvement.

Thus, it is as easy to paint a bleak picture of the state of Muslim womanhood as it is to render an euphoric account of breathtaking progress, and equally compelling evidence can be marshaled to buttress either view. Transitional periods know excesses in all directions. In a situation replete with contradictions, anyone attempting to present a general trend is sure to be accused of providing useless generalizations.
Both currents, the emancipationist and the antiemancipationist, constitute a mutually reinforcing dialectic, causing an escalation of controversy that makes it difficult to predict the outcome. Wherever female emancipation makes great strides, a backlash is almost certain. And wherever the backlash becomes overwhelming, with the antiemancipation movement coming to power and enforcing its norms (as in Pakistan in 1977, Iran in 1979, Sudan in 1989, and Afghanistan in 1996), opposition to it grows fiercer and the emancipationist movement gains more strength than it might otherwise have. While it may be too early to render a final verdict, there is much to indicate that counterrevolutions against female emancipation are self-defeating in the long run. The eleven years of General Diya’u-l-Haqq’s draconian antiemancipationism (1977–88) slowed down the progress of Pakistani women, but could not halt it. More than a decade of General Bashir’s equally draconian antiemancipationism (since 1989) has only strengthened the resolve of Sudanese women to forge ahead.

Many Islamists never tire of claiming that they stand for women’s rights, insisting that Western statements to the contrary are wrong. And yet, developments at the end of the twentieth century make it evident that the Islamists are one of the major forces opposing female emancipation throughout the world. For example, in Kuwait they thwarted a government initiative to grant women voting rights. In December 1999, the Kuwaiti parliament narrowly defeated a motion to give women the right to vote. Of course women have been denied this right in some non-Muslim countries as well, but what is significant about the Kuwaiti case is the role of the Islamists. While several religious leaders supported the motion, Islamists opposed it on the basis of their reading of the sharia.5

The year 2000 was marked by a movement against “honor killings” of women, especially in Jordan, where Prince `Ali led the protest demonstrations. The term “honor killings” refers to the murder of a young woman by her own relatives who suspect her of illicit relations with a man. Often, if not mostly, the accusation is false. Many times it is based on a rumor, but the young woman is held responsible for having spoiled the family’s reputation. In some cases the young woman may have eloped with the man of her choice instead of following her parents’ dictates to agree to an arranged marriage. In Pakistan, where most of these murders occur, Mahmūd Ghāzī, the director of Islamabad’s International Islamic University, unabashedly defended the honor killings in a BBC interview.

**Experiments in Separate Development**

In terms of crimes against women, the Muslim world is second to none. This shocking state of affairs is due partly to the spreading lawlessness and chaos, perhaps most evident in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, the region where the bulk of the world’s Muslims live (almost 400 million, more than the

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number of Arabs and Iranians combined). While it is difficult to develop precise data because of the private, familial settings in which they frequently occur, rape and other forms of abuse of women almost certainly happen here on a larger scale than in the "evil West," which Islamists stigmatize as a moral abyss. Abject poverty is a major reason for the enormous trade in human flesh that characterizes South Asia. But some of the widespread abuse of women is also due to an overemphasis on ritualism and religiosity and a commensurate neglect of the ethical dimension.

Islamist irrationality in tackling social problems has only made matters worse. The result is general despondency in the face of a moral breakdown. This is particularly noticeable in the Pakistani media, which betray profound pessimism regarding the future of their country and of Muslim society in general. The amount of crime directed against women defies the imagination, and the number of girls sold as sex slaves is probably higher than elsewhere. The fact that Hindu India, Buddhist Thailand, and the Catholic Philippines have almost equal amounts of crime directed against women strongly suggests that this is a socioeconomic problem affecting large parts of today's world. But Muslims can take little comfort from the comparison; they, too, have failed miserably in addressing this problem. Because of the drift into general criminality in many of these societies, many are attracted by the slogan "Islam Is the Solution," especially after the Taliban enforced their puritan vision, subjecting Afghan society to a virtual curfew for women.

Still, at the beginning of the third millennium, large numbers of Muslim women, if not a majority, are living incomparably freer lives than did their sisters half a century ago. In some places education is still heavily weighted in favor of males, but several countries have a surplus of highly educated women. Among the world's predominantly Muslim countries, more than half have enacted laws to promote women's rights. These laws are criticized as insufficient, but at least they are a step forward. Most of the reformed family laws stipulate a minimum age for marriage. In the case of girls it is age eighteen in Morocco and sixteen in Pakistan. Under Iran's reformed family laws, the minimum age for marriage used to be age seventeen for girls, but one of Khomeini's first acts after coming to power was to abrogate this law so that men could marry girls as young as nine years old.

As deplorable as are the various forms of continuing discrimination against women, including legal discrimination, a change for the better is underway.

The Taliban may practice a version of fundamentalism, but the movement is not part of the international Islamist network; it is far more atavistic. Despite its fundamentalist character, Islamism has modernist traits; it is a twentieth-century ideology based on a selective reading of the sources and their interpretation. For instance, it does not oppose female educa-

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6 See "8 Gangs Involved in Flesh Trade Smashed," Pakistan Link (Inglewood, Calif.), December 26, 1997, p. 27. According to some statistics, nearly 2,000 girls disappear from Bangladesh every year and surface as sex slaves abroad. At least the same number of Egyptian women are being married by men from richer countries, and most end up as concubines rather than as wives. The many instances of men from the Gulf states marrying girls from poor Indian families caused a furor in the media and was brought up twice before the Indian parliament, because many of these marriages are fake and the girls are used as slaves.
tion; indeed, in some places it encourages it. But what happens after women receive their diplomas or advanced degrees? What spheres of life are appropriate for female professionals? There are a number of reasons why the emancipation of Arab and other Muslim women follows its own laws, differing from the way other Third World women emancipate themselves. In Iran, Sudan, and Pakistan, one of the reasons is that women’s struggle with Islamism is not exactly the same as the conflict between religion and progress in other cultures. Here the conflict is not with a church, but with a political party or a totalitarian regime.

Muslim women have made significant advances in some professions but little in others. This is true in other cultures as well, but here the pattern differs. A fascinating development in the Islamic world is the predominance of women in journalism. The editorial staffs of several international Arab weeklies consist mainly of women. The flexibility of working hours in journalism is seen as more conducive to family obligations than, for instance, a career as pilot of a plane. The judiciary has remained largely closed to women because of prejudice against women rooted in the sharī‘a; women are seen as emotionally unstable and therefore should not be judges. Among tellers in Arab banks, there have long been as many women as men, but a relatively recent development is that in the higher echelons, such as branch manager, one comes across as many women as in American or European banks.

Social pressure and the Islamist trend restrict women to a limited number of professions, usually those in which women work among women rather than among men. For their part, women try to make up for this limitation by taking over some professions as if they were female fiefs. Islamists demand gender segregation in public life, and one method of coping with their demand that women should not mix with men in the workplace is to make them feel out of place where women constitute a majority of the employees. The workplace then turns into a “women only” establishment.

This is an incipient trend, and it may be too early to draw conclusions. The decisive point is that the emancipation of Muslim women has not been blocked altogether, despite a number of setbacks, particularly in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. The number of women in the workforce has increased almost everywhere. For instance, in Algeria it doubled between 1967 and 1977. Islamist attempts to reverse this trend have thus far failed. The number of girls enrolled in school has also undergone a manifold increase in most countries, even where jihādists murdered hundreds of teachers, as in Algeria.

To sum up: Some passages of the Qur’ān appear problematic with regard to women’s rights, but they are more than balanced by others that support those rights in considerable detail. As persons before God, man and woman are equal. Woman is seen neither as merely derivative from man nor as morally inferior. Eve is not portrayed as having seduced Adam; instead, Islam’s holy book is explicit in emphasizing the essential oneness and equality of man and woman, as well as their dependence on one another, coupled with the idealization of harmony and mutuality rather than domination and subjugation.
However, the social order envisioned in the Qur’an is unmistakably patriarchal. Women are called upon to respect the placement of man in the position of leadership. Given its origins in seventh-century Arabia, the elaborate outlining of women’s legal rights is remarkable, and it was undoubtedly far ahead of its time in those days. It is no less true, however, that much would have to be amended in order to meet present-day standards of human rights. Such adjustment need not be difficult if the general ethical principles of the revelation are understood to be of primary importance, and the legal details as secondary.

Muslim women’s struggle for equal rights is dramatic and often tragic, with many setbacks, and is still beset by great obstacles. All the same, there is discernable progress and indications that the process of emancipation has become unstoppable.

While in Saudi Arabia women fight for basic rights, such as to drive a car, in Los Angeles female Ph.D. students from Saudi Arabia plot to overthrow their government because it is not Islamist enough for their taste. Practical experience with Islamism, however, is a cure for such delusions; it is bitter and radical but effective. In Afghanistan, Algeria, Iran, Pakistan, and Sudan, the vast majority of women are adamantly opposed to the Islamists.

**Female Circumcision**

A number of pre-Islamic practices continue in Muslim countries despite the changes brought about by Islam. Female circumcission is one of these ancient customs. The issue received publicity when a Muslim woman from West Africa asked to be granted asylum in the United States because if she returned to her native village, she would be subjected to circumcision. This and a few other cases made it appear as if female circumcision were an Islamic religious requirement.

The truth, however, is that female circumcision is practiced in several parts of Africa by followers of traditional animist religions, by many Christians, and by some Muslims too. In Sudan it used to be common among Muslims, but it has become much less so. It is widely practiced in Egypt despite the fact that the Egyptian Ministry of Health banned female circumcision in 1997.

In Sunni Islam there are four different rites, or schools, and only one of those allows female circumcision. Called the Šafi’i school, the bulk of its adherents are found in Indonesia and Malaysia, but its major center is Al Azhar, the theological seminary in Cairo. In 1997, when some of its religious leaders argued that female circumcision was Islamic, their stand infuriated a majority of scholars who reasoned that the Prophet had discouraged this practice, which is popularly known as “Tharasonic,” in other words, heathen or pagan.

A few contemporaries of the Prophet practiced female circumcision, probably because of the proximity to Egypt. Asked his opinion, Muhammad replied with dismay: “Well, if you think you must, do it, but don’t cut deep!” The defenders of female circumcision construe this as an affirmative reply. Their argument is not convincing, however, because whatever the Prophet did or said is acted upon by tradition-
alist Muslims all over the world in minutest detail. They even aspire to cut their beards precisely as the Prophet did, even though there is no consensus regarding the correct length. However, as far as female circumcision is concerned, most Muslims learned about its existence only through the Egyptian controversy, and many do not know about it even now. When they first hear about the practice, many are left aghast, refusing to believe that such a thing truly occurs. The common reaction is a surprised: "What is there to cut in a female?" For fourteen centuries the vast majority had never heard about it, not even the masses of Shafiis in Indonesia.

In a few African regions, female circumcision was introduced as an Islamic practice because those who spread Islam in these places had learned their religion in Egypt or Sudan. Some emigrants from those regions to France carry on with female circumcision, not only scandalizing the French, but also other Muslims. Moroccans find the practice incomprehensible, whereas it is normal in neighboring Senegal. Elsewhere noteworthy changes are taking place. While among Muslims the custom is waning, some Christian widows and divorcees in East Africa have themselves circumcised, believing that it will rid them of their sexual urges. The rationale that brought this practice about in the first place was, of course, the notion that circumcised girls would be immune to sexual temptation.

Female circumcision is one of several dramatic examples of how some Muslims do things in the name of Islam that other Muslims regard as the very opposite of Islamic teachings. Islam is often blamed for sanctioning the legal punishment by mutilation advocated by some traditionalists. But even most traditionalists reason that the mutilation of human beings is a grave sin, except if prescribed by the shari'a. There is general agreement that female circumcision is an instance of barbarous mutilation, causing a feeling of shame in most Muslims.7

HOMOSEXUALITY

People join Islam for many reasons, some of which are mutually exclusive. As happens with converts to Christianity and other religions, people sometimes convert as a result of erroneous assumptions. For instance, quite a few European gays, among them Vincent Monteil, a renowned French Africanologist, embraced Islam because they had been impressed by its apparently greater tolerance of homosexuality. This was a misunderstanding resulting from a misperception of the distinction between the private sphere and the public sphere. The predominant Muslim attitude, anchored in the shari'a, is that what one does in one's private life is between the individual and God. For this reason any infraction of the public sphere is punished all the more severely. For instance, the shari'a demands capital punishment for adultery, but there must be four witnesses to the act, meaning that it is the propagation of adultery that is being punished.

7 See Nawal Saadawi, The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World (London: Zed Press, 1980). This widely translated book has become a classic on the question of women in present-day Islam, though the perspective is Egyptian rather than Arab or Islamic in general.