

TOWSON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

THE RESULTS OF CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS ON THE
ADVANCEMENT OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN THEIR SOCIETY

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Robin A. McMenamin
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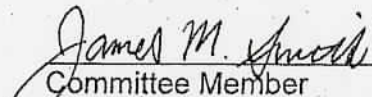
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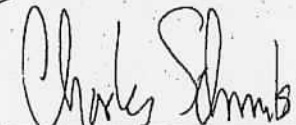
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Chair, Thesis Committee

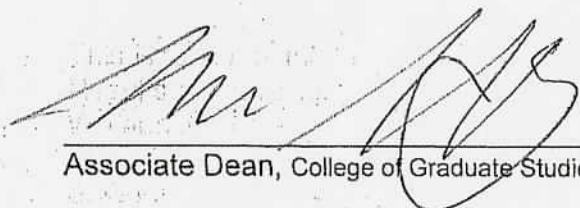
23 Dec. 2011
Date


Committee Member

23 Dec. 2011
Date


Committee Member

23 Dec 2011
Date


Associate Dean, College of Graduate Studies and Research

3 Jan 2011
Date

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ABSTRACT

Muslim women in France, Turkey and Egypt are creating new social and religious identities as a result of globalization and contemporary Islamic movements. While the three countries analyzed have different governments and demographics, their case studies provide an overview of the varying challenges Islamic women are confronting. Muslim women are challenging the law on the issue of the veil, access to education and employment opportunities. Their fight against the gender disparities with their male counterparts is an arduous battle, as governments and Islam are so intertwined it is difficult to gain legitimacy for their cause. Globalization has benefitted women's movements by modernizing their Muslim culture and exposing them to western concepts of equality. Islamic women are using an Islamic feminine paradigm to integrate themselves into their societies and advance their social-political status.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	6
Analysis of Women's Dress.....	12
Education.....	28
Conclusion.....	51
Bibliography.....	55
Resume.....	63

INTRODUCTION

Muslim women face many challenges reasserting themselves into society in the Middle East. This paper focuses on their journey for equal rights and opportunities while struggling to create their identity in a globalized world. Contemporary Islamic movements have advanced women's roles in society. The markers of progression for the equality of Islamic women are apparent in the complex issue of veiling and access to educational opportunities.

Muslim women in different social and political contexts are confronting comparable issues revolving around their identity. What influences their definition of themselves, how they deal with the impact of globalization and what challenges they are overcoming to become equal with their male counterparts, are questions which I will answer through an interdisciplinary perspective of historical, sociological and feminist theories.

Contemporary Islamic movements allow Muslim women to create new roles and identities. The analysis of Islamic women and their shifting roles illustrates the contemporary elements influencing Muslims. Some attribute the shift in cultural practices of Islamic women to globalization and the influence of the Western world.

Women break away from the “moralizing definition of woman in Islam by referring to Western feminism”¹. Gole labels these women “the forbidden modern”² where the forbidden refers to the gender differences in Islamic culture. He offers an interesting perspective into the socially constructed boundaries of Muslim women comparing traditional roles to the problems faced when contemporary elements challenge those roles.

The controversy surrounding Islamic women developing new identities is an issue in part due to globalization. Mauro Guillen’s definition of globalization is “to combine the perspectives of Robertson and Albrow, and so defines globalization as a process leading to greater interdependence and mutual awareness (reflexivity) among economic, political and social units in the world, and among actors in general”.³ This greater interdependence and mutual awareness are markers used to analyze the advancement of women’s rights. Guillen further differentiates between the definition of globalization and globalization as an “ideology with multiple meanings and lineages...the term also appears linked to cross-border advocacy networks and organizations defending human rights, environments, women’s rights or world peace.”⁴

While Jan Aart Schulte stresses an important marker of globalization in his definition, which is the interconnectedness of nation states, Schulte goes further to analyze globalization in five sections namely

¹ Gole, 11

² Gole, 13

³ Guillen, Mauro. “Is Globalization Civilizing, Destructive or Feeble? A Critique of Five Key Debates in the Social Science Literature.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 27, pp. 235-260, 2001.

⁴ Guillen, 238

internationalization, liberalization, universalization, deterritorialization and westernization or modernization⁵. The more influence technology and globalization has on Islamic women, the more women are turning towards new social and religious identities.

What the *Quran* says about woman and what some interpret the scriptures to say about woman are two different concepts as Asam Barlas argues. She states that globalization will only be able to transform women's lives if they "enable a fundamental epistemic shift in how Muslims interpret and practice Islam"⁶. This interpretation of Islam is supported by the Muslim women's ability to utilize globalization to their advantage.

Despite the varying beliefs of Islam, "Muslims everywhere regard men as ontologically superior to women, and most hold that the woman is obligated to submit to the man in his capacity as her 'husband, father, or brother'"⁷. This interpretation of the *Quran* is what modern Islamic women are grappling with while constructing their new identities and place in society.

Amira El Azhary Sonbol⁸ points out that in the *Quran* there are no female prophets, only females used as examples both in positive and negative ways. Nevertheless, women comprise a large portion of the Muslim population and Islamic women in France, Turkey, and Egypt are finding their

⁵ Scholte, Jan Aart. *Globalization a Critical Introduction*. London: Macmillan, 2000.

⁶ Barlas, Asam "Globalizing Equality: Muslim Women, Theology, and Feminisms," in Fera Simone (ed.), *On Shifting Ground: Muslim Women in the Global Era* (NY: Feminist Press, 2005)

⁷ Barlas, 96

⁸ Amira El Zahary Sonbol

place in modern society and religion through contemporary Islamic movements.

While there are differences in interpretations of religious texts, Muslims are undoubtedly confronting the West and their own challenges. Oliver Roy analyzes Muslims and the West, specifically the United States and Europe, and argues that the way they practice Islam has undergone a westernization. This influence of western culture is seen in the “homogenisation of the academic space”⁹ or in the emergence of transnational identities to which Muslims in the west ascribe to. Women and men are advancing their educations together and forming new identities within their socially constructed space. Yet women are typically considered in society as “low due to the combination of a patriarchal structure and legal Islamic norms”¹⁰. These norms are what modern women are challenging as they redefine what it means to be an Islamic woman. In the traditional Muslim practices “the dress issue becomes central in modernized societies.”¹¹ This analysis of the evolving spheres of women in Muslim societies within France, Egypt and Turkey will focus on the creation of their new identities by way of their dress and educational opportunities.

In France the issues of dress and integration in society have dominated this arena in recent times with a large portion of their immigrant population practicing Islam. These topics are an issue in Turkey and Egypt

⁹ Roy, Oliver. *Globalized Islam, The Search for a New Ummah*. Columbia University Press, New York, 2004. Page 24. (Roy 2004)

¹⁰ Roy, 266

¹¹ Roy, 267

as well, however with dramatically different political and social contexts. The Islamic population in France is comprised of immigrants, while Turkey and Egypt are predominantly Muslim.

Contemporary Islamic movements in the 20th century have occurred as a direct reaction to globalization and “the global changes that constitute modernity”¹². Globalization is a positive movement for Islamic women in France, Turkey and Egypt. It can assist them in their advancement efforts and act as an equalizer. This force of technology enables more women access to education, and other opportunities which were not previously available to them without globalization permeating their culture.

Leila Ahmed acknowledges the debate on modern Islamic women and their abandonment of religious traditions for new practices, which coincide more with European and Western cultures. Women are facing resistance as they create their identities with their new beliefs. The impact of “European political and cultural encroachment were complicated and, in certain respects, decidedly negative”¹³. However, the positive impact on women is greater than the negative aspects as “social institutions and mechanisms for the control and seclusion of women and for their exclusion from the major

¹² Lapidus, Ira M. Islamic Revival and Modernity: The Contemporary Movements and the Historical Paradigms: *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (1997), pp. 444-460.

¹³ Ahmed, Leila, *Women and Gender in Islam, Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1992.

domains of activity in their society were gradually dismantled".¹⁴ This destruction of socially constructed boundaries was no longer hindering Islamic women in France, Turkey and Iran due to a shift towards a globalized world.

¹⁴ Ahmed, 128

Analysis of Islamic Women's Dress

The choice of Islamic women in France, Turkey and Egypt to wear a veil or not, marks the shift towards a new identity and definition of self. The right to choose what to wear, or the lack of choice in the matter of their dress is extremely controversial and complex. The way a woman dresses is more than articles of clothing, it is an expression of the women's choice or lack there of, and "it is a language that can be readily changed in different context".¹⁵

The social and political context in France, Egypt and Turkey are important in order to give adequate consideration to the variety of ways Islamic women are constructing new identities. The population and governments differ from each other in the three aforementioned nations. In France the predominant religion is not Islam, whereas in Turkey and Egypt it is. Many Muslims in France immigrated to the secular country. Turkey also ascribes to secularism while Egypt is currently going through major reforms to their government. Islam plays an integral role in Egyptian and Turkish politics and arguably it is permeating the political scene in France as the French government has passed laws regarding displays of religion¹⁶.

¹⁵ Fandy, 385

¹⁶ As of December 12, 2011, Hind Ahmas, a French Muslim woman was sentenced to 15 days in jail for refusing to follow the French law regarding

The common term used to refer to the veil, the Hijab, is known to be associated with the connotation of modesty and morality¹⁷. These values are highly regarded in Islamic traditions, and establish the desire of Muslim women to veil themselves.

The following discussion about the meaning of the veil in Islamic movements is not based upon the veil representing oppressed women. Veiling is much more of a choice that women have rather than just an act of control by men in modernized nations. Interestingly, the governments in the “modernizing states of Turkey and Iran had earlier in the century banned veiling and required men, except religious clerics, to adopt western dress.”¹⁸ In France, Egypt, Iran, and Turkey, women are asserting themselves in varying ways by use of the veil.

While this one particular item of clothing holds immense significance and meaning, “the veil itself and whether it is worn are about as relevant to substantive matters or women’s rights as the social prescription of one or another item of clothing is to western women’s struggles over substantive issues”.¹⁹ In France, Muslim women have been confronting the clash between new beliefs versus long held traditions with respect to their ability to wear veils in public schools. On March 15, 2004 the government of France

headscarves as she would not remove her veil outside the Elysee Palace. Hind Ahmas has her own group called Do Not Touch My Constitution where she writes about her struggle to maintain her religious identity.

<http://toucheapasamaconstitution.wordpress.com/english/>

¹⁷ Wiles, 717

¹⁸ Abu-Lughod, Lila 786

¹⁹ Ahmed, 166

passed a law²⁰ against the wearing of any clothing reflective of any religious affiliation in public schools.²¹ This was met with widespread criticism on both sides of the issue.

In the years preceding the 2004 law, many conflicts occurred in Islamic nations and “certainty contributed to anxiety about the place of Muslims in France, despite the fact that polls continued to show that the vast majority of Muslims were becoming more secular, more integrated into French society”²². Arguments against the law cite racism and discrimination in particular against Muslim immigrants in France. A marked time in France’s history was the influx of immigration after decolonization of their colonies. The mixed reactions to Muslim immigrants into France resulted in discrimination against them. Joan Scott argues that the veil in France embodies these reactions, “whether it connotes excessive sexuality or a denial of sexuality, where it is worn as an expression of personal religious commitment or as a sign of political opposition”²³ the veil is a powerful piece of political rhetoric.

Joan Scott also evaluates Oliver Roy’s interpretation of Islam and modernity and agrees with his link between Islamic women and their contemporary religious practices. She believes that even if his interpretation

²⁰ Article L. 141-51 of the French Education Code “In state primary and secondary schools, the wearing of signs or dress by which pupils overtly manifest a religious affiliation is prohibited.”

²¹ “In public elementary, middle and high schools, the wearing of signs or clothing which conspicuously manifest students religious affiliations is prohibited. Disciplinary procedures to implement this rule will be preceded by a discussion with the student” Joan Wallach Scott

²² Scott, 35

²³ Scott, 89

of the issue can explain the motives of a few of the women who wear headscarves, the main focus of his analysis is that this is a modern phenomenon which is an integral part of her study.

Mayanthil Fernando analyzes the controversy surrounding the veil and laws in France. Fernando debates how much of the French Islamic revival is specifically about the headscarf. She also questions if it is dependent upon “a series of oppositions between choice and constraint, personal autonomy and religious authority, and self realization and ‘external’ norms.”²⁴ As many Muslims in France are challenging this, they are faced with reconciling their place in religion and society.

The core of the conflict between religion and the state in France is the veil. The start of the conflict began with “the first ‘headscarf affair’ [which] occurred in 1989, when three Muslim schoolgirls of Tunisian and Moroccan descent refused to remove their headscarves in class, provoking a national policy crisis.”²⁵ A law was subsequently passed in 1989 allowing headscarves in public schools yet in 2004 a new law was passed banning the display of religious signs in school, including the veil.

As Joan Scott detailed in her book, and as Fernando acknowledges in her article there are many arguments for the justification of this law. For example “the headscarf violated the avowedly secular, neutral space of the public school; it represented an unacceptable form of communalism and was the tip of the iceberg of a larger Islamic threat; and it symbolized the

²⁴ Fernando, 20

²⁵ Fernando, 21

submission of women to patriarchal religious authority, and therefore had no place in the secular public schools.”²⁶ Yet Islamic women are making the conscious choice to veil themselves. They are creating their identity and expressing their choice by wearing the veil.

Some believe that the headscarf controversy in France suggests that a veil represents a women’s submission to a man. For example Fernando claims the belief that “young girls in headscarves are being forced to wear them by their fathers, brothers, or Muslim community leaders, and that they need to be emancipated by secular republic and its laws.”²⁷ Older women who make the decision to veil themselves continue the conflict between outward religious displays and the significance or lack thereof that they hold. French sociologists have concluded that the headscarf is a display of liberation and of women reasserting themselves in society²⁸. “Many of these analysts argue that by becoming a practicing Muslim and participating in Islamic civil associations, young women are able to cloak their desires – for work, for education, for freedom- in, if you will, a veil of Islamic legitimacy, enabling them to escape traditional customs.”²⁹ A women’s age correlates to their view on the banning of headscarves in France. Older immigrant women “have actively supported the ban, [and] younger feminists more commonly

²⁶ Fernando, 21

²⁷ Fernando, 21

²⁸ The French Sociologist are Gaspard, Khosrokhavar, Tietze, Venel

²⁹ Fernando, 28

opposed both the veil and the law banning the veil.³⁰ Women of Arab descent denounced the 2004 law yet support the French government in advocating for more separation between the government and religion.

The Muslim immigrant population in France wears a wide variety of dress and headscarves. The variation in dress reflects different levels of cultural interpretations of traditions surrounding the veil, for example some veil because it is a part of their cultural tradition while others do so because it is their interpretation of their religion. The *Quran* only mentions the modesty of women and does not dictate what they should specifically wear, thus there is an array of ways Islamic women cover themselves. The assimilation of Muslim immigrants in France has been troubled due to their adherence to their religious dress and cultural traditions. France attempts to guard its legislation against the mingling of church and state, yet they decided to pass controversial legislation combating religious dress in public institutions.

Caitlin Killian's study on Muslim immigrants in France concluded that numerous Islamic women wear the veil in schools because of family pressure. In fact "many indicated that if they did not veil, their parents would not allow them to attend school."³¹ Women between the ages of 18 and 22 responding to Killian's study revealed the majority wears the veil as a personal choice, while other older women take pride in veiling because it is a way to maintain

³⁰ Ezekiel, Judith. *French Dressing: Race, Gender and the Hijab Story*. Feminist Studies, Vol. 32, No. 2, Summer 2006, pp 256-278. (Ezekiel 2006)

³¹ Killian, Caitlin. The Other Side of the Veil North African Women in France Respond to the Headscarf Affair. *Gender & Society*, Vol. 17, No. 4, August 2003, pp. 567-590.

their cultural identity in their new country. Well-educated, younger immigrant women believe that the veil is a personal choice, a right that Muslim women should not have taken away. They also expressed to Killian that France should be more accepting of different cultural traditions. The issue is not if they like the veil or not. The majority of young women dislike the veil however, they believe excluding girls from having the choice to wear it is doing more harm than good for their advancement and assimilation into society.

While some Muslim immigrants in France affirm that the headscarf is their personal choice, others wear it because they believe it is their religious responsibility. Fernando argues that when a woman states “they wear the headscarf out of religious obligation, secular critics assume either that it is compelled by fathers, brothers or other male religious leaders, or that these women believe the veil should be imposed on all women.”³² However, the aforementioned assumption is not completely accurate since calling the veil a religious duty does not conform to the teachings of the *Quran*. The religious obligation of the veil is an interpretation of the religious texts. When a Muslim women’s right to veil or unveil is addressed as their choice rather than a religious obligation, they “paradoxically undermined their case for religious liberty because it enabled policy makers like Weil to consider veiling as simply a choice rather than religious duty.”³³ Fernando and Scott come to similar

³² Fernando, 28

³³ Fernando, pg 29: “Because one person’s freedom ends where another’s begins, the decision was made to protect unveiled girls’ freedom of religion-

conclusions that the veil and surrounding controversy in France highlights anxiety over Islam. Ellen Wiles' argument parallels Fernando and Scott, however her interpretation of the implications of the French law is broader.

To analyze the implications of the law according to Wiles would be to "open Pandora's box, revealing jumbled interrelationships and tensions between notions of equality, human rights, and the social and political theories that surround and inform them."³⁴ Wiles focused on the equality of the law, or lack thereof, as laws like this perpetuate a larger societal problem.

Differentiating between citizens who have struggled to integrate themselves into French culture continues the divisiveness between citizens. However, a divide between individuals is not what the law was intended to create, if you follow the Stasi Commission's reasoning that the law banning headscarves would help with gender equality³⁵. Thus the question arises which equality is more important, gender or cultural equality? And how can the current legislation be rectified to be more inclusive of cultural and gender discrepancies?

To answer this question Wiles looks to the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom embraces multiculturalism more so than France as demonstrated by their Muslim population wearing the headscarf. The

understood as the right to choose freely in the absence of the ostensibly constraining pressure produced by other girls' headscarves."

³⁴ Wiles, Ellen. Headscarves, Human Rights, and Harmonious Multicultural Society: Implications of the French Ban for Interpretations of Equality. *Law & Society Review*, Volume 41, Number 3, 2007.

³⁵ The Stasi Commission was established by President Jacques Chirac in July 2003 as a nonpartisan group to investigate the implications of banning religious signs in public schools

headscarf has never become a major point of legislative contention in the United Kingdom. The choice to wear a headscarf is “simply assumed to be a matter of basic freedom of expression and religion that women and girls are able to wear it in public life.”³⁶ While the United Kingdom embraces cultural differences and has not passed laws regarding the veil, Turkey is a secular state and, similar to France, they have also passed laws against headscarves.

However a major difference in the population of France and Turkey is that Turkey is comprised of an overwhelming majority of Muslims. The Turkish ban on headscarves went further than public schools. It also included higher educational institutions. The 1990 law in Turkey resulted in large amount of confusion because of the resulting court rulings and the varied enforcement of the headscarf ban. Seven years later the “Turkish military issued an ultimatum to the government, in what has been called a postmodern coup d’état, demanding that the civilian authorities implement the ban without exception.”³⁷

The reinforcement of gender inequality is argued as a reason against laws banning headscarves yet in Turkey a major component of their former ban on headscarves is to advance gender equality. Turkey is a candidate to become a member of the European Union and to validate their pledge to advance women’s rights and roles in society they are using the headscarf as

³⁶ Wiles, 705

³⁷ Wiles, 709

a “symbolic means of demonstrating a commitment to gender equality.”³⁸ Yet the veil is a symbolic representation in Turkey that barely covers the depths of gender differences in their nation which “[fails] to meet human rights standards in terms of the oppression of women...[and] the continued existence of practices such as honor killings.”³⁹ Their judicial system is clearly flawed.

Turkey has since reversed the ban on veils. Their legislation regarding women’s dress has changed many times since the 1980’s. The original ban on headscarves was established in 1982 and expanded to public spaces and educational institutions. Secularists in Turkey supported the laws against the veil, yet women in higher educational institutions disagreed and argued that the law violated their right to religious freedom. In 2007 a moderate Islamic political party the Justice and Development Party was elected. One of the issues on their agenda was to change the headscarf ban. Their rationale for the rejection of the ban on headscarves is that it violated women’s rights. In 2008 the Turkish parliament amended the constitution to repeal the ban on headscarves while the secularists in Turkey challenged the amending of the constitution. The repeal of the headscarf ban was eventually passed.

Globalization has influenced the perception of Islamic women who wear the veil and as a result the western media has inaccurately portrayed them as lacking their own identity and choice. This view has been adopted in France with their ban on headscarves while it is disputed in Turkey and Iran.

³⁸ Wiles, 710

³⁹ Wiles, 711

Turkish feminists and sociologists view Muslim women in Turkish universities as in a position of power. They have the power over themselves to decide if they are going to veil and it is a way to express their political, social and religious identity.

Another component of the laws against veils is the argument that the governments are becoming more aligned with the west. Roy accounts for the “westernization” of Islam. This modern concept is paramount to Scott’s argument of veiling as a modern marker of women asserting themselves in society. Wiles also uses Roy’s theory of the lack of a “Muslim Community” in France, but rather than use the term community Wiles suggests that “Muslims who identify themselves as members of an ethnic, religious, or cultural minority are best described in French terms as ‘casualties of the integration process’”⁴⁰. Another indication in society of women asserting themselves is through their choice to wear a veil in educational pursuits.

While France outlaws the veil in public education, Egypt does not and many women choose to veil themselves while at universities. The choice to cover themselves while in academia can be traced back to avoiding ridicule by men. The Muslim brotherhood rejected modernization of women and the shifts towards women becoming more westernized.

An example of traditional practices being dismissed in favor of modern ones is occurring in Egypt. Women are choosing to wear a veil while they pursue higher education. This example combines two markers of modernity,

⁴⁰ Wiles, 703

women making the choice to not only pursue their education but also do so while making the a choice in their dress. Women are seeking to avoid harassment so they opt to pursue their educations fully veiled. In Egypt there are no laws regarding harassment against them in educational intuitions. So they turn to the veil, completely covering themselves when in public.

Mamoun Fandy analyzes the way Egyptian women dress and by doing so uncovered flaws in Egyptian politics. In Egypt, many areas that appear to be the most aligned with the West are the areas where there are women choosing to wear a veil. Yet the common understanding is that the west dismisses the wearing of the veil. The way women dress in Egypt is not only an expression of the state but also a representation of the complexity of the issues. There are tensions between groups that favor 'traditional' dress or the more modern, westernized dress the government requires of citizens in government offices, schools and clinics. This picture is further complicated by different notions of private, semiprivate and public spaces. The way a woman dresses is a statement in and of itself.

The veil is more than an article of clothing, it is an expression of the woman's choice and "it is a language that can be readily changed in different contexts"⁴¹. On two college campuses in Egypt, al-Azhar University and Cairo University two opposite views towards women's dress exist. Police from al-Azhara University actually "prevent[ed] non veiled women from entering the university because being nonveiled in that context is considered

⁴¹ Fandy, 385

defiance of patriarchal norms of modesty; at the same time police in front of Cairo University were turning away fully veiled women and admitting only the nonveiled, because veiling is interpreted as an Islamic defiance of the State's officially secular policies"⁴². Educated Muslim women tend to dress differently as do women in urban areas in Egypt, and Egyptian men.

Fadwa El Guindi also focuses on gender differences in Islamic movements. He specifically addresses the contemporary Islamic movement in Egypt and argues that it represents a new alternative to practicing Islam. The example of women and their veils representing assertiveness and a physical connection with Islam and modernity is the core of his argument. Contemporary women in Egypt illustrate a contradiction of traditional Islamic stereotypes. They are pursuing educations and yet are dressed in traditional Islamic dress, fully veiled face and body, "the veil is one element in a total dress code called al-zivy al-Islami (the Islamic dress), and the new women assertively wearing it represents a large movement occurring in Egypt today"⁴³.

Guindi focuses on two main elements of the Islamic movement in Egypt. The first is the "al-Infitah (the open door policy) and second results from development programs launched with the 1952 Egyptian Revolution, particularly the strong offensive in women's education and employment"⁴⁴. Women who choose to wear the veil while pursuing their education are

⁴² Fandy, 389

⁴³ Guindi, 465

⁴⁴ Guindi, 466

confronting the ultimate challenge, which is to “maintain tradition while achieving progress”⁴⁵. The advancement of women and their dress is made possible by contemporary Islamic movements. As a result, women are able to create a new social and religious identity for themselves.

The Muslim brotherhood in Egypt has a significant influence on women’s movements. They dislike the western women, rejecting the west’s model of women, and the exploitation, especially sexual exploitation, of women in the name of capitalism and profits.⁴⁶ The Muslim brotherhood also relates the rise of nation states to the westernization of the Middle East. When states begin to develop some Muslims saw the newly formed states as distancing themselves from traditional Muslim practices.

Amin and Al-Bassusi assert that there is a correlation between women in Egypt, their educational achievements, employment opportunities and outlook on marriage.⁴⁷ Islamic women are defining new roles for themselves by pursuing educational opportunities rather than marriage. Women’s goals are shifting to focusing more on themselves, their employment opportunities and to further their opportunities through education. However, Amin and Al-Bassusi conclude that even with women advancing their education, their roles are not likely to change drastically due to the dominance of deeply held Islamic customs engrained in society.

⁴⁵ Guindi, 483

⁴⁶ Ahmed, 194.

⁴⁷ Amin, Sajeda and Al-Bassusi, Nagah, *Education, Wage Work, and Marriage: Perspectives of Egyptian Working Women*; *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 66, No. 5, Special Issue: International Perspectives on Families and Social Change (Dec., 2004), pp. 1287-1299

Globalization is closely associated with economic influences and Amin and Al-Bassusi acknowledge its significance in Egypt's modern movements. They relate declining wages and employment opportunities to the male dominated structures in Egypt and other areas in the Middle East that prevent feminization around the world and have led to growth in other nations economies.⁴⁸

Marriage in Egypt follows these patriarchal structures and plays a fundamental role in Egyptian society, fully defining one's relations within that society.⁴⁹ Women are now challenging these socially constructed norms. For example, "young women in Egypt are now more likely to be in school, more likely to enter the workforce, and less likely to be married than women in the same age group 10 years ago."⁵⁰ Globalization is advancing women's status in Egyptian society by aiding in social change and providing more opportunities for the advancement of women.

The reasons for and against legislation regarding the veiling of Islamic women center around gender equality. While arguments for or against legislation revolve around the limits the legislation establishes on women, the majority agree that headscarves inherently oppress women's advancements. They outwardly brand women as inferior to men and the issues of legislation perpetuate the gender issue. While women are adapting to modern times with their interpretation of their religion, state imposed interpretations can assist in

⁴⁸ Amin and Al-Baussi, 1288

⁴⁹ Amin and Al-Baussi, 1290

⁵⁰ Amin and Al-Baussi, 1296

their advancement, if done so in conjunction with unified efforts to equalize women in all aspects of society. If the issue of the veil is not addressed with other efforts to neutralize gender inequalities, then it will only serve to prolong and deepen the divide between Muslim men and women. The plurality of meanings and representations of the veil add to this complex issue. The two conflicting reasons behind veiling are first, that it is a form of submission, male dominance and control over Islamic women. Secondly, it is a sign of women who have made the choice to veil themselves as their interpretation of the *Quran* and what values it represents.

The wearing of the headscarf is seen as a threat to nations that ban it in public. The government in France determined that the core of their culture and national identity are endangered by the veil and the fundamentalist Islamic meanings which are associated with it. Creating a public space, for example in French schools, void of outward displays of religion puts the students at an advantage. However, they are also at a disadvantaged due to the perceived multicultural discrimination. Nevertheless, as the Stasi Commission found the French “political philosophy was founded on the defense of a single, unified social body. The concern with oneness prevails over all expression of difference, perceived as a threat.”⁵¹

⁵¹ The Stasi Commission Report 2004

EDUCATION

Education is a powerful tool for political, cultural and social change and enables the empowerment of Muslim women. The pursuit of higher education by Muslim women has increased since 1990. Through access to education Islamic women are creating a new identity and benefitting from being involved in a more globalized world. They are overcoming adversities by pursuing an education and making themselves more involved in society and politics.

As women's enrollment in universities has increased however, there is still a gap in their literacy and enrollment in schools compared to their male counterparts. According to the United Nations access to basic education is a human right. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics compiled data on the percentage of the population in Islamic nations who are illiterate and enrolled in schools. In 2000, the percentage of women over 15 years old who are illiterate in Yemen is a startling 75% while men over 15 years old make up 33% of the illiterate population. Over half of the women in Egypt, 56%, who are over 15 years old are illiterate and 33% of males over the age of 15 are as well. Saudi Arabia

has one of the lowest ratios of women over 15 years of age who are illiterate with 33% of women, and 17% of men over 15 years old are illiterate⁵².

The percentage of women enrolled in primary school is the highest category compared to their enrollments in secondary schools and universities. According to Roudi-Fahimi and Moghadam 96% of women in Egypt are enrolled in primary school, however that number drops to 83% of women enrolled in secondary school. In Yemen, 61% of women are enrolled in primary schools and their enrollment in secondary school drops significantly to 25% of the population. Women in universities in Yemen comprise a mere 21% of the total population of the university study body. Saudi Arabia's rate of women enrolled in universities is higher at 56%.⁵³

In 2000 Egypt conducted a Demographic and Health Survey, which asked families about their children and education. Sadly, when families were asked if they could send one son or one daughter to a university who would they send, only 8% of the population surveyed said they would send their daughter⁵⁴. However, out of the population surveyed "53 percent of the women said that the decision should depend on the children's capabilities, 39 percent said that the son should go to the university...and mothers of children

⁵² Data on literacy and enrollment figures from The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics and the Population Reference Bureau – specifically by Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi and Valentine M. Moghadam, 2003.

⁵³ Statistics by Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi and Valentine M. Moghadam

⁵⁴ The 2000 Egypt Demographic and Health Survey Analysis by: El-Zanaty, Fatma and Ann Way. 2001 Egypt Demographic and Health Survey 2000. Calverton, Maryland [USA]: Ministry of Health and Population [Egypt], National Population Council and ORC Macro.

who had never attended school were more likely to cite the cost of education as a reason for not educating their daughters.”⁵⁵

While the educated women in Egypt are challenging this societal stigma and are calling for equality not only in society, politics, and the economy, but within their family as well. The current economic times are also forcing women to join the workforce. By pursuing an education or trade women are making themselves more marketable and supporting their families financially.

In Iran the number of women attending universities has increased in the last twenty years. Mitra Shavarini’s article about the feminization of education in Iran focuses on the implications to traditional beliefs and cultural systems in Iran as a result of women pursuing their education. In Iran there is a national exam, similar to the SAT in the United States, which determines college entrance. In 2002 the Iranian exam – the Kunkur – was given and the results showed that “62% of those who passed in 2002 were women. The number of women attending institutions of higher education has been steadily growing in Iran since 1989.”⁵⁶ Shavarini’s study details interviews with Iranian women and in their own words, they explain their motivations for going to college. The main reasons they decided to pursue an education was because it represents hope, a place to enjoy a taste of freedom and most importantly education is viewed as an asset. An education will provide

⁵⁵ El-Zanaty and Way

⁵⁶ Shavarini, Mitra. *The Feminisation of Iranian Higher Education*. *Review of Education*, Vol.51, 2005. Pages 329-347.

women with better employment opportunities, financial gains and increase their worth to prospective suitors.⁵⁷ Shavarini's analysis is done through a Muslim feminist framework which advocates that education is a significant part of a Muslim women's life. The challenge these women are facing is reconciling their traditional beliefs with their modern actions.

Pursuing an education in Iran marks a trend in the women's movement to assert themselves. In recent years Iran has remodeled their educational system. In the 1990s women and men could pursue majors which were once off limits to them. For example, women could not go into veterinary medicine, or agriculture studies, and men could not study family health. Shavarini shows that Iranian women attend college for a variety of reasons. One reason is to better their employment prospects after obtaining a degree. However, once educated there is little hope of finding a job. The government of Iran has not caught up to the influx of educated women in the work force thus relegating them to minimal jobs and perpetuating gender inequalities.

Education is political, as evidenced by the government of France passing legislation about religious dress in schools, to Iran's government remodeling their university system. The government of Egypt is confronting how to address the role Islam in a public education. The *Quran* stresses the importance of knowledge and education and Islamic nations are struggling in modern times to reconcile their beliefs. Bradley Cook argues that no nation has developed a successful model for education which is acceptable to

⁵⁷ Shavarini, 331

Muslims. Globalization has impacted education in Islamic nations where the “lingering influences of Western inspired approaches to education [have] been vehemently criticized by contemporary Islamic scholarship as immeasurable damage to the moral, spiritual and ethical values of Islamic culture and heritage.⁵⁸” It is important to acknowledge that what Islam represents and Islam as a religion is not the same as Christianity, “for Muslims [it] is much more than a moral philosophy of life, system of belief, or spiritual order; it is a ‘complete and comprehensive way of life’(Geertz, 1971)⁵⁹.” Education is inherently rooted in Islamic traditions and ideas.

Contemporary Islamic movements introduce modern developments to education. The issue is how to maintain religious traditions while adapting to the modern developments. Many Muslims are resistant to western influences specifically with modern educational concepts and thus changes are not well received. This is evident in Egypt with Islamic and secular forces influencing education in the Muslim world.⁶⁰

Egypt is a leader in the Islamic world with respect to politics and culture and therefore can be used as a marker to chart the outside forces that influence religion and education. Bradley Cook notes the ties between religion and education, given the central role Islam plays within Egypt, and

⁵⁸ Cook, Bradley James. *Egypt's National Education Debate*. Source: Comparative Education, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Nov., 2000), pp. 477-490

⁵⁹ Cook, 479

⁶⁰ Cook, 479

wonders whether Egypt can actually produce an educational system that works within their society.⁶¹

Islam is so ingrained in Egyptian society that it is taught in public schools from primary through secondary schools. Some educational reform has occurred as a result of modern influence or as Cook refers to it as the impact of Islamization on the Egyptian educational system which not only shapes the identity of students but the modern culture. The effect of “Islamization movement in Egypt’s educational system is potentially very powerful and magnifies tensions between the state, secular intellectuals and Islamists.”⁶² As a result of the modernization of education in Egypt more women have the opportunity to further their education and attend universities. By furthering their education women are empowering themselves. Women are not only gaining knowledge, they are advancing their status in society and securing more opportunities in the work force.

Enhancing women’s viability in the labor force is critical to the success of their agenda. Not only is the completion of higher education important it is the quality of education as well. If women do not receive the same education as men then they cannot compete with them on an equal level in the workforce. Ultimately this will perpetuate gender discrepancies. Women who have post-primary education completed have the greatest influence in

⁶¹ Cook, 480

⁶² Cook, 488

advancing women's interests in increased pay and responsibility in the workforce.⁶³

Somaya Ahmed Aly Abdel Mowla's research contends "empirical evidence suggests that standard aspects of school quality have a stronger impact on girls' education than on boys' education." When education is too expensive or when quality education is not readily available, some parents may not believe that investing in their children's education is as important. Case studies from Pakistan, Kenya and Bangladesh reflect girl's enrollment is more sensitive than boys to the quality of their education and school⁶⁴.

Educated women are more aware of their legal rights, health, and are more qualified to be an influential player in society. Their status within their family, and the community will increase with the more education women achieve. One of the most significant benefits of education is the reduction of gender differences between men and women. Men have been regarded as superior yet in Islamic nations more women are pursuing their education and asserting themselves as equals in the community.

An Islamic woman could pursue the education of her choice and begin a career, as long as she was modest in behavior and dress. Even though women were permitted to further the career of their choice, a profession

⁶³ Somaya Ahmed Aly Abdel Mowla, The American University in Cairo, Social Research Center. *Education and Economic Empowerment Of Women in Egypt Working Paper Series*, November 2009.

⁶⁴ Somaya Ahmed Aly Abdel Mowla, 16

outside the home was not always a desirable goal as a women's real role was to tend to the family.⁶⁵

Through education employment opportunities outside the home are more readily available to women. There is a marked difference between the male and female labor markets in Egypt. The participation rates for women with "no education or less than secondary are below the average female participation rate [compared to] to those with secondary and university education."⁶⁶ Education directly correlates to women's participation in the Egyptian workforce and the gender gap between men and women who are university educated decreases with the increase in female education rates.⁶⁷

While education has proven to be a powerful tool to reduce the gender differences in the work force, many women are still facing challenges in the Muslim world as a result of the *qiwamah*. *Qiwamah* is an Islamic concept that men are guardians of women. This principle hinders the advancement of women in Islamic areas. It is important to acknowledge that the Quran does not explicitly state this difference between male and female roles, however it is a traditional interpretation of Islamic texts.

The bureau for Policy and Program Coordination with the USAID issued a 2003 report titled Strengthening Education in the Muslim World. The

⁶⁵ Ahmed, 195

⁶⁶ Somaya Ahmed Aly Abdel Mowla, 18

⁶⁷ When estimating the impact of the level of education completed on the female labor force involvement, "using binary logistic regression, where the reference category is female university graduates, it is found that lower educational levels have a highly significant negative effect (significant at 0.01) on the participation rate."

report details educational statistics in 39 Muslim countries and analyzes secular and Islamic school systems in 12 Muslim nations. The analysis focuses on secular versus Islamic schools, access to education, the management of educational systems, religious affiliation and the relation of education and Islam.

The report acknowledges that enrollment rates for women in secondary schools are low. The USAID research attributes this to two factors; poverty and access to education. They also stress the importance of quality education. It is vital to establish teaching guidelines to ensure access to quality education for both males and females. If children “demonstrate poor learning achievement, poor parents are less inclined to send their children to school and to keep them there- they cannot afford the loss of their children’s labor abilities”⁶⁸. If the children have high levels of scholastic abilities then parents are more likely to support education for their children with the hope that they will have greater opportunities in the work force.

In Islamic countries low quality of teaching results in poor educational achievements of students. For example, of Yemeni fifth graders who were tested in mathematics, science and Arabic, only 3, 14, and 5 percent, respectively, passed.⁷⁵ The educational system in Yemen is based on Islam. This is a major flaw in their educational system as it is not producing well rounded and educated students. They neglect secular subjects and thus do

⁶⁸ *Strengthening Education in the Muslim World*. The Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination with the USAID, 2003.

an injustice to the students as they will only be prepared and educated in religion.

In comparison to Yemen, Egypt's Al-Azhar educational system is a secular system. This secular education is "comparable to education provided in public schools, and their preparation for employment is similar to that of students who go through the public school system."⁶⁹ Religion can conflict with education if Muslims are attending schools under more westernized regulations. If Muslims decide to attend public schools where their religion is not integrated into the curriculum then they are distancing themselves from fundamentalists traditions. This is occurring in France where Muslims are changing their identities.

The public schools in France are regulated to promote an equal opportunity for all students, yet they restrict religion. Leslie Limage argues that the French government created a "French Islam"⁷⁰ based upon their laws regarding immigrants and education. Islam in France is judged on cultural practices rather than the practice of the actual religion and thus public schools aim to eliminate practices, which would distinguish different religions. The purpose of school is to educate students, and to do so successfully they must be void of biases and favoritism. When a threat to the republican values occurred with females wearing headscarf's to school, refusing to participate in different activities citing their religious beliefs, lawmakers took action. In the

⁶⁹ *Strengthening Education in the Muslim World*. The Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination with the USAID, 2003, pp. 11

⁷⁰ Limage, Leslie, *Education and the Muslim Identity: The Case of France*. Comparative Education, Vol. 36, No. 1, 2000, pp. 73-94.

eyes of the French government the wearing of the veil was a sign of oppression of women's rights and the connotations associated with the headscarf are an unwelcome distraction in schools. Limage believes that it is hard to determine why a woman is wearing the veil, but what is notable is that the headscarves were not an issue until recently. Islamic conflicts and an increase in awareness of Muslims can be attributed to France's reaction to Islam's place in public education. Their reaction to the perceived threat to their republic by Islamic practices is what Saeeda Shah argues is holding back the inevitably multicultural educational arena.

Shah analyzes population data through an Islamic perspective of educational leadership in Europe. The Quran stresses the importance of knowledge and thus the "aim of Islamic education is to develop humans through knowledge to enable them to follow the path of righteousness"⁷¹. Education in Islam is considered a religious obligation for both men and women, however statistics show that education is not equally available for both men and women. Education is critical to the advancement of women in society. Academia not only prepares women for employment it empowers them as well. Knowledge is something that no one can take away and a powerful tool for women to use. Through education women can advance their employment opportunities and better their financial status.

Education holds on an important role in Islamic thought. It is evolving to incorporate a globalized world and as Meir Hatina writes education is an

⁷¹ Shah, Saeeda. *Educational Leadership: An Islamic Perspective*. British Educational Research Journal, Vol. 32, No. 3, June 2006. pp. 363-385

integral part of the modern Islamic revival⁷². More women are attending schools and as a result the ideologies are shifting towards a more western approach.

Hatina believes that the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt advanced education because it was a mechanism for them to gain political legitimacy. Not only did education provide knowledge, but the Muslim Brotherhood was able to develop support.

The Islamists supported the move of Egyptians seeking education. The Muslim Brotherhood assisted in this movement to navigate between religion and modernism. Women assumed roles in the community as teachers, or caring for orphans, which highlighted the importance of education and advancing opportunities for women in society. As Hatina points out “the ideological justification for assigning women these public roles was that Islam is revealed not only to men but to women, too, and women have the same duty as men to serve Islam in every way.”⁷³

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt saw the benefit education could provide to women and the nation. There were some disparities between the ranks of the brotherhood regarding this sensitive subject, yet they almost all agreed that education was necessary for both men and women alike. In their opinion the Egyptian government served as an “obstacle, preoccupied by pretty internal politics and foreign affairs while neglecting moral conditions of

⁷² Hatina, Meir. Restoring a Lost Identity: Models of Education in Modern Islamic Thought. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2, November 2006, pp. 179-197

⁷³ Hatina, 183

the nation.⁷⁴ The Muslim Brotherhood tackled their ideological agenda with force and violence. Unfortunately this bloody approach impacted social and political change and their violence spread to other Islamic movements in the Middle East. These conflicts between governments and active political groups have helped women in their efforts to advance their educational options and thus advance their status in society.

They site job opportunities for women and the increase in their options as a positive outcome of globalization. The increase in options gives women “more ways to get out of the unequal relations; these options give women more change to take their labor and skills elsewhere.”⁷⁵ Globalization is closely associated with economic changes and marked by a shift towards a global economy. Cultural changes that improve women’s standing in the community can be traced back to economic changes according to Gray, Kittilson and Sandholtz. They cite a study of gender roles and public attitudes in seventy nations and assert that the economy in conjunction with “substantial changes in social norms, beliefs, and values are also necessary to bolster women’s roles” in society and improve their integration.⁷⁶

Women are furthering their education to expand future employment opportunities and reach equality with men. If they increase their earning potential they not only improve their quality of life, but also assert themselves as viable players in the male dominated social and political scene. Gray,

⁷⁴ Hatina, 184

⁷⁵ Mark Gray, Miki Caul Kittilson and Wayne Sandholtz, 297

⁷⁶ Mark Gray, Miki Caul Kittilson and Wayne Sandholtz, 298

Kittilson and Sandholtz, and many other scholars, have noted that participation in the workforce enables women to advance. For example “Engles notes that ‘the first condition for the liberation of the wife is to bring the whole female sex back into public industry.’ Cotter and colleagues remark that there is ‘general agreement’ now that Engles was correct and that gains in gender equality have been ‘fueled’ by increases in female participation in the labor force.”⁷⁷ In addition to advancing their status by entering the male dominated labor force, women are also becoming more involved in politics.

A woman holding public office marks a significant achievement in their assimilation into nation states. It also reflects positive changes in efforts to equalize gender disparities. Integration of women in society can be measured by their success in education, employment and activity in government. If more women become educated, they will position themselves for better employment opportunities and make a better case for their involvement in government.

Globalization has a positive outcome on gender equality and the status of women integrating themselves in society. Through Gray, Kittilson and Sandholtz’s analysis they found that when society is more welcoming of international influences, then outlooks for women improve when measured by education, and participation in the economy and government. The positive outcomes for gender equality can be hindered by the negative side effects of globalization and the clash between traditional and modernists.

⁷⁷ Gray, Kittilson, and Sandholtz, 305

Mansoor Moaddel analyzes Islamic fundamentalism versus modernist and their interpretation of Islamic laws applicable to women. In the nineteenth century Islamic countries faced ridicule by more western nations for their treatment of women. While the Islamic countries follow more traditionalist approach towards gender roles, the westernized countries hold a modern one.

Muslim nations respond to perceived threats from the West by controlling women. They force women into a social status of being inferior to men, dictate their dress and determine where women can and cannot go. Recently the modernist Muslims take a quite different approach to the traditionalists. For example in Egypt the Islamic feminist agenda was advanced and received backing from leaders who supported women's rights, education, employment opportunities and equal opportunities for all. Two polar opposite views on gender equalities, the modernists and traditionalist, ironically share the same Islamic belief system.⁷⁸ They both rationalize their actions and views by citing the *Quran* yet they developed extremely different interpretations of the texts and its meaning of women in society.

Contemporary Islamic movements have given rise to an awareness of Muslim women's issues and social changes necessary to advance their status and create a new identity. Moaddel argues that beyond organizational resources there are other independent influences that impact the interpretation of religious text and the role of women. He believes that

⁷⁸ Moaddel, Mansoor

differing ideologies can be credited to the disparity between Islamic modernism and fundamentalism.

Moaddel further argues that religious ideas are produced by the debate between varying ideologies in their efforts to be the dominating intellectual force and control society. Islamic modernism in Egypt arose from this debate between westerners, traditional Islamic followers and modernists. Egypt in modern times has endured many transformations from expanding their economy, changing public policies, restructuring of social classes and distancing themselves from traditional Islamic discourse⁷⁹. This distancing from traditional Islamic discourse provided a forum for the modern Islamic discourse to flourish.

Amin is more critical in his analysis of Muslim women's advancement compared to Moaddel. He believes that theologians manipulated religious texts to be interpreted however they wanted. For example Amin argues that Islam allowed a women to decide to veil themselves or to uncover just her face and palms. The veil does not make a woman any less moral and quite contrary that some veiling can even cause sexual stimulation⁸⁰. In a modern take to the tradition of the veil, Amin states that it is no more suitable for a woman to veil herself than it is for a man to cover himself as well.

Integration into society for Muslim women means establishing themselves by furthering their education, becoming players in the work force and by exercising the freedom to veil.

⁷⁹ Moaddel, 112

⁸⁰ Amin, 65

Women's power in their society is improved as employment opportunities increase and financial security is achieved. Their reintegration into society is shifted from their initial struggles for basic quality education to equalizing employment opportunities. Contemporary Islamic feminists have evolved from modern feminists ideologies. According to Moaddel, modern feminists stresses equality between genders and redefine social roles exclusive of sex in their definitions. In comparison, the modern Islamic feminist movements strive to achieve the same ideologies while deriving its validity from Islam.

Rebecca Barlow and Shahram Akbarzadeh maintain that through modern Islamic movements, two Muslim feminist paradigms have emerged. They argue that Muslim feminism is not bound by Islam rather it is held back by socially constructed boundaries and conflicts which are omnipresent in the Middle East.

One paradigm is referred to as "Secular Muslim Feminism", which as Rebecca Barlow and Shahram Akbarzadeh describe as encompassing Muslims who advocate for women's rights and lobbied for universal rights for all women⁸¹. Islam can hinder women's rights in this paradigm and in order to accomplish integration into society major changes to the cultural and religious structure is needed.

Fatima Mernissi's writings illustrate the dual paradigms which Barlow and Akbarzadeh analyze. Mernissi embodies these paradigms from

⁸¹ Rebecca Barlow and Shahram Akbarzadeh

secularism to reform and Islamic feminists movements as she has first hand experience as a Muslim women. She represents the evolution of feminist movements and the advancement of women's rights in Islamic societies⁸². Her perspective began as a "secular advocate of conceptual revolution to a champion of reform in Islam and its traditions. Mernissi's vision is still within the broad spectrum of Muslim feminism, but it appears to have been significantly shifted towards a more extreme end."⁸³

Mernissi's proposition that Muslims should establish their futures in a "liberating memory of Islam" is an example of the extreme end of the spectrum in the modernity movement. The memory of Islam could neglect women's rights and thus it is necessary for the reform paradigm to be recognized. The reformists interpret Islamic text in a way that liberates women and aids in their advancement. The reformist paradigm calls for reconstruction of governments and for Muslim societies to adapt to women improving their status. Challenging the patriarchal Muslim system of society is also a marker of modernization and reformation. Mernissi's perspective on women's rights and Islam was originally a reconstructionist paradigm, however recently she has changed her perspective to associate more with a reform system. As Barlow and Akbarzadeh noted Mernissi originally dismissed the patriarchal status quo and its foundations in Islamic sources. She now rejects the historical misogynous practices that have evolved in spite

⁸² Mernissi, Fatmina. *Behind the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* Revised Edition. Indiana University Press, 1987.

⁸³ Barlow and Akbarzadeh, 1482

of Islam.⁸⁴ The evolution of social and political reformations to advance women's right reflects the larger shift in the rational segment of Muslim societies in the Middle East.

The recent shifts in Islamic practices and society in the Middle East can be attributed to ideological influences from the West. Traditionalists argue that Muslim women need to be protected from western influences, however Mernissi believes an international approach to women's rights is necessary to equalize gender roles. Her Islamic feminism view is significant in the present times marked with conflict. Should her view prevail then Islamic nations may become more democratic and gender neutral.

Contemporary Islamic movements are essential to advance women's place in society. As Lapidus argues, Islamic movements are a reaction to movements and manifestation of modernity.⁸⁵ Embracing these reactions to contemporary movements, with deference to the practice of Islamic traditions, women are becoming contenders in Islamic cultures. It is evident that Islamic women do not have the same economic, educational and social opportunities as Islamic men. As Judith Lorber notes, Islamic women's efforts to advance themselves was closely associated with revolutionary movements. Lorber

⁸⁴ Barlow and Akbarzadeh, 1498

⁸⁵ Ira Lapidus. "Islamic Revival and Modernity: The Contemporary Movements and the Historical Paradigms." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 1997. pp. 444-460.

generalized governments and noted that women have more equality with men in secular regimes⁸⁶.

To reconcile globalization, religious traditions and individual rights of Islamic feminists Lorber puts forth three predominant trends. The first trend is the Islamist, which counters the westernization of Islamic women. The second is Islamic feminism, which is secular and split between modernization and democratization of the state. The third trend is the middle ground between Islamists and gender equality⁸⁷. Women who are in favor of changing their social status and furthering their efforts for equal rights are in this middle ground.

Shahrazad Mojab's concept of Islamic feminism is similar to Lorber's as Mojab believes that modernism has impacted Islam and subsequent political actions. However Mojab focuses on the oppressiveness of gender relations and failures of the Islamization for women's rights. The concept of Islamic feminism began in publications around the 1990s. At the same time globalization brought in western concepts of gender equalities, opportunities for women, and their idea of feminism.

In the mid 1990's the Islamization of gender relations was met with strong government resistance⁸⁸. During this time the Muslim states were

⁸⁶ Lorber, Judith. "Heroes, Warriors, and Burqas: A Feminist Sociologist's Reflections on September 11." *Sociologist Forum*, Vol. 17, No. 3, September 2002.

⁸⁷ Lorber, 391

⁸⁸ Mojab, Shahrazad. "Theorizing the Politics of 'Islamic Feminism'." *Feminists Review*, No. 69, The Realm of the Possible: Middle Eastern Women in Political and Social Spaces. Winter 2001, pp. 124-146

faced with women who were asserting themselves more in society. This highlighted failures in their ability to cope with the changes in gender policies.

Feminists tend to view Islam “not through other religions, as the engine of history, the builder of identity, and a constant presence in history, which is permanently inscribed in the mind and body of every Muslim.”⁸⁹ Mojab argues that viewing Islam as an “agent” of history is difficult for the Islamic feminist ideology and critiques the Islamization of gender relations in Iran to support her arguments.

In order to analyze Islamic Feminism it is important to acknowledge that they separate law and politics from the practice of religion. This is their equivalent of the notion of the separation of church and state. Mojab cites the differences in marriage and divorce laws in Muslim communities as an example of the separation. Hoodfar as cited by Mojab also highlights the separation and “reveals the interpretive characteristics of personal status laws- crafted by men and not through divine revelation – despite their justification through selective use and misuse of hadith and quranic verse.”⁹⁰ The patriarchal structures of Muslim societies perpetuate the injustice between male and female rights. Feminists embrace reform of the political and social system towards a more democratic administration. While the mainstream feminist embrace this change, Iranian Islamic feminists worked towards reform with a patriarchal agenda. The government of Iran is not willing to adjust to the modern gender relations and reform their politics to

⁸⁹ Mojab, 131

⁹⁰ Hoodfar, 1996:4

become more democratized. The process of democratization “depends, to a large extent, on the separation of law and religion as well as state and religion.”⁹¹

In order to gain legitimacy in their fight for equality, Islamic feminists look to their religion to grant them authority. They believe that Muslim interpretations of their religion grant them equal rights. While they continue to fight for egalitarianism through social movements their critics believe their activities are flawed. Even victorious social movements are fleeting in results as the state ultimately interprets the resolution and adjust politics as they see fit. While women in western nations have been advanced in society and integrated into the social and political culture, Islamic women are fighting for basic rights to do the same. Their platform for combating the oppression they face puts them at an extreme disadvantage compared to western women. Islamic women have a “built in contradiction between constitutions which award equal rights to men and women and shar’ia- derived personal codes which define women as wards of men and their families.”⁹² Therefore the separation between religion and the state is a critical marker for the advancement of women, without the separation they are on a steep uphill battle to further their position in their society. In Turkey and Egypt if they were to separate Islam and politics, the changes would be far-reaching and require a total deconstruction of their current political structure.

⁹¹ Mojab, 137: “The separation is all the more significant in the Iranian case in so far as the building of the Islamic state depends on the negation of the very idea of gender equality.”

⁹² Mojab, 140

Like so many Muslim nations, religion and laws are heavily intertwined. For women to break the patriarchal barrier they must challenge the socially constructed traditions in their male dominated culture.

CONCLUSION

Islamic women in France, Egypt, and Turkey have overcome political, social and cultural barriers to advance themselves in society. Globalization has transcended the ideological paths in the Muslim world to change identities for Islamic women. Though France, Egypt and Turkey differ dramatically in their social and political structure, their case studies provide a range of examples of ways Islamic women are creating new identities.

Muslim women are faced with the challenge of integrating themselves into society while constructing their new identities. They are searching for their place in their religion and evolving social spheres. Globalization and contemporary Islamic movements have heavily influenced the Islamic feminist agenda and their identities. The increased interconnectedness between cultures and states as a product of globalization has advanced Islamic women's identities and their roles within their society.

Muslim women in France, Turkey and Egypt are defining themselves through the veil. When they make a decision to veil they are asserting their independence and religious identity. Social and political reactions to their new identities cause friction between Muslim women and the government as evidenced in France. Veiled women in France are persecuted with fines and the threat of jail time for violating the law banning the headscarf in public

spaces. Muslim women in Turkey are defining themselves with the veil and subsequently changed the law which once banned headscarves, so that they could be free to wear the veil as they so choose.

To overcome obstacles and benefit from globalization, women are utilizing contemporary Islamic movements as a tool to integrate their beliefs and acquire rights in society. Not only are they working towards gender equality in education and the workforce they are also creating their identities as equal with their male counterparts.

The westernization of Islam can have a negative impact on women's reassertion and rights. If the male dominated culture begins to feel threatened they react and constrict women's advancement. Similarly, governments can react to Islam if they feel threatened as evidenced with the controversial French law banning headscarves in public school. The challenge is to neutralize gender inequalities, without alienating groups of society. The downside of establishing laws regarding religion is that it could potentially exacerbate the issue. The question is, does legislation go too far in managing different facets of religion, and when does the state go too far in attempting to regulate Islam. The separation of church and state is not solely a western concept, it is also valued in the Middle East, yet aspects of the Turkish and Egyptian governments are based on the foundations of Islam. Since Islam is the foundation upon which these nations govern, to eliminate the conflict between church and state would require a total reform of their political system.

Islamic women in France, Egypt and Turkey are creating new identities, which incorporate their interpretation of their religion. These women are finding their place in Islamic society by adapting to social changes and asserting themselves in the religious, social and political arena.

The significance of having the choice to veil themselves, or attend school are milestones in their efforts for equality. Education should be a basic right for everyone; however access to education is not always available for women in Islamic societies. Knowledge provides opportunities thus education is the most important investment one can make. The access to and the ability to pursue education is a tenet of current Islamic women. In areas of the Middle East female enrollment in higher educational institutions are on the rise. Once educated women are able to join the workforce with their male counterparts and be competitive in their employment fields. They are able to use education to their advantage in establishing themselves in the community in conjunction with increasing their marketability. Educated women have more control over their destiny. Obtaining an education impacts women's reproductive choices and changes their socio economic status. They are integrating themselves alongside their male counterparts with respect to employment opportunities while simultaneously asserting their control over their bodies and minds through education.

Islamic women in these aforementioned social and political contexts have created a new identity for themselves by not only advancing their education but by making statements with their veil. Their choice for the way

they identify with their religion has been a struggle between their desire and laws in France, Egypt and Turkey. However despite the political obstacles, they are still gaining political grounds in their efforts for gender equality with their new identities.

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Robin A. McMenamin
 3258 Bevin Street
 Camp Lejeune, North Carolina 28547
 Phone: (240) 731-7314
robinamcmenamin@gmail.com

Education **Towson University, Towson Maryland, December 2011**
 Master of Science in Social Science

Georgetown University, Washington D.C.
Paralegal Certificate Received September 2007.
 Internship with Montgomery County Circuit Court Judge Bernard.

University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, Received May 2007.
 B.A. Government and Politics with a Citation in Rhetoric
 Activity: Risk Management Officer and Member of the Public Relations
 Committee for the Delta Delta Delta Sorority.

Skills and Abilities:

Software: Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel and PowerPoint, proficient with
 Windows based programs and Macintosh systems, Internet Explorer,
 Westlaw, Lexis, CampusVue, and Blackboard.

Experience

Miller Motte College, Jacksonville, NC.

6/10-Present

Assistant Director of Admissions

Meet with students to discuss their options and methods to achieve their goals through education.

Counsel students on the benefits and opportunities education provides as well as overcoming obstacles both personally and professionally.

Implement new procedures for the Admissions Department and conduct continuous training.

Work with high school and adult students to navigate them through the admissions process.

Arent Fox, LLP, Washington D.C.

10/07-08/08

Project Assistant

Publish briefs to the firm and deliver presentations regarding client files.

Communicate with clients regarding legal and corporate matters.

Prepare documents for filing, litigation, draft resolutions and weekly reports.

Coordinate closings of real estate and loan transactions.

Armed Forces Center for Child Protection, Bethesda, MD.

10/02-8/07

Volunteer

Prepared brochures and presented information to families in need.

Organized charitable drives to collect stuffed animals for victimized children.

Assisted the doctors with paperwork and patients.

Organized files and coordinated cases with social agencies, attorneys and law enforcement.

References available upon request.

