

**Women in Middle
Eastern History**

Shifting Boundaries

in Sex and Gender

EDITED BY

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22. See especially Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, *The Second Message of Islam*, translated with an introduction by Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), and Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990).

2 Islam and Patriarchy: A Comparative Perspective

DENIZ KANDIYOTI

In contrast to the growing body of historical scholarship on gender relations in the West, the question of women in Muslim societies has remained closely tied to a predominantly ahistorical consideration of the main tenets of Islamic religion and their implications for women. This has been attributed by some to the more general shortcomings of Middle Eastern historiography, namely the lingering influence of orientalism and an idealist bias that presents historical facts as flowing directly from ideology.¹ In the case of scholarship on women, these tendencies have been compounded by a high degree of confusion between polemical and analytical goals. There is a continuing output of exegetical writing by Muslim scholars, many of whom identify themselves as feminists.² This writing typically tries to establish Islam's compatibility with the emancipation of women. The favored sources of such works continue to be the Quran, the hadith, and the lives of prominent women in early Islam. There is a clear attempt to resuscitate early Islamic history and the holy text in order to formulate an indigenous feminist project, or at the very least to encourage more progressive reading of the texts that are regularly invoked by traditionalists to justify the status quo. That feminists and traditionalists are equally concerned with appropriating the "true" message of Islam indicates that all parties believe it to be the only legitimate ideological terrain on which issues pertaining to women can be debated. I will not discuss the adequacy or merits of this position, but merely point out that it has been one of the tendencies giving a longer lease of life to ahistorical approaches to the question of women in Muslim societies.³

There is, on the other hand, a vigorous body of scholarship that locates women as historical and political actors firmly in the context of temporal processes of socioeconomic transformation.⁴ Most work in this genre does not necessarily privi-

lege Islam as an analytic category, but inserts gender into broader discourses about social transformation or the various theoretical paradigms of different social science disciplines. At one extreme of this spectrum, one finds studies that are barely distinguishable from work on women and development in any other part of the Third World. The specificity of Muslim women's subordination, if any, and the possible role of Islamic ideology and practice in reproducing it are thus lost from view. This leads to a paradoxical situation whereby Islam sometimes appears to be all there is to know, and at other times to be of little consequence in understanding the condition of women, or more broadly, gender relations in Muslim societies.

I argue in this chapter that this is in part because we have not found adequate ways of talking about the articulation between Islam and different systems of male dominance,⁵ which are grounded in distinct material arrangements between the genders but are rather imprecisely labeled with the blanket term *patriarchy*. Indeed, the literature confirms that different systems of male dominance, and their internal variations according to class and ethnicity, exercise an influence that inflects and modifies the actual practice of Islam as well as the ideological constructions of what may be regarded as properly Islamic. Religious practice is necessarily influenced by the history of productive and reproductive relations between the genders, as reflected in the workings of different indigenous kinship systems. It may be, and has been argued, that the spread of Islam has expedited the demise of varied local systems in favor of a more uniformly patriarchal mode, with an emphasis on patrilineality and patrilocality, and with characteristic modes of control of female sexuality and spatial mobility.⁶ This does not, however, justify the use of imprecise expressions such as "Muslim patriarchy"⁷ to denote the sexual asymmetries encountered in contexts as varied as those of a Bedouin tribe, a Hausa village, or an upper-class harem in Cairo or Istanbul. We therefore need to examine critically the concept of patriarchy itself, before moving on to a more detailed consideration of its usefulness for an understanding of gender relations in Muslim societies.

PATRIARCHY: A PROBLEMATIC CONCEPT

Although a brief incursion into feminist theory cannot do justice to the complex debates generated around the term *patriarchy*,⁸ I will attempt a sketchy outline of some contemporary developments in its usage.

Radical feminists were the first to initiate a fairly liberal usage of the term to apply to almost any form or instance of male dominance. Since patriarchy defined in those terms was an all-pervasive, virtually timeless phenomenon, its manifestations could be sought anywhere, although the symbolic and psychic spheres were singled out as privileged areas of

investigation. In spite of numerous modifications and reworkings within radical feminism, patriarchy was by and large allocated to the ideological sphere, with a material basis in the division of labor between the sexes (and in particular the facts of reproductive biology).⁹

In the case of Marxist or socialist feminism, the concept has a somewhat different history. It emerged as a residual category, because forms of exploitation and oppression based on gender proved singularly recalcitrant to reduction to other forms (such as those based on race and class). In those terms, what could not be explained through the workings of capital could be put down to the logic of a related but distinct system with its own laws of motion, namely that of patriarchy. However, the degree of analytic independence assigned to the category of patriarchy, as distinct from capitalism or the class system, could be quite variable, as indeed was the degree of commitment to a systematic consideration of the relations between the two.¹⁰ Nonetheless, this position had advantages in that patriarchy was acknowledged to have a material basis in the social relations between the sexes, which are in turn subject to historical transformations. The emphasis on the reciprocal relations between types and systems of production, the sexual division of labor, and age and gender hierarchies meant that the psychodynamics and cultural constructions of gender could be historicized, and at least in principle, more adequately theorized. In practice, however, most of the debate remained centered on the effects of industrial and postindustrial capitalism on gender relations, with relatively fewer attempts to establish linkages within a broader comparative perspective.

The ways in which such linkages were theorized have in addition been quite diverse. Some concentrated on establishing empirical associations between types of production, kinship systems, and indicators of women's status. Ester Boserup, for instance, made a distinction between male and female farming systems, relating them to population density, technology, and type of cultivation.¹¹ Female farming systems, most prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa, are characterized by abundant land, low population density, shifting cultivation, and the use of the hoe as a farming implement. Apart from tasks like clearing the land for cultivation, food production is primarily the responsibility of women, who, according to Boserup, have a high degree of mobility and the ability to market their surplus to support themselves and their children. Male farming systems, more characteristic of Asia, are prevalent under conditions of higher population density, the necessity to increase productivity, and the use by men of draught animals and the plow. Plow agriculture is prevalent in areas of private ownership where a landless class whose labor may be hired exists. Ideally, the women of landed households are released from agricultural work in the fields and confined to domesticity, often actually

secluded as a symbol of prestige and family honor (as in Muslim veiling or the purdah system). They increasingly come to depend on men for both economic support and symbolic shelter.

Germaine Tillion, in her analysis of codes of honor and female modesty in the Mediterranean, argues that these phenomena may in fact be of more recent origin than suspected and may have evolved as a reaction to the threat posed to endogamous tribal societies, which form the backbone of the post-neolithic ancient world, by outside forces, particularly by an expanding urban civilization.¹² She sees the customs and practices related to the seclusion of women as results of the incomplete evolution and degeneration of tribal society and of the structures of defense it erected to maintain its integrity. Islamic rules are incidental to this process, as evidenced by the very selectivity with which they are applied, ignored, or circumvented. For instance, women are either altogether deprived of their inheritance rights when these threaten tribal property and solidarity, or when they are accorded such rights, they are tightly monitored through strict controls over marriage alliances and their spatial mobility. Thus the apparent irony behind the fact that veiled urban women have property rights whereas their unveiled rural sisters, whose contribution to subsistence is typically higher, are deprived of them, disappears. Although Tillion is quite clear about the material forces underpinning tribal endogamy, the process of erosion of such structures through contact with city values and exposure to other civilizational influences (operating through changes in mentality and outlook) remains more nebulous.

Jack Goody followed up Boserup's typology by relating women's contribution to production with kinship systems and modes of inheritance.¹³ He notes the empirical association between plow agriculture, male farming, diverging devolution (that is, bilateral inheritance), and monogamy, all characteristic of Eurasia, which stand in contrast to Africa, where female predominance in hoe cultivation is accompanied by homogenous inheritance (matrilineal or patrilineal), polygyny, and bridewealth. This approach has been criticized for trying to explain differences in kinship patterns between very broadly defined regions through ahistorical reference to technological and ecological variations and for trying to understand kinship and systems of production solely in terms of property relations.¹⁴

At a more general level, approaches to women's subordination stressing their modes of contribution to subsistence were criticized for their "productivist" bias. It was argued that ultimately the position of women could not be explained in terms of participation in production, which could be extremely variable, but could be better understood with reference to their roles in reproduction.¹⁵ Some even turned the productivist

argument on its head by suggesting not only that women's status was not predicated on their roles in production but also that productive roles may in fact themselves be defined and limited by the kinds of reproductive tasks assigned to women at different junctures of capital accumulation.¹⁶ Thus Lourdes Beneria and Gita Sen argued in their critique of Boserup that the crucial distinguishing features of African and Asian farming do not reside in the tools used—the hoe or the plow—but in the forms of appropriation of land, surplus, and women's reproductive capacities.¹⁷ They proposed an analysis based on the dual concepts of accumulation and reproduction, it being understood that there are systematic connections between different phases of accumulation, class formation, and gender relations.¹⁸

Where did these developments leave the concept of patriarchy? To the extent that efforts were made to relate it to processes of accumulation, it became increasingly insubstantial and was often reduced to an epiphenomenon of the workings of capital. The allocation of productive and reproductive tasks between the sexes is frequently presented as functional to the maintenance of a cheap labor force, with gender ideologies merely acting to justify the existing division of labor. In spite of strenuous attempts at disentangling the workings of patriarchy from those of capitalism and the wish to grant the former some analytic autonomy,¹⁹ a great deal was said about the laws of motion of capitalism whereas those of patriarchy have at best remained nebulous and vague. This is partly due to the often implicit assumption that there is such a thing as a unitary and universal system that we may call patriarchy, and that the differences in the character of women's subordination concretely encountered are merely the outcome of different expressions or stages of the same system.²⁰ This has resulted in an overly abstract and monolithic conception of male dominance, which obfuscates rather than reveals the intimate inner workings of different gender arrangements.

I have proposed elsewhere that a useful point of entry for the identification of different systems of male dominance may be found through analyses of women's strategies in dealing with them.²¹ I have argued that women strategize within a set of concrete constraints that reveal and define the blueprint of what I term the *patriarchal bargain*²² of any given society, which may exhibit variations according to class, caste, and ethnicity. These patriarchal bargains exert a powerful influence on the shaping of women's gendered subjectivity and determine the nature of gender ideology in different contexts. They also influence both the potential for and the actual forms of women's active or passive resistance. Most important, patriarchal bargains are not timeless or immutable entities, but are susceptible to historical transformations that open up new areas of struggle or renegotiation of the relations between genders.

By way of illustration, I will contrast two systems of male dominance, rendered ideal-typical for the purposes of discussing their implications for women. I use these ideal types as heuristic devices that necessarily simplify more complex reality, but can be fleshed out and expanded with comparative, empirical content. These two types are based on examples from sub-Saharan Africa and from the Middle East and southern and eastern Asia. My aim is to highlight a continuum ranging from less corporate forms of householding, involving the relative autonomy of mother-child units evidenced in sub-Saharan polygyny, to the more corporate male-headed entities prevalent in the regions identified by James Caldwell as the "patriarchal belt."²³ Against this background, I will explore the extent to which Islam cut across different systems of male dominance and the possibility that gender relations in the Middle East are influenced by a particular conjunction between Islam and the system I identify as "classic patriarchy." Finally, I will speculate on the impact of contemporary social transformations on patriarchal bargains and gender ideologies.

AUTONOMY AND PROTEST: SOME EXAMPLES FROM SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

As I reviewed the literature on women in agricultural development projects in sub-Saharan Africa, my own background, as a woman born and raised in Turkey, left me totally unprepared for what I found.²⁴ This literature was rife with instances of women's resistance to attempts to lower the value of their labor, and more significant, women's refusal to allow the total appropriation of their production by their husbands.

Whenever new agricultural schemes provided men with inputs and credit, and the assumption was made that as heads of household they would have access to their wives' unremunerated labor, problems seemed to develop. In the Mwea irrigated rice settlement in Kenya, where women were deprived of access to their own plots, their lack of alternatives and their total lack of control over men's earnings made life so intolerable to them that wives commonly deserted their husbands.²⁵ In Gambia, in yet another rice-growing scheme, the irrigated land and the credit were made available to men, even though it was the women who traditionally grew rice in tidal swamps and there was a long-standing practice of men and women cultivating their own crops and controlling the produce. Women's customary duties with respect to labor allocation to common and individual plots protected them from demands by their husbands that they provide free labor on men's irrigated rice fields. Men had to pay their wives wages or lend them an irrigated plot to have access to their labor. In the rainy season, when women had the alternative of growing their own swamp rice, they created a labor bottleneck for men,

who simply had to wait for the days on which women did not go to their own fields.²⁶ Pepe Roberts also illustrates the strategies used by women to maximize their autonomy in the African context.²⁷ Yoruba women in Nigeria negotiate the terms of their farm-labor services to their husbands while they aim to devote more time and energy to the trading activities that will enable them to support themselves. Hausa women in Niger, whose observance of Islamic seclusion reduces the demands husbands can make on their services (an important point to which we shall return), allocate their labor to trade, mainly the sale of ready-cooked foodstuffs.

In short, the insecurities of African polygyny for women are matched by areas of relative autonomy that they clearly strive to maximize. Men's responsibility for their wives' support, although normative in some instances, is in actual fact relatively low. Typically, it is the woman who is primarily responsible for her own and her children's upkeep, including meeting the costs of their education, with varying degrees of assistance from her husband. Women have little to gain and a lot to lose by becoming totally dependent on husbands, and quite rightly resist projects that tilt the delicate balance they strive to maintain.

Documentation of a genuine trade off between women's autonomy and men's responsibility for their wives can be found in some historical examples. Kristin Mann suggests that despite the wifely dependence entailed by Christian marriage, Yoruba women in Lagos accepted it with enthusiasm because of the greater protection they thought they would receive.²⁸ Conversely, men in contemporary Zambia resist the more modern ordinance marriage, as opposed to customary marriage, because it burdens them with greater obligations for their wives and children.²⁹ A form of conjugal union in which the partners may openly negotiate the exchange of sexual and labor services seems to lay the groundwork for more explicit forms of bargaining. Commenting on Ashanti marriage, Katherine Abu singles out as its most striking feature "the separateness of spouses' resources and activities and the overtness of the bargaining element in the relationship."³⁰ Polygyny, and in this case, the continuing obligations of both men and women to their own kin, does not foster a notion of the family or household as a corporate entity.

Clearly, there are important variations in African kinship systems with respect to forms of marriage, residence, descent, and inheritance rules, which are grounded in complex historical processes, including different modes of incorporation of African societies into the world economy.³¹ Nonetheless, it is within a broadly defined Afro-Caribbean pattern that we find some of the clearest instances of noncorporateness of the conjugal family both in ideology and in practice, which informs marital and marketplace strategies for women.

It is therefore particularly interesting to see how Islam, which privi-

leges patrilineal bonds and clearly enjoins men to take full responsibility for the support of their wives, acts on gender relations in different African contexts. Enid Schildkrout's study of secluded Hausa women in Kano, Nigeria, suggests that a typically West African pattern of high economic activity and relative autonomy of women persists within a family structure defined by Islamic values concerning the sexual division of labor.³² She relates how women are able to subvert the idealized structure of the domestic economy through the control they exercise over the labor of their children, which makes it possible for them to trade in cooked foods without having direct contact with the marketplace. Their seclusion obviously restricts their mobility so that they are dependent on manipulating the limited resources their husbands provide for consumption and diverting them to their own productive ends. However, this also puts limits on the services husbands may expect from their wives, as they cannot rely on them as a source of support and are thus at least in theory expected to be the providers. Schildkrout suggests that the widespread adoption of purdah in Kano is possible precisely because women have the ability to play active economic roles while participating in the myth of their total dependence on men. To the extent that this ability is predicated on their control over children's labor, however, it will be increasingly jeopardized as the latter are absorbed by the modern educational system and become unavailable as domestic labor. Ultimately, the structure of all but the wealthiest families in Islamic West Africa may be challenged by such contemporary changes.

In Mette Bovin's work on the Manga women in Bornu, Niger, she detects signs of actual female resistance to Muslim institutions in spite of nine hundred years of "Islamization."³³ Islam in Bornu grafted itself on an older matrilineal system with different pre-Islamic marriage rules, which were superseded but not totally eradicated by a Muslim patrilineal system. Bovin suggests that it is women who maintain and transmit this pre-Islamic cultural heritage, through their struggle to enforce the matrilineal principle, the actual result being a kind of bilateral system. Pre-Islamic influences are also apparent in traces of totemism in women's rituals, the existence of independent statuses for women, and women's vocabulary, which unlike men's does not include Arabic words. It is as though Islamic rules were being negotiated by participants with diverging gender interests, the women stubbornly clinging to aspects of the pre-Islamic system that may have been more empowering.

One does not have to accept this particular interpretation of pre-Islamic survivals to concede a more general and rather obvious point. There may or may not be a good fit between Islamic injunctions concerning kinship and marriage and local pre-Islamic customs and practices. In the latter case, not only local kinship patterns and ideologies are modified

but often the practice and interpretation of Islam itself. Presenting women as active participants in this process of reinterpretation and cultural negotiation exercises a corrective influence on depictions of Muslim women as passive victims of patriarchal domination. It is no accident, moreover, that it is in sub-Saharan Africa that we encounter the clearest instances of women's resistance, since they frequently involve the safeguarding of existing spheres of autonomy.

SUBSERVIENT AND MANIPULATION: WOMEN UNDER CLASSIC PATRIARCHY

The foregoing examples of women's resistance stand in stark contrast to women's accommodations to the system I call classic patriarchy. The clearest instances of classic patriarchy are found in the geographical area that includes North Africa, the Muslim Middle East (including Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran), and southern and eastern Asia (specifically India and China).³⁴

The key to the reproduction of classic patriarchy lies in the operations of the patrilocally extended household, which is also commonly associated with the reproduction of the peasantry in agrarian societies.³⁵ Even though demographic and other constraints may have curtailed the actual predominance of three-generational patrilocal households, there is little doubt that they represented a powerful cultural ideal. It is plausible that the emergence of the patriarchal extended family, which gives the senior man authority over everyone else, including younger men, is bound up in the incorporation and control of the family by the state,³⁶ and in the transition from kin-based to tributary modes of surplus control.³⁷ The implications of the patrilineal-patrilocal complex for women are not only remarkably uniform but also entail forms of control and subordination that cut across cultural and religious boundaries, such as those of Hinduism, Confucianism, and Islam.

Under classic patriarchy, girls are given away in marriage at a very young age into households headed by their husband's father. There they are subordinate not only to all the men but also to the more senior women, especially their mothers-in-law. The extent to which this represents a total break with their own kin group, and consequent isolation and hardship, varies in relation to the degree of endogamy in marriage practices. Michael Meeker in his comparison between the rural Arabs of the Levant and the Black Sea Turks draws our attention to the different structuring of conceptions of honor among them and its possible relation to the degree of endogamy they favor in marriage.³⁸ Among the Turks, he finds much lower rates of endogamy, and that the husband is directly and principally responsible for a woman's honor. Among the rural Arabs of the Levant, there is much greater mutuality among affines, and a wom-

an's natal family retains both an interest and an active involvement in protecting a married daughter's honor. As a result, a Turkish woman's traditional position may more closely resemble the status of the "stranger-bride" of pre-revolutionary China than that of an Arab woman, whose position in the patriarchal household may be somewhat attenuated by endogamy and recourse to her natal kin.

Lila Abu-Lughod, in her study of the Awlad 'Ali, Bedouins of the Western Desert in Egypt, draws attention to the tension that marriage creates in an ideological system in which agnation is given clear priority as a basis for affiliation, and suggests that one resolution of this tension may be sought in a preference for patrilateral parallel-cousin marriages.³⁹ She comments on the preferential treatment that wives from the same patrikin as their husbands receive and on their greater sense of security. Unni Wikan in her study of Oman indicates quite perceptively that although in principle men subscribe to the ideal of cousin marriage and agnatic loyalties, in practice they strive to stay clear of such unions.⁴⁰ Marrying a stranger enhances the control of the husband by reducing accountability to related in-laws and ensures the wife's exclusive dependence on him.

Under classic patriarchy women frequently have no claim on their father's patrimony, whether the prevalent marriage payment is bride-price or dowry. Their dowries do not qualify as a form of premortem inheritance since they are transferred directly to the bridegroom's kin and do not take the form of productive property, such as land.⁴¹ In the case of the *mahr* (brideprice), the proportion retained by the bride's father and that returned to her in the form of valuables can be extremely variable, despite explicit provision that part of the *mahr* belongs to her. Likewise, women's access to and control over property can vary a great deal. There is substantial historical evidence that women in the Middle East did own and control property, especially if they were urban and middle or upper class.⁴² There is equally widespread evidence that the patrilineage expropriates them if productive property takes the form of land or flocks and if their inheritance rights threaten the economic integrity of the family or tribal unit. Thus whether they are members of Muslim, Hindu, or Confucian communities, young brides often enter their husband's household as effectively dispossessed individuals, who can establish their place in the patriliney only by producing male offspring.

A woman's life cycle in the patrilocally extended family is such that the deprivation and hardship she may experience as a young bride are eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own daughters-in-law. The powerful postmenopausal matriarch thus is the other side of the coin of this form of patriarchy. The cyclical nature of women's power and their anticipation of inheriting the authority of se-

nior women encourages a thorough internalization of this form of patriarchy by the women themselves. Subordination to men is offset by the control older women have over younger women. Women have access to the only type of labor power they can control, and to old-age security, however, through their married sons. Since sons are a woman's most critical resource, ensuring their lifelong loyalty is an enduring preoccupation. Older women have a vested interest in the suppression of romantic love between youngsters to keep the conjugal bond secondary and to claim their sons' primary allegiance. Young women have an interest in circumventing and possibly evading their mother-in-law's control. There are culturally specific examples of how this struggle works to the detriment of the heterosexual bond,⁴³ but there are striking similarities in the overall pattern. In the case of Muslim societies, Fatima Mernissi emphasizes the role of Islamic ideology, which posits the primacy of the male believer's relationship with God, treating all other involvements, especially passionate and exclusive relationships with women, as diversionary if not positively subversive.⁴⁴ Although this ideology may indeed constitute a local contributory factor, there is little doubt that what is being played out in the mother-son-bride triangle forms a central structural component of a much broader patriarchal scenario.

The class or caste impact on classic patriarchy produces additional complexities. Among the wealthier strata, the withdrawal of women from nondomestic work is frequently a mark of status institutionalized in such seclusion and exclusion practices as the purdah system and veiling. The women who are thus restricted nonetheless share in the privileges of their class through greater access to and control over property, more leisure, and eventually better access to education. For the women of poorer strata, who can ill afford to observe this cultural ideal, the ideology of seclusion and dependence on men still exercises a powerful influence that severely restricts the range of options available to them. Judith Tucker's data on nineteenth-century Egypt suggest that the strongly interventionist state policies of the Muhammad 'Ali period resulted in women's recruitment into public works, state-run industries, and expanding sectors of health and education.⁴⁵ Yet at the same time she draws our attention to how women's independent access to income could result in losses on the family front, as when women in certain kinds of employment were legally deprived of the right of guardianship of their children. Ultimately, women's access to resources is mediated through the family. In situations where the observance of restrictive practices is a crucial element in the reproduction of family status, women will resist breaking the rules, even if observing them produces economic hardship. I would therefore agree with Maria Mies's analysis of the lacemakers of Narsapur, India, about whom she observes that the ideology of their

domesticity keeps them working at home, for extremely low wages, even though they are producing for the world market.⁴⁶ In this instance, ideology acts as a material force that results in a lucrative export commodity produced by conveniently cheap labor.

Women in areas of classic patriarchy thus are often unable to resist unfavorable labor relations in both the household and the market, and frequently adhere as far and as long as they possibly can to rules that result in the devaluation of their labor. The cyclical fluctuations of their power position, combined with status considerations, result in their active collusion in the reproduction of their own subordination. They frequently adopt interpersonal strategies that maximize their security through manipulation of the affections of their sons and husband. As Margery Wolf's insightful discussion of the Chinese uterine family suggests, this strategy can even result in the aging male patriarch losing power to his wife.⁴⁷ Even though these individual power tactics do little to alter the structurally unfavorable terms of the overall patriarchal script, women become experts at maximizing their own life chances.

This creates the paradoxical situation noted by Kay Anne Johnson, who comments on female conservatism in China: "Ironically, women through their actions to resist passivity and total male control, became participants with vested interests in the system that oppressed them."⁴⁸ One also gains important insights into women's investment in existing gender arrangements through ethnographic studies of the Middle East. Some suggest that far from producing subjective feelings of oppression, this willing participation enhances women's sense of control and self-worth. Wikan, for instance, depicts Omani women in the following terms: "Indeed many of the constraints and limitations imposed on women, such as the *burqa* [veil], restrictions of movement and sexual segregation, are seen by women as aspects of that very concern and respect on the part of the men which provide the basis for their own feeling of assurance and value. Rather than reflecting subjugation, these constraints and limitations are perceived by women as a source of pride and a confirmation of esteem."⁴⁹

The survival of the moral order of classic patriarchy, as well as the positioning of male versus female and young versus old, however, is grounded in specific material conditions. Changes in these conditions can seriously undermine the normative order. As expressed succinctly by Mead Cain, S. R. Khanan, and S. Nahar, it is both the key and the irony of this system that "male authority has a material base, while male responsibility is normatively controlled."⁵⁰ Their study of a village in Bangladesh offers a striking example of the strains placed by poverty on bonds of obligation between kin and, more specifically, on men's fulfillment of their normative obligations toward women. Martin Greeley also docu-

ments the growing dependence of landless households in Bangladesh on women's wage labor, including that of married women, and discusses the ways in which the stability of the patriarchal family is thereby undermined.⁵¹

In a purely analogical sense, patriarchal bargains, like scientific paradigms,⁵² can be shown to have a normal and a crisis phase, which challenges our very interpretation of what is going on in the world. Thus during what we might call the normal phase of classic patriarchy, there were always large numbers of women who were in fact exposed to economic hardship and insecurity. They were infertile and had to be divorced, or orphaned and without recourse to their natal family, or unprotected because they had no surviving sons or, even worse, had ungrateful sons. They were merely considered "unlucky," however, anomalies and accidental casualties of a system that otherwise made sense. It is at the point of breakdown that every system reveals its internal contradictions and often forces participants in the system to take up new and seemingly contradictory ideological positions.

THE DEMISE OF PATRIARCHAL BARGAINS: RETREAT INTO CONSERVATISM OR RADICAL PROTEST?

The material bases of classic patriarchy crumble under the impact of new market forces, capital penetration in rural areas,⁵³ and processes of economic marginalization and immiseration. Although there is no single path leading to the breakdown of this system, its consequences are fairly uniform. The domination of younger men by older men and the shelter of women in the domestic sphere were the hallmarks of a system in which men controlled some form of viable joint patrimony in land, animals, or commercial capital. Among the propertyless and the dispossessed, the necessity of every household member's contribution to survival turns men's economic protection of women—which is central to Muslim men's claims to primacy in the conjugal union—into a myth.

The breakdown of classic patriarchy results in the earlier emancipation from their fathers of younger men and their earlier separation from the paternal household. Whereas this process implies that women escape the control of mothers-in-law and head their own households at a much younger age, it also means that they themselves can no longer look forward to a future surrounded by subservient daughters-in-law. For the generation of women caught in between, this transformation may represent genuine personal tragedy, since they have paid the heavy price of an earlier patriarchal bargain, but are not able to cash in on its promised benefits. Wolf's statistics on suicide among women in China suggest a

clear change in the trend since the 1930s, with a sharp increase in the suicide rates of women over forty-five, whereas previously the rates were highest among young women, especially new brides.⁵⁴ She relates this change explicitly to the emancipation of sons and their new chance to escape familial control in their choice of spouse, which robs the older woman of her power and respectability as mother-in-law.

In the case of Muslim societies, Mernissi comments on the psychologically distortive effects of the discordance between deeply ingrained images and expectations of male-female roles and the changing realities of everyday life. "The wider the gap between reality and fantasy (or aspiration), the greater the suffering and the more serious the conflict and tension within us. The psychological cost is just barely tolerable. The fact that we cling to images of virility (economic power) and femininity (consumption of the husband's fortune) that have nothing whatever to do with real life contributes to making male-female dynamics one of the most painful sources of tension and conflict."⁵⁵ This tension is documented through an analysis of "sexual anomie" in contemporary Morocco, in which she stresses primarily men's frustration and humiliation at being unable to fulfill their traditional role and the threat posed by women's greater spatial mobility and access to paid employment.

The breakdown of classic patriarchy may be equally threatening to women, however, who often resist the process of change because they see the old normative order slipping away from them without any empowering alternatives. In a broader discussion of women's interests, Maxine Molyneux suggests that this may not be put down merely to "false consciousness" but to the possibility that changes realized in a piecemeal fashion "could threaten the short-term practical interests of some women, or entail a cost in the loss of forms of protection that are not then compensated for in some way."⁵⁶

Thus when classic patriarchy enters a crisis, many women may continue to pressure men to live up to their obligations and will not, except under the most extreme circumstances, compromise the basis for their claims by stepping out of line and losing their respectability. Their passive resistance takes the form of claiming their half of this particular patriarchal bargain—protection in exchange for submissiveness and propriety, and a confirmation that male honor is indeed dependent on their responsible conduct.

The response of some women who have to work for wages in this context may be an intensification of traditional modesty markers, such as veiling. Often, through no choice of their own, they are working outside the home and are thus "exposed"; they must now use every symbolic means at their disposal to signify that they continue to be worthy of protection. It is significant that Khomeini's exhortations to keep women

at home found enthusiastic support among many Iranian women, despite the obvious elements of repression. The implicit promise of increased male responsibility restores the integrity of their original patriarchal bargain in an environment where the range of options available to women is extremely restricted. Younger women adopt the veil, Farah Azari suggests, because "the restriction imposed on them by an Islamic order was therefore a small price that had to be paid in exchange for the security, stability and presumed respect this order promised them."⁵⁷ That this promise has proven to be illusory is strongly suggested by Haleh Afshar's review of social policies under the Islamic Republic.⁵⁸ She nonetheless acknowledges a large support base among the poor and working classes. Fadwa El Guindi's analysis of young women taking up the veil in Egypt also speaks of women's concern with retaining respectability and a measure of "untouchability" now that they are present in public spaces in growing numbers.⁵⁹

It would be simpleminded to single out Islam as unique in fulfilling this soothing and restorative function. There is evidence from non-Muslim societies that retreat into social and religious conservatism is one of the possible responses to changes that seem to threaten the moral order, especially when they present challenges to existing gender arrangements. At the ideological level, broken bargains seem to instigate a search for culprits, a hankering for the certainties of a more traditional order, or a more diffuse feeling that change might have gone either too far or badly wrong. The familism of the New Right and the anti-feminist movement in the West thus have been interpreted by some as an attempt to reinstate an older patriarchal bargain, with feminists providing a convenient scapegoat on whom to blame the loss of family values, intimacy, and community.⁶⁰ What makes conservative Islamic discourse even more compelling is that it often associates moral decay with contamination by foreign, generally Western values, and assigns women a privileged role in restoring the lost authenticity of the community of believers. This anti-imperialist, populist discourse constructs women upholding Muslim values as radical militants rather than mere traditionalists, adding a significant new dimension to female reaction in the Muslim world. What unites female conservatism in the West with Muslim women's militancy in the Middle East, however, is the common perception that the furtherance of women's gender interests lie in the restoration of an original patriarchal bargain that afforded them protection and dignity.

I have argued here that one of the major weaknesses in our theorizing about women in the Middle East stems from a conflation of Islam, as ideology and practice, with patriarchy. This conflation is encouraged by monolithic and essentialist conceptions of both Islam and patriarchy. In

search of an alternative, I presented case materials illustrating women's strategies and coping mechanisms as a means of capturing the nature of patriarchal systems in their cultural, class specific, and temporal concreteness. I have tried to show how two ideal-typical systems of male dominance could provide different base lines from which women negotiate and strategize, and how each affects the potentialities of their resistance and struggles.

Islam cuts across these ideal types and extends well beyond them (as in the case of Southeast Asian societies). Even though Islam brings its own prescriptions to bear on gender relations in each context, it nonetheless achieves different accommodations with the diverse cultural complexes it encounters. That the core areas of Islamic civilization have historically coincided with areas of classic patriarchy has tended to obscure these variations, and encouraged a confusion between the assumed workings of Islam and those of a specific type of patriarchy.

The different political projects of modern nation-states, the specificities of their nationalist histories, and the positioning of Islam vis-à-vis diverse nationalisms also account for deep and significant variations in policies and legislation affecting women.⁶¹ These variations find concrete expression in the degree of access that women have to education, paid employment, social benefits, and political participation.

There is, nonetheless, a sense in which Islam in the contemporary world may be promoting a homogenization of ideology and practice concerning women, the family, and gender relations. This political Islam speaks to the gap created by the breakdown of patriarchal bargains and to the turmoil and confusion created by rapid and often corrosive processes of social transformation. The extensive "ideologization" of the sphere of family and gender relations is itself, however, a historical phenomenon of fairly recent origin that cannot be imputed to Islam itself.

It should be clear that these different levels at which I have invoked Islam—kinship systems, the state, and political ideologies—cannot be conflated and must be kept analytically distinct. We should now be moving toward finely grained historical analyses of how they intersect, interact, and change.

Notes

1. Nikki R. Keddie, "Problems in the Study of Middle Eastern Women," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10 (1979): 225–40; Judith E. Tucker, "Problems in the Historiography of Women in the Middle East: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15 (1983): 321–36.

2. Nawal al-Saadawi, "Women and Islam," in *Women and Islam*, ed. Azizah

al-Hibri (Oxford: Pergamon, 1982), 193–206; Azizah al-Hibri, "A Study of Islamic Herstory," in *Women and Islam*, 207–20; Fatima Mernissi, *Le harem politique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1987).

3. For critical views on this question, see Azar Tabari, "The Women's Movement in Iran: A Hopeful Prognosis," *Feminist Studies* 12 (1986): 343–60; Mai Ghoussooub, "Feminism—or the Eternal Masculine—in the Arab World," *New Left Review* 161 (1987): 3–18.

4. Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie, eds. *Women in the Muslim World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978); Judith E. Tucker, *Women in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Elizabeth W. Fernea, ed., *Women and the Family in the Middle East* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985); UNESCO, *Social Science Research and Women in the Arab World* (London: Frances Pinter, 1984).

5. We have likewise not paid enough systematic attention to the articulation between Islam, nationalism, and different state-building projects in the Middle East. On this question, see Deniz Kandiyoti, ed., *Women, Islam and the State* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

6. Leila Ahmed, "Women and the Advent of Islam," *Signs* 11 (1986): 665–91.

7. Mervat Hatem, "Class and Patriarchy as Competing Paradigms for the Study of Middle Eastern Women," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29, no. 4 (1987): 811–18.

8. This discussion will not be representative of the broader debate on the question of the origins and causes of women's subordination. On the question of origins, see Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). A useful collection of essays may be found in Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., *Women, Culture, and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974). This work introduces the public-private dichotomy, which has been particularly influential, as well as contested, in analyses of women in the Middle East. See chapters by Friedl and Hegland in this volume.

9. For two very different materialist accounts, see Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (London: Women's Press, 1979), and Christine Delphy, *The Main Enemy* (London: Women's Research and Resource Centre, 1977).

10. As in Zillah Eisenstein, "Developing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy," in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, ed. Zillah Eisenstein (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), 5–40; Roisin McDonough and Rachel Harrison, "Patriarchy and Relations of Production," in *Feminism and Materialism*, ed. Annette Kuhn and Ann Marie Wolpe (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 11–41; Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union," in *Women and Revolution*, ed. Lydia Sargent (London: Pluto, 1981), 1–41; Michele Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today* (London: Verso, 1980).

11. Ester Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970).

12. Germaine Tillion, *The Republic of Cousins* (London: Al Saqi, 1983).

13. Jack Goody, *Production and Reproduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

14. Ann Whitehead, "Review of Jack Goody's *Production and Reproduction*," *Critique of Anthropology* 3, nos. 9–10 (1977): 151–59; Karen Sacks, *Sisters and Wives: The Past and Future of Sexual Equality* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1979).
15. Felicity Edholm, Olivia Harris, and Kate Young, "Conceptualizing Women," *Critique of Anthropology* 3, nos. 9–10 (1977): 101–30.
16. Lourdes Beneria, "Reproduction, Production and the Sexual Division of Labour," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 3, no. 3 (1979): 203–25.
17. Lourdes Beneria and Gita Sen, "Accumulation, Reproduction and Women's Role in Economic Development: Boserup Revisited," *Signs* 7 (1981): 279–98.
18. There have been many variations on this theme. See, for instance, Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (London: Zed, 1986).
19. As in Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution*, and Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today*.
20. Hence the host of such imprecise formulations as "state" patriarchy versus "private" patriarchy, Muslim patriarchy, and so on.
21. Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," *Gender and Society* 2, no. 3 (1988): 274–90.
22. This term is intended to indicate the existence of set rules and scripts regulating gender relations, to which both genders accommodate and acquiesce, yet which may nevertheless be contested, redefined, and renegotiated.
23. James C. Caldwell, "A Theory of Fertility: From High Plateau to Destabilization," *Population and Development Review* 4 (1978): 553–77.
24. Deniz Kandiyoti, *Women in Rural Production Systems: Problems and Policies* (Paris: UNESCO, 1985).
25. John Hanger and Jon Moris, "Women and the Household Economy," in *Mwea: An Irrigated Rice Settlement in Kenya*, ed. Robert Chambers and Jon Moris (Munich: Weltforum, 1973), 209–44.
26. Janet Dey, "Gambian Women: Unequal Partners in Rice Development Projects," in *African Women in the Development Process*, ed. Nici Nelson (London: Frank Cass, 1981), 109–22.
27. Pepe Roberts, "The Sexual Politics of Labour in Western Nigeria and Hausa Niger," in *Serving Two Masters*, ed. Kate Young (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1989), 27–47.
28. Kristin Mann, *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status and Social Change among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
29. Monica Munachonga, "Income Allocation and Marriage Options in Urban Zambia," in *A Home Divided: Women and Income in the Third World*, ed. Daisy Dwyer and Judith Bruce (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 173–94.
30. Katherine Abu, "The Separateness of Spouses: Conjugal Resources in an Ashanti Town," in *Male and Female in West Africa*, ed. Christine Oppong (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 156–68.
31. Jane I. Guyer and Pauline E. Peters, eds., *Conceptualizing the Household: Issues of Theory and Policy in Africa*, special issue of *Development and Change* 18 (1987).
32. Enid Schildkrout, "Dependence and Autonomy: The Economic Activities of Secluded Hausa Women in Kano, Nigeria," in *Women and Work in Africa*, ed. Edna G. Bay (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1982), 55–81.

33. Mette Bovin, "Muslim Women in the Periphery: The West African Sahel," in *Women in Islamic Societies*, ed. Bo Utas (London: Curzon, 1983), 66–103.
34. I am excluding not only Southeast Asia but also the northern Mediterranean, despite important similarities in the latter concerning codes of honor and the overall importance attached to the sexual purity of women, because I want to restrict myself to areas where the patrilocal-patrilineal complex is dominant. Thus societies with bilateral kinship systems such as Greece, in which women do inherit and control property and whose dowries constitute productive property, do not qualify in spite of important similarities in other ideological respects. This is not to suggest, however, that an unqualified homogeneity of ideology and practice exists within the geographical boundaries indicated. There are critical variations within the Indian subcontinent, for example, that have dramatically different implications for women. For these, see Tim Dyson and Mick Moore, "On Kinship Structures, Female Autonomy and Demographic Behavior," *Population and Development Review* 9 (1983): 35–60. Conversely, even in areas of bilateral kinship, there may be instances in which all the facets of classic patriarchy, namely property, residence, and descent through the male line, may coalesce under specified circumstances. See Bette Denich, "Sex and Power in the Balkans," in *Women, Culture, and Society*, ed. Rosaldo and Lamphere, 243–62. What I am suggesting is that the most clear-cut and easily identifiable examples of classic patriarchy are found within the boundaries indicated in the text.
35. Eric Wolf, *Peasants* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1966).
36. Sherry Ortner, "The Virgin and the State," *Feminist Studies* 4 (1978): 19–36.
37. Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
38. Michael Meeker, "Meaning and Society in the Near East: Examples from the Black Sea Turks and Levantine Arabs," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7 (1976): 383–422.
39. Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
40. Unni Wikan, *Behind the Veil in Arabia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).
41. Ursula Sharma, *Women, Work and Property in North West India* (London: Tavistock, 1980).
42. Ronald C. Jennings, "Women in Early Seventeenth Century Ottoman Judicial Records: The Sharia Court of Anatolian Kayseri," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 28 (1975): 53–114; Haim Gerber, "Social and Economic Position of Women in an Ottoman City, Bursa, 1600–1700," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12 (1980): 231–44; Tucker, *Women in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*.
43. Abdelwahab Boudhiba, *Sexuality in Islam* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985); Kay Anne Johnson, *Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Margery Wolf, *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972).
44. Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil* (London: Al Saqi, 1985).
45. Tucker, *Women in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*.
46. Maria Mies, "The Dynamics of the Sexual Division of Labour and Integra-

- tion of Women into the World Market," in *Women and Development: The Sexual Division of Labour in Rural Societies*, ed. Lourdes Beneria (New York: Praeger, 1982), 1–28.
47. Wolf, *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*.
 48. Johnson, *Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China*, 21.
 49. Wikan, *Behind the Veil in Arabia*, 184.
 50. Mead Cain, S. R. Khanan, and S. Nahar, "Class, Patriarchy and Women's Work in Bangladesh," *Population and Development Review* 5 (1979): 408–16.
 51. Martin Greeley, "Patriarchy and Poverty: A Bangladesh Case Study," *South Asia Research* 3 (1983): 35–55.
 52. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
 53. Deniz Kandiyoti, "Rural Transformation in Turkey and Its Implications for Women's Status," in *Women on the Move: Contemporary Changes in Family and Society* (Paris: UNESCO, 1984), 17–30.
 54. Margery Wolf, "Women and Suicide in China," in *Women in Chinese Society*, ed. Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 111–41.
 55. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, 149.
 56. Maxine Molyneux, "Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State and Revolution in Nicaragua," *Feminist Studies* 11 (1985): 227–54.
 57. Farah Azari, "Islam's Appeal to Women in Iran: Illusion and Reality," in *Women of Iran: The Conflict with Fundamentalist Islam*, ed. Farah Azari (London: Ithaca Press, 1983), 1–71.
 58. Haleh Afshar, "Behind the Veil: The Public and Private Faces of Khomeini's Policies on Iranian Women," in *Structures of Patriarchy*, ed. Bina Agarwal (London: Zed, 1988), 228–47.
 59. Fadwa El Guindi, "Veiling *Infitah* with Muslim Ethic: Egypt's Contemporary Islamic Movement," *Social Problems* 8 (1981): 465–85.
 60. Janet S. Chafetz and Anthony G. Dworkin, "In the Face of Threat: Organized Antifeminism in Comparative Perspective," *Gender and Society* 1 (1987): 33–60; Deborah Rosenfelt and Judith Stacey, "Second Thoughts on the Second Wave," *Feminist Studies* 13 (1987): 341–61; Judith Stacey, "Sexism by a Subtler Name? Postindustrial Conditions and Postfeminist Consciousness in the Silicon Valley," *Socialist Review* (November 1987): 7–28.
 61. Kandiyoti, ed., *Women, Islam and the State*; see also Deniz Kandiyoti, "Emancipated but Unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish Case," *Feminist Studies* 13 (1987): 317–38.

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