

Gap of Values: Gender and Family Issues as Source of Tension between Islam and the West

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Abstract

The conflict between Islam and the West is often described as a clash of values. Some Islamic thinkers, such as the famous Egyptian Sayyid Quttb see Western technology and spreading Western culture, as "intellectual and spiritual colonialism." Islamic fear comes from the breakdown of the traditional sources of social authority, an outcome of the Westernization of the youth. Western values, spread all over via media and technology, bring contradictory messages to the traditional Islamic worldview and their families remain unprotected by these barrages of a new world. The three most important and vulnerable issues are family values, the status of women, and the elders authority.

This article provides a comparative outlook of 31 topics, all connected to the status of women, from the spectrum of Western pluralistic perception, to the harsh Islamistic attitudes. The comparison demonstrates how long can the discrepancy between the two poles can be, and the significant distance between its two edges. Partial list of the 31 topics, overviewed in the article: Dress, Mobility, Virginity, Age differences, Culture of Shame, Loyalty in Marriage, Sexual Discourse, Female Genital Mutilation, Rape Victims, Divorce, Inheritance, Etc.

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Introduction

The conflict between Islam and the West is often described as a clash of values. The “Clash of Civilizations” is too, in essence, a clash of values, insofar as a major portion of the attributes of a civilization is composed of its social values. In public opinion polls in Muslim countries Western influences are popularly identified with vulgarity, immorality, blatant sexuality and indifference to religion.¹ The main attribute of Western culture, which is popularly appreciated, is its technology.² It is to this that the Egyptian Islamist thinker, Sayyid Qutb referred to as “intellectual and spiritual colonialism”, warning the Believers that the enemies of Islam may attempt to disguise the conflict as an economic, political or racial struggle.³

A major social factor in the spread of Islamic radicalism is the **breakdown of traditional sources of social authority** in societies with a relatively young population. This is a source of both the power of attraction of radical ideologies for youth and the reaction of the Islamic establishment and conservative elements to what is perceived as the “Westernization” of the youth. Tensions resulting from modernization and Westernization (parents-children relations) within the Muslim household play an important role in the radicalization of Muslim communities.

For decades, the West penetrated Muslim politics, but the households remained “immune” to this penetration. The relationships within the households continued in line with the traditional paradigm, despite changes occurring outside. The infiltration of the West into the inner sanctuary of the household escalated over the last decades to a level of foreign penetration which threatens to change a community’s norms, upsetting the basic assumptions of social hierarchy and behavior. Messages contradictory to the traditional Islamic worldview are carried into the family through mass media and the household has no firewalls to protect itself. One of the main agents of these messages is satellite TV. The combination of accessibility of the messages and their acceptance by the youth and the women poses a threat to a highly defined system of norms, and to the predominance of the traditionally dominant members of the family unit. This threat has triggered a natural defense mechanism and a desire to reject the “corrupting” Western values. The West therefore, may be likened to the Sirens of the Odyssey – a dangerous “magnet”, which once succumbed to, will jeopardize core values of Islamic society – foremost among them, **family values, the status of women, and the authority of the elders.**

The potential for change in the **social status of women** is both a major grievance leading to radicalism and anti-Westernism, and a catalyst for change. It is difficult to distinguish between attitudes towards gender issues, which derive from Islamic law, and those, which result from local or tribal traditions (*'urf*; *'adat wa-taqalid*) that have no connection to canonical Islam. Therefore, violations of the latter are commonly interpreted as breaches of the former. The proliferation of women’s organizations in the Muslim world in the last decades, prominence of female movie stars in the Arab cinema industry, female public literary and political figures, laws banning polygamy

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¹ Gallup Poll, March 12, 2002: Poll of the Islamic World: Perceptions of Western Culture.

² Gallup Poll, March 28, 2002: What do Islamic World Residents Like about the West?

³ Reuven Paz, “Islamists and Anti-Americanism,” *MERIA*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (December 2003).

and forced child marriages, Western values of sexual equality portrayed on satellite TV and of course, the access to the internet are all seen as attempts to incite Muslim women to abandon traditional Islamic mores. Islamic spokesmen lash out at the connections between local women's organizations and foreign organizations as "cultural imperialism" and as a Western attempt to woo Muslim women away from Islam and attack plans, in coordination with international agencies, for family planning.

This paper describes some problems which Islamic societies face when exposed to Western values and norms, especially those connected to gender, sex, family and the status of women. Islamic sensibility regarding these issues is illustrated by: A. juxtaposition of Islamic traditional values with Western liberal ones, and B. showing the manner by which Islamic *'ulama* referred to the 1994 UN Population and Development Conference in Cairo. In the view of many Islamists, this international event was proof that Islam as a religion and as a set of norms and mores is under vile cultural attack. This feeling caused many Islamists to think and talk in terms of *à la guerre comme à la guerre*; a feeling that persists to this day, and a few extremists and radicals extend this attitude to commit "defensive" actions against symbols of what they perceive as subversive Western culture.

Background

When we talk about gender issues we generally mean those connected to women and the questions, which stem from the fact that women are part of the private and public sphere. Western public discourse has no problem dealing with questions connected to gender, since liberal societies are used to discussing even the most sensitive issues. Therefore, issues connected to sex, sexuality, sexual behavior, sexual inclination, sexual freedom, and other such issues are the subject of academic research, public debate, artistic expression and discourse in the mass media of Western societies with almost no restrictions. The freedom of the individual and his right to express his views, which became a basic rule in Western societies in the previous generation are now protected by the continuation of the extensive dealing with issues of sex and gender by law and social norms.

In Islamic societies the reality is quite the opposite. Traditional concepts concerning sex and gender still rule the mores and legal systems; and restrictions still form a protective armor around an individual's freedom and the right to express his opinion. It is difficult, however, from methodological and practical points of view, to distinguish between Islamic rule and local or tribal tradition which has no connection to Islam; since there is no clear division between official Islamic religion and tradition and habits (*'adat wa-taqalid*) which are not necessarily rooted in Islam.⁴ This situation stems from two main reasons:

1. Islam as an institutionalized religion is based on written texts: a holy basic book – the Qur'an – and authorized exegesis which developed through generations on the basis of the *Hadith* – the oral tradition of the deeds of the Prophet Muhammad, his sayings and the deeds of others which he approved. Since these texts moved from one country to another and through sectors and eras, they became an accepted basis, which was shared and binding for different sectors, places and times. Local

⁴ For example, the importance of a girl's virginity prior to marriage is common to Islamic, Christian, Druze and 'Alawi communities living in the Middle East, but when discussing this issue many will say that this is a religious Islamic matter.

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and tribal traditions and customs were usually unwritten and passed from one person to another and from generation to generation, while differing from place to place, from family to family, and subsequently changed through time.

2. Throughout 1400 years of Islam, Islamic societies inserted many traditions and customs into their legal systems, usually without writing them as official law. This gave these traditions and customs a seal of religious Islamic approval.⁵

Communities dwelling side by side through time influenced each other in a way which makes it difficult to trace the source of moral concepts and social values. Add to this the fact that widespread traditions and customs which are even part of law in Arab countries are clearly contradictory to Islamic laws.⁶ It can be said that in the conflict between custom and tradition on the one hand, and established religion put down in canonic texts on the other, the power of customs and tradition wins out over religion. Indeed many Muslims, both men and women, who are not formally schooled in Islam, know very well the rules of what is permitted and what is forbidden in their society, rules which are very different from those practiced in other Islamic societies where people are convinced that they live by the “correct” Islam.⁷ The lack of an accepted religious authority over all aspects of Islam amplifies the differences between the systems of moral values that govern Islamic societies. The division between Sunni and Shiite Islam and the conflict between them for the last 1300 years has intensified the complexity of the question: what are the moral laws of Islam which any faithful Muslim must follow?

Areas of Clash of Values and Mores

In issues concerning sex and gender, there are basic characteristics common to many systems of norms which prevail in Islamic societies. There are groups in which these rules and norms are strictly followed, and there are groups which follow them loosely. The reality today is that in every Islamic society there are men and women who strictly adhere to Islamic custom living side by side with people who feel less bound by these customs. The friction between them is a source of not only tension in society, but also of public and political struggles over the nature of society and its trends.

The term “Islamic Society” used in this paper also includes groups whose religion is not Islam, but have lived close to Islamic societies for many generations and were influenced by their norms. Thus we find Jewish, Christian, Druze, Alawi and animist

⁵ An example of this is the practice of female circumcision, which received the Islamic stamp of approval through a *hadith* which many regard as dubious. The societies which follow this practice, accept this *hadith* as a true and reliable precept, while those that do not practice it, regard this *hadith* as false. See Mordechai Kedar, “Islam and ‘Female Circumcision’: The Dispute over FGM in the Egyptian Press, September 1994,” *Medicine and Law*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2002), pp. 403-418.

⁶ The most prominent example of this is the murder of women to preserve the family’s honor. According to Islam, no one is allowed to harm another, even his own daughter, for any reason. The suspect must be brought to trial along with witnesses and evidence and only the judge can decide the verdict. The reality is totally different. Every year, hundreds of girls and women in Arab and Islamic states are murdered by their male relatives as punishment for immoral behavior whether real or imagined. In a number of countries, the murderers are treated leniently when they convince the judge that they acted as they did because the victim had acted contrary to accepted moral behavior. The laws that allow this leniency express the power of tradition, but are totally in contradiction to Islamic law.

⁷ For example, the freedom of a woman to decide who will be her husband: In Islamic Bedouin societies this freedom is very rare, while Muslims who live in cities for generations respect much more their daughters’ opinion in this regard. However in both environments people relate to this issue as connected to their Islamic background.

groups living in proximity to large Islamic communities in the Middle East, Asia and Africa, who have adopted the same stereotypes, rules of behavior, morals, and ways of thinking. Since there is no term which includes all these societies, the term “Islamic Society” was chosen to describe the nature of the norms in these societies and not their religion.⁸

In this section we will juxtapose 33 examples of an Islamic norm in its strictest form as viewed by the most traditional part of society on one hand, and the norm which prevails in the West as seen by the most liberal sector of Western society on the other.. (Maybe "While it is clear – line" should not be deleted). In every one of the norms described below there is a continuum between two poles, and every group places itself at a certain point on this continuum. For example, the issue of dress: on the Islamic pole we place the *burqa*, the traditional women’s dress in Afghanistan, which covers the woman from top to toe, and enables her only peek out through small holes in the head covering. On the opposite pole, the Western one, we place the nudity of European women who sunbathe in public gardens on sunny summer days. Between these poles every society and group has its place, including Islamic societies.

The norms are:

1. Dress:

Islamic discourse sees a woman as pure nakedness (*‘awra*), and therefore her whole body must be covered whenever she leaves the family home. Traditional dress should cover her head, and in some societies – Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan – women are forced to cover their faces as well. The long robe should be wide and opaque in order that the body’s shape will not be evident. A woman’s voice and scent are also considered nakedness, therefore it is forbidden for a woman to use make-up or perfume when she goes out in public.

In Western civilization, women have the freedom to wear whatever they want and to totally expose their bodies in places and at times which legitimize this exposure, such as the beach and public gardens in the summer. Make-up and perfume are allowed accepted.

2. The way women are viewed:

Islamic societies view the very existence of women as *fitna* – seduction. The mere presence of a woman is enough to create sinful thoughts in men’s mind and therefore she has to act according to the rules of *hishma* – modesty. Since a woman is *‘ar* - shame, she must totally cover herself and be careful not to sit or move in a way that would reveal any part of her body. She must lower her voice, never giggle or laugh, never look directly at any man, speak, sing or dance in public and never assume a task, which would put her in contact with men outside her family.

Western societies have no problem accepting the fact that women have the same roles as men in every sphere and field, and men are expected not to turn the women’s presence into sexual opportunities.

⁸ Dr. Muhammad Sa’id Ramadan al-Bouti relates to “Islamic Society” in this way. See his book *The Jihad in Islam*, (Damascus: Dar-al-Fikr, 1993), p. 80.

3. Mobility:

In traditional Islamic societies there is a concept that a woman's place is in the home or within the family circle and her presence in the public sphere is regarded in a negative light. If she leaves home, she must be accompanied by a male relative, who will keep his eye on her and make sure that she has no contact with strange men. To this day, women in Saudi Arabia are not allowed to drive because of this rule which stems from the negative light that any manifestation of a woman's independence from the family's framework is regarded. The Druze religious leaders declared a boycott on families who allowed their daughters to drive.⁹

In Western societies there are no normative restrictions on women's presence in public.

4. Interaction between males and females:

In traditional Islamic societies men and women are separated in public. Separation is obligatory in governmental offices, private companies and in schools from the age of 3. In Saudi Arabia and other countries there are restaurants that have two sections: one for female customers and families and another for men. Some banks have opened branches for women and the staff in these branches is women as well. In Cairo there are "women only" subway cars,¹⁰ and in many apartments and houses there are two entrances and two living rooms, one for men and one for women where the latter can remove their head covering.

In Western societies men and women mingle in every field: Women study and work with men with no restrictions, serve in the armed forces with men, and in many universities dormitories are co-ed.

5. Virginit

In Islamic society a girl's virginity is worth more than her life. She must guard it on pain of death before marriage, and the loss of her virginity is considered her fault, even if she was raped. Girls' participation in sports and games is limited in order to keep their virginity intact. Many parents punish their daughters for touching their genitals because they are afraid that they will harm their virginity while masturbating. The inclination to marry girls off at an early age stems – inter alia – from the preoccupation with preserving the girl's virginity until marriage.

In the West the permissive atmosphere accepts pre-marital sex as legitimate, and therefore virginity is not regarded as important. Young girls' activities are not restricted for fear that they will lose their virginity and no parent would consider marrying off their daughter at an early age because of it.

6. Match making:

Islamic societies do not allow an unmarried woman to have contact with men, even for the purpose of marriage. Marriage arranged by the bride's parents is the preferred method. After the match is proposed, the parents on both sides consult with their brothers, and the marriage is conditional upon their approval. Therefore marriage is not a matter between the bride and the groom but a "political" issue between families.

⁹ *Lady* (an Israeli women's magazine published in Nazareth, Israel), March 2005, p. 50-51.

¹⁰ *Jerusalem Post*, April 1, 2005.

Western societies accept the fact that unmarried women enter relationships with unmarried men, either for the purpose of marriage or simply living together without the benefit of marriage. Parents do not choose their daughter's husbands and their brothers have no say about the match.

7. Marriage between relatives:

In Islamic societies marriage between relatives is very common. The Qur'an (Chapter 33, Verse 50) allows a man to marry his cousin, one of the Prophet's wives, Zaynab, was his cousin. However, there is a *hadith*, which recommends "make your match from far away" meaning marry women who are not related to you, but this *hadith* was not accepted as binding. It is customary that a girl's cousin has the right to marry her, especially if their fathers (who are brothers or brothers-in-law) decided on the marriage when the boy and the girl were very young. Marrying a relative spares the parents the need to consult with their brothers as described above.

In Western societies match making between relatives is not customary, and the awareness of genetic diseases and disabilities generally deters people from marrying their relatives.

8. Exchange marriage:

In Islamic societies there is a phenomenon of marriage based on *badal* - exchange of brides. A boy marries a girl on condition that her brother marries the first boy's sister. This kind of marriage is intended to solve the problem of the boy's old or handicapped sister who cannot find a husband and their father forces him to marry a girl, who might also be old or handicapped, so her brother will marry the sister. This deal is usually arranged by the parents in order to solve the problem of the unmarried daughters. The element of force plays a major role in this kind of marriage, on the sons as well as on the daughters. This process has negative influences on the life of both couples and the problems between one couple reflect on the other.

In Western societies such a system of exchange marriage is unheard of.

9. Pregnancy without marriage:

In Islamic societies, the worst thing an unmarried girl or woman can do is to get pregnant, since pregnancy without marriage causes great shame to her parents, brothers, uncles and to all the men in her extended family. Usually this girl will be murdered. If there is a possibility, an abortion will be performed in order to conceal the pregnancy and to save the family's honor.

In Western societies single mothers are viewed as legitimate. Girls live with their boyfriends, and their children are not considered an anomaly.

10. Status of marriage:

In Islamic societies marriage is considered to be the basic element of the social structure. The traditional family, which includes a father, a mother and children, is the only acceptable family framework.

In Western societies the traditional family is only one of the legitimate options for both men and women.

11. Age of marriage:

In traditional Islamic societies, especially in rural areas, it is customary to marry the girls off as early as possible. Girls of 9 who are either married or betrothed are a common phenomenon, and 13-year-old mothers are considered the norm. States make laws, which set the minimum age of marriage as 16 to 18, but the state's ability to enforce these laws on the population of peripheral areas is usually limited.

In Western societies girls usually do not get married until they have finished their studies and have developed a professional career.

12. Age difference:

In Islamic societies, a man is traditionally older than his wife by a significant number of years. This habit is a result of the social norm which states that a man should be the only decision maker in the home (*"al-kalima lil-rijjal"* – the word belongs to men), and a young woman who has less experience in life will accept her older husband's authority without question. It is also common that a man marries his daughter off to one of his own friends, (the father's contemporary) even if the daughter is in the early stages of puberty. The father is pleased that he found a good man for his daughter; a man of means whom he knows, and can trust to treat his daughter well. The husband is satisfied since he has a young virgin for a wife, and has done a favor to her father, his friend, by taking his daughter before she "goes astray" during adolescence.

In Western societies marriage is usually based on the emotional connection between the couple, and age plays a small role. There are many couples where the woman is older than the man and society generally has no problem with this.

13. Polygamy:

In many Islamic societies it is common for a man to live a full family life with a number of wives. According to the Qur'an (Chapter 4, Verse 4), polygamy is permitted under two main conditions: (a) the maximum number of wives with whom a man can live is four, while the number of concubines (*jawari*) is according to his financial abilities; (b) the man has to treat all his wives with equity and justice. Modern religious authorities say that since it is hard to treat all the wives equally (as stated in the Qur'an itself) it is recommended that a man marry one wife only. The pre-Islamic Arab society allowed a man to have as many wives as he wished since they viewed a woman as a husband's property. Since he could have as many camels as he could afford, he could also have many wives. Although Islam limited polygamy to four wives, the view of the woman as the property of her husband still prevails.

Monogamy in Western societies is based on the idea that marriage entails equal rights for both the husband as well as the wife to have their spouses for themselves; just as the principle of equality between men and women prevents women from having more than one husband; it prevents the men from having more than one wife.

14. Independence of a girl before her marriage:

In Islamic societies a girl lives in her parents' home until her marriage.¹¹ Even if she stays unmarried until she is older (*'anousa*) it is unacceptable for her to live

¹¹ There is a popular saying that a woman goes out three times: first, from her mother's womb,

alone as long as her parents are alive. She must live in her parents' home under their supervision.

In the West, it is accepted for a girl to move out of the family home when she is financially independent. It is common for them to live either by themselves or with friend(s) (either male or female). Many girls do not return to live in the parental home after spending years in academic studies far from home.

15. Status of women in family:

In Islamic societies “men have authority over women” (Qur’an, Chapter 4, Verse 34), and shape their daily agenda as well as the course of their lives. Thus, the girl’s father and brothers draw for her the lines of the permitted and the forbidden, and after she gets married her husband takes over the authority of her behavior and deed in every aspect.

In the West, a girl’s brother has usually no authority over her or her way of conduct, and after certain age a girl’s father loses the legitimacy to influence her life, which he had during her childhood. The principle of equality between husband and wife makes it hard for a man to force ways of conduct upon his wife, especially if she has developed professional career and financial independence.

16. “Culture of Shame”:

In Islamic societies, the “culture of shame” rules over the behavior of both men and women. The basic principle of this culture states that everyone of the family must refrain from doing anything, which might bring shame on himself or on someone else in the family, especially if said family member is a man. Shame is almost the hardest of social sanctions imposed on whoever violates the social moral code.¹²

In the West, sexually permissive behavior is usually not a source of shame for an unmarried girl or her family, as long as such behavior is not viewed as prostitution.

17. Murdering of daughters for bringing shame on family:

In many Islamic societies it is common that if a girl crosses the red lines of morally unacceptable behavior, her father or another relative can murder her. In some states this social norm was adopted by the state law or by the judicial system, which deals with such father, brother or other relative in tolerance and understanding.¹³

In Western societies, a man has no permission to hurt his daughter, sister or any other female relative even if their behavior is not according to the social moral code.

second, from her father’s home to her husband’s, and third, to the cemetery.

¹² Harold Glidden, “The Arab World,” *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Washington D.C., Vol. 128, No. 8 (February 1972), pp. 984-988.

¹³ See, for example, article 340 in the Jordanian penal code. See also Guy Bechor, *Between Vision and Reality: Law in the Arab World*, Herzliya (2002), pp. 133-138.

18. Loyalty in marriage:

Islamic societies demand a total loyalty of a woman to her husband. Any doubt, which a husband might have concerning his wife's loyalty, justifies severe punishment.

In the West a woman is expected to be loyal to her husband. However, this loyalty is in condition that her husband is loyal to her as well. Regardless either spouse has the ability to be disloyal without any reprocusion from society.

19. Sexual discourse:

Islamic societies refrain from writing or talking about issues connected to sex, and this prohibition lies especially on women. Dealing with gender issues is usually viewed as illegitimate. A woman is not allowed to talk or write about her love, her sexual desires, or her experience with men. Expressions of love are acceptable only between a man and his wife.

In Western societies men and women can write and speak openly about gender, sex, sexuality, sexual desires and experience of both men and women.

20. Sexual education:

School curricula in Islamic societies usually do not include any preparation of the youth for appropriate behavior concerning sex and sexuality. Parents also seldom talk with their adolescent children about these issues.

In Western societies school curricula include lessons on the physiology of sex, sexual behavior, diseases transmitted through sexual relations, and contraceptives. The idea is to bring the youth to look at sexual issues in a serious, considerate, and responsible way. In many schools students can obtain contraceptives freely.

21. Birth:

In Islamic societies men look at having many children as a source of honor, especially if these children are males. A large number of children proves the father's virility, and the woman, knowing the way her husband thinks, tries to bear as many children as she can in order to increase her husband's sympathy towards her, and thus lessen the chance of divorce. Economic considerations are secondary, and governments of over-populated countries spare no effort in order to increase the weight of economic elements in the considerations of the families.

Western families prefer having a smaller number of children due to considerations of economy, career, and convenience.

22. Contraceptives:

Islamic societies view the use of contraceptives by unmarried women as a license to have sexual relations without marriage. Married women are not expected to use contraceptives since marriage is meant to bring children into the world, and preventing pregnancy is considered human intervention in order to stop the divine process which Allah created. However, modern Islamic verdicts allow a married woman to use contraceptives in order to space her pregnancies or for health reasons; on the condition that her husband agrees. If he is away from home for long periods of time the use of contraceptives is forbidden since it might seem as an intention to commit adultery.

In the West, girls and women use contraceptives whether they are married or not. Many girls even purchase condoms in order to prevent disease and pregnancy, and married women usually decide for themselves to use contraceptives, while their husbands know and agree.

23. Abortions:

Traditional Islamic law and mores forbid abortions when there is no danger to the mother.

In the West, liberal circles consider abortion as a legitimate right based on the principle that a woman has the right to control her own body. Conservatives consider abortion to be murder.

24. Medical care:

In Islamic societies medical care, which involves exposing the body is problematic for men, especially if the doctor is a woman. The problem is more complex when the doctor is a man and the patient is a woman, since an unclothed woman may not be seen by a man who is not her husband.¹⁴ The situation becomes less problematic when another woman or the husband is present for the examination.

In the West, health systems do not pay much attention to the gender of the doctor and the patient, or to the exposure of the patient's body. However, in gynecology there is more attention paid to a patient's desire to be treated by a woman doctor.

25. Same-sex relationships:

Homosexual and lesbian relationships are strictly forbidden in Islam. A homosexual son or lesbian daughter is a disgrace to the family and in many cases they will be murdered by a family member in order to erase the shame of their existence. Homosexuals and lesbians live "in the closet" in order not to be found out.

In the West, homosexuals and lesbians have gained a legitimate place in society, but they continue to fight for their legal status and their right as free people to lead their private lives as they see fit. Many parents of gays and lesbians accept their children's inclinations and welcome them within the family structure. Homosexual literature is a legitimate literary genre and many academic institutions have initiated gay and lesbian studies.

26. Female Genital Mutilation:

The practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) is well known, and widely practiced in Muslim societies in Africa: Egypt, Sudan, Somalia and in countries south of the Sahara.¹⁵ FGM can also be found in Yemen and in Bedouin societies where the parents circumcise their own daughters or have it done by someone who specializes in the procedure. Another phenomenon in Islamic society is of divorcees or widows who inflict this on themselves or have someone else do it in order that their families will not see them as a "danger" to the family honor.

¹⁴ According to the *Hadith*, Prophet Muhammad said: "any woman who takes off her cloths not in her husband's home tears the curtain between her and her God." Al-Tirmidhi, Sunan, No. 2727; Abu Daud, al-Hammam, No. 3495; Ibn Maja, al-Adab, No. 3740; Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, Baqi Musnad al-Ansar, No. 24238; al-Darimi, al-Isti'dhan, no. 2537.

¹⁵ See above, note 2.

Societies in which FGM is customary, base it on an oral tradition (*hadith*) in which the Prophet Muhammad recommends this practice.

Western society regards genital mutilation as a serious crime.

27. Violence towards women:

Islamic society views violence towards women in an understanding light. The Qur'an (Chapter 4, Verse 34) permits the beating of women and the *Hadith* states that one should be gentle in the beating.¹⁶ In actual practice, the reality is much harsher since there is a conspiracy of silence to protect the family from shame should it become known that there is violence within the family.

In Western societies where violence towards women does exist, it is regarded with censure and dealt with harshly.

28. Art:

Islamic tradition forbids any artistic portrayal of the female body, which shows parts hidden by the *hijab*. Therefore painting, photography and sculpture may not show more than a woman's face and hands if the local tradition of *hijab* allows no more than this exposure. Female singers and dancers who perform in front of men are viewed as corrupt, especially if they are not dressed according to the rules of *hijab*.

In the West, art – and especially European painting of the last four hundred years – use female nudity as a legitimate object. Nude ballet has become common in the last few years, and nudity and sex scenes prevail in theater and opera. The film and video industry show nudity and pornography with almost no restriction, and adult TV channels are available almost everywhere in Western Europe, the US and other Western countries.

29. Studies and Employment:

Islamic tradition does not look kindly on general education for young girls since this will not prepare them for their role of wife and mother. Some parents fear that educating their daughters will result in a desire to seek employment and develop financial independence. Working outside of the home is regarded in a negative light since this would bring the girls in contact with men who are not family members. If a woman develops a career, it will be at the expense of her duties towards her husband and children.

Western society believes in equality of education for males and females, and women are expected to be active members of the work force. A woman who does not work outside the home is can often be considered inferior, while educated, career women are regarded as successful.

30. Attitude towards Rape Victims:

In Islamic societies, the rape victim is the guilty party. Unbecoming behavior and provocative dress are ascribed to her. According to Islam, rape can be proved only by the testimony of four male Muslim witnesses who comport themselves

¹⁶ Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Hajj, No. 2137; Al-Tirmidhi, Bab al-Rida', No. 1083, Exegesis, No. 3012; Abu Daud, Sunan, Kitab al-Manasik, No. 1628; Ibn Maja, al-Nikah, No. 1841, al-Manasik, No. 3065; al-Darimi, Sunan, Kitab al-Manasik, No. 1778

according to the rules and morals of Islam. If the victim cannot produce four such witnesses, she will be found guilty of adultery. An Islamic court in Nigeria sentenced a Muslim woman to death after she was raped and became pregnant.

Western society finds the rapist to be the guilty party unless proven otherwise or proof is brought of consensual relations.

31. Divorce:

Traditionally it is enough for a Muslim to say, "I divorce you" three times to his wife and he need not give her any explanation. In the past few generations, Islam has accepted an approach which makes divorce more difficult, and the intervention of the court is required either to try for domestic peace or to approve the divorce. In any case, a man who says, "I divorce you" three times to his wife has started the divorce process. A woman may initiate divorce proceedings, but in doing so she gives up some of her rights.

Western society does not regard divorce as only a male's right and both men and woman may initiate divorce without losing any of their individual rights.

32. Attitude to the Divorcee:

Islamic society sees the divorcee as a woman who has failed her most important role: that of wife and mother. The *Shari'a* courts treat divorcees much worse than the civil courts especially when it comes to alimony, division of property, and custody of children. A divorced woman usually returns to her parents' home under a cloud of shame.

Western society sees the divorced woman as someone who decided to leave her partner. In most cases she has the support of her family and friends and does not lose her rights.

33. Inheritance:

According to Islam, a woman inherits half of the amount a man does. In a number of societies, the woman is pressured to give even this half to her brothers.

Inheritance laws in Western society do not discriminate against women in favor of their brothers.

Many of these rules of Islamic society have a common denominator, the absence of autonomy for women. A girl before marriage is her father's property, and he regards her as a source of income through the dowry that will be paid for her. He controls her behavior, her friends, her future, and her marriage just as he would control any piece of his property. She in turn must not harm herself (his property) through unbecoming behavior that would sully her good name, for that would lessen her value. After marriage, the husband takes over the role of the father. Marriage for the husband is acquiring a wife, and he may purchase many wives (polygamy). It is not difficult to get rid of a wife through divorce and he controls his wife or wives as any piece of property. A woman's value is determined by how well she fits the ideal: beautiful, modest, fertile (producing mainly sons), serves her husband without complaint or demands. Such a woman is proof of her husband's virility, and the more satisfied a man is with his wife, the more her life will be protected and secure.

These rules and traditions have an enormous impact mainly because generation after generation of men and women have grown up and been educated according to them and regard them as their cultural essence. Women do not usually resist this system of rules for they have been indoctrinated (or “engineered” as Fatima al-Mernisi says¹⁷) to accept this as their lot in life. This social situation remains stable as long as outside influences do not infiltrate and undermine the social-normative order that has survived throughout many generations.

The Infiltration of Western concepts into Islamic Societies

It has been over 150 years since Arabs from the East first started to become familiar with Western culture. The first were members of educational delegations sent by Muhammad ‘Ali, ruler of Egypt, in the first half of the 19th Century. They were sent to European capitals to learn Western technology and bring it back to Egypt. In addition to technology, they returned with stories of the nature of life in Europe, conduct in public and private areas and most important to our subject, much information on the status of women in European countries. They reported on their manner of dress, their behavior, and of their position in society. Quite a few Arabs compared their society to that of Western Europe and came to the conclusion that the status of their women should be promoted to equal that of European women. At the beginning of the 20th Century, Qasim Amin wrote two books: “Women’s Liberation” (1899), and “The New Woman” (1900). In the 1920’s Sa’ad Zaghlul removed the *hijab* from his wife, Safiya’s head, and apparently encouraged Huda al-Sha’rawi to do the same.

Following the participation of Egyptian women in conventions in Europe, the members of women’s organizations brought up these demands: the removal of the *niqab* from women’s faces, the removal of the *hijab* from their heads, allowing men and women to mix in public places, the outlawing of polygamy, a limitation on divorce, and the cancellation of all discrimination against women by law and in the attitude of society. These demands encountered fierce opposition from those who spoke in the name of Islam. Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood ascribed great importance to preserving tradition as it pertained to the status of women as one of the main points of his movement. He saw Qasim Amin’s call for change as the infiltration of secular Western ideas into the religious Islamic society.

Arab feminist organizations today have connections with international organizations and receive funding, guidance, and political support in order to promote the feminist agenda. But activity aimed at changing the values of society is no longer the monopoly of these Arab feminist organizations.

The system of norms which has characterize the Western culture in the last generation is disseminated all over the world through mass media, especially by the satellite TV channels, the internet, films, press, poetry and literature, straight to the man on every street and in every country. Young men and women living in Islamic societies are exposed to a flood of messages about the norms of the West as described above, and are fascinated by what they view as amazing freedom, the good life (“*dolce vita*”), and hedonism. It is impossible for them, especially the girls, not to make comparisons between Western norms and those which rule over their own lives: submission, restriction, violence. They want to see more and more of what they cannot experience, and this explains why in the last fifty years the Egyptian film industry has produced thousands of films about love, lust, passion, and treachery in

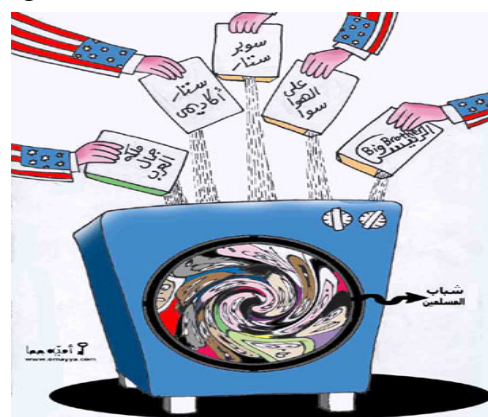
¹⁷ Fatima al-Mernisi, *Sex as Social Engineering between Text and Reality*, Beirut (1996).

married life, (though without showing explicit scenes of nudity and sex). For the past ninety years, romantic novels have been written in Arabic about women and their love affairs,¹⁸ but sexual scenes are rare. In the last five years the al-Azhar institution banned the publication of several books, which were too sexually explicit in spite of the fact that some of these books had been published and distributed in Egypt in the past with no problem.

The mass media plays a major role in introducing changes in the patterns of adherence to traditional mores. For a century newspapers have described the behavior of Western societies in connection with issues of gender and sex. The *raison d'être* of women's magazines, published in the Islamic world for many years is actually to deal with these issues. These magazines demonstrate the extent to which Western popular culture has infiltrated Islamic media. Many of them promote concepts of feminine self-awareness, individualism, equality between men and women, permissiveness, freedom (especially in sexual behavior), enjoyment of sex, sexuality, fitness and health (especially reproductive health), information about sexually transmitted diseases, sexual orientation, discrimination against women, women's rights (especially over their own bodies), family planning, use of contraceptives and safe abortion, female genital mutilation, modern fertility treatments, women's education and work, raising the age of marriage, condemnation of violence against women, and the exploitation and trafficking in women. They also feature fast food, fashion, exposure of the female body, make-up, and many other issues that characterize Western culture and lifestyle of the post-1970's generation.

Many radio programs devote themselves to various subjects concerning women, and the role of the BBC Arabic radio in this arena is very important. The most substantial development of all occurred in the 1970's, when watching television became a common way to spend free time, and the satellite channels which started to be broadcast during the 1990's enabled people in the Islamic world to see Western society "in real time". For a relatively small fee, anyone in the Islamic world can install a satellite dish on his roof or next to his tent, purchase a receiver, converter and TV screen, and by pressing a button can watch, in full color, hundreds of channels showing films, news, art, sports, music, cooking, documentaries, fashion, sex, and even pornography.

In the past few years, large sections of the Arab population have become addicted to 'reality TV', which is broadcast on commercial Arabic channels, and where the red line of acceptable behavior followed in Arab societies is often crossed. Unmarried participants, male and female giggle with each other, touch, hug and even kiss in front of the cameras. Even Saudi-owned channels such as MBC do not strictly follow the rules of Saudi Arabia, and many women shown on this channel are shown with no head covering, and their clothing is in the latest, albeit relatively modest Western fashion.



Omayya Juha, al-Hayat al-Jadida, Feb. 26, 2004. The brainwashing machine brainwashes the Arab youth with American style reality TV programs named "Arab Beauty Queen", "Arab Super Star", "Big Boss", "Star Academy" and "Together in Love".

¹⁸ The first Arabic novel about romance is *Zaynab* written in Egypt by Muhammad Husayn Haykal in 1914.

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Parents try to prevent their children from watching pornography channels, but many adolescents know very well what to do in order to watch them, to record and to disseminate their contents among their friends. As a result of this trend, the Muslim *'ulama* issued many *fatwas* which forbid watching these sex channels and reality TV and have established Islamic channels that try to bring the people programs with Islamic content as an alternative to the permissive, commercial channels.

Another challenging issue has appeared in the last five years, and that is the wide use of the internet in the Islamic world. Any "surfer" can enter thousands of sex sites on the net which require no knowledge of a foreign language in order to enjoy their content. Arabic chat sites enable anyone to participate without being identified. Experimenting in these chat rooms, I found that whenever a user with a female name enters a chat room "she" immediately receives dozens of offers to engage in chats with explicit sexual content. The internet enables boys and girls develop forbidden relations away from the watchful eye of their families. The internet also contains match-making sites ("*Zawaj al-Internet*" – "Internet wedding") which challenge the tradition of marriages arranged and controlled by the family.

Many young people are distancing themselves from Islam and its commandments, especially the five daily prayers, and the fasting during the month of Ramadan. Many boys and girls between the ages of 20 and 30, especially in Egypt and Lebanon, leave the traditional family framework and immigrate to bigger cities, e.g. Cairo, Alexandria and Beirut. Some go to the universities, but most leave because of the boredom in their traditional villages, and the lack of opportunities there to work in modern professions. In the city young men and women meet and move in together under the framework of *zawaj 'urfi* ("Marriage by the law") in Egypt, or civil marriage in Lebanon. From the *Shari'a* point of view these marriages are considered adulterous, and when the couples are from different religions, their life together is viewed as a violation of religious rules. Though these young adults seem completely unconcerned regarding their "discretions".

More and more girls abandon the traditional long and heavy *hijab* for jeans and close-fitting T-shirts, which flatter their shape. Young adults, boys and girls alike, spend long nights at dance clubs; dancing to the sounds of singers and groups whose music reminds one very much of Western rock bands. Fashion shows in Istanbul, Beirut and Cairo look more and more like fashion shows in Rome, London and Paris; if one compares the cut of the dresses and the level of exposure of the models' bodies.

Men and women intermingle in public in most Islamic cities, and beaches at which whole families can sunbathe and swim together are common. Most institutions of higher education are mixed, and so are most workplaces, both public and private.

Arab and Muslim authoresses and poetesses write texts with harsh messages about the traditional characteristics of their societies as described above. There are even those who dare to attack religious Islamic texts and in some cases Muslim female writers and poets curse the Prophet Muhammad for laws against women which he made.¹⁹



Fashion Show in Beirut

¹⁹ The Moroccan poetess Hakima al-Shawi read a poem cursing the Prophet Muhammad on live Moroccan TV, for what he said about women. *Al-Hayat*, May 13, 2001.

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Women such as Huda al-Sha'rawi, Nawal al-Sa'dawi and Fatima al-Mernisi is well known as part of the front line of the feminist struggle, aiming at abolishing all kinds of oppression and marginalization against women in Arab and Muslim societies. It is also important to mention that many changes in the status of women are due to the efforts of some men: writers like Qasim Amin, poets such as Nizar Qabbani, presidents like Saddam Husayn and Hafiz al-Asad, and many others who deplored the status of women in their societies and acted to better their situation.

Countries are adopting more and more laws which reflect the will of women indeed, a more Western view of women; , banning bigamy and polygamy, raising the minimum age of marriage from 16 to 18 years, promoting women's rights in the workplace, medical care, inheritance, divorce and alimony. Implementation of these laws, however, is rather problematic within traditional sectors and populations, and their enforcement is a permanent source of tension between the state and the traditional sectors of the population.

In Islamic countries there are thousands of NGO's whose sole purpose is the promotion of the status of women. Many of them are local, and some are supported by international organizations such as the UN, World Health Organization, UNICEF and the European Union. Some also are given financial support from Western governments and private funds whose agenda is to promote the status of women in the Third World in general and in Islamic societies in particular. These organizations act under the slogan "female empowerment", their aims are giving women psychological, social and legal means by which they will be able to demand and receive all the rights that are traditionally denied them by their societies.

Islamic Reactions

As shown, large parts of the population in the Arab and Islamic worlds have changed their patterns of behavior during the last century, due to the deterioration of obedience to their traditional mores. This process of change is continuous and intensifies as it is absorbed into Islamic societies. Simultaneously with the rapid, or rather too rapid changes, many feel more and more that the traditional characteristics of their societies are in danger. Parents are concerned that their sons and daughters are attracted by negative permissiveness, while grandparents view their grandchildren's life style as corrupt and full of chaos. Traditional Islamic elements harshly criticize the connection between local women's organizations and foreign organizations. They see this connection, which they often describe as "cultural imperialism", as a Western attempt to extract Islam from their women's hearts. More dangerous in their eyes, is the connection between their states and international organizations, especially the UN. It is believed that the UN and its agencies want to promote a Western moral agenda for the purpose of reducing the demographic growth in their countries, and to weaken the Islamic elements of their societies which pose danger to the stability of the regimes.

Arab governments do not generally do anything to stop the deterioration of Islamic mores, or to prevent the infiltration of Western values into their societies. Politically this is viewed as a positive move while tradition is regarded as a social anachronism, which perpetuates political approaches that are not in synch with the modern ideas regimes would like to adopt. Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan of the Taliban are almost the only examples of modern states, which take steps on a large scale in order to stop the infiltration of Western values into their countries. The main tool used is an authority (in Saudi Arabia) and ministry (in Afghanistan of the Taliban) under the

name “Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Bad”.²⁰ In other countries, on the contrary, it is social organizations not governmental that try to face the crisis caused by the infiltration of Western values; the Muslim Brotherhood is an example of such a social organization. In 2002, the Islamic movement in Israel, a branch of the Brotherhood, launched a campaign under the title “Our Children are in Danger,” in an attempt to challenge the Westernization of values within the Arab sector in Israel. Almost everywhere in the Islamic world mosque preachers dedicate their sermons to the obligation to keep the tradition and commandments, and thousands of Islamic organizations invest much effort to address their societies in this vein, and disseminate the traditional Islamic message through lectures, newspapers, magazines, books, booklets, pamphlets, posters, radio stations, TV channels, movies, videotapes, DVD discs, and websites, in order to promote the keeping of Islamic traditions and commandments (especially the *hijab* and prayer). The fact that presently, a large portion of Muslim girls and women all over the Islamic world wear a head covering and many men and women attend public prayers in mosques is the result of these efforts. However, despite these traditional based efforts, many others are attracted to Western lifestyles, and adopt – usually in an eclectic manner – the characteristics of Western societies: dress, hairstyle, music, food and behavior, along with liberal Western ideas and discourse. Both phenomena, the resurgence of Islamic observance, and the adoption of Western characteristics are more pronounced within Muslim emigrant communities in Western countries.

Therefore, the activity of Islamists against the adopting of Western mores stems from a deep feeling of emergency which many who are faithful to Islamic tradition sense. They are under the impression that the cultural earth under their feet trembles, and that the future of their societies are not secure. A few conclude that in order to remove the Western cultural that poses great danger to their societies, they have to wage war against the West, its culture and its symbols. These are the supporters of Bin Laden’s Jihad against the West, and they are the sector from which his “soldiers” come. Bin Laden in his speeches talked much about the value crisis in Islamic societies, and the obligation of Jihad to deal with the source of this crisis, the West. In his view, he is fighting in defense of a culture in peril. It is based on this that many Muslims identify with his goals even though they disagree with his actions, especially against Arabs and Muslims, in Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

The belief of this author is that the more Western values infiltrate into Islamic societies, the polarization inside these societies will become even more extreme, and the extremism of those who see these values as a danger to themselves, to their religion, tradition, and society will grow. Since these societies usually have weak social and political mechanisms of conflict management, the extremists’ anger and wrath will continue to be directed at the “corrupt” West, whom they consider the source of all their problems.

The September 1994 UNPD Conference in Cairo – A Case in Point

Islamists have affirmation for their view of the West. An event perceived by Islamists throughout the Middle East as the most dangerous cultural attack against the Islamic system of values was the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in September 1994. Convened by the United Nations, its purpose was

²⁰ Based on the Qur’an 9:70: “The believers, both men and women, are in charge of each other; they enjoin the good and forbid the bad.”

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to reduce the rate of population growth in the Third World, as a means of ensuring the welfare of the world population.²¹

This “roving” conference, which still meets once every few years, each time in a densely populated country, is aimed at bringing the Western gospel of low birth rate to the overpopulated countries of the Third World. This is presented as a way of enhancing development and stability, since overpopulation is a heavy burden on the economies of these countries. The 1994 conference was intended to bring this concept, bearing the UN stamp of approval, to the Egyptian people, as well as to the Arab and Islamic peoples. The conference covered a variety of topics promoting a lower birth rate, such as legitimizing family planning by the distribution of contraceptives; legalizing abortions; raising the age of marriage; allowing “safe” sex between teenagers through the use of contraceptives and the teaching of sex education; monogamy; official recognition of the right of homosexuals and lesbians to establish families; and promoting awareness of women’s health and women’s autonomy over their bodies. Even women’s education was one of the issues at this conference, since education, especially at higher levels, postpones the age at which women begin to have children and enables them to acquire professional skills and, subsequently, economic and social independence.²²

All these values, which in Muslim eyes characterize the Western civilization of this generation, are fundamentally in direct opposition with the Islamic values of modesty, family stability and sexual morality. The dissemination of these modern Western values in Islamic countries was therefore viewed by Muslim fundamentalists as nothing less than a vile attack against Islamic traditions, concepts and values, (especially those connected with sexual behavior and gender). It should be noted that family values in the Islamic world are a mixture of religious commands, popular convention, and concepts based on *‘adat wa-taqalid* – customs and tradition – and that the conceptual line dividing Islam from the other elements is not clear, and differs from place to place and from time to time.

However, in spite of significant changes in Muslim societies, the whole system of rules or norms of behavior, especially those related to gender and sex, are still viewed as the last bastions of Islam – a solid fortress which, as yet, has not entirely been breached by Western culture; and still protects women and daughters from being overwhelmed by the permissive cultural currents of the West. Thus, in most Muslim countries, personal status law is generally traditional Islamic, and has been adopted by the legislative authority and integrated – sometimes with minor adjustments – into state law.

Many of us remember how CNN, as part of its media coverage of the issue of women’s rights during the conference broadcast a now famous report showing the

²¹ Evidence that the September 11 attack was commemorating the ICPD and was seen as a defense of Islamic values may even be hinted at in the pronouncements and writings of Usama Bin Laden himself. See, for example, his speech reported in *al-Quds al-‘Arabi* on December 27, 2001, where he claims responsibility for the attacks of 9/11. In this speech Bin Laden asserts that America wants to impose heresy on the Islamic nations, and that the real victory is in faithful adherence to the tenets of Islam. In his will, which was broadcast on *al-Jazeera* and published in the London daily *al-Hayat* on February 16, 2003, he links the September 11 attacks to his goal of crushing America’s value system. He also attacks the “heretical laws of the UN” that were imposed on Islamic nations in order to bring about the “heretics’ hegemony” over the Muslim nations.

²² A draft of the closing document of the conference can be found in “Linkage – A Multimedia Resource for Environment and Development Policy Makers,” at: <http://www.iisd.ca/linkages/Cairo/program/p00000.html>.

“circumcision” of Nagla’ Hamza, a ten-year-old Egyptian girl. This item aroused widespread anti-American resentment in Egypt and in the Arab and Islamic world, and its repercussions reverberated throughout the conference.²³

It was, however, the Egyptian government that had invited the conference to Cairo, as part of its ongoing effort to increase popular awareness of the need to reduce the country’s birth rate. As a result, the government, including the president himself, was harshly criticized by Islamic spokesmen in Egypt and by many conference delegates from other Islamic countries. In Egypt the Islamic press, and especially the Muslim Brotherhood’s newspaper *al-Sha’b*, published a spate of hostile articles before, during, and after the conference. The *al-Sha’b* articles reflected the negative attitude of Islamic fundamentalists towards Western culture and towards the Egyptian regime that hosted the conference. Several examples are cited below, under categories of pre-marital sex, abortion, homosexuality and politics.

Premarital Sex and the Use of Contraceptives

On August 26, 1994, a headline in *al-Sha’b* announced: “An update from the UN on the population conference: Propagation of sex among adolescents and providing them with contraceptives.” The article, written by ‘Amir ‘Abd al-Mun‘im, stated that “all the issues of sexual permissiveness, encouraging sex culture and promoting legislation to permit abortions were agreed upon ahead of time and given top priority on the conference’s agenda.”

In order to illustrate the serious threat posed by the conference’s recommendations, the paper quoted parts of the closing document:

With the loosening of the traditional social mores and the increasing interactions between the sexes, especially in urban areas, the phenomenon of premarital sexual activity is on the rise. Since this activity is usually spontaneous, there are more and more instances of unwanted pregnancies among adolescent girls.

The document recommended educating the adolescent population of developing countries in practicing safe sex, which would prevent pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. It advises countries to offer sex education in order to allow adolescents to make responsible and correct decisions concerning their sexual behavior. Opponents of sex education argue that the dissemination of such information among adolescents will only encourage them to engage in early sexual activity and will violate their parents’ rights as well.²⁴

²³ See Mordechai Kedar, “Islam and Female Circumcision: The Dispute over FGM in the Egyptian Press, September 1994,” *Medicine and Law*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2002), pp. 403-411.

²⁴ It seems that this article related to the following paragraphs of the UN document. Its objectives were: “(a) To address adolescent [sexual and reproductive health] issues, including unwanted pregnancy, [unsafe abortion], sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, through the promotion of responsible and healthy reproductive and sexual behavior, including voluntary abstinence, and the provision of appropriate services and counseling specifically suitable for that age group; (b) To substantially reduce all adolescent pregnancies. Actions:

7.43. Countries should remove legal, regulatory and social barriers to sexual and reproductive health information and care for adolescents and must ensure that the programs and attitudes of health-care providers do not restrict the access of adolescents to the services and information they need. In doing so, services for adolescents must safeguard their rights to privacy, confidentiality, informed consent and respect.

7.44. Countries ... should protect and promote the rights of adolescents to [sexual and reproductive health] education, information and care and greatly reduce the number of adolescent pregnancies.

7.45. Governments ... are urged to meet the special needs of adolescents and to establish appropriate programs to respond to those needs. Such programs should include support mechanisms for the

The article quoted from UN reports elucidates on stories about a few African girls who had free abortions at UN clinics, and others who were prevented from contracting AIDS by using contraceptives dispensed by these clinics. It concluded:

We emphasize again that this conference will deal with matters that do not conform to our moral values and religion. Even if the West has the right to discuss the means to prevent the spread of AIDS and legitimizing abortions in order to prevent the birth of bastards, it has no right to impose its will on us. We hope that the delegates from Islamic countries will take a united stand, will express the Islamic conscience and will reject these proposals.

These words of ‘Amir ‘Abd al-Mun‘im, express the great importance placed by Islamic societies on virginity, as well as the negative attitude that Islam maintains towards premarital sex. The article was accompanied by a photo of a crowded street in Cairo and the ironic caption: “They should all be exterminated.”

Traditionally, Islamists oppose the use of contraceptives for the following reasons:

- (a) Contraceptives, even if meant for “family planning”, are seen as encouraging sexual activity outside the marital framework. This view was reflected in the heading: “An international organization strives to turn the family planning centers into centers of promoting prostitution.”²⁵ The logic behind this title is the equation between family planning, adultery and prostitution, derived from the assumption that if you give a woman the possibility to use contraceptives she will deceive her husband or become a prostitute, since she is free from the fear of unwanted pregnancy.
- (b) Reducing the chance of contracting disease is seen as encouraging permissiveness and sexual freedom.
- (c) The use of contraceptives requires instruction. In Muslim societies it is not customary to discuss sexual matters with women or girls, especially if the instructor is a stranger.
- (d) Family planning is viewed as human intervention in processes that are under divine control.
- (e) Social axioms still widely accepted in Muslim societies grant males the right to dictate women's lives. This authority is based on the Qur’an: “Men have authority over women because Allah has made the one superior to the other.”²⁶
Thus, ideas of women's liberation and a woman's right over her body are seen as violating the Qur’an, traditions and social axioms. As one headline put it: “Everything in the closing document of the conference which deals with development and the freedom of woman, is contrary to Islam.”²⁷

education and counseling of adolescents in the areas of gender relations and equality ... responsible sexual behavior, responsible family-planning practice, family life [reproductive and sexual health], sexually transmitted diseases, HIV infection and AIDS prevention ... Such programs should provide information to adolescents... Sexually active adolescents will require special family-planning information, counseling and services, including contraceptive services, and those who become pregnant will require special support from their families and community during pregnancy and early child care. Adolescents must be fully involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of such information and services.”

See the Draft Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (May 13, 1994), <http://www.un.org/popin/icpd/conference/offeng/eng694.html>.

²⁵ *Al-Sha‘b*, August 30, 1994.

²⁶ Qur’an, 4:34.

²⁷ 26 August 1994.

Abortions

Dr. Halfdan Mahler, Secretary-General of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), stated that:

IPPF's fourth challenge and one that has been particularly contentious for this Conference is the elimination of unsafe abortion. IPPF has made a powerful and bold commitment to speak out on this major threat to the health and lives of women. Each year, a significant proportion of the 500,000 maternal deaths worldwide that occur are due to unsafe abortion, and it is estimated that 99 per cent of these deaths occur in developing countries. The only way to fight wanted and unnecessary abortions is to provide all women everywhere with quality reproductive health care including contraception and, if indispensable, safe abortion.²⁸

By the phrase "safe abortion" Dr. Mahler was referring to an environment that would include:

1. Fully equipped abortion clinics that offer their services at an affordable price.
2. Official permission by the state to perform abortions.
3. Trained medical personnel who will not have to work in secret or in unhygienic surroundings.

The meaning of this proposal is that legal abortion will be within the reach of every woman, married or not. Islamists cannot accept such a situation, because:

- (a) The *Shari'a* considers abortion after the 120th day to be murder.
- (b) Ready availability of abortions is seen as a license for unmarried Girls to engage in sexual activity, since the threat of unwanted childbirths is removed.
- (c) Married women will feel free to engage in forbidden relationships without fear of bringing an illegitimate child into the world. Moreover, they may abort their husband's fetuses without his consent in order to limit the size of their family.

Islamists have invested vast effort, widely publicized in *al-Sha'b*, into the matter of abortion. A headline from September 6, 1994 read: "Extermination of human beings [i.e. abortions] is the official and public policy of the international system." The paper's main headline of September 9 1994 warned: "Moral corruption and abortions are dominating the discussions of the conference." On its front page, it reported that the Vatican, too, refused to endorse the summary document of the conference because of its immoral and inhuman content. On September 13, 1994, the final day of the conference, the editorial was headed: "This was indeed the abortion conference!" On the front page, a picture showed Muslims in London demonstrating against the conference carrying slogans saying: "Abortion kills children" and "Islam against abortion". On September 2, 1994, *al-Sha'b* printed a picture of an aborted fetus and the accompanying story asked: "The right to abort or the right of the fetus to live?" The article pointed out that: "Abortion is justified only when the health of the mother requires it. Many women's organizations try to promote the right of women to abort, but no one represents the right of the fetus to live. The fetus is a living human being in the full sense of the word, with its own personality, and the Islamic *Shari'a* regards it as having the right to inherit and the right to a family; it ruled that a pregnant mother is entitled to alimony if divorced or widowed, out of consideration for the fetus."

After describing the development of the fetus during the first four months, the article stated: "Abortion is not a woman's right and is not a legitimate means of birth control.

²⁸ gopher.undp.org/11/ungophers/popin/icpd/conference/ngo.

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It is a crime against the fetus, a living human being.”

The tendency of the Islamists, in their campaigning to seek support from Christian authorities stems from the considerable common ground between the traditional Islamic and Christian approaches to issues of abortion and contraceptives, since both religions (and Judaism as well) regard these practices as a negative human intervention in the orderly reproduction process designed by God. The Vatican’s view is clearly expressed in its comments on “Contraception and ‘abortifacient contraceptives’”:

It is frequently asserted that *contraception*, if made safe and available to all, is the most effective remedy against abortion. But the negative values inherent in the "contraceptive mentality" are such that they in fact strengthen this temptation when an unwanted life is conceived. Indeed, the pro-abortion culture is especially strong precisely where the Church's teaching on contraception is rejected. Certainly, from the moral point of view contraception and abortion are *specifically different* evils. But contraception and abortion are often *closely connected*, as fruits of the same tree (they have the same roots). The life which could result from a sexual encounter thus becomes an enemy to be avoided at all costs, and abortion becomes the only possible decisive response to failed contraception.²⁹

The Catholic Church’s attitude to family values is unequivocal:

The family is the *original cell of social life*. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society.³⁰

In attacking the 1994 conference, Bilal al-Zuhri summed up the Islamic fundamentalist’s approach to contraceptives:

These allegations which were used in order to circulate and propagate limiting birth rate cannot provide it with any justification; moreover, these are all incorrect since they are contradictory with reality, and oppose the nature on mankind (*fitra*) and Islam, since limiting birth rate or preventing pregnancy by any means is very harmful, from the religious, economic, political, social, psychological and physical points of view.³¹

Another writer, discussing family values in Islam, stated:

The family is the institution through which one generation prepares another for the service of human civilization. Members of this institution desire that those who replace them should be better than they themselves. Parents want to see their children happier, healthier, more educated, and better human beings than their own selves. Islam has placed great emphasis on family and family values. However, in the Western culture in general and in America in particular family is

²⁹ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/family/documents/rc_pc_family_doc_20001014_rome-jubilee-of-families-index_en.html.

³⁰ http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s2c2a4.htm.

³¹ <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=1137>, quoted from *Nida’ al-Islam*.

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in deep trouble. Fifty per cent of the children born in United States now are born outside of wedlock. This is unprecedented in human civilization.³²

In other words, the dichotomy in views about sexual reproduction, contraceptive use, and abortion separated secular and religious circles in the Muslim world and the West more than it divided the two religions. The Islamists, however, gave this division a political significance by depicting it as a Western plot against Islam.

Homosexuality

The legitimacy of homosexuality was one of the values promoted at the conference, since homosexual marriages produce no children. However, the authors of the conference's documents were aware that in traditional societies homosexuality is a sensitive subject. They therefore used the term "sexual orientation". Despite this, Islamists understood the underlying meaning of the euphemism, and its inclusion among legitimate variables such as age, gender, religion, race, abilities, health and ethnic background did not mellow their attitude.³³

In *al-Sha'b* on August 26, 1994, Muhammad al-Ghazzali, one of the most prominent Islamic propagandists (he died in 1996), referred to homosexuality in the headline: "Stone the perverts and don't fall into the trap of the UN." He stated that "The human race and the animal kingdom have never seen anything like what the West stands for." He called on all forces to "rise against this 'fishy' conference which was convened especially to fight against us in our faith (*muharabatuna fi 'aqidatina*), and we therefore have to rise against them because of the war which was declared on us..."

Referring to the intention of gay rights' organizations to demonstrate in the streets of Cairo, he said: "I call upon the sons of Egypt to stone these perverts, invited by the conference, should they demonstrate in public, since the only way to deal with them is to stone them. Even if their imperialistic governments permitted them [the homosexuals] to establish organizations in their countries, they have no right to defile the streets of Cairo with their perversions."

To emphasize al-Ghazzali's statements, the paper published photos of male couples kissing in public. On September 9, 1994, *al-Sha'b*'s front page showed a photo of two men near the Nile, one sitting on the other's shoulders, it is captioned: "Moral corruption in the middle of Cairo, this is what the Population Conference propagates against our Islamic habits, traditions and values." The implicit message was that if Western atheists wanted to offer their corrupt ideas to the Third World, let them do so at home. Why should they send their filth into the streets of Cairo, the city of al-Azhar, the heart of the Arab and Islamic world?

An item on September 9, 1994, summed up Islamist opinion about the conference's major concerns: "On the NGO sessions: European and American delegations preach abortion, permissiveness and perversion and demand safe adultery!"

Politics

The spokesmen for fundamentalist Islam tried to prove that the conference had a political agenda as well, that was intended to ensure Western hegemony over the

³² <http://www.pakistanlink.com/religion/religion-8-23-96.html>.

³³ Dr. Muhammad 'Amara, one of the regular contributors to *al-Sha'b*, analyzes the disingenuous language of the conference's resolutions "which threaten to destroy the value system of Islamic families" in the Egyptian monthly *al-Hilal* (August 2001, pp. 31-36).

Third World. A headline on September 9, 1994, stated: “America stands behind the conference and is the wicked force that drives it.” *Al-Sha`b* explained America’s intentions in an article on September 2, 1994: “American officials admit: stopping the population growth in the Islamic world is one of the primary considerations for American national security.” The article claimed that the United States had made aid to these countries conditional on their acceptance and implementation of the conference’s recommendations, and had even persuaded a number of countries, headed by Egypt, to sign an additional UN document called “The Population Fund”, obligating them to halt population growth.

The article also blamed the US for aiming to keep the Third World countries in poverty and at a low standard of living, “so that we [the Arab states] will not increase our consumption of resources which they wish to reserve for their own use, as if we were a flock of animals deserving nothing.” The paper took the opportunity to denigrate Israel too, as seen in its heading on September 16: “The adoption of the document is a success of ‘the world government’ under the leadership of America and Zionism.”

In its role as the newspaper of the Islamic opposition, *al-Sha`b* also used the conference as a means of denouncing the Egyptian government, and President Mubarak, who had invited the dubious gathering to Egypt. However, because it is unlawful to attack the president openly, the newspaper did so in a roundabout way by implying that his wife had played a part in the destruction of Islamic tradition. On August 30, 1994, *al-Sha`b* ran a story entitled: “The wife of the President of the Republic in an unbecoming role.” It continued: “It has been reported in the press that Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak will open the international conference of NGO delegates on September 4,” without an indication as to who is responsible for this spectacle. This statement was the newspaper’s way of hinting that the responsibility lay with the president himself. “It is known that some members of these organizations are sexual perverts, of both sexes, who work openly to reach their well-publicized goals, while demanding recognition of their rights as deviants from human nature. It is not fitting that the wife of the President of the Republic [should] open such a conference which includes organizations like these, since it is likely that publications will be distributed, signs carried and demonstrations take place in support of their demands, all this in the presence of the president’s wife, causing embarrassment to Egypt, to all Egyptians, facing the entire world. Is there a possibility that she might desist from this?”

The Islamists’ Conclusions

The conference, the documents presented there, the delegates attending and the conclusions reached, were all perceived by Islamists as directly attacking Islam, its traditions and values. The main *al-Sha`b* headline of September 9, 1994, read: “In the conference halls: pamphlets mocking Allah and blaming Muslims for beggary and backwardness.” Al-Ghazzali claimed that “the conference is another link in the chain of attacks upon Islam ... this is an imperialistic plot declaring open war against all morals, not just against the morals of Islam. They want to destroy the last remnant of divine inspiration, and agreement to this is a confirmation that heresy has turned into a way of life, devoid of all religiosity.”³⁴

One of the conference’s delegates was Sheikh ‘Ikrima Sabri, the Mufti of the Palestinian Authority, and the preacher of the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. On September 9, 1994, under the heading, “Al-Aqsa preacher warns: the conference’s

³⁴ *Al-Sha`b*, August 26, 1994.

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closing statement will provoke the emotions of the Muslims,” he was quoted as saying: “The superpowers are planning to destroy the Third World after sucking its blood.”

The leitmotif of this outpouring of news items and articles about the conference was that Islam and its traditions were under a vicious attack by Western-American culture, aimed at secularizing Muslim peoples and, through the Cairo conference, at bringing them the ‘gospel of progress’ of the West, which is anti-Islamic in spirit, essence and methods. Globalization – as fundamentalist Muslims see it – has less to do with economic or environmental issues than with the global spread of Western-American social and cultural values, which pose a threat not only to the Islamic states as political and national entities, but to the entire set of values of every individual, family and group in the Islamic world.

The Egyptian connection to Bin Laden is well known: his deputy and close friend Ayman al-Zawahiri, headed the Egyptian Jihad terror organization that planned the destruction of the Egyptian regime, regarding it as “an agent of the imperialistic West,” and as blindly following the permissive and corrupt Western culture.

Such ideas, which were widely presented and emphasized in the 1994 ICPD in Cairo, are viewed as a dangerous threat to the value system of Islamic societies, especially in regard to women and family stability. For some, this threat demanded more than protest. According to a headline in *al-Sha’b* of August 30, 1994: “Taking exception to the resolutions of the population conference, which contradict our religion and traditions, is not enough.”

On September 20, 1994, Muhammad al-Ghazzali summarized in *al-Sha’b* his view of the conference and its recommendations in an article titled, “This is our Religion”:

There is an outcry in high tones about the sexual behavior of the world’s population. On behalf of Islam, and probably on behalf of all the monotheistic religions, I put forward the following principles as the basis to a more prudent conference which will deal with this disorganized behavior:

The human being is the owner of his body and has the right to do with it whatever he wishes, as most secular people say. However, we would like to remind that Allah has priority over this body since He is its Creator and Patron, the source of the legislation,³⁵ which can benefit, elevate and purify it. We will never accept any dispute over Allah’s priority.

The marital bed is the only acceptable place for a man and a woman to meet; anywhere else is a sin. Sexual relations are the pillar of an honorable home and a noble education to children which Allah gives. Marriage is the impetus of modesty, and caring for the youth is a most pure worship. Therefore it is obligatory to facilitate marriage and remove any obstacle from its way. Prostitution, homosexuality, lesbianism and all other lustful kinds of irresponsibility are rejected detestable things, and legitimizing them is a war against Allah, injustice to the human nature [by which Allah created mankind] and the destruction of society.

³⁵ Meaning that no parliament, government or organization – even an international one – has the right to issue laws that are contradictory to Islam.

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Due to special circumstances³⁶ it is permissible to space periods of pregnancy, and this is left to the couple's estimation.³⁷ In principal, abortion is a crime, and a doctor should not perform it unless it would save the mother's life. The Creator of this planet stored in it enough to feed its inhabitants, on condition of cooperation between the powers in order to cultivate the earth and gather its goodness. This earth is capable of feeding multiples of its present population on condition that crime and aggression are stopped and all mankind will cooperate in pious goodness and fear of Allah. When the devil succeeds in inflaming wars, cities and villages are destroyed and billions are frozen in order to purchase weapons of mass destruction. It would be possible to eliminate hunger if these efforts were invested in feeding the hungry people.

In the papers presented at the population conference in Cairo there was not a single letter of condemnation against perversions and the laws legitimizing them. Moreover, from studies of the conference it seemed that a stamp of approval was given to sexual freedom as long as it does not bring harm. Thus, with safety from AIDS and other plagues the Conference placed no restrictions on the impure freedom! It was clear that the conference also was aiming in reducing the population of the Third World in order to provide a higher standard of living to the First World which dominates the earth at present.

This conference did not raise its eyes to heaven even once. Isn't it obvious that the conference does not believe in the Lord of Hosts? We Muslims – on the contrary – believe in God of Heavens, we honor His revelation which was inherited by Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, and even if the others betrayed His religion, we shall keep saying to our Lord: “We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, Lord; to You shall all return.”³⁸

³⁶ Such as the illness of the woman.

³⁷ Meaning that a woman has no right to decide this matter by herself. However, allowing the use of contraceptives is widespread among Egyptian Islamic authorities, due to the government policy of distributing contraceptives and promoting their use, which results from the rapid population growth and the pressure it has put on the economy and social services. The al-Azhar institution issued *fatwas* (Islamic legal opinions) that permit the use of contraceptives in certain circumstances.

³⁸ Qur'an, 2:285.

Conclusions

The clash of cultures between the West and Islamic fundamentalism did not erupt in September 2001, nor was it discovered by Samuel Huntington in 1993.³⁹ It started much earlier, when Western ideas began to infiltrate into the Islamic space. The threat escalated further when mass media, and especially satellite TV channels, started bringing the Western style of life into almost every Islamic home, tent, living room, or rather, bedroom. This clash of values is today, taking place inside Islamic societies, inside the Islamic family and inside the Islamic soul.

The internal dilemma between tradition and modernism has caused a large number of negative phenomena, such as tension between generations, (especially between fathers and their daughters who strive to adopt Western patterns of behavior); between husbands and wives; and between any person and what he or she might perceive as an older set of values according to which he or she was brought up. The relevance of Islamic teachings, values, traditions, and habits to the modern Muslim life is challenged in many Islamic societies, especially in the cities of homeland Arab states and in Muslim immigrant populations living in the West.

Contemporary Western imperialism, as Islamic fundamentalists see it, is not merely territorial occupation or economic hegemony, but rather a cultural dictatorship, since current Western values are fundamentally opposed to all that is sacred in the eyes of every Muslim committed to his tradition. Therefore – according to some radical Muslims – Islam has no other choice but to wage a Jihad against those who threaten the values of personal modesty and family stability, basic values in Islamic tradition.⁴⁰

The strong repugnance with which many Islamists viewed the 1994 ICPD and its recommendations is evident to this day, and both the conference and its concluding document continue to be attacked in speeches, sermons, articles and books published since then.⁴¹ The conference was an important marker in shaping the attitude of fundamentalist Islam toward what it sees as the Western campaign against Islamic culture, traditions and values. The writing had been on the wall for a long time, but unfortunately it was written in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Pashtu and other languages that too many in the West had felt it unnecessary to master, thus restricting their means of understanding non-Western cultures, and especially those of Islam.

³⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993), pp. 22-49.

⁴⁰ Referring to the attacks of September 11, Bin Laden points out how to succeed in such a Jihad in his testament of February 16, 2003 (see Note 1): "In spite of the fact that an international alliance stood against them, a small group of young Muslims not only succeeded in fighting the so-called "powers" but also protected their faith and furthered their nation's interests more successfully than the 50-odd nations of the Islamic world had done until then. These young men had chosen jihad as the way to support their faith."

⁴¹ See, for example, the criticism of Dr. Sulayman Jad al-Husayni, *Wathiqat Mu'tamar al-Sukkan wal-Tanmiya – Ru'ya Shar'iyya* (The Document of the Population and Development Conference – A Shar'i view), Qatar, Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Issues, 1417 Hijri (= 1996) (in Arabic). See also above, Note 24.