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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The world of Islam is very much a man's world. Women in most Muslim countries are accorded lower status than men and have many less opportunities to develop their potential. They have a crucial role to play, however, in the future orientation of the developing Muslim world. We are devoting this issue to WOMEN IN THE MUSLIM WORLD.

Our first article, *The Veil* ..., shows that much of the significance of the veil was not an Islamic innovation, but predated it for centuries in Middle Eastern Societies. We also learn that the implications of the veil in today's society are not all negative to the women most directly concerned.

Then you will find several articles illustrating the lot of women in different areas of the Muslim world, and our approach to them as Christians. Most of the articles that we have received are from a North African or European context. Where situations differ significantly from other parts of the Muslim world, we would welcome contributions highlighting some of those differences.

And finally, we have included an extensive, although by no means complete, bibliography of books and articles concerning women in the Muslim world. We hope it will help you find helpful materials of which you might be otherwise unawares.

* Signifies a pen name

THE VEIL IN HISTORY, POLITICS AND MODERN SOCIETY

by Sarah Marsh

The following review article is based largely on the book by Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, New Haven, CT. & London, UK: Yale University Press, 1992. Numbers in parenthesis in the article refer to page numbers in the book.

All of us who work in the Middle East have seen Muslim women wearing veils. Some may wear them only on occasion, others frequently or regularly. Perhaps some of *us* wear veils on occasion. The veil is also becoming more common in the West as Muslims emigrate to Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand and bring their customs with them. Do you remember the recent incident about Muslim girls in France being expelled from school for wearing veils?

What does the veil mean to Muslims and to others in their society? What does it mean to the casual Western observer? What does it mean to us who want to understand and sympathize with Muslim people, and especially with Muslim women?

Historical Development of the Seclusion & Veiling of Women.

Mesopotamia before the time of Christ.

Archeological evidence from Mesopotamia suggests that women were held in esteem prior to the rise of urban societies, and suffered a decline in status with the emergence of urban centers and city states. (p11) The importance of increasing the population and labor power led to the theft of women, whose sexuality and reproductive capacity became the first "property" that tribes competed for. Warrior cultures favoring male dominance consequently emerged (p12). [Think of the Trojans and Greeks fighting over Helen.]

The growth of complex urban societies and the increasing importance of military competitiveness further entrenched male dominance and gave rise to a class-based society in which the military and temple elites made up the propertied classes. The patriarchal family, designed to guarantee the paternity of property-heirs by vesting in men the control of women, became institutionalized, codified, and upheld by the state. A woman was designated the property of men, first of her father, then of her husband; female sexual purity became negotiable, economically valuable property. Marriages were generally monogamous, except among royalty, though commoners might take second wives or concubines if the first wife was childless (p14).

The rules of veiling were carefully detailed. Wives and daughters of nobles, concubines accompanying their mistresses, former "sacred prostitutes" now married, all had to veil, but harlots and slaves were forbidden to veil. The veil came to differentiate between respectable women and those who were publicly available. The veil signaled to men which women were under male protection and which were fair game.

Eastern Mediterranean Region in the early centuries AD

In the period immediately preceding Islam, ideas fundamental to Christianity–the intrinsic value of the individual, the equal spiritual worth of men and women and of slaves and master, and the superiority of virginity over wifely obedience (nuns, for instance)–in some ways subverted ideas fundamental to the reigning patriarchies of the age (p25-26). Byzantine women, largely Christian by this time, were nevertheless still not supposed to be seen in public. Women and young girls were only allowed to leave the house to attend marriages, births, or religious events, or to go to the public baths. Here also, the veil distinguished honest women from prostitutes. Some respectable women, such as midwives and doctors, were able to move about in public, and some dealt in retail and long-distance trade, or invested money. Byzantine practice was thus very close to that of Muslim society from the 8th to the 18th centuries (1000 years).

Arabia around the time of Muhammad

Islamic civilization developed a construct of history that labeled the pre-Islamic period the Age of Ignorance (the *Jahilia*) and projected Islam as the sole source of all that was civilized. In its rewriting of history, it used that construct so effectively that the peoples of the Middle East lost all knowledge of the past civilization of the region. It successfully concealed, among other things, the fact that in some middle Eastern cultures, women had been considerably better off before the rise of Islam than afterward (p36-37).

In the sixth century AD, Arabia formed an island, the last remaining region in the Middle East in which patrilineal, patriarchal marriage had not yet been instituted as its sole legitimate form. Khadija's marriage to Mohammed reflects customs in effect during the *Jahilia*. By contrast, after Muhammad became the established prophet and leader of the Muslim community, autonomy and monogamy were conspicuously absent in the lives of his wives, and the male guardianship of women and the male prerogative of polygyny (more than one wife) were to become formal features of Islamic marriage (p42-43). What happened to Aisha foreshadowed the limitations that would thenceforth hem in the lives of Muslim women: she was born to Muslim parents, married Muhammad when she was nine or ten, and soon thereafter, along with her co-wives, began to observe the new customs of veiling and seclusion (p43).

The lives of Muhammad's wives were the first to be circumscribed, and during his lifetime the verses enjoining seclusion applied to them alone. Early texts record the occasions for the verses instituting veiling and seclusion for his wives, offer vignettes of the lives of women in the society Islam was displacing, and record the steps by which Islam closed women's arenas of action. These texts do not distinguish between veiling and seclusion; they use the term *hijab* interchangeably both to mean first "a curtain," in the sense of a separation or partition, and then "a veil," as in *darabat al-hijab*– "she took the veil"–which in turn meant "she became a wife of [Muhammad]." They use the same term to refer to the seclusion in general of Muhammad's wives and to the decrees relating to their veiling (p53-54, cf. Stern, *Marriage in Early Islam*, pp. 111ff.).

By instituting seclusion, Muhammad was creating a distance between his wives and those who thronged his doorstep: tribal envoys or members of the community seeking religious or political rulings. It was the distance appropriate for the wives of the now powerful leader of a new, unambiguously patriarchal society. He was, in effect, summarily creating in non-architectural terms the form of segregation–the *harem* quarters–that was already firmly established in such neighboring patriarchal societies as Byzantium and Iran, and perhaps he was even borrowing from their architectural and social practices (p55).

Apparently, veiling was not introduced into Arabia by Muhammad; it existed already among some classes, particularly in the towns, although it was probably more prevalent in the countries with which the Arabs were in contact, such as Syria and Palestine. There, as in Arabia, it was connected with social status. Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Assyrians all practiced veiling to some degree. It is nowhere explicitly prescribed in the Qur'an, but Sura 24:31-32 instructs women to guard their private parts and throw a scarf over their bosoms (p55).

By the 10th century, the Abbasid or Classical Age of Islam, Muslim legal thought and practice achieved final formulation. During Muhammad's lifetime and the first centuries thereafter, Arab Muslim soldiers had quickly gained great wealth, and took wives from among the conquered peoples of Persia and Syria. The capital was moved to Damascus, and then to Baghdad. The codification of the Hadith included absorbing the cultural practices of the conquered peoples as interpreted by the conquerors.

Political Significance of the Veil in Colonial Egypt.

For Middle Eastern women in general, the effects of European political and cultural encroachment in the 19th century were complicated and, in certain respects, decidedly negative. In crucial ways, however, the outcome of the process of change set in motion by these encroachments was broadly positive, because the social institutions and mechanisms for the control and seclusion of women and for their exclusion from the major domains of activity in their society were gradually dismantled (ppl27-128). For the first time since Islam was established, the treatment of women in Islamic custom and law (polygamy, easy male access to divorce, and segregation) was openly discussed. From the start the discussion of women and of the need for reform was embedded in considerations of the relative advancement of European societies and the need for Muslim societies to catch up (pl28). The veil emerged as a potent signifier, not only of the social meaning of gender but also of matters of far broader political and cultural import. It has retained that cargo of signification ever since.

Rashid Rida, a respected social reformer of late 19th century Egypt, commented on the changes that had taken place in women's lives. The imitation of European ways could be observed everywhere among the upper classes and "those that followed them from the people"; even the veil, he asserted, was being removed by degrees (pl42). Comments made early in the new century indicate that upper-class women traveling in Europe became accustomed to being unveiled; for the most part they veiled only when at home in Egypt. Among this class the veil became lighter and more transparent, apparently in imitation of the fashions of Istanbul (pl43). By the end of the 19th century, women in a

variety of dress, veiled and unveiled, openly pursuing a range of professional activities, had begun to be features of this society (pl43).

Qassim Amin's *Tahrir Al-Mar'a* ("The Liberation of Woman"), published in 1899, caused intense and furious debate. The anger and passion that his work provoked become intelligible only in the light of its insistence upon the abolition of the veil, rather than the substantive reforms for women that it advocated (which were not radical by his time). In his view, changing the customs regarding women and their clothing, especially the veil, was essential to bringing about the desired social transformation. The battle of the veil in the press inaugurated a new discourse in which the veil assumed far broader significations than women's position in society alone. Its connotations now encompassed issues of class and culture: the widening gulf between the different classes in society, and the related conflict between the culture of the colonizers and that of the colonized (pl45). The principle beneficiaries of the British reform measures and of increased involvement in European capitalism were the European residents of Egypt, the Egyptian upper classes, and the new middle class of rural notables and men educated in Western-type secular schools who became the civil servants and the new intellectual elite. Traditional knowledge, such as that gained at the Qur'an schools, became devalued as antiquated, and mired in the old "backward" ways.

The intense debate provoked by Amin must be understood in the context of ideas imported into the local situation from the colonizing society (pl49). Veiling, in *Western eyes* the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies, became the symbol of both the oppression of women and the backwardness of Islam, and the open target of colonial attack on Muslim societies.

Cromer, the British Consul General, had quite decided views on Islam, women in Islam, and the veil. He believed quite simply that Islamic religion and society were inferior to those of Europe and bred inferior men (pl52). He wrote that whereas Christianity teaches respect for women, and European men "elevated" women because of the teachings of their religion, Islam degraded them; it was to this degradation, most evident in the practices of veiling and segregation, that he traced the inferiority of Muslim men. He never doubted that the practices of veiling and seclusion exercised a "baneful effect on Eastern society" (pl53). Marriage in Islam was "not founded on love but on sensuality," and a Muslim wife, "buried alive behind the veil," was regarded as "prisoner and slave rather than ... companion and helpmeet." Cromer was a hypocrite, however; he opposed women's suffrage in England, and cut back the budget for women's education in Egypt. The ideas of Western feminism essentially functioned to morally justify the attack on native societies and to support the notion of the comprehensive superiority of Europe.

These ideas formed the basis of Amin's book (pl55). He describes Muslim marriage as based not on love but on ignorance and sensuality, as does missionary discourse. In his book, however, the blame is shifted from men to women who become the chief source of the "lewdness," coarse sensuality and materialism that characterize Muslim marriages; since only superior souls could experience true love, this was beyond the capacity of the Egyptian wife. The fundamental and contentious premise of the work was his

endorsement of the Western view of the inferiority of Islamic civilization, peoples, and customs. His view of women was profoundly patriarchal and even misogynist. He merely substituted Islamic-style male dominance for Western-style male dominance.

This negative Western perception spread to other parts of the Muslim world. In the 1920s the Iranian ruler, Reza Shah, went so far as to issue a proclamation banning the veil. The ban, which symbolized the westerly direction in which the ruling class intended to lead society and signaled the eagerness of the upper classes to show that they were "civilized," was quite differently received by the popular classes. Rumors of the ban provoked unrest, and demonstrations broke out which were ruthlessly crushed. For most Iranians, women as well as men, the veil was not "a symbol of backwardness," as the upper classes thought, but "a sign of propriety and a means of protection against the menacing eyes of male strangers."

Ever since then, the colonialist use of feminism to undermine native Arab culture has tainted feminism, rendering it suspect in Arab eyes and vulnerable to the charge of being an instrument of colonial domination and an ally of colonial interests. True, reforms introduced by upper and middle-class political leaders who had accepted and internalized the Western discourse led, in some countries and specifically Turkey, to legal reforms benefiting women. Ataturk's programs included the replacement of the Sharia family code with one inspired by the Swiss family code; it outlawed polygamy, gave women equal rights to divorce, and granted child-custody rights to both parents. These reforms benefited primarily women of the urban bourgeoisie, but had little impact beyond this class. Whether they will endure remains to be seen, however; even in Turkey, Islam and the veil are coming back: militant Turkish women have staged sit-ins and hunger strikes to demand the right to veil (p168, Deniz Kandiyoti, "Women and the Turkish State: Political Actors or Symbolic Pawns?"). Reforms in the laws governing marriage and divorce that were introduced in Iran in the 1960s and 1970s, though not as far-reaching as those of Turkey, have already been reversed since the Revolution.

By 1910 or so, unveiling was distinctly on the increase in Egypt (p172). The literary, intellectual, and social life of women in fact went through a period of enormous vitality. Huda Sha'rawi (1879-1947) founded the Egyptian Feminist Union. After attending a conference in Rome in 1923, she and Saiza Nabarawi removed their veils, presumably in a symbolic act of emancipation, as they stepped off the train in Cairo. For Sha'rawi it was the fulfillment of a childhood dream. She had been guided by her friend and mentor Eugenie Le Brun and shared her belief that "the veil stood in the way of Egyptian women's advancement" (p177).

Where Sha'rawi espoused a Westward-looking feminism, already in the 1900s and 1910s, Malak Hifni Nassef was articulating the basis of a feminism that did not automatically affiliate itself with westernization. Nassef was opposed to unveiling, and her views in this matter suggest the differences between her perspective on feminism and culture and that of Sha'rawi, as well as give some sense of the incisiveness of Nassef's thought and the precision of her understanding of the new varieties of male domination being enacted in and through the contemporary male discourse of the veil (p179).

Nassef (1886-1918) took up the subject of the veil within a decade or so of the publication of Amin's book advocating unveiling. Nassef explained that she felt bound to comment, for the subject continued to provoke such a "battle of the pens." She was opposed to unveiling, though not for the usual conservative reasons. She neither believed that religion dictated anything specific on the matter nor that women who veiled were more modest than those who did not, for true modesty was not determined by the presence or absence of a veil. Men based their views on the veil on their "imaginings," she said, but she based hers on "observations and experience." In the first place, she points out, women were accustomed to veiling and should not be abruptly ordered to unveil. Egyptian women were too "ignorant" and the men of such "corruptness" that unveiling and the mixing of the sexes was for the present a bad idea. What was essential was not for intellectuals to debate the veil but for "you men" to give women a true education and rectify how people are raised, and to improve your own moral character.

The Political and Social Significance of the Veil in Modern Society.

Veiling first reappeared among university students in major urban centers, such as Cairo, Alexandria, and Assiut in the 1970s. It is among these, and young professionals of both sexes, that formal or informal affiliation with the Islamist trend, indicated outwardly by veiling among women, became most prevalent. Although the term veiling is commonly used in English to refer to the new "Islamic" dress (in Arabic the women are referred to as *mutahajibat,* "veiled ones") the clothing women wear often in fact does not include a veil, in the sense of a face covering, but rather a variety of styles of headgear and face coverings which mask it to a greater or lesser degree–if worn at all. The garments, of whatever style, are intended to conform to the Islamic requirement that dress be modest, that is, not sexually enticing; the mandate applies to both men and women. It is generally taken to mean robes, or loose-fitting, long-sleeved, ankle-length garments that do not reveal the contours of the body. Both men and women conforming to this code have developed styles of dress that are essentially quite new. They do not copy the traditional dress of Egypt or of any other part of the Arab world, or the West, although they often combine features of all three. The term "Islamic dress" means that they fulfill the Islamic requirement of modesty, not that they are derived from an Islamic society of the past.

Men complying with the requirement of modesty may wear Arabian-style robes (rather than Egyptian robes), sandals, and sometimes a long scarf on the head, or they may wear baggy trousers and loose shirts. Women wear robes in a variety of styles, all of which resemble Western styles more than traditional peasant dress, except that the skirts are ankle length and the sleeves long. Along with the robes they wear an assortment of headgear, ranging from scarves, hats, and bonnets to what might be described as wimples and fabric balaclavas. Depending on how they interpret the requirement for modesty, some wear face-veils which come in a variety of styles, thicknesses and lengths. Finally, some also wear gloves. Traditional dress also fulfills the Islamic requirement of modesty, but in modern times it has come to be confined to the lower classes and the peasantry. It therefore identifies the wearers with that class, whereas "Islamic" dress,*al-ziyy al-islami,* which might be seen as a democratic dress, erases class origins (p221).

Women who wear Islamic dress usually joined an Islamic group in their late teens or early twenties, and were usually studying in fields that require the highest grades. They are for the most part of the new middle classes, and more typically of the lower middle classes, and often have a rural background or come from families that have recently migrated to urban centers. A study was conducted among veiled and unveiled women at Cairo University. It showed that a majority of veiled students came from families in which other women were veiled, especially their mothers. That is, their adoption of Islamic dress did not entail innovation and conformity to new, socially accepted codes of dress, but rather the adoption of a "modern" version of the conventions of dress to which they and their families were accustomed (p222).

Typically these women are educationally and professionally upwardly mobile, and are confronting bewildering, anonymous, cosmopolitan city life for the first time. There, vivid inequalities, consumerism and materialism, foreign mores, and unscrupulous business practices linked to the foreign presence, whether Western or Arab, are glaringly apparent. They are generally the first generation of women in their family to emerge socially into a world where men and women intermingle on the university campuses, in the crowded transport system, and in the professions. In the face of such stresses and novelties, preserving the conventions of dress that prevailed at home, while adopting the version of that dress that proclaims educational and professional upward mobility appears to be a practical coping strategy, enabling them to negotiate in the new world while affirming the traditional values of their upbringing (p222-223).

For women, Islamic dress also appears to bring a variety of distinct *practical* advantages. On the simplest, most material level, it is economical. One is saved the expense of acquiring fashionable clothes and having more than two or three outfits. It also protects from male harassment. In responding to a questionnaire, women stated that wearing Islamic dress resulted in a marked difference in the way they were treated in public places. It declares their presence to be in no way a challenge to, or a violation of, the Islamic sociocultural ethic. It thus has the paradoxical effect, as some have attested, of allowing them to strike up friendships with men and be seen with them without the fear that they will be dubbed immoral. In an age in which arranged marriages are disappearing and women need to find their own marriage partners, clothes that enable women to socialize with men to some degree and at the same time indicate their adherence to a strict moral code (which makes them attractive as wives) are advantageous in very tangible ways.

The adoption of Islamic dress thus legitimizes women's presence outside the home rather than declaring their place to be in the home. Consequently, it appears that the prevalence of Islamic dress among women coming of age in the 1970s and 1980s—women of the second phase—should not be seen as a retreat from the affirmations of female autonomy and subjectivity made by the generation immediately preceding them (p224).

Recently, however, there have been some *backward steps* in regard to veiling and women's emergence into society

Iran after 1979: Immediately upon taking power, Ayatollah Khomeini began a campaign to "drive women back into the sphere of domesticity." Their mere presence in public was described as 'seditious' and "they were required to don the Islamic *hijab,* covering them from top to toe." Defiance of the rule to wear the hijab was punishable by 74 lashes (p232).

Pakistan.: In 1980 Zia Ul-Huq issued the first of a series of directives ordering all women government employees to veil (p233).

Egypt: 67% of the veiled university students responding to the questionnaire agreed to the proposal that *Sharia* law should become the law of the land, and 53% of the unveiled women agreed. It is surely extremely doubtful that either group has any idea of the extremes of control, exclusion, injustice, and brutality that can be legitimately meted out to women in the name of Islam (p234).

The reemergent veil is an emblem of many things, prominent among which is the rejection of the West. In the 19th century, under the influence of Western thinking, it became the symbol of backwardness, and Muslim women sought advancement through unveiling. Today, the symbol is still there, but it has become an expression of cultural resurgence. Muslim women are again "veiling" in order to take stronger roles in their own society.

THE GOOD TUNISIAN GIRL

Factors To Consider When Trying To Reach Young Tunisian Women With The Gospel

by Katherine Conrad

"*I want to marry Leila.*" Ahmed informs his mother. It is one of his most decisive steps on the pathway to being able to marry the woman of his life. "*I first want to find out if she is a good girl,* " his mother responds, rather skeptically.

During the weeks that follow, Ahmed's mother contacts Leila's relatives, neighbours and other acquaintances, to find out what kind of girl she is. They ultimately confirm that she comes from a respectable, well-to-do family–and that she is a "good" girl. Ahmed and Leila can now happily be united.

But what is it that makes Leila a "good" girl? By what standards is she judged? To what set of measurements is she subjected? To which role must she conform, in order to be accepted in her family and in society? And–what kind of self-image does she develop while trying to behave in this "right" way?

The Status of Women in Tunisian Society

"Good" Tunisian girls are identified mostly by what they are ***not***, or ***do not do.*** Because women are generally considered to have less worth than men, a good Tunisian woman is one who does not take for herself rights which are reserved for men. Practically this means that she should not decide things for herself, do things on her own, or try in any way to be independent. For example, she is not granted the right to decide about her future (what

or where to study, whom to marry, where to live or with whom, and certainly not to live alone); she is not supposed to take care of herself, in terms of paperwork and often not even finances; she is not supposed to move about outside the house as it pleases her. The list could be continued.

In a nutshell, she is expected to be helpless, submissive, and willing to let others think and decide things for her. (Although Tunisian society is drifting more and more towards western values, and although equality of the sexes is being encouraged, traditional patterns of behaviour and thinking still very much prevail, even in the more westernised and "modern" parts of society.)

How Young Tunisian Women View Themselves

As a consequence (or is it *because of this?* It is difficult to draw lines here), young Tunisian women generally have a picture of themselves which matches their assigned role: they think of themselves as being inferior to men, they feel incapable of making major decisions (apart from what to cook today), and they are afraid of anything that includes exploring something new (like finding an address they haven't been to before, or using a metro-line they haven't used before).

Some women, who have had to move away from home for the sake of work or studies, are experiencing a greater amount of freedom. These women have learned to be more independent on a few practical levels. This however does not change their basic role as women. Often another male family member who is living close by takes over the role of the girl's father and brothers.

Fear of Being Alone

One interesting trait, typical of Tunisian women, is a fear (almost a horror) of being alone. This characteristic is almost universal, whereas the traits mentioned earlier might vary from individual to individual. Girls are seldom able to go outside the house by themselves, even if they are only going round the corner to the next public telephone. Staying at home on their own, they generally become depressed or frightened after a very short time. They are afraid to sleep alone. Anything they do has to be together with others.

A major reason for this, of course, is that they are used to living with a family, or with a group of girls. Therefore, they are incredibly social, congenial, willing to share, etc. However their fear of being alone can only fully be understood if we bear in mind the lack of self-confidence they feel due to being a woman.

Relationships with Men

Probably the most important area in which a Tunisian girl is judged for being "good" or "bad" concerns her behaviour towards men. If you are a man and like to flirt, you might possibly get away with it; not so if you are a girl. The mere act of talking to a guy can, under some circumstances, ruin your reputation (this is especially true in villages). The expected standard for a girl in her relationships with men is total chastity and abstinence. The ideal would be a girl who never talks to any male being, apart from the members of

her family. One day someone will fall in love with her good reputation and ask her parents for her hand, before he has even exchanged a word with her.

Of course we know that reality is quite different, but the ideal is still there–somewhere in the Tunisian mind. Most girls try to play this role, at least in public (which, of course, makes it more complicated to initiate relationships from the woman's side). Moreover, passivity, submission and helplessness are quite dominant in defining a woman's relationship with men. Feeling generally inferior, and suffering from domination and ill-treatment (with no possibility for reprisal because of their status), girls often desire to marry out of a longing for protection. Sadly, hardly any of them is aware that the protection they are looking for (against domination from male society), merely perpetuates the pattern from which they are trying to escape.

Housework

There is one area in which girls are positively judged or measured by what they do, rather than by what they don't do. Since women's life is traditionally restricted to the home, any way of expressing creativity or individualism needs to be within the domain of housework, such as cooking, cleaning, decorating, knitting. Having done housework since their childhood, Tunisian girls are normally proficient in at least the areas of cooking and cleaning. They face quite high standards, especially regarding "cleanliness." It is, however, more or less taken for granted that a woman knows how to take care of the house. So the moral issues mentioned earlier are more important criteria for determining if she is "good."

Summary

To summarize, Tunisian girls are not allowed the freedom and respect they deserve as human beings. As a result, they suffer from low self-esteem, and fail to develop their personalities and intellects as they should. The formation of their character is deeply affected by the role they are given in society. (Of course hardly any Tunisian women are aware of this themselves.)

Some Conclusions

Where does religion come in all this?

Because girls are submissive, easily scared (including being scared of God's punishment), and conscientious, and because they have learned to accept rules and to obey without questioning, they are generally more religious than guys, at least in that which concerns the fulfillment of religious duties. Not a small number pray (although they are still a minority, and they pray mostly out of duty). Nearly all girls fast during Ramadan. (There seems to be a higher percentage of guys than girls who don't observe the fast, at least this is what I personally observed.). I conclude that the women are generally more religious than the men

Our Approach in Evangelism

How can we take all these things into account in our communication of the Gospel so as to enable them to respond? It is not sufficient to use the approach of intellectually challen-

ging their Islamic beliefs. As important as it may be to discuss differences between Islam and Christianity, by itself this is not a successful approach to evangelism. In any event, they are not Muslims, for the most part, because they are intellectually convinced that it is true, but rather because their status and position in society demands "submission." This means that even if we could prove Islam wrong, which is in itself difficult to do when the person is not trained to think critically, this would not change their status, and would therefore not provide a reason for them to set it aside.

It is important not only to confront a person with the Gospel, but at the same time to enable him/her to respond to it. In the case of young Tunisian women, a response to the Gospel is very much linked to self-esteem and the ability to think and decide things for themselves. It is most important to concentrate on God being LOVE Let's not try to break down their Islamic beliefs before we have erected a sound foundation of love upon which they can build their new belief in Jesus. When we communicate true LOVE that gives them VALUE as individuals, a value they are currently deprived of as women, we will meet one of their most desperate needs.

If we adapt our approach to their needs, Tunisian women could easily become the most responsive segment of society. As it stands, they are certainly one of the most needy.

WOMEN OF THE SAHARA

by Fiona Roberts

Talking to young Muslim women in my remote corner of North Africa has some things in common with talking to certain secular Western girls. Interest in spiritual things is more or less limited to fortune-telling. Conversation revolves around *fashion, money and men.* To them, my spurning the advances of a wealthy admirer is a far more serious problem than my refusing to accept Mohammad as a prophet.

Fashion

You might wonder how women can discuss fashion when all they ever wear is a floor-length piece of fabric wrapped around their bodies from head to toe. But you soon spot the world of difference between a teenage girl's transparent, pastel-tinted polyester, worn hitched up at the ankle and falling back off her hair, and her grandmother's thick indigo cloth swathed from head to toe. It's a sign of the many changes that have taken place in this people-group. They were mostly nomads until the 1970's when years of drought began to drive them from the desert to the towns. While their grandparents studied only the Qur'an and lived without the most basic amenities, young people now enjoy education, imported goods and satellite TV.

Money

Women, who traditionally own the tents in a nomadic family, also own and rent out property in town. Not many women go out to work, but nor do most men; unemployment

is around 80% and most families are poor. People who do have jobs are obliged to help their extended families; a mother who needs new clothes for her children for a forthcoming festival will flatter, beg and cajole her male relatives to collect the money. Since trading is hardly considered work, many women will sell something, be it Parisian perfumes or a few vegetables. Some do it for entertainment, some for survival as many households are headed by women.

Men

Visitors from other countries are sometimes shocked by men's attitude to women here, although it's not "un-Islamic." Islam grants men the right to instant divorce on demand, and in this part of the world they take full advantage of it. It is not unusual for someone in their mid-twenties to have been through five weddings and divorces, nor for a marriage to last a matter of only months, even days. A woman normally goes back to her mother when she is divorced, along with any children the father doesn't want. If having dependent children hinders her chances of re-marriage, her mother or another relative will take responsibility for them, bringing them up with her own. For women who are no longer integrated into their families, prostitution might be the only way to feed the children.

It seems ironic that it is an absolute necessity for a woman to get married in order to have any status, and preferably have a child to show for it. Does the bride secretly wonder, during the three days of wedding celebrations, what all the fuss is about? One cynical friend pointed out that since the wife knows she will be divorced sooner or later, she feels obliged to extract as much money for her relatives as possible out of her husband while she has the chance. Hard and materialistic? It's easy to see why.

Implications for sharing the Gospel

The Gospel is good news for women. To my women friends, "Islam is always right." Nevertheless they insist that divorce and polygamy are bad, and think what the Bible says about marriage is good. Stories of Jesus' encounters with women are astonishing, but also good. Discussing religion as such quickly reaches a dead end. But my neighbourhood has discovered from watching my every move that Christians, contrary to popular belief, pray, fast, and don't sleep around. Even single, white, female ones! My national friends and I help each other when we can. I sometimes offer to pray for situations of need, e.g. sick children. I value my friendship with these women, and like to think that it will prepare the way for friendship with a God who loves them, regardless of their perceived lack of value to men, and Who can be relied upon to meet all their needs.

YOUNG WOMEN IN MOROCCO

By H.L.

Why is it that the vast majority of BCC students in Morocco are young men, rather than young women? This phenomenon can no longer be explained by differences in the literacy

rate, particularly in the cities. Any observer outside a primary or secondary school in a Moroccan city would find it hard to see any great difference in the number of boys and girls entering. Even at university there is a fairly even balance, at least in the Arts and Human Sciences faculties.

Why then, are young women apparently less reachable with the Gospel than their male counterparts? Here are some observations made in my circle of acquaintances, mainly university students, plus a few high school students, all in the age group to which most BCC students belong.

In spite of the fact that many girls look very modern in their dress and sometimes behaviour, they are less "westernized" in their general lifestyle and thought patterns than many young men. One factor which contributes to this is that women spend a large proportion of their time at home, most of them in a very traditional situation, helping in the household and caring for younger children. Whilst boys are generally out on the street from an early age, teenage girls and unmarried women are expected to stay at home. I once interviewed a language class I taught about methods of bringing up boys and girls. Two teenagers in mini-skirts declared that they practically never went out except to school. The same is true of women students at university. Asking my friends what they had done during the summer holidays, most of them said, "Nothing." They had not gone out, visited friends, read books, etc..

The fact that they spend most of their free time at home means that they are far more under the supervision of their parents than their brothers are. It would be difficult for most girls to listen to Christian broadcasts and send or receive mail unless their parents were exceptionally tolerant. Boys, on the other hand, can do more or less what they want, as they often are only at home to eat and sleep. One friend who came to my house regularly to read the Bible with me found it difficult to leave her house as the neighbours always asked where she was going and why.. Even I have had neighbours who have exercised like surveillance over me!

In the female-dominated milieu of the home, conversation concentrates on the household, children, cooking, prices, etc., rather than on more intellectual subjects. This is reflected in conversations with friends at school or university. There is, of course, talk about classes and student problems, but rarely about religious or political issues. Thus girls are unused to thinking about abstract issues or questioning beliefs.

One favorite topic is marriage. I have witnessed more than one lively discussion on whether a young woman should get engaged to a man she has only met one, i.e. should she choose her partner herself or let her parents choose. It is not uncommon for parents to find a suitable young (or not so young) man for their daughter, though she does have the freedom to refuse him. Friendship with a fellow student may well lead to marriage, on the other hand, if the parents agree. In Morocco the police can still fine a couple who are seen in the street together if they cannot prove that they are married!

Girls generally have little experience or knowledge of the world outside their small sphere. Most of my friends have never met another foreigner or known another Christian. Many

of them have next to no idea of what Christians believe except for the little (and that distorted) that they have learnt in Qur'anic classes. Some girls even had no idea what religion I might be expected to follow as a European and a non-Muslim. And these are university students!

In my contacts with many students I let it be generally known that I am a committed Christian and am willing to talk about what I believe. However, I find that scarcely anyone admits to ever having seen the *Injil* or to having had any exposure whatsoever to Christian witness of any kind.

The very few exceptions are girls who are exceptional anyway. One friend, for instance, ordered a BCC course. But she is interested in everything and can hold forth on any subject. But because of being involved in so many things, she has never found time to actually do her Bible Correspondence course. Another girl who has had contact with the Radio School of the Bible also has very wide interests and does not live with her family.

Many are willing to talk about Islam and listen to what I have to say. However, because of the lack of previous exposure and the lack of experience generally in thinking about issues outside their small circle of vision, moving from there to talking about *my* faith is a slow process. Often girls who wear the *hijab* are the most open to talk. They seem to respect me for being a serious believer. One even prefers spending time with me rather than with other Muslims because she approves of my morals!

In my opinion, to reach girls and young women, more Christian women need to move into into situations where they have daily contact with Muslim young people. And we need to pray for young Moroccan Christian girls and women that they would have boldness for a discrete witness amongst those they study and work with.

MUSLIM WOMEN IN DIASPORA

by M.A.

[Although written several years ago, the following article illustrates well the conflict of cultures experienced by second-generation immigrants from Muslim lands to the western world. So many elements of the climate described still prevail among Muslim women in diaspora that we consider it worth printing. Ed.]

Only a very small number of Arabs have become integrated into French culture. The rest are painfully struggling to adhere to their traditional Muslim culture. Although having changed countries physically, they have not changed mentally, emotionally, culturally or socially. This results in unhappiness, frustration, segregation and complexes (inferiority OR superiority), all of which, sadly and perhaps permanently, affect the young people of the family, and especially the young women.

One of my young Algerian friends said, "I must constantly play the game of submission to my parents' strict Muslim code while I am European in my thinking and a rebel at heart. Some day I MUST leave to make my own life. But no matter what I am or do, I will

always be an Arab! I have no desire to live loosely (as my parents think all European girls live), but only to have freedom to have friends, fellows and girls; freedom to decide as to my future; freedom to choose my husband."

That same young lady, along with a girlfriend, soon ran away from home as she said she would. The oppression became too much for them. They felt they were up against a wall and could never penetrate it while living at home. Both of these girls sent us poems they composed just before leaving home. The dominant theme of the poems is this: "If I stay at home I'll be stifled, never be myself, and never amount to anything; if I leave home I face an uncertain future, unhappiness, loneliness. Where to go? To whom to turn?"

Arabs seek to enforce the same social and moral code for females in France as in North Africa, but have to fight very hard to maintain the same restrictions. They tend to over-react as they feel the need to contend with the bad morals of the new land! The resulting rigidity and injustice drives many unhappy girls to leave home and seek refuge in boarding houses for just such young women. Here they are protected from their parents (if they are of age) and are given jobs and/or taught trades.

There are many young married women whose husbands reluctantly give them the freedom to come and go as they please, and sometimes to hold jobs. Others are kept in their homes and don't go out unless with their husbands; still another few are LOCKED in when the husbands are out!!

Another of my young friends, a pretty, intelligent and outgoing girl, turned from radiant to depressed overnight as, according to the traditional customs of her elderly parents, she was married to a man she had never met and spent her 'honeymoon' with him in the small apartment of his sister and husband whom she had never met either! She is educated and Europeanized, her new husband is fresh out of Algeria, has never had an education, and hardly knows French! It was heartbreaking to see this lovely girl so unhappy when she should have been radiant following her wedding! Happily, she has a Bible and I pray she will find an inner peace in Jesus.

BOOK REVIEW

by D. Smith

The Harem Within by Fatima Mernissi, U. K. published by Doubleday 1994, published by Bantam 1995, 254 pages. £5.99 (Bantam)

Fatima Mernissi delights the reader with fascinating tales of her childhood in Fez, Morocco in the 1940s, a period of political and social transition. Her grandmother had been one of nine wives, while her mother, the only wife, was kept enclosed in her husband's family home with his mother as her boss. The concept of the harem, which inspired her tales, is defined by Mernissi as the men's desire to seclude their wives and their wish to maintain an extended household rather than break into nuclear units.

How do women survive under such restrictions? The women in the Mernissi household responded creatively, often enacting their own dramas based on current events and literature. They offered young Fatima sage advice which included teaching on how the weak could assert power. In her account are examples of the use of magic and the pervasive presence of belief in the spirit world. Mina, a former slave, introduced Fatima to the world of the djinni and the possession dances, a world forbidden by the heads of families but secretly entered by the women.

Mernissi has also described the women's imaginative responses to traditions and constraints. Her maternal grandmother lived on a farm with more freedom than the women in the big house in Fez. Grandmother Yasmina coped with the proud head wife by using her name for one of the ducks. When challenged to get rid of the duck, Yasmina maintained that she could not possibly kill the duck, because of her co-wife's name- that would be a bad omen. She promised to call her duck by that name only in her mind.

I found this collection of tales to be amusing, yet indirectly stimulating in my search to understand and appreciate North African women. Close observation of these fascinating characters expanded my ideas about how to reach them with the Gospel- both in terms of subject matter and of methods. Of course some circumstances have changed for Arab women today, but many aspects are the same, such as a great sense of fun, lots of spunk and a love for dramatic stories. The underlying belief in the spirit world and occultic practices are still prevalent in North Africa and a major factor in all consideration of sharing the Good News of Christ. While the extended family may no longer live under one roof as in the past, a strong attention to sex and a concern for regulating male/female relationships remain.

The Harem Within is a good read for all who are interested in Arab women and family life.

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CORRECTION

In the 1/96 article ***MY BROTHER'S BLOOD, Christian Churches and Religious Freedom in the Middle East,*** Case Study 2, the author stated that "*On 5th December, Bishop Cesare Mazzolari, the Roman Catholic Bishop ... confirmed that Sheikh Abdullah was in fact executed by crucifixion on 10th August, 1994.*"

We have since received a letter from a Christian in Sudan who knows Sheikh Abdullah personally. He writes, "*I would like to draw your attention to a grave mistake in case study 2 from the Sudan. ... This is not true! I know Sheikh Abdullah personally and have spoken with him several times since his detention in August 1994. I ... can assure you that S.A. is alive and well ... and that he is still living in the Muslim north of the Sudan. ... there were some rumours that [he] was threatened with crucifixion. ... But it was not issued as a legal sentence. Sheikh Abdullah and the other man were both released and moved to Khartoum, together with many of the group. Here they live in economically very poor conditions. The group started to meet regularly for Bible study and prayer, and they now call themselves "Kanisat Al-Nahda." ... Since their move to Khartoum the group has experienced relative freedom, even through the security must know about their activities.*

" ... To my knowledge and to the knowledge of all the other expats I know here in the Sudan, there has not been a single case of crucifixion in the northern part of the Sudan in recent years. ... in my opinion it is one thing to accuse the government of the Sudan of terrible atrocities in war (I am not in a position to either confirm or deny these,) but it is a different thing to charge the government of the Sudan with executing apostates by crucifixion in the north. This is simply not true."

Sorry for not checking our facts carefully enough!

DID YOU KNOW...?

Feminist Challenge to the Ayatollah Regime — A new generation of Iranian feminists, led by the daughter of the president, is demanding the right to run for the highest posts in government, including the presidency. ... To Western eyes, Ms. Hashemi [the president s daughter] might appear an unlikely feminist. She always wears the black *chador* the symbol of conservative Muslim womanhood, and forswears coscetics. ... She was attacked recently by the radical clerical-backed group, Ansar Hizbullah, for urging

that women be allowed to ride bicycles and motorcycles. Radicals compared her with the Prophet Mohammed s wife, Ayesha, a figure viewed as anti-Shi ite by Iranian Muslims.

A Stretch Too Far — A white limousine belonging to Sheikh Hamed Bin Hamdan Al-Nahayan of the United Arab Emirates and thought to be the longest in the world has been ordered off the road by Californian police because it is too long. The car measures more than 66ft. and has 36 seats. It is available for rent when not in use by the sheikh. Guardian Weekly, 26/5/96

When the Taps Run Dry — Water supplies over much of the world could be in trouble, according to a recent study in the US journal. ... Scientists warn that although new dams could increase the world supply of water by about 10per cent in the next 30 years, ... the number of people needing the water will increase by 45 percent. ... Humans can no longer regard water as available on tap: it is one natural resource for which there is no substitute. Guardian Weekly

An ***Islamic-led government*** has just gained control in Turkey for the first time in its 73-yr. history as a secular republic. Guardian Weekly, 7/7/96.

Two out of three Moroccan women are **illiterate**, according to Moroccan Government estimate in 1994. Guardian Weekly, 7/7/96.

A growing body of evidence that **independent comment is being suppressed in Tunisia** is threatening to blacken the image of the Mediterranean tourist destination, whose government claims to be above the abuses that characterise much of the Arab world. Guardian Weekly.