Chapter 16  Women, intellectuals, and other challenges


For some reflections on the legal status of women see Fatima Mernissi, Beyond the Veil: Male–Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society, revised edition, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987, pp. xxii–xxix. The status of older women may comprise a third category on top of those of the female child and the married woman, but it is far less problematic a group for the jurists in the way in which they have understood the legal requirements.

Traditional patterns of women’s religion


**Seclusion**

Mohammad Fadel, “Two Women, One Man: Knowledge, Power, and Gender in Medieval Sunni Legal Thought,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 29 (1997), 185–204, points out that according to the jurist al-Qarāfī (d. 1285), the discrimination against women in Islamic law, where such occurs, is there to discourage the role of women in legal situations where it would unnecessarily remove them from their seclusion (see p. 193). Further historical reflections on these issues are found in Eli Alshech, “Out of Sight and Therefore Out of Mind: Early Sunnī Islamic Modesty Regulations and the Creation of Spheres of Privacy,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 66 (2007), 267–90.

The narratives of Alifa Rifaat are found in her book *Distant View of a Minaret and Other Stories*, Denys Johnson-Davies (trans.), London, Heinemann, 1985.

**Modern demands**

The discussion of complementarity in Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Religion of Islam: A Comprehensive Discussion of the Sources, Principles and Practices of Islam*, Columbus, OH, Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam, 1990, reflects an Aḥmadī point of view (and thus the status of the author as a Muslim is “suspect” in many parts of the Islamic world). However, many Muslims would have no difficulty in agreeing with the sentiment expressed in the passage. The modernist stance of Muhammad Ali’s writing indicates that the idea of the natural inclinations of men and women as dictating their roles in society is far more widespread than simply belonging to Islamist circles (in which it is the standard motif of the discussions). Whether it is possible to deny these “natural” differences (or to what extent one may do so) has plagued North American feminist thought; see Carol Tavris, *The Mismeasure of Woman*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1992, who argues, for example, that studies show that men placed in the role of nurturer do just as well as women, and that women are as capable as men of acts of extreme violence.

On the strong sense of women being women see the discussion in Deniz A. Kandiyoti, “Emancipated but Unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish Case,” *Feminist Studies*, 13
(1987), 317–38. Some people, of course, may argue that a “secure sense of gender identity” is not necessarily a welcome end.

Islamic answers

On the answer to women’s issues being found in religion see, for example, Saddeka Arebi, “Gender Anthropology in the Middle East: The Politics of Muslim Women’s Misrepresentation,” *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 8 (1991), 99–108.


The use of the past

Some contemporary feminist readings of the past try to avoid the re-mythologizing of history: for example, Sa´diyya Shaikh, “Knowledge, Women and Gender in the Ḥadīth: A Feminist Interpretation,” *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, 15 (2004), 99–108, attempts a critical reading of hadīth material for its androcentricism and patriarchy while also proposing a “counter-narrative” that uncovers hidden traces of powerful female voices.


For other views of the impact of the historical development of Islam on women see Leila Ahmed, “Women and the Advent of Islam,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*,

*Hijāb* in the modern context


Women in the Muslim *umma*


The move outside Islam


The role of Muslim intellectualism


For an introduction to Mohammed Arkoun’s ideas see his *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1994; note therein, p. 2, “The great majority of Orientalists who specialize in the study of Islam remain indifferent to upheavals linked to the ‘postmodern condition’.” It needs to be remarked that Arkoun’s comments in the introduction to a translation of the Qurʾān, given the context of the publication of the essay, were likely written with an audience conceived to be people without the ability to read the Qurʾān in Arabic, i.e., non-Muslims and Muslims without formal religious training. Arkoun’s concept of the imaginaire, not really captured by the English “imagination,” is central to his thought. See his discussion in Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking*
New voices in a Traditionalist framework


One prominent voice in traditional circles today is Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī; see Ana Belén Soage, “Sheikh Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī: A Moderate Voice from the Muslim World?” *Religion Compass*, 4 (2010), 563–75; al-Qaraḍāwī’s “middle way” illustrates what Shabbir Akhtar sees himself as reacting to.

Putting matters in perspective


