"Believing Women"
in Islam

Unreading Patriarchal
Interpretations of the Qur'an

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ

أَحْسَنَهُ أُوْلَئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَاهُمُ

اللَّهُ وَأُوْلَئِكَ هُمْ أُوْلُوا الْأَلْبَابِ

ASMA BARLAS

"Believing Women" in Islam

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Unreading Patriarchal
Interpretations of the Qur'ān

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University of Texas Press, Austin

Do they not reflect on the Qur'an, or is it that their hearts have locks upon them?

The Qur'ān (47:24)

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With love
for Ulises Ali,
who recently began his journey in Islam,
and
for Iqbal Barlas,
who recently ended his.

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Preface

The central question I have posed in this book, whether or not the Qur'ān is a patriarchal text, is perhaps not a meaningful one from the Qur'ān's perspective since its teachings are not framed in terms of the claims made by either traditional or modern patriarchies. However, since the Qur'ān was revealed in/to an existing patriarchy and has been interpreted by adherents of patriarchies ever since, Muslim women have a stake in challenging its patriarchal exegesis.

In writing this book, I have wanted not only to challenge oppressive readings of the Qur'ān but also to offer a reading that confirms that Muslim women can struggle for equality from within the framework of the Qur'ān's teachings, contrary to what both conservative and progressive Muslims believe. I am always disheartened to hear progressive Muslims claim, (dis)ingenuously, it seems to me, that "Islamism is Islamism," as a young Algerian feminist puts it in a critically acclaimed film shown recently in the West. To identify Islam inseparably with oppression is to ignore the reality of misreadings of the sacred text. Every religion is open to variant readings; the Christianity of the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the Conquest that wiped out millions of people in the name of Christ and commerce bears little family resemblance to the liberation theology of today. Confusing Islam with "Islamism" or "Islamists" also ignores that Islam does not sanction a clergy, or invest anyone with the right to monopolize religious meaning. To accept the authority of any group and then to resign oneself to its misreadings of Islam not only makes one complicit in the continued abuse of Islam and the abuse of women in the name of Islam, but it also means losing the battle over meaning without even fighting it, as Abdullahi An-Naim (1990) reminds us.

This is not to say that attempts to rethink our understanding of Islam or to reread the Qur'ān are going to be easy, given the control over reli-

gious knowledge of obscurantists and experts alike. Yet, more and more Muslims, realizing that "no one has a monopoly over the meaning of what God says," as Aref Ali Nayed (1992) puts it, are beginning to reclaim their interpretive rights. In fact, the struggle to reclaim such rights may be related proportionally to attempts by some Muslim states and clerics to keep Muslims from reading, a true irony for a people who believe that Revelation to the unlettered Prophet commenced with the single word "*Iqra'!*" or "Read!"

Although the practice of Islam concerns only Muslims, Muslim practices are of concern to the community of nations in which we live. I have thus written this work with both Muslims and non-Muslims in mind. Writing for such different audiences in a shared vocabulary has proven hard to do, not because I could not always find the right words, but because so many people are invested in the myth of radical difference; that is, the false but comforting idea that they share absolutely nothing with Others. To speak to such people simultaneously and in the same language is to threaten in some very real way the imagined borders that serve as the markers of their identities; it is thus to call forth unrelenting animosity against oneself, as I have discovered over the years.

To conservative Muslims, terms like antipatriarchal, sexual inequality, liberation, and even hermeneutics—all of which I use liberally—smack too much of the epistemology of non-Muslim Others to be safely applied to themselves, let alone used in reading the Qur'ān. Consequently, even though I engage Western/feminist thought only circumspectly, and often to differentiate and privilege what I take to be a Qur'ānic viewpoint, my language and the mere act of engagement are likely to render me a "Western feminist" in the eyes of those Muslims who are prone to hearing in such language, and in any criticism of Muslim men, the subversive voices of Western feminists. Mislabeling Muslim women in this way not only denies the specificity, autonomy, and creativity of their thought, but it also suggests, falsely, that there is no room from within Islam to contest inequality or patriarchy.

Conversely, to feminists and non-Muslim Westerners, terms like liberatory and antipatriarchal are much too self-referential to be applied to, or used meaningfully by, Others, especially Muslims. My use of these terms for the Qur'ān, as also my favorable reading of it in comparison with Western/feminist discourses, will doubtless render me a "Muslim apologist" in their eyes. To such people, it is inconceivable that Islam (usually labeled "Other/Eastern") has any truths to offer that may be commensurable with

Judaism and Christianity (considered "Western"), much less with insights claimed by secular feminisms. Such views, however, ignore the scripturally linked nature and Middle Eastern origin of all three religions, hence the commonality of some of their truth claims. In positing a hyperseparation between Islam and the West, they also ignore that counterposing Islam to the West is misleading in that Islam is a way of life and not an "imagined geography," to borrow Edward Said's (1979) rich phrase; it cannot therefore meaningfully be compared to one. Further, Islam not only exists within the West but also has helped to constitute the West, as Said so compellingly demonstrated two decades ago.

What, then, of my own tendency to refer to "the West" and "Western"? In spite of initial reluctance, I have chosen to retain such terms because of their usefulness in providing descriptive access to an unhappy reality: the asymmetric relationship between a self-defined West and a Western-defined Other (Islam, non-West). It is this process of naming, with its attendant material consequences, that I wish to convey rather than to suggest that the West is absolute, monolithic, or always exclusive of Islam. Nonetheless, if such terms disturb some of my readers, I ask them to read beyond them to get at my intent, which is to address Muslims and non-Muslims, women and men, believers and nonbelievers, the non-West and the West, in a broadly shared discourse of meanings. Toward that end and in the interest of facilitating access by non-Arabic speaking readers to my work, I have relied on a simplified version of the Library of Congress system of transliterations. (The glossary, beginning on page 235, may also be helpful to readers who are unfamiliar with Arabic words.)

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Acknowledgments

helped me to refine and expand my knowledge of the Qur'ān's egalitarian ethos, the "Near" East, and sundry other topics too esoteric to list.

Sadly, my father, Iqbal, did not live long enough to see this book published. I continue to reflect on his life and death and what they mean for me, and I draw strength from the fact that it was his unfailing, unshakable, and (to others) immoderate pride in my achievements that allowed me to confront life's challenges without pausing to think that I was not up to them as a woman. It is only fitting that I dedicate this work partly to him.

Ongoing dialogues and readings of the Qur'ān with my companion in Islam, Ulises Ali, and his supportive but always discerning readings of my work continue to provide the context for me to find new meanings in both my work and my life. His ability to embrace differences in sameness and to value sameness in differences never ceases to remind me of the virtues of egalitarian modes of "knowing one another." It is also to him that I dedicate this book with much love, especially for making the journey into Islam.

Mohammed Arkoun (1994) speaks of "the secret consciences of those who still believe." Readers will find in this work clear signs of the consciousness of someone who still believes, and not so secretly. Indeed, writing this has brought me to a fuller appreciation of my faith, in particular, of why Muslims regard the pursuit of knowledge (*'Ilm*) as a form of worship (*'Ibādah*) and why we pray to God to "increase me in knowledge." If this book augments my readers' knowledge half as much as writing it did mine, its purpose will have been well, and doubly, served.

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Asma Barlas
January, 2001

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"Believing Women" in Islam

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The Qur'ān and Muslim Women
Reading Patriarchy, Reading Liberation

It was not God who wronged them,
but they wronged their own souls.

The Qur'ān (30:9) [1]

This work reflects my ongoing engagement with two questions that have both theoretical significance and real-life consequences for Muslims, especially women: First, does Islam's Scripture, the Qur'ān, teach or condone sexual inequality or oppression? Is it, as critics allege, a patriarchal and even sexist and misogynistic text? Intimately related to that question is the second: Does the Qur'ān permit and encourage liberation for women?

When I ask whether the Qur'ān is a patriarchal or misogynistic text, I am asking whether it represents God as Father/male or teaches that God has a special relationship with males or that males embody divine attributes and that women are by nature weak, unclean, or sinful. Further, does it teach that rule by the father/husband is divinely ordained and an earthly continuation of God's Rule, as religious and traditional [2] patriarchies claim?

Alternatively, does the Qur'ān advocate gender differentiation, dualisms, or inequality on the basis of sexual (biological) differences between women and men? In other words, does it privilege men over women in their biological capacity as males, or treat man as the Self (normative) and woman as the Other, or view women and men as binary opposites, as modern patriarchal theories of sexual differentiation and inequality do?

When I ask whether we can read the Qur'ān for liberation, I am asking whether its teachings about God as well as about human creation, ontology, sexuality, and marital relationships challenge sexual inequality and patriarchy. Alternatively, do the teachings of the Qur'ān allow us to theorize the equality, sameness, similarity, or equivalence, as the context demands, of women and men?

It is obvious that much is at stake for Muslims in how we answer these questions, especially in view of the increasing levels of violence against women in many states from Afghanistan to Algeria today. What is less obvious—given the widespread tendency to blame Islam for oppressing Muslims rather than blaming Muslims for misreading Islam[3]—is the possibility that we can answer the first set of questions—is the Qur'ān a patriarchal or misogynistic text—in the negative, while we answer the second—can the Qur'ān be a source for women's liberation—in the affirmative. Using an interpretive methodology, or hermeneutics,[4] derived from the Qur'ān, as well as two definitions of patriarchy (as a tradition of father-rule, and as a politics of gender inequality based in theories of sexual differentiation),[5] I hope to show not only that the Qur'ān's epistemology is inherently antipatriarchal but that it also allows us to theorize the radical equality of the sexes.

This book, then, is as much a critique of sexual/textual[6] oppression in Muslim societies as it is a concerted attempt to recover what Leila Ahmed (1992) calls the "stubbornly egalitarian" voice of Islam and to locate it as a legitimate countervoice to the authoritarian voice of Islam about which we hear so much these days, especially in the Western media. If, as Ahmed says, these "fundamentally different Islams" arise in different readings, then it is imperative to challenge the authoritarian and patriarchal readings of Islam that are profoundly affecting the lives and future of Muslim women.

This is not to say, however, that sexual inequality and discrimination are a function merely of misogynistic readings of Islam, or that one can explain the status of Muslim women "solely in terms of the Qur'an and/or other Islamic sources all too often taken out of context" (El-Sohl and Mabro 1994, 1). As many recent studies reveal, women's status and roles in Muslim societies, as well as patriarchal structures and gender relationships, are a function of multiple factors, most of which have nothing to do with religion. The history of Western civilization should tell us that there is nothing innately Islamic about misogyny, inequality, or patriarchy. And yet, all three often are justified by Muslim states and clerics in the name of Islam. This recourse to sacred knowledge—or, more accurately, knowledge that claims to derive from religion—to justify sexual oppression, and the resulting misassociation of the sacred with misogyny, motivates my own engagement with Qur'ānic hermeneutics and, I believe, renders such an engagement imperative, even unavoidable, to all projects of Muslim women's (and men's) liberation.

Even though a Qur'ānic hermeneutics cannot by itself put an end

to patriarchal, authoritarian, and undemocratic regimes and practices, it nonetheless remains crucial for various reasons. First, hermeneutic and existential questions are ineluctably *connected.* As the concept of sexual/ textual oppression suggests, there is a relationship between what we read texts to be saying and how we think about and treat real women. This insight, though associated with feminists because of their work on reading and representation, is at the core of revelation albeit in the form of the reverse premise: that there is a relationship between reading (sacred texts) and liberation. If this were not the case, there would be little point in God's communicating with us in order to reform us. Accordingly, if we wish to ensure Muslim women their rights, we not only need to contest readings of the Qur'ān that justify the abuse and degradation of women, we also need to establish the legitimacy of liberatory readings. Even if such readings do not succeed in effecting a radical change in Muslim societies, it is safe to say that no meaningful change can occur in these societies that does not derive its legitimacy from the Qur'ān's teachings, a lesson secular Muslims everywhere are having to learn to their own detriment.

However, even though Muslim women directly experience the consequences of oppressive misreadings of religious texts, few question their legitimacy and fewer still have explored the liberatory aspects of the Qur'ān's teachings.[7] Yet, without doing so, they cannot contest the association, falsely constructed by misreading Scripture, between the sacred and sexual oppression. This association serves as the strongest argument for inequality and discrimination among Muslims since many people either have not read the Qur'ān or accept its patriarchal exegesis unquestioningly. However, as numerous scholars have pointed out, inequality and discrimination derive not from the teachings of the Qur'ān but from the secondary religious texts, the *Tafsīr* (Qur'ānic exegesis) and the *Ahādith* (s. *hadīth*) (narratives purportedly detailing the life and praxis of the Prophet Muhammad). As such, by

> returning to a fresh and immediate interpretation of the Holy Book, and by taking a new and critical look at the Hadiths—in other words, by engaging in creative ijtihad[8]—modern Islamic authority could very well reform and renew the position of Islam on the issue of the status of women. (Stowasser 1984, 38)

A reinterpretation of the Scripture is particularly important because the Qur'ān's teachings provide Muslims with role models for both women and

men. Since different readings of the Qur'ān (and of other texts) can yield what are for women "fundamentally different Islams," it becomes crucial for them "to reinvestigate the normative religious texts"[9] and even to become specialists in the sacred text, as Fatima Mernissi (1986) urges.

Finally, as theorists argue in other contexts, there is "no practice without a theory,"[10] and Muslims have yet to derive a theory of equality from the Qur'ān. This is partly because, as Fazlur Rahman (1982, 2) points out, Muslims have yet to resolve "basic questions of method and hermeneutics." Every new reading of the Qur'ān, by helping to resolve these basic questions of hermeneutics, can also help to generate such a theory. That is why critiquing the methods by which Muslims produce religious meaning and rereading the Qur'ān for liberation are crucial for ensuring sexual equality.

In attempting to do both here, I concentrate on recovering the liberating and egalitarian voice of Islam that is rarely heard today but which we are most in need of hearing. In the rest of the chapter, I explain my arguments regarding the reading of the Qur'ān; how Muslims read sexual inequality and patriarchy into it; how we can read the Qur'ān for liberation; my epistemology and methodology; and, finally, the plan of this book.

1. Reading the Qur'ān

Those who read Islam as a misogynistic and "uncompromising and overtly paternalistic" religion (Hussain 1994, 118) point both to the Qur'ān's alleged advocacy of sexual inequality and to the long history of discrimination against women in most Muslim societies. My purpose here is not to deny that the Qur'ān can be read in patriarchal modes (as privileging males), that oppressive practices in many Muslim societies often stem from an uncritical adherence to what are assumed to be Islamic norms and strictures, or that the images of "the woman" in the Muslim unconscious are indeed misogynistic.[11] Nor do I deny that "the enveloping maleness"[12] of Muslim religious text engenders grave problems for women, as does the legalization of sexual inequality by classical Muslim law, the *Sharī'ah*. Rather, I argue that descriptions of Islam as a religious patriarchy that allegedly has "God on its side"[13] confuse the Qur'ān with a specific *reading* of it, ignoring that all texts, including the Qur'ān, can be read in multiple modes, including egalitarian ones. Moreover, patriarchal readings of Islam collapse the Qur'ān with its exegesis (Divine Discourse[14] with "its earthly realization"[15]); God with the languages used to speak about God (the Signified with the signifier); and

normative Islam with historical Islam.[16] Thus, Islam and Muslims are confused on the one hand, and texts, cultures, and histories are collapsed on the other. My purpose is both to critique the methods by which Muslims generate patriarchal readings of the Qur'ān and to recover the egalitarian aspects of Qur'ānic epistemology. I do this on the basis of two claims, whose substantiation provides the subject matter of the two parts of this book.

My first and relatively simple claim is that, insofar as all texts are polysemic, they are open to variant readings. We cannot therefore look to a text alone to explain why people have read it in a particular mode or why they tend to favor one reading of it over another. This is especially true of a sacred text like the Qur'ān which "has been ripped from its historical, linguistic, literary, and psychological contexts and then been continually recontextualized in various cultures and according to the ideological needs of various actors" (Arkoun 1994, 5). We need, therefore, to examine who has read the Qur'ān historically, how they have read it—that is, how they have chosen to define the epistemology and methodology of meaning, hence certain ways of knowing (the realm of hermeneutics)—and the extratextual contexts in which they have read it. In particular, we need to examine the roles of Muslim interpretive communities and states (the realm of sexual politics) in shaping religious knowledge and authority in ways that enabled patriarchal readings of the Qur'ān. I address these issues, which impinge on the power and politics of reading itself, in Part I of the book.

If emphasizing the Qur'ān's textual polysemy allows me to argue against interpretive reductionism, however, it merely reiterates modern definitions of the text and also a well-known historical fact; it says nothing specific about the Qur'ān itself. And I do want to make a more specific, if also more controversial, claim (in dialogue with recent Muslim and feminist scholarship)[17] which is that the Qur'ān is egalitarian and antipatriarchal. This, of course, is a harder claim to establish for at least two reasons. First, while there is no universally shared definition of sexual equality, there is a pervasive (and oftentimes perverse) tendency to view differences as evidence of inequality. In light of this view, the Qur'ān's different treatment of women and men with respect to certain issues (marriage, divorce, giving of evidence, etc.) is seen as manifest proof of its anti-equality stance and its patriarchal nature. However, I argue against this view on the grounds both that (as many feminists themselves now admit) treating women and men differently does not always amount to treating them unequally, nor does treating them identically necessarily mean treating them equally.[18] Second, as my

reading will show, the Qur'ān's different treatment of women and men is not based in claims about either sexual difference or sameness that theories of sexual inequality and oppression make.

Another difficulty with claiming that the Qur'ān is egalitarian and anti-patriarchal is that some of its teachings, especially those dealing with polygyny and "wife beating," suggest otherwise, as does the fact that the Qur'ān recognizes men as the locus of power and authority in actually existing patriarchies. However, recognizing the existence of a patriarchy, or addressing one, is not the same as advocating it. Moreover, the Qur'ān's provisions about polygyny, "wife beating," and so forth—which have been open to serious misinterpretation—were in the nature of *restrictions,* not a license. However, we can only address these types of issues if, in addition to questioning the textual strategies Muslims have used to read the Qur'ān, we also keep in mind the historical context of its revelation in a seventh-century (Arab) tribal patriarchy (much like the Taliban in Afghanistan today).[19] Contextualizing the Qur'ān's teachings (i.e., explaining them with reference to the immediate audience and social conditions to which they were addressed), shows that, far from being oppressive, they were profoundly egalitarian; it depends on how we position the Qur'ān and also ourselves vis-à-vis it historically.

If this line of reasoning suggests that the meanings we derive from, or ascribe to, the Qur'ān are unfixable,[20] or are fixable only in the context of a given historical period or hermeneutic method, it does not mean that we can never know the Qur'ān's meanings or intent, or that all the meanings we derive from it are equally legitimate. Nor does it mean that the Qur'ān is not universal in its scope, or that its teachings were egalitarian only by the standards of a seventh-century society and are irredeemably oppressive by ours. On the contrary, I will contest each of these propositions on the basis both of a hermeneutic argument and by reading (in Part II) the Qur'ān's teachings on a wide range of issues, extending from the nature of Divine Self-Disclosure (how God defines God), to the Qur'ān's view of prophets, parents, spouses, human creation, moral agency, sex/gender, and sexuality. My reading draws on hermeneutic principles suggested by the Qur'ān for its own interpretation, as well as on a comprehensive definition of patriarchy; it also is based in conceptual distinctions that Muslims who read the Qur'ān as a patriarchal text usually fail to make. Prior to specifying my own approach, however, I would like to discuss how Muslims and their critics read patriarchy, inequality, and even misogyny into the Qur'ān.

11. Reading Patriarchy

They treat men's oppression
As if it were the Wrath
Of God!

The Qur'ān (29:10) [21]

Muslims read patriarchy and sexual inequality into the Qur'ān on the basis both of specific verses (*Āyāt,* s. *Āyah*) and of the Qur'ān's different treatment of women and men with regard to such issues as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. From these, they infer that men and women are not only biologically different but also unequal, and are opposites, a view mirrored in the claim that in Islam the masculine and the feminine principles also are strictly separated. On the readings of conservatives,[22] male superiority is both ontological, since woman is said to have been created from/after man and for his pleasure, and moral-social, since God is alleged to have preferred men in "the completeness of mental ability, good counsel, complete power in the performance of duties and the carrying out of (divine) commands."[23] God also is said to have given men a "degree" above women and to have appointed them guardians (in some accounts, rulers) over women. The woman, on the other hand, is represented as a "tragic being [whose] sex functions and physiology make her unfit for any work or activity except child-bearing," which is her "biological tragedy" (Maududi in Khan 1983, 21). Not only do biological and mental functions and capacities differentiate the two sexes, argue conservatives, but they also justify a sexual division of labor in which women must submit to the man "who is responsible for the maintenance of this system be he her husband, father or brother" (61–62). On conservative views, it is clear that

> The Book of Nature, the sciences and the philosophers of Europe have emphatically proclaimed that though woman may try her best . . . she cannot be the equal of man in physical and intellectual powers. . . . Her natural functions oblige her to be subjected to man, by which alone she can have any meaningful identity. (Vajidi in Khan, 129)

Surpassing the audacity even of Europeans like Freud, some conservative Muslims label a woman's anatomy her "pre-destiny," claiming that nature itself "has given man superiority over woman" and made her redundant to civilization (Vajidi in Khan, 173).

Such misogynistic readings of Islam derive not from the Qur'ān's teachings, however, but from attempts by Muslim exegetes and Qur'ān commentators "to legitimise actual usage of their own day by interpreting it in great detail into the Holy Book." [24] In fact, one can trace changes in Muslim women's status "through a comparative study of [Qur'ānic] interpretations such as those of Tabari (d. 923), Zamakhshari (d. 1144), Baydawi (d. 1286) . . . al-Suyuti (d. 1505)," [25] and so on, all of whose works form part of the Sunni canon [26] today. This is why we need to examine not just the methods by which Qur'ānic exegesis and religious meaning have been and continue to be produced, but also the extratextual contexts of their production.

Recent scholarship increasingly makes clear that conservative readings of the Qur'ān are a function of the methods Muslims have used—or have *failed* to use—to read it. In particular, argue critical scholars,[27] Muslims have not read the Qur'ān as both a "complex hermeneutic totality" [28] and as a "historically situated" [29] text. Instead, says Mustansir Mir (1986, 1), they have relied on a "linear-atomistic" method that takes a "verse-by-verse approach to the Qur'an. With most Muslim exegetes, the basic unit of Qur'an study is one or a few verses taken in isolation from the preceding and following verses." As a result, the Qur'ān is not read as a text possessing both "thematic *and* structural *nazm* [coherence]" (24). As Amina Wadud (1999, 2) also argues, the exegetes of the classical period

> begin with the first verse of the first chapter and proceed to the second verse of the first chapter—one verse at a time—until the end of the Book. Little or no effort is made to recognize themes and to discuss the relationship of the Qur'an to itself, thematically.

Even when they do refer to the relationship of two Āyāt, contends Wadud, they do so without applying any "hermeneutical principle" since a method "for linking similar Qur'anic ideas, syntactical structures, principles, or themes together is almost non-existent" (Wadud 1999, 2).

Not surprisingly, this method has failed to yield a creative synthesis of Qur'ānic principles,[30] since it does not recognize the connections between different themes in the Qur'ān. (As my reading will show, recognizing the Qur'ān's textual and thematic holism, and thus the hermeneutic connections between seemingly disparate themes, is absolutely integral to recovering its antipatriarchal epistemology.) By ignoring the fact that the Qur'ān is "a unified document gradually unfolding itself" [31] in time, classical exegetes have also ignored that in the Qur'ān content and context possess one

another[32] such that one cannot grasp the significance of the Qur'ān's teachings without considering the contexts of their revelation.

If we need to keep in mind the historical contexts of the Qur'ān's revelation in order to understand its teachings, we also need to keep in mind the historical contexts of its interpretations in order to understand its conservative and patriarchal exegesis. The most definitive work, not only in Qur'ānic exegesis but also in law and tradition, is considered by many Muslims to have been produced during the first few centuries of Muslim history, the Golden Age of Islam, which coincided with the Western Middle Ages.[33] The misogyny of this period is, of course, well known. It was assimilated[34] into Islam by way of the commentaries and super-commentaries on the Qur'ān (*Tafsīr*) and the narratives detailing the life and praxis of the Prophet (*Ahādith*) (Ahmed 1992; Spellberg 1994; Stowasser 1994). In other words, it was the secondary religious texts that enabled the "textualization of misogyny"[35] in Islam. These texts have come to eclipse the Qur'ān's influence in most Muslim societies today,[36] exemplifying the triumph not only of some texts over others in Muslim religious discourse but also of history, politics, and culture over the sacred text,[37] and thus also of the crosscultural, transnational, and nondenominational ideologies on women and gender in vogue in the Middle Ages over the teachings of the Qur'ān. However, since we often do not distinguish between texts, cultures, and histories when studying Islam, we tend to ignore this inversion. As a result, we end up confusing the Qur'ān with its *Tafsīr,* and confusing Islam with patriarchy and the practices of repressive Muslim states that have a history of using Islam for their own political ends (Mernissi 1991, 1996; Khalidi 1994; Marlow 1997; Zaman 1997).

The fact that the Qur'ān "happens against a long background of patriarchal precedent"[38] may also explain why its exegesis, the work entirely of men, has been influenced by their own needs and experiences while either excluding or interpreting, "through the male vision, perspective, desire, or needs," women's experiences (Wadud 1999, 2). The resulting absence of women's voices from "the basic paradigms through which we examine and discuss the Qur'an and Qur'anic interpretation," argues Wadud, is mistaken "with voicelessness in the text itself"; and it is this silence that both explains and allows the striking consensus on women's issues among Muslims in spite of interpretive differences among them.

However, we know that women participated actively in the creation of religious knowledge in the early days of Islam. As Ahmed (1992, 72) says,

women of the Prophet's community felt they had a right "to comment forthrightly on any topic, even the Qur'an," and both God and the Prophet assumed their "right to speak out and readily responded to their comments." It is necessary, therefore, to reexamine the details of Muslim history, in particular the processes of knowledge formation, in order to understand women's exclusion from interpretive communities over time.

In sum, in order to understand patriarchal readings of the Qur'ān, we need to study the relationship not only between hermeneutics and history, but also between the content of knowledge and the methods by which it is generated. It is not "enough to ask *what* we know about religion, but equal attention must be paid to *how* we come to know what we know" (King 1995, 20; her emphasis). We need to realize that our understanding of the Qur'ān's teachings is contingent on how we have, or have not, read it; on the sorts of questions we have asked of it; and the voices we have preferred to hear in response to our questions. As such, if we want to read the Qur'ān in liberatory and antipatriarchal modes, we will need to use a different method to read it and also to ask different sorts of questions than we have been willing to ask thus far.

III. Reading Liberation

> **[E]njoin**
> **Thy people to hold fast**
> **By the best in the precepts**
>
> **The Qur'ān (7:145)** [39]

Readings of Islam as a religious patriarchy rest on a number of conceptual confusions. The most endemic of these is between the Qur'ān as revelation (Divine Discourse) and as text (a discourse fixed in writing [40] by humans and interpreted by them in time/space, that is, *historically*). However, collapsing God's Words with our interpretation of those Words not only violates the distinction Muslim theology has always made between Divine Speech and its "earthly realization," but it also ignores the Qur'ān's warning not to confuse it with its readings (39:18; in Ali 1988, 1241). It is crucial to make this distinction because there are slippages between the Qur'ān and its *Tafsīr,* and also within interpretations and translations of the Qur'ān (inter/intratextual tensions), which present scholars with a conundrum. As Neal Robinson (1996, 29) confesses, the "striking difference between what

can be safely inferred from the Qur'ān itself and what has frequently been read into it presents me with a serious dilemma." This disjuncture between the Qur'ān and its exegesis also explains why many norms and practices that are labeled "Islamic" do not, in fact, derive from the Qur'ān's teachings.[41] This is why we need to make another equally crucial distinction that patriarchal readings of Islam do not make: between Islam in theory and Islam in practice, thus also between Islam and already existing patriarchies on the one hand and Islam and Muslim history and practices on the other. Among others, W. C. Smith (1981, 30) argues in favor of such distinctions. "To reduce what Islam is, conceptually, to what Islam has been, historically, or is in the process of becoming," he says, "would be to fail to recognise its religious quality: the relationship to the divine; the transcendent element. Indeed, Islamic truth must necessarily transcend Islamic actuality." (As Smith notes, even the ideal of Islam has had a complex history and "has in some measure been different things in different centuries, in different countries, among different strata.") Although it is not always easy to make these distinctions—between Islam's actuality and its transcendent truth, between the Qur'ān and its exegesis, and between Islam and Muslim practices (thus between texts, cultures, and histories)—they nonetheless allow us to see that many ideas and practices, including the theme of patriarchy, ascribed to the Qur'ān do not originate in it or have been read into the text in contextually problematic ways.

This only becomes clear, however, if we begin by defining patriarchy itself, which no reader of the Qur'ān seems ever to have done, including those feminists who condemn Islam as a patriarchy. Even Wadud (1999, 9), who argues that the Qur'ān is neutral toward "social [and] marital patriarchy," does not say what she means by the term. This may explain why she remains unaware that her own work helps to establish the Qur'ān's *anti*patriarchal episteme by showing that it does not privilege males *as* males (sex is irrelevant to its definition of moral agency), it does not use males as a paradigm to define women, and it does not even use the concept of gender to speak about humans. In the absence of a definition of patriarchy, one cannot know that the Qur'ān's treatment of these themes undermines the very core of patriarchal ideology. This is why I begin my own reading by defining patriarchy.

Defining Patriarchy

I define patriarchy in both a narrow (specific) and a broad (universal) sense in order to make the definition as comprehensive as possible. Narrowly de-

fined, patriarchy is a historically specific mode of rule by fathers[42] that, in its religious and traditional forms, assumes a real as well as symbolic continuum between the "Father/fathers";[43] that is, between a patriarchalized view of God as Father/male, and a theory of father-right, extending to the husband's claim to rule over his wife and children. I apply this definition in reading the Qur'ān because the Qur'ān was revealed in the context of a traditional patriarchy, and my aim is to see if it endorsed this mode of patriarchy by representing God as Father or by representing the father or husband as ruler over his wife and children.

Since the Qur'ān's teachings are universal and since father's rule has reconstituted itself, I also define patriarchy more broadly, as a politics of sexual differentiation that privileges males by "transforming biological sex into politicized gender, which prioritizes the male while making the woman different (unequal), less than, or the 'Other'" (Eisenstein 1984, 90).[44] Patriarchy, broadly conceived, is based in an ideology that ascribes social/sexual inequalities to biology; that is, it confuses sexual/biological *differences* with gender dualisms/*inequality* (differences based on sex or biology with inequality based on gender dualisms). This "culturalization of nature and the naturalization of culture"[45] manifests itself in three claims (as the conservative Muslim position summarized above reveals): that there are essential ontological and ethical-moral differences between women and men, that these differences are a function of nature/biology, and that the Qur'ān's different, hence unequal, treatment of women and men affirms their inherent inequality (in a series of steps, difference is thus transformed into inequality). In reading the Qur'ān in light of this definition of patriarchy, my aim is to see whether it endorses the ideas of sex/gender differentiation, dualisms, and inequalities that are implicit in these claims.

While a definition of patriarchy is fundamental to being able to establish the Qur'ān as an antipatriarchal (or, for that matter, as a patriarchal) text, and also for explaining issues of con/textuality (the relationship between texts and the contexts of their reading), it does not address the problem of con/textual legitimacy or the question of what constitutes a proper reading of a text. In fact, I am convinced that one of the primary reasons Muslims have failed to recover the Qur'ān's antipatriarchal epistemology has to do with the fact that we have not systematically addressed this question, particularly in light of the Qur'ān's own recommended modes of reading it. Indeed, I believe that the failure to consider the criteria for generating a contextually legitimate reading of the Qur'ān is not just a *hermeneutic* failure,

but also a *theological* one. Inasmuch as readings of Scriptures are as likely to be influenced by theological considerations, especially by one's conception of God, as they are by the use of specific methodological criteria, focusing only on the latter to the exclusion of how a Scripture is experienced within the context of a distinctive image of, and relationship to God, whose Speech it is, cannot be the best way to generate contextually appropriate readings of it. Yet, that is how Muslims have, in fact, tended to read the Qur'ān historically: without making God's Self-Disclosure the hermeneutic site from which to read the Qur'ān. The failure to connect God to God's Speech (which has resulted in some extremely objectionable readings of the Qur'ān) is inexplicable in view of the fact that the organizing principle of Islam, the doctrine of God's Unity (*Tawhīd*), stipulates that there is a perfect congruence between God (Divine Ontology) and God's Speech (Divine Discourse). This means that Muslims should seek the hermeneutic keys for interpreting the Qur'ān in the nature of Divine Ontology or, more appropriately, in the nature of Divine Self-Disclosure, since our knowledge of one is contingent on our understanding of the other. That is where I locate my own hermeneutics.

Defining a Qur'ānic Hermeneutics

Given the unity of Divine Ontology and Divine Discourse, we need to begin our reading of God's Speech by connecting it to God. Thus, God's Self-Disclosure needs to become intrinsic to any project of Qur'ānic hermeneutics. Here I examine three aspects of God's Self-Disclosure that generate liberatory readings of the Qur'ān: the principles of Divine Unity, Justness, and Incomparability.[46]

The principle of God's Unity (*Tawhīd*) has the most far-reaching implications for how we understand God and God's Speech. Here, I wish to note only its implications for a theory of male rule/privilege that underpins traditional patriarchies. In its simplest form, *Tawhīd* symbolizes the idea of God's Indivisibility, hence also the indivisibility of God's Sovereignty; thus, no theory of male (or popular) sovereignty that pretends to be an extension of God's Rule/Sovereignty, or comes into conflict with it, can be considered compatible with the doctrine of *Tawhīd*. In fact, this is the axiomatic meaning of the term: that God is absolute Sovereign and no one can partake in God's Sovereignty. To the extent that theories of male rule over women and children amount to asserting sovereignty over both and also misrepresent males as intermediaries between women and God, they do come into

conflict with the essential tenets of the doctrine of *Tawhīd* and must be rejected as theologically unsound. A reading of the Qur'ān that suggests even subtle parallels between God and males, in their capacity as fathers or husbands, must then be rejected as an insufferable heresy. (In later chapters, I show how the doctrine of *Tawhīd* directly undermines theories of father-rule/right.)

A second foundational principle of God's Self-Disclosure is that although "severe, strict and unrelenting [in] justice," God "never does any *zulm* to anybody" (Izutsu 1964, 77, 129). To do *Zulm* (in the Qur'ān), Toshihiko Izutsu (1959, 152) points out, is " 'to act in such a way as to transgress the proper limit and encroach upon the right of some other person.' " Divine Justice thus is self-circumscribed by respect for the rights of humans as moral agents. However, if God never does *Zulm* to anyone, then God's Speech (the Qur'ān) also cannot teach *Zulm* against anyone. That is, if "God by definition, cannot be a misogynist,"[47] then God's Speech also cannot by definition be misogynist, or teach misogyny or injustice.

Clearly, reasonable people may disagree about what constitutes *Zulm,* as also about the proper definition of human rights. However, it is harder to argue that theories asserting the incomplete humanity of any group of people or justifying their physical or moral abuse and degradation do not violate the rights of that group and therefore do not constitute *Zulm.* In this context, it may be argued that by teaching the precept of the inherent inferiority of women, which breeds misogyny, and by justifying women's subordination to men, patriarchies violate women's rights by denying them agency and dignity, principles that the Qur'ān says are intrinsic to human nature itself. As such, we can think of patriarchies as being manifest cases of *Zulm,* and to the extent that that is so, we must be willing to assume, again as a hermeneutic principle, that the Qur'ān cannot condone them. (As I will argue, the Qur'ān's teachings challenge inequality and patriarchy in more concrete ways as well.) An exegesis that reads oppression, inequality, and patriarchy into the Qur'ān should be seen as a misreading, a failure in reading, since it attributes to God *Zulm* against women. What we may, out of either historical habit or expedience, read as Qur'ānic support for women's subordination to men must then be reexamined in light of a more ecumenical definition of *Zulm* that coheres with the totality of the Qur'ān's teachings about the equality of the sexes. (I consider these issues in detail in Chapters 4–6.)

A third principle of God's Self-Disclosure with hermeneutic implica-

tions is that God is Incomparable, hence Unrepresentable, especially in anthropomorphic terms. The Qur'ān's tireless and emphatic rejections of God's sexualization/engenderment—as Father (male)—confirm that God is not a male, or like one. However, if God is not male or like one, there also is no reason to hold that God has any special affinity with males (the positing of such an affinity allows men to claim God as their own and thus to project onto God sexual partisanship). Not only should we recover the liberatory potential of Islam's rejection of a patriarchalized God, we should also make it the *hermeneutic site* from which to read the Qur'ān's antipatriarchal epistemology. (I make this argument more fully in Chapter 4.)

All three aspects of Divine Ontology are far more nuanced and have far richer implications than I have explored here. However, even a cursory exploration reveals that the liberatory nature of Qur'ānic epistemology inheres in the very nature of God's Being. In other words, it is not only in the Qur'ān's teachings about human creation, ontology, and relationships that we can find liberatory potential but also in the very nature of Divine Ontology itself.

In addition to these theological principles, the Qur'ān also offers us specific methodological criteria for reading it that emphasize the principles of textual holism, reading for the best meanings, and using analytical reasoning in interpretation. The Qur'ān's emphasis on reading it as a textual unity emerges from its warning that "Those who break the Qur'an into parts. Them, by thy Lord, We shall question, every one, Of what they used to do" (15:91–93; in Pickthall n.d., 194). Yusuf Ali (1988) translates this verse (in which God is addressing the Prophet) as:

> And say: "I am indeed he
> That warneth openly
> And without ambiguity,"—
>
> (Of just such wrath)
> As We sent down
> On those who divided
> (Scripture into arbitrary parts),—
>
> (So also on such)
> As have made [the] Qur'an
> Into shreds (as they please).

Therefore, by the [*Rabb*],[48]
We will, of a surety,
Call them to account,
For all their deeds.

    The Qur'ān (15:89–93; in Ali, 653)

Similarly, in a reference to the Book given to Moses, God condemns those who make "it into (Separate) sheets for show, While ye conceal much (Of its contents)" (6:91; in Ali, 314). The Qur'ān's warning against reading it in a decontextualized, selective, and piecemeal way emerges also from its criticism of the Israelites who broke their covenant with God: "They change the words From their (right) places And forget a good part Of the Message that was Sent them" (5:14; in Ali, 245). And, again, they "change the words From their (right) times And places" (5:44; in Ali, 255). Revelation, the Qur'ān emphasizes, is of a continuity and is also internally clear and self-consistent (39:23; in Ali, 1243–44).

The Qur'ān's internal coherence and consistency do not, however, preclude us from deriving multiple meanings from it, including ones that may not be appropriate. Thus, while noting its own polysemy, the Qur'ān also confirms that some meanings, thus some readings, are better than others. For instance, it praises "Those who listen To the Word And follow The best (meaning) in it" (39:18; in Ali, 1241), clearly indicating that we can derive more than one set of meanings from the Qur'ān, not all of which may be equally good. Similarly, God tells Moses to "enjoin Thy people to hold fast By the best in the precepts [i.e., the Tablets given to him]" (7:145; in Ali, 383). (God also tells the Prophet and all believers to reason with unbelievers in the best possible way.) While it may not be easy to say what would be the best meaning of every Āyah—especially given the (sufi) view that each verse in the Qur'ān can be read in up to 60,000 ways—in light of our idea of a Just God and of the Qur'ān's concern for justice, it is reasonable to hold that the best meanings would recover justice (fairness, impartiality) broadly conceived. However, even if one cannot agree on what the best meanings in every case may be, it is less easy to feign ignorance of what is *not* appropriate inasmuch as the Qur'ān makes this clear in different contexts. First, as noted, it criticizes readings that are decontextualized and selective. The Qur'ān's emphasis on reading it holistically, hence intratextually, also emerges from its praise for those who say " 'We believe In the Book; the whole of it Is from our Lord' " (3:7; in Ali, 123).

Second, the Qur'ān distinguishes between readings that draw on its foundational (clear) Āyāt and those that draw on its allegorical (obscure) Āyāt. The Qur'ān criticizes those who ignore its "basic or fundamental" Āyāt, with their "established meaning," in order to focus on the "allegorical [Āyāt], Seeking discord, and searching For its hidden meanings" (3:7; in Ali, 123). While allegory has crucial didactic functions in the Qur'ān, it is not meant to obscure the Qur'ān's meanings, which, says the Qur'ān, are clear. Third, the Qur'ān states repeatedly that God does not love wrongdoing and oppression. As I have asserted, we can disagree on what constitutes oppression, but reading into the Qur'ān various forms of *Zulm* as defined by its *victims* cannot be considered legitimate. It is thus reasonable to hold that con/textually legitimate readings will cohere with the overall moral objective of the Qur'ān's teachings, treat the text as a unity, privilege its clear and foundational Āyāt over its allegorical ones, and seek to avoid ambiguity.

In the end, of course, a reading of the Qur'ān is just a reading of the Qur'ān, no matter how good; it does not approximate the Qur'ān itself, which may be why the Qur'ān distinguishes between itself and its exegesis. Thus, it condemns those "who write The Book with their own hands, And then say: 'This is from God' " (2:79; in Ali, 38). While the Āyah was a warning to those among the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) of the Prophet's time who were engaged in forgeries, it serves also as a warning against confusing Divine Discourse with its interpretations. In this context, the Qur'ān is clear that "those who are bent on denying the truth attribute their own lying inventions to God. And most of them never use their reason" (5:105; in Asad 1980, 166). People not only fabricate false meanings, says the Qur'ān, but they also project into Scripture their own desires. As one Āyah says, "And there are among them Illiterates, who know not the Book, But (see therein their own) desires, And they do nothing but conjecture" (2:78; in Ali, 38). For all these reasons, then, we need to read the Qur'ān carefully and scrupulously and without the hubris of believing that we can exhaust its meanings.

Finally, the Qur'ān also comments on its own revelation in Arabic and clarifies that it is in Arabic because the Prophet was an Arab; God wanted the Arabs, to whom no "warner" had been sent before, to understand and heed God's teachings, and God wanted to make the Qur'ān easy for them to understand and remember. The Qur'ān does not suggest, however, that Arabic has any unique or intrinsic merit as a language of revelation, or that it is the only language in which we can understand revelation. Rather, argues Izutsu (1964, 189), the Qur'ānic view of the Arabic language is based in

the very clear cultural consciousness that each nation has its own language, and Arabic is the language of the Arabs, and it is, in this capacity, only one of many languages. If God chose this language, it was not for its intrinsic value as a language but simply for its usefulness, that is because the message was addressed primarily to the Arabic speaking people.

What seems significant is not so much the language in which the Qur'ān's teachings are conveyed as the need for us "to *discover*" its meanings by exercising our own reason and intellect (Hourani 1985; his emphasis). Ziauddin Sardar (1985, 167) points out that, compared to 260 Āyāt on legislative issues, there are some 750 that instruct believers to "reflect [and] make the best use of reason" in trying to decipher the Qur'ān's polyvalent semiotic universe.

The principles found within the Qur'ān reveal a preference for reading the text as "a cumulative, holistic process,"[49] that is, as "a whole, a totality."[50] Traditional Muslim views that the Qur'ān is "its own best interpreter"[51] and that we need to "interpret the Qur'an by the Qur'an"[52] are hermeneutic principles implicit in the Qur'ān itself, which suggests textual holism as the basis of "intrascriptural investigation."[53] However, the Qur'ān also "clearly enjoins an understanding of itself which makes 'contextuality' central and fundamental, both to its existence and its relevance" (Cragg 1994, 113). The best method, then, would be to read the Qur'ān intratextually but also with regard to the contexts of its revelation.[54] Beyond these broad principles, the Qur'ān does not "authorise recourse to methods of explanation or logical deduction for the purpose of better understanding" it, observes Faruq Sherif (1985, 42); however, as he notes, it does not "forbid the use of such expedients," either.

In sum, the Qur'ān itself offers criteria by which we can judge between readings, which is important to do because even though "multiple readings are not per se mutually exclusive, not all interpretations are thereby equal" (Trible in West 1995, 149). A commitment to textual polysemy thus does not mean having to embrace moral relativism. In this context, scholars maintain that "an interpretation must not only be probable, but more probable than another," and that reading the text as a unity enhances this probability inasmuch as a text is "a limited field of possible constructions" (Ricoeur 1981, 213). In fact, texts themselves can "resist imposed interpretations" in their details (Wolterstorff 1995, 202); as a noted biblical scholar once put it, "You can revise the text to suit yourself only just so far" (Frei in ibid., 230). Moreover, if we cannot agree on which is the best inter-

pretation, we should be able to "agree on the fact that certain interpretations are not contextually legitimated" (Eco in Carson 1996, 76–77). At the very least, we should be willing to agree that "[t]heologically speaking, whatever diminishes and denies the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the divine or an authentic relation to the divine" (West 1995, 110).

iv. Entering the Hermeneutic Circle/Spiral

Since we always bring what Martin Heidegger called "pre-understanding"[55] into all interpretive processes, I would like to clarify my epistemology, methodology, and reading practices here. I also speculate on how some readers are likely to respond to my work partly in the hope of encouraging them to move beyond their preconceptions and biases.[56]

On Epistemology

I read the Qur'ān as a "believing woman," to borrow a term from the Qur'ān itself. This means that I do not question its ontological status as Divine Speech or the claim that God Speaks, both of which Muslims hold to be true. I do, however, question the legitimacy of its patriarchal readings, and I do this on the basis of a distinction in Muslim theology between what God says and what we understand God to be saying. In the latter context, I am especially interested in querying the claim, implicit in confusing the Qur'ān with its patriarchal exegesis, that only males, and conservative males at that, know what God *really* means. It is this claim that I believe underwrites sexual oppression in Muslim societies and therefore needs to be contested.

As a believer, I also look to the Qur'ān, rather than to Western texts and theories, for my understanding of concepts like sexual equality. However, while the Qur'ān's concern with equality and rights prefigures modern, Western, and feminist discourses, it is grounded in a very different ethics and epistemology and is conveyed by means of a very different language than the latter. In using terms like patriarchy, hermeneutics, and sexual/textual, I do not wish to misrepresent the Qur'ān as a feminist text; rather, the use of such terminology shows my own intellectual disposition and biases.

It also is from the Qur'ān and from Muslim tradition that I draw inspiration for my critical engagement with the text itself. The Qur'ān's counsel to believers to use our reason/ing and knowledge to decipher its Āyāt (lit-

erally, Signs of God) opens the way for all believers to engage in critical inquiry. Indeed, Muslim tradition records that this is a legacy we inherited from a woman at the start of our history. Thus, some fourteen centuries ago Umm Salama is said to have asked her husband, the Prophet Muhammad, why God was not addressing women directly in the Qur'ān, then in the process of being revealed to him.[57] Perhaps she was concerned at the number of Āyāt addressed to men, or perhaps she did not take the Qur'ān's references to men to be inclusive of women, even though in Arabic that is often the case. In any event, that is how—says tradition—the Qur'ān became the only Scripture to address women as women. As a believer, I interpret this incident to mean not that a woman corrected God, but rather that, by God's Grace, Umm Salama's critique became the way for God to correct an entire community.

I draw several lessons from this incident. First, I learn that long before we came to define the term "critical," and long before we came to study the relationship between language and forms of human subjectivity, some premodern, illiterate Muslim women were thinking critically about the role of language in shaping their sense of self. Were that not true, I assume Umm Salama would not have asked her question, and I assume God would not have responded to her by making women the subjects, rather than the objects, of Divine Discourse. In fact, as the Qur'ān makes clear, God shaped not only the language of Divine Discourse but also its content in light of women's concerns as they themselves expressed these during the process of its revelation. More importantly, I learn that "*women too* are among those oppressed whom God comes to vindicate and liberate,"[58] and that, in Islam, they have a direct relationship with God which is not dependent upon the mediation of male authority. Finally, and most significantly, I learn that for Divine Speech to be responsive to us, we should be willing to engage it critically by asking the right sorts of questions of it.

Even though as a woman I ask some questions of the Qur'ān that a man may not perhaps think of asking, and even though I believe that women are more likely than men to read the Qur'ān for liberation (because women and men have different stakes in patriarchy and thus also in liberation from it), I do not rule out the possibility that both women and men are equally capable of liberatory readings. We may not always share the same idea of liberation, of course, but I would like to believe that disagreements are a function not of sexual but of intellectual and ideological differences. This is not to say that different experiences of sex/gender play no role in struc-

turing our ideas; nor does it mean that sex/gender is not a site for creating, subverting, and critiquing meaning. It is merely to affirm the possibility for women and men to arrive at a mutually shared discourse of meanings in spite of sex/gender differences. Thus, I do not adhere to a deterministic view of the relationship between sex/gender and reading. This may sound counterintuitive, given the example of Umm Salama I have just cited, and it certainly is an unstylish view to hold at a time when we are becoming ever more aware of the phallocratic nature of language and its role in constituting gendered subjectivities. However, the very fact that men's exegesis influences women's understanding of religion, as also the fact that language allows for its own contestation, testifies to the autonomy of meanings and language from sex/gender. Moreover, the Qur'ān also assumes that a shared discourse of meaning and mutual care is not only possible but also necessary for the development of moral individualities and communities. I do not therefore valorize communities of women readers as the sine qua non of liberatory readings, as feminists do. To me, the fact that both men and women can produce patriarchal readings or liberatory ones is an acknowledgment of the relationship between texts and the contexts of their reading (or between discourses and materiality) and an argument against biological essentialism.

On Methodology

I employ the hermeneutic principles the Qur'ān suggests for its own interpretation as outlined above, to read the Qur'ān as text, as well as to read behind it and in front of it. When I say I read the Qur'ān as text, I mean that I read it to discover what God may have intended (that is, for Authorial intent discourse).[59] This means that I ascribe intention/ality to the text. I also read to uncover what I believe already is there in the Qur'ān; that is, I hold that certain meanings are intrinsic to the text such that anyone can retrieve them if they employ the right method and ask the right questions. This means, of course, that I accept the possibility that men and women can read in similar ways, even though we may have a stake in reading differently.

Breaking with another feminist tradition, I also do not read the Qur'ān as a dual-gendered text, that is, a text that has both male and female voices in it. For Muslims, the Qur'ān is God's Speech and not the work of human authors, and God is beyond sex/gender. (It could well be, of course, that men and women tend to interpret the Qur'ān's message differently. Also, since access to Divine Discourse is mediated by humans and in gendered lan-

guages, and since the humans who have interpreted the Qur'ān historically have been men, we can certainly hear male voices and masculinist biases in exegesis.) When I say, therefore, that the Qur'ān is not a patriarchal text, I am not saying that it is not the work of men, since I hold that to be a priori true; what I am saying is that its teachings challenge the premises that sustain patriarchy in both its traditional and modern forms. Similarly, when I refer to the Qur'ān's egalitarian "voice," I am not referring to female voices in it that only I can hear as a woman. I am referring to tendencies in the Qur'ān that have been submerged or lost because of the patriarchal nature of its exegesis and the gendered nature of human language.

Given the limitations of language, I occasionally question the translation of a specific word, or the use of a phrase by means of which a crucial idea is conveyed, since much can rest on a word or a turn of the phrase. For instance, the Qur'ān states that God is Unrepresentable and that we should not use similitudes (representations) for God. I thus take the use of the pronoun "He" to be a bad linguistic convention and not an epistemological claim about God's Being. However, more than querying language use, I focus on uncovering the hermeneutic connections between seemingly disparate themes in the Qur'ān (e.g., between the nature of God's Self-Disclosure and the Qur'ān's opposition to ideas of father-right/rule as well as to theories of sexual differentiation) that allow me to recover its antipatriarchal epistemology.

In this context, I concentrate not only on what the Qur'ān says but also on what it does *not* say; that is, I view silence as symbolically suggestive since the "unsaid, the assumed, and the silences in any discourse provide . . . the backdrop against which meaning is established" (Denzin 1997, 38). Of course, what one makes of the Qur'ān's silences depends on what one makes of silence itself; in law, we treat silence as consent, but it can be rather more complex and can convey opposition, resistance, neutrality, indifference, and so on, depending on the context. Thus, I interpret the Qur'ān's silences in light of its expressed teachings.

To read behind the text means to reconstruct the historical "context from which the text emerged" (West 1995, 113). This is important because, as scholars maintain with respect to the Bible, patriarchalization was "not inherent in Christian revelation and community, but progressed slowly and with difficulty." Furthermore, "definitions of sexual roles and gender dimorphism are the outcome of the social economic interactions between men and women [and were] not ordained either by nature or by God"

(Schussler-Fiorenza in West, 143, 144). This is equally true of Muslim attitudes toward women, which is why I begin by examining the historical contexts in which the Qur'ān was revealed and read and the means by which its teachings came to be overlaid by a patriarchal exegesis (discussed in Part I).

To read in front of the text, on the other hand, means to recontextualize it in the light of present needs, something that requires a double movement, as Rahman (1982, 5) calls it, from the present to the past and back to the present. The first half of the movement allows one to specify the contexts of the Qur'ān's revelation and teachings, and the second to distill their "moral-social" principles so as to make them applicable today. However, as Rahman (85) says, it is "precisely the systematic working-out of Islam for the modern context" that has not occurred even though the Qur'ān can be adapted to such contexts, including those of women. In fact, interpreting it with them in mind would confirm its universality, according to Wadud. Part II of this book is thus my way of reading in front of the text.

On Reading

What I offer here is both a hermeneutic method for reading the Qur'ān and a holistic and thematically linked interpretation of its teachings. I am not offering my own translation of the Qur'ān. To speak of the Qur'ān in any language other than Arabic is, of course, to speak of it in its translations, and while translating the Qur'ān raises complex problems,[60] it is unavoidable if one wishes to speak of it in a different language, as I do.

Accordingly, I rely primarily on Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation, which Muslims almost universally[61] regard as being the best. Occasionally, where I believe they serve as useful correctives to Ali, I also draw on Muhammad Asad, A. J. Arberry, and M. M. Pickthall, all of whose works Muslims consider to be among the finest in English. The only change I make on occasion to these translations is to use the Arabic word "*Rabb*" for God (which the Qur'ān itself uses) instead of the English "He/His" since I wish to retain sex/gender-neutral references to God for reasons I will explain in Chapter 4. Less frequently, I give some words in their original Arabic instead of their English translations, especially when translators differ in their interpretation of these words. Nevertheless, I hope to show that in all of its translations, even by men, the Qur'ān remains a liberatory text.

Although my choices of translation, as well as my reading, involve "some kind of modulation or interpretive process"[62] such that it is unrealistic to claim total objectivity, this does not mean that the choices or the reading

are entirely biased or illusory. The fact that a reading can never be wholly objective does not, in itself, render it false; in other words, subjectivity does not rule out the possibility of saying something that also is true. As theorists argue with respect to the hermeneutic circle (i.e., the problem of pre-understanding in structuring our encounter with a text), the reader's aim should not be to avoid getting into it, but to get "into it properly," recognizing the role of the forestructure of understanding in interpretation (Bleicher 1980, 103). In terms of this argument, subjectivity "is not so much what initiates understanding as what terminates it" (Ricoeur 1981, 113). (In other words, it is the *limitations* of my reading that most clearly reveal the influence of subjective factors.) Ideally, argues Paul Ricoeur (143), rather than imposing ourselves on the text, we "unrealize" ourselves in front of it, "receiving from it an enlarged self." As such, awareness of subjectivity can foster a critical hermeneutic self-consciousness that can lead to better self-knowledge and thus to more meaningful engagements with texts, transforming the hermeneutic circle into what D. A. Carson (1996) calls a hermeneutic spiral.

Many Muslims, however, are of two views with regard to the role of subjectivity. On the one hand, they hold that modern readings of the Qur'ān, especially by women, are tainted by biases, while on the other they embrace the religious knowledge produced by a small number of male scholars in the classical period as the only objective and authentic knowledge of Islam. Belief in the "theoretical infallibility"[63] of these male scholars and the idea that the knowledge they produced transcends its own historicity arises in, and also gives rise to, a view of imaginary time that serves to draw Muslims close to what is distant from us in real time and to distance us from that which, in real time, is close to us. As such, the denial of historicity in one case and its affirmation in the other defines acceptable and unacceptable modes of reading the Qur'ān among conservatives. This mindset, which allows "the burden of decision and discrimination to be taken off [our] shoulders by tradition,"[64] encourages Muslims to adhere to exegetical practices designed to find out how texts "were read when they were new" (Jackson 1989, 3). Hence we have the Muslim emphasis on tradition, especially in exegesis. Lately, however, Muslim scholars have begun querying the methods used to read the Qur'ān, the *Tafsīr* these methods have generated, and the processes by which Muslim tradition itself was constructed, opening the way for new scholarship on, and readings of, the Qur'ān (Mir 1986; Rahman 1965, 1980; Wadud 1999). My work is situated within these

new revisions of Muslim tradition and attempts to synthesize the old with the new. My work remains traditional in its view of the Qur'ān as an egalitarian text, a view I share with some Muslim exegetes of the classical period and certainly with many Muslims today. It also is traditional in that I read the Qur'ān in terms of its own "intrinsic sense" and truth claims. However, my work is new in that I apply new insights to read the Qur'ān on issues that exegetes have not examined (its position on patriarchy and sexual equality as we define them today). Thus, the way in which I frame the reading itself is novel from the perspective of Muslim tradition. And, of course, what is new is the temporality of the site from which I read the Qur'ān.

Were I not reading the Qur'ān, I would not need to defend, in this heyday of postmodernism, the newness of the insights that I apply to read it, or the reading itself. Yet, contemporary readings of the Qur'ān, especially liberatory ones, run the risk of being dismissed a priori because of the belief (shared by conservative Muslims, many non-Muslims, feminists, and unreconstructed Orientalists) that the Qur'ān's meanings have been fixed once and for all as immutably patriarchal and that one cannot develop a new way of reading it that incorporates theories and insights that have matured twelve or so centuries after its own advent. However, applying new insights to read the Qur'ān is both unavoidable and justified. It is unavoidable because one always reads in and from the present; it thus is impossible not to bring to one's reading sensibilities shaped by existing ideas, debates, concerns, and anxieties. Indeed, if we are to read before the text (recontextualize it for each new generation of Muslims), we *must* bring new insights to our reading. Interpreting the Qur'ān in light of new insights is also legitimate inasmuch as Islam is not bound by space, time, or context; it should thus be possible to ask if, and how, the Qur'ān's teachings address or accommodate ideas we find to be true or compelling today. Even if we do not agree with these ideas, we need to take them seriously if we wish to argue against them. This is another way of saying that dissent, to be meaningful, must contend seriously with the discursive and moral-ethical frameworks it seeks to challenge in order to demonstrate its own value. That is partly what has prompted my own engagement with Western/feminist theories, many of which serve as helpful points of departure, that is, as "a starting point and an act of divergence, of moving away" [65] for my work. However, while I draw on both Western and Muslim theories to make my argument, I do not pretend that it is possible, or even desirable, to attempt a synthesis between Qur'ānic and Western epistemology.

v. Plan of the Book

This book consists of two parts, each of which engages a different problematic; it therefore lends itself to a nonlinear reading. Those new to the subject might benefit from reading from front to back; those more familiar with the subject might want to begin with Part II.

Part I consists of Chapters 2 and 3, which together explain the nature of texts, textualities, and inter/extratextuality in Muslim religious discourse. In Chapter 2 I discuss the primary religious texts of Islam, the relationship between specific interpretive practices (method) and specific readings of the Qur'ān (meaning), and different conceptualizations of the relationship between texts, time, and method. In particular, I focus on differing views of sacred and secular time and explain how these shape our understanding of the Qur'ān's teachings, taking as an example conservative exegesis of the verses on "the veil."

In Chapter 3 I extend my exploration of textualities to an analysis of the relationship within and between texts (intertextuality) on the one hand, and the role of extratextual contexts (the state, law, and tradition) in shaping Muslim religious discourse, on the other. Here I consider how definitions of the canon, and of knowledge itself, shaped Qur'ānic exegesis. I also examine the roles of the state and of interpretive communities in the early stages of Muslim history in influencing the processes by which method, meaning, and memory were constructed. In this context, I focus in particular on how exegetical communities came to link their own commentarial practices to those ascribed to the Prophet and, in time, to elevate their commentaries over revelation itself, a method that has put a closure on how Muslims can "legitimately" read the Qur'ān today. Inasmuch as this method displaces Divine Discourse, negates the principle of scriptural polysemy, inhibits the development of new interpretive paradigms, and closes off the Qur'ān to new communities of readers (especially women), I question its sacralization as "Islamic."

Part II comprises Chapters 4 through 6. In Chapter 4, I examine the nature of Divine Self-Disclosure in the Qur'ān, since sexual hierarchies and theories of father/husband rule in religious patriarchies derive from representations of God as Father/male. My aim is to show that characterizations of Islam as a religion of the Father/fathers are misguided inasmuch as they ignore the Qur'ān's unyielding rejection of the patriarchal imaginary of God-the-Father and the prophets-as-fathers, as well as its sustained

critique of the history of rule by fathers. I illustrate this claim by rereading the Qur'ānic narratives of the prophets Abraham and Muhammad, which I interpret as dis-placing father/male rule in favor of God's Rule and Sovereignty.

Chapter 5 analyzes the Qur'ān's approach to sex/gender and sexuality and argues that while the Qur'ān recognizes biological (sexual) *differences,* it does not espouse a view of sex/gender *differentiation,* or gender dualisms. That is, the Qur'ān does not endow sex (biology), or difference itself, with symbolic meaning. As such, it is difficult to derive a theory of gender, much less of gender inequality, from its teachings. To the contrary, the Qur'ān establishes the principle of the ontic equality of the sexes and it does so in a manner that is distinctive from both the one-sex and the two-sex models on which Western patriarchal thought draws. My reading shows that not only do the Qur'ān's teachings have nothing in common with either model but also that the Qur'ān treats issues of sexual sameness and difference in a totally different way than the two models do. I end by discussing the Qur'ān's attitude to sexuality and show that it does not distinguish between men and women based on their sexual identities. In fact, I argue that the Qur'ān assumes that men and women have similar sexual natures and needs and that its precepts about sexual modesty and morality apply equally to both.

This argument extends into my analysis, in Chapter 6, of the family in the Qur'ān. Here I consider its position on mothers and fathers and on wives and husbands, and I distinguish it from both (Western) patriarchal and feminist thought. Among other things, I demonstrate that the Qur'ān's view of mothers and fathers and its definition of parental responsibilities is completely at odds with patriarchal theories. Similarly, its definition of spousal relationships differs markedly from their conceptualization in and by patriarchies inasmuch as it confirms the principle of the equality, equivalence, sameness, or similarity (depending on the context) of the spouses, notwithstanding specific verses on polygyny, divorce, and "wife beating." In sum, these chapters aim to emphasize those aspects of the Qur'ān's teachings that are conducive to theorizing sexual equality. I feel this is important to do in view of the fact that Muslim women today find it hard to struggle for equality from within an Islamic framework because of the assumption that equality is a Western, not an Islamic, value.

I end this work by means of a postscript in which I consider whether texts are responsible for their own (mis)reading; that is, contrary to what I have

argued, are patriarchal readings of the Qur'ān a function of the text itself? This is my way of reflecting on the appropriateness of my entire project.

Since each chapter employs concepts specific to the argument I make in it, I explain the concepts in the relevant chapters. This necessarily places on readers the burden of patience and a willingness to read an argument in its entirety before evaluating it.

Part I

They change the words
From their (right) places
And forget a good part
Of the Message that was
Sent them

   The Qur'ān (5:14)

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Texts and Textualities
The Qur'ān, *Tafsīr,* and *Ahādith*

To understand how Muslims produce religious meaning, and Qur'ānic exegesis in particular, we need to know something about the primary religious texts of Islam, how they have been read, and their relationships both to one another and to social, legal, and state practices as these developed during the first few centuries of Islam, before the door of *Ijtihād,* or critical hermeneutics, was considered closed[1] in the fourth/tenth century.[2] I begin therefore by examining the nature of texts, textualities, and inter- and extra-textuality in Muslim religious discourse. By texts I mean "any discourse fixed by writing";[3] by textualities, how a text is read (modes of reading);[4] by intertextuality, the internal relationships of texts to one another;[5] and by extratextuality, the contexts of reading.

In my discussion I aim, first, to identify the methodology Muslims have traditionally used to read the Qur'ān. I then show how that methodology leads to confusing the Qur'ān with the secondary religious texts and to marginalizing it in Muslim religious discourse in spite of its unique status as Islam's Scripture. Second, in my analysis of textualities, I examine two conceptualizations of the relationship between Divine Speech and time, the conservative and the critical, and their implications for Qur'ānic exegesis, taking as an example conservative *Tafsīr* of the verses on "the veil." Finally, I give an overview of some historical trends in the formation of religious knowledge, method, and meaning, to highlight the role of the state and interpretive communities in these processes. In this chapter, I examine the nature of texts (Section I) and textualities (Section II), and in the next chapter, intertextuality and the extratextual contexts of knowledge and canon formation.

1. Texts

At the heart of each of the three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, is a sacred text, or a set of texts, that its adherents regard as (the embodiment of) Divine Discourse. In Islam, this text is the Qur'ān. Access to its teachings is, however, mediated by other religious (and literary)[6] texts, specifically, *Tafsīr* (exegesis), and the *Aḥādith* (narratives of the Prophet's life and praxis, or *Sunnah*). Access to the Qur'ān's teachings also is mediated by customary, state, and legal practices, which is why we need to know the extratextual contexts in which Muslims have read the Qur'ān. Figure 1 shows the fields of inter- and extratextuality in Muslim religious discourse.[7]

The Qur'ān

For Muslims, the Qur'ān is both the source of Truth and the means of realizing it in action;[8] it is the "quintessential source and language of the faith."[9] Muslims treat the Qur'ān as "the methodology of ascent to God" (Taha 1987, 148), but it is not a "*mere* devotional or personal pietistic text" (Rahman 1982, 2; his emphasis). It has had "a practical and political application" from the time of its revelation, since its teachings are concerned with "socioeconomic justice and essential egalitarianism" and are "undoubtedly *for action in this world*" (19, 14; his emphasis).

The Qur'ān not only provides a "unifying framework"[10] for Muslim praxis; it is also the source[11] of classical Muslim law (the *Sharī'ah*), viewed as the "most decisive expression of Islamic thinking [and the] essential nucleus of Islam in general."[12] The Qur'ān's importance for women is magnified by the fact that Muslims believe that the legalization of sexual inequality found in the *Sharī'ah* is in conformity with the Qur'ān's teachings even though the *Sharī'ah* departs from these teachings in significant ways (see Chapter 3).

Revealed through divine inspiration to the Prophet Muhammad over a 23-year period in the seventh century C.E. in Arabia, first in the city of Mecca and then in Madina,[13] the Qur'ān is the text of the revelation in its original form; hence, it is inimitable. It has 114 *Sūrahs* (chapters), each consisting of several Āyāt (s. Āyah; verses, or "Signs" of God). In the text, the Sūrahs are generally arranged by length, with the longest first.[14] Although this arrangement "does not reflect either chronological or rational, formal criteria," argues Mohammed Arkoun (1994, 38), it "conceals a profound semiotic order and points up the need to distinguish the types of discourses utilized in the
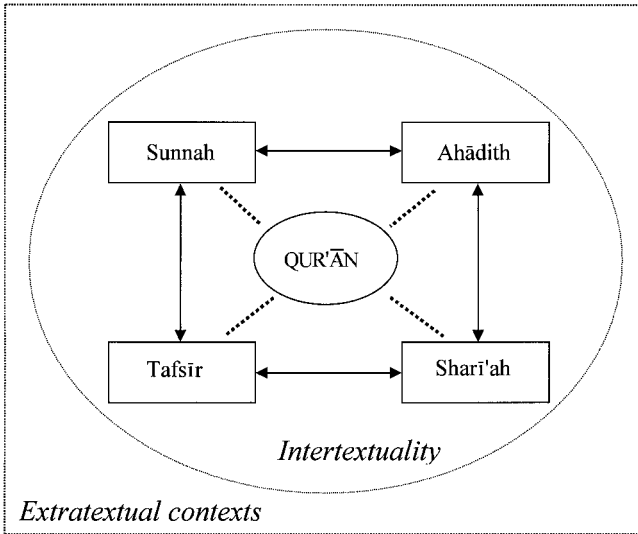
Figure 1

Quran," of which he discerns five. In the Prophet's lifetime, the Qur'ān was memorized by his Companions and had not been compiled in the form of a book at the time of his death in A.D. 632., a *Mushaf,* or official recension, being completed only under Uthman.[15]

Although the Qur'ān refers to itself as the fairest Divine Discourse sent down as a Book,[16] it also clarifies that the real, or archetypal, Qur'ān remains with God, thus rendering problematic, according to Arkoun (1994, 36), the confusion of the *Mushaf* with Divine Speech and the Archetypal Qur'ān.[17] Due to this confusion, he says, the "written Quran . . . has become identified with the Quranic discourse or the Quran as it was recited, which is itself the direct emanation of the Archetype of the Book." It is the omnipresence of the *Mushaf,* continues Arkoun, that "has sanctified the written word in the collective consciousness, which in turn has been an effective instrument of power."

As Divine Discourse,[18] the Qur'ān is inimitable, inviolate, inerrant, and incontrovertible; however, our understanding of it is not, which is why Muslim theology distinguishes between "divine speech and its earthly realization" (van Ess 1996, 189). Figure 2 conveys some sense of this relationship.[19] This distinction, which emerged from the doctrine of the uncreatedness of God's Speech, recognizes not only the limitations of human

Divine Discourse

The Prophet's mind

Oral recitation

Written version

Translation →

Individual's present
interpretation and application

PROCESS OF REVELATION

PROCESS OF EXEGESIS

Sociohistorical context
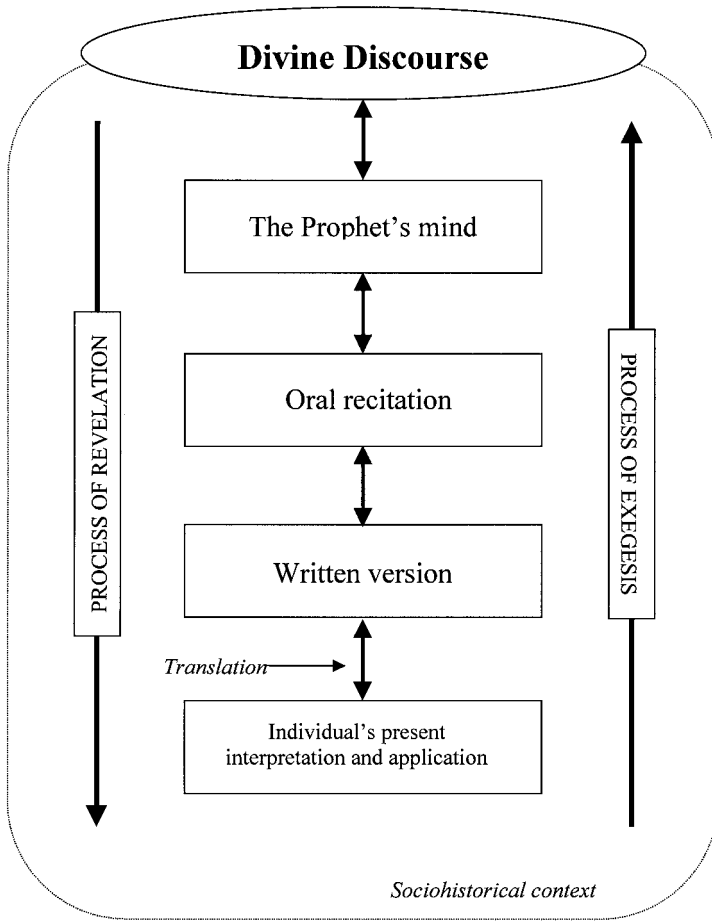
Figure 2

understanding, but also the interpretive nature of "sacred writings" (Holm, 1994). It thus entertains the possibility that interpreting God's Words means adapting "in varying degrees, [God's] message" (Abu Layla 1992, 229). As Talal Asad (1993, 236) puts it, "Divine texts may be unalterable but the ingenuities of human interpretation are endless." It is the interpretive process, both imprecise and incomplete, that is open to critique and historicization, not revelation itself. Thus, while Muslims understand revelation within history, insofar as they regard it to be sacred and true, they consider it beyond historicization. Although in some of its formulations this view raises com-

plications for exegesis (see Section II), it is not necessarily contradictory. As theorists argue in other contexts, "in so far as truth is apprehended by persons, it is apprehended within history; yet in so far as it is true, it transcends history" (Smith 1981, 190). As such, belief "in the suprahistoricity of the Quran . . . does not preclude its role as a historical scripture" (Esack 1993, 126). In fact, "[the Qur'ānic] phrase 'every term has a book' . . . so controversial in both traditional and modern theology," argues Abdelwahab Bouhdiba (1985, 3), "certainly allows a historicizing understanding of the Word of God." Yet Muslim tradition, as he points out, firmly rejects this idea.

Like other texts, the Qur'ān also is open to variant readings since each Āyah can be interpreted differently. In fact, even the single phrase *bismillah ar-rahman ar-rahim* that occurs at the beginning of every Sūrah except one has been rendered in six different ways by six exegetes (Haq 1989). The Prophet's Companions also are said to have had differences in understanding of some Āyāt, a fact the Prophet is reputed to have known about (Rahman 1982, 144). Not only does "[c]ollective human hearing [impose] its own necessities of awareness and interpretation"[20] on revelation, but as Paul Ricoeur (1981, 109) says of texts in general, "Plurivocity is typical of the text considered as a whole." Hence, a "key hypothesis of hermeneutical philosophy is that interpretation is an open process which no single vision can conclude" (212). In spite of prior exegetical successes, then, interpretive communities assume by their very practice that "additional discernment is always possible; the activity of discerning the divine discourse is forever *incomplete*" (Wolterstorff 1995, 185; his emphasis).

One reason that a primary sacred text like the Qur'ān cannot be expected "to deliver a *single* authoritative usage"[21] is the difficulty of reading it conclusively. Conclusive readings are made difficult by the fact that there are some Āyāt whose meaning is clear (as noted earlier, the Qur'ān itself refers to its clear Āyāt and its allegorical Āyāt[22]), some whose meaning has been settled but on which persons may hesitate, and some on which there is no consensus.[23] Interpretive differences also reflect the fact that a text "can be read differently according to the different conditioning and cultures of authors and readers, not to mention differences in education, prejudice and a vast variety of other areas" (Netton 1996, 132). It is also difficult to generate a conclusive reading because of the "multiplicity and subjectivity of shades of meanings in the original Arabic text" (Taha 1987, 28). (This makes it even more crucial to ask why exegesis relating to women's rights is considered

immutable.) Multiplicity and subjectivity of meanings are a function of the presence in Arabic of natural and artificial homographs (words and phrases with many meanings), as well as of the conflicting etymology of many words that have roots that can mean opposite things. When to such linguistic complexities is added the fact that some Āyāt are said to have abrogated others (the theory of *naskh*),[24] it should not be difficult to see why there are variant readings of the Qur'ān. Polyvalent readings are not unique to the Qur'ān, of course, and a commitment to polysemy, which "simply states that the literal meaning never exhausts scripture as a source,"[25] is common to all religious traditions.

Many Western theorists ascribe variant readings of the Qur'ān to the need to accommodate the "practical needs of the believers" (Versteegh 1993, 65), copyists' errors, or attempts by exegetes to "correct" the Qur'ān's language (al-Suyuti in Haddad 1992, 27). To Muslims, however, the doctrine of the Qur'ān's inviolability rules out the possibility that it was altered, or is alterable. Instead, they view variant readings as being of "exegetical, rather than textual, origin" (al-Suyuti in Brockett 1988, 31), that is, they are "alternative ways of reading the text" (Versteegh, 79). Thus, Muslims point to the well-known fact that before the Qur'ān was written down, "Quran reciters and scholars differed substantially in their readings of certain words, phrases, and even verses" (Ayoub 1984, 2).

If it is difficult to "fix" the Qur'ān's meanings in Arabic, it is even harder to fix them in its translations, which is why many Muslims generally view "the Quran translated [as] not however the Quran" (Forward 1994, 105). As Ian Netton (1996, 5; his emphasis) warns in this context, there is a "danger, inherent in every translation, of extrapolating from a *single* surface 'meaning'" that ignores the text's semiotic polyvalence. Moreover, as Toshihiko Izutsu (1964, 12) has shown, concepts and words in the Qur'ān "are closely interdependent and derive their concrete meanings [from the] conceptual system" at work in it; they cannot therefore be "taken separately and considered in themselves apart from the general structure, or Gestalt . . . into which they have been integrated." Even preexisting key words, he says, acquired very different connotations when employed in the Islamic semantic and conceptual systems, and it is difficult to reflect these systems in translations because of the inability of even "apparently nearest equivalents [to do] full justice to the original words" (Izutsu 1959, 20). As an example, Izutsu (1964, 14) takes the key word Allah, the name of one of the gods in *Jāhilī* (pre-Islamic) society, and shows how, by pronouncing Allah to be supreme God

not in a hierarchy but *absolutely* supreme and unique, and other gods false, the Islamic system effected a "drastic and radical change of the whole conceptual system" of the Arabs, thereby also profoundly affecting "the whole structure of the vision of the universe" (15).

If it is difficult to find equivalents for original words, interpreting them "in a variety of different ways" can obscure the "structural unity of individual surahs and of the Quran as a whole" (Robinson 1996, 4). This is because the Qur'ān's unity is a function not only of a specific conceptual system, but also of an organic relationship between "structure, sound and meaning," as Neal Robinson (4) argues. To the extent that it is assonance and rhyme that give Sūrahs part of their meaning, and to the extent that both are lost in translations, so too are aspects of meaning itself.

Yet, the fact that "[no reading] of the Quran can be absolutely monolithic" or conclusive should not be cause for concern, argues Rahman (1982, 144). In fact, insisting on "absolute uniformity of interpretation is neither possible nor desirable," since it is in its ability to yield new meanings to new generations of Muslims that the Qur'ān remains a living and universal force. Not only have variant readings enriched our understanding of its teachings, but they also reveal tolerant and democratic tendencies in Muslim religious discourse that open up a pluralism of meanings. (If this democratic promise remains unfulfilled due largely to the repressive practices of states, it must not lead us to ignore the liberatory, even subversive, potential of textual pluralism itself.)

A pluralism of readings, the multiplicity of interpretive interests, and the Qur'ān's own polysemy do not mean, however, that the Qur'ān itself is variant. What changes, says Wadud (1999, 5), is not the Qur'ān, but "the capacity and particularity of the understanding and reflection of the principles of the text within a community of people." This is why in Islam, hermeneutics aspires not to erase the distinction between the Qur'ān and its exegesis but to bridge it ever more scrupulously.

It is on the basis of this distinction that Muslims regard the Qur'ān as the "primary arbiter" of its own meanings and also criticize the use of "extra-Quranic sources" for interpreting it, which, they believe, need "to be subjected to critical scrutiny" (Mir 1993, 218). Such an inquiry is crucial for women since even though exegeses and translations of the Qur'ān by men are not free of biases, the misogyny that has found a niche in Islam derives mostly from extra-Qur'ānic sources, notably the *Tafsīr* and *Ahādith,* both of which are used to interpret the Qur'ān.

Tafsīr

The necessity for exegesis arose because of the Qur'ān's polysemy and the lack of transparency of some Āyāt. It also arose because of the need to govern—if not strictly in consonance with the Qur'ān's principles, then at least formally in the name of Islam—the increasingly multicultural communities drawn into its fold following its expansion outward from Arabia after the Prophet's death. The modes of exegesis thus reflected not only the "training, religious affiliation, and interest" of scholars and jurists (Ayoub 1984, 3) but also the political goals and ambitions of the early Muslim states, especially the Umayyad and Abbasid (see Chapter 3).

Tafsīr means "general elucidation of a verse with the view to discovering its exoteric meaning and application" and is to be distinguished from *Ta'wīl,* an allegorical-symbolic explanation of "the general as well as particular meanings of the words of the Quran" (Ayoub 1984, 21), a mode of interpretation most favored by the sufis. *Ta'wīl* assumes that the Qur'ān has at least two levels of meaning: an apparent meaning (*zāhir*) and an interior truth (*bātin*) (Taha 1987, 147). Indeed, according to Taha, "the whole of the Quran is of dual meanings." Muslims also distinguish between *Tafsīr ma'thūr* (interpretation in accordance with *Ahādith* and *Sunnah*), and *Tafsīr bi al-ra'y* (interpretation by means of critical reasoning). In all its forms, however, *Tafsīr* remains an "abstract, theoretical, intellectual" and essentially literary activity (Burton 1993, 269), which is based in and also enables "polyvalent" readings of the Qur'ān (Calder 1993).

Initially, argues Mahmoud Ayoub (1984, 3), *Tafsīr* began "as an oral tradition of hadith transmission" founded on the opinions of exegetes. Varying opinions acquired legitimacy, he says, because of the "need to make the Quran relevant to every time and situation" (24). However, while the need to deal with diverse social contexts facilitated *Tafsīr,* in time, these social contexts came to shape its content; eventually, too, from being viewed as ancillary to the Qur'ān and as specific to a particular historical context, *Tafsīr* came to be confused with the Qur'ān and thus also to be given a suprahistorical status. As John Burton (1977, 271) argues, over time, "ancient *tafsir* became itself part of that past actuality now attached to the contents of the Quran, with the consequence that [it] came to be regarded as beyond question or doubt," thereby bestowing on it "a creative license to participate in the building of the sacred law [*Sharī'ah*] of Islam."

As an interpretive activity, *Tafsīr* reflects not only the training, concerns,

and religious affiliations of the exegetes, but also their "knowledge . . . skills, sensitivity, imagination, even humour [as well as] their literary and sectarian loyalties," all of which also influenced the relationship between *Tafsīr* and the study of Arabic and disciplines like "law, theology and prophetic narrative" (Calder 1993, 105–106). These disciplines, notes Wadud (1999, xx), generated a literature that "began to play a role so central in Islamic scholarship that it over-shadowed the text upon which it was originally based." Not surprisingly, *Tafsīr* also became the peg on which "sectarian and scholastic theologians were able to hang their own doctrines" (Poonawala 1993, 235).

The confusion of the Qur'ān with its *Tafsīr* dates from the classical period when exegetes, naturally being unaware of "modern textual linguistics and interpretive theory" (Arkoun 1994, 41), assumed a correspondence between the two. For instance, al-Tabari could "naively introduce each of his commentaries with the formula 'God says . . .' postulating implicitly the perfect equation of exegesis with the intended meaning and, of course, with the semantic content of the words in each verse." As a result, exegesis came to be confused with "the contents of the *mushaf,* that is to say, with the 'Quran' understood as that space where the levels distinguished in Figure [3] come together" (37) (see Figure 3).

According to Arkoun, by a sequence of confusions that are peculiar to both the religious imaginary and the political realm that, he points out, is inseparable from it, "the values and irreducible functions characteristic of (1) the Archetype of the Book, (2) Qur'ānic discourse, (3) the Closed Offi-
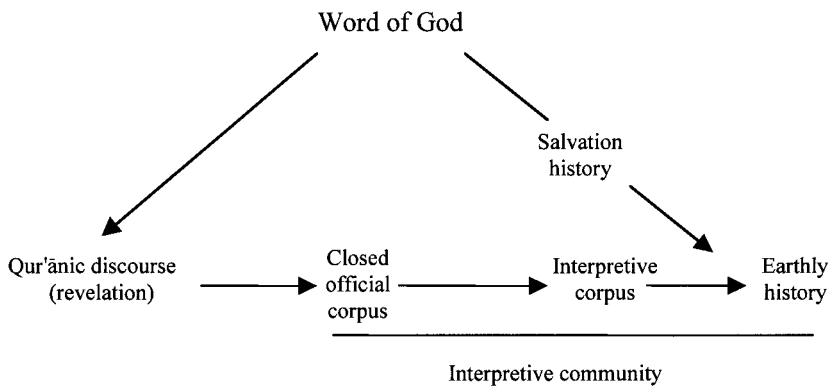
(Reproduced from Arkoun, 1994:38)

Figure 3

cial Corpus and (4) the body of interpretative work were projected into the *mushaf*." The Qur'ān as *Mushaf* thus became enmeshed in a double confusion: with Divine Discourse on the one hand and with its own *Tafsīr* on the other, creating enduring problems for how we understand its teachings.

Arguably, however, these confusions resulted not only from the factors Arkoun identifies but also from the very nature of intertextuality, that is, from the ability of the signifying process to pass from one sign system to another; in Julia Kristeva's words, the "transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) onto another" (in Netton 1996, 116). This transposition makes reading itself an intertextual exercise, especially of scriptures that describe "a world in which one does not already live." As such, getting a sense of "a strange text, of one that is other than one's own narrative requires intertextual interpretation" (Tilley 1995, 103). That such transpositions between the Qur'ān and its exegesis were at work is confirmed by "the number of occasions on which what is signalled as Quranic material diverges from the text of the Quran in remarkable and interesting ways" (Hawting 1993, 260). Among the themes introduced (partly by Jewish and Christian converts to Islam) into Qur'ānic material that diverge from its teachings is the name "Eve" for Adam's spouse, the assertion that she was created from his rib, and the claim that she brought about the Fall, for which all women were punished by painful childbirth and menstruation. The Muslim denials of "female rationality and female moral responsibility" also derives from "Bible-related traditions" (Stowasser 1994, 28, 41), as do Muslim depictions of such women figures in the Qur'ān as the Queen of Sheba [26] and Potiphar's wife, known by the popular name of Zuleikha.[27]

Conversely, transpositions from the Qur'ān to other texts are suggested by the fact that the status reserved for the Qur'ān was extended not only to its *Tafsīr,* the *Ahādith,* and the Prophet's *Sunnah,* but eventually also to Muslim customary practices that were absorbed into narratives about the Prophet's *Sunnah* (see Chapter 3). As a result, problems arose as early as "the second century of Islam," when the *Ahādith* (a source of *Tafsīr*), which "had come to be regarded as of equal authority with the [Qur'ān], contradicted some of its provisions."[28] Al-Shafi, an influential Arab jurist and founder of one of the four legal schools in Sunni Islam, resolved these tensions by decreeing in favor not of the Qur'ān, but of the *Ahādith,* and thus of the *Tafsīr.* He did this by making *Ijmā'* (consensus, in which the *Ahādith* were said to be based), into a source of *Sharī'ah* and interpretive tradition on the grounds that it manifested God's Will. Narratives of the Prophet's life

and praxis, reconstructed centuries after his death, thus not only came to provide conceptual access to the Qur'ān's teachings—as they well might—but to be privileged over the Qur'ān itself. And while al-Shafi was able to establish *Ijmā'* as a source of law and tradition, he came to his own ruling by means not of consensus but of independent reasoning (*Ijtihād*), against which he then decreed in the interest of protecting religious knowledge in the future.[29]

By canonizing the *Ijmā'* of the classical/medieval period, al-Shafi's ruling also canonized the *Tafsīr* (and religious knowledge) produced during this era. Rethinking was deemed innovation, or *bid'a,* and henceforth discouraged by tradition, binding Muslims to the works of about half a dozen men, which, in spite of their individual merits, were produced during an era known for its misogyny. More damaging, the doctrine of consensus also legitimized the tendency in religious discourse to elevate some texts (the *Tafsīr, Ahādith*) over others (the Qur'ān), as well as consensus (*Ijmā'*) over revelation and critical reasoning (*Ijtihād*). Since the means by which these reversals were brought about were declared closed to further inquiry,[30] the choices and sensibilities of medieval jurists, scholars, and exegetes became institutionalized in ways that proved damaging to the pluralism and egalitarianism of the Qur'ān's teachings, as also of Muslim tradition. It therefore becomes important to ask why Muslims continue to believe that communal harmony and unity depend on a set of events and choices that have been long overtaken by time and that not only discourage new readings of the Qur'ān but also undercut the doctrine of its plurivocity, a cardinal tenet of Muslim theology from the earliest days of Islam.

Classical *Tafsīr,* says Hasan Hanafi (1996, 196), did more to provide insights into its own social, historical, and linguistic contexts than it did into the Qur'ān. As he points out, most commentaries fail to treat the Qur'ān as a textual unity or thematically, or they are longitudinal in nature and focus on "accumulating meanings" rather than on developing a holistic exegesis. The inconsistency of the *Tafsīr* is a drawback, as is its sheer size—there are not only commentaries on the Qur'ān but also commentaries on the commentaries that engage each other more than they do the Qur'ān, thereby making excessive demands on readers. Finally, argues Hanafi, not only does classical *Tafsīr* confuse information with knowledge, but it also is distanced "from the needs of the soul and of present-day society." However, in spite of their awareness of such problems, Muslims have made few attempts to clarify the lineage of *Tafsīr,* the processes of its diversification, or the frame-

work within which Islamic reason was exercised, which are all crucial for explaining "how the theological, historical, and linguistic postulates of this reasoning have led to confusion about levels of signification in the Quran" (Arkoun 1994, 41).

Part of the reason for the Muslim reluctance to critique classical *Tafsīr* is its formidable hold on their consciousness. Muslims view it as an integral element of the process by which a "tradition [was] formed and then embedded in sacred history and religious writing."[31] Therefore, for Muslims, classical *Tafsīr* is not only a commentary on the Qur'ān, it also is a historical record of the circumstances in which a community, or *ummah,* and a state claiming to have lawful authority over it, emerged and developed. Communal identities are thus inextricably bound up with the role of *Tafsīr* in reconstructing history in ways that allow Muslims to experience psychically the unity they may lack at an existential level.[32]

The intertextual nature of knowledge construction also means that opening up the *Tafsīr* to inquiry will mean having to open up to similar critique reconstructions of the Prophet's *Sunnah* (praxis) by the *Ahādith,* on which classical *Tafsīr* relies for its authority. And opening up the *Ahādith* is risky because its record of the Prophet's *Sunnah* usually is confused with his real *Sunnah,* a confusion that leads to problems in exegesis as well.[33]

Ahādith

The word *hadīth* (pl. *Ahādith*), meaning tale or communication, customarily refers to a narrative of the Prophet's life and practices (*Sunnah*). These records began to be compiled over a century after his death and were not completed until three hundred or more years later. About six works are taken as canonical by various Muslim sects and, as a corpus, they are a "part of the official history of Islam and of the literature that established the normative practices of Islamic society" (Ahmed 1992, 47).

Structurally, a *hadīth* has two parts: the *silsilah,* or chain of narrators, a chain being called a *sanad* (pl. *isnād*), and a *matn,* or narrative. *Ahādith* are classified according to the quality of the *isnād* (narrators) into three groups: (1) *Sahīh,* reliable, due to the scrupulousness of their transmitters and the historical authenticity of their content; (2) *Hasan,* less reliable, due to the "forgetfulness" of some of the narrators; and (3) *Da'īf,* or weak, which do not fulfill either of the criteria of integrity of the narrators or the authenticity of the content. *Ahādith* also are classified quantitatively, based on the number of *isnād,* into two groups: (1) *Mutawātir,* those that have so many

isnād that fabrication is considered inconceivable, hence, their postulated authenticity. Such *Ahādith,* however, are few and there are hardly any on legal issues; and (2) *Ahad,* those that have only one or a few *isnād.* Finally, *Ahādith* are divided into three categories on the basis of their *matn:* those that record the Prophet's *Sunnah ʿamalīya,* or praxis; those that recount his *Sunnah qawlīyah,* or sayings on ethical issues; and those that record his *Sunnah al-taqrīrīyah,* or tacit approval of deeds he reputedly knew about.[34]

Hadīth compilation most clearly demonstrates the relationship between texts (*Ahādith*) and their extratextual contexts (*Sunnah,* which provides their content and context). While *hadīth* is an oral report derived from, or ascribed to, the Prophet, the *Sunnah* is a compendium of practical religious or legal rules regardless of "whether or not there exists an oral tradition for it" (Goldziher 1971, 24). As such, a norm contained in a *hadīth* is regarded as a *Sunnah,* but a *Sunnah* may not have a corresponding *hadīth.* That is, *Sunnah* is practice, and *hadīth* theory; knowledge of both is rooted in tradition, hence the power of tradition. While theorists are unclear about the oldest original materials, they view most of the collection as resulting from "the religious, historical and social development of Islam during the first two centuries" (19). This is why they consider the *Ahādith* "a mirror in which the growth and development of Islam as a way of life and of the larger Islamic community are most truly reflected" (Esposito 1982, 116).

Some of the same circumstances that occasioned the *Tafsīr* also generated the *Ahādith,* and in this area, too, the religious and political needs of believers were intertwined. On the one hand, the *Ahādith* served an irreducibly religious function in allowing for the interpretation and historicization of the Qur'ān (Khalidi 1994). It was also the *Ahādith* that gave some Qur'ānic teachings specificity (e.g., the number and content of daily prayers). The *Ahādith* also reflected a genuine desire to learn about the life of the Prophet (which the Qur'ān defines as exemplary) and the methods and principles of reasoning he employed, so as to be able to follow his example more closely, especially after his death. In fact, the further the Prophet was distanced in real time from Muslims, the more they seem to have wanted to draw him closer in narrative time through the medium of the *Ahādith.*

At the same time, the *Ahādith* also performed a political function in the governing of lands with differing structures and conditions for which the Qur'ān offered no precedents.[35] For instance, the Qur'ān does not specify the nature of institutions for governance,[36] though it challenges modes of rule based on kinship and lineage (the two most common forms of gov-

ernance to which Muslims eventually reverted after the Prophet's death). Nor is there a church structure or a priestly class in Islam. Thus jurists, exegetes, and political rulers came to decide how best to govern people in keeping with their understanding of Islam. Since the Prophet's words "carried an ontological guarantee" (Arkoun 1994: 45), recourse to them through the *Ahādith* became critical both to debates about governance and to settling competing historical and legal claims. Competition for the "control of the tradition, itself a conditioning factor for the legitimacy of caliphal authority" (45) thus became imminent, and its objective was leadership of the community. (It is this struggle that explains variations in works that are considered canonical by different Muslim sects, says Arkoun.) The very political schisms that gave rise to conflicts, then, also were conducive for the growth of the *Ahādith,* conceived of as a way to "stabilize a social structure consisting of the most diverse elements" (Walther 1981, 23).

Significantly, scholars and political rulers tried to achieve this goal not by imposing a uniform or monolithic reading of Islam or the Prophet's *Sunnah* on the people, but by incorporating into the rubric of Islam existing ideas, discourses, and practices, including some that were in tension with and even contradicted the Qur'ān's teachings. The *Ahādith* and *Tafsīr* made possible the textual and religious eclecticism necessary for accommodating cultural pluralism, and when conflicts arose between their authority and that of the Qur'ān, scholars like al-Shafi resolved them in favor of the *Ahādith* and *Tafsīr.* An outcome of this strategy, so far as women are concerned, was that interpretations of the Qur'ān's "women parables" were formulated in keeping "with existing social norms and values," as Barbara Stowasser (1994, 23) has shown. As she says, Muslim "scholars' consensus, of need, embraced and canonized preexisting traditions in scripturalist language." Even the *Sharī'ah* was formulated not by adhering strictly to the Qur'ān, or by imposing a uniform legal code on diverse cultures, but by absorbing into the principles of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) doctrines on which there was communal accord but which were sometimes irreconcilable with the Qur'ān's precepts. In effect, compliance with Muslim rule was acquired *hegemonically;* that is, not so much through coercion and force as through reliance on consensus.[37]

If the liberality of this embrace of Others speaks to the openness and pluralism of Muslim tradition in its early years, it also disguises the fact that for women, this was a "repressive pluralism."[38] There already was a theological-legal paradigm in place based on the idea of sexual inequality,

and it was not very conducive to change. Indeed, women's position "in law and society formed part of the traditional structures and coherences that firmly underlay the medieval Muslim worldview and provided for its transregional solidarities" (Stowasser 1994, 7). The very pluralism of tradition worked against women's interests as "ideas and customs of the earlier civilization penetrated more deeply" into *Sharī'ah* "by being formulated as hadith" (von Grunebaum 1976, 25). Many of these ideas and customs, which were associated with Arab and Mediterranean culture as well as with Judaism and Christianity, embodied a deep-seated misogyny that became part of the Islamic discourses on women (Ahmed 1992). In particular, "Bible-related traditions, including their symbolic images of the female's defective nature, were seamlessly integrated into an Islamic framework" (Stowasser 1994, 23). Thus, it was the *Ahādith* that introduced into Islam images of women as "morally and religiously defective," "evil temptresses, the greatest *Fitna* [temptation] for men," "unclean over and above menstruation," "the larger part of the inhabitants of Hell, because of their unfaithfulness and ingratitude toward their husbands," and as having "weaker intellectual powers," therefore being unfit for political rule (32). Ironically, the legacy of the Prophet, a man renowned for his gentleness to women, was evoked by those who claimed to follow him most closely, the *Ahl-i-Sunnah* (followers of the Prophet's praxis), on behalf of themes that cannot be inferred either from the Qur'ān's teachings or from the Prophet's treatment of women (see Chapter 4).

It is not just the anti-woman content of the *Ahādith* that is troubling; it is also the fact that many misogynist *Ahādith* were introduced into the so-called "Official Corpus" in the fifth/eleventh century, a full hundred years *after* its alleged closure. Yet, it is these *Ahādith,* embodying the "prevalent medieval Islamic model of women as dangerous and destructive to political order" (Spellberg 1994, 143), that continue to shape present-day attitudes towards women. As Stowasser (1994, 6) argues, "Until fairly recently, modern [Muslim] conservatism continued to evoke the medieval theme of women's innate physical and mental deficiency as proof of the justice of [its] paradigm." The development of the *Ahādith* along misogynistic lines is also ironic in that, as Ahmed (1992, 73) points out, Islam is the only major living religion to include women's accounts in its central religious texts. Women's testimony also has been crucial to the correct reading of the Qur'ān, especially the testimony of 'Ayesha, the Prophet's wife, who is said to have contributed more *Ahādith* than his cousin and son-in-

law, Ali, the fourth Caliph. In fact, contends Mernissi (1996, 93), ‘Ayesha’s *Ahādith* transmission accounts for “15 percent of the bases of the Sharia.” One out of the six volumes compiled by Ibn Hanbal is ascribed to women. (Women’s participation in communal life also is manifest from the fact that the Prophet had over 1,500 women as disciples, according to Mernissi.) And, even though *Ahādith* transmission “had to do with the centrality of memory as the essential component in the process” (Spellberg, 57), many Muslims continue to view women’s memory as defective because of their misreading of one Āyah (see Wadud 1999 for an explanation of this Āyah on evidence).

Finally, it is ironic that even though there are only about six misogynistic *Ahādith* accepted as *Sahīh* (reliable) out of a collection of 70,000, it is these six that men trot out when they want to argue against sexual equality, while perversely ignoring dozens of positive *Ahādith.* Among the latter are *Ahādith* that emphasize women’s full humanity; counsel husbands to deal kindly and justly with their wives; confirm the right of women to acquire knowledge; elevate mothers over fathers; proclaim that women will be in heaven, ahead, even of the Prophet; record women’s attendance at prayers in the mosque during the Prophet’s lifetime, including an incident where a girl played in front of him as he led the prayer; affirm that many women (including women from the Prophet’s family), went unveiled in the later years of Islam; and record that the Prophet accepted the evidence of one woman over that of a man (Mernissi 1994; Siddique 1990). When Muslims do refer to these *Ahādith,* they do so to emphasize Islam’s egalitarianism, but they rarely question why the *Ahādith* have been erased so wholly from communal memory as to preclude the possibility of evolving a counterhegemonic discourse on sexual equality based on them.

The lack of importance attached to the positive *Ahādith* is, I believe, a function both of Muslim history and historical memory, in particular, of “the tendency of public” and religious discourse in Muslim states “to make some forms of experience readily available to consciousness while ignoring or suppressing others.”[39] Both functions derive in part from the way in which religious knowledge and political/state power were configured in Muslim societies from the earliest days of their history. Thus, while the *Tafsīr,* the *Ahādith,* and the *Sharī‘ah* have allowed states to legitimize their own practices, it is equally true that the state also influenced the development of the *Tafsīr, Ahādith,* and *Sharī‘ah* along conservative and patriarchal lines. Of the early stages of the relationship between state/political power and religious *‘Ilm* (knowledge), scholars note that when opponents of the Umay-

yads advanced the theory of resistance to rulers, it was "the pious theologians with their hadith" who removed "religious scruples" against rebellion by advocating the principle of obedience, even to corrupt rulers (Goldziher 1971, 93). The *Ahādith* also were used in the service of more "trivial purposes" such as altering the *Khutba* (the address at the Friday congregational prayer) so as to "divest it of its ancient democratic character" (49–50). Towards rather different political ends but in much the same way, exegetes also brought the *Ahādith* to bear on the Shii-Sunni conflict, with the Shii claiming that the Prophet backed Ali's claim to the caliphate and the Sunnis that he had condemned Ali's father to hell. As one Muslim scholar puts it,

> The vast flood of tradition soon formed a chaotic sea. Truth, error, fact and fable mingled together in an undistinguishable confusion. Every religious, social, and political system was defended when necessary, to please a Khalif or an Ameer [state ruler] to serve his purpose, by an appeal to some oral tradition. The name of Mohammad was abused to support all manner of lies and absurdities or to satisfy the passion, caprice, or arbitrary will of the despots. (Ali in Hassan 1999, 338)

Although the *Ahādith* "are closely linked with the political and social circumstances of the time and grew out of them" (Goldziher 1971, 121), this does not mean that state rulers and religious scholars during the early years welcomed the use of religion for political ends. The first four caliphs and some of the Prophet's Companions are said to have discouraged the prodigal reporting of *Ahādith* because they realized "the danger of contradictions and inconsistencies" (Junyboll 1969, 5). However, in spite of opposition, *Ahādith* were "eagerly invented, collected, and transmitted by the early Muslims, and later on the process developed into an academic discipline [with] thousands of people [being] engaged in it" (Bellamy 1979, 25). In view of the vast numbers of persons occupied in inventing traditions, by the time al-Bukhari (whose collection is regarded as *Sahīh*) began his compilation, he had "reputedly accumulated 600,000" *Ahādith* (Peters 1994, 222). Inevitably, "Every stream and counter-stream of thought in Islam [found] expression in the form of a hadith" (Goldziher, 126). Thus there is a *hadīth* on virtually every topic, even an anti-*hadīth hadīth*! Many "contain a very wide range of views, some of which are even contradictory" (Walther 1981, 22); many incorporate pre-Islamic (*Jāhilī*) concepts, reflected in the "conflicting utterances attributed to the Prophet or to his Companions" (Kister 1988, 3). Some exhibit traces not only of Jewish and Christian thought but

also of Greek, Zoroastrian, Sabian, and Indian as well, and many ascribe to the Prophet aphorisms that contradict the Qur'ān's teachings (al-Alousi 1985; Rahman 1965).

Eventually, *hadīth* compilers themselves reacted to forgeries by investigating the character of the narrators "on whom the claim of authenticity for each hadith was based" (Goldziher 1971, 134). They also began to focus on the inner consistency of the *isnād,* to see, for example, if it was chronologically possible for two narrators to have shared information with one another. While they did uncover many forgeries, they were able to exclude only some of the most egregious because of their view that if the *isnād* was sound, so too was the *matn.* As Goldziher (141) puts it, one could not say that "because the *matn* contains a logical or historical absurdity I doubt the correctness of the *isnad.*" As a result of focusing on the narrator's integrity rather than on the historical consistency of the narrative, critics let pass "even the loudest anachronisms provided that the *isnad* [was] correct." Moreover, since what was disparaged was not the invention of tradition, but invention for the wrong reasons, "communal sentiment differentiated between various grades in the ethical judgment of the invention of traditions accepting as bona fide those *Ahādith* that were invented 'for good ends' " (145, 147). Indeed, it was thought that any moral maxim could be ascribed to the Prophet, whatever its accuracy (Rahman 1965, 40). Thus, in spite of knowledge about "the existence of a great body of forged 'traditions,' hadith grew into a valid source or 'root' " of Muslim law (Levy 1962, 172).

The "canonical authority" of the *Ahādith,* including those of the *Sahīhs,* then, has less to do with the accuracy of their content (which has been subjected to criticism from the earliest times) than with "the unanimous collective consciousness of the Islamic community . . . which elevated these works to the heights which they have attained" (Goldziher 1971, 236). Scholars have explained "tendentiousness" in *Ahādith* with reference to various factors, including the aspiration of "the pious condemned to live in an age of social and moral decay . . . to locate precedents for their own desires . . . in a setting that would not be doubted or gainsaid" (von Grunebaum 1976, 156). They also have explained it in terms of the assumed desirability of investing new ideas with the Prophet's authority. However, no matter how commendable their intent, the *Ahādith* represent "not so much history-writing [as] history-making" (Rahman 1965, 47); or, as Denise Spellberg (1994, 14) says of *Tafsīr,* a "politically inspired reshaping of the past," in which the real and imaginary became fused. This is why many Muslims today favor under-

taking a critique of *Ahādith* as a way to remove "a big mental block [and to] promote fresh thinking about Islam." However, as they well recognize, the "greatest sensitivity surrounds the Hadith, although it is generally accepted that, except for the Quran, all else is liable to the corrupting hand of history" (Rahman 1982, 147).

In spite of resistance to such an exercise by conservatives, debates have emerged in states like Egypt and Pakistan about the grounds on which to rethink the *Ahādith.* One concern is the long time it took to transcribe them; that is, the objection has to do with the role of memory, even the famous memory of the Arabs, which, it is held, could not have transmitted "so much material for so long a time without making mistakes or suffering lapses." [40] Another concern has to do with the reliability of the narratives, as well as of narrators like Abu Huraira, the " 'Achilles' heel' of the tradition literature," who relayed most of the misogynistic *Ahādith,* and finally, the influence of *Isrā'īlīyāt,* or Jewish traditions, on many *Ahādith.* [41]

In spite of such problems, few reformists advocate the wholescale rejection of *Ahādith* since that would result also in abandoning the *Sunnah,* which believing Muslims would not want to do. Instead, scholars like Muhammad Abduh suggest ascribing only the Qur'ān and *"a small part of the sunna amaliya"* (the Prophet's actions) to the *Sunnah,* which means keeping only some *Ahādith.* [42] Similarly, Rahman (1965) wants to limit the *Ahādith* to the Prophet's *Sunnah* as it is understood by critical scholars; he has called for a "historical-critical" approach to the *Ahādith* that can bring out "their true *functional* significance in *historical context*" (78; his emphasis). Indeed, says Rahman (19), since "God speaks and the Prophet acts in . . . *a given historical context*" and since what gives Qur'ānic teachings their coherence "is the actual life of the Prophet and the milieu in which he moved," Muslims must study not just the *Ahādith,* but also revelation and the *Sunnah* historically (his emphasis). As he says, "If it is historically true, then it is *fraught with meaning for us now, and, indeed, for ever*" (Rahman, 177; his emphasis). Hence, by refusing to take an historical approach to the *Ahādith,* Muslims are ruling out this possibility and propagating a "thousand year-old sacred folly" instead (152). However, as some scholars argue, it is "always impossible to *think* the historicity of the Quran, of the hadith, of the Sharia, since one would be touching on the foundations of actual powers" (Arkoun in Watt 1988, 1; his emphasis). Not only would one be touching on the foundations of real powers, but one would also be opening up to question the framework within which "Islamic" reason was defined

and exercised historically. I make this point now by analyzing the nature of textualities in Islam.

ii. Textualities: Texts, History, and Method

In spite of the inherently interpretive nature of reading, argues Ahmed (1992, 94), the fact that "its central texts do embody acts of interpretation is precisely what orthodoxy is most concerned to conceal and erase" from Muslim consciousness. And it is precisely in the nature of this interpretive process, in the *methods* that generate Qur'ānic exegesis, that we can find reasons for why some readings of the Qur'ān are unfavorable to women.

A common practice that yields unfavorable readings is the tendency to generalize the specific, argues Wadud (1999, 99). Some "of the greatest restrictions on women causing them much harm," she says, result from "interpreting Qur'anic solutions for particular problems as if they were universal principles." The reluctance to distinguish the universal from the particular within the Qur'ān stems, I believe, from how exegetes theorize the relationship between revelation (sacred/universal) and its human interpretations (specific/historical). Indeed, at the heart of textualities in Islam is the challenge of how best to define and delimit the relationship between the universal (God; revelation) and the particular (the specificity of our lives; our historicized and limited understanding of Divine Discourse). This is particularly true of Qur'ānic exegesis and the framework within which "Islamic reason" has been exercised historically. Here I examine two views of this relationship, the conservative and the critical, with the intent of exploring the exegetical methods they generate and the implications of these methods for Qur'ānic exegesis.

Conservative Theories: Generalizing the Particular

The tendency to generalize the particular is associated mainly with conservatives, but it arises in a doctrine that all believing Muslims accept: of the Qur'ān's universalism, that is, the belief that the Qur'ān, as the embodiment of Divine Speech, is universal, hence relevant to all times and places, not just to the time or place of its revelation. Although all believing Muslims accept this doctrine, they define and defend it rather differently. Conservatives theorize the Qur'ān's universalism (transhistoricity) by *de*historicizing the Qur'ān itself, and/or by viewing its teachings ahistorically. This is because they believe that historicizing the Qur'ān's *contexts* means also historicizing

its *contents,* thereby undermining its sacred and universal character. In this view, time becomes either incidental or irrelevant to explaining or understanding the Qur'ān, which is why conservatives often do not contextualize its teachings.

On the other hand, conservatives draw on a view of time-as-history to defend the theory of *naskh* (the view that some Qur'ānic Āyāt abrogate others), thereby confirming the historicity of the Qur'ān's teachings. The history-as-sacred model also is pivotal to the conservatives' defense of classical exegesis on which they draw for their own interpretive authority and practices. Thus, what renders classical exegesis (and the religious knowledge produced by early Muslim scholars) sacrosanct to conservatives is their belief that these scholars were able to replicate the Prophet's own methodology because of their proximity *in real time* to him and to the first Muslim community. Time thus becomes integral to their advocacy of a specific communal model and the passage of time a "retreat, a gradual moving away from the original Model" (Bouhdiba 1985, 4). (This view of time-as-decay borrows from Biblical temporalizations of the rift between God and humans represented by the doctrine of the Fall, which epitomizes the moment of human rupture with God; time as history then represents alienation and degeneration.[43] However, as I argue in Chapter 5, Islam does not espouse the idea of the Fall or of a rupture between God and humans, making conservative views of time incompatible with the Qur'ān's teachings.) In this way, they are led back to the very historicity they reject, but by a different route. This is why I call the conservative position universalizing, and even sacralizing, the particular. In the rest of this section, I clarify how and why they come to this position and its implications for their exegesis of the Qur'ān.

The conservative position originates in a distinctive view of the relationship between Divine Speech and time. Specifically, it arises in the idea that since time is created, viewing Divine Discourse as occurring in time means viewing it also as created; however, since God is not created, God's Speech (which they regard as an attribute)[44] cannot be created. This view extends into the claim that the Qur'ān is uncreated[45] (outside time, hence history), explaining why time and history are irrelevant or incidental to (understanding) its teachings. Thus, while conservatives believe that revelation occurred on specific occasions, they refer to such occasions as *azbāb al-nuzŪl,* or occasions *of* revelation, and not occasions *for* revelation, since the latter suggests a connection between revelation and its temporal/spatial contexts, which they reject. In their view, God *speaks* in time, but God's *Speech* exists

outside time, in timeless time and in contextless space, implying that the *contexts* of this Speech/revelation are immaterial to its *contents*. This view has its (theo)logical parallel in a view of "the Quran's noncontextual eternity" (Stowasser 1994, 123), that is, the idea that the Qur'ān's contents and contexts are coincidental. Hence the conservative belief that contextualizing one will undermine the other's universality. Conservatives (and classical *Tafsīr*, on which they draw) thus focus on textual/logical time (sequence of words and meanings) within the Qur'ān, rather than on reading the Qur'ān as a totality revealed *over* time. In so far as this method deemphasizes the contexts of the Qur'ān's revelation, and thus of its teachings, it also fails to distinguish the general from the specific within the Qur'ān, generating the restrictive readings that Wadud refers to and I illustrate below.

If conservatives rely on a view of sacred time to interpret God's Speech, they rely on a view of secular (historical) time to elevate some Qur'ānic Āyāt over others and also to declare the Prophet's community paradigmatic. Ignoring the doctrine of the Qur'ān's universalism and transhistoricity, which they themselves profess, conservatives want it instead to adhere to the contexts and "unicultural perspective" of the Prophet's community, a view that "severely limits its application and contradicts the stated universal purpose of the Book itself" (Wadud 1999, 6). Moreover, instead of conceptualizing the Qur'ān's universalism in terms of its ability to be read anew by each new generation of Muslims in every historical period (recontextualized), conservatives canonize readings of it generated over a thousand years ago in the name of sacred history and historical precedent (as represented by classical *Tafsīr*, the *Ahādith*, and *Ijmā'*). They thus end up with a historical defense of the sacred/universal even as they refuse to accept (at least, formally) a historicizing understanding of it.

It thus follows that, in the view of the conservatives, Muslim history should strive to recreate and reproduce the model of the first community. They expect Muslim tradition to enable and ensure this process of replication by adhering to and protecting the canon and by avoiding innovation. To look back in time/history then is to look forward to a redemptive future (hence the criticism directed against conservatives that they want to regress in time). However, looking back in time in an attempt to revive or reproduce the practices of the first Muslim community amounts to sacralizing and universalizing both the community and its practices. From a view of revelation as non-historical and eternal, conservatives progress to a view of the first Muslim community and its practices as also non-historical and

eternal. (Eventually this view culminates in regarding their own interpretative practices as non-historical and eternal and in conflating these with revelation itself; see Chapter 3.)

Such a view of Divine Discourse and its relationship to time engenders specific textual reading practices. The most obvious is that in spite of their familiarity with the occasions of the revelation of specific Āyāt, conservatives usually do not read behind the Qur'ān in order to contextualize its teachings. Nor, for that matter, do they read in front of the Qur'ān in the sense of recontextualizing its teachings in light of the present historical needs of Muslims themselves. Indeed, by refusing to *contextualize* the Qur'ān, they also render the process of its *re*contextualization problematic since "one cannot proceed *to* the abidingness of the Quran, in word and meaning, unless one intelligently proceeds *from* its historical ground and circumstance" (Cragg 1994, 114; his emphases). Not only do conservatives not follow this method, they also want Muslims to read the Qur'ān *as* the first Muslims are said to have read it. Since they claim to do so themselves, they view their own reading practices as privileged over those of others, hence binding upon all Muslims.

This overview, though insufficiently attentive to the theological and philosophical complexities of the conservative position, is meant only to illustrate my claim that what leads them to downplay the significance of the temporal/spatial contexts of the Qur'ān's teachings, and thus to universalize the particular, is a specific view of time and revelation and the relationship between them. This results in readings of the Qur'ān that are restrictive for women, a point I will illustrate now by examining conservative interpretation of the Qur'ān's teachings on "the veil." (I put the word in quotes since the words veil and *hijāb* do not occur in the Qur'ān.)

Essentially, there are two sets of Āyāt on the basis of which conservatives legitimize a generalized model of veiling for all Muslim women:

> O Prophet! Tell
> Thy wives and daughters,
> And the believing women,
> That they should cast
> Their [*jilbāb*] over
> Their persons (when abroad):
> That is most convenient,
> That they should be known

(As such) and not molested . . .
Truly, if the Hypocrites,
And those in whose hearts is a disease . . .
Desist not, We shall certainly
Stir thee up against them.

   The Qur'ān (33:59–60; in Ali 1988, 1126–27)

And,

Say to the believing men
That they should lower
Their gaze and guard
Their modesty: that will make
For greater purity for them:

.   .   .   .

And say to the believing women
That they should lower
Their gaze and guard
Their modesty; that they
Should not display their
Beauty and ornaments except
What (must ordinarily) appear
Thereof; that they should
Draw their [*khumūr*] over
Their bosoms and not display
Their beauty except to . . .[46]

   The Qur'ān (24:30–31; in Ali 1988, 904–5)

Conservatives read these Āyāt as giving Muslim males the right to force women to don everything from the *hijāb* (a head veil that leaves the face uncovered) to the *burqa* (a head-to-toe shroud that hides even the feet; some models even mandate wearing gloves so as to hide the hands). They justify such forms of veiling on the grounds that women's bodies are pudendal, hence sexually corrupting to those who see them; it thus is necessary to shield Muslim men from viewing women's bodies by concealing them. This claim draws on classical exegesis, in which, however, such a view of women's

bodies developed only gradually. Whereas al-Tabari (d. 923 C.E.) held that both women and men could show those parts of the body that were not pudendal, al-Baydawi (d. 1285 C.E.) ruled that the entire body of a free [47] woman was pudendal, the gaze itself being a "messenger of fornication." By the seventeenth century, al-Khafafi had decreed "even face and hands" pudendal (in Stowasser 1984, 27). In time, such claims led not only to forms of veiling that involved covering the head, face, hands, and feet, but also to domestic segregation. While none of the ideas espoused by these exegetes about female bodies derives from the Qur'ān's teachings (see Chapter 5), the fact that conservatives continue to cling to them demonstrates their tendency to sacralize works by early Muslim commentators and to universalize what in the Qur'ān can be shown to be specific. Thus, I believe there are two models of the notion of the veil—one specific, and the other general— in the Qur'ān, and the first set of Āyāt suggests the specific model and the second, the general (I consider the latter in Chapter 5). However, not only do conservatives not distinguish between the two sets of Āyāt and thus between the two forms of "veiling," but by generalizing and dehistoricizing the first set of Āyāt, they also subvert their openly stated intent and purpose.

In this context, it is important to note, first, that both sets of Āyāt are addressed only to the Prophet; that is, they are not a universal mandate for all Muslim men to force women to comply with them. As I argue in later chapters, not only can one not force moral praxis upon a person—as the Qur'ān (2:256) [48] says, "Let there be no compulsion in religion"—but no one, not even the Prophet, was given the right to force compliance upon his wives with any of the Qur'ān's injunctions. Second, and more to the point, the form, purpose, and content of the idea of "the veil" in these two Āyāt is not the same, and it also is completely different from the one suggested by conservatives. To begin with, the Qur'ān uses the words *jilbāb* (cloak) and *khumūr* (shawl), both of which, in ordinary usage, cover the bosom (*juyūb*) and neck, *not* the face, head, hands, or feet. The Qur'ān does not mandate such a form of veiling in any Āyāt. Women prayed unveiled in mosques until the third/ninth century and they perform the *Haj,* the holiest ritual in Islam, with faces uncovered. Even more significantly, the purpose of the covering in these two sets of Āyāt is different. In the first set, the *jilbāb* is meant not to *hide* free Muslim women from Muslim men but to render them *visible,* hence recognizable, by *Jāhilī* men, as a way to protect the women. This form of "recognition/protection" took its meaning from the social structure of a slave-owning society in which sexual abuse, espe-

cially of slaves,[49] was rampant. While odious, such practices were not spe-
cific to the Arabs, nor were they aberrant. As Judith Antonelli (1995) notes,
in ancient societies women in the public arena were considered to be pros-
titutes; in such societies, therefore, the law of the veil distinguished "which
women were under male protection and which were fair game" (Lerner in
Ahmed 1992, 15). In mandating the *jilbāb,* then, the Qur'ān explicitly con-
nects it to a slave-owning society in which sexual abuse by *non-Muslim* men
was normative, and its purpose was to distinguish free, believing women
from slaves, who were presumed by *Jāhilī* men to be nonbelievers and thus
fair game. *Only in a slave-owning Jāhilī society,* then, does the *jilbāb* signify
sexual nonavailability, and only then if *Jāhilī* men were willing to invest it
with such a meaning. Consequently, even though worn by Muslim women,
the *jilbāb* served as a marker of *Jāhilī* male sexual promiscuity and abuse
at a time when women had no legal recourse against such abuse and had
to rely on themselves for their own protection. Further, as the Āyāt clearly
state, at the time of their revelation some *Jāhilī* men were involved in a cam-
paign of sedition against the Muslims (which included an attempt to slander
the Prophet's wife, 'Ayesha, by impugning her integrity).[50] Thus, Muslim
women had a double reason to fear abuse at the hands of non-Muslim men.
Finally, neither this set of Āyāt nor the second, as my reading in Chapter 5
shows, frames the issue of veiling in terms of women's sexually corrupt/ing
bodies or nature. Thus, the Qur'ān's treatment of the public and private dis-
play of the human body, male and female, is not premised on a view (shared
also by Jews and Christians) of the body itself as corrupt and corrupting.

Conservative exegesis of these Āyāt, however, inverts their intent inas-
much as the exegesis displaces their focus from the sexual misconduct of
Jāhilī men to believing female bodies, and its intent from the need to pro-
tect Muslim women from *Jāhilī* men to the need to shield them from *Mus-
lim* men, or, alternatively, to shield the latter from viewing potentially cor-
rupt/ing female bodies. These reversals indicate that conservatives accept
Jāhilī views not only of a dangerous and depraved female nature but also
of an aberrant male sexuality that can be kept in check only by "disappear-
ing" women from view, themes that are missing from the Qur'ān itself. Even
the second set of Āyāt—which generalizes the "veil," or, to be more pre-
cise, mandates the covering of private parts by *both* the sexes—is not based
in such assumptions. In fact, as these Āyāt make clear, the "veil" is not so
much a piece of clothing as it is a sexually moral and modest *praxis* on the
part of *both* the sexes in contrast to "their allegedly flaunting manners in
the *Jahiliya*" (Levy 1962, 195).

People who regard the veil (and polygyny) as proof that for a woman "there is only slavery, and know it well that she cannot be emancipated from this bondage,"[51] or who believe that the veil is the means to guard women's sexual chastity in a Muslim society or, alternatively, to keep Muslim males at bay—in other words, who view the veil as the hallmark of an Islamic society—ignore the Qur'ānic link between the *jilbāb* and *Jāhilī* society in one set of Āyāt, and its definition of sexual modesty in the other, which extends to both women and men. Hence, Muslim men who feel they have the right to assault or kill unveiled (but decently dressed) women in some "Islamic" societies are living by *Jāhilī* precepts, not by Qur'ānic ethics that enjoin modesty and restraint on both the sexes. Indeed, it is remarkable that women should have to fend off sexual abuse in a society that claims to be Islamic, given that the rule of Islam, by ordaining sexual modesty for women and men, *runs counter to* the rule of the veil, brought on by *Jāhilī* male promiscuity. Yet, the Islamization of the veil has made it synonymous today with the rule of Islam. (I do not ignore the fact that the veil has become so overinvested with meaning that one can no longer speak of it in any simple way; nor do I hold that unveiling women liberates them. Rather, I am disturbed that the issue of veiling is currently framed in most Muslim societies in a way that results in misrepresenting the Qur'ān's form, purpose, and intent in formulating a specific dress code.)

If the veil's persistence in its most un-Qur'ānic forms (the covering of the face, hands, and feet) in some Muslim societies raises troubling questions about how Muslims read the Qur'ān, so, too, does its observance in non-Muslim societies, where it has become even more of a Muslim cultural icon. Even if one were to concede that a *Jāhilī* ethos persists in Western societies in the normalization of sexual promiscuity, it is important to remember that there also are laws against sexual harassment in Western societies (which Muslim states have yet to promulgate). Veiling is thus not women's only defense against abuse; their rights in law are. It is ironic that while secular laws give women such protection, laws formulated by many Muslim states often do not because of their embrace of *Jāhilī* views of women as sexually depraved and of their sexist belief that males can be expected to be easily provoked, licentious, and out of control.

Such views are both a cause and a consequence of redefining and universalizing the *jilbāb*. Initially a symbol of *Jāhilī* corruption in the Qur'ān, it has come to be seen as proof of *female* immorality and inferiority. This perversion of the Qur'ān's teachings results also in ignoring the critical issue of what constitutes sexually appropriate behavior for *men*. This frees up Mus-

lim states from the obligation of having to create public spheres in which women do not need to fear *Jāhilī*-type misbehavior on the part of Muslim men. Instead, by defining women's morality and safety in terms of their own dress codes, conservatives are legitimizing the kind of pathologies that are leading men to murder unveiled women in the name of Islam. And nowhere are the really fundamental issues being debated by the so-called "fundamentalists": how can Muslim men, if they are living by the Qur'ān's injunctions, feel free to kill or assault women; and how can we reconcile religious vigilantism with the irreducibly voluntary nature of faith and of moral responsibility in Islam? (See Chapter 4 on this point.)

Critical Theories: Historicizing the Particular

Critical scholars reverse each of the three assumptions that conservatives make about Divine Speech: that it does not occur in historical time, that it can be understood best only at the time of its occurrence, and that it is the *same as* its interpretation. On the contrary, they argue, not only does Divine Discourse occur within time, but history, "like Scripture, provides clear 'signs' and lessons of God's sovereignty and . . . intervention in human development" (Stowasser 1994, 14). Divine intervention not only reveals that there is a coherence between the contents and contexts of God's Words, but it also is what renders these Words *relevant;* it is thus precisely the location of the sacred within history that is critical to understanding its universal nature.

The Qur'ān's location in history allows us to understand what is unique about Islam itself since the "Quran 'descent' (*nuzul*) into the world is an occurrence which interests the earthly order, creating a new historical era where truth . . . can finally and manifestly be distinguished from falsehood" (Khalidi 1994, 8). The contrast between truth and falsehood acquires in the Qur'ān a comparison not just between Islam and paganism but also between Islam and prior revelation (Judaism and Christianity), with which the Qur'ān suggests both scriptural and historical continuity, but also rupture. Thus, revelation to the Prophet evinces textual and historical continuity with the past in the Qur'ān's restatement of certain teachings of Jewish and Christian Scriptures, notably, the idea of God's Unity, and also prophetic narratives and lineages. At the same time, however, Islam also entailed a break with Jewish and Christian teachings, especially with their patriarchalization of God as Father. In its very continuity and discontinuity, then, Islam reveals an engagement with history (the context for human life and praxis),

which nonetheless remains subject to God's Rule. These views extend into the claim that the Qur'ān "occurred in the light of history and against a social-historical background" and is a "response" to it (Rahman 1982, 5). In fact, it is

> God's response through Muhammad's mind (this latter factor has been radically underplayed by the Islamic orthodoxy) to a historical situation (a factor likewise drastically restricted by the Islamic orthodoxy in a real understanding of the Quran). (Rahman, 8)

This explains why the Qur'ān is couched in semiotic, linguistic, and ethical-moral terms *specific to* Arab society. As Faruq Sherif (1985, 3–4) argues, many Āyāt "relate to a particular time and place and to circumstances which had only a temporary" importance, such as crises in the Prophet's life, and practices like slavery or the arbitrary rejection of wives, which were routine in Arabia. As a result, most Qur'ānic penal provisions are aimed at "the social conditions that were characteristic of the Arabian tribes fourteen centuries ago," which is why treating them as "binding today would in many cases be a lamentable anachronism."

To make the Qur'ān "immune from history [then] is to make its own history irrelevant" (Cragg 1994, 114). This idea, says Kenneth Cragg, "emerges indisputably from the Quranic text itself. There are several important passages which underline the necessarily periodic and contextual nature of its contents." As he points out, its "gradualism, spread over 23 years, means that" the Qur'ān's Sūrahs "impinge upon a succession of temporal events" (115). The Muslim failure "to reckon with moving time," however, transforms the " 'incidentalism' of the days of the Quran [into] the 'fundamentalism' of the centuries," an approach that does a disservice to Islam (121–22). Thus, the tendency of "Traditional Tradition [to suppose] a passive role for ongoing time in its obedience to the paragon time, a care for strict memory not for creative repossession," makes such a repossession impossible, says Cragg, even if it "remains the plainest argument for taking the Quran historically" (123).

Recognizing the historical contexts and specificity of the Qur'ān's teachings does not require an assumption that the *moral purpose* of the Qur'ān is limited to Arab society, or that we cannot derive universal laws from it; indeed, the Qur'ān itself "provides, either explicitly or implicitly, the rationales behind [its] solutions and rulings, from which one *can deduce general principles*" (Rahman 1982, 20; his emphasis). Thus, critical scholars who

argue for a historicizing understanding of revelation are not rejecting the doctrine of its universalism. On the contrary, they reject the opposite: the view that the sacred can be temporalized only within a specific context. They argue that that is what happens when we privilege religious knowledge produced in the first centuries of Islam as the only true understanding of revelation because of its proximity in real time to the Prophet's community, thus to revelation.

For critical theorists, the Qur'ān's universalism also is undermined by attempts to fix its meanings by interpretive fiat. They see the Qur'ān's universalism as lying, instead, in the ability of new generations of believers to derive new meanings from it by relying on their own *'aql* (intellect) and *'Ilm* (knowledge), as the Qur'ān itself asks us to do. This necessarily involves a process of recontextualizing the Qur'ān through new modes of reading, none of which can exhaust its meanings. New methods and readings are not only desirable but also essential because our knowledge of the Qur'ān is eternally evolving. This is why *Ijtihād* (critical thinking) is a better hermeneutic method than a blind reliance on consensus or tradition. And, while no one can claim "a monopoly" over what God means (Nayed 1992), critical scholars argue that a hermeneutic method that takes a thematic-historical approach to the Qur'ān, in addition to analyzing the semiotic, semantic, and linguistic systems at work in it, can yield better readings than a (conservative) methodology which does not.

Critical scholars also favor a thematic-historical method because only such a method can help to distinguish the general from the specific within the Qur'ān. However, they disagree on what this method entails. For some, the distinction between the general and the specific is internal to the Qur'ān itself and can be retrieved by differentiating between the two phases (Meccan and Madinan) of its revelation. Mahmud Mohamed Taha (executed for "sedition" in his native Sudan), finds differences between the Meccan and Madinan Sūrahs and urges Muslims to evolve a praxis based on the Meccan Sūrahs, which embody the revolutionary and egalitarian aspects of Islam's message (the first message). The Madinan phase, on the other hand, he argues, circumscribes some of the principles revealed in Mecca because of the unreadiness of the Madinan community to live by the standards of moral freedom needed for transforming the first message into practice. Not only is the Madinan stage focused on events specific to the lives and problems of the Madinans, argues Taha (1987, 125), but, as a result, revelation in this phase focuses more on regulation and control. In effect, differences in the

two groups of Sūrahs result not from "the time and place of their revelation, but essentially [from] the audience to whom they are addressed" (134).

Though it is the first message of Islam that is egalitarian, says Taha (1987, 21), it is from the "texts of the second stage" that the *Sharīʿah* is derived. This is because classical exegetes held that the Meccan Sūrahs had been abrogated by the Madinan Sūrahs though they remained "operative at a moral/persuasive level." However, the "historical Sharia," which draws on the Madinan Sūrahs, "is merely the level of Islamic law that suited the previous stage of human development." To bring it closer to Islam's first message, we need to shift some of its aspects "from one class of texts to another." We can do this by "examining the rationale of abrogation (*naskh*) in the sense of selecting which texts of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* are to be made legally binding, as opposed to being merely morally persuasive" (23–24). What is required, in essence, is a second message of Islam that can revive the Prophet's *Sunnah* and transform it into law through fresh *Ijtihād* (critical reasoning) and *Ijmāʿ* (consensus).

For Taha, the issue of what is universal and what is specific in the Qur'ān can be resolved only by distinguishing between the Meccan (universal) and Madinan (particular) Sūrahs, and thus between different historical contexts of revelation. For Rahman (1980), though, such a distinction is problematic because it suggests discontinuities and tensions within revelation itself. He thus criticizes the tendency to view the "career of the Prophet and the Quran in two neatly discrete and separate 'periods'—the Madinan and the Meccan—to which most modern scholars have become addicted" (133). Moreover, as Wadud (1999, 30) also argues, not all the Meccan Sūrahs are general in nature, nor are all the Madinan Sūrahs specific. According to her, the best solution is to formulate a "hermeneutical model which derives basic ethical principles for further developments and legal considerations by giving precedence to general statements rather than particulars." If, for Wadud, the solution is a hermeneutic and not a historical one, for Rahman it is both; while favoring the formulation of hermeneutic principles, he also points out that since "all interpretations are historically and geographically contextualized, Muslims must exert every effort to understand those contexts in order to be able to distinguish the essential from the contingent" (Sonn 1996, 65).

In sum, to critical scholars, the indecidability of the universal and the particular can only be resolved by undertaking several steps. First, it is necessary to study the Qur'ān historically (contextually, not chronologically)

and hermeneutically, so as to replace the contexts of the first centuries of Islam with those of the fifteenth/twenty-first century. This is a process that involves reading in front of the Qur'ān by reading behind it first. Second, it is necessary to disentangle the Qur'ān from its *Tafsīr* and from reconstructions of the *Sunnah* by the *Ahādith*. This requires separating normative from historical Islam, in part by reexamining the relationship between inter- and extratextuality. Third, it is necessary to revise the *Sharī'ah* by rethinking the principles of jurisprudence. Fourth, we must undertake a critical *Ijtihād* to make possible new readings of the Qur'ān. This is a process that will not only call into question the nature and role of Muslim intellectuals, but also of the state. From textualities one has progressed then to issues having to do with inter- and extratextuality, that is, from the question of *who* reads the Qur'ān and *how,* to the *contexts* in which the Qur'ān is read. Historically, the Qur'ān has been read by exegetes and communities within discursive frameworks in whose formation the state has played a central role. As such, intertextuality has an extratextual dimension as Muslim states, acting in the name of Islam, have sought to define, limit, or normalize certain reading and textual practices. It is time, therefore, to shift to the contexts of reading, which I will discuss in the following chapter.

Intertextualities, Extratextual Contexts
The *Sunnah, Sharī'ah,* and the State

The Qur'ān, marvels Mohammed Arkoun (1994, 39), "never ceases to produce . . . secondary, integrating texts where all the cultures of 'Islam' exert their influence." And this, he says, provides "another fascinating, but as yet scarcely touched, field of investigation: the Quranic text taken as part of a very tangled intertextuality."

As noted in Chapter 2, intertextuality refers to the transposition of sign systems from one text to another and to the ensuing relationship between them. While it results from the very act of reading, intertextuality also is a function of the extratextual contexts within which reading occurs. For instance, how Muslims have read the Qur'ān historically or have defined its relationship to other texts (the *Tafsīr,* the *Ahādith*) or practices (the Prophet's *Sunnah,* the *Sharī'ah*) is a function not only of the transposition of sign systems between texts but also of the contexts within which religious knowledge, method, and meaning were produced. Accordingly, in this chapter, I analyze the nature of inter- and extratextuality in Muslim religious discourse and the connections between them. I focus in particular on the role of the *Sunnah* (the Prophet's praxis), the *Sharī'ah* (law), the state, and interpretive communities in shaping Qur'ānic exegesis as well as Islamic epistemology and methodology during the early years of Muslim history.[1] My discussion aims to explain why Muslims have traditionally read the Qur'ān in restrictive modes and why it is difficult to read it in liberatory ones today.

1. Texts, Contexts, Practice(s)

A patriarchal exegesis of the Qur'ān, I argued in Chapter 2, often results from applying the *Ahādith* (narratives of the Prophet's life and praxis) to interpret it. Restrictive readings of the Qur'ān also are a function of how

Muslims conceptualize the Prophet's life and praxis (*Sunnah*), which is the primary source of exegesis and the second source—besides the Qur'ān—for deriving the *Sharī'ah*. I begin therefore by discussing the *Sunnah;* in particular, I focus on the processes by which jurists in classical/medieval times came to reverse the relationship between the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah,* since this reversal continues to pose problems for how Muslims read the Qur'ān today.

The *Sunnah/sunnah*

The word "Sunnah" derives "from a root meaning of the verb *sanna,* 'to form, fashion, or shape' and by extension, 'to institute, establish or prescribe.'"[2] The *Sunnah* refers to the Prophet's praxis, including his sayings, actions, or tacit approval of behavior he knew about. As such, the *Sunnah* establishes the framework for Muslim praxis and also for reading the Qur'ān, since the Prophet's life is deemed the best exegesis of its teachings; hence the aphorism that "the Quran has more need of the sunna than the sunna has of the Quran."[3] Although Muslims view the Prophet's *Sunnah* as paradigmatic and therefore generalizable,[4] it is difficult to replicate in practice inasmuch as it was unique to the Prophet, thus specific to him.

The *sunnah* (with a small "s"), on the other hand, will be used in this text to refer to customary practices in general, that may be and usually are unrelated to the Prophet's *Sunnah* or to the Qur'ān's teachings. For reasons I will consider below, many of the customary practices, especially of the Arabs, were incorporated into the *Ahādith* and thus into the Prophet's *Sunnah* since the details of the *Sunnah* are recorded in the *Ahādith.* (This is why one cannot speak of the *Sunnah* without referring to the *Ahādith.*) However, notwithstanding its textualization in and by the *Ahādith,* the *Sunnah* also is seen as practice that occurred prior to and independent of its textualization, and it is in its role of practice that the *Sunnah* enjoys its "authority [and] legitimacy."[5] (This is why the *Sunnah* functions as both text and as the extratextual context of Qur'ānic exegesis.)

Among the many confusions in Muslim religious discourse, one of the most endemic and detrimental is that between the Qur'ān and the Prophet's *Sunnah* on the one hand and between the Prophet's *Sunnah* and (a) the *Ahādith* and (b) Muslim customary practices on the other. This is because while Muslims venerate the principle of *"imitatio Muhammadi"* (Brown, 1996), most of the content of the *Sunnah* is not a reflection of the Prophet's praxis. Rather it is a reflection of "the free thinking activity of the early legists of

Islam who had made deductions from the existing Sunna or practice and—most important of all—had incorporated" into it Byzantine, Arab, Jewish, and Persian elements[6] (Rahman 1965, 5). Annals of prophetic praxis thus became a repository of many pre-Islamic ideas, including abidingly misogynistic ones. In spite of its problematic content, however, the *Sunnah* was ascribed to the Prophet in the second and third Islamic (eighth and ninth c.e.) centuries. As a result, existing practices, especially of the Arabs, were absorbed into Islam and came "to be equated with the Sunnah of the Prophet [thus being] given an unwarranted, elevated religious status" (Esposito 1982, 103). In turn, when the Prophet's *Sunnah* was elevated over the Qur'ān (thus becoming decisive in its exegesis and in the drafting of the *Sharī'ah*), so too were Arab practices (such as female circumcision and stoning to death for adultery). The boundaries between the two *sunnahs* thus became blurred, putting an Islamic stamp on pre-Islamic misogyny. Boundary problems of a different sort arose between the Qur'ān and the *sunnah* when scholars attempted in the classical/medieval period to standardize the sources of religious authority. These efforts culminated in reversing the authority of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* vis-à-vis one another, thus also influencing Muslim exegesis of the Qur'ān.

Reversing the Authority of Religious Sources

In the early years, argues Daniel Brown (1996, 13), Muslims did not discriminate between different sources of religious authority. However, the growing complexity of religious and political life and the emergence of dissent in the second and third Islamic centuries led some jurists to set up "a hierarchy of revealed material whereby the evidence one liked could be justified and the evidence of one's opponents . . . dismissed." These hierarchical impulses resulted, argue scholars, from the incorporation into Islam of Middle Eastern ideologies and cultures.[7] This method, however, led to undermining not only the doctrine of the self-sufficiency of the Qur'ān but also its unique status as revelation (*wahy*). Thus, jurists began by equating the Qur'ān's authority with that of the *Sunnah*, then began to accord the *Sunnah* the status of *wahy*, and then took the *Sunnah* to "abrogate the Quran" itself (Lokhandwalla 1992, 45). From being an exemplar of *wahy*, the *Sunnah* came to be regarded in and of itself as *wahy*, and then as even more consequential than Qur'ānic *wahy*! The principle that "passed into Muslim orthodoxy . . . that the Quran could be abrogated by both the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet"[8] was defended by the "orthodox" al-Shafi and by the sufi al-

Ghazali, one of the greatest reformers of the "Islamic Middle Ages." It was al-Shafi who established the status of the *Sunnah* as *wahy* by ruling that "the command of the Prophet is the command of God," and that the Prophet's behavior also was a form of *wahy,* albeit of a different order than the Qur'ān (in Brown, 8).

Only after the third/ninth century did the maxim "[The] sunna rules on the Quran, but the Quran does not rule on the sunna" gain acceptance among Muslims, being preserved for posterity in the theory "of consensus (ijma)" (Brown, 20). However, in spite of having assented to the authority of the *Sunnah* and thus also to that of the *Ahādith,* the legal schools resisted applying it strictly because of the unreliability of many *Ahādith.* Sacralizing the *Sunnah* thus did little to resolve the issue of its own authenticity or that of the *Ahādith* and created a number of other problems.

First, as Tamara Sonn (1996, 65) argues, not only was the Prophet's behavior "itself interpretive of Islamic principles but . . . reports [*hadīths*] of that behavior are themselves interpretations. We are therefore at least two interpretations removed from the essential teachings of revelation [the Qur'ān]." However, Muslim scholars ignored the problem not only of the *Sunnah's* double distancing from *wahy* and the unreliability of most of the *Ahādith,* but also of the inconsistencies between the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah,* as well as between the two *sunnahs.* They introduced a lasting anomaly into religious discourse by maintaining, alongside the doctrine of the Qur'ān's unique status, a view of the *Sunnah* as "also a product of divine revelation" and "equal to [the Qur'ān] in status" (15–16). Tensions between these two sources of religious authority not only were papered over but also were institutionalized in al-Shafi's method.

Second, using the *Sunnah* to read the Qur'ān undercut the doctrine of revelation's self-sufficiency and the interpretive flexibility inherent in it, putting a methodological closure on how the Qur'ān could "legitimately" be read. As the *Sunnah* "serves to 'close' the text of the revelation by making it pertinent to the definition of certain practices," says Brannon Wheeler (1996, 11), canonizing it "made meaning and the authority of the Quran dependent upon how the [Prophet] was reported to have understood and applied certain portions" of it. Since the *Sunnah's* content came to be fixed by interpreters, the Qur'ān's "applicability and thus authority [came to be] fixed by the sunnah, the sunnah by [their] opinions, and the opinions by subsequent scholarship" (13). By linking their own authority with that of the *Sunnah,* and the *Sunnah*'s authority with that of the Qur'ān, interpreters

of sacred knowledge became its architects instead, reducing, by a series of mediations, Divine Discourse to their own interpretations of it.

Clearly, as an illustration of the Qur'ān's teachings (which enjoin obedience to the Prophet),[9] the *Sunnah* provides an invaluable context for both Qur'ānic exegesis (*Tafsīr*) and for Muslim praxis; hence, its elevation to authoritative status is understandable from a theological perspective. However, its elevation *over* revelation itself seems to have resulted less from jurists' efforts to define Islamic knowledge (*'Ilm*) in an authoritative way than from their attempts to define their own interpretive authority, processes in which the state also became active. Thus, the *Sunnah's* privileging over the Qur'ān resulted in part from the very nature of Islamic epistemology and the role of the state in shaping it during the early years of Muslim history.

At the core of this epistemology, argues Tarif Khalidi (1994, 20), were the *Ahādith,* which "afforded their possessors a nucleus of early Islamic *ilm,*" seen to derive from the Prophet and his Companions. Expertise in *Ahādith* thus became a determinant of the personal or political power of their possessors, whether religious scholars (*ulama*) or state elites. A tradition grew up based in an "increasingly unrelenting advocacy" of the *Ahādith* and in a "firm (but . . . not always consistent) commitment to the righteousness of the early Muslim community and the rectitude of the Prophet's first successors" (Zaman 1997, 1). When this oral tradition grew into a "text-based epistemology," mastery of a more elaborate method was needed to define religious knowledge and to sustain interpretive authority. Although this method originated in the desire to protect the Qur'ān's integrity—by using the *Sunnah* to regulate the strategies for reading it—over time, it instead allowed interpretive communities to entrench their own authority and privileges (Wheeler 1996; see also Section II).

The problems resulting from the inversion of the relationship between the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* have led Muslims periodically to resurrect the doctrine of the Qur'ān's self-sufficiency so as to free up exegesis from its reliance on the *Sunnah* and *Ahādith.* Such efforts, however, have been opposed by conservatives, ostensibly the staunchest supporters of a return to the Qur'ān's teachings. In spite of opposition, however, many scholars have emphasized the need to disentangle the *Sunnah* from the *Ahādith* by differentiating between the Prophet's praxis and the "problem of the historical authenticity of hadith" (Brown, 101). While separating the *Sunnah* from its textualization in the *Ahādith* is difficult, it is necessary for greater interpre-

tive freedom and also for reading the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān (intratextually), a methodology the Qur'ān itself recommends.[10]

Ijtihād and *Ijmā': Democratizing Tradition*

In spite of the problematic nature of the *Sunnah's* context, says Fazlur Rahman (1965, 2), the manner of its construction illustrates the democratic nature of Muslim tradition in its early years. While Rahman admits that the *Sunnah's* content is not a scrupulous record of the Prophet's praxis or of Islam's teachings, he believes the concept itself is emblematic of the importance Muslims once attached to the role of critical reasoning (*Ijtihād*) and societal consensus (*Ijmā'*) in the creation of religious meaning.

Ijtihād refers to a mode of reasoning that allows for "the interpolation of meaning" by enabling one to determine "the meaning of the revealed text in its own historical context" and therefore also "how to act in accordance with that meaning in changed circumstances" (Sonn 1996, 24). Such a method enables "historical objectivity" in studying tradition by allowing one to distinguish it from both the present and from its own precedents (Rahman 1982, 8). *Ijmā'*, on the other hand, can refer either to the unanimous consent "of the jurists of a particular age on a specific issue" (*Ijmā' al-immah*), or to the consensus of the whole community (*Ijmā' al-ummah*) (Esposito 1982, 7).

In the early years, argues Rahman (1965), *Ijtihād* and *Ijmā'* functioned in symbiosis, providing a democratic balance between critical reasoning and communal and juristic consensus. Thus the *Sunnah's* formulation resulted from *Ijtihād,* which grew into *Ijmā',* a fact that showed the community's ability to assume *"the necessary prerogative of creating and recreating the content of the Prophetic Sunna"* through a method that ensured *"the working infallibility . . . of the new content"* (19; his emphasis). To Rahman, the aphorism "the Sunnah decides upon the Quran; the Quran does not decide upon the Sunnah" means that *"the Community, under the direction of the spirit (not the absolute letter) in which the Prophet acted in a given historical situation, shall authoritatively interpret and assign meaning to Revelation"* (20; his emphasis). That is, hermeneutic meaning was created by the community itself. This democratic practice—which sought to accommodate interpretive differences—was undercut, however, by attempts at "standardization and uniformity throughout the Muslim world," a goal attained by replacing *Ijtihād* and *Ijmā'* with the *Ahādith* (21).[11]

Instead of continuing to rely on reason, deliberation, and consensus to

frame religious meaning, Muslims began to refer all issues back to the *Ahādith.* This move was consummated in al-Shafi's work and originated, ironically, in his attempt to protect the *Sunnah's* authority by establishing that of the *Ahādith* on the grounds that the latter represented communal consensus, hence God's Will. Yet, the effects of his ruling were to reverse the relationship between *Ijtihād* and *Ijmāʿ* by a priori privileging *Ijmāʿ*. As the outcome of critical thinking (*Ijtihād*), consensus (*Ijmāʿ*) could be progressive; as the means for proscribing it, however, consensus could only foster a tradition based in "theological censorship" (Moazzam 1992). By declaring against *Ijtihād,* al-Shafi also declared against a democratically evolving *Ijmāʿ,* even while criticizing uncritical adherence to precedent (*taqlīd*)[12] as "conducive to ignorance" (Khalidi 1994, 137). In contrast, says Rahman (1965, 23), other schools realized that *Ijmāʿ* was "not an imposed or manufactured static fact but an ongoing democratic process . . . [which] must live not only *with* but also *upon* a certain amount of disagreement" (his emphasis). In al-Shafi's hands, however, *Ijmāʿ* became "an agreement that left no room for disagreement" (12). Rahman (29) starkly sums up the contrast between al-Shafi's position and that of other legal schools as

> Here a freely flowing situational treatment of the Prophetic activity, there a once-and-for-all positing of immobile rules; here a ceaseless search for what the Prophet intended to achieve, there a rigid system, definite and defined, cast like a hard shell.

Thus, it was the *Sunnah's* authorization in such rigid and fixed terms and the closing of the gate of *Ijtihād* that, argues Rahman, robbed Muslim tradition of its democratic character.

Significantly, however, even though Muslim scholarship is familiar with the saying that the gate of *Ijtihād* is closed, says Rahman (1965, 149), the fact is that nobody "quite knows when . . . or who exactly closed it." There is "no statement to be found anywhere by anyone about the desirability of the necessity of such a closure, or of the fact of actually closing the gate," even though there are rulings by later writers to this effect. From now on, interpretive communities and states were to employ the theory of *Ijmāʿ* to promote *taqlīd* in the methodological realm (fostering a scholarship based on imitativeness, or *naql,* rather than on critical reasoning or innovative thinking) and to mandate obedience to rulers in the political realm, transforming the Sunnis "forever [into] the king's party, almost any king" (89). Although these developments gave Sunni Islam a content and an orthodoxy
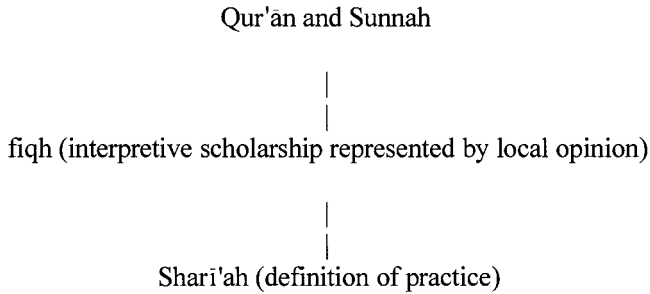
of sorts, continues Rahman (87), the ensuing cohesion, equilibrium, and creativity proved brief because "the *content* of this structure was invested with a halo of sacredness and unchangeability since it came to be looked upon as uniquely deducible from the Quran and [Sunnah]" (his emphasis). As a result, creativity was stifled from the start as the " 'living sunna' ceased to be a living sunna, i.e., an ongoing process and came to be regarded as the unique incarnation of the Will of God." By transforming the *sunnah* into an "immutable [article] of Faith," then, Muslim scholars sacrificed originality to stability.

Since *sunnah* refers to practice and no two practices can be identical, concludes Rahman, it necessarily allows for change. However, inasmuch as creative renewals of tradition and culture also presume "a reawakening of communicative action,"[13] to be able to rethink the *Sunnah* and tradition, Muslims must revive *Ijtihād-Ijmā'*, both because *Ijtihād* is the "central hermeneutic" of Islamic reasoning and jurisprudence (Sonn 1996), and because the *Ijmā'* inherited from the past rests on an outmoded and thin consensus of jurists, not a consensus of the whole community, and certainly not of the women in the communities of Islam. Adhering to this medieval *Ijmā'* also ignores that the system inherited from the past obscures "the Quran and the real performance of the Prophet" from both laypeople and *ulama* alike and engenders a "mechanical and semantic rather than interpretative or scientific" scholarship (Rahman 1982, 86, vii). Just as importantly, it allows states and conservative interpretive communities to continue defining Islam in ways that complement their own particular visions of it. And since states and conservative clerics derive their authority from managing this system, it is this very process of rethinking that they most fear and discourage, typically by branding it a heresy.

The *Sharī'ah:* Defining Practice

Although *Sharī'ah* refers to classical Muslim law, the term itself means "definition of practice." The *Sharī'ah* determines "how certain aspects of everyday life are to be practiced according to the model provided by the canon" (Wheeler 1996, 2). The contents of this model are supplied by the Qur'ān and the Prophet's *Sunnah;* that is, the "revelation contained in the text of the Quran is interpreted through the medium of the sunnah to indicate the contents of the Shariah" (2). (See Figure 4.) In effect, the principles of jurisprudence (*usūl al-fiqh*) are derived by way of the *Sunnah,* hence by *limiting* the Qur'ān's canonical authority (10). Among other methodologies for

Qur'ān and Sunnah

|

|

fiqh (interpretive scholarship represented by local opinion)

|

|

Sharī'ah (definition of practice)

Figure 4

deriving the *Sharī'ah* are consensus (*Ijmā'*), critical reasoning (*Ijtihād*), and analogical reasoning (*qiyas*). However, as noted above, *Ijtihād* was considered closed fairly early in Muslim history.

Although many Muslims view the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* as "co-equal sources"[14] of the *Sharī'ah,* there are tensions between them. An integral feature of the *Sharī'ah* is thus its eclecticism deriving from conflicts between its sources and also from the growth of four legal schools in Sunni Islam "founded by and named after early masters of Islamic jurisprudence," the Shafi, Maliki, Hanafi, and Hanbali, who "agreed to differ . . . and, more importantly, to accept each other's orthodoxy" (Peters 1994, 239, 241). Far from being a "single, logical whole," the *Sharī'ah* reveals a "diversity of opinion" not only across schools but within them as well (An-Naim 1990, 33). In spite of their differences, however, all schools concur that women and men are not to be treated equally "in the administration of criminal justice" (90). Thus, even though Islam "is probably the most uncompromising of the world's religions in its insistence on the equality of all believers before God,"[15] to the "jurists it did not follow from the equality of 'all believers' before God that men and women should be equal before the law" (41).

Two legal schools, the Maliki and Hanafi, developed independently of, or in opposition to, the Abbasid state. The legal principle they sought to uphold was that of "the common good," a position that generated inconsistencies and eventually provoked a reaction from the tradition-bound Shafi and Hanbali schools (Sourdel 1979, 60). Ibn Hanbal in particular adopted an antirationalist stance by affirming the "harmful character of controversy[16]

and reasoning in matters of faith,"[17] instead favoring uniformity in the development of law and a restriction on "the continued growth of different schools of legal interpretation" (Peters 1994, 239). In spite of the differences dividing medieval Muslims, by the sixth/twelfth century the Sunni schools had agreed "that these four ways of looking at the Quran and Sunna were sufficient to meet the needs of the community and guide them to fulfill the will of God for the rest of human history" (Sonn 1996, 29). Law, which had been "elaborated slowly and not without contradictions" thus far came to be authorized and has remained so ever since (Sourdel, 61).

This development also owed itself to al-Shafi who linked the Qur'ān, the *Sunnah, Ijmā',* and *Ijtihād* "into a coherent system of jurisprudence by effectively championing the adoption of his method as the only legitimate approach to sunna" (Brown 1996, 7). (According to Zaman [1997], however, al-Shafi did not intend a fourfold schema.) The fact that his method gained legitimacy had much to do with the growing emphasis that the state itself came to place on scholarly consensus as a way to safeguard its own power. This process aided in the closure of *Ijtihād,* also putting an end to new legal developments. Although the closure institutionalized the authority of four competing legal schools, and thus the conflicts between them, the ensuing "uniformity [in] legal judgments" proved helpful to state rulers (Khalidi 1994, 45). Involved in a process of administrative reform, they found the "practice of determining issues on the basis of regional consensus—and the inevitable differences of consensual opinion among the various regions— problematic" (Sonn 1996, 27); some legal uniformity therefore made the task of ruling easier.

Both the Umayyad and the Abbasid states inherited a legacy of rapid conquests, external threats, and civil wars, all of which "had a devastating effect on the loyalties and beliefs of early Islamic society" (Khalidi 1994, 19). In such a milieu doctrinal conflict threatened not only "religious beliefs, but . . . the social order" as well (Zaman 1997, 63). Consensus was thus seen as pivotal to ensuring both social stability and the state's authority. This is why it seems likely that the "initiative in the direction of evolving the concept of a consensus of scholars came from the ruling circles" themselves (Khalidi, 45). In the event, *Ijmā'* was to become the "logical foundation, although not the formal basis, for the whole system of Islamic law" (Brown 1996, 20).

The state's involvement in development of the law does not mean, however, that it was committed to implementing the *Sharī'ah* itself. In fact, on

some accounts it was the state's "lawlessness and despotism" that encouraged jurists to "assert the independence of Islamic legal and constitutional principles from the abuses of temporal power." Thus, legal and constitutional theories "were elaborated as storm shelters: if ignored or abused in practice, they would be at least preserved in doctrinal purity" for another time (Kerr 1966, 14). Moreover, even though the Abbasid challenge to the Umayyads was based in the allegation that the latter had "failed to pursue rigorous Islamization . . . in due course political expediency caused Abbasid practice to depart from the theory of Sharia" (An-Naim 1990, 15). Indeed, the Abbasids—like the Umayyads—were committed to reconciling "the ideals of Islam with the demands and constraints of secular government" (Kennedy 1981, 17). Nonetheless, it was their support that enabled the formulation of the *Sharī'ah,* and it is "the four surviving Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence" established during that period that Muslims follow today (An-Naim, 15–16). Thus, while not always adhering to the law itself, the state aided in its growth along lines that, after the fourth/tenth century, made for growing conservatism, as did the Ashari defeat of the Mu'tazilites,[18] the "growing political fragmentation and decay, assimilated customs contrary to the Quranic spirit, and finally, the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century" (Esposito 1982, 10).

Like the *Ahādith,* the principles of jurisprudence also derive partly from extratextual precedent, reflecting the tendency in Muslim religious discourse to allow necessity to overrule texts. Indeed, some theorists hold that exegetical and legal readings are "most likely not to have been textual in origin, that is, not to have been literally there in the text, written or oral" (Brockett 1988, 43). Among the *Sharī'ah's* extratextual sources are *Istihān,* the principle of juristic preference that comes into play when analogical reasoning seems too rigid to ensure equity; *Istislāh,* the principle of public interest that comes into play in cases where public interest is not "textually specified"; and *Istishāb,* the principle of presumed continuity that bases rulings on antecedents deemed valid unless proven otherwise (Esposito 1982, 9).

Although the Qur'ān is not a law book,[19] legal principles must be derived from it. Thus, the two primary methods Muslims use for deducing such principles—critical reasoning (*Ashāb al-Ra'y*) and a reliance on texts and traditions (*Ashāb al-Hadīth*)—seem appropriate, at least on the surface. Unfortunately, however, they have not had auspicious results, especially for women. The first method, which arose from the insufficiency of

the *Aḥādith,* resulted in assimilation into the *Sharī'ah* of precepts from Ro-man law, Oriental Christianity, and Byzantine legal doctrines and methods, many of which were anti-women. Reliance on the *Aḥādith* — which, as noted in Chapter 2, are the source of most Muslim misogyny — proved equally harmful. There was no fixed practice for most legal issues, and jurists ended up drawing on contradictory *Aḥādith* whose authenticity was not verified until after thousands of *Aḥādith* were in circulation (see Goldziher 1971 and Levy 1962).

Among others, Abdullahi An-Naim (1990, xiv) points out that in spite of its "assumed religious authority and inviolability," the *Sharī'ah* is "not the whole of Islam" but "an interpretation of its fundamental sources as understood in a particular historical context." Not only was the method for deriving it a "product of the intellectual, social, and political processes of Muslim history," (14) but the "Sharia was *constructed* by its founding jurists" (xiv; his emphasis). In the process, some jurists tried to reconcile it with what they perceived to be the community's best interests at that time; others "simply disregarded reality and addressed themselves to an ideal situation in theorizing on what *ought* to be the case" (5; his emphasis).

As a result, legal norms often came to be based on the opinions of the Prophet's Companions even when these opinions were not based on his *Sunnah.* Not only does the *Sharī'ah* not always adhere to the *Sunnah,* then, but it embodies "medieval principles of reason and objects of public good [that] may no longer be valid today" (An-Naim 1990, 71). For instance, its restrictive stance on human rights may have been "justified by the historical context, [but] it ceases to be so justified in the present drastically different context" (170). Also, implementing the *Sharī'ah* can curtail the rights not only of women under secular law but of men as well, due to the extensive power given to rulers (9). We need therefore to rethink the *Sharī'ah,* says An-Naim (32), a process that is of special concern to women because its hold is "strongest in family law [due to] the greater degree of detailed regu-lation of these fields in the Quran and Sunnah."[20] Rethinking the *Sharī'ah* requires clarifying the "Islamicity" of certain principles, and one way to do so is to make sure that they are "consistent with the *totality* of the Quran and Sunnah" (45; his emphasis). The problem, however, is that there are in-consistencies between "certain verses of the Quran and Sunnah." Following Mahmud Mohamed Taha,[21] An-Naim argues that the tensions can be re-solved by drawing on the Meccan Sūrahs, which embody "the fundamental values of justice and the equality and inherent dignity of all human beings."

In the aftermath of the Prophet's migration to Madina, Taha says (1987, 54), the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* "began to distinguish between men and women," and it is in this period that the Qur'ān's "discriminatory verses" were revealed. Muslims should then strive to implement the Meccan Sūrahs that jurists view as having been abrogated.

As An-Naim (1990, 61–62) points out, orthodoxies are the strongest defenders of the *Sharī'ah,* and the strongest defense against them is that Sunni Islam does not distinguish between "'clergy' and 'lay' Muslims." Hence there is no reason for Muslims to "concede authority . . . to the ulama and the proponents of Sharia." In fact, by doing so, "secularist intellectuals are conceding defeat without a fight." What we need is to confront the *Sharī'ah's* advocates on their own ground and not to assume that the *Sharī'ah is* Islam. In this context, since the "primary area of concern in the relationship between the Quran and legal reform" is exegesis, what we need is a hermeneutics that can recover the "motive, intent, or purpose"[22] behind Qur'ānic Āyāt. This would provide new contexts for deriving juristic principles as the first step in reframing the *Sharī'ah.*

One can get some sense of the complex relationship between texts, textualities, and extratextuality from the fact that in order to reformulate the *Sharī'ah,* it is necessary not only to rethink the Islamicity of certain provisions but also to undertake a critique of the *Sunnah.* This means, in effect, reassessing the authenticity of the *Ahādith.* Such a reassessment, however, can threaten the very foundations of Muslim tradition. As Barbara Stowasser (1992, 1) represents this conundrum, inasmuch as the

> sharia rests on the authenticity of the sunna as formulated in the medieval Hadith, large-scale and substantive criticism of the Hadith would mean to strip the sunna of its importance which, in turn, would deal *taqlid* (unquestioning adoption of established legal decisions) a deadly blow.

Rethinking any part of tradition then raises formidable problems; it also can unravel the fabric of religious authority as it is structured in Muslim societies and, to the extent that the state depends on this structure for its own legitimacy, the latter's hegemony as well. This is why states seek to obstruct reform and this is also why the state became invested in the creation of religious meaning from the early years of Muslim history. Yet, if we want the *Sharī'ah* "to adapt and adjust to the circumstances and needs of contemporary life within the context of Islam as a whole" (An-Naim 1990, 2), we

will need to undertake just such an endeavor, challenging both conservative constructions of religious meaning and the state's role in underwriting these meanings.

11. Method, Meaning, and Memory: States and Interpretive Communities

Many contemporary Muslim scholars ascribe the conservatism of Islamic epistemology and methodology to Islam's own "orthodox" nature (e.g., Bouhdiba 1985). Yet, the construction of method and knowledge along conservative-orthodox lines resulted from the manner in which interpretive communities, and a state claiming to have political and religious authority over the *ummah,* emerged and eventually instituted their own hegemonies. Both processes shaped not only how Muslims came to read the Qur'ān but also how they came to define method, meaning, and even historical memory itself.

Intertextuality and Religious Meaning

If what we know (the content of knowledge) depends on how we come to know it (the methods by which we generate knowledge), then we must look to the modes of knowledge creation among Muslims in order to understand conservative-patriarchal readings of the Qur'ān. In Chapter 2, I examined the conservative tendency to decontextualize the Qur'ān's teachings by dehistoricizing the Qur'ān itself because of a particular view of time. Here, I analyze the intertextual and accumulative nature of knowledge construction that serves both to restrict and to normalize the methodological framework within which religious meaning, including exegesis, is produced. Though labeled Islamic, such a method does not in fact arise in a Qur'ānic epistemology and even contradicts it.

An entry point into the accumulative and intertextual modes of knowledge construction is provided by John Burton's (1977, 67) analysis of the *Ahādith.* Of these he maintains that, since

nothing once called into existence in Islam ever quite perished, such reports having been added to the general stock of Muslim learning were sooner or later used by Muslim scholars. Thus it happened that the exegetical musings of one age generated hadiths which became the Tradition of a later age.

Later generations, says Burton, unsuspecting that parts of the "Tradition had originated in older scholastic disputes[,] solemnly eyed the added material as part of the *Fiqh* [rules of legal jurisprudence] and proceeded to construct [their] own new analyses," unintentionally adding "to the fund of the general Tradition." Although his analysis of the nature of Muslim methodology is correct, Burton's suggestion that it developed more or less accidentally and was a function of Islam itself is questionable. As Wheeler's (1996) study of the Hanafi legal school shows, it was the attempt by *ulama* from the second/eighth centuries onward to define a religious canon and, more to the point, to institute their own interpretive authority in the process, that resulted in a methodology in which — to use Burton's happy phrase — nothing ever perished. Thus, the tendency to accumulate meanings, says Wheeler (14), was a result of reading " 'backward' through the scholarship of previous generations" in an attempt initially to access information about the Prophet's *Sunnah* (seen as the best *Tafsīr* of the Qur'ān) and his methodology for interpreting the Qur'ān. Since his *Sunnah* and interpretive method existed in their most authentic forms in the Prophet's own lifetime, it was assumed that the closer one got to him (or to his Companions) in real time, the greater the likelihood of interpretive accuracy.

It thus is an essentially "historicist conception" of the *Sunnah's* relation to its interpretations that explains the accumulative nature of Muslim methodology and commentarial practices, not happenchance. In this mode of knowledge creation, notes Wheeler (1996, 88), the opinions

> of the second century authorities are interpretations of the third generation's practice, which is an interpretation of the second generation's practice, which is an interpretation of the companions' practice, which is an interpretation of the [Prophet's] practice, which is an interpretation of the revelation contained in the Quran.

Each generation thus links its interpretation of revelation to that of its predecessors and successors. Interpretive authority in such a system derives not from closing the canon, or even from fixing its contents, but from certain ways of interpreting them. In other words, what this system restricts is not interpretive consensus, or even the canon, but the method of interpretation. Since an opinion "to be authoritative needs to be derived from principles that are logically consistent with those known principles from which derived opinions already are established as authoritative," argues Wheeler (1996, 92), the canon's contents remain open, but there is a closure to how

they can be interpreted. What then becomes "canonical about the Quran" is not the text itself, but the principles that can be induced from it, and these principles can be derived by ana/logical reasoning. That is why the Hanafi school specifies a "method rather than certain conclusions" for identifying opinions as authoritative (227). On its part, "future scholarship is authoritative not because it does not deviate from the conclusions of previous generations, but because it accepts and puts to its own uses what previous scholarship established as authoritative" (228).

Such a method is not necessarily restrictive, according to Wheeler (1996, 93), inasmuch as "later generations have more examples, due to the proliferation of specific cases with each successive generation" from which to infer the Prophet's methodology. Also, in theory, every generation is free to establish its own consensus (*Ijmā'*). In reality, however, the desire to ensure "continuity with the past" (239) and the closure of *Ijtihād* not only render this interpretive freedom nominal but also eliminate the need for new methodological paradigms. Hence we have the extraordinary textual and historical continuity in religious meaning from the time of Islam's advent over fourteen centuries ago.

Apart from predetermining the framework for Qur'ānic exegesis, this methodology also allows interpretive communities to link their own commentarial practices to those ascribed to the Prophet and even to equate them with revelation itself. This conflation involves three steps, as Wheeler details them. The first is to recognize the plurivocal nature of the *Sunnah;* that is, the fact that the Prophet's praxis does not "provide a single, definitive interpretation of revelation"; second, that "expertise in the use of interpretive reasoning, more than knowledge of the revelation itself is integral to the definition of practice"; and, finally, "that the authority of the practice defined by later generations [is equivalent to] the authority of revelation" (Wheeler 1996, 68, 88).

There are problems with this line of thinking, however. First, there are no methodological, or logical, connections between the three steps. Certainly, it is difficult to see how the third step follows from the first two. Second, to assume that scholars can interpret revelation without any knowledge of it not only sounds counterintuitive but effectively nullifies the importance of the *Sunnah,* which, after all, is said to offer knowledge about revelation. In terms of this method, what is important is not the Qur'ān or the *Sunnah* but knowledge of the method itself! Most disturbing of all, however, is the assumption that Muslim commentarial practices have the

same authority as revelation, which puts the Qurʾān on the same footing as its exegesis. Indeed, this method erases the distinction between the Qurʾān and its exegesis that the Qurʾān establishes as being critical to safeguarding its integrity as Divine Speech,[23] and relocates hermeneutic meaning from Divine Discourse to its interpretations. However, no human interpretation of God's Words can possibly be accepted as having the same authority as God's Words,[24] for that would mean also erasing the distinction between God and humans.

In effect, the method Muslims sacralize as Islamic nullifies the distinction Muslim theology has always made between "divine speech and its earthly realization."[25] This so-called Islamic method collapses the Qurʾān with its male-authored exegesis, displacing the Qurʾān's authority by the authority of (conservative) male exegetes. In this way, it confuses God's Authority with the authority of interpreters of sacred knowledge, thus violating the cardinal tenet of God's absolute Sovereignty, or *Tawhīd*.

Ironically, like other aspects of religious knowledge, this method of interpreting the Qurʾān began as the opposite of what it eventually became. It originated in attempts—by the ubiquitous al-Shafi in the second/eighth century—to make the *Sunnah* paradigmatic but ended up generating a paradigm that enabled its users to further their own hegemony instead. For al-Shafi, the problem was how to authorize interpretive variations within an Islamic framework. His solution was to link variations to the same textual sources: the Qurʾān and the *Sunnah*. However, the use of this intertextual method in the hands of various schools in the following centuries came to preclude variations, for reasons that Wheeler considers in detail but which are too complex to condense meaningfully here. The point is that a method devised to protect the integrity of the Qurʾān and the *Sunnah* enabled its users to extend "authority from a posited [canonical text]" to themselves instead, thus permitting them to install "a paradigm that authorizes [their] own interpretive privilege" (Wheeler 1996, 237, 226). This method has developed into a system of scholarly lineage, or *nasab,* in which one's authority derives not so much from knowledge of the subject matter or the merits of one's work, as from one's association with a specific interpretive community and one's acceptance of a thin consensus of medieval jurists. It also rests on an epistemology that, by confusing Divine Speech with its human interpretations, undermines the doctrine of *Tawhīd* and enables and legitimizes the displacement of misogyny onto the Divine.

The fact that the developing structure of "Islamic" method "made for

nothing but conservatism" (Rahman 1965, 141) is hardly surprising, then, although conservatism was also a product of the manner in which debates among the *ulama* about the merits of philosophy versus dogmatic theology were resolved. Conservative *ulama* opposed philosophy and the use of reason in religious inquiry on both epistemological and theological grounds. Even al-Ghazali, hardly a conservative, held that real knowledge comes only through unmediated religious experiences and intuition and not through rational or philosophical inquiry, and it was his way of thinking that won the day. Their victory, says Rahman, allowed orthodoxies (in his terminology) to proscribe rational thought when they assumed control over educational institutions and processes in the state. As a result, *'Ilm,* or knowledge, came to be confused with knowledge of tradition, in particular, of the Prophet's *Sunnah,* and Islam gradually was disassociated not only from philosophy and reason, but from science and culture as well. By reducing Islam to a "mere theology" Muslim scholars also transformed a "culture of knowledge . . . into a culture of theological censorship" (Moazzam 1992, 72–73).

The rejection of rationalism and a growing interest in disciplines like rhetoric also added to the conservatism of Muslim methodology, eventually fostering a milieu in which "a vibrant and revolutionary religious document like the Quran was buried under the debris of grammar and rhetoric" and displaced by "commentaries and supercommentaries" (Rahman 1982, 37, 36). This does not mean, however, that later scholars did not contest these developments. Ibn Rushd, for example, undertook a major critique of al-Ghazali; also, "religious curiosity remained great, and in certain places and periods of time even Muslim orthodox authors remained quite open-minded" (Lazarus-Yafeh 1992, 133). However, radical ideas did not leave a trace on the community, which, says Rahman (1982, 146), only changes "when the cumulative process has reached a stage of outburst that literally re-forms orthodoxy." Such an outburst unfortunately did not come to pass.

Arguably, an additive mode of knowledge construction is not unusual or without merit inasmuch as its cumulative aspects also reflect an accommodative and plural strain in religious discourse. (Of course, textual and discursive pluralism is also a function of interpretive *differences* and not only accommodation.) For instance, the *Ahādith* "and other compilations from medieval Islam often preserve multiple accounts of the same episode, with little or no effort to privilege one over the other" (Zaman 1997, 15); even the theory of *Ijmā'* did little to eliminate these variations. The very tradition of pluralism and the pluralism of tradition provide materials for a critique

of religious knowledge and allows Muslims to rethink it by drawing on its different aspects. That is why even progressive Muslims can continue to re-vision Islam in the light of tradition today (Brown 1996, 1). At the same time, the tendency to accumulate meanings by reading backward has resulted in canonizing religious knowledge generated over a thousand years ago, including an exegesis that fails to read the Qur'ān as a textual and thematic unity. It therefore is unable to recover general principles from it. Nor can this method recover the egalitarian and antipatriarchal epistemology of the Qur'ān, which, I argued in Chapter 1, can only be retrieved by recognizing the hermeneutic connections between different themes in the text.

The tendency to accumulate meanings rather than to (re)create them, and the growth of a self-referential and self-reproducing methodological paradigm can be explained in terms not only of the activity of conservative interpretive communities and the workings of intertextuality but also of the state's active participation in the processes of knowledge creation.

The State and Knowledge Creation

Several recent works suggest that the early Muslim state became a purveyor of processes ranging from the way in which interpretive communities came to define religious *'Ilm* to the consolidation of their own authority within the state. Khalidi (1994), for instance, argues that it may have been the Umayyad state's reliance on religious *'Ilm* that permitted the transition from an oral to a written tradition. As he says (22), the advocacy "of religious knowledge in a manner which would make it available to state or faction use was soon to lead to a situation where the transmission of *texts* without direct oral authorization was more practicable" (his emphasis). This transition, as noted above, would lead ultimately to the creation of a hierarchy of religious materials in which the Qur'ān's authority would be subordinated to that of the *Sunnah* and the *Sunnah's* authority to that of interpretive communities.

Similarly, the Abbasid state helped to foster, though perhaps neither intentionally nor always consistently, the rise of a "proto-Sunni elite" and a legacy of collaboration between the state and religious scholars, according to Muhammad Qasim Zaman (1997). In distinction to those who adhere to the theory of a separation of religion and the state under the Abbasids, Zaman maintains that, in spite of the fact that Abbasid "commitment to Islamic norms [and] their Realpolitik (not to mention their personal conduct) . . . fell short of these norms [and also] frequently violated them," (135) there also was collaboration "between the caliphs and the ulama" (12).

This collaboration survived not only periodic conflicts, but also the "inquisition"[26] launched by the caliph al-Mamun in the third/ninth century against the *ulama,* in a desire to establish his own religious clout as *imām* (leader of a religious community). Indeed, according to Goldziher (1971, 66), the less the caliphs were true kings, the more they sought to represent themselves as *imāms.* Conversely, the more the diminution in the power of the caliphal court in Baghdad,

> the more did the theologians ponder on the canonical law of the state, which so beautifully delineated the powers of the Caliph in a theoretically definitive way at a time when the caliphate in fact had only the ideal character of imam. (Goldziher, 71)

This nexus between religion and politics was perhaps inescapable. In "a state where the caliph constantly reiterated that he was 'God's deputy,'" says Khalid Blankinship (1994, 101), "political dialogue necessarily had to take a religious course." By the same token, many religious initiatives were overtly political in nature. For instance, *Sunnah* supporters (*Ahl-i-Sunnah*) initially developed in opposition to the Abbasids and envisaged using the *Sunnah* to curb the caliphs' religious authority, even as the latter were trying to institute their own hegemony over society by their "deep involvement . . . in the religious life of the times" (Zaman 1997, 11). Only gradually and as a result of numerous factors did political collusion between the *ulama* and the state and, in some cases, the *ulama's* cooptation by the state, become prevalent. As "recipients of state largesse or beneficiaries of private endowments, as frequent employees on state business . . . as public preachers," and even as temporary rulers in some places, the *ulama* increasingly became "propagandists for the state" (Khalidi 1994, 200). In their capacity as propagandists (or organic intellectuals) for the state,[27] the *ulama* drew on the theory of *Ijmā'* to advocate loyalty to rulers, even if corrupt, a position that divested the Qur'ān and Muslim tradition of their subversive elements.

Not only did the *ulama* progressively dilute "the egalitarian impulse in various parts of tradition," argues Louise Marlow (1997, 93), but they also justified hierarchical "models of kingship" in a society whose Scripture extolled the virtues of egalitarianism (66). Thus, the *ulama,* who had "gained incontestable possession of the moral high ground" by the second/eighth century, refused to "translate the antihierarchical and antiauthoritarian moral at the heart of their scholarly tradition into an active social and political opposition" (116). Instead, they sought to justify not only hierarchies but

quietism as well, even though some of them "still felt obliged to defend their quietism, since it was activism that had been suggested most strongly by early Muslim experience" (40). By the third/ninth century, even Qur'ānic exegesis showed that the egalitarianism once associated with the Qur'ān had lost its "subversive connotation" (49).

This conservatism aided state rulers in representing themselves as the "true heirs of Islam's earliest saints and scholars" (Khalidi 1994, 43), in their attempt to underwrite their own hegemony[28] (a mode of rule based as much on coercion as on consent). In fact, it was the attempt by the Abbasids to acquire hegemony that had the most far-reaching consequences for the construction of both religious and secular knowledge. Faced with the prospect of ruling a multicultural and multiethnic empire in the face of chronic rebellions, state elites often turned to compromise rather than to force. Thus, while ruling through an "absolute monarchy" which concentrated unprecedented power in their own hands,[29] the Abbasids nonetheless showed "sympathy to their loyal constituencies; they also anticipated and then catered to their requirements" (Lassner 1980, 244), ending revolts "as much by compromise as by repression" (Kennedy 1981, 15).

On the religious front, not only did the Abbasids collaborate with sections of the *ulama*—enabling the emergence of a "proto-Sunni elite" (Zaman 1997)—but they also supported the theory of *Ijmā'* in an effort to preserve communal solidarities. This goal was shared also by the "community of consensus-minded scholars in the first two Islamic centuries" who, writes Khalidi (1994, 70), did not wish to espouse ideas that could be used to "fuel civil and religious discord." The problem was that "once the unity of the community was accepted as the highest politico-juristic value and took shape in the theory of consensus" (226), it became difficult to contest the religious (and secular) interpretations of knowledge preserved in it. In fact, over time, the objective of *Ijmā'*—to protect communal solidarities— became secondary to protecting its own authority, which was done by elevating it over *Ijtihād,* the "central hermeneutic" of law (Sonn 1996, 7). As noted above, it was this reversal that quashed the democratic potential of a tradition once based in critical thinking and in civil society.

The theory of *Ijmā'* and the state's role in its construction allowed states and the *ulama* an increasing role in the creation of religious meaning, while the use of *Ijmā'* to discourage critical thinking (*Ijtihād*) tended to foster a self-perpetuating and basically conservative paradigm that continues to persist, with some modifications, in Muslim societies even today. *Ijmā'* and

the closure of *Ijtihād* functioned to limit the right of later scholars to interpret Islam and heralded in "the advent of scholasticism" instead. Scholars were obliged to fashion their works "on an established body of masters, in this case the developed doctrine of the canonical schools" (Peters 1994, 242). By the fourth/tenth century, they had been reduced to little more than "copyists," as one Ibn Zuhayra lamented. "Authorship nowadays," he observed, "is but collecting what is scattered and gluing together what has crumbled" (in Goldziher 1971, 245).

The usefulness of the theory of *Ijmā'* to the state does not mean, however, that the theory itself was merely instrumentalist; nor is it proof of Islam's fixation with authority, as critics allege. For one, the formation of any paradigm requires consensus, and it was no different for the Muslims. Not only did consensus allow scholars like al-Shafi to introduce some rigor into modes of interpretive reasoning, but it also preserved the *Sharī'ah* in its early years. For another, the theory of *Ijmā'* was a response to specific historical exigencies, and if it promoted quietism, it was not because Islam itself is averse to rebellion, but, as Marlow shows, because of the felt need to *counter* the radicalism of the Qur'ān's teachings and the example of early Muslim history.

If the Abbasid state's role in the creation of religious *'Ilm,* tradition, and methodology underwrote communal identities, its involvement in the creation of secular knowledge reinforced these identities by (re)shaping Muslim historical memories. As Mernissi (1996, 89) argues in this context, every "claiming of Islam as a tradition is a political act. Every 'tradition' is a political construct, a sophisticated editing of 'memory.'" If this is so, then the most sophisticated editing of this memory occurred during the reign of the Abbasids through reconstructions of history itself. Thus, on the one hand, collusion between the state and the *ulama* inspired the latter to doctor the historical corpus which, says Khalidi (1994, 70), was "islamized, 'domesticated,' pruned of its outrageous elements." On the other hand, the state presided over the inauguration of a brand of historiography in its own service that sought to reconstruct religious and political events without much concern for factual accuracy. When the evidence did not conform to the vision of the Abbasid state, writes Jacob Lassner (1986, xiii), its apologists simply

> reversed the historiographical process. Returning to the earlier periods, they again rewrote history; however, this time, they recorded the past as

a back projection of more current events. As a result, critical moments of Islamic experience were idealized and then recorded as distant echoes of one another.

In this manner, "the nostalgic memories of a not so distant past were instrumental in shaping the political outlook of Muslims during the formative years of the Abbasid regime" (Lassner 1986, xii). This search for "a legitimating past" (Khalidi, 1994) — rendered sacred by the Prophet's presence in it — endowed "complex realities . . . with a compelling though highly artificial sense of symmetry" (Lassner, xiii). It is this sense of time — undefiled, sacred, unbroken — that continues to shape not only Muslim religious imaginaries and memories today, but also communal identities. And, defining their identities "according to the interpretation of a shared past" also makes Muslims the "true inheritors of a medieval process of Islamic interpretation" (Spellberg 1994, 80, 195).

This does not mean, however, that the desire to recapture the past was "an exercise in which historical memories were cynically distorted and presented to a gullible public for political gain." Rather, the efforts to retrace the Prophet's steps not only had "an almost magical quality" but it seemed as if an invocation of past memories was enough "to overcome the most discouraging of contemporary obstacles" (Lassner 1986, xiv). To the extent that the Abbasids were besieged by obstacles, such "imaginative reconstructions"[30] of history (and of Islam) must have seemed ineffably appealing and integral to maintaining unity in the face of dissension and diversity. Indeed, "the attachment to Islam and to the liturgical language which had become the cultural language," argues Dominique Sourdel (1979, 185), helped to maintain "a deeper unity than could have been thought possible in this very mixed totality, always ready to carve itself up, and which remained, despite all the divisions and all the schisms, an Arabic and Islamic world." Yet, eventually, this very attachment would enable the political use — and abuse — of Islam by states to further their own political and ideological objectives.

Although the conservative nature of Muslim methodology and Islam's association with quietism resulted from the consensual, rather than the coercive, aspects of religious discourse and of Abbasid rule, this does not mean that coercion played no role in its growth. The Abbasids suppressed dissenters "with a determination hitherto unknown in Islam" (Kennedy 1981, 97), even having some *ulama* flogged for political dissent. Their persecution quashed the pluralism inherent in different readings of Islam. As a result,

in spite of interpretive differences, "including with regard to arrangements governing the relationship between the sexes," what emerged at the end of their rule was a uniform "interpretation and . . . generally minimal differences" among the surviving "versions of Islam," argues Ahmed (1992, 99). These versions, she says, "reflect not unanimity of understanding but rather the triumph of the religious and social vision of the Abbasid state at this formative moment in history." Insofar as this vision excluded egalitarian readings of Islam, and insofar as Abbasid rule coincided with and also facilitated the age of the *jawārī* (women slaves), its legacy was not very providential for women. (It was the accumulation of slaves and concubines by the thousands that spawned the prodigious harems of the celebrated world of the *Thousand and One Nights* that continue—through the workings of Orientalist intertextuality—to shape not only Muslim but also Western memories and stereotypes of Islam.) Thus Mernissi (1996, 14) argues that the "triumph of political/economic power" of the Abbasid state was accompanied by, and founded on, the institutionalization of female slavery and subordination to men. From now on, this era—eulogized as the Golden Age of Islam—would provide the stuff of endless fantasy (and misogyny) to both Muslims and non-Muslims. The "tradition of historicizing women as active, full participants in the making of culture" would come to be replaced by a "memory in which women have no right to equality" (94, 79). Indeed, over the centuries, women would be marginalized not only in memory but also in fact within states and religious communities.

According to some theorists, however, this era also saw positive changes in Muslim attitudes towards women's sexuality. For instance, the institution of the harem, borrowed by Muslims from the Greeks and Persians, no longer came to be viewed as "a reservoir of passive women in the sexual service of their master" (Tucker 1993, 12). Rather, women were acknowledged as having the same sexual drives as men and the same right to fulfill them; moreover, women and men were seen to be equally responsible for creating a child. Qualities that allegedly were prized in slaves—such as intellect, spirit, and learning—also came to be prized in wives. Yet, at the level of rulers and the *ulama,* segregation remained prevalent (12).

The belief that the "Islamic world" was not "a congeries of national states" but, rather, a conglomeration of "tribes, dynasties, religious communities" (Beckingham 1983, 610) often deflects attention from the role of the state in the subordination of Muslim women. The fact remains, however, that the state helped to define meaning and historical memory in ways

that were inimical to women and encouraged a mode of religious politics that conflated Islam with the state, lending legitimacy to repressive state practices against women even today.

Texts, Sex, and States

The conservatism of Muslim tradition, method, and memory, I have suggested, can be ascribed to a specific configuration of political and sexual power that privileged the state over civil society, men over women, conservatism over egalitarianism, and some religious texts and methodologies over others.

The nexus between state power and knowledge is, of course, not unique to Islam. Bandali Jawzi argued in the 1930s that "interpretations that [become] canonized as knowledge, to be passed down through generations, are those that are conducive to the maintenance of power in the institutions which produced them" (Sonn 1996, 9). To Jawzi, says Sonn (viii), "it stood to reason that the accounts promulgated as authoritative, and thus bequeathed to successive generations, would be those approved by the imperial bureaucracy." If the imperial bureaucrats and scholars of the Abbasid era could do no better than to leave their own imprints on Muslim knowledge and tradition, later generations had an equal obligation to reappraise both in the light of their own wisdom and learning. However, in spite of, or perhaps because of, their "preoccupation with the authenticity and continuity of tradition," Muslims have not found it easy to do so (Brown 1996, 81). In part, the Muslim view of history makes this difficult since, for Abrahamic faiths, "history is the field in which God operates; it is in historical events that the transcendent becomes known" (81). Tradition, then, is not just intertwined with history; it becomes its reincarnation. This may also explain why Muslims ignore "the power of interpretation in the formation of historical meaning"[31] (Spellberg 1994, 1), a process in which "imagination and representation [are] no less, if not more, important than . . . the 'reality' of that past" (Zaman 1997, 16). Consequently, opening up to critique the processes by which historical, hence religious, meanings were formed threatens Muslims' sense of their past and thus also of themselves. In part, however, the Muslim desire to protect their past from controversy may also have to do with the legacies of Western colonialism. As Rahman (1982, 147) says, the encounter with the West has left behind a "peculiar psychological complex" that often leads Muslims to defend their "past as though it were our God." Whatever the case, it is their deep investment in

the past that renders Muslims so vulnerable to *ulama* and states who are often the only ones to claim the mantle of leadership on the basis of appeals to it, appeals that once Muslims accept as legitimate also lock them into certain epistemologies, methodologies, and histories.

In this context, I have argued that what is defined as an Islamic epistemology and methodology is based less on the view of Qur'ān-as-revelation than on prophetic praxis-as-revelation (the *Sunnah*-as-*wahy*). This view leads to locating hermeneutic meaning not in the Qur'ān, and thus in Authorial intent discourse (though classical *Tafsīr* contains elements of both), but in communal interpretive practices that have given the *Sunnah* much of its content. In spite of the putatively democratic and liberatory nature of a method that locates meanings in the community, it has turned out to be neither democratic nor liberatory since it has closed off critical reasoning (*Ijtihād*) by taking a medieval consensus (*Ijmā'*) as infallible and irrevocable (Hourani 1985, 199, 225). This has culminated in the stagnation of tradition itself. Even though tradition is not always irrational or arbitrary, and every redefinition of it may be freely chosen,[32] in reality, Muslim tradition resists the application of new methods to read the Qur'ān, while the structure of religious authority also closes off the Qur'ān to new readers, especially women. Interpretive communities have come to see as their task not only reading the Qur'ān *as* the first Muslims may have done, but also to read it *for* all Muslims; in such a milieu, locating meaning in "the community" counts for little. Moreover, the state's ongoing involvement in sustaining the hegemony of conservative interpretive communities and of religious meaning has injected coercive power into the very heart of knowledge construction in many Muslim societies. In light of these facts, as also of the conservative processes that shaped tradition and method, it should not be difficult to see why Muslims have been susceptible to patriarchal readings of the Qur'ān, why it is difficult to generate new, liberatory readings, or why hermeneutics remains an underdeveloped area of inquiry.

While the conservatism of Muslim method and tradition derive from the ways in which knowledge was constructed historically, its persistence today in most societies has to do with "the absence of large-scale external—or internal—challenges or pressures to change it" (Stowasser 1994, 7–8). In fact, there are pressures to keep it intact. Their own conservatism may be the most crucial internal pressure that functions to protect not only tradition and method, but also their attendant legal-theological paradigms, even though Muslims have challenged both periodically. Where such pressures

have threatened the status quo, the modern state has stepped in to ensure the hegemony of certain groups and of their readings of Islam. In fact, "the ability of the authoritarian 'Islamic' state to establish the dominant terms of discourse" (Roff 1987, 5–6), and thus to impose its own vision of Islam on civil society, has increased over time as the state has acquired the means to execute its policies more efficiently. Thus, whereas the Umayyad and Abbasid states were able to proscribe religious knowledge and discourses from time to time, they were unable "to implement their religious policies effectively," even enabling the advent of counterorthodoxies (Zaman 1997, 202). The policies of the early states also showed significant consensual elements (the fact that the content and consequences of accord were not very auspicious for method or tradition is, of course, a different matter). While not all modern Muslim states are committed to a process of Islamization, and while not all states who are committed have the same understanding of it, they are now far more interventionist and can implement their programs in a much more thorough manner due to their control over printing presses, modes of censorship, laws against apostasy,[33] and the existence of frequently weak and disorganized civil societies.

It is in light of such considerations that we can identify what is distinctive about (re)reading the Qur'ān in Muslim societies today. What is distinctive is not the existence of interpretive communities, since "every reading of a text always takes place within a community, a tradition, or a living current of thought" (Ricoeur 1974, 3). Rather, what is distinctive is the way in which the state itself has become involved in defining the framework for the production of religious knowledge. Readings, to be accepted as legitimate, must occur not only within the framework of certain interpretive communities and practices but also within a matrix of coercive political power wielded by the state. In such a milieu, rereading the Qur'ān in egalitarian modes is an exercise that has the potential to impinge on the hegemony of the state itself, and to the extent that states can threaten people's lives, it can become an exercise in personal risk taking. The coercive abuse of Islam to oppress people, especially women, is one of the greatest impediments to rereading the Qur'ān today. In such a context, liberatory readings are not just about redefining personal freedoms; they are about challenging entrenched structures of political, patriarchal, state, and sexual power. And few people can do that with impunity. Yet, to not do so is to remain acquiescent with the very structures that abuse Islam and women; it is thus to be complicit both in one's own oppression and the oppression of others.

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Part II

And say: "I am indeed he
That warneth openly
And without ambiguity,"—

(Of just such wrath)
As we sent down
On those who divided
Scripture into arbitrary parts),—

(So also on such)
As have made the Qur'ān
Into shreds (as they please).

Therefore, by the [*Rabb*],
We will, of a surety,
Call them to account,

For all their deeds."

   The Qur'ān (15:89–93)

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The Patriarchal Imaginary of Father/s
Divine Ontology and the Prophets

> **Invent not similitudes**
> **For God: for God knoweth,**
> **And ye know not.**
>
> **The Qur'ān (16:74)** [1]

. . . .

> **God has said: "Take not**
> **(For worship) two gods:**
> **For [God] is just One God**
> **Then fear Me (and Me alone)."**
>
> **The Qur'ān (16:51)** [2]

Islam, I began this work by saying, need not be read as a religion of the Father/fathers, that is, as a patriarchal religion, if by patriarchy we mean father-rule and/or a politics of male privilege based in theories of sexual differentiation. Both forms of patriarchy associate the male/masculine with the Self, knowledge, truth, and sovereignty, while representing the woman as different, unequal, or the "Other." [3] In monotheistic religions these representations draw on a patriarchalized view of God, whereas in secular contexts they are based in specific claims about biology and culture. I thus visualize patriarchy as a continuum and move between its different poles in interpreting the Qur'ān. I hope to show that the Qur'ān challenges the constitutive myths of patriarchy and that it does not inherently or symbolically (biologically or culturally) privilege males, masculinity, fathers, or father-right/rule. Beyond that, I will show that the teachings of the Qur'ān are radically egalitarian and even antipatriarchal.

I substantiate this claim by examining the nature of Divine Self-Disclosure and the Qur'ānic narratives of the prophets Abraham and Muhammad. Specifically, I focus on the Qur'ān's repudiation of the patriarchal imaginary of God-the-Father and the irreconcilable conflict between Islamic monotheism (*Tawhīd*) and theories of father-right/male privilege. In this context, I examine the Qur'ān's refusal to sacralize the prophets as real or symbolic fathers, as well as its sustained critique of the historical practice of fathers' rule. In Chapters 5 and 6, I explain why we cannot derive theories of male privilege or sexual inequality and differentiation from the Qur'ān's position on sex/gender, sexuality, the family, and marriage. Together, these chapters aim to clarify the scriptural basis of sexual equality in Islam and to challenge feminist claims that patriarchy has God on its side and conservative ones that "the Islamic family was to be essentially male-worshipping" (Bouhdiba 1985, 11).

1. (Re)presenting God

Since "a culture's idea of divinity is central not only to that culture's religious life but also to its social, political, familial institutions and relationships,"[4] how we define God has implications not only for patriarchies but also for a theology and hermeneutics of liberation. In other words, "sacred knowledge [as] master knowledge"[5] has the power to shape our views not only of God but also of our own moral, social, and sexual self-worth and relationships. As such, when sacred knowledge is used to engender or sexualize God (humanize or anthropomorphize God) as male, it also underwrites male privilege since men acquire power from "the fact that the source of ultimate value is often described in anthropomorphic images as Father or King."[6] Indeed, feminists believe that it is the "exclusively masculine symbolism for God, for the notion of divine 'incarnation' in human nature, and for the human relationship to God" that reinforces sexual oppression (Daly 1973, 4).

Since the use of sacred knowledge to engender God or, rather, to represent God as male impedes a theology of liberation, attempts to depatriarchalize theology and to evolve a liberatory hermeneutics start by engaging the sexual/textual politics of sacred misrepresentation. In this context, some theorists favor degendering "the word *God*" (Ramshaw 1995, 19), while others want to *re*engender God by recovering God's "female guises" (Raschke and Raschke 1995). Yet others have sought to revive the ancient goddess cults as a counterpoint to masculinist constructions of God. In spite

of the differences between them, however, all three approaches reveal that the problem as scholars see it ultimately is not so much that a specific *sex* has been ascribed to God, but that a specific *meaning* has been ascribed to this sex historically, one that has served to legitimize sexual hierarchy and inequalities. Arguably, then, it is not God's representation as male that is problematic but our own definitions of male/ness; that is, sexed representations of God are problematic only to the extent that specific constructions of gender are. Nonetheless, as long as our views of gender remain questionable, so does God's depiction as Father/male. That is why, in my own analysis, I begin by examining the nature of Divine Self-Disclosure in the Qur'ān before discussing the various "Creator models"[7] Muslims have formulated.

Divine Self-Disclosure

The single most essential aspect of God's Self-Disclosure in the Qur'ān is that God is One, hence Indivisible; this principle of Divine Unity (*Tawhīd*) extends to the idea that God is Incomparable, hence Unrepresentable. Both separately and together, these doctrines preclude associating forebears, partners, or progeny with God, or misrepresenting God as father, son, husband, or male. I will, therefore, consider each proposition in turn.

Monotheism would not be monotheism if it were not based in the idea of God's Indivisible Unity. As the Qur'ān repeatedly warns and confirms, "Your God is One God" (16:22; in Ali, 661). In fact, one entire Sūrah is dedicated to the theologeme of Divine Unity:

> Say: [God] is God,
> The One and Only;
> God, the Eternal, Absolute;
>
> [God] begetteth not,
> Nor is [God] begotten;
>
> And there is none
> Like unto [God].
>
>   The Qur'ān (Sūrah 112; in Ali, 1806)

God is Absolute and God's nature is Unity. *Tawhīd,* as Merryl Wyn Davies (1988, 58) points out, is the foundation of "the Islamic conceptual fabric," and, as a concept, it rules out the notion of "dichotomy, of mutually opposed difference. Any reduction to mutually opposed difference would be

false opposition, a reductive destruction of balance." Thus, the very manner in which the Qur'ān describes God's Unity rules out binary modes of thinking that structure patriarchal thought.[8]

Since God is Indivisible, God's Sovereignty also is indivisible. No one — other deities, or divine consorts and offspring, or humans — can partake in it; *shirk,* the symbolic extension of God's Sovereignty to others, is the only unpardonable sin mentioned in the Qur'ān. In explaining why God and God's Sovereignty are Indivisible, the Qur'ān states that, had there been multiple gods and many sources of Divine Sovereignty, "behold, each god Would have taken away What [each] had created, And some would have Lorded it over others!" (33:91; in Ali, 889). In contrast to the existential and moral chaos unleashed by polytheism, monotheism makes for a just and coherent moral universe, since God — as Toshihiko Izutsu (1964, 129) reminds us — never does any wrong (*Zulm*) to anybody; rather, God in the Qur'ān is an ethical construct associated with the concepts of truth and justice. Indeed, the idea of God's Justness is integral to God's Unity (monotheism). As L. E. Goodman (1996, 16) says, "God here is universal, not local or parochial," an "Absolute [Who] brooks no evil" (22). In fact, it is the

> goodness of God, integrating all affirmative values, that renders the God of Abraham[9] universal. Had evil remained, conflict would be ineradicable — one deity or tribe of deities for one value or farrago of values and another deity or swarm of deities for another. Moral coherence would be lost and, with it, the very possibility of an idea of God. (Goodman, 28)

God's Unity thus is foundational to "the intellectual advance [that represents the] purgation of evil from the idea of the divine," since it is only "when dualism finally yields to monotheism and acknowledges the insubstantiality of evil and the pure reality of the Good" that evil is nullified (Goodman 1996, ix, 29).

God's Unity means not only that God has no partners but also that God is neither Son (Christ) nor Father (of Christ or of other deities). Allegations to the contrary by the Jews, Christians, and polytheists during the Prophet's lifetime, led the Qur'ān to admonish them unendingly. Says the Qur'ān,

> In blasphemy indeed,
> Are those that say
> That God is Christ
> The son of Mary.

Say: "Who then
Hath the least power
Against God, if [God's] Will
Were to destroy Christ
The son of Mary, his mother,
And all—every one
That is on the earth?"

   The Qur'ān (5:19; in Ali, 246–47)

Christ, the Qur'ān repeatedly clarifies, was a prophet who forbade his own deification and sacralizing God as his Father:

Christ Jesus the son of Mary
Was (no more than)
An apostle of God,

.   .   .   .   .   .

Say not "Trinity": desist:
It will be better for you:
For God is One God:
Glory be to [God]:
(Far Exalted is [God]) above
Having a son.

   The Qur'ān (4:171; in Ali, 234)

The Qur'ān also condemns Jewish sacralizations of God as father; as it says:

The Jews call 'Uzair a son
Of God, and the Christians
Call Christ the Son of God.
That is a saying from their mouth;
(In this) they but imitate
What the Unbelievers of old
Used to say: God's curse
Be on them: how they are deluded
Away from the Truth!

   The Qur'ān (9:30; in Ali, 448)

The Qur'ān is equally severe in castigating the polytheists who, it says, "falsely, Having no knowledge, Attribute to [God] Sons and daughters. Praise and glory be To [God Who is] above What they attribute to [God]!" How, asks the Qur'ān, "can [God] have a son When [God] hath no consort?" (6:100–101; in Ali, 319). When another Āyah condemns the polytheists for ascribing only daughters to God, it is not because God deems them less worthy than sons; it is because the polytheists assign to God "what they hate (for themselves)" (16:62; in Ali, 672). Not only did the Arabs of the Prophet's time regard the birth of girls as a calamity, but they buried many alive, a practice God condemns as utterly heinous and promises to punish.[10] That it is no better to ascribe sons to God than it is daughters is clear from numerous Āyāt, including those quoted above.

Not only does God not stand in the *literal* relationship of son, father, husband, or partner to a divine pantheon, then, but God also does not stand in the *symbolic* relationship of a father (or jealous wife)[11] to human beings, either. Thus, the Qur'ān also rejects designations of God as a figurative father:

> (Both) the Jews and the Christians
> Say: "We are sons
> Of God, and His beloved."
> Say: "Why then doth [God]
> Punish you for your sins?
> Nay, ye are but men,—
> Of the men [God] hath created:"
>
> The Qur'ān (5:20; in Ali, 247)

Given the Qur'ān's unrelenting rejection of God's sacralization as Father, it seems unconscionable to read Islam as a theological patriarchy. If God can only be a *patriarch* or, rather, God can only be *patriarchalized,* to the extent that God can in fact be sacralized as *Father,* how can God's Self-Disclosure in the Qur'ān be interpreted as providing the basis either for patriarchalized views of God or for theories of father-right/rule based in such views? If God is not Father in Heaven in either a literal or a symbolic sense, how can fathers represent their rule on earth as replicating the model of divine patriarchy? And if—as the Qur'ān makes clear—we cannot, in what sense is God "on the side" of fathers or of patriarchy? Indeed, if God is not father, son, or husband, in what sense can God be male ("He")?

Ironically, while Muslims reject misrepresentations of God as father/ male, most see no problem in continuing to masculinize God linguistically and to propagate, on the basis of this view, theories of male rule/privilege over women. One needs therefore to inquire into the paradox of masculinist conceptions of God and the idea of a symbolic continuum between God's Rule and man's in the absence of the Qur'ānic view of God as Father/male. This paradox, I believe, is a function of the Creator models in Ian Netton's (1989) words and of a semiotic collapse in Muslim theology between the signifier (the word "God") and the Signified (God), and I examine each in turn.

Creator Models: (Re)theorizing the Divine

As the four Creator models—the Qur'ānic, the mystical, the allegorical, and the neo-Platonic—attest, Muslims have conceived of "their one God in several widely different ways" (Netton 1989, 2). Nonetheless, all "Islamic thinking about God, centers upon the divine names or attributes revealed in the [Qur'ān]" (Murata 1992, 9). Drawing on such Āyāt as "there is nothing Whatever like unto [God]" (42:11; in Ali, 1307) and "Glory be to God, the Lord of Inaccessibility, Above everything [ascribed to God]" (37:180),[12] the classical position (*tanzīh*) in dogmatic theology (*kalām*) began by declaring God Incomparable, hence Unrepresentable, especially in terms of "human form or human attributes" (Sherif 1985, 16). However, since this position stressed God's Transcendence to the exclusion of God's Immanence, it also ended up conveying the sense of a God whom (argued scholars such as ibn al-Arabi) "no one could possibly love since He was too remote and incomprehensible" (Murata, 8). The theological cost of rendering God incomparable, then, was also to render God remote, hence dissimilar to humans. This is why the sapiential tradition has concentrated on God's Immanence, interpreting it as nearness to, and similarity with, humans by way of *tashbīh.* However, even those Muslims who stress similarity, notes Murata (53), "give priority to incomparability" so as to remain within Islamic norms. As she says, *tashbīh* and *tanzīh* represent the two poles between which Muslims have tended to think about God, and both, I will argue, anthropomorphize God.

Thus, readings of Islam as a "theological patriarchy" emerge from within *kalām,* which "is locked into an approach that places God the King and the Commander (a close associate of God the Father) at the top of its concerns" (Murata 1992, 3). It seems God's very transcendence creates the desire to

render God intimate in uniquely human terms. Hence, it is *kalām* (and the *Sharī'ah* that derives from it), says Murata, that establishes God's primacy as King/Lord/Ruler, and in one case, even as Father; however, the solitary reference, by ibn al-Arabi, to God as Father is anomalous both because of its Christian[13] connotations (Murata, 145), and because in Islam God's relationship to humans is ontological and ethical in nature, not consanguinal or contractual (Asad 1993).

It is not just *kalām* that anthropomorphizes God; so, too, does the sapiential tradition that, maintains Murata (1992, 79), seeks to establish a spiritual, as distinct from a social, matriarchy—by "affirming the primacy of God as Merciful, Beautiful, Gentle, Loving"—even though Muslim theologians "refuse to apply the word father (or mother) to God."

If both *kalām* and sufism misrepresent God (by engendering God), so too do neo-Platonic models that represent God in terms of essences and attributes. According to Izutsu (1964, 48), the idea of God understood "as a transcendental 'essence' opposed to its 'attributes' is no longer a [Qur'ānic] concept in its original form." Indeed, even the word "Allah," he (51) says, does not "denote in philosophy simply the same thing as that living God of Creation and Revelation . . . so vividly depicted in the [Qur'ān]." God in the Qur'ān, insists Izutsu (49), can "epistemologically . . . only be an object of *ilm* [knowledge]. In other words, God can only be known to [humans] indirectly." Even when the Qur'ān assigns an "immanent aspect" to God, the "Quranic Creator Paradigm,"[14] as Ian Netton (1989, 22) calls it, conveys the idea of "a God Who (1) creates *ex-nihilo;* (2) acts definitively in historical time; (3) guides His people in such time; and (4) can in some ways be known *indirectly* by His Creation" (my emphasis).

Although all Creator models (except the allegorical, which represents God in purely symbolic terms) anthropomorphize God, there is nothing in the doctrines of Divine Transcendence or of Divine Immanence that should lead us to do so. Thus, in its avowal that "there is none Like unto [God]" (112:4; in Ali, 1806), the Qur'ān establishes that God is Unique, hence beyond representation, and also beyond gender since gender is nothing but a representation of sex. In the ideas of Divine Transcendence and Incomparability, then, we have compelling theological reasons to reject God's engenderment. In fact, inasmuch as the doctrine of Divine Immanence also recognizes Divine Incomparability, it provides equally compelling reasons to reject God's engenderment. Even the sufis, who emphasize God's Immanence (hence similarity to humans) do not reject the idea of God's Incompa-

rability; rather, they arrive at similarity after bringing out incomparability, says Murata (52). What they dispute is not the idea of incomparability, but that it is "the only valid point of view." However, even if we do not take Incomparability as the only valid viewpoint, it is not necessary, even though it is difficult, to think and speak of divine similarity in sexed or gendered terms since there is nothing in the idea of Divine Immanence itself that should lead us to engender God.

To understand this point, it is necessary to recall that God's engenderment results both from using gendered languages to speak about God and from labeling God's attributes masculine or feminine. The sufis, for example, emphasize attributes they feel reflect " 'feminine' qualities like love, beauty, and compassion" (Murata, 56), even though the Qur'ān itself does not define God, or these qualities, in such terms. Similarly, the Qur'ān speaks of God's love for humans; it is theology that, in translating this theme, declares God " 'similar' (*tashbīh*) in some fashion to His Creation," and it justifies this move by referring to such Āyāt as "Wherever you turn, there is the face of God" (2:115, in Murata, 9). However, references to God's face, or hands, or even to God's attributes, are insufficient in themselves to allow us to depict God as a "distant, dominating, and powerful ruler" or as "a strict and authoritarian father" or as "a warm and loving mother" (9). Rather, such portrayals stem from imposing onto Divine Ontology a system of gender dualisms and binary thought in which men are defined as stern, distant, and authoritarian and women as close, loving, and gentle. Yet nothing in the ideas of distance and sternness renders them (or God) male (*kalām*), or love and nearness that renders them (or God) female (sufism). Nonetheless, such ideas of the masculine and feminine principles infuse Muslim conceptualizations of God, even as their own views of *Tawhīd* (Divine Unity) suggest that God incorporates, but also transcends, all (gender) dualisms and oppositions.

God and the Masculine and Feminine Principles

Muslim mystics and scholars, says Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1987, 185), interpret "the Quranic statement that God reveals Himself in the Universe through His Names" to mean that "Being manifests itself through its Qualities." Humans see these qualities as manifesting the masculine and feminine principles and, since we view these principles as being opposed to each other, as also manifesting opposites. Thus, God is "the all-comprehensive reality, the coincidence of opposites, in whom all characteristics are found"

(Murata 1992, 95). God is the First and the Last, the Evident and the Immanent, the Subduer and the Bestower, the Expediter and the Delayer, the Exalter and the Abaser, the Creator of Death and the Alive, and on, as the ninety-nine beautiful Names of God reveal. According to Murata (93), these opposing attributes have led sufis and scholars to search for the "deepest roots of polarity in the Real." Since God's Reality as manifest in the cosmos "can be described by opposite and conflicting attributes," she says, the cosmos too can be viewed "as a vast collection of opposites." However, not only does this collection "display the activity of the single Principle," but "opposing forces [are not] absolutely opposed," rather, they are "complementary or polar" (10–12). Polarity, as Roger Ames defines it, is to be understood as a "holographic" view of the world, not as duality. The difference, he says, is that the separateness implicit in dualistic explanations yields a view of "a world of 'things' characterized by discreteness, finality, closedness, determinateness, independence, a world in which one thing is related to the 'other' extrinsically." In contrast, polar explanations give rise to

> a world of "foci" characterized by interconnectedness, interdependence, openness, mutuality, indeterminateness, complementarity, correlativity, coextensiveness, a world in which continuous foci are intrinsically related to each other. (Murata, 10)

Polarity thus manifests not the exclusion implied by duality, but the relationship of opposites within an internally differentiated organic unity. (However, as Murata says, the distinctiveness of polarity emerges only through a critique of duality, hence the latter's usefulness for defining certain theological positions.)

As theorists observe, there is in polar explanations a sense of a "higher order unity [that] supersedes contradictions," much like the "unifying function of the dialectic" (Grosz 1990, 65). And it is such a view of unity that underpins Islamic conceptions of God. Inasmuch as it does, it also challenges both "orthodox" and feminist Muslim assertions that there is a strict separation of masculine and feminine principles in Islam (Bouhdiba 1985; Sabbah 1984). Such views ignore that Muslims throughout the ages have understood Tawhīd to signify multiplicity-in-unity, meaning that all principles (masculine or feminine) are interconnected in the totality of God's Being. Thus, among God's attributes are ones we label "feminine," like loving, creating, nourishing, forgiving, being patient, compassionate,[15] and so forth. At the same time, however, God also is stern in justice, power-

ful, and a ruler, attributes we think of as masculine. However, the Qur'ān itself does not engender (masculinize or feminize) God's attributes, and even though femininity and masculinity "have figured very strongly in interpretation of the Qur'ān," they have done so without explicit Qur'ānic sanction, argues Wadud (1999, 22).

Polarity — or the interconnectedness of opposite principles — defines not only God's Reality but the reality of humans as well who, says Murata (43), being "made in the form of God [also] manifest the whole."[16] This means, in effect, that women and men do not embody mutually exclusive or opposite attributes; rather, they incorporate both masculine and feminine attributes.[17] In a polar conception, women are not women because they manifest a lack (defined in terms of feminine traits) and men are not men because they possess what women lack (masculine traits). Rather, *each* manifests *the whole.*

Indeed, if Islam were to designate women and men as opposites (man as the Self and woman as the Other, man as having and woman as lacking something), it could not reasonably hold them to identical standards of moral praxis; lacking knowledge, rationality, the ability to reason (attributes associated with the masculine/Self), women would be unable to understand, or act upon, Divine Truth. The Qur'ān does not, therefore, define women and men in terms of sex or gender attributes; rather, it teaches that humans were created from a single Self (*nafs*), possess the same attributes, and have the same capacity for moral choice, reasoning, and individuality (see Chapters 5 and 6). As such, there is nothing in the concept of divine incarnation in humans, or in monotheism itself, as feminists allege, that is anti-women. In fact, inasmuch as the idea of *Tawhīd* allows for a holistic view of human identity, it is liberatory not only for women but also for men.[18]

Language and the Semiotic Collapse

It is not only social constructions of gender, including our ideas of masculinity and femininity, that have led Muslims to anthropomorphize God; so have the discursive strategies they have employed to read the Qur'ān. In particular, masculinist representations of God result from the tendency to collapse the signifier (the word "God") with the Signified (God); that is, to confuse gendered languages with God's Reality. On the other hand, the tendency to represent men as sovereign/rulers over women arises not only in masculinized representations of God, but also in misreading the

Qur'ān's position on human subjectivity (vice-regency) which is interpreted as establishing men's superiority over women.[19] It is thus through a double movement, a semiotic one and an analogical one, that God is masculinized and men deified.

The semiotic collapse of the Signified with the signifier dates from medieval times, but few scholars have studied it or its implications for Muslim masculinizations of God. In fact, Netton (1989, 3), who uses modern linguistic and semiotic theories to analyze medieval Muslim theology, locates the opposite tendency in it: toward a semiotic *disjuncture* resulting from its adherence to the theme of Divine Transcendence. This adherence, he says, grew out of a desire to *rid* formulations about God of "grosser anthropomorphisms [by] stripping God . . . of all human attributes." As Netton (331) explains it, however, the problem is that once we

> accept a theory of God's utter transcendence after the frequent manner of so many of the medieval philosophers, and then say that "God knows," or "God has knowledge," the theologeme "divine knowledge" is basically meaningless in deconstructive terms, since what does it really mean to predicate knowledge of a transcendent divinity?

According to Netton, then, it was theology's attempt to deanthropomorphize God that occasioned a "radical break between the . . . signifier and the signified," leading logically to the "prospect of an endless semiosis" and semiotically to a "paradigm of imperfect signification." In such a context, he argues (1989, 331), even the term "God" becomes "almost equally meaningless."

To me, however, Netton's example shows that far from emptying out the term "God" and thereby making it meaning-less, Muslim theology *invested* it with a specific, patriarchal/ized meaning by continuing to assume that God's Transcendent Reality was male ("He"). The semiotic disjuncture thus is also a semiotic *collapse* since God has been masculinized in the midst of efforts to rid our ideas of God of human attributes! Indeed, efforts to deanthropomorphize ideas of God have never involved finding a suitable theological *language* to speak about God. Not only do Muslims collapse gendered terms with God's Reality (masculinizing God by a mere use of words rather than by means of a sound theological argument), but they also fail to consider the ways in which gendered meanings subvert the Qur'ān's purposes. For example, rendering the word *insān* as "man" even where such a usage runs counter to the Qur'ān's intent gives a totally different mean-

ing to its Āyāt for, if *insān* did refer only to man, then women would be "exempted from almost all the Islamic injunctions" (Shahab 1993, 403).

The androcentric nature of language is, of course, likely to create persistent problems in signification. It may therefore be that "because all our words fall short of His reality, a huge range of more or less unsatisfactory ways of talking about God is positively desirable" (Tugwell in Netton 1989, 134). However, when some modes of God-Talk [20] are always undesirable to the same group of believers (women), and for the same reasons (their paternalism or sexism), it is time to say that some unsatisfactory ways of talking about God are, in fact, worse than others. The Qur'ān itself offers us better ways to talk about God by using terms like *Rabb* and Allah, that have no human counterpart or equivalent. It is thus all the more troubling when we translate such terms as "King" or "Lord," which not only are androcentric but which also fail to convey the sense of creatorship and sovereignty implicit in terms like *Rabb* and Allah. In fact, words like king and lord encourage false analogies between God's Sovereignty and man's, even though the two are wholly different, as I will argue below. Similarly, confusing words like "He" or "Himself" with God's Reality—which the Qur'ān also conveys in sex/gender-neutral terms as "We, Us, I"—subverts the rich pluralism of scriptural language, reducing God's Reality to one term or attribute.

Even when the Qur'ān refers to God as "He," it does not mean that God is male, or like one. As the Qur'ān says, God cannot be explained by way of similitude (by comparison with another). In that God's representation as "He" or as "King/Lord" is, in fact, premised on our idea of males and what we take to be definitive about their social or sexual roles, it *is* a similitude, and thus contrary to the Qur'ān's injunctions. As the Qur'ān's teachings suggest, humans (hence our languages) cannot comprehend, much less define, God; moreover, God's recourse to human language is meant only to communicate with us in words we can understand, not to delimit God's Reality. However, instead of recognizing the limitations of language, Muslim theology confuses it *with* Divine Reality, ignoring how this confusion results in humanizing God. And, of course, when "anthropomorphisms succeed in containing God, we have no God; we have instead a glorified image of ourselves" (Ramshaw 1995, 21).

It may be that the only way we know how to think or talk is from within our own sexed/engendered bodies and experiences; moreover, as Gail Ramshaw (1995, 20) says, in "a century obsessed with sexuality, it is difficult to image a being beyond sexuality." However, what we need is an anamnes-

tic practice,[21] a working toward an unrepresentable something that allows us to think and speak differently than we otherwise could. Unfortunately, however, there is much at stake for most Muslims in *not* learning to think or speak differently, given the real and symbolic value of masculinist images and language in sustaining male privilege. Masculinizing God is the first step in positing a hierarchy in which males situate themselves beneath God and above women, implying that there is a symbolic (and sometimes literal) continuum between God's Rule over humans and male rule over women. However, the assumption, no matter how indirect, that God's Sovereignty and man's are coextensive fundamentally misreads the nature both of Divine Sovereignty (hence the doctrine of *Tawhīd*) and of human vice-regency. (As my discussion in later chapters shows, it also misreads the Qur'ān's definitions of faith and human equality.)

Divine Sovereignty, Human Vice-Regency

I noted above that God's Sovereignty is a function of God's Unity, which is absolute and extends over all living and nonliving worlds and is not contingent on human approval or acceptance of it, though faith hinges on our voluntarily accepting it. (This is why the "master-slave" metaphor[22] cannot convey the sense of willed submission to Divine Truth that defines Muslim praxis.) In contrast, human vice-regency is finite and a trust from God and not meant to further one's own personal power or glory; as the Qur'ān says, "If any do seek For glory and power,— To God belong All glory and power" (35:10; in Ali, 1155). The concept of vice-regency derives from the term *khilāfah,* a word the Qur'ān uses twice for humans, not just for men. As a verb, *khilāfah* signifies succession, and Muslim scholars believe it has a dual meaning:

> that of [hu]mankind in general succeeding, according to God's will, to the inheritance of the earth; as well as the implication that each generation of [hu]mankind succeeds the other in assuming the obligations of the status of *khilafah.* (Davies 1988, 92)

In other words, the idea of vice-regency is not contingent on sex, and while it is a relational term (Davies, 92), it does not mean that humans are vice-regents *over one another.* Rather, they are vice-regents *on earth,* on which they nonetheless have been warned not to walk "with insolence" (17:37; in Ali, 704).

That humans are vice-regents over the earth and that their vice-regency

is a trust from God emerges from Āyah 33:72: "Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet [humans] took it up" (in Davies 1988, 92). The concept of trust, or *ammanah,* says Davies,

> entails responsibility and the notion of rights and duties implicit in the terms of the trust. The *khilafah* has been entrusted to inherit the earth, to have the use of all the bounties for the sustenance and enrichment of [hu]mankind's life on it. The capacities of *fitrah* [human nature] are the means to be employed so that the status and role of the *khilafah* can be enjoyed. . . . Since all men and women are *khilafah* there is a basic equality in their rights of access to and enjoyment of the bounties of earthly existence. (93)

There is thus no reason to assume that only males are vice-regents on earth, much less vice-regents over women.

The finite nature of human vice-regency and its trust-like nature are clear also from God's admonishment to David:

> O David! We did indeed
> Make thee a [vice-regent]
> On earth: so judge thou
> Between [humans] in truth
> (and justice):
> Nor follow thou the lusts
> (Of thy heart), for they will
> Mislead thee from the Path
> Of God: for those who
> Wander astray from the Path
> Of God, is a Penalty Grievous,
> For that they forget
> The Day of [Account].
>
>   The Qur'ān (38:26; in Ali, 1223)

Even a prophet and a king like David is not infallible inasmuch as he is capable of "following the lusts" of his heart, and even the vice-regency of a prophet and a king like David is a trust from God, not a function of his own sovereignty over humans. Significantly, even the vice-regency of a prophet and king like David is meant to establish God's Rule on earth, not his own.

To establish that humans are not rulers/sovereign in the same way that God is would be to belabor an obvious point to believers. But, if we concede that, how can we then extrapolate from God's Rule/Sovereignty over humans to man's over woman? Yet, exegetes customarily draw on both views of man as vice-regent (and ruler) and of God as King, Lord, and Ruler, to advocate men's dominion over women, in some cases even ordering wives to prostrate themselves before their husbands (Tabrisi in Murata 1992, 176), a form of worship Muslims reserve solely for God. Similarly, following a *hadīth,* most Muslims hold that ingratitude to a husband is like ingratitude to God (Thanawi in Metcalf 1990, 23), explicitly equating God and husbands. In much the same vein, Muslims who reject ibn al-Arabi's depiction of God as Father nonetheless accept the typology deriving from his portrayal that represents fathers as the high, spiritual aspects of existence, and mothers as the low, corporeal ones. This is so in spite of the fact that the Qur'ān elevates mothers over fathers (see Chapter 6), as does tradition. However, not only is it rank hubris to associate males with God in this way, but the mis-association also violates the concept of *Tawhīd* that places God above such correspondences and also establishes the principle of the indivisibility of God's Sovereignty.

Misrepresentations of God as male, and of male sovereignty as being coextensive with that of God, derive not from the Qur'ān, then, but from the tendency to anthropomorphize God on the one hand, and to misconstrue the theme of vice-regency on the other. Such misrepresentations are common not only among "orthodoxies," but also among many Muslim feminists who routinely assail Islam's "paternalistic" and "uncompromising monotheism" (Hussain 1994), drawing on representations of monotheism itself as unremittingly misogynistic. As I have argued, however, monotheism as embodied in the doctrine of *Tawhīd* is vital not only to a purification of our idea of God but also to our being able to *reject* patriarchalized misrepresentations of God and, along with these, theories of father-right or male privilege. The idea of *Tawhīd* also is essential to our idea of humans as inherently good and as manifesting *"the whole"* (Murata 1992, 43; her emphasis). By rejecting gender dualisms and binaries, we open up a space to theorize human subjectivity in terms that respect the complete equality and humanity of women and men.

11. Desacralizing Prophets as Fathers

> **we worship**
> **None but God;**
> **. . . we associate**
> **No partners with [God];**
> **. . . we erect not,**
> **From among ourselves,**
> **Lords and patrons**
> **Other than God**
>
> The Qur'ān (3:64) [23]

The Qur'ān challenges misrepresentations of fathers as surrogates of a divine patriarch by rejecting the mythos of God-the-Father. Likewise, the Qur'ān challenges the concept of father-right by refusing to sacralize the prophets as real or symbolic fathers. I illustrate this now by (re)reading the Qur'ānic narratives of the prophets Abraham and Muhammad. To understand the point of my reading, it is necessary to recall that patriarchy has ranged from traditional modes in which the father was symbolically the "common father of all those . . . under his authority," [24] to classical ones based in theories of political obedience and rights, to modern and contractual forms. Here I concentrate on the first definition of patriarchy because I wish to examine the Qur'ān's position on father-right. In later chapters, I will interpret its teachings with the definition of modern patriarchy in mind.

God, Abraham, and Abraham's Father

Usually exegetes in all three monotheistic religions read Abraham's narrative as confirming his status as a patriarch [25] rather than as *displacing* father-right and thereby subverting the imaginary of the prophet-as-father. The latter reading, though, is con/textually plausible and is actually more congruent with the idea of *Tawhīd* (the indivisibility of God's Sovereignty).

The Qur'ānic story of Abraham opens with his search for God, which begins when God shows him "the power And the laws of the heavens And the earth" so that he might discern God's Reality (6:75; in Ali, 309). At the outset, however, Abraham confuses the manifestations of God's Power ("signs of God") with God's Reality:

When the night
Covered him over,
He saw a star:
He said: "This is my [Rabb]."
But when it set,
He said: "I love not
Those that set."
When he saw the moon
Rising in splendour,
He said: "This is my [Rabb]."
But when the moon set,
He said: "Unless my [Rabb]
Guide me, I shall surely
Be among those
Who go astray."

When he saw the sun
Rising in splendour
He said: "This is my [Rabb];
This is the greatest (of all)."
But when the sun set,
He said: "O my people!
I am indeed free
From your (guilt)
Of giving partners to God.

"For me, I have set
My face, firmly and truly,
Towards [God] Who created
The heavens and the earth,
And never shall I give
Partners to God."

> The Qur'ān (6:76–79; in Ali, 309–10)

In the Qur'ān's narration, Abraham arrives at Divine Truth through a dual process of reasoning and spiritual submission (*islam*), and it is this process that brings him to an awareness of his father's sin of *shirk* (extending God's Sovereignty to others, in this case to false gods) and ultimately to a break with him. Incidentally, false gods are not just idols; there is he who takes

"for his god His own passion (or impulse)," says the Qur'ān (25:43; in Ali, 935). The break between father and son occurs when Abraham, having come to recognize God's Reality, confronts his father in an exchange that truly is instructive for determining the Qur'ān's position on father-right:

> Behold, he said to his father:
> "O my father! why
> Worship that which heareth not
> And seeth not, and can
> Profit thee nothing?
>
> "O my father! to me
> Hath come knowledge which
> Hath not reached thee:
> So *follow me: I will guide*
> *Thee* to a Way that
> Is even and straight."
>
> The Qur'ān (19:42–43; in Ali, 776; my emphasis)

Thus Abraham begins by rejecting his father's *gods,* and then his father's *authority,* calling on his father to follow him instead, challenging the very core of father-right as it is structured in patriarchies (where the father derives his authority from his assumed association with God, knowledge, and truth). This inversion is not meant, however, to establish Abraham's authority over his father, as the Qur'ān makes clear, but that of Abraham's God; and only after his father rejects God does Abraham reject his *father.* In effect, what leads Abraham into the conflict with his father is his "uncompromising monotheism"; as such, the conflict between his (belief in) God and (obedience to) his father is necessarily a conflict between monotheism and patriarchy (in its traditional sense). Indeed, Abraham's break with his father is embedded in a larger discourse that seeks to uncover the tensions that have existed historically between God's Rule and fathers' rule. As the Qur'ān details it in the Abrahamic narrative and in others, the struggle to establish God's Rule constantly has run up against the ways of the fathers who were "void of wisdom and guidance" (2:170; in Ali, 67). This theme is palpable in Abraham's address to his community:

> Behold! he said
> To his father and his people,

"What are these images,
To which ye are
(So assiduously) devoted?"

They said: "We found
Our fathers worshipping them."

He said, "Indeed ye
Have been in manifest
Error—ye and your fathers."

They said, "Have you
Brought us the Truth,
Or are you one
Of those who jest?"

He said, "Nay, your [*Rabb*]
Is the [*Rabb*] of the heavens
And the earth, . . . Who
Created them (from nothing):
And I am a witness
To this (truth)."

> The Qur'ān (21:51–56; in Ali, 834)

The basis of the polytheists' faith as they themselves declare it is adherence to patriarchal traditions, and it is this practice that Abraham attacks, with God's full approval, as the Qur'ānic narrative makes clear. In fact, Abraham attacks not only this practice but its material culture as well by breaking the polytheists' idols and then challenging them to get the biggest idol to identify him as the culprit. On their ensuing confusion, he asks why they take for "Worship, besides God, Things that can neither Be of any good to you Nor do you harm?" (21:66; in Ali, 836). Unable to persuade him of their logic and evidently at a loss for inventiveness, the polytheists—his father among them—determine to consign Abraham to a fire, from which he is saved by God's Mercy. As a righteous man, Abraham prays to God on his father's behalf and is told that God's Mercy is not for those who persist in espousing falsehoods after the truth has reached them.

Central to Abraham's embrace of God, and *the condition* for the embrace, then, is his break with his father. The conflict between God's Rule

and father's rule at the heart of Abraham's story also finds exposition in the Qur'ān's warnings to believers to "fear (The coming of) a Day When no father can avail Aught for his son, nor A son avail aught For his father" (31:33; in Ali, 1089). For believers, then, the Rule of God (monotheism) must take precedence over the rule of fathers (patriarchy) and the pursuit of worldly success, which, the Qur'ān reminds us, is transitory.

One could perhaps argue that Abraham's story, as well as the Qur'ān's disapproval of misguided fathers, applies only to unbelievers; that God's bestowal of prophethood on Abraham and his line is meant to replace the rule of unbelieving fathers with that of believing fathers. In other words, it is possible that the Qur'ān disapproves of fathers' rule only when it conflicts with God's Rule, which is to say it is opposed to a specific *content* of father-right and not to its *form.* However, the Qur'ān itself offers evidence against such a reading. Three themes in particular are relevant here: First, the Qur'ān seeks to establish the rule not of believing fathers but of their God (God's Rule takes precedence over the institutions of prophethood, fatherhood, and motherhood); second, while the Qur'ān extols Abraham and his line, including the Prophet Muhammad, it does not do so by valorizing them as fathers; finally, the Qur'ān does specify parental, as against paternal, rights, but never in terms of sovereignty or rule over children (I consider this last point in Chapter 6).

When the Qur'ān extols Abraham and his line, it does so in order to establish their moral certitude as *believers* and not their real or symbolic status or rights as *fathers;* thus, when Abraham's progeny testify that they are following their fathers, they actually are attesting to following the *God* of their fathers:

> Were ye witnesses
> When Death appeared before Jacob?
> Behold, he said to his sons:
> "What will ye worship after me?"
> They said: "We shall worship
> *Thy God and the God of thy fathers,—*
> Of Abraham, Isma'il, and Isaac,—
> The One (True) God:
> To [God] we bow (in Islam)"
>
> The Qur'ān (2:133; in Ali, 54–55; my emphasis)

Incidentally, in Islam, references to the "God of our fathers" never devolve into views of God-as-father, unlike in the Hebrew Bible in which, says Paul Ricoeur (1974, 484), "Yahweh is 'God of our fathers' before being father." However, according to Ricoeur (486), even in the Bible, "Yahweh's 'I am that I am'" dissolves "all anthropomorphisms, of all figures and figurations, including that of father."

As the Qur'ān makes clear, then, believers are expected to submit to the God of believing fathers, not to the fathers themselves. Indeed, a central motif of the Abrahamic narrative is establishing Abraham's own submission to God's Will:

> Behold! [Abraham's *Rabb]* said
> To him: "Bow (thy will to Me):"
> He said: "I bow (my will)
> To [my *Rabb*]."
>
> And *this was the legacy*
> That Abraham left to his sons,
> And so did Jacob;
> "Oh my sons! God hath chosen
> The Faith for you: then die not
> Except in the Faith of Islam."
>
>   The Qur'ān (2:131–32; in Ali, 54; my emphasis)

What makes Abraham a believer is his willingness to yield up his will/ sovereignty to God; he is thus not sovereign in the sense in which fathers are sovereign in traditional patriarchies where the legitimacy of their rule derives from its association with God's Rule/Sovereignty. Submission to God's Will, however, does not make one an associate in God's Sovereignty, but *subject* to it.

Second, when God rewards Abraham and his line with the mantle of prophethood, God does so by designating Abraham an *imām* and not by anointing him as a symbolic patriarch/ruler:

> And remember that Abraham
> Was tried by his [*Rabb*]
> With certain Commands,
> Which he fulfilled:

[God] said: "I will make thee
An Imam to the Nations."
[Abraham] pleaded: "And also
(Imams) from my offspring!"
[God] answered: "But My Promise
Is not within the reach
Of evil-doers."

> The Qur'ān (2:124; in Ali, 52)

Etymologically, *imām* is related to *ummah* or community, and *umm,* or mother. In this Āȳah, its primary meaning, says Yusuf Ali (1988, 52 n. 124), is to be

> foremost: hence it may mean: (1) leader in religion; (2) leader in congregational prayer; (3) model, pattern, example; (4) a book of guidance and instruction . . . ; (5) a book of evidence or record . . . Here meanings 1 and 3 are implied.

In effect, the term *imām* is sex/gender-neutral[26] and is applicable to both humans and nonhuman things. Thus, God's favors to Abraham do not entail sacralizing him as a symbolic father; rather, God designates Abraham an *imām.* Indeed, as the episode of his near-sacrifice of his son reveals, it is Abraham's willingness to yield up his rights as father in favor of the Rule/Rights of God (his *de*-sacralization as father) that establishes him as a true believer in the Qur'ān's account.

In the Qur'ānic account, the idea of the sacrifice appears to Abraham in a vision,[27] which he shares with his adolescent son, whom the Qur'ān does not name:

> when (the son)
> Reached (the age of)
> (Serious) work with him,
> [Abraham] said: "O my son!
> I see in vision
> That I offer thee in sacrifice:
> *Now see what is*
> *Thy view!*" (The son) said:
> "O my father! Do

As thou art commanded:
Thou will find me,
If God so wills one
Practising Patience and Constancy!"

So when they had *both*
Submitted their wills (to God),
And he had laid him
Prostrate on his forehead
(For sacrifice),

We called out to him,
"O Abraham!

Thou hast already fulfilled
The vision!"

> The Qur'ān (37:102–5; in Ali, 1204–05; my emphasis)

Thus, it is only after Abraham's son freely, and in his own voice, consents to the sacrifice that they proceed further. The fact that Abraham does not assume his son's consent illustrates that, without it, the sacrifice would not carry moral weight in view of the Qur'ān's teachings about the voluntary nature of faith. It also shows that Abraham does not have the right of life and death over his son, as fathers did in traditional patriarchies (Abraham does not "rule over" his son). As the Qur'ānic account makes clear, it is the son's *expressed will,* not just the father's vision, that clears the way for the sacrifice, a fate from which God saves both; as the Qur'ān says tersely, this was "obviously A trial—" (37:106; Ali, 1205). Abraham, the dearly beloved prophet of God, cannot dispose of his own son as he wishes, even in the name of God, until his son, at his own discretion, agrees to it! And, once again, it is God Who saves a (believing) son from a (believing) father.

Traditionally, as noted, exegetes have read this account as establishing the primacy of father-right since, after all, it is Abraham who sets out to sacrifice his son and not the other way around. But such a reading transforms into a tale of patriarchal tyranny what clearly is a moral allegory about the consensual and purposive nature of faith, its primacy over kinship and blood, the existential dilemmas that can result from submitting to God's Will (especially where it comes into conflict with one's own life), and, not least, the insignificance of the father's will in comparison to God's Will. These themes infuse all of the Qur'ān's teachings, not just the Abrahamic

parable. Indeed, the Abrahamic parable is one way to illustrate these themes in intimately personal terms. Thus, they emerge also from God's counsel to the Prophet Muhammad and to all believers,

> Take not
> For protectors your fathers
> And your brothers if they love
> Infidelity above Faith:
> If any of you do so,
> They do wrong.
>
> Say: If it be that your fathers,
> Your sons, your brothers,
> Your mates, or your kindred;
> The wealth that ye have gained;
> The commerce in which ye fear
> A decline: or the dwellings
> In which ye delight—
> Are dearer to you than God,
> Or his Apostle, or the striving
> In [God's] cause;—then wait
> Until God brings about
> [God's] Decision: and God
> Guides not the rebellious.
>
> The Qur'ān (9:23–24; in Ali, 444–45)

The Qur'ān does not mention daughters here, but then it is giving examples of what the Arabs of those times held dear. Those Arabs were practicing female infanticide and were unlikely to have found any references to daughters meaningful. Nonetheless, the Qur'ān's command applies equally to daughters. It instructs women, no less than men, not to take the males in their families (the heads of the family) as their protectors if doing so interferes with their practice of faith. Clearly, the Āyāt here were encouraging the pagans and polytheists of the Prophet's time to choose belief in God even if doing so led them to break with their families (as Abraham did with his father). However, what is significant is that the Qur'ān expressly legitimizes the principle of disobedience to males in their capacity as fathers, brothers, and so on. (It also mandates disobedience to parents on similar grounds; see Chapter 6.) To say that faith should take priority over social or

material attachments and accoutrements—a teaching that finds a powerful allegorical expression in Abraham's story—is not to say anything about the legitimacy of father's rule, or even to say anything out of the ordinary, at least to believers. But to suggest that for God's Rule to exist, the father's rule must either be broken (Abraham's father) or subordinated symbolically to God's Rule (Abraham *as* father) is indeed to say something revolutionary. Thus, it is not just that the Qur'ān seeks to establish the primacy of God's Rule over father-right/rule; rather, in delineating the relationship between God's Rule and father's rule, the Qur'ān *dislocates* the latter. God comes to dis-place (not re-place) fathers. In fact, one Āyah expressly bids people to "Celebrate the praises of God, As ye used to celebrate The praises of your fathers" (2:200; in Ali, 80). (This does not mean that God wishes to *be* a Father, as the Qur'ān makes clear.) It is in light of this moral that the Qur'ān's refusal to sacralize Muhammad, the Seal of Prophets, as a symbolic father also becomes so significant, as I argue below.

There is one additional way in which Abraham's story can be read as illustrating the Qur'ān's opposition to father-right, and this has to do with how the Qur'ān—through the Abrahamic story—defines faith itself. Thus, when God accepts Abraham's prayer to make his line *imāms,* God does not promise them all freedom from evildoing; as the Qur'ān says, God "blessed [Abraham] and Isaac: But of their progeny Are (some) that do right, And (some) that obviously Do wrong, to their own souls" (37:113; in Ali, 1206; see also Āyah 2:124 above). In other words, faith is not a function of kinship or sex but remains transcendently personal, that is, in the reach of the moral personality alone. This theme finds an illustration not only in Abraham's story, in which the son of a disbelieving father embraces Divine Truth, but also in Noah's story, in which the son of a prophet breaks with this truth and becomes one of the lost. Similarly, the wife [28] of the prophet Lot is of those who disbelieve and is punished by God, whereas the wife of the unbelieving pharaoh is of those who believe and is saved by God. In all instances, the prophets pray on behalf of their kin to God but, as the Qur'ān tells us, no "bearer of burdens [can] Bear another's burden . . . Even though he be nearly Related" (35:18; in Ali, 1158). Rather, says the Qur'ān, each soul must account for "herself," and warns us to "guard yourselves against a Day When one soul shall not avail another, Nor shall compensation be accepted from her Nor shall intercession profit her Nor shall anyone be helped (from outside)" (2:123; in Ali, 51–52). In place of intercession the Qur'ān privileges the idea of individuals as free moral agents and as witnesses to their own deeds,[29] and in place of bloodlines, the idea of a morally defined commu-

nity, the *ummah.* That is why the Qur'ān describes the "nearest of kin to Abraham," as "those who follow him . . . And those who believe" (3:68; in Ali, 140). Such a view of faith, says Arkoun (1994, 57), opens up

> an infinite space for the promotion of the individual beyond the constraints of fathers and brothers, clans and tribes, riches and tributes; the individual becomes an autonomous and free person, enjoying a liberty guaranteed by obedience and love lived within the community.

The very structure of faith in Islam, then, is at odds with (traditional) patriarchy. Faith privileges the Rights and Rule of God (freedom) over the rule of even believing fathers (necessity, tradition). Since moral freedom "is achieved only by moving towards God" (Murata 1992, 79), the rule of the father, which sets up man as a parallel node of authority over women and children, becomes an impediment to faith. It therefore matters little whether or not the father is a believer (the content of father-rule is immaterial); it is the very form of father-rule (its assumed parallelism to God's Rule) that is unacceptable.

Prophet Muhammad and Symbolic Father/hood

The Qur'ān's opposition to father-right continues to surface in its account of the Prophet Muhammad's life. The opposition is discernible in its narration, for the benefit of the Prophet and of believers, of the history of unbelief against which God's messengers[30] had to contend. It also is discernible from God's refusal to anoint the Prophet as a symbolic father. The Qur'ān's opposition to the idea of male rule and sovereignty, on the other hand, emerges from its delineation of the relationship between God and prophets on the one hand, and from the nature of the Prophet Muhammad's marital relationships (which we can deduce from the Qur'ān and Tradition) on the other.

In the Qur'ān's telling, the conflict between belief and un-belief has manifested itself historically as a struggle between God's Rule and fathers' rule (following the ways of the fathers, or ancestors). As God tells the Prophet, whenever God

> sent a Warner
> Before thee to any people,
> The wealthy ones among them
> Said: "We found our fathers
> Following a certain religion,

And we will certainly
Follow in their footsteps."

He [the Warner] said; "What!
Even if I brought you
Better guidance than that
Which ye found
Your fathers following?"
They said: "For us,
We deny that ye (prophets)
Are sent (on a mission
At all)."

So We exacted retribution
From them: now see
What was the end
Of those who rejected (Truth).

  The Qur'ān (43:23–25; in Ali, 1328–29)

Plainly, then, following their fathers has led people to reject God, and their rejection has been the cause of their destruction. This antagonism between monotheism and traditional patriarchy is evident from a number of narratives in the Qur'ān, including that of Moses. When Moses takes God's message to Pharaoh, his people ask him if he has "Come to us to turn us Away from the ways We found our fathers following" (10:78; in Ali, 504). Similarly, it is the Arabs' adherence to their fathers' ways that keeps them from embracing Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. As the Qur'ān says:

When it is said to them:
"Come to what God
Hath revealed; come
To the Apostle":
They say: "Enough for us
Are the ways we found
Our fathers following."
What! even though their fathers
Were void of knowledge
And guidance?

  The Qur'ān (5:107; in Ali, 275)

Adherence to patriarchal traditions has kept not only unbelievers from the path of God but also many believers (People of the Book, i.e., Christians and Jews), who, says the Qur'ān, "take their priests And their anchorites to be Their lords in derogation of God . . . Yet they were commanded To worship but One God" (9:31; in Ali, 448). The very persons entrusted with interpreting sacred knowledge have misled people, both because of perversity in their hearts (2:7; in Ali, 123) and their cupidity, which drives them to "Devour [in falsehood] the substance of [*insān*] And hinder (them) from the Way of God" (9:34; in Ali, 449). (This scathing criticism of professional interpreters of sacred knowledge, who claim to be intermediaries between God and believers, may be why Islam did not ordain a clergy.)

It is in the context of the history of this conflict between monotheism and patriarchy that we need to interpret the Qur'ān's categorical assertion that even though he is "closer To the Believers than Their own selves" (33:6; in Ali, 1104), "Muhammad is not The father of any Of your men, but (he is) The Apostle of God, And the seal of the Prophets" (33:40; in Ali, 1119). While this Āyah meant to clarify the Prophet's relationship to his adopted son, its assertion that he does not stand in the symbolic relationship of father to his own community returns us once again to the role of fathers, and it does so by *refusing* to consecrate them! From the denial of symbolic fatherhood to the Prophet, which exegetes pass over in silence, I derive the lesson that, in Islam, God's Rule displaces *rule* by the father, whether or not the father is a believer. At the same time, the concept of *imām* (which does not give the sense of rule/sovereignty and is not sex/gender specific) displaces the *imaginary* of the father altogether. In other words, the Qur'ān views fathers in a fundamentally different way than patriarchies do (see Chapter 6 as well).

Given that the Prophet is not sacralized as father, is it also a mere coincidence that he loses his father, Abdullah, in his own infancy, and all his sons in theirs; that only his daughters survive, at a time and in a place when people viewed girls as a curse? Or, do these events in his life illustrate the superficial nature of many of our priorities and the Qur'ān's moral that neither fathers, nor progeny, nor spouses, nor wealth, nor false gods will stand people in better stead than God's Mercy? Is that not why the Qur'ān reassures the Prophet, when he stands alienated from his entire tribe, that he will not find those

> who believe
> In God and the Last Day,
> Loving those who resist

God and [God's] Apostle,
Even though they were
Their fathers or their sons,
Or their brothers, or
Their kindred. For such
[God] has written Faith
In their hearts, and strengthened
Them with a spirit
From [God's Self].

    The Qur'ān (58:22; in Ali, 1518)

In other words, believers are expected to define social ties and relationships through faith, hence the Islamic perception of a community united by a shared *moral* worldview rather than by blood, sex/gender, race, or age. (Significantly, the first to join the new *ummah* were a woman—Khadijah, the Prophet's first wife, twice widowed, some fifteen years older than he, and a merchant[31]—and Ali, his cousin, a preteen youth.)

In the absence of valorizations of Muhammad as a symbolic father, there remains the complex issue of how best to interpret the Qur'ānic injunctions to obey and follow him while also not taking one another "for lords." Clearly, the Prophet is a role model for Muslim women and men,[32] both in his capacity as prophet and as a moral individual whose character embodies the best of the masculine and feminine traits as we describe them. Thus, he is said to have been unyielding and stern in justice and yet also "a man of kindness, gentleness, integrity, and humility"[33] who had "a mild and forgiving disposition, and disliked unpleasantness and cruelty."[34] Indeed, his nature and habits are "those we may think of as particularly feminine: he is humble, gentle, given to few words, eager to serve others, always ready to work with his own hands, pious beyond measure. He keeps his gaze lowered."[35] In other words, the Prophet was unconventional by the hypermasculinist standards not only of traditional Arab culture,[36] but also by modern ones, that disparage tenderness, gentleness, and humility in men. In Muhammad, therefore, all Muslims have an exemplary model for emulation. The problem, however, is that in their desire to live by his standards and ethics, most Muslims have ended up canonizing his *Sunnah* (praxis) and even elevating it over the Qur'ān itself, which—for reasons I explained in Chapter 3—is inappropriate. How, then, do we find the balance between following the Prophet and not idolizing him? The Qur'ān itself makes clear

that following and obeying the Prophet means obeying and following *God,* not idolizing the *Prophet* himself. (This is why Muslims are offended by the old European way of referring to them as Muhammadans.) It is on the basis of this distinction between God and prophets that Islam also denies divinity to Christ. To those who sacralize prophets, the Qur'ān says that

> It is not conceivable that a human being unto whom God had granted revelation, and sound judgment, and prophet-hood, should thereafter have said unto people, "Worship *me* beside God"; but rather [did he exhort them], "become [*Rabbani*] by spreading the knowledge of the divine writ, and by your own deep study [thereof]." And neither did he bid you to take the angels and the prophets for your lords: [for] would he bid you to deny the truth after you have surrendered yourselves unto God? (3:79–80; in Asad, 79; emphasis in original)

(*Rabbani,* says Asad (79 n. 62), is someone devoted "to the endeavour to know the Sustainer (*ar-rabb*) and to obey Him.") The Āyāt not only make a clear distinction between God and prophets, but they also can be read as establishing the primacy of the Qur'ān (Divine Writ) over the narratives of the Prophet's life and praxis (*Ahādith*). This may seem obvious, but, as I noted earlier, Muslims interpret the Qur'ān by way of the *Ahādith* (and thus by way of the Prophet's assumed *Sunnah*), rather than the other way around (using the Qur'ān to determine the accuracy of both as recorded by Muslims). They also take the Prophet's *Sunnah* (as textualized in the *Ahādith*) to abrogate the Qur'ān, practices that, from the Qur'ān's perspective, seem inadmissible. To be sure, one cannot obey the God of the prophets without obeying the prophets and, in order to obey the latter, we need knowledge of their life and practices (*sunnahs*). However, the Qur'ān clarifies that the *sunnahs* of the prophets cannot outweigh Divine Writ, nor, indeed, do we need to emulate the prophets themselves inasmuch as that can result in glorifying them. As the Qur'ān says, "Muhammad is only an apostle; all the [other] apostles have passed away before him: if, then, he dies or is slain, will you turn about on your heels?" (3:144; in Asad, 89). The point, evidently, is to contrast Muhammad's mortality with God's Immortality, and the absence of prophetic sovereignty with the Reality of Divine Sovereignty. God is Ruler, Sovereign, Savior, not Muhammad. The Qur'ān, argue scholars, makes clear that "Muhammad was a human being, and therefore fallible; the Prophet himself urged the first Muslim community to discriminate between his opinions as a human being and his teachings as a prophet" (Davies 1988,

59). Consequently, reversing the relationship between the Qur'ān and his *Sunnah* or sacralizing his *Sunnah* (thus encouraging its ritualized imitativeness) contravene both the Qur'ān's and his own teachings.

If the Qur'ān does not sacralize the Prophet as father, it also does not sacralize him as husband by designating him ruler, guardian, or manager over his wife's affairs, or those of his people. As it says, "thou art One to admonish. Thou art not one To manage [people's] affairs" (88:21–22; in Ali, 1729). Although these Āyāt, which exemplify the principle of the uncoerced nature of faith and of moral responsibility, are not directed at the Prophet's relationships with his own wives, there are others that are, and none of them suggest that he forced compliance on his wives to God's injunctions. Thus, according to Ahmed (1992, 56), after the Āyāt on veiling were revealed, the Prophet gave his wives the choice of remaining married to him or getting a divorce. Nor did the Qur'ān force the Prophet's wives to obey God (or the Prophet). Instead, it held out to those who were righteous the promise of a doubled reward, and to those who were guilty of "manifest lewdness" a double punishment (33:30–31). The Qur'ān suggests that this exception is a function of the fact that his wives "are not like any Of the (other) women" [37] (33:32; in Ali, 1115). Presumably, as the Prophet's consorts, they were required to be role models for the entire community and therefore carried a greater moral responsibility. As such, the Qur'ān holds them to standards of behavior it does not require of others. For instance, it asks them to speak to men not of their household from behind a curtain, not to remarry after their husband's death, and to remain in their homes and not to go into public arenas to make a wanton display of themselves. However, there is controversy regarding the last injunction contained in Āyah 33:30. Arberry (1955, 124) renders it as "Remain in your houses; and display not your finery, as did the pagans of old." According to some scholars, the Qur'ān placed this restriction on the Prophet's wives because they were not permitted to remarry after his death. Others, however, argue that the word *qarna* (translated as "stay quietly in your homes") was rendered as *qirna* (in Basra), meaning "have dignity and serenity." [38] As Kaukab Siddique (1990) points out, the Qur'ān could not have required the Prophet's wives to be sequestered in this way since it commands them to *udhkurnā:* to mention, teach, spread God's Words which required their presence in the public arena; nor did the Prophet himself confine his wives to their home. (Two of his wives, the daughters of Omar and Abu Bakr—the first two caliphs of Islam—are said to have rebuffed attempts by their fathers to restrict them, saying that

if the Prophet did not do so, their fathers had no right to demand it of them either.)

By all indications, the Prophet did not behave like a traditional head of household in other matters, either. He is said to have done his own household chores including preparing his own food. Not only did his wives not wait upon him, but his status as God's Messenger did not deter them from sometimes quarreling with him, and one of them divorced him by saying that she sought refuge in God from him.[39] There is no record that he ever abused them physically or verbally. Indeed, "for most of his life Muhammad himself respected and trusted women, was strongly influenced by a number of forceful females, and attempted to provide for equal participation of women in the religious life of the new community" (Smith 1985, 20). He also was far more progressive than his peers on the issue of children's position in the community (Levy 1962, 91).

Yet, it is usually not these egalitarian aspects of the Prophet's *Sunnah* that many Muslim men want to emulate today; rather, they place a great deal more emphasis on the fact of his multiple marriages, as also on the age of one of his wives, 'Ayesha, which they use to legitimize marriages to little girls. In this context, it is important to be aware, first, that the Qur'ān permitted the Prophet to contract specific types of marriages as "a privilege for thee only, not for the (rest of) believers" (33:50; in Pickthall, 305). The privilege given to the Prophet seems to have been in his capacity as God's Messenger and not as a man, otherwise, why would God have denied it to other men? Moreover, the Qur'ān also circumscribed the Prophet's polygyny by forbidding him to "to take (other) women henceforth, nor that thou shouldst change them for other wives even though their beauty pleased thee" (33:52; in Pickthall, 305). However, as M. M. Pickthall (406) points out, the Prophet was allowed to marry more wives than were others "because, as head of the State, he was responsible for the support of women who had no other protector. With the one exception of Ayeshah, all his wives had been widows." Similarly, Wiebke Walther (1981, 34) notes that in "most of his marriages, if not in all of them [the Prophet] is said to have also had the solidarity of his community in mind." As I will argue in Chapter 6, these standards do not apply to all men, and the Qur'ān does not, in fact, favor generalized polygyny. (It also is important to recall that the Prophet is said to have discouraged his son-in-law, Ali, from taking a second wife.)

As far as 'Ayesha's age at the time of her marriage to the Prophet is concerned, it is a matter of ongoing controversy among Muslims. Conserva-

tives (and Western Orientalists) put her age as low as nine years, based on *Ahādith* that claim that she was playing with dolls when she got married. This could well be true since the concept of childhood is a relatively recent one, and the age of consent for women in most cultures in those days was quite low. (Even in the United States, the age of consent for women was between seven and ten as late as 1889 and was raised to eighteen only as the result of feminist campaigns.) [40] As such, there was nothing aberrant in the practice of marrying young girls fourteen centuries ago (though it is today, given that we now recognize children as children). On the other hand, however, Muslims who calculate 'Ayesha's age based on details of her sister Asma's age, about whom more is known, as well as on details of the Hijra (the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Madina), maintain that she was over thirteen and perhaps between seventeen and nineteen when she got married. Such views cohere with those *Ahādith* that claim that at her marriage 'Ayesha had "good knowledge of Ancient Arabic poetry and genealogy" and "pronounced the fundamental rules of Arabic-Islamic ethics" (Walther 1981, 75). However, most of what we know about 'Ayesha, including the details of her marriage, are reconstructions that remain susceptible to interpretive controversy and manipulation in view of the very different meaning of her life for Sunni and Shii Muslims. (After the Prophet's death, 'Ayesha led an unsuccessful revolt against Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, the fourth caliph of Islam whom the Shii follow as *Imām*.) Not only are Muslims thus particularly invested in specific reconstructions of her life, but the most definitive work on it was begun a century and a half after her death. This work drew for its details on "oral reports transmitted over three to four generations" (Spellberg 1994, 2); thus, "even the earliest Arabic written sources on Aisha's life already capture that life as a legacy, an interpretation." As D. A. Spellberg puts it (191), in studying 'Ayesha, one therefore is studying "male intellectual history, not a woman's history, but reflections about the place of a woman, and by extension, all women, in exclusively male assertions about Muslim society." To what extent estimates of 'Ayesha's age or the details of her marriage also embody displaced male desires must then permanently remain open to question. However, it is safe to say that men who wish to marry children today in order to indulge their sexual lusts under the guise of adhering to the Prophet's *Sunnah* seem to have forgotten another crucial aspect of it: that the Qur'ān unequivocally rules against lechery in a marriage, as my discussion of its position on sexuality will show in Chapter 5. Given that the Prophet's life was meant to ex-

emplify the Qur'ān's teachings, it is safe to assume that his marriages were not, in fact, based in lust notwithstanding attempts to portray them as such. This is more than can be said for those who—on the pretext of following his *Sunnah*—are engaging in lecherous behavior that the Qur'ān repeatedly warns against.

In Conclusion

The Qur'ān's teachings about God and prophets, I have argued, clearly undermine the imaginary of "the Father/fathers" inasmuch as they do not allow us either to engender God (represent God as Father/male) or to condone theories of father-right/rule and male privilege. This is because if Qur'ānic monotheism is intolerant, as its feminist critics allege, it is intolerant of men/fathers arrogating to themselves rights that belong only to God.

It is true, of course, that the Qur'ān's teachings recognize that, in patriarchies, men are the locus of authority, which may be why so many Āyāt are addressed to men. Here I refer not just to the use of the words *an-nās* or *bashar* (incorrectly translated as man), but also to Āyāt that explicitly address men (fathers and sons). There are those who read these Āyāt as, in fact, being inclusive of women; in other words, they believe that references to fathers actually are references to both male and female ancestors. If this is so, then my argument becomes moot (and the arguments of those who read such Āyāt as sexist become redundant). If, on the other hand, one takes many of the Qur'ān's references as in fact addressing men, then my argument may serve to establish that the Qur'ān does not privilege fathers or males and that it takes the notion of father-rule and male privilege to task in a number of ways.

In this context, what seems to be worthy of comment in the Qur'ān is not that patriarchies exist, but that historically they have provided the core of resistance to Divine Truth. This is partly why the Qur'ān objects to the idea of father-right whether or not the father is a believer; that is, it opposes not only the content but also the form of father's rule. At least, this is how I understand the Qur'ān's delineation of the Rule of God vis-à-vis the lives of both prophets and ordinary humans. If my reading is correct, then it becomes possible to say that the Qur'ān *is* an antipatriarchal text, or at the very least, it can be read as one. Nonetheless, Muslims have not done so, both because of their own investment in patriarchy and because of their belief that the Prophet's community is above interpretive error,[41]

a conviction that frees them from having to rethink their patriarchal exegesis of the Qur'ān. However, what God has pledged to protect is the integrity of the *Qur'ān,* not that of Muslim *interpretations* of it. As I argued in Chapter 2, the Qur'ān clearly distinguishes between itself and its human interpretations. Further, as I have shown in this chapter, God does not even promise the lineage of prophets freedom from error and wrongdoing. In fact, Islam is unique in rejecting the idea that its followers are either infallible or exceptional; even the Prophet stands corrected on occasion in the Qur'ān. Arguably, theories of exceptionalism or infallibility would undercut the Qur'ān's own view of moral individuality and, in the end, it may be its view of human fallibility and unexceptionalism that makes Qur'ānic epistemology truly antipatriarchal.

The Qur'ān, Sex/Gender, and Sexuality
Sameness, Difference, Equality

> **reverence [God]**
> **Who created you**
> **From**
> **a single Person**
>
> **The Qur'ān (4:1)**[1]

In Chapter 4, I read the nature of God's Self-Disclosure and the narratives of the prophets Abraham and Muhammad in the Qur'ān in order to show that Islam opposes traditional patriarchal imaginaries of God-the-Father, the prophet-as-father, and the father/male-as-ruler. Here, I analyze the Qur'ān's position on sex/gender in support of my claim that Islam also opposes modern patriarchal theories of sexual differentiation that represent man as a "constituting Cartesian subject"[2] and woman as his Other by teaching the idea of the "immutable, and complete differences of their nature."[3] On a related note, I also examine the Qur'ān's approach to sexuality in order to show that, unlike "Patriarchal religion and ethics," Islam does not "lump the female and sex together as if the whole burden of the onus and stigma [attached] to sex were the fault of the female alone" (Millett 1970, 51).

If all binary thinking is in itself patriarchal,[4] as is the tendency to confuse sex with gender and to associate women with sex (while disparaging both), then I assume that revealing the absence of such tendencies in the Qur'ān is one way to affirm the non/antipatriarchal nature of its epistemology. Accordingly, that is what I will do here. Basically, I will argue that not only does the Qur'ān not define women and men in terms of binary oppositions, but that it also does not portray women as lesser or defective men, or the two sexes as incompatible, incommensurable, or unequal, in the tradition

of Western/ized patriarchal thought. Unlike the latter, the Qur'ān does not even associate sex with gender, or with a specific division of labor, or with masculine and feminine attributes (e.g., men with intellect and reason[5] and women with instinct and emotion); rather, "since they manifest *the whole*,"[6] the Qur'ān does not endow humans with a fixed nature. Moreover, its account of human creation from a single Self, its definition of moral agency and subjectivity in terms of "ethical individualism,"[7] and its emphasis on the equality before God of the moral praxis of both men and women not only confirms that the sole criterion for differentiation in Islam is ethical-moral and not sexual but also allows for a mutual recognition of individuality.[8] That is, morally purposeful action in keeping with the Qur'ān's teachings and not sexual identity defines the human subject in Islam. Finally, not only does the Qur'ān not use sex/gender to discriminate against women, but it also does not stigmatize sex itself. Rather, it treats sex as natural and desirable for women and men, albeit within the context of a moral sexual praxis that remains within the limits prescribed by God.

In support of this argument, I read the Qur'ān's position on human ontology, creation, and moral personality in Part I, and on sex/uality in Part II. On occasion, I contrast Qur'ānic concepts with both pre-Islamic and modern/Western ideas both to explain them and to establish their specificity. While many Western theorists view such comparisons as suspect,[9] there is no other, or better, way to distinguish different religious or theoretical positions and perspectives from one another.

1. Sex/Gender and Moral Individuality

In order for me to illustrate and for readers to appreciate the Qur'ān's approach to sex/gender and sexual (in)equality, it would be helpful to begin by clarifying some general theoretical points about both.

Sexual In/equality: Sameness versus Difference

Even though theorists differ widely in their definitions of sexual equality, most agree that at the core of theories of sexual *in*equality is the confusion of biology (sex) with its social meanings (gender); or, in Marshall Sahlins's (1976, 99) words, the "subordination of the symbolic with the natural." Even though this confusion of difference with inequality is a "confusion of categories . . . too immoderate" to sustain (Sahlins, 106), it has structured (Western) patriarchal thought from earliest times. As feminists point out, "patri-

archal religions" ascribe "psycho-social distinctions" between women and men to biological (sexual) differences between them (Millett 1970, 26). In fact, not only patriarchal readings of religion, but also Western secular (patriarchal) theories locate the "underlying structure [of gender dualism in] anatomical differences," claiming that it is women's biology that renders them deficient in reasoning and morality, hence hostile to civilization (Hewitt 1995, 64).

The tendency to impute gender dualisms to sex is quite old, but views of the relationship between sex and gender have changed over time. For instance, argues Thomas Laqueur (1990, 5), the early Greeks propagated a one-sex model in which men and women were "arranged according to their degree of metaphysical perfection"; hence, to be "a man or a woman . . . was to hold a social rank, a place in society, to assume a cultural role, not to *be* organically one or the other of two incommensurable sexes" (his emphasis); that is, sex was "a sociological and not an ontological category" before the eighteenth century (8). However, since then, the dominant Western view has been "that there are two stable, incommensurable, opposite sexes and that the political, economic, and cultural lives of men and women, their gender roles, are somehow based on these 'facts' " (6). This "two-sex model" not only collapses sex with gender by assuming that there are fundamental biological differences "between the male and female sexes, and thus between man and woman," but it also holds that the sexes "are different in every conceivable aspect of body and soul, in every physical and moral aspect" (5); in a word, they are opposites. To put it differently, women and men are distinguished "not on the basis of (. . . 'pure') difference but in terms of dichotomous opposition or distinction; not, that is, as contraries ('A' and 'B'), but as contradictories ('A' and 'not-A')" (Grosz 1990, 124). As Elizabeth Grosz explains it,

> in relations governed by pure difference, *each* term is defined by all the others; there can be no privileged term which somehow dispenses with its (constitutive) structuring and value in relation to other terms. Distinctions, binary oppositions, are relations based on one rather than many terms, the one term generating a non-reciprocal definition of the other as its negative. The presence and absence of *one* term defines *both* positions in the dichotomy. (her emphases)

It is the second view of difference—as binary opposition—that, says Grosz, structures phallocentric thought and thus female and male subjectivities in

patriarchies. And it is this second view of difference that has been used to oppress women and to exclude them from public and civic life during the last few centuries.[10]

It should thus be easy to understand why feminist theorizing on sexual equality, especially in its earliest stages, focused on trying to establish the sameness/similarity[11] of women and men and why feminists have been so persistent in calling for identical treatment of both. Arguably, however, it is not only the notion of sexual *difference* (the two-sex model) that is phallocentric, but also of sexual *sameness* (the one-sex model), in that both view man as the Subject and woman as the Other. And elements of both persist in modern patriarchal discourses in which woman is re-presented not only as the opposite of man but also as "a lesser man" (Moi 1985, 134).

Given, then, that the idea of sexual sameness also has been used to discriminate against women, some theorists believe that the solution is not to replace difference with sameness (as they note, treating women and men identically does not always mean treating them equally), but to recognize some differences as crucial. This is because, first, the "same unacceptable consequences" arise if we assume women and men to be the same in all respects for, "if women have no special interests or legitimate grounds for their social being, men could speak for them as they had in the past" (Laqueur, 197). Second, as Alison Jaggar (1994, 19) points out—citing the Aristotelian dictum that "justice consists not only in treating like cases alike but also in treating different cases differently"—even equality before the law may not always benefit women inasmuch as "sexual equality in procedure often may ensure rather than obliterate sexual *in*equality in outcome" (20). And, finally, as some feminists argue, "Essential difference need not be associated with power and subordination nor does it necessarily imply a static relationship between the sexes"; as such, it may not be "an irretrievable barrier to the establishment of social organizations built on mutual tolerance and interdependency" (Hart "Procreation" 1996, 29). This is why many recent theories conceptualize sexual equality not as blindness to sexual difference but as responsiveness to it (Jaggar 1994). In effect, the challenge is to think of difference itself differently so as to de-link it from biology and also from social hierarchies and inequalities.

Accordingly, in my reading of the Qur'ān, I do not begin by assuming, a priori, that sexual equality consists in treating men and women identically or differently. Instead, I examine the teachings of the Qur'ān in order to see if it uses the idea of sexual sameness and difference to privilege men or to discriminate against women in their biological capacities as males and

females. And, I focus as much on what the Qur'ān does not say about sameness, difference, in/equality as on what it does say. In this context, I hope to show that Qur'ānic discourses are not based in the same view of sameness/difference as either the one-sex or the two-sex models. Thus, although the Qur'ān affirms the principle of the ontological sameness/similarity of women and men, it does not use man as the paradigm for defining sameness/similarity. On the other hand, although the Qur'ān recognizes sexual specificity (hence sexual differences), and although it treats women and men differently with respect to some issues, it does not advocate the concept of sexual differentiation or inequality (a Self/Other binary). I realize that this way of reading the Qur'ān does not prove that it advances a *theory* of equality; however, it allows me to identify some of its teachings that are conducive to *theorizing* equality.

The Qur'ān and Equality: Ontology of a Single Self

The most radical of the Qur'ān's teachings, which establishes the ontic nature of sexual equality in Islam and which undermines the very notions of radical differences and hierarchy, has to do with the origin and nature of human creation. As the Qur'ān describes it, humans, though biologically different, are ontologically and ethically-morally the same/similar inasmuch as both women and men originated in a single Self, have been endowed with the same natures, and make up two halves of a single pair. Thus, the Qur'ān instructs believers to

> Reverence
> Your [*Rabb*],
> Who created you
> From a single *nafs* [12] ["Person"]
> Created, of like nature,
> [its] *zawāj* [mate] and from them twain
> Scattered (like seeds)
> Countless men and women;—
> Reverence God, through Whom
> Ye demand your mutual (rights).
>
>   The Qur'ān (4:1; in Ali, 178)

Nafs (feminine plural), argues Rahman (1980), refers to Self, or Person, not soul, as it was interpreted by early Muslim scholars who, under Greek in-

fluences, invented a typology of spirit, soul, and body, in which the spirit occupied the highest place and was associated with man, and the soul occupied a lower rank and was associated with woman. (This typology allowed them to read sexual hierarchy and inequality even into Āyah 4:1!) However, as Rahman points out, the Qur'ān itself does not endorse mind-body or body-soul dualisms. Nor does it espouse sex-gender dualisms (that is, the idea of sexual differentiation) inasmuch as words like *nafs* and *zawāj* confirm the basic similarity,[13] not differences, of men and women but without treating the male as normative.

The theme that women and men commenced from a single Self and constitute a pair is integral to Qur'ānic epistemology and is repeated in different contexts throughout the text: "It is [God] Who hath Produced you From a single person" (6:98; in Ali, 317); "It is [God] Who created You from a single person, And made [its] mate of like nature, in order That he might dwell with her (In love)" (7:189; in Ali, 398); "God has made for you Mates (and Companions) of your own nature" (16:72; in Ali, 675); "And among [God's] Signs Is this, that [God] created for You mates from among Yourselves, that ye may Dwell in tranquillity with them" (30:21; in Ali, 1056); "We created You from a single (pair) Of a male and a female, And made you into Nations and tribes, that Ye may know one another" (49:13; in Ali, 1407); God "did create In pairs,—male and female" (53:45 in Ali, 1450); "of [*insān*] [God] made Two sexes, male and female" (75:39; in Ali, 1653); "(have We not) created You in pairs?" (78:8; in Ali, 1673); "God has produced on earth every kind of Beautiful growth (in pairs)" (50:7; in Ali, 1411); and "of everything We have created pairs: That ye may receive Instruction" (51:49; in Ali, 1428). Male and female thus are not only inseparable in the Qur'ān but they also are ontologically the same, hence equal. The reason the Qur'ān gives for their equality and similarity is that the two sexes were meant to coexist within the framework of mutual love and recognition. (As I argue later, such a mutuality presupposes the absence of hierarchy and inequalities.) There is nothing ambiguous about these Āyāt; on the contrary, they are completely clear. Thus, we can take them as providing the ethical and epistemological framework within which we need to understand the Qur'ān's teachings about sexual relationships.

Even though the Qur'ān's account of human creation as originating in a single Self is (or should be) sufficient to establish women and men as the same and as equal, Muslims continue to view them as binary opposites and as unequal, in part because of how they conceptualize the pair itself.

In this context, it may be argued that the Qur'ān's references to the pair do not establish that women and men are not binary opposites; nor do they speak to the issue of whether one term (male) in the pair defines the other (female); that is, whether there is a real or symbolic hierarchy *within* the dyad. In fact, on most views, the very idea of a pair denotes opposition (and on more progressive views, complementarity) inasmuch as it is only by coming together that the two halves in/of a pair become whole. Such a view, however, is based in dualistic modes of thinking; as I argued in Chapter 4, in polar explanations, a pair is conceived of as an internally differentiated unity comprising two halves, *each* of which represents *the whole* (in Murata's phrase). As Wadud (1999, 21) also clarifies, in the Qur'ān a pair "is made of two co-existing forms of a single reality [such that the] existence of one in such a pair is contingent upon the other in our known world." This single reality, as noted, is the *nafs,* conceivably, God's Self,[14] which incorporates within itself all oppositional attributes (the whole). There is no reason to assume that the attributes of this integrated Self get distributed unevenly between men and women who derive their existence from it.

Even if by *nafs* we do not mean the Divine Self, the fact remains that in the Qur'ān, man and woman are "related to each other ontologically, not merely sociologically" (Hassan 1999, 342), and this relationship is based in equality and not in hierarchy or differentiation. The Āyāt so far cited confirm this, as does the fact that not a single Āyah states that man and woman were created from different substances, or embody opposite or in-commensurable attributes, or that woman was created from man, or even that woman was created *after* man, claims that are foundational to theories of male superiority, hence to the concepts of sexual hierarchy and in-equality. In the Qur'ān, argues Riffat Hassan (345),

> none of the thirty or so passages which describe the creation of humanity (designated by generic terms such as "an-nas," "al-insan," and "bashar") by God in a variety of ways is there any statement which could be inter-preted as asserting or suggesting that man was created prior to woman or that woman was created from man. In fact there are some passages which could—from a purely grammatical/linguistic point of view—be interpreted as stating that the first creation ("nafs in wahidatin") was feminine, not masculine!

Although Muslims read the Qur'ān as establishing the priority of Adam's creation, hence also the principle of male superiority,[15] the term Adam is a

Hebrew and not an Arabic word and means " 'of the soil' (from 'adamah': the soil)," says Hassan (345). As she points out, in Hebrew the "term 'Adam' functions generally as a collective noun referring to 'the human' (species) rather than to a male human being." Similarly, in the Qur'ān, "the term 'Adam' refers, in twenty-one cases out of twenty-five, to humanity." That is, Adam in the Qur'ān is both a universal and a specific term, and it is in its universal (generic) sense that the Qur'ān uses it to define human creation. If, says Hassan (346), one analyzes the Qur'ān's "descriptions of human creation," one finds that it

> evenhandedly uses both feminine and masculine terms and imagery to describe the creation of humanity from a single source. That God's original creation was undifferentiated humanity and not either man or woman (who appeared simultaneously at a subsequent time) is implicit in a number of Quranic passages.

If, however, God did not create biological man first, there also is no reason to assume that God taught knowledge only to the man, or appointed only the man to be God's vice-regent on earth.[16]

In other words, the Qur'ān does not arrange women and men in terms of their degree of metaphysical perfection (like the one-sex model); nor does it define them in terms of binary oppositions (like the two-sex model). Rather, in the Qur'ān, men and women originate in the same Self, at the same time, and in the same way; that is, they are ontologically coeval and coequal. The Qur'ān "does not consider woman a type of man in the presentation of its major themes. Man and woman are two categories of the human species given the same or equal consideration and endowed with the same or equal potential" (Wadud 1999, 15). Given this fact, we can argue that the Qur'ān treats women and men as contraries ("A" and "B")[17] and not as contradictories ("A" and "not A").

Notwithstanding the Qur'ān's unusual and egalitarian treatment of difference, many scholars read binary opposition into it on the basis both of the Qur'ān's different treatment of men and women with respect to some issues (which I examine in Chapter 6), and of some symbolic references in it, such as the following oath:[18]

> By the Night as it
> Conceals (the light);
> By the Day as it

Appears in glory;
By (the mystery of)
The creation of male
And female;—
Verily, (the ends) ye
Strive for are diverse.

The Qur'ān (92:1–4; in Ali, 1746)

According to Angelika Neuwirth (1993, 22), the semantic structure and subject matter of the oath embody a binary opposition between the two sexes who, she says, form "the first contrasting pair" in it (actually, the first contrasting pair are night and day). And while Neuwirth does not claim that the Qur'ān privileges the man in this oath, or that the contrast itself is problematic, both ideas are implicit in the very idea of binary opposition. However, while the Qur'ān does rest "on a number of basic conceptual oppositions" (Izutsu 1964, 74), and while it does refer to the creation of males and females alongside the contrasts of day/night, light/dark, and good/evil, it does not use these oppositions to define women and men either in relation to the oppositions themselves or to one another. This is clear not only from the totality of the Qur'ān's teachings but also from the Āyāt quoted above in which the first half of the dyad is not privileged over the second. That is, the Qur'ān does not privilege day over night, light over dark/ness, or male over female; it only privileges virtue over evil. Nor does the oath align males with day/light/good and females with night/darkness/evil. Rather, in delineating good/evil, the Qur'ān (in subsequent passages) says only that God will punish "those most unfortunate ones Who give the lie to Truth" and reward "those most devoted to God" (92:15–17; in Ali, 1748). It does not define the unfortunate or the devoted in terms of their sex; rather, the rest of the Sūrah speaks in the most sex/gender-neutral terms of the good simply as

Those who spend their wealth
For increase in self-purification,

And have in their minds
No favour from anyone
For which a reward
Is expected in return,

> But only the desire
> To seek for the Countenance
> Of their [*Rabb*]
>
> > The Qur'ān (92:18–20; in Ali, 1748–49)

The contrast between day/night, light/darkness, and good/evil thus never extends into associating men with the first half of the dyad and women with the second; instead, the Qur'ān only distinguishes between humans on the basis of their praxis (see also below).

The radical significance of the Qur'ān's teachings, especially its creation narrative, becomes apparent if we recall that in Christian traditions, sexual (and racial) hierarchies derive from their temporalization,[19] that is, from the belief that superiority of creation is a function of its priority. This posited "hierarchy of being"[20] is critical in biblical texts, for example: "For man is not out of woman but rather woman out of man. Because also man was not created for the sake of the woman, but rather woman for the sake of the man" (in Ali 1991, 206). It is this account of woman as derivative from, hence secondary to, man, argue feminists, that establishes her as the Other in Christian thought. In fact, as Margaret Hodgen (1964) shows, this hierarchy of being also allows Western secular theories, especially anthropological, to label non-Westerners as Others. In the Qur'ān, however, since both women and men originate in a single Self and at the same time, there is, either literally or symbolically, no "Other."

If the Qur'ān does not treat woman as derivative, it also does not blame only her for original sin or the Fall. Indeed, Islam does not teach the concept of original sin, so crucial to Otherizing women in Christian theology. Thus, "with one exception, the Qur'ān always uses the Arabic dual form to tell how Satan tempted both Adam and [his spouse] and how they both disobeyed [God]; this much is clear: woman is never singled out as the initiator or temptress of evil" (Wadud 1999, 25). The Qur'ānic expulsion narrative therefore also contrasts with its Christian counterpart that holds Eve culpable for original sin, for which God damns her in grimly misogynistic terms in the Bible: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Genesis 3:16; in Stowasser 1984, 22). As feminists argue, the concept of original sin leads in Christian theology to the degradation of "the woman" as a symbolic category; for example, "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to

teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (in Stowasser, 22). Or, "give me any wickedness but the wickedness of a woman"; and "from a woman was the beginning of sin, and because of her we all die" (Parrinder 1996, 185). The Book of Renditions also mentions "the elect who 'were not defiled with women'" (214). This misogyny results not only from the idea of original sin and its association with Eve, but also from the theme of the Fall which temporalizes and institutionalizes "man's" alienation from God.[21] Islam, however, does not interiorize "the rift [symbolized by the Fall] between the divine and human orders into man's [sic] essence"[22] since it does not propagate the idea of the Fall. God and humans thus are not alienated; rather, the expulsion of the human pair from Paradise opens up the possibility for all humanity to receive immeasurably of God's Mercy and to acquire permanent salvation through their own moral praxis.

Even though the Qur'ān's expulsion narrative does not suggest the loss of Divine Grace or the woman's role in bringing it about, Muslim exegetes—possibly unhappy at the very absence of detail (Wadud 1999)—have borrowed wholesale from biblical accounts to assert "Eve/Hawah's" role in the Fall (and her creation from Adam's rib). Some even claim that childbirth and menstruation are punishments for this role (al-Tabari 1987, 51–55). Such views then serve to establish women's sinful and weak natures and the legitimacy of their subordination to men. Ironically, however, Christian traditions that make such claims, or that assert the "moral imbecility of women" or deny them "full capacity for moral responsibility,"[23] upon which Muslims draw, themselves are flawed. As feminists emphasize, the Old Testament does not preach the idea of original sin or of the sexual fall. Moreover, the early Hebrews held that all humans were created in God's image; the claim that Eve was created from Adam's rib was a later distortion. Also, in the Talmud "God endowed women with more intelligence than men," and wisdom (Sophia) was God's female companion before creation (Parrinder 1996, 185). As my reading will show, many Muslim ideas about women also do not derive from the Qur'ān's teachings and in fact contradict them. One must then question the textual strategies by means of which misogynistic themes external to the Scriptures of all three faiths have been so consummately woven into their core discourses as to render monotheism itself suspect in the eyes of many people today.

Equality as Agency/Praxis

It is not only the Qur'ān's account of human creation and ontology that establishes the principle of sexual equality but also its definition of moral

agency and praxis, specifically, its teaching that both women and men have the same capacity for moral agency, choice, and individuality. This is evident from two facts: First, the Qur'ān holds both men and women to the same standards of behavior and applies the same standards for judging between them; that is, it does not sexualize moral agency. Second, the Qur'ān appoints women and men each other's guides and protectors, indicating that both equally are capable of attaining moral individuality and both have the same function of guardianship over one another.

To understand the ethical-moral dimensions of sexual equality in the Qur'ān, it is necessary to understand the Qur'ānic concept of moral personality on the one hand and the intrinsic relationship between the moral, religious, and social spheres in Islam on the other. The best way to do both is by examining the Qur'ān's definition of faith (*dīn*)[24] since morality—hence moral agency and personality—inhere in a specific practice of faith, and faith involves the observance of moral-religious as well as social responsibilities and obligations. In its most quotidian sense, faith, or righteousness as the Qur'ān describes it, is a willingness

> To believe in God
> And the Last Day,
> And the Angels,
> And the Book,
> And the Messengers;
> To spend of your substance,
> Out of love for [God],
> For your kin,
> For orphans,
> For the needy,
> For the wayfarer,
> For those who ask,
> And for the ransom of slaves;
> To be steadfast in prayer,[25]
> And practice regular charity;
> To fulfil the contracts
> Which ye have made;
> And to be firm and patient,
> In pain (or suffering)
> And adversity,

And throughout
All periods of panic.
Such are the people
Of truth, the God-fearing.

> The Qur'ān (2:177; in Ali, 69–70)

A distinctive cosmology, based in the idea of Divine Love, makes binding not only certain ritual practices like prayers but also certain material responsibilities to the community (especially to those most at risk within it) and moral-social ones toward oneself. Thus, the structure of faith encompasses the rights of God and of humans, the moral-religious and the social-communal; indeed, one grows from the other and is conditional upon it.

If things that are incumbent on believers define one aspect of faith, and hence of moral personality in Islam, things that are prohibited describe its other. As the Prophet is told to recite,

> The things that my [*Rabb*]
> Hath indeed forbidden are:
> Shameful deeds, whether open
> Or secret; sins and trespasses
> Against truth or reason; assigning
> Of partners to God, for which
> [God] hath given no authority;
> And saying things about God
> Of which ye have no knowledge.

> The Qur'ān (7:33; in Ali, 348)

In delineating the unlawful, no less than the lawful, then, the Qur'ān continues to connect specific beliefs about God with specific actions in the world, that is, the moral-religious with the social-communal (in the above Āyah, violating truth and reason both in one's view of the Divine and one's actions towards people). This relationship between the moral and the social (the Rights of God and the rights of humans) is so intrinsic to the Qur'ān's definition of faith that one cannot disconnect them. As Merryl Wyn Davies (1988, 129) says, community and faith, or "*ummah* and *din* are mutually defining and they give distinctive characteristics to the Islamic view of communal existence." It is the *Tawhīdi* (Islamic) perspective that

leads to defining the "community as a moral entity . . . [whose] purpose is to achieve moral balance within and between a network of relationships." How these relationships are realized in practice and "translated into a particular pattern of living is the function of a *din*" (130). To separate the moral from the social, as Muslims do when they concede equality to women in the moral sphere while discriminating against them in the social/legal sphere, thus runs counter to a *Tawhīdi* perspective and is, to that extent, un-Qur'ānic.

At the core of Islam's view of a morally defined community is the concept of human nature (*Fitra*) as also moral. As Fazlur Rahman (1980, 25) argues, weakness can lead it to evil and "self-injustice" (self-injustice because humans have free will and can choose good or evil), but human nature and life remain moral at core. The human purpose is to serve God and to use knowledge and power under God's guidance for good; the test of having succeeded is whether or not one can direct one's history toward positive ends since the natural order in Islam is purposive and not pure chance. According to Rahman (28), it is the extremes between good and evil that provide the natural tensions for appropriate moral praxis, which consists in following the Qur'ānic ideal of the mean: "that moment of balance where both sides are fully present, not absent, integrated, not negated." In effect, praxis to be moral must be anchored within the tensions defined as the "limits of God" (29). What provides the unique balance for integrative moral action is God-consciousness (*taqwá*), says Rahman, and it is on the basis of their *taqwá* that the Qur'ān differentiates between human beings. For instance, says the Qur'ān, describing the essence of integrative moral praxis:

> Those who eschew Evil,-
> And fall not into
> Its worship,—and turn
> To God (in repentance),—
>
> .   .   .   .
>
> Those who listen
> To the Word,
> And follow
> The best (meaning) in it;
> Those are the ones

Whom God has guided, and those
Are the ones endued
With understanding.

    The Qur'ān (39:17–18; in Ali, 1241)

Taqwá—which defines the essence of moral personality by orienting us towards God—consists, then, in our willingness to embrace virtue and refrain from evil by exercising our reason, intellect, and knowledge. In no context does the Qur'ān suggest that men, either in their biological capacity as males, or in their social capacity as fathers, husbands, or interpreters of sacred knowledge, are better able than women to acquire *taqwá* or to practice their *dīn.* Indeed, the Qur'ān is rare among Scriptures in teaching that women and men are able equally to acquire *taqwá* (moral personality), as is evident from innumerable Āyāt; for example,

> For Muslim men and women,—
> For believing men and women,
> For devout men and women,
> For true men and women,
> For men and women who are
> Patient and constant, for men
> And women who humble themselves,
> For men and women who give
> In charity, for men and women
> Who fast (and deny themselves).
> For men and women who
> Guard their chastity, and
> For men and women who
> Engage much in God's praise,—
> For them has God prepared
> Forgiveness and great reward.

    The Qur'ān (33:35; in Ali, 1116–17)

Thus, the Qur'ān does not distinguish between the moral and social praxis of men and women, holds them to the same standards, and judges them on the basis of the same criteria. There is not the least suggestion that women and men, because they are biologically different, are in any way unequal or

opposites or that God has endowed men with capabilities or potential that God did not confer upon women. This "pairing" of women and men (on the basis of their belief or unbelief) is at the core of all the Qur'ān's teachings on moral personality and faith. To give another example:

> That [God] may admit
> The men and women
> Who believe, to Gardens[26]
> Beneath which rivers flow,
> To dwell therein for aye,
> And remove their ills
> From them;—and that is,
> In the sight of God,
> The highest achievement
> (For [*insān*]),—.
>
> And that [God] may punish
> The Hypocrites, men and
> Women, and the Polytheists,
> Men and women, who imagine
> An evil opinion of God.
>
> The Qur'ān (48:5–6; in Ali, 1392)

The pairing of men and women who are virtuous or, conversely, guilty of the same sins, is evidence that the Qur'ān expects both the sexes to live by the same principles and views them both as being equally capable of doing so, or not.

At the core of the Qur'ān's view of "ethical individualism," or what I term moral personality, then, is the idea that every human, whether male or female, can aspire to faith and *taqwá* and that every individual, whether woman or man, is responsible for him or herself. In the Qur'ān's words: "Every soul is a pledge for its own deeds" (74:38; in Pickthall, 421), and every soul will receive "its reward By the measure of Its Endeavour" (20:15; in Ali, 793). That is, the Qur'ān does not link moral agency or individuality, much less the quality of one's praxis, to sexual differences; certainly, it does not teach that because women are biologically different from men they also are morally or socially unequal, deficient, weak, inferior to, or less than, men.

It is not just that the Qur'ān does not propagate the same view of sex or sexual difference as patriarchies do, but it also treats difference itself differently than do patriarchies. Thus the Qur'ān does not conceive of difference as inequality; nor does it view it as degenerative[27] or symbolic of (racial, sexual) disunity[28] as Western (Christian and secular) thought does. On the contrary, in the Qur'ān, differences serve to establish the principle of the fundamental unity of the human race and to enable mutual recognition:

> O [*insān*]! We created
> You from a single (pair)
> Of a male and a female,
> And made you into
> Nations and tribes, that
> Ye may know each other
> (Not that ye may despise
> Each other). Verily
> The most honoured of you
> In the sight of God
> Is ([the one] who is) the most
> Righteous of you.
>
> The Qur'ān (49:13; in Ali, 1407)

The "knowing one another" that the Qur'ān envisages, argues Davies (1988, 6), "is clearly a mutual process, a dialogue," and while this may seem obvious, the absence of such a dialogue is "one of the greatest stumbling blocks in modern western anthropology"[29] whose embrace of relativism ("whatever is, is right in cultural terms") shuts down conversation even as it seems to open it up. The Qur'ān's view of mutuality also reveals that Islam takes the "unity of [hu]mankind [as] an established proposition" (8). Further, as Davies points out, when "we refer to humankind we are discussing implications that apply equally to men and women as the consequence of the common origin in the *nafs*" (84).

Thus, in the Qur'ān, differences serve a necessary, and a necessarily moral-social, function by providing the framework for mutual recognition and moral praxis. Moreover, in the Qur'ān, "difference differentiates laterally"[30] not hierarchically, as is evident from other Āyāt as well. For instance, speaking about the existence of religious diversity, the Qur'ān clarifies that

To each among you
Have We prescribed a Law
And an Open Way.
If God had so willed,
[God] would have made you
A single People, but ([God's]
Plan is) to test you in what
[God] hath given you: so strive
As in a race in all virtues,
The goals of you all is to God;
It is [God Who] will show you
The truth of the matters
In which ye dispute

The Qur'ān (5:51; in Ali, 258–59)

Thus, religious, racial, and linguistic differences are all divinely ordained and provide "Signs For those who know" (30:22; in Ali, 1056). By representing differences as an expression of God's Will, not only does the Qur'ān demystify and normalize them, but it also establishes the inappropriateness of trying to erase or obliterate them, for instance, through assimilation or physical destruction. If something exists by Divine Will, then believers must accept its legitimacy and moral purposiveness as well.

In sum, differences in the Qur'ān are not meant to establish hierarchies based in race, sex, nationality, or class. Such differences, as Wadud (1999, 37) points out, are immaterial from God's perspective in which the only "distinguishing value" is that of *taqwá* and, for believers, God's perspective is the only real perspective. Thus, the sole function of difference in the Qur'ān is to differentiate between belief and unbelief. To the extent that a hierarchy based in difference exists in the Qur'ān, it is not sexual, racial, or economic, but moral. As Murata (1992, 44) says, Islam only "distinguishes between those who meet the expectations of God and those who do not; [i.e.] those who live up to the human role in existence and those who do not." Thus,

at the most basic level of general belief, the [Qur'an] distinguishes between those who have faith and those who do not: the "believers" and the "unbelievers." In all the perspectives of Islamic life and thought people are separated into groups according to the degree to which they fulfill the purpose of life. (44)

The Āyāt I have so far considered suggest that women and men can fulfill life's purpose equally well, or badly.

By affirming that sexual differences are irrelevant to moral agency and praxis, the Qur'ān undermines not only claims about male privilege (and, to that extent, theories of sexual inequality) but also the tendency to associate "moral voice with gender."[31] Thus, the Qur'ān assumes both that women and men have the same *ability* to reason and also similar *patterns* of reasoning. This is evident not only from the Āyāt cited but also from the fact that the Qur'ān appoints the believers each other's *awliyā'*:

> The Believers, men
> And women, are [*awliyā'*],
> One of another: they enjoin
> What is just, and forbid
> What is evil: they observe
> Regular prayers, practise
> Regular charity, and obey
> God and [God's] Apostle.
> On them will God pour
> [God's] mercy: for God
> Is Exalted in power, Wise.
>
> God hath promised to Believers,
> Men and women, Gardens
> Under which rivers flow,
> To dwell therein,
> And beautiful mansions
> In Gardens of everlasting bliss,
> But the greatest bliss
> Is the Good Pleasure of God:
> That is the supreme felicity.
>
> The Qur'ān (9:71–72; in Ali, 461)

The Qur'ān also makes clear that "The Hypocrites, men and women, (Have an understanding) with each other: They enjoin evil, and forbid What is just, and are close With their hands. They have Forgotten God; so [God] Hath forgotten them" (9:67; in Ali, 459–60). The term *awliyā'*, which often is translated as protectors, has much wider implications. It actually implies that men and women are "guides or in charge of one another. There is a

mutuality in the relationship which should be characterized by love and mercy; it has moral and spiritual basis to be expressed in actions that cover the whole spectrum of existence" (Davies 1988, 84). In other words, the Qur'ān's view of *awliyā'* enables a mutual recognition of individuality and reveals that "man and woman stand absolutely equal in the sight of God." Once again the Qur'ān testifies to the irrelevance of sexual differences in defining moral agency or voice. Not only does the Qur'ān "not create a hierarchy in which men are placed above women," but it also does not pit them against one another in an adversarial relationship (Hassan 1999, 353). On the contrary, it affirms that a shared moral discourse and mutual care between the sexes not only is possible but also desirable in the interest of a healthy relationship.

Clearly such a regime of mutuality is conceivable only in the absence of hierarchies and inequalities based in the idea of sexual differentiation. Yet Muslims continue to read all three (hierarchy, inequality, and differentiation) into the Qur'ān, generally by differentiating between the moral and the social realms. They concede that the Qur'ān treats women and men similarly, hence equally, in the moral realm (conceived as the realm of worship, or *'Ibādah*), but they argue that the Qur'ān treats women and men differently, hence unequally, in the social realms by giving them different kinds of rights in marriage, divorce, and so on. Two arguments can be made against this misreading. First, quite apart from confusing difference with inequality, it ignores that the Qur'ān defines moral personality in terms not only of *'Ibādah,* but also in terms of responsibilities to the *ummah,* and that the two are connected and inseparable. As I argued, the very structure of faith, or *dīn,* rules out disconnecting the moral and social spheres in this arbitrary way. How logical, for instance, is it to argue that the Qur'ān teaches the precept of sexual equality in the moral realm (by establishing that women and men originate in the same *nafs* and are each other's *awliyā'*), but the precept of sexual inequality in the social and legal spheres (by appointing men as rulers and guardians over women,[32] as many Muslims claim)?

Second, the realm of *'Ibādah,* as the core of Muslim praxis and of moral individuality (*taqwá*), is the highest expression of the value of human equality and is not subject to change (Esposito 1982). How logical, then, is it to argue that women and men are each other's equal in the sight of God, but unequal in the sight of men?

Although I give examples of how the moral and the social are connected

in the following chapter, I would like to cite one case here that also illustrates the nature of these connections. This pertains to the oath that women wishing to embrace Islam in the Prophet's lifetime were required to take. In this most significant of events, in both real and symbolic terms, the Qur'ān connects *'Ibādah* to specific *social* obligations within the *ummah:*

> O Prophet! If believing women come unto thee, taking oath of allegiance unto thee that they will ascribe nothing as partner unto Allah, and will neither steal nor commit adultery nor kill their children, nor produce any lie that they have devised between their hands and feet, nor disobey thee in what is right, then accept their allegiance and ask Allah to forgive them. (60:12; in Pickthall, 397)

Notably, this oath — which required women to speak for themselves — does not mention obedience to husbands, as Siddique (1990) among others, points out, and obedience to the Prophet also is in what is "right." Moreover, if the word "women" were removed from this Āyah, one could not tell the sex of the person taking the oath. While there is no comparable oath for men in the Qur'ān, we know from tradition that they had the duty of defense added to their obligations. The Qur'ān exempted (but did not forbid) women from doing battle. This may have been because of the practice of enslaving women taken as war captives, which made them vulnerable to sexual abuse. This is why the Qur'ān also instructed Muslims not to repatriate women who had converted to Islam to their own tribes because of the "more terrible prosecution which women had to undergo, if extradited, and their helpless social condition" (Fernea and Bezirgan 1977, 25). Although, as I will argue in Chapter 6, men and women do not have identical responsibilities in Islam (which is why they also have some different rights), this is not because the Qur'ān views the social sphere as being separate from the moral, or women as being unequal to men; it is because the Qur'ān seeks to protect women's rights within patriarchies by recognizing their sexual specificity as women.

11. The Qur'ān and Sex/uality[33]

Prior to analyzing the Qur'ān's position on sex/uality, I begin with some observations about its representations in Jewish, Christian, and Western patriarchal traditions.

Patriarchal Constructions of Sex/uality

Sex, argues Jeffrey Weeks (1985, 16), "has long been a transmission belt for wider social anxieties, and a focus of struggles over power, one of the prime sites in truth where domination and subordination are defined and expressed." Hence, "Struggles around sexuality . . . are struggles over meanings—over what is appropriate or not inappropriate"; and in defining meanings and regulating sexual practices, religion plays a vital role (35). In this context, theorists note the tendency of Western/Christian traditions both to view sex as "an overpowering force which the social/moral/medical has to control" (Weeks, 8), and also to associate sex with women, raising "Fears of the carnivorousness in female sexuality" and the idea that "women can threaten male order, male life and sanity" (Padel 1993, 3–4). Such ideas predate Judeo-Christian traditions, of course. Ancient Athenians, for instance, identified women with what was dark and "unspeakable" in human nature and saw women (and even mother's milk) as polluting (6). The female body, especially its interior, was considered open to demonic possession. Means to control women's sexuality extended from violence against them to veiling and secluding them, a regime of discipline and control justified by theories about their flawed and incomplete humanity (see Ahmed 1992; Cameron and Kuhrt 1993; Ide, 1982).

Some of the same themes surface in the traditions (but not necessarily the Scriptures) of the monotheistic religions. For example, orthodox Jewish traditions treat women as polluting for most of their lives and limit their movements during menstruation. The Torah states that "Anyone who touches [a menstruating woman's] bed or sits on her seat must wash his clothes and bathe in water and is *tamae* until evening";[34] some even hold that if such a woman passes between two men at the start of her period, she will kill one of them. In the past, where

> sacrificial ritual was concerned, women in the formula of the Talmud were coupled with gentiles, slaves, children, imbeciles, deaf-mutes, and persons of doubtful or double sex, all of whom were excluded from participation in the Temple's cultic affairs. (Archer 1993, 279)

Women were barred not only from temples but also from studying the Torah (while subject to its negative commandments) and were excluded from "public expressions of piety." They also were exempt "from nearly all of the positive precepts whose fulfillment depended upon a specific time of

the day or of the year," as well as from daily affirmations of faith because of their seclusion and alleged uncleanliness. And, "Throughout their lives, women's personal vow of valuation to God was reckoned at roughly half that of men." This may explain why, among the orthodox, men thank God daily for not making "me a woman"[35] (284).

Christian representations of "women as the repositories of morality" also turn out, on closer scrutiny, to disguise negative attitudes towards women and sex, since only women in the roles "of obedient wife and ever-nurturing mother" are considered moral (Turner 1985, 325). Outside these roles, they are seen as impure and dangerous and associated with sex, which is viewed as "unclean, sinful, and debilitating" (Millett 1970, 51). Hence the practice of veiling women to protect *men's* virtue and hence the themes of permanent sexual renunciation, abstinence, and asceticism (the confusion of virtue with virginity) in Christianity. However, alongside this asceticism there also exists a "grossly male view of sexuality" that justifies female prostitution as the means for men to obtain sexual release, even as it blames life's sorrows on sex (Parrinder 1996, 226). As Kate Millett (54) says, "eat" in Hebrew also means coitus; the punishment for Adam and Eve "eating" is for Adam to toil by the sweat of his brow and for Eve to have him as her ruler. This "connection of women, sex, and sin constitutes the fundamental patterns of Western patriarchal thought thereafter." Inasmuch as femaleness is seen as a cause of the Fall, there also is a "correlated rift between femaleness and sacrality," thus between God and women (Borresen and Vogt 1993, 27).

In Islam, however, there is a radical departure from such views. As Franz Rosenthal (1979, 4) points out, there is a "much repeated commonplace that Islam is a 'sex positive' religion and society, in contrast with the pervasive negative attitude attributed to Christianity." Not only does sexuality pose no danger to Muslims, but "[s]exual desire . . . serves God's will and the interest of the individual at the same time" since it helps to perpetuate human communities (Nicolaisen 1983, 5). Nor does Islam hold women's sexual virtue to be central, which implies that men's virtue is tangential (Metcalf 1990).

And yet, Muslim patriarchies have managed to read into Islam ideas that once were specific to Judaism and Christianity due to the peculiar nature of their "inter-religiously shared 'worlds'" (Wasserstrom 1995, 209). Among these is a tendency to view sex as unclean and dangerous and women as sexually corrupt/ing and insatiable. In fact, on some accounts, it is Islam's desire to curb "active female sexuality" that is at the base of many of its

"family institutions" (Nicolaisen, 6). At the same time, most Muslims also adhere to the view that men have been endowed with a hyperactive libido whose satisfaction necessitates polygyny, a view that leads them to see women merely as passive receptacles for men's sexual pleasure and release (Sabbah 1984).

Such ideas, however, derive not from the Qur'ān, but from its exegesis and from traditions of the Prophet's life, the *Ahādith*. In fact, "Muslim sexual morality" has its roots in *Ahādith* that, argues James Bellamy (1979, 27), propagate two attitudes to sex: one, a "naive and simplistic, even innocent, view, devoid of complications, free of doubts, and quite unaware of some of the darker aspects of human sexuality"; the second and more influential view, on the other hand, embodies a strong sense of pudendency. As Bellamy (39) notes, the "sexual ethics of Islam" were "worked out by men," especially the sufis, who are credited with having taken the "scattered and often dry and repetitive anecdotes" about sex and having shaped "them into a viable sexual ethic." This ethic, argues Annemarie Schimmel (1979, 124), is marked by a "fear of the demonic power of sex and its dangers," and out of this "fear of the uncontrollable, dangerous, and yet fascinating power of sex [she says] develops the tendency to see all the dreaded (hence hated) aspects of life in woman: the concept of the *nafs*, the lower self (feminine in Arabic)."

The Qur'ān's Approach to Sex/uality

The Qur'ān not only makes no pejorative claims about women or sex, but it also challenges the misogyny in which such claims and representations are embedded. As I argue in this section (and in Chapter 6), the Qur'ān speaks less to the issue of human sexualities (socially constructed sexual identities) than it does to the issue of human sexual natures and praxis. At the core of its view of both is the idea that women and men have the same sexual natures (the idea of sexual sameness). In effect, the Qur'ān espouses an undifferentiated view of sexuality inasmuch as it does not ascribe a particular type of sexual identity, drive, or proclivity for certain types of behaviors to either sex. For instance, it does not advocate either the idea of a sexually corrupt or passive female nature or a polymorphously perverse or aberrant male sexuality. Contrary to what patriarchies and many feminists claim, its provisions on polygyny are not meant to pander to male sexual needs or lusts. Indeed, the Qur'ān counsels chastity both outside of marriage and within it, and it extends its notion of chastity—associated with

"the feminine"—to men as well. In the Qur'ān, chastity implies not virginity, asceticism, or renunciation, but a sexual praxis that remains within the moral limits prescribed by God. Thus, while the Qur'ān recognizes the importance of sexual desire and the need for its fulfillment, it also establishes a framework for its expression. Finally, while the Qur'ān's emphasis on chastity reveals some anxieties about sex, it does not treat sex itself as dangerous or dirty. Rather, the Qur'ān views sex as fulfilling and wholesome in itself, that is, outside of its procreative role. This may interest those who claim as the "signal triumph of modernity" the "acceptance of sexual behavior as a joyful and salutary form of human activity independent of the biological necessity of procreation" (Raschke and Raschke 1995, 7).

Sexual Praxis: Modesty and Lust

Foundational to the Qur'ān's conception of sex/uality and of female-male relationships is the claim that among God's "signs" is the fact that "[God] created for you helpmeets from yourselves that ye might find [*sukūn*] in them, and [God] ordained between you love and mercy. Lo, herein indeed are portents for folk who reflect" (30:21; in Pickthall, 291). *Sukūn,* often rendered as love, implies a deeper intimacy ensuing from sexual gratification and mental peace (Mir, 1987). Its use in the Qur'ān is significant for a couple of reasons: First, it indicates that Islam expects sexual/marital relationships to be based in mutual love, harmony, and fulfillment, a view that—given the time in which it was advocated (in the seventh century)—is nothing short of revolutionary. By emphasizing the mutuality of sexual desire and its gratification, the Qur'ān establishes that both men and women have sexual desires and needs and the right to fulfill them. Second, by defining sex in terms that suggest mutual pleasure and fulfillment, the Qur'ān also affirms that sex is not only or primarily for procreative purposes; it is a joyful and purposive activity in itself which is conducive to *sukūn.*

The Āyah itself is significant for two additional reasons. First, it reveals that, "unlike dualistic traditions," the Qur'ān does not set up sexuality in opposition to spirituality; rather, it regards sexuality as a "'sign' of God's mercy and bounty to humanity." Nor does it associate sex/uality with "animality or corporeality" (Hassan 1999, 341). Thus, it does not suggest—in the manner of many Muslims—that the "'sex-instinct' [is the] 'greatest weakness of the human race'" (Maududi in Hassan, 351). To the contrary, the Qur'ān views sex "as the divine instrument for creating man-women relationships characterized by togetherness, tranquillity, love, and mercy"

(Hassan, 341). Second, this Āyah, like many others, confirms that women and men have same/similar natures, including sexual natures, which are an integral aspect of one's overall nature, or *Fitra.* Indeed, it is the sameness/similarity of human (sexual) nature that makes mutual *sukūn* meaningful and possible.

That the Qur'ān does not distinguish between female and male sexual natures is evident also from its "pairing" of women and men on a variety of issues that show their equivalence/likeness. For instance, the Qur'ān decrees that

> Women impure are for men impure,
> And men impure for women impure
> And women of purity
> Are for men of purity,
> And men of purity
> Are for women of purity
>
> The Qur'ān (24:26; in Ali, 902)

By affirming that both women and men can be sexually pure or impure and that believing women, no less than believing men, have the right to marry pure spouses, this Āyah challenges Muslim views of women as sexually corrupt on the one hand, and the association of purity (typically defined as virginity) only with women, on the other. The Qur'ān, however, does not put a premium on only female chastity, as the above Āyah shows. Moreover, in the Qur'ān, purity and chastity are a function of conduct and not of sexual identity or nature, which is why the Qur'ān applies the concept of chastity equally to both the sexes. This is borne out by another Āyah:

> Let no man guilty of
> Adultery or fornication marry
> Any but a woman
> Similarly guilty, or an Unbeliever:
> Nor let any but such a man
> Or an Unbeliever
> Marry such a woman:
> To the Believers such a thing
> Is forbidden.
>
> The Qur'ān (24:3; in Ali, 896)

Sexual morality, or purity, is a function not of one's nature or sexual identity, then, but of one's behavior. Further, purity is not the absence of sex, but the absence of certain types of sex (adultery, fornication) and the valuation of purity, chastity, avoidance of lust and lewdness, and so on. Indeed, in the Qur'ān, the condition of forced abstinence *from* marriage, the permission *for* marriage, and the state *of* marriage all are made contingent on chaste behavior and the avoidance of degrading, uncontrollable, or violent sex (lust and lewdness) on the part of both women and men (although the Qur'ān addresses men more than it does women in warning against lustful behavior). Thus, the Qur'ān forbids extramarital sex by advising those who do not have the means to get married to "Keep themselves chaste, until God gives them means" (24:33; in Ali, 906). Those who can afford to marry, on the other hand, are encouraged to seek wives "With gifts from your property,—Desiring chastity, not lust" (4:24; in Ali, 187). Lawful to men, says the Qur'ān,

> Are (not only) chaste women
> Who are believers, but
> Chaste women among
> The People of the Book,
> Revealed before your time,—
> When ye give them
> Their due dowers, and desire
> Chastity, not lewdness,
> Nor secret intrigues.
>
> The Qur'ān (5:6; in Ali, 241–42)

(The Qur'ān forbids marriage with unbelieving women until they believe, but it does allow men to marry from among the People of the Book. Likewise, it forbids marriage with unbelieving men. It does not, however, state that women cannot marry men from among the People of the Book; tradition holds they cannot.) That by chastity the Qur'ān has in mind male virginity as well as female is evident from its stipulation to those who cannot marry to abstain from sex, as well as from its injunction that only pure women and men should marry one another. It also is borne out by the Prophet's life; as I noted in Chapter 4, with one exception, all his wives were widows. The example of the Prophet's marriages reveals that pure women are not simply virgins; nor does the Qur'ān itself valorize female

virginity in this way. Besides, the purpose of marrying chaste women is not to encourage their despoliation but to enable *the man also* to remain chaste within the marriage, whose very purpose is to *avoid* lust. In this context, notably, the Qur'ān does not define chastity as a characteristic only of Muslim women; non-Muslim women also can be chaste, and they also are to be paid their dower and sought in marriage and not for the purpose of indulging one's sexual lusts. (Men who try to legitimize their affairs with non-Muslim women by "marrying" them for the duration of the affair, therefore, are violating the Qur'ān's teachings.)

In the Qur'ān, then, chastity is a function of one's conduct, hence of the moral and sexual choices one makes, rather than one's nature, identity, religion, or even social class. This is evident also from the Qur'ān's injunction to believers to "Marry those among you Who are single, or The virtuous ones among Your slaves, male or female" [36] (24:32; in Ali, 905). That virtuous slaves are better than free-born believers is developed at some length in the Qur'ān, which tells men that if they desire to marry women slaves, they "should be Chaste, not lustful, nor taking Paramours: when they Are taken in wedlock" (4:25; in Ali, 188). Pickthall (82) renders this Āyah as "Ye (proceed) one from another; so wed [slave girls and concubines] . . . and give unto them their portions in kindness, they being honest, not debauched nor of loose conduct." Given the racialization of slavery by white Europeans and its legacy of the systematic rape, murder, and dis-location of millions of Africans, some people may misread this Āyah as justifying slavery. However, the principle the Qur'ān establishes here is not that slavery itself is just, but that slaves, who existed at that time, had a moral personality and *will.* This is clear from the fact that the Qur'ān is assuming the ability and right of women slaves to turn down lovers after their marriage. This teaching is significant because it shows that chastity is a function of choice rather than identity or nature. Even more, it is significant because it ascribes to *female slaves,* in the eyes of society the most debased of all social classes, a will (the right to reject lovers upon their marriage), and thus moral agency and personality! However, even though slavery in seventh-century Arabia was unlike its modernized version (the Qur'ān, after all, was encouraging *marriage* to slaves), Islam sought to attenuate it by various means. In addition to marriage, these included freeing slaves, especially as an atonement for various transgressions.

In view of the Qur'ān's disapproval of licentiousness and its insistence that marriages be based in chastity and mutuality, one may wonder how Muslims can interpret its provisions on polygyny (or the Prophet's marriage

to 'Ayesha) as accommodating male sexual lusts. As I argue in Chapter 6, the Qur'ān not only restricted polygyny, but it made the practice contingent on ensuring justice for *women*. However, many Muslim men have made a mockery of its teachings by acquiring harems and contracting serial one-night marriages. Not only do these not serve any moral or social purposes that are compatible with the Qur'ānic ideals of chastity and justice but they also pervert these ideals. By valorizing only female virginity and, on this pretext, marrying prepubescent girls, and by misinterpreting the promise of chaste women in paradise as a license to unbridled debauchery (in fact, the very mention of chaste women conjures up in many men fantasies of rape and defilement) many Muslim men have corrupted in the extreme the Qur'ānic ideals of temperance and virtue. Through their prurient and orgiastic speculations, they have transformed even the Qur'ān's view of paradise into what some critics of Islam call a "heavenly whorehouse" [37] (Brooks 1995, 39).

Sexual Praxis: From the Gaze to the Body

It is in light of the Qur'ān's teachings about chastity that one can understand its other provisions about sexual praxis, especially those pertaining to the gaze and the body, which apply equally to men and women. The male gaze, characterized as male phallic/scopic activity, has been the subject of extensive feminist critiques. Thus, some theorists emphasize the "mastery of the gaze" that allows a man to " 'eye up' a woman" (King 1992, 134), while others criticize the "gendered character of looking and being looked at" (Bonner and Goodman 1992, 4). On such views, men are empowered "as spectators" while "women live as the seen rather than as a seer" (King, 135–36). The Qur'ān, however, rules out all scopic activity by eliminating the gaze itself, and it does so in the context of its discussion of "the veil," as I argued in Chapter 2. Thus, the Qur'ān instructs the Prophet to tell the

> believers, that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts; that is purer for them. God is aware of the things they work. And say to the believing women, that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts,[38] and reveal not their adornment save such as is outward; and let them cast their [*khumūr*] over their bosoms, and not reveal their adornment save to . . .[39] (24:30; Arberry 1955, 2:49–50)

Yusuf Ali (1988, 904) renders "outward" as "except What (must ordinarily) appear," which seems more appropriate inasmuch as ideas about what must "ordinarily" show are culturally specific, and the Qur'ān's purpose is to

counsel modesty for all cultures, not just the Arab, or to universalize Arab modes of dress/ing.

I argued earlier that there are two concepts of "the veil" in the Qur'ān, one specific and the other general. In Chapter 2, I discussed the specific (historically contingent) model; as such, I will focus here only on the general model suggested by the Āyah quoted above. In this context, I should note that there are two concepts of the "veil" within this Āyah as well: one having to do with the eyes/gaze and the other with the body/dress, which often get displaced onto one another with dire consequences for women. Thus, many commentators of old, who took this Āyah to mean that the gaze was the "messenger of fornication,"[40] sought to mitigate it not as the Qur'ān does, by counseling modesty for both men and women, but by segregating and veiling women in order to protect men's sexual virtue.[41] The Qur'ān, however, rules out both male and female scopic activity. Moreover, its injunction to cast down one's eyes establishes that people must, in fact, be free to look upon one another publicly. If men and women were segregated, or if women's faces were veiled, it would not be necessary to cast down one's eyes, and thus this ruling of the Qur'ān would be unnecessary. If anything, therefore, the Qur'ān's ruling establishes that women can freely enter public arenas (as do the Āyāt on the *jilbāb* I considered in Chapter 2), undermining the claim of Muslim conservatives that Islam mandates secluding and segregating women.

Even though, as this Āyah makes clear, the real veil is in the eyes/gaze, the Qur'ān is concerned also with the dress/body. In this context, it is important to note, first, that it requires both men and women to dress modestly. That is to say, the Qur'ān does not single out women when it comes to the issue of modesty of dress. Second, the Qur'ān describes modesty of dress rather sparingly as the covering of private parts. The only difference is that whereas it does not refer to men's apparel and "adornments," it does to women's. However, it is important to be clear, third, that the function of the *khumūr* (shawl) is to cover the bosom, not the face; this is evident not only from the nature of the garment itself, but also from the Āyah which, in so many words, refers to the bosom and to private parts. Yet, Muslim commentators overlook that fact and focus instead on words like "adornment," which the Qur'ān does not define but which they define so broadly as to include even the face and hair. This obsession with the female body has spawned forms of veiling the Qur'ān does not mandate and has deflected attention from its provisions on male "veiling"; that is, its teachings about the proper display of the male body in front of women believers:

O ye who believe!
Let those whom your right hands
Possess, and the (children) among you
Who have not come of age [attained puberty]
Ask your permission (before
They come to your presence),
On three occasions: before
Morning prayer; the while
Ye doff your clothes
For the noonday heat;
And after the late-night prayer:
These are your three times
Of undress: outside those times
It is not wrong for you
Or for them to move about
Attending to each other.

   The Qur'ān (24:58; in Ali, 915–16)

If women have an obligation not to be sexually provocative and, to that end, to dress decently in public, men also have an obligation not to be sexually provocative by being undressed in private, even in front of their "own" women. Even men's bodies, then, are not to be displayed in all states, even in the privacy of their own homes.

It thus is reasonable to assume that the Qur'ān's concern with bodily modesty is based in its view of the body itself as a *sexed* body and not with the *female* body. And, implicit in its attitude to the sexed body is a view of it as a potentially *erotic* body, not a *polluting* body, since missing from the Qur'ān are the tortuous "Judeo-Christian disquisitions on the sins of the flesh" (Weeks 1985, 65). While the Qur'ān thus closes off the body to scopic activity, it does not mean that it de-eroticizes or de-sexualizes the body. Even a de-eroticized body (if a clothed body is such) is not a de-sexualized body. We can infer, therefore, that the Qur'ān is concerned with modulating sexual *desire* and not with establishing the body itself as de-sexualized/unerotic or, conversely, as unclean/sinful. In other words, the Qur'ān links desire to the body and it views the body—whether male or female—as erotic, rather than as unclean.

In sum, we need to understand the Qur'ān's provisions on "veiling" in the context of its view of human bodies as potentially desiring and desir-

able, and not as pudendal. In fact, the Qur'ān does not refer to pudendency, much less to female pudendency. Nor does it suggest that—in order to maintain an Islamic society—we need to hide women from view by confining them to their homes or by enshrouding them in face and body veils. What the Qur'ān does mandate is that both women and men comport themselves modestly and not make public spectacles of themselves through a "wanton display" of their bodies. There is absolutely nothing in these values that supports the conservative Muslim position on the female body, male and female sexual natures, or the practice of veiling.

If the Qur'ān's teachings are fundamentally at odds with conservative readings of these teachings, they also are at odds with Western and feminist views of the body. Thus, the fact that in the Qur'ān this erotic body remains a private body, and not a body meant for public viewing, is what seems the most intolerably offensive to many Westerners and feminists who argue against an association between bodily exposure and sexual availability. (Yet these same feminists hold that a clothed body signals sexual inaccessibility!) Some deny that bodily exposure is meant to provoke sexual desire, while others hold that a woman's right to dress as she chooses outweighs any provocation she may cause to others. Indeed, the popular view not only disparages sexual modesty ("if you have it, flaunt it"), but it assumes that modesty inheres not in one's own modes of dress or undress but in how others react to it. Moreover, the exposed/naked body is represented as the free/liberated body, leading many to see clothed bodies as unfree/imprisoned bodies. And while some forms of the veil *are* prisons, it is simplistic to assume a correlation between nudity and freedom/democracy, or between a covered body and slavery; in fact, historically, it was slaves who were denied the right to cover themselves, as the Qur'ān recognizes when it defines the function of the *jilbāb* ("cloak") to distinguish free women from slaves, as I argued in Chapter 2.

Women as Sexual Property?

Many Muslim feminists identify the Islamic marriage as patriarchal on the grounds that it "transfers" the rights to a woman's sexuality from "her tribe to men" [42] (Ahmed 1992, 62); others claim that Islam objectifies women by describing them as a category of possessions that tempt men on earth (Sabbah 1984). Such "feminist" readings—which suggest that Islam treats women as men's sexual property—draw not on the Qur'ān but on a conservative-patriarchal exegesis, in particular of two Āyāt: 3:14 and 2:223. I will therefore discuss each in turn.

A. J. Arberry (74) renders 3:14 as: "Decked out fair to men is the love of lusts—women, children, heaped-up heaps of gold and silver, horses of mark, cattle and tillage. That is the enjoyment of the present life; but God—with [God] is the fairest resort." Although women are included among men's "lusts" on earth, this is a list of what *men* covet, not what God *wants* them to covet, which is nearness to God. Indeed, the Qur'ān is clear that covetousness and lust can cost men the afterlife. Hence, the primary function of this Āyah is to emphasize the primacy of the afterlife over this life; it is not to establish the nature of property, or women as property. Nor does it suggest that women are temptresses whose role it is to keep men from attaining salvation. The Qur'ān does not in any context state that the afterlife is contingent on abandoning the love of/for women for the love of/for God. God and women are not competing for the love and attention of the male believer as both misogynists and feminists alike are wont to claim.[43] Such a view not only debases our ideas of the Divine, but it also contradicts the teaching of the Qur'ān that God created men and women so that they could live together in mutual love, harmony, and sexual fulfillment on this earth and, if they are believers, together in the afterlife (in Paradise) as well.

There remains Āyah 2:223, which refers to women as *"harth,"* a word most commentators translate as "tilth" (property). However, in order to read the Āyah accurately, we also need to read the preceding passage (i.e., 2:222):

> They question thee (O Muhammad) concerning menstruation. Say: It is an illness [*adan*], so let women alone at such times and go not in unto them till they are cleansed. And when they have purified themselves, then go in unto them as Allah hath enjoined upon you. Truly Allah loveth those who turn unto [Allah], and loveth those who have a care for cleanness. Your women are a tilth [*harth*] for you (to cultivate) so go to your tilth as ye will, and send (good deeds) before you for your souls, and fear Allah, and know that ye will (one day) meet [Allah]. (2:222–23; in Pickthall, 53)

From these Āyāt many Muslims infer that a wife is her husband's sexual property and that he has the right to have sex with her as and when he pleases (without her consent). They also take the reference to menstruation to mean that women themselves are unclean. As the last claim is the easiest to contest, let me address it first. The root meanings of *adan* are "damage, harm, injury, trouble, annoyance, and grievance" (Cowan 1976, 12). Menstruation, therefore, is hurt, injury, and so on, not pollution. Even if we view

menstrual *blood* as polluting, it does not follow that the woman or her *body* are polluting since there is no statement to that effect in the Qur'ān. Moreover, in the Qur'ān the menstrual taboo extends only to intercourse; it does not extend to sexual intimacy, nor does it call for social ostracization or confinement (Badawi 1995). There are *Ahādith* to the effect that menstruating women may go to mosques, participate in *Haj, jihad,* and *du'ā'* (invocation to God after ritual prayer), and even have the Qur'ān read on their laps, following the Prophet's example (Siddique 1990, 17). Moreover, while the Qur'ān counsels cleansing after menstruation and sexual intercourse, it also counsels cleansing after calls of nature, indicating that uncleanliness is a function of certain biological *functions,* not biological *differences.* And while "menstrual taboos clearly affirm a difference between the genders, their existence per se may not be correlated with gender inequality," since even egalitarian societies have such taboos (Bonvillain 1995, 207). As for the general import of the Āyāt, first, they are said to have been revealed in response to men's questions about when and in what positions they could have intercourse. The response of the Qur'ān to the "when" is to forbid sex during menstruation on the grounds that it is a period of hurt or trial for women. (The Qur'ān also forbids sex during the fast in Ramadan, when Muslims forego food and drink.) Second, the Āyāt state that men must go into their wives *as God has enjoined.* This reference can be both to the general and to the specific. In general, the Qur'ān forbids lust, hence, undoubtedly, violence and force. What it is enjoining in terms of the specific seems to be sexual position; since the "Allah hath enjoined" in the preceding Āyah rules out "'unnatural' practices,"[44] the reference seems to be to natural or vaginal intercourse, also suggested by the metaphor of sowing, or *harth* and the menstruation taboo. The permission to husbands to go into their wives, then, is not as open ended as it seems; if anything, it is clear that men cannot have sex with their wives as, when, and how they please. If many men read these Āyāt as a license to rape their wives or to abuse them, it may be because they already are abusing their wives and are seeking religious justification for their transgressions.

However, the Qur'ān does not condone degrading or violent sexual behavior, nor does it establish the wife as her husband's sexual property, in spite of the use of the term *harth.* Since patriarchs and feminists alike are willing to hang an entire epistemology and ontology onto this one word—ignoring all other aspects of the Qur'ān's teachings—I also will restrict my analysis to its use in the Qur'ān, and I will make both a historical and a textual argument against translating it as property.

The historical argument is that while metaphors are not time bound, they convey different meanings in different social, cultural, and historical contexts. For instance, in the seventh century, *harth* could not conceivably have meant property because property in land *did not yet exist*. Hence, the Qur'ān could not have used it to mean property because that would not have conveyed anything of significance to its immediate audience. If, on the other hand, the word refers more broadly to land, then, in the Qur'ān, land is "to be protected, not destroyed or polluted" (Hanafi 1996, 209). Yet, again, if the metaphor means to convey the idea of cultivation, then the "use of the simile of cultivated land shows that it is natural intercourse that is thought of," since the metaphor of tillage denotes the sowing of seed (Bell 1991, 46). As such, even if many of us are bent today upon viewing *harth* as property, this could not have been its commonsensical meaning to the first Muslim communities.

Second, while metaphors, like texts, are polysemic, it is possible to identify the dominant textual and symbolic sense in which they are used by examining other contexts of their usage. Thus, in the Qur'ān *harth* also refers to Paradise:

> To any that desires
> The [*harth*] of the Hereafter,
> We give increase
> In his [*harth*]; and to any
> That desires the [*harth*]
> Of this world, We grant
> Somewhat thereof, but he
> Has no share or lot
> In the Hereafter.
>
>   The Qur'ān (42:20; in Ali, 1311)

Pickthall (345) translates this Āyah as: "Whoso desireth the harvest of the Hereafter, We give him increase in its harvest. And Whoso desireth the harvest of the world, We give him thereof, and he hath no portion in the Hereafter." In one translation, *harth* is tilth; in the other, harvest; in Arberry, it is tillage. None of these translations, however, can be taken to mean that Heaven literally is the property of believers, to be parceled out to them to treat as they wish! Nor can the Āyah itself be taken to mean that only men will get the *harth* of Paradise. Rather, textually, linguistically, and histori-

cally, *harth* means to convey a sense of cultivation. Since not all believers are landholders, and the Qur'ān is not concerned with agriculture per se, the sense in which it uses the term cultivation suggests that what it means is the cultivation of love and mercy, since these themes are central to its teachings on marriage and female-male relationships. Finally, given that the Qur'ān does not, in any context, designate a human being (even a slave) as another's property, it seems wrong to confuse the word *harth* with the idea that women are sexual property. Of course, it is not impossible to mis-read the Āyāt along such lines; more harmful and unseemly views have been hung by more tenuous threads, but such a reading is incongruent with the emphasis of the Qur'ān on equality and mutuality and its reference to spouses as each other's "raiment" (2:187). Garments, says Murata (1992, ix), connote "the alter-ego of a human being." In the Qur'ān, garments not only protect against evil but they also render their wearers resplendent; hence, its advice to believers to wear their best raiment for *'Ibādah,* although "the raiment of restraint from evil" is best of all (7:26; in Pickthall, 123).

If one were not dealing with centuries of entrenched sexism and mi-sogyny, the emphasis of the Qur'ān on mutuality would have been enough to disabuse men of the idea that their wives are their property or that the wife's will does not count (which leads to the contention that sex in marriage does not need to be consensual). Unfortunately, however, the teachings of the Qur'ān, especially on such sensitive issues, have been consistently ignored, misinterpreted, and perverted. This is why I will end this section by considering whether the Qur'ān does, in fact, advocate nonconsensual sex in marriage or the idea that the wife/woman has no will in the matter.

Even though the Āyāt quoted above do not refer to the wife's will or to the idea of consensual sex in marriage (which we have come to value only lately), the Qur'ān does raise both issues in other contexts. In addition to imputing will to women as moral agents, it also imputes will to women as *sexual beings* on at least two occasions. First, as I noted above, it assumes that even female slaves can act willfully not to take lovers; if this were not a matter of choice for them, then the Qur'ān's distinction between virtuous slaves and nonvirtuous freewomen would not be very meaningful. Second, the Qur'ān tells men that they "are forbidden to inherit Women against their will" [45] (4:19; in Ali, 184). While the specific reference here was to the seventh-century Arab practice of inheriting a dead father's wives as part of his estate, the fact remains that the Qur'ān imputes a will to women in matters of sexual access and choice and it also mandates that men respect its

expression. Thus, the Qur'ān assumes that men will respect even a female slave's will, once she is married, not to have sex with her (that is, the Qur'ān assumes both that female slaves will refrain from taking lovers after their marriage and that the potential lovers will take their "no" as a no!). What reason is there to assume, therefore, that upon marriage, the woman loses her will, or becomes incapable of expressing it, or that the husband has no obligation to respect it if she does express it, for instance, by not wanting to have sex at a particular time or in a particular position? In fact, Muslim marriages often are called "consensual contracts of sexuality." [46] While it is true that the Qur'ān does not specifically speak about consensual sex in marriage, its teaching that men should not take women against their will and its emphasis on the concept of *sukūn* assumes that there will be mutual love, kindness, and decency between spouses. We could not adhere to these values if we did not respect each other's wills or desires. Therefore, even though the Qur'ān does not frame the issue in language to which we are accustomed, it does not condone the abuse of wives. Even the misogynist *Ahādith* do not advocate forcibly having sex with one's wife.

III. Sex/Gender and Sex/uality: Sameness/Difference

Based on the preceding discussion, it seems that sex as presented in the Qur'ān is an ontological and not only a sociological category; at the same time, however, the Qur'ān does not use sex to construct ontological or sociological hierarchies that discriminate against women. Thus, the Qur'ān recognizes sexual *differences,* but it does not adhere to a view of sexual *differentiation;* put differently, the Qur'ān recognizes sexual specificity but does not assign it gender symbolism.[47] Since the Qur'ān does not invest biological sex with content or meaning, being male or female does not in itself suggest a particular meaning. And, to the extent that it is difficult to theorize a determinate relationship between sex and gender based on the Qur'ān's teachings, it also is difficult to ascribe sex/gender hierarchies or inequality to biological sex.

Conversely, while the Qur'ān recognizes sexual differences, it does not sexualize difference itself; in other words, the Qur'ān does not define women in terms of attributes that are unique only to women,[48] or suggest that they are opposites of men, or that they manifest the lower aspects of creation. Nor does it define men in terms of attributes that are unique only to men,[49] or suggest that they are opposites of women or that they alone mani-

fest the higher aspects of creation. Indeed, Wadud (1999, xxi) argues that there is no "*concept* of woman" in the Qur'ān because there is no concept of "gendered man" in it, either (her emphasis). As such, whatever differences exist between women and men "could not indicate an inherent value" because, if they did, the concept of "free will would be meaningless" (35).

Although the Qur'ān does not locate gender dimorphisms in sex, it does recognize sexual specificity, for instance, in its view of the female and male bodies. However, its views of the body do not arise in "a biology of sexual incommensurability" (Laqueur 1990, 196), or in claims about sexual differentiation or inequality. Thus, even though the provisions of the Qur'ān on "veiling" have become part of Muslim discourses on sexual inequality, the Qur'ān itself does not locate its treatment of the female body in the context of such a discourse. Even as it acknowledges the sexual specificity of the woman's body, hence also its greater vulnerability to abuse in patriarchies, it does not do so in order to discriminate against women. Moreover, as feminists themselves now admit, recognizing "the particularity and specificity of the woman's body need not be to define her as 'different.'" Thus, it is possible to affirm "the biological particularity of the female body" without endorsing "the historical contingencies of its engendered form" (Eisenstein 1988, 107, 4). And the Qur'ān certainly does not endorse either the engendered forms of the female body or the historical contingencies that have resulted in particular modes of engenderment. Thus, whatever ideas Muslims may have of women and their bodies and of sex and sexual differentiation, the Qur'ān itself does not suggest that sex or sexual differences are a determinant of moral personality, gender roles, or inequality. This emerges not only from the position of the Qur'ān on the issues I have discussed here, but also from its treatment of the family and marriage, to which I turn in the following chapter.

The Family and Marriage
Retrieving the Qur'ān's Egalitarianism

In this chapter I examine the Qur'ān's position on both mothers and fathers and wives and husbands, the two axes along which Islam defines the family. My primary objective is to show that the family in Islam is not patriarchal inasmuch as the Qur'ān's treatment of women and men in their capacity as parents and spouses is not based in assumptions of male rule/privilege or sexual inequality. Of course, if we consider the heterosexual family patriarchal by definition, then the family in Islam also is patriarchal. However, if we find such essentialisms problematic, we might also be able to read the Qur'ān's teachings differently.

Since, in traditional patriarchal societies, the rights of a husband extend from his rights as a father, I discuss the Qur'ān's view of fathers and mothers before examining its approach to husbands and wives. In this context, I focus on showing that the Qur'ān repudiates the concept of father-right/rule and, to that extent, claims about husband-privilege as well. To understand this point, it is necessary to recall Carole Pateman's (1988, 104) definition of traditional patriarchy as having been symbolized by the "law of the father, the untrammeled will of one man." This form, as feminists note, gave the father-husband "nearly total ownership over wife or wives and children, including the powers of physical abuse and often even those of murder and sale."[1] That is why the principal institution of patriarchy was said to be the "patriarchal marriage," which blurred the distinction between the male's authority as father and his authority as husband and which, while designating the father-husband God's surrogate on earth, established the woman/wife as (his) property/child. As my reading will show, however, the Qur'ān not only does not link the rights of fathers and husbands in this way, but it also does not appoint either one a ruler or guardian over his wife (and children), or even as the head of the household. Nor does it des-

ignate the wife and children as the man's property or require them to be submissive to him. Indeed, as I argued in Chapter 4, the Qur'ān teaches that submitting to fathers/males has led people in the past to transgress against God. (Although this emerges more clearly from the Qur'ān's treatment of fathers than from its treatment of husbands, inasmuch as their rights are interdependent, it is significant for how we understand the husband's status as well.)

Prior to discussing the Qur'ān's teachings, I begin by revisiting the relationship between text and context, and then situate the family and marriage in Islam conceptually before analyzing the Qur'ān's perspective on mothers and fathers and on wives and husbands. I end by assessing Qur'ānic teachings in light of some Western/feminist approaches to the family and marriage.

1. Text/Context

In Chapter 1, I argued in favor of examining the Qur'ān's contents and contexts together by reading it intratextually but also with regard to the social and historical contexts of its revelation. This is because even though the Qur'ān's teachings embody universal principles, the fact that it "was revealed in seventh-century Arabia when the Arabs held certain perceptions and misconceptions about women and were involved in certain specific lewd practices against them resulted in some injunctions specific to that culture" (Wadud 1999, 9).

Contextualizing the Qur'ān's teachings thus is necessary for understanding their rationale. It also is necessary in order to distinguish between the universal and the specific, so as to avoid generating readings that are oppressive for women. This is not to say, however, that oppressive and restrictive readings arise only from ignoring the contexts of the Qur'ān's teachings; rather, they arise also from specific epistemologies and methodologies employed to read the text, as I argued in Chapters 2 and 3.

Reading the Text

My argument so far has been not that we cannot read the Qur'ān in patriarchal or oppressive modes, but that such readings result from reading the text in a piecemeal and decontextualized way, for instance, by privileging one word, or phrase, or line, or Āyah, over its teachings as a whole, and/or by focusing on its less clear Āyāt at the expense of those of fundamental

meaning. Moreover, not only do Muslims often *fail to read* those aspects of the Qur'ān's teachings that threaten the power and legitimacy of patriarchies, but they also *read into* the Qur'ān meanings that often are just not there, especially with regard to issues like polygyny and "wife beating." In other words, a restrictive and oppressive exegesis results both from the failure to historicize the Qur'ān's teachings and to read the text as "a whole, a totality."[2] Accordingly, I read the Qur'ān holistically and also try to distinguish between its stated intent and the unintended outcomes of (misreading) some of its Āyāt. I also attempt to differentiate between teachings that I believe were specific to the Arabs and the universal principles that these teachings mean to convey. Throughout this exercise, I focus on retrieving the Qur'ān's ethical vision and its egalitarianism.

Evaluating the Qur'ān's teachings leads one to ask: Whose perspective and definition are we to apply if we are to determine if these teachings are ethical and egalitarian—those of the Qur'ān itself or of (Muslim and Western) patriarchies, feminists, or some combination? This is a critical question since different perspectives yield different assessments. For instance, those who accept the Qur'ān's own line of reasoning and its view of what is egalitarian generally consider its teachings progressive; on the other hand, those who derive their ideas from Western/feminist theories generally consider the Qur'ān's teachings oppressive (though, clearly, not everyone can be pigeonholed in this way).[3] Both approaches have merit inasmuch as the first approximates an internal critique and the second an external one; my own method, therefore, is to combine them. Thus, I accept the Qur'ān's own view of egalitarianism and justice, which allows me to consider the intent of its Āyāt separately from the results that flow from (mis)reading them. At the same time, however, I also situate and assess the Qur'ān's teachings in light of some modern, feminist theories. That is, I start my reading of the Qur'ān in the first mode and end my argument in the second.

Specifying the Context

The misogyny and sexism of Arab culture, especially at the time of the Qur'ān's revelation, have been well documented by Muslims themselves (Ahmed 1992; Bouhdiba 1985; Malti-Douglas 1991). However, the Arabs did not invent sexual inequality or discrimination; no society in the seventh century was egalitarian since no society at that time recognized women as full human beings, or as moral agents, or as independent legal persons. As Ahmed (1992, 13) has shown, misogyny also was endemic to most cultures

at that time. For instance, Assyrian laws allowed a husband to pull out his wife's hair and to mutilate her ears; a wife who contradicted her husband could have her "teeth smashed with burnt bricks." Unchecked polygyny, concubinage, slavery, incestuous marriages with sisters and daughters, husband-worship, and the veiling/seclusion of elite women were endemic. While a few women were able to acquire some moral and spiritual authority in Christianity, they could do so only by embracing celibacy. A premium on female virginity also meant that women who were not virgins had no avenues to express their sexuality (13).

Seventh-century Arab society had its own modes of sexual politics, and its record was mixed. A woman could choose/dismiss a husband at will; she remained with her kin after marriage, and her children belonged to her tribe (Smith 1885). However, by the time of Islam's advent, women may have become more dependent on men because of "baal" marriages (deriving from the Old Testament) that established the husband as overlord over his wife and the wife as his subject. Sexual unions were generally temporary since husbands deserted their wives for years on end and also enjoyed powers of unilateral, habitual, and arbitrary divorce (Ayoub 1984; Esposito 1982). A nomadic lifestyle prevented the strict seclusion of women, but not all women enjoyed freedom of movement. One custom was to parade around daughters and female slaves in their finery, faces unveiled, in order to attract suitors/buyers; if the attempt succeeded, the women had to don the veil (Levy 1962). Yet, some women were able to exercise influence in public life as priestesses and prophetesses (though they were not active in Meccan political life on the eve of Islam). They also could take part in warfare by tending the sick and wounded. On the whole, however, women's social place was a function of their class or their own personalities and was not codified in law (Smith 1985, 232). In spite of some freedoms, women could not inherit property but were themselves considered property and could be inherited as part of a dead father's estate by his sons. Unrestricted concubinage, polygyny, and slavery were replenished by taking women captives in war. The sexual abuse of such women and of slaves was endemic, and baby girls often were buried alive. This was the milieu in which the Qur'ān was revealed and interpreted, and it is in light of this milieu that the radicalism of the Qur'ān's teachings on the family, marriage, and sexual relationships becomes fully apparent.

11. Conceptualizing the Family and Marriage

Prior to discussing the Qur'ān's provisions on marriage and the family, it might be useful to locate them conceptually. The Islamic marriage—which is based in a contractual[4] and typically monogamous[5] relationship—is located at the intersection of the social and the moral-religious spheres. The marriage is located in the social realm because of its contractual nature; it also is situated in the religious realm because spousal (and parental) rights are claimed through the practice of faith, hence by observing the limits ordained by God. These limits can be understood in terms not only of the Rights of God, but also of the social good (Izutsu 1959). Since faith in Islam is personal but not private, the marriage (and the family) also can be located at the intersection of the private and the public. (Faith is personal in that only individuals can choose to embrace it; however, since the rights of individuals are defined in relation both to the Rights of God and to those of the community, the practice of faith necessarily is communal.)

The private and the public as they exist in the Qur'ān and in classical Western theory[6] are very different, however. The latter defines the public sphere as the domain of freedom, politics, and culture, and associates it with men. The private sphere, on the other hand, is described in terms of a lack: as the domain of necessity, not freedom; of nature, not culture; of the family, not politics/state, and while the private sphere is associated with women, it also is the arena in which males reign supreme (as "kings of the castle" and "heads of households"). While men may move freely between both spheres, women are confined to the private. The family and marriage, then, also fall into a private, nonpolitical domain, and it is this location, argue many feminists, that accounts for the history of sexual inequality and oppression in Western societies.[7]

The Qur'ān, however, does not define either human beings or social reality in terms of female-male, public-private, nature-culture, politics-family binaries. Nor does it assign politics or the public sphere the same primacy as does Western thought. What matters in and to the Qur'ān is the extent to which women and men, whether organized in a family, state, or the economy, observe the limits of God, and the only distinction it makes in this regard is between believers and unbelievers. Secondly, even though the Qur'ān distinguishes between the individual and the community, and thus between the private and the public, since God belongs equally in both spheres there is little to distinguish public institutions from private relation-

ships: both must equally observe the limits of God. As such, claims to the effect that in Islam the "public was in fact the ideal domain of religion; the private, by default was marginal"[8] are misleading inasmuch as the Qur'ān does not make such distinctions between the public and the private. To the extent that the public and the private do exist in real life, the Qur'ān's reforms, particularly with respect to women, impinge on both. Finally, since the Qur'ān teaches that all authority and power are a trust from God and not a sign of human sovereignty, a public sphere based on Qur'ānic ideals would be greatly diminished.

It thus is in terms of the Qur'ān's teachings that I locate the family and marriage in Islam at the juncture of the private (individual) and the public (communal), the religious and the social. (Even though the social and the sexual also are connected in the Qur'ān, I chose to examine its position on sexuality and on the sexual aspects of marriage separately from its other teachings on marriage simply in the interest of organizational convenience.)

If the public/private dichotomy is only marginally helpful in reading the Qur'ān, the concept of the social/sexual divisions of labor (in terms of which feminists analyze the family in the West) is not helpful at all. For one, the concept itself is problematic in its confusion of sex with class;[9] for another, the Qur'ān does not advocate a specific social or sexual division of labor.[10] That is, while it "does not attempt to annihilate the differences between men and women the Qur'ān does not propose or support a singular role or single definition of a set of roles, exclusively, for each gender across every culture" (Wadud 1999, 8). As such, while there may be a relationship between the social and sexual divisions of labor in the real world, the Qur'ān does not have much to say about it. Nonetheless, I apply some insights generated by the concept in order to distinguish the Qur'ān's position from that of both Muslim and Western patriarchies and feminists.

iii. Mothers and Fathers

If my argument so far is correct that the Qur'ān opposes rule by fathers and the symbolism attaching to fatherhood (in Lacanian terms, the Name-of-the Father),[11] and that it stipulates the ontic equality/similarity of men and women, then one would expect it to speak of parental rather than paternal rights, and that is what it does. However, in discussing parents' rights, the Qur'ān privileges mothers while dis-placing the thematic of father's

rule, thus also challenging the way patriarchies treat both mothers and fathers.

God's Rights and Parents' Rights

In Chapter 4, I discussed how God's Rights/Rule come into conflict with the rights and rule of fathers by examining the accounts of the prophets Abraham and Muhammad as well as the Qur'ān's criticism of following the ways of the fathers. Here I examine how God's Rights and Rule also come into conflict with the rights and rule of fathers by examining the Qur'ān's definition of parent-children relationships.

The first thing to note about the Qur'ān's discussion of parent-children relationships is that it is based more in the idea of obligations than of rights (though one can always derive rights from obligations). There are only a couple of Āyāt that deal with parents' rights, and none with the father's rights, especially as defined in patriarchies. Thus, foremost among the parents' responsibilities is the father's obligation to take care of his children, especially daughters,[12] and to provide economically for them, including in the event of a divorce between the parents. However, the Qur'ān does not then give the father any additional rights; the mother and father have identical rights over the children.

If the Qur'ān is sparse in defining parental rights or roles (it does not, for instance, define the content of mothering or fathering), it is more forthcoming in outlining the children's duties towards their parents. Primary among these is the charge to show kindness to parents, especially as they grow older. Thus, says the Qur'ān, God has

> decreed
> That ye worship none but [God],
> And that ye be kind
> To parents. Whether one
> Or both of them attain
> Old age in thy life,
> Say not to them a word
> Of contempt, nor repel them,
> But address them
> In terms of honour.
>
> And, out of kindness,
> Lower to them the wing

Of humility, and say:
"My [*Rabb*]! bestow on them
Thy Mercy even as they
Cherished me in childhood."

   The Qur'ān (17:23–24; in Ali, 700–701)

This juxtapositioning of the Rights/Rule of God and the rights of parents is significant because it differentiates between what is owed to God—that is, worship and, to the extent that worship is contingent on obeying God's limits, obedience—and what is owed to parents—compassion and mildness in conduct. This distinction renders problematic misrepresentations of God as Father and of fathers as associates in God's Rule/Sovereignty by *separating* them. At the same time, it also renders problematic the idea that fathers enjoy real or symbolic privileges that mothers do not by *failing to separate* them. The Qur'ān neither defines the father in terms that suggest he is a ruler over his children ("cherish" implies loving, not ruling), nor in terms that imply that he has any rights in his role as a father as against in his role as a parent. Moreover, the command to honor parents issues from God, not from the parents themselves, and is linked to the idea of mutuality: Children need to be kind to their parents because the parents nourished them in their youth. This theme reiterates two others in the Qur'ān: the view that believers come to kinship through faith (hence by observing God's limits and Rights), and the idea of mutual care that, far from setting up a hierarchy, suggests parallelism. As the Āyāt quoted above reveal, the Qur'ān envisions a reversal in parent-children relationships: As they age, parents become more vulnerable to, thus dependent on, their children just as the children once were vulnerable to and dependent upon them; and in both cases the Qur'ān enjoins mutual love and gentleness.

   This juxtapositioning of the Rights of God and those of parents is intrinsic to all Qur'ānic references to parental rights even though the ends toward which the Qur'ān juxtaposes these rights differ. Thus, say other Āyāt:

   We have enjoined on *insān*
   (To be good) to his[13] parents:
   In travail upon travail
   Did his mother bear him,
   And in years twain
   Was his weaning: (hear

The command), "Show gratitude
To Me and to thy parents:
To Me is (thy final) Goal.

"But if they strive
To make thee join
In worship with Me
Things of which thou hast
No knowledge, *obey them not;*[14]
Yet bear them company
In this life with justice
(And consideration), and follow
The way of those who
Turn to Me (in love):
In the End the return
Of you all is to Me
And I will tell you
The truth (and meaning)
Of all that ye did."

The Qur'ān (31:14–15; in Ali, 1083; my emphasis)

While these Āyāt also begin by reiterating the theme of kindness to parents, this time the Qur'ān links filial obligations to the *mother's* role in bearing and nursing children (that is, not just to her role as a parent or a caregiver, but to her biological role as mother as well). However, while recognizing the travails inherent in childbearing, the Qur'ān does not suggest that it is a punishment for women and, indeed, it shows sensitivity toward the mother. This sensitivity and tenderness also are apparent in God's attitude to Moses's mother and her desire to nurse him; thus, God grants her *wahy,* or inspiration, that enables her to fulfill her desire. God also is sympathetic to Mary when she is in labor; moreover, "the priority of saving the child, in each case, is also viewed in the light of the concern for the respective mothers" (Wadud 1999, 40).

After emphasizing the mother's role in engendering life, the first Āyah returns us to the theme of life's impermanence and the inexorable return to God of both parents and children alike: a reminder that we need to acknowledge the primacy of God's Rights/Rule over those of parents. In effect, the mother's role *in procreation* should not detract attention from God's role

as Creator. (The juxtapositioning of Creation and procreation is significant for women and mothers for reasons I consider below.)

The second Āyah is instructive for rather different reasons; it reiterates that obedience is due only to God and, should there be a conflict between obeying God and parents, the children have an obligation *not* to obey the parents. The reference to associating with God things of which a person has no knowledge can be interpreted either narrowly or broadly. However, it is important to be clear that the practice of faith entails not only a specific idea of God but also a specific mode of being in the world, stemming from this conception of God. That is, a particular view of God leads one to embrace not only certain types of moral and spiritual practices but also a particular kind of *social* praxis. As such, the command to disobey parents cannot be read merely as allowing children some space for their privately held religious beliefs.[15] Rather, it is a call to them to define their own understanding of Divine Truth, and with it the essentials of a good life. The charge to disobey parents, then, is more significant than it may at first appear, and implicit in it are a number of significant points. First, and most obviously, it reconfirms the intentional and reflexive nature of faith. The Qur'ān here assumes that every new generation of daughters and sons will come to Divine Truth by means of their own reasoning and knowledge and not by accepting their parents as intermediaries between themselves and God, hence blindly following in their footsteps. (As I noted in Chapter 4, the Qur'ān criticizes the tendency to cleave to tradition in other contexts as well.) Second and relatedly, such a view of faith assumes that both men and women are moral agents endowed with free will; thus, both sons and daughters are expected to choose their own path to moral praxis, and both are called upon to disobey their parents, should they consider it necessary. By confirming female moral and social agency, this view challenges the fatalism to which women often become inured because of the idea that only men are agents. Third, and most crucially for my argument, the Qur'ān's command reveals that it assumes that sons and daughters will, in fact, be *free to disobey fathers.* The Qur'ān could hardly assume, much less mandate, disobedience if it viewed as legitimate the idea of the sanctity of the father's rule, or traditional views of fathers as heads of the household. The call to disobedience shows that the Qur'ān not only does not consider the father infallible or his authority supreme, but it also does not regard him as a surrogate for God on earth, or his authority as an extension of God's Authority. In fact, it poses the clear and open possibility of the two coming into conflict.

Some may argue that this Qur'ānic teaching pertains only to unbelieving parents and that it only establishes the legitimacy of breaking with the rule of such parents, as did Abraham. However, as I argued earlier, the Qur'ān also opposes rule by believing fathers, and the principle it establishes is the need to obey the God of these fathers, not the fathers themselves, particularly as patriarchies would have us obey them. As such, we can argue that this teaching was not just specific to the Arabs. It embodies a universal principle at the heart of the Qur'ānic notion of *Tawḥīd:* the primacy of God's Rights and Rule over the rights of humans, especially fathers (and husbands), who usually are the ones in patriarchies who re-present themselves as God's surrogates.

And yet, the Qur'ān's command to disobey parents in specific circumstances is not a call to incivility since the Āyāt also enjoin care and justice between parents and children. Not only does the Qur'ān refer to "(the mystic ties of) Parent and Child" (90:3; in Ali, 1737), but it also decrees caring behavior between them. Thus God's Rule does not denigrate parents or their rights; rather, it locates God and parents in their respective spheres. Only in the eventuality of a conflict between them are believers expected to privilege the Rights of God over those of parents. This juxtapositioning of God's Rights and parental rights is significant for fathers and mothers for different reasons and in different ways. For fathers, it is significant because, by making parental rights subordinate to the Rights and Rule of God, the Qur'ān displaces the theme of father-right and paternal privilege in the sense in which (Muslim) patriarchies define these rights and privileges. For mothers, on the other hand, it is significant for the opposite reason: It not only establishes the specificity and significance of their roles but, as I will now argue, it also incorporates them into the sphere of symbolic reverence associated with God, thereby also elevating them over fathers.

God's Rule and Mother/hood

God's Rule has radical implications for the real and symbolic rights that mothers enjoy in Islam because the Qur'ān evokes one of the most symbolically charged and powerful of all concepts, that of *taqwá* (God-consciousness),[16] to link the reverence humans owe to God and the reverence they owe to their mothers:

> O [hu]mankind! [have *taqwá* for]
> Your [*Rabb*],

Who created you
From a single Person [*nafs*],
Created, of like nature,
[Its] mate, and from them twain
Scattered (like seeds)
Countless men and women;—
[Show *taqwá* for] God, through Whom
Ye demand your mutual (rights),
And [show *taqwá* for] the wombs [17]
(That bore you): for God
Ever watches over you.

    The Qur'ān (4:1; in Ali, 178)

The use of the term "womb" here may sound instrumentalist or pejorative given the tendency in patriarchies to reduce women to their biology and reproductive functions, and given early Western views of "the womb [as] an animal within an animal" (Aretaeus in Davis 1997, 47). However, in Arabic, "the word for womb (*rahim*) derives from the same root as the words mercy (*rahma*) and All-merciful (*rahman*)," which are attributes the Qur'ān ascribes to God (Murata 1992, 182); all Sūrahs, barring one, begin by describing God as *Rahman* and *Rahim*. Etymologically, then, divine attributes and the womb are related and signify benevolence and compassion. We can thus take the term as affirming both the benevolent nature of procreation and the specificity and significance of motherhood (for which the womb is a metaphor), also is reflected in the importance that Muslim tradition attaches to observing the "rights of 'womb relatives'" (215).

By using the words *taqwá* and *rahma,* the Qur'ān not only brings mothers into the same sphere of symbolic signification as that reserved for God, but, in so doing, it also privileges them over fathers, to whom it never extends the concept of *taqwá*. Clearly, *taqwá* for God and for mothers cannot be of the same nature; however, the fact that the Qur'ān extends it only to mothers shows that it privileges them in a way that it never privileges fathers. (The Qur'ān also gives mothers the same share in inheritance as fathers and, if the deceased has no son, double the father's share.) [18]

Some may counter that the Qur'ān merely reifies patriarchal glorifications of women as mothers and of motherhood. However, historically, patriarchies (especially Christian) have used "sex-change metaphors" [19] to re-present God and pious men as mothers, thus *denying* the specificity

of women as mothers. They also have dis-placed motherhood through the theme of motherless birth, so dear to misogynists in every religion.[20] Moreover, when they do glorify mothers, patriarchies do so in the context of discourses that sentimentalize the son's feelings for the mother. Also, they represent motherhood as a woman's only function (thus collapsing wives with mothers inasmuch as a good wife invariably is defined as a fertile mother, of sons). Most significantly, even though patriarchies elevate mothers over women who are not mothers, they do not elevate them over fathers. Not only do they view the father's role in procreation as being of greater value than the mother's, but, in patriarchies, it is the father who remains the real source of power and privilege.

The Qur'ān, however, does not define women in terms of their role as mothers since we cannot assume that all women will, in fact, become mothers. ('Ayesha did not become a mother in spite of her status as the Prophet's wife, but that neither diminished her importance in his life nor her appeal as a role model for women.) Nor does the Qur'ān collapse the roles of wife and mother, as I argue below. Moreover, it protects the specificity of motherhood by locating it in the *womb*. At the same time, however, the Qur'ān does not describe the mother's role, or other functions related to "child care and rearing . . . as essential created characteristics of the female. Thus, the Qur'ānic reference is restricted to the biological function of the mother—not the psychological and cultural perceptions of 'mothering'" (Wadud 1999, 22). (The fact, however, that women biologically can bear a child does not lessen the significance of motherhood itself in the Qur'ān.) By mandating *taqwá* for mothers but not for fathers, the Qur'ān also elevates mothers over fathers and makes reverence for mothers a sign of righteousness, not just an expression of sentimentality. Finally, even though the Qur'ān does not describe the mother's rights in the same terms in which patriarchies define the father's rights (as ruling over children or spouse), it gives mothers a real and symbolic status that patriarchies do not and it does not give fathers the same status that patriarchies do.

In spite of all these facts, however, many Muslim feminists continue to assail Islam's position on mothers. For instance, in a work that continues to exercise strong appeal in the West, Fatna Sabbah (1984) argues that Islam's location of the power to engender life in "a God" instead of in mothers divests motherhood of its "reality"[21] and therefore is misogynistic. This reading, however, illustrates a dilemma in which those Muslim feminists become ensnared who want to have it both ways: On the one hand, they want

to argue that the association of fathers with God underwrites male privilege, and, on the other, to claim that the association of mothers with God undermines the "reality" of motherhood, hence women's rights as mothers. Such claims are problematic not only for their doublespeak but also for their hubris inasmuch as they assume that Creation and procreation are the same. They assume that God and women engender life in the same way such that one must do away with the "idea of a God" jealous of women's reproductive powers[22] in order for motherhood to exist. However, juxtaposing God's Rights as Creator with mother's rights in procreation is what gives motherhood its *specificity*! Thus, the Qur'ān does not assign to God what belongs to mothers (the womb; procreation); rather, God as Creator has powers over everything, hence also over the life that emerges from women's wombs. There is thus no competition between God and mothers (God Creates and mothers procreate, and that, too, with some assistance from men, a fact that Sabbah's fetishization of motherhood elides), no conflicting jurisdictions, no reason for God to be jealous of women, or for the divine order to "liquidate" them, as she insists.

Daughters and Fathers

No discussion of parent-children relationships would be complete that did not refer to the old Arab practice of female infanticide (killing newborn girls, usually by burying them alive in the sand) since the Qur'ān offers an explicit and revealing commentary on it. Moreover, since some Muslims even today hold that Islam allows fathers to kill their daughters,[23] it is appropriate to examine the Qur'ān's position on this issue which quite unambiguously displays its opposition to such patriarchal notions of father-right.

Female infanticide, and the low esteem in which daughters were held in Arab patriarchies, became a focus in the Qur'ān both because of the nature of the abuse itself and because the same fathers who were guilty of murdering their daughters were in the habit freely of ascribing daughters to God. The Qur'ān condemns both the abuse and the hypocrisy that prompted sacralizations of God as Father and that, too, only of daughters:

> And they assign to God daughters; glory be to [God]!—and they have their desire [for sons]; and when any of them is given the good tidings of a girl, his face is darkened and he chokes inwardly, as he hides him from the people because of the evil of the good tidings that have been given unto him; whether he shall preserve it in humiliation, or trample it into the dust. Ah, evil is that they judge! (16:55–60; in Arberry, 292)

The Qur'ān's condemnation of the practice of ascribing daughters to God does not mean that God looks down on daughters for *humans,* as is clear from the Qur'ān's characterization of their birth as good news. However, as it points out, the father reacts to this news with deep aversion: He regards what is good as evil; his face darkens and he chokes with mortification; if he does not kill her, he will only end up keeping her on sufferance, *both* being evil choices. Is it any wonder, then, that when the Qur'ān speaks to men of their love of sons, women, and wealth—as a way of reminding them that "Of no profit whatever To them against God" will these be (58:17; in Ali, 1516)—that it makes no reference to daughters? Given depraved ideas about women, is it also any wonder that the Qur'ān condemns the pagans for feminizing God: "What! For you the male sex, And for [God] the female?" (53:21; in Ali, 1445).

Not only does the Qur'ān condemn fathers for killing their daughters and for oppressing them if they do not kill them, but it also promises that on Judgment Day, God will question "the female (infant), Buried alive . . . For what crime She was killed" (81:8–9; in Ali, 1694). This is a portentous covenant because on Judgment Day people will be recompensed for "the truth (and meaning) Of their conduct" which they "may have forgotten" but to which "God is Witness" (58:6; in Ali, 1512). On that day, when sons will not avail fathers, a baby girl's testimony will seal her father's fate as a sinner.[24]

The Qur'ān's promise that God will hold fathers to account for killing their daughters, and its avowal that it is equally evil to oppress them in life, should show that girls are not their father's property and that fathers have no right to ill-treat them, much less to kill them. Had the Qur'ān given fathers powers of life and death over children, or designated girls their parents' property, it could not have held them to account for murdering or abusing their daughters; nor would it have enjoined on the children the duty of disobeying parents in matters of faith. Thus, Muslims who view children, or wives, as the father's or husband's property fail to consider that the Qur'ān delineates relationships between parents and children, husbands and wives, and even masters and slaves, in terms that rule out the idea of ownership altogether.

In sum, what is significant in the Qur'ān is not just the right of parents to respect and kindness but also the right of children to life, disobedience, and nurturance, in particular, of the rights of girls to *paternal* love and care. The Qur'ān is the only Scripture to address the rights of girls in such terms and to raise squarely the problem of fathers' abuse of daughters, something

on which not just religious but also secular patriarchies and traditions frequently are silent.

iv. Wives and Husbands

Marriage in Islam is based in a social contract that takes the legal equality of both spouses as a given. While Muslim patriarchies clearly do not treat women and men as legal equals, the very idea of making the marriage contractual was, at least in theory, to give women equality. In this context, it may be true, as some feminists contend, that modern patriarchy is based in contractual institutions (Pateman 1988). However, even if patriarchies have managed to reconstitute themselves in this way, it does not follow that the contract itself is patriarchal. On the contrary, its introduction by Islam in a traditional-tribal patriarchy (seven hundred years before its advent in Europe) secured women's position in that society. By allowing them to make the transition from chattel to persons with legally binding and enforceable rights vis-à-vis men, it helped to mitigate some of the most pernicious aspects of patriarchy (such as views of the wife as property/child). As a prenuptial agreement, the contract also allows women to set conditions not only for marriage but also for divorce. (These can extend from stipulations against polygyny, to right of divorce for the wife, to a determination in advance of the amount of a divorce settlement, to agreements about child custody.) It is, of course, a different matter than many women choose not to use the contract in this way, or many men choose not to honor their part in it—even though the Qur'ān warns us "To fulfill the contracts Which ye have made" (2:177; in Ali, 69–70), or many states choose not to enforce marriage contracts or to punish their breaches (especially by men). Of course, Muslims need to remedy all these problems in order to make the marriage Islamic.

However, even though it is important to examine the rights that women can claim contractually through a marriage, that is not the only lens through which we should assess the Qur'ān's teachings about spousal relationships. This is because spousal equality in the Qur'ān is a function not of (identical) entitlements or rights but of human ontology (the idea of sexual sameness/similarity). And, since the Qur'ān teaches the principle of the equality of the sexes as an ontological fact, it cannot, logically, teach the principle of the inequality of husbands and wives. We thus need to understand the different rights they enjoy vis-à-vis one another in the overall context of the Qur'ān's teachings about sexual equality.

Sameness as Basis of Equality

The Qur'ān confirms the idea of the ontic equality of the sexes by way of its teaching that both have the same *Fitra,* or nature. The reason they have the same nature, says the Qur'ān, is because they originated in the same Self (*nafs*), and because they "proceed one from another" (2:195; in Pickthall, 78). This theme—an inversion of the Christian claim that women proceed from men—is a recurrent one in the Qur'ān, as Pickthall notes. The idea of the sameness/similarity of human nature finds expression in a number of Āyāt dealing specifically with marriage; for example,

> God has made for you
> Mates (and Companions) of *your own nature,*
> And made for you, out of them,
> Sons and daughters and grandchildren,
> And provided for you sustenance
> Of the best . . .
>
>   The Qur'ān (16:72; in Ali, 675; my emphasis)

(Note that daughters are as much a sign of God's Grace as sons). And, God created "helpmeets *from yourselves* that ye might find [*sukūn*] in them, and [God] ordained between you love and mercy" (30:21; in Pickthall, 291; my emphasis).[25] It is easy, as I said in Chapter 5, to forget that the concept of mutual love and sexual fulfillment in marriage is of very recent origins; in the seventh century, it was truly radical.[26] It distinguishes the Qur'ān from the contexts not only of its own times but also from those of ours, given both ancient and modern views of sex and gender that preclude the possibility of genuine love between women and men by Otherizing women. The Qur'ān, however, describes the ability of men and women to love one another as a function both of their similar natures and of Divine Will (God ordained it).

Although the Qur'ān does not assume that all marriages will in fact be based in love and mercy, it continues to emphasize these ideals even in some unusual circumstances:

> O you who have attained to faith! Behold some of your *azwājikum* and your children are enemies unto You: so beware of them! But if you pardon [their Faults], and forbear, and forgive—then, behold, God Will be much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. (64:14; in Asad, 871)

As Asad [27] notes, the customary translation of *azwājikum* as wives is wrong since, "according to classical Arabic usage [it applies] equally to both the male and the female partners in a marriage." The enmity the Qur'ān speaks of here, moreover, is a function not of (the wife's) sex, but of value systems. Families in the early days often were split between Islam and polytheism, with people from the same family belonging to both sides. As an earlier Āyah in the same Sūrah states, "[God] it is Who created you, but one of you is a disbeliever and one of you is a believer, and Allah is Seer of what ye do" (64:2; in Pickthall, 401). Even in such cases, however, the Qur'ān enjoins spouses to be compassionate; in fact, even in cases where men *hate* their wives, the Qur'ān charges them to "consort with them in kindness, for if ye hate them it may happen that ye hate a thing wherein Allah hath placed much good" (4:19; in Pickthall, 81).

The Qur'ān, then, draws on the principle of the sameness and similarity of human nature to define spousal relationships, and the terms in which it describes these relationships suggests that it views wives and husbands as equal: They not only have the same natures, but they also are entitled equally to love and *sukūn;* both, moreover, are held to the same standards of ethical behavior, even in some terribly trying circumstances. In spite of these teachings, however, there is a tendency among Muslims to define husbands as guardians over their wives and as wife beaters. It is thus necessary to examine the origin and validity of their claims.

Husbands as "Guardians" and "Wife Beaters"?

Muslims who infer the themes of sexual inequality and husband privilege from the Qur'ān's teachings usually do so on the basis of (mis)reading two Āyāt, 4:34 and 2:228. From the first, they infer that men are women's guardians (even rulers), and from the second, that God has preferred men to women and given them a "degree" above women. However, such a reading not only interpolates meanings into the Qur'ān that cannot be justified contextually, but it also contradicts the Qur'ān's teachings about human equality. Since Āyah 2:228 deals with divorce, I consider it later. Here I want to focus on 4:34, which Yusuf Ali renders as:

> Men are the protectors
> And maintainers of women,
> Because God has given
> The one more (*strength*)

Than the other, and because
They support them
From their means.
Therefore the righteous women
Are devoutly obedient, and guard
In (the husband's) absence
What God would have them guard.
As to those women
On whose part ye fear
Disloyalty and ill-conduct,
Admonish them (first),
(Next), refuse to share their beds,
(And last) beat them (lightly);
But if they return to obedience,
Seek not against them
Means (of annoyance).

The Qur'ān (4:34; in Ali, 190; my emphasis)

There are two separate, yet interrelated, themes here, the first pertaining to men's roles as the protectors and maintainers of women, and the second to a husband's right to beat a disobedient wife. I will consider these themes separately.

With respect to the first half of the Āyah, Ali's translation makes clear that the Qur'ān describes men as women's protectors and maintainers, not as guardians or rulers. However, Ali inadvertently transforms the social responsibility implicit in this charge into paternalism by using the word "strength" (which the Qur'ān does not use), to qualify what it is that God has given the one more of than the other. In fact, by claiming in his commentary on 2:228 that the man's duty "to maintain the woman" implies "a certain difference in nature between the sexes" (Ali 90 n. 255), Ali transforms an injunction about social duties into a claim about male biology and ontology. Thus, in a series of mediations, he interpolates the themes of sexual differentiation and inequality into the Qur'ān. In this sense Asad's translation is an improvement: "Men shall take full care of women with the bounties which God has bestowed *more abundantly on the former than on the latter,* and with what they may spend out of their possessions" (2:228; Asad 109; my emphasis). As Asad (109 n. 42) points out, the italicized part of the sentence in Arabic reads: "more on some of them than on the others."

As such, this could be a reference to the unequal distribution of God's bounties *between men* since, clearly, not all men have the same "bounties" and, certainly, not all men have more "bounties" than all women. The problem, of course, is that Asad does not specify the nature of the bounties; however, the Qur'ān's reference to "possessions," as also its charge to men to maintain women, establishes that what it has in mind by "bounties" are financial resources. Arguably, men can only maintain women by means of such resources, rather than by means of brute strength, or virtue, or intelligence, and so on, attributes which Muslim exegetes say God has bestowed in greater measure on men than on women. Such a view then allows some men to interpret this Āyah baldly as "Men are the managers of the affairs of women because Allah has made the one superior to the other" (Maududi in Hassan 1999, 354). However, this exegesis—which establishes the husband as a ruler over his wife or, at the very least, as the head of the household—ignores that the Qur'ān appoints women and men each other's *awliyā',* or mutual protectors, which it could not do if men were in fact superior to women and their "managers." More to the point, such an exegesis reads into the Āyah claims about sexual inequality and male privilege on the basis of misinterpreting three words in it: *qawwāmūn,* which is read as managers; *qanitāt,* read as wifely obedience, and *nushūz,* read as the wife's disobedience to the husband. However, all three interpretations are misleading, as a number of Qur'ān scholars have shown. To understand their critique, it would be helpful to draw on Wadud's (1999) rephrasing of Pickthall's translation, which is the clearest:

> Men are [*qawwamuna 'ala*] women [on the basis] of what Allah has [preferred] (*faddala*) some of them over others, and [on the basis] of what they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are [*qanitat*], guarding in secret that which Allah has guarded. As for those from whom you fear [*nushuz*], admonish them, banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then, if they obey you, seek not a way against them. (4:34; in Wadud, 70)

As Wadud, Azizah al-Hibri (1982), and Riffat Hassan (1999) argue, linguistically, *qawwāmūn* means " 'breadwinners' or 'those who provide a means of support or livelihood' " (Hassan, 354). We can thus read the Āyah as charging men with maintaining women from their economic resources in which they have been "preferred" (given more of than women). Although associated with contemporary Muslim women scholars, this reading is of

a much older vintage; some exegetes of the classical period, like al-Tabari, also read the Āyah as referring to men's financial duties vis-à-vis women and not to their ontological status as males.

As Hassan (1999, 354) also points out, the first sentence in the Āyah is meant to be normative rather than descriptive "since obviously there are at least some men who do not provide for women." (The fact that the Qur'ān charges the husband with the duty of being the breadwinner does not mean, she says, that "women cannot or should not provide for themselves"; it simply means that the Qur'ān does not expect women to be the breadwinners.) Moreover, inasmuch as men are only " '*qawwamun*' over women in matters where God gave *some* of the men more than *some* of the women, *and* in what the men spend of their money, then clearly men as a class are not '*qawwamun*' over women as a *class,*" concludes al-Hibri (in Wadud 1999, 71; her emphasis). By this rule, she says (1982, 218), "no one has the right to counsel a self-supporting woman." In this context, Rahman (1980, 49) also argues that a wife's economic self-sufficiency and contribution to the household reduces the husband's superiority "*since as a human,* he has no superiority over his wife" (his emphasis).

However, even though the Qur'ān charges the husband with being the breadwinner, it does not designate him head of the household, especially as the term has been understood in Western feudal cultures. Such a designation, I argued earlier, was contingent on traditional patriarchal definitions of the father-as-husband and the husband-as-father, to which the Qur'ān does not adhere. And while most Muslims believe that men are the head of their households, the Qur'ān itself does not use this concept or term to speak about either husbands or fathers.

What, then, of its reference to wifely obedience and its provision allowing husbands to *daraba* a disobedient wife, in the second half of the Āyah? As Wadud (1999, 70) and Siddique (1990) point out, the Qur'ān uses the word *qanitāt* (which most Muslims interpret as wifely obedience) in other contexts to refer to human behavior towards *God;* we cannot, therefore, assume that it refers to the wife's conduct alone. Indeed, as Wadud (77) points out, the Qur'ān "never orders a woman to obey her husband. It never states that obedience to their husbands is a characteristic of the 'better women' "; nor does it make it "a prerequisite for women to enter the community of Islam." The Qur'ān did not force even the wives of the Prophet to obey him, nor did he force obedience on them; nor, indeed, did he deal with marital discord by abusing or beating them. Similarly, while exegetes translate *nu-*

shūz as disloyalty and ill-conduct on the wife's part, in the Qur'ān it refers to a general state of marital disorder, as Wadud notes.

Of course, there still remains the reference to *daraba,* which many Muslims read as sanction for wife beating. However, Wadud (1999, 76) clarifies that *daraba* can mean "to strike" but also "to set an example," and is not the same as *darraba,* which means "to strike repeatedly or intensely." As such, the Āyah should be read "as prohibiting unchecked violence against females. Thus, this is not permission, but a severe restriction of existing practices." Although, as I will argue in a moment, this is not the only way to read the word *daraba,* even if one interprets it as permission to strike a wife, there is good reason to read it as a restriction, as Wadud does, for two reasons. First, we can infer this from another example in the Qur'ān, that of Job and his wife, as Muslim exegetes explain it. In the Qur'ān, God asks Job to take in his hand "A little grass, and [*daraba*] Therewith: and break not (Thy oath)" (38:44; in Ali, 1227). Some exegetes hold that Job was asked to use a sprig of leaves. Although the Qur'ān itself does not specify who or what Job was being given permission to strike, according to Muslim exegetes, it was his wife, who had cursed God and whom Job had sworn to beat on that account (note, it was not because she had disobeyed Job). While this exegesis extrapolates from biblical accounts, if it is correct, it shows that *daraba* is a symbolic, and not a punitive gesture, or rather, the punitive is rendered symbolic since grass is not meant to inflict bodily injury. (Tradition holds that the gesture should not cause pain; hence some exegetes favor using a folded handkerchief.) Second, we also can deduce that the Qur'ān uses *daraba* in a restrictive rather than in a prescriptive sense by examining the historical context of this teaching. At a time when men did not need permission to abuse women, this Āyah simply could not have functioned as a license; in such a context, it could only have been a restriction insofar as the Qur'ān made *daraba* the measure of last, not the first, or even the second, resort. And if the Qur'ān meant to restrict abuse even during those most abusive of times, there is no reason to regard this Āyah as an authorization at a time when we claim to have become more, not less, civilized.

In fact, it is questionable whether *daraba* even refers to striking a wife, even if symbolically. Rafi Ullah Shahab (1993, 231), for instance, says that *daraba* also means "to prevent"; on his reading, the Āyah is instructing the husbands to "leave [the wives] alone in their beds and prevent them from going outside of houses." In support of his reading, he points out that the

Qur'ān provides for similar treatment of lewd wives in 4:15. However, while Shahab reads the Āyah as pertaining to lewd behavior, Hassan (1999, 355) has a completely different understanding not only of *daraba,* but of the second half of the Āyah as well. The word "*salihat,* which is translated as 'righteously obedient,' is related to the word *salahiat,* which means 'capability' or 'potentiality,' and not obedience," she says; according to her, then, this is a reference to women's child-bearing potential, suggested also by the word *qanitāt* which refers not only to obedience but also to a water container (a metaphor for the womb). She thus reads this Āyah as referring to "women's role as child-bearers" and argues that only if *all* the women rebel against this role must they be disciplined by the *community,* not their husbands. This does not imply random acts of violence, however, because in a "legal context" the word *daraba* "means 'holding in confinement' " (355–56). Her reading not only accords with Shahab's interpretation of *daraba* as confinement but, more importantly, also is in conformity with the Qur'ān's counsel to husbands to deal kindly with their wives, even those who are their enemies or whom they hate. It therefore appears to be the best construction that one can put on this Āyah.

The fact that there are so many different readings of this Āyah means that it is ambiguous and, to that extent, we should be willing to rethink our commitment to its centrality in our own understanding of the Qur'ān's teachings, as well as to an exegesis that reads sexual inequality and husband privilege into the Qur'ān. In this context, even if we cannot all agree on the most suitable reading, we should be able to admit that reading this Āyah as a license to batter wives, or to compel obedience upon them, is not acceptable in that it is not the best meaning we can derive from the Qur'ān. Moreover, it contradicts the Qur'ān's view of sexual equality and its teaching that marriages should be based in love, forgiveness, harmony, and *sukūn.*

Adultery and Polygyny

I have claimed so far that the Qur'ān's different treatment of women and men does not mean necessarily that it privileges males. Here, I want to substantiate my argument by taking as an example the Qur'ān's provisions on adultery and polygyny which exemplify this different treatment.

In order for a husband to charge his wife with adultery, he must generally produce four male witnesses of good moral standing to the act of sexual intercourse itself. This requirement, argue exegetes, is meant to discourage

men [28] from slandering innocent women. (A man who brings a false charge is to receive eighty lashes with the whip and is to have his testimony on all other issues discounted in the future.) However, if a husband cannot produce four witnesses, he can stand witness himself by swearing an oath four times that he is telling the truth, and a fifth time that he invokes God's curse on himself if he is lying. The wife's recourse is then to swear an oath four times that her husband "Is telling a lie," and a fifth time that she invokes God's wrath on herself if he is not (24:6–9; in Ali, 897–898). And her word is the last; if she is guilty, says the Qur'ān, God will punish her, but it gives her husband no more legal recourse against her.

Clearly, the Qur'ān here privileges the evidence of a wife over that of her husband, and of a woman over that of a man, but Muslims do not read this stipulation as a sign of inequality and female privilege. I make this point because, on popular Muslim views, the evidence of two women equals the evidence of one man, a "two-for-one formula" [29] that they derive from another Āyah that allows two women instead of one man to witness the transaction of a financial debt. However, there are a total of five cases of evidence giving in the Qur'ān, and in only one does it make the provision about two women, for very specific social reasons. Had this been an across-the-board formula in the Qur'ān, it would not have attached greater weight to a wife's evidence than to the husband's in the far more consequential matter of adultery.

If the Qur'ān does not privilege males in its treatment of adultery, and can be said even to privilege women, it also does not privilege males in its treatment of polygyny. Odd as it may sound to us today, given its abuses by Muslims historically, in the Qur'ān, polygyny serves a very specific purpose: that of securing *justice for female orphans.* Since Muslim exegesis of the Qur'ān's position on polygyny is the most notoriously decontextualized of all, it is necessary to quote the whole of the relevant Āyah:

> Give the orphans their property, and do not exchange the corrupt for the good and devour not their property with your property; surely that is a great crime. *If* you fear that you will not act justly towards the orphans, marry such women as seem good to you, two, three, four; but if you fear you will not be equitable, then only one, or [*aw*] what your right hands own; *so* it is likelier you will *not be partial.* (4:1; in Arberry, 100; my emphases)

Women whom men's "right hands own" are thought to be war captives, slaves, and concubines, all of whom were part of the structure of tribal Arab society in the seventh century and for whose equitable treatment the Qur'ān

laid down guidelines. Commentators thus read the Āyah as permitting men to marry such women by translating *aw* as "or." However, Asad (1980, 519 n. 3) renders *aw* as "that is"; on his reading, the reference is to women whom men's right hands possess, that is, their spouses. In his translation, then, the Qur'ān is encouraging men to remain married to their spouses.

Even if one does not accept his translation, the point is that this Āyah mentions polygyny only in reference *to orphans.* Moreover, as both Asad and Richard Bell (1991, 108) note in this context, since the Āyah is addressed to the entire community, it does not "necessarily mean that the guardian should himself marry those for the management of whose property he is responsible." However, even if one does not agree with this reading, it should be clear that polygyny is only permitted in those cases where the guardian feels that (1) he may be unable to do full justice to his charge outside of marriage (the assumption being that marriage gives the husband a stake in the honest management of his wife's property), and (2) if the marriage does not do injustice to the *wife.* If there is such a likelihood, says the Āyah, then a man should marry only one wife. Indeed, the Qur'ān is clear that men in polygynous situations are never "able to be equitable between your wives, be you ever so eager" (4:125; in Arberry, 119). The gap between desire and its fulfillment is large, and as far as polygyny is concerned, the Qur'ān is frank: in spite of good intentions, men cannot deal justly between their wives. This may be because, as the Qur'ān says, "God has not made for any man two hearts" (33:4; Ali, 1102), implying, says Ali, that a man cannot love two women equally. We thus can read these Āyāt together as presenting a case against generalized polygyny, which Muslims derive from reading half a line of Āyah 4:1.

Significantly, the Qur'ān does not present polygyny as a solution for economic problems, a wife's infertility, or the need to fulfill male sexual needs, as Wadud (1999, 84) points out. In fact, if acceptable to women, it may be a way to protect them and give them sexual access to men at a time when women outnumber men. However, the Qur'ān itself does not refer to the sexual nature or needs of women or men in dealing with polygyny; it refers only to the need to ensure social justice for orphaned girls. Arguably, then, polygyny does not even serve a sexual function in the Qur'ān. Nor does it exemplify male privilege since the Qur'ān *limited* the number of wives men could now marry, restricted multiple marriages to orphans, and made such marriages contingent on a set of well-specified and stringent criteria. If today we cannot think of a polygynous relationship as having anything to do with justice, we should not ignore that this is what the Qur'ān itself

intended to achieve, at a time when unprotected women were open to all forms of abuse. Even so, polygyny is not the Qur'ānic ideal; otherwise, its admonition to marry only once, its assertion that men cannot do justice between wives, and its reference to the oneness of the human heart would hold no meaning. And since for believers the Qur'ān's teachings cannot be meaningless, it is we who must be willing to reread the Āyāt cumulatively as an argument against a generalized model of polygyny.

Divorce and "Degrees" of Male Privilege

It is a commentary on the deeply egalitarian nature of the Qur'ān that it counsels compassion and tolerance not only within marriage, but also in the event of a divorce.[30] In fact, it is the Qur'ān's teachings on divorce that conclusively establish the value of tolerant and ethical behavior on the part of spouses. If this seems counterintuitive, given that divorces are the least likely events to induce scrupulous behavior on the part of most people, it makes sense for precisely that reason.

Prior to examining the Qur'ānic Āyāt on divorce, I want to note, first, that most of the Āyāt are addressed to men, perhaps because Islam was seeking to limit "the frequency and the facility of divorce in preIslamic Arabia." Since a wife's right to divorce was "virtually non-existent in pre-Islamic times" and men had almost total powers of repudiation,[31] it is logical that the Qur'ān would address them. Second, while Islam permits divorce, it also is among the things considered most hateful to God (Ali 1988, 221 n. 638). Thus, the Qur'ān advises couples to try an attempt at family mediation first: "If they wish for peace, God will cause Their reconciliation," it says (4:35; in Ali, 191). A husband and wife also can reach an agreement between themselves without outside arbitration, and it is in discussing the latter option that the Qur'ān comes out most clearly in favor of marital harmony:

> If a woman feareth ill-treatment from her husband, or desertion, it is no sin for them twain if they make terms of peace between themselves. *Peace is better.* But greed hath been made present in the minds (of men). If ye do good and keep from evil, lo! Allah is ever Informed of what ye do. (4:128; in Pickthall, 91; my emphasis)

Here again, the Qur'ān categorically recommends marital peace, even in a difficult situation, which is particularly significant since the very next Āyāt are read as permission for "wife beating."

Should matters come to a divorce, the Qur'ān is insistent that spouses not forget "Liberality between yourselves" (2:237; in Ali, 95). It especially mandates just and decent behavior on the husband's part at all stages of the divorce process, ranging from when he may divorce a wife and how, to the manner in which he is to maintain and treat her during different stages of the process:

> O Prophet! When ye
> Do divorce women,
> Divorce them at their
> Prescribed periods,[32]
> And count (accurately)
> Their prescribed periods:
> And fear God your [*Rabb*]:
> And turn them not out
> Of their houses,[33] nor shall
> They (themselves) leave,
> Except in cases they are
> Guilty of some open lewdness,[34]
> Those are limits
> Set by God: and any
> Who transgresses the limits
> Of God, does verily
> Wrong his (own) soul.
>
> The Qur'ān (65:1; in Ali, 1562)

And again,

> When ye divorce
> Women, and they fulfil
> The term of their (*iddat*) [waiting period],
> Either take them back
> On equitable terms
> Or set them free
> On equitable terms;
> But do not take them back
> To injure them, (or) to take

Undue advantage;
If anyone does that,
He wrongs his own soul.
Do not treat God's Signs
As a jest . . .

(2:231; in Ali, 91–92)

These Āyāt do not require a lengthy exegesis. The Qur'ān warns men to treat their wives justly and not to harass or hurt them or turn them out of the house, even during the tribulations of a divorce. One Āyah likens injury to an estranged wife to transgressing the limits of God, and the other to wronging one's own soul; both warn against making light of the limits established by God.

Even if a woman is independently wealthy, the Qur'ān places on the man the obligation to support her during and after the divorce, and its recommendations are radically enlightened, even by modern standards. A husband must accommodate a wife he plans to divorce

where you are lodging, according to your means, and do not press them, so as to straiten their circumstances. If they are with child, expend upon them until they bring forth their burden. If they suckle for you, give them their [recompense],[35] and consult together honourably. . . . Let the man of plenty expend out of his plenty. As for him whose provision is stinted to him, let him expend of what God has given him. God charges no soul save with what [God] has given him. (65:5; in Arberry 285)

A husband planning on divorcing his wife thus has an obligation to maintain her in the same way as himself, and both spouses are to settle any issues between them in a mutually agreeable manner.

If a divorced wife gives birth, the Qur'ān expects that she will nurse her baby for two years[36] and requires her ex-husband to maintain her "On a reasonable (scale)" (2:241; in Ali, 96). Neither parent must be made to suffer on account of their child; as the Qur'ān says, "No mother shall be Treated unfairly On account of her child. Nor father On account of his child" (2:233; in Ali, 93).[37] The baby should be weaned by mutual consent.

Women going through a divorce, on the other hand, are asked only "to wait For three monthly periods" to determine if they are pregnant[38] (since the father is responsible for providing for the child and mother), and

their husbands
Have the *better right*
To take them back
In that period, if
They wish for *reconciliation.*
And women shall have rights
Similar to the rights
Against them, according
To what is equitable;
But men have a degree [*darajah*]
(Of advantage) over them.
And God is Exalted in Power, Wise.

(2:228; in Ali, 89–90; my emphases)

Since this is the Āyah that accords men the famous "degree" over women, which fuels claims about male privilege, it is important to consider it in its different renditions so as to identify some common themes. Asad translates it as follows:

And the divorced women shall undergo, without remarrying, a waiting-period of three monthly courses; for it is not lawful for them to conceal what God may have created in their wombs, if they believe in God and the Last Day. And during this period their husbands are fully entitled to take them back, if they desire reconciliation; but, in accordance with justice, the rights of the wives [with regard to their husbands] are equal to the [husbands'] rights with regard to them, although men have *precedence* over them [in this respect]. And God is almighty, wise. (Asad, 50; my emphasis)

Pickthall (53) is even clearer in his translation:

Women who are divorced shall wait, keeping themselves apart, three (monthly) courses. And it is not lawful for them that they should conceal that which Allah hath created in their wombs if they are believers in Allah and the Last Day. And their husbands would do better to take them back in that case if they desire a reconciliation. And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them *in kindness,* and men are a degree above them. Allah is Mighty, Wise. (my emphasis)

Wadud's (1999, 68) rephrasing of Pickthall's translation renders it clearer:

Women who are divorced shall wait, keeping themselves apart, three (monthly) courses. And it is not lawful for them that they conceal that which Allah has created in their wombs if they believe in Allah and the Last Day. And their husbands would do better to take them back in that case if they desire a reconciliation. And [(the rights) due to the women are similar to (the rights) against them, (or responsibilities they owe) with regard to] the *ma'ruf,* and men have a degree [darajah] above them (feminine plural). Allah is Mighty, Wise.

Though translated "as 'kindness,' " *ma'ruf,* says Wadud (69), has much wider implications.

There are, then, four themes in this Āyah in its various renditions: the waiting period in a divorce, the possibility of reconciliation between an estranged couple, the theme of kindness, and, the equality of spousal rights except that the husband has a degree or advantage over the wife whose nature the Qur'ān does not specify. Given this fact, exegetes interpret the Āyah differently. Wadud (1999, 68) reads it as giving husbands the advantage of being able to "pronounce divorce against their wives without arbitration or assistance;" wives, on the other hand, need arbitration in order to get divorced. However, as she points out, this stipulation does not derive from the Qur'ān, which does not say that women *should* have no powers of repudiation; they *did not* have such powers at the time of its revelation. Asad, on the other hand, reads the Āyah as giving husbands the advantage of being able to *rescind* a divorce; as he says (Asad 1980, 50 n. 216), "since it is the husband who is responsible for the maintenance of the family, the first option to rescind a provisional divorce rests with him." Since the Qur'ān also mentions kindness and the possibility of a reconciliation, this may be a more appropriate reading than Wadud's. Hassan (1999, 357), however, reads the Āyah as giving husbands the advantage of being able to remarry without having to wait for a three-month period. Whichever reading one prefers, however, it is clear that the "degree" does not refer to the ontological status of men as males, or even to their rights over women; rather, it is a specific reference to a husband's rights in a divorce and, from all indications, is meant to encourage more, not less, kindness towards women.

In this context, it also is important to clarify that the Qur'ān does not allow men to divorce wives freely or unilaterally, as they do in practice. Thus, no Āyah supports "the license of divorce presently awarded to males" in most Muslim societies (Esposito 1982, 109). In fact, the Qur'ān not only discouraged divorce, it also outlawed one form of divorce in response to a

woman's plea to God (the Sūrah "She Who Disputes" takes its name from this Āyah):

> God has heard the words of her that disputes with thee concerning her husband, and makes complaint unto God. . . . Those of you who say, regarding their wives, "Be as my mother's back,"[39] they are not truly their mothers; their mothers are only those who gave them birth, and they are surely saying a dishonourable saying, and a falsehood. (58:1; in Arberry 2, 263)

After the revelation of this Āyah, Muslim men could no longer revert to *zihār* divorce, which symbolically collapsed the wife with the mother. Mothers, the Qur'ān says, are those who give us birth, protecting both wives and the specificity of motherhood.

The Qur'ān also limits the number of times a man can divorce his wife, a ruling prompted by pre-Islamic practices in which a husband was

> perpetually divorcing a wife, pretending to take her back, and then divorcing her again in order to either convince her to relinquish her dower for her final freedom, or to prevent her from remarrying and seeking the protection of another husband. (Esposito 1982, 39)

The Qur'ān not only makes it "illegal to divorce a wife on a false charge whereby the husband might retain some of the property lawfully belonging to her" (Levy 1962, 97), it also limits the number of times a man can divorce his wife to two. After that, the "parties should either hold Together on equitable terms, Or separate with kindness" (2:229; in Ali, 90–91). If a man does make the mistake of divorcing his wife a third time,[40] they cannot remarry until she marries another man and is divorced from him (2:230). In effect, while the Qur'ān allows remarriage "If they mutually agree On equitable terms" (2:232; in Ali, 92), it makes remarrying and divorce difficult. Too often when Muslims argue that in Islam divorce is easy and that it privileges males, they either do not understand, or they ignore, the Qur'ān's teachings. If men were to take these seriously, a divorce would be among the hardest situations in which they could find themselves as believers.

Differences versus Inequality

As the preceding discussion reveals, in dealing with the family and marriage, the Qur'ān treats women and men identically on some issues and differently on others. However, where it treats them differently, it does not necessarily

privilege males. On the contrary, most of its provisions seem to be directed at protecting women's interests. Thus, the Qur'ān treats both parents identically by counseling kindness towards them; however, it also treats them differently by privileging mothers over fathers and by mandating disobedience to parents in specific cases, which undercuts the father's authority more than it does the mother's in a patriarchy. Similarly, the Qur'ān treats both spouses identically by affirming the similarity of their natures and their right to *sukūn* in a marriage; it also holds them to the same standards of loving and tolerant behavior. The marriage contract also assumes their legal equality. However, the Qur'ān also treats spouses differently on a number of issues. For instance, it privileges the wife's testimony over that of the husband's in the case of adultery. At the same time, however, it makes husbands, not wives, breadwinners for the household, and it allows husbands, but not wives, to marry up to four times. However, since polygyny is meant to protect women and not to cater to men's sexual needs, it is difficult to view it as privileging males. Moreover, while allowing for polygyny under specific circumstances, the Qur'ān also establishes the primacy of a wife's right to just treatment, and it is on this basis that it counsels monogamy. Were the Qur'ān a patriarchal text, it would not adopt the woman's perspective (whether that of the girl killed by her father, or the female orphan at the mercy of a male guardian, or that of the wife) to legislate male behavior.

Perhaps the only teaching of the Qur'ān that shows a measure of inequality is the Āyah on confining the wife ("wife beating"), since it does not give the wife comparable rights. However, if Hassan's (1999) reading is accurate that such a confinement is only to be effected in the face of a mass revolt by women against childbearing—a function only women can perform (at least, thus far)—then, such an eventuality seems remote and, to that extent, the Āyah also becomes peripheral to understanding the Qur'ān's view of spousal relationships. What this Āyah does reveal, however, as do others, is that the Qur'ān recognizes that men have the power and authority in patriarchies. However, this does not mean that it either condones patriarchies, or that it is itself a patriarchal text. As I have argued, the Qur'ān does not mandate obedience to fathers/husbands, or authorize rule by the father/husband, or propagate the idea that men have any advantage over women in their capacity as *males,* though clearly, men have some advantages (and also some disadvantages!) in their capacity as husbands. However, there is no narrative in the Qur'ān that suggests even the remotest parallels between God and husbands, just as nothing in the Qur'ān suggests that males are intermediaries between God and women.

In light of these teachings, it is difficult to view the Qur'ān's different treatment of women and men as evidence of its anti-equality stance. For one, as I have emphasized repeatedly, difference does not always imply inequality, particularly if it is not based in a theory of sexual differentiation; indeed, difference may even be "compatible with [definitions] of similarity" (Ricoeur 1974, 471). Thus, the Qur'ān's different treatment of women and men does not invalidate its teachings about human equality or similarity. For another, it is important to keep "analytically distinct" gender differentiation and gender devaluation and not to confuse every recognition of gender roles as a devaluation of women (Nicholson 1986, 92). The Qur'ān's recognition of gender roles is fundamental to its desire to secure women's rights, especially in situations where they may be vulnerable to abuse. However, the Qur'ān does not suggest that women's vulnerability is a function of their being the "weaker sex"; rather, it ascribes their vulnerability to the existing patriarchal social and sexual divisions of labor. However, even as it recognizes the existence of such divisions of labor and thus of gender roles, the Qur'ān

> does not strictly delineate the roles of woman and the roles of man to such an extent as to propose only a single possibility for each gender[41] (that is, women must fulfill this role, and *only* this one, while men must fulfill that role and only men *can* fulfill it). (Wadud 1999, 63; her emphases)

As such, one cannot hold the Qur'ān itself responsible for how a particular social or sexual division of labor has evolved over time. At best, one can say that the Qur'ān makes stipulations

> for a gender inequality that exists, but should not. Thus, the Quran makes certain stipulations about slavery as well, but not timelessly. The assumption is that slavery will be around for a while, so this is how one needs to deal with it *until* it goes down in history. So perhaps some of its other provisions also cannot be read timelessly.[42]

However, not only do mainstream Muslim interpretive communities continue to read the Qur'ān's provisions timelessly, but they also continue to ignore the egalitarian aspects of its teachings that deal with the rights of women as mothers, daughters, and wives. This may be because they fail to recognize the ontological basis of human equality in Islam, or it may be because they distinguish between religious and social/legal equality. This distinction also accounts for the very different kinds of views that Muslims

and their critics have of Islam's position on women. Thus, Muslims who argue that Islam protects women's rights and accords them a status denied them in the West draw on the theme of religious equality, while critics who view Islam as discriminatory refer to the different rights it extends to women and men. Both views, however, are problematic. The first attempts to unlink the religious and the social spheres even though they cannot be disconnected in this way; it also ignores that the Qur'ān's view of equality structures its teachings on not just faith, but also on sexual relationships. The second view, on the other hand, confuses equality with similarity and inequality with difference, a confusion against which I have argued, hopefully, persuasively.

v. Reading in Front of the Text

Modern readers view the Qur'ān's position on marriage and the family in different ways. Some argue that the Islamic marriage is "life-affirming rather than life-denying" (Esposito 1982, 15); that it is conducive to the growth and stability of the family; that it enhances woman's status "in terms of her rights and obligations as a wife and the mother of a family" (Coulson in Marsot 1979, 66). Such arguments recognize the historical significance of the change in women's status from chattel to wives and mothers as a result of Islamic provisions, the most revolutionary of which was the contractual marriage, recognizing women and men as equals. Others, meanwhile, claim that the Islamic marriage is patriarchal, hence oppressive to women (Ahmed 1992). This critique, which assumes that the family quintessentially is patriarchal, also assumes a particular view of oppression. One can begin then by asking why some Western and feminist theorists believe that the family has "served only to oppress women and children" (McMillan 1982, 91).

The answer depends on whose view of history and which theory one accepts. Marxist feminists maintain that an (avowedly) egalitarian social and sexual system based on free (presumably consensual) sex between women and men was replaced over time and in tandem with the emergence of private property by the patriarchal family that allowed men to monopolize the products of women's labor. Thus "women lost their equal status when they lost control over the products of their work"[43] (Leacock 1981, 200). Since this family structure restricted women's sexual access to men, it also was sexually repressive. The family in this mode of traditional patriarchy

was premised on a view of the Father/husband as ruler with powers of life and death over wives/children, and a view of women that reduced them to their biological role of childbearers. Although this form of father-right passed from the scene, argue Marxist feminists, the patriarchal family and patriarchy did not; they were able "lawfully" to reconstitute themselves by means of contractual relationships (Pateman 1988).

Other explanations for why the monogamous/contractual family represses women range from the claim that the private domain of family life (associated with women) is inferior to the public domain of politics and culture (associated with men), to the view that women's biology and "procreation [are] the *substance* of female subordination in the late twentieth century" (Hart 1996, 25; her emphasis). However, this association of women with biology (nature) by some feminists is ironic given that the "major source of women's oppression resides in this enforced identity between woman and nature." This association allowed theorists like Hegel to claim that whereas men acquire knowledge through reason, women, who live in a natural state, acquire it by "breathing in ideas" (Hewitt in Haddad and Findly 1985, 17). Radical lesbians, on the other hand, regard *all* heterosexual unions as oppressive because of their view that male nature is innately misogynistic. And then there are those who believe that not just the family and marriage as defined in monotheism, but monotheism itself, is patriarchal and oppressive. Thus, explanations for why the family and marriage are patriarchal or oppressive range from the nature of the social/sexual divisions of labor, to women's biology and reproductive roles, to cultural constructions of God, the family, sexuality, and patriarchy.

In view of the broad range of these views, it is difficult to establish the family and marriage in Islam as nonpatriarchal and nonoppressive on all counts. Those who view biology, monotheism, or heterosexuality as oppressive—confusing sex, sexuality, biology, and monotheism with their social constructions—also are unlikely to view as egalitarian a monotheistic perspective that legitimizes heterosexuality and sees the role of childbearing, but not necessarily childrearing, as the woman's function. However, other views are harder to apply in their totality to the Qur'ān. For instance, it is difficult to impose the concept of the social/sexual division of labor onto the Qur'ān inasmuch as the Qur'ān does not espouse a specific social/sexual division of labor. Similarly, the concept of the public/private as defined in Western mainstream theories also cannot be applied to the Qur'ān, which views the two spheres differently than Western and Muslim patriarchies do.

As such, while Western/feminist theories of the family and marriage may be helpful in distinguishing the Qur'ān's position, they are of little help in explaining it.

This does not mean, however, that the Qur'ān's teachings are incompatible with all modern/Western/feminist theories. Those who argue against "overpoliticizing our most intimate relations and turning the family into the war of all against all to be negotiated by contract" (Elshtain 1981, 337), may find the Qur'ān's view of the family egalitarian and nurturing. So will those who believe that, for the needs of mothers and children "to be taken seriously, the home—that is, family life—must retain a central place in any society [and] the importance of the women's role in the home" must be recognized (McMillan 1982, 104). Similarly, the fact that in the Qur'ān spousal rights are not contingent on the sex of the spouse, that the wife is an agent in her own right, entitled to rights and safeguards in marriage and divorce, and that marriage is based on mutuality, may comfort those of us who are concerned with issues of sexual equality, or equity, or the nondiscriminatory treatment of women. The Qur'ān's teachings also will resonate with those who are suspicious of a feminist Utopia conceived as "a world in which birth, sex and death no longer exist" (McMillan 1982, 156). They also will make sense to those who hold that it is no longer "obviously valid to argue that the idea that a mother has to face peculiar problems because of her situation *qua* mother is an invention of the patriarchal mind" (113). And, finally, the Qur'ān's teachings will reassure those who view the feminist assault on women's biology and attempt to delink reproduction and sexuality as a revolt against nature and who call for "social changes which would embrace more fully, and with more justice . . . differences [between women and men] and their consequences for women" (152).

Freedom, we are told, "requires order and order requires limits."[44] The problem is that many people have grown increasingly suspicious of limits because they have grown increasingly more sure of moral uncertainties. However, if we can "reject the idea that all social norms and ideals operate as instruments of domination and control,"[45] we may find in the Qur'ān's view of rights and responsibilities both order and limits. We may also find that it comes closest to articulating sexual relationships in the kind of "non-oppositional and non-hierarchical"[46] mode that many scholars believe can be liberating for both women *and* men.

Postscript

**Verily We have brought
The Truth to you:
But most of you
Have a hatred for Truth.**

   The Qur'ān (43:78) [1]

My objective in writing this book was to recover the scriptural basis of sexual equality in Islam and thereby to defend Islam against the claim, made by both Muslim conservatives and feminists, that it is a religious patriarchy that "professes models of hierarchical relationships and sexual inequality" and puts a "sacred stamp . . . onto female subservience" (Mernissi 1996, 13–14). In spite of the longevity and pedigree of such readings—which justify sexual oppression in many societies—I argued against them, on both historical and hermeneutic grounds.

   The historical argument involved specifying the nature of sexual/textual politics in Muslim societies, specifically, the processes that have yielded a patriarchal exegesis of the Qur'ān. While I do not claim to have explained Muslim history, or why it unfolded in the ways it did, I do remain convinced that the manner of its unfolding was central to how Muslims came to define religious epistemology and methodology, and thus also to how they came to read the Qur'ān. The hermeneutic aspect of my argument consisted in recovering what I term the Qur'ān's egalitarian and antipatriarchal epistemology. I made this part of the argument in three steps. The first was to draw on the principle of textual polysemy (the fact that texts can be read in multiple modes) to critique interpretive reductionism/essentialism (the idea that we can read the Qur'ān only in patriarchal modes). The second was to argue against interpretive relativism (the view that all readings are equally correct) without relinquishing my commitment to the textual polysemy on the grounds that not all readings can be accepted as contextu-

ally legitimate or theologically sound, especially those that read into God's Speech various forms of *Zulm* (injustice resulting from transgressing against another person's rights). If, I argued, we are invested in the idea of a God Who is just and never does any *Zulm* to anyone, then we must also cultivate the habit of reading God's Speech as not teaching *Zulm*. Thus, my third move was to locate the hermeneutic keys for reading the Qur'ān in the nature of Divine Ontology, and while this theological defense may disturb some people, it is entirely in keeping with a believer's view that the purpose of faith is to act as an "aid to understanding" by enabling one to integrate "thinking and believing" (Maier 1994, 51).

Even though how we think about and read God's Speech cannot be divorced from what we believe about God, generations of Muslims have read *Zulm* against women into God's Speech—by reading patriarchy into the Qur'ān—while believing in a God Who never does any *Zulm* to anyone. It may be that many people see no contradiction in this because they do not view patriarchy itself as a manifest case of *Zulm* that transgresses against women's rights in fundamental ways. However, given the long history of misusing God's Speech to oppress women, I believe it is critical to develop and apply a precise definition of patriarchy in reading the Qur'ān, as I have done here.

If—as I suggested—patriarchy is a continuum at one end of which are misrepresentations of God as Father, and of fathers as rulers over wives and children, and at the other end, the notion of sexual differentiation that is used to privilege males while Otherizing women, then the Qur'ān's teachings are antipatriarchal. In support of this claim, I examined a broad range of issues extending from how the Qur'ān describes God, to how it theorizes the rights of parents and spouses, to how it views sex/gender. On my reading, the Qur'ān's antipatriarchal epistemology can be located in the very nature of Divine Self-Disclosure, which rules out not only views of God as Father/male but also theories of father-right, as well as of sexual differentiation. In the latter context, I argued that missing from Qur'ānic discourses is the idea of gender dualisms because missing from the Qur'ān is the idea of sexual differentiation and "thought by sexual analogy";[2] that is, the tendency to decipher all phenomena in terms of the organization of sexual difference(s). Not only does the Qur'ān not employ the concept of sexual differences (or sameness) to discriminate against women, but it affirms the principle of the ontic equality of the sexes. This is why I believe that we can theorize radical sexual equality from the Qur'ān's teachings.

Unlike those people who blame Islam's "uncompromising monotheism" for women's oppression, or who argue that its emphasis on God's Rights narrows the scope of human rights by displacing the idea of popular sovereignty, I believe that Islam is liberatory. Not only does Islamic monotheism, properly understood, serve to liberate women from the tyranny of male rule but, by privileging the Rights of God, it dis-locates rule by the father as well as theories of male sovereignty, which are at the root of women's oppression. As such, privileging the Rights of God is the condition for *protecting* the rights of women within the context of different social and sexual relationships. As we know, moreover, theories of popular sovereignty also can coexist with patriarchy and sexual inequality. As I see it, then, the problem lies not in monotheism, or in the emphasis that Islam places on the Rights of God, but in how we visualize both. I have offered an approach that allows us to visualize them in liberatory ways and thus enables us to struggle for equality from within the framework of Islamic monotheism.

I have, of course, been selective in my argument, as Muslims (like other people) generally also "are selective in terms of which of their body of unalterable truths they emphasize."[3] Disturbed by the gap that exists between what "can be safely inferred from the Quran itself and what has frequently been read into it,"[4] I set out to absolve the Qur'ān "itself" of culpability for what Muslims have, or have not, read into it. This does not mean that I did not consider seriously the alternative argument that the problem is not one of reading but of the very nature of some of the Qur'ān's teachings. Edged on by an "absence of doubt"[5] and also by skeptical critics, I wondered whether the Qur'ān itself is responsible for its misreadings. After all, why should a text bear no responsibility for how it is read, and why should it not anticipate the possibility of its misreadings, hence abuse?[6] Particularly if meaning is located in the text itself, as I argued, is not the text accountable for the meanings that we retrieve from it? I want to address these and related questions here by way of a postscript to my work, which I do not see as in any way being conclusive, or as having been concluded.

My own view is that the Qur'ān's auto-hermeneutics serves not only as a guide to how we should read it, but also, and by the same token, as an argument against holding it responsible for how it has or has not been read. To begin with, the Qur'ān anticipates the possibilities of its own misreadings; as God says, "Those who pervert the Truth in Our Signs are not hidden from Us" (41:40; in Ali, 1298). These perversions, in the Qur'ān's telling, reflect both moral and hermeneutic failures. Thus, the Qur'ān condemns

those who, for reasons of personal gain, "conceal God's revelations in the Book And purchase for them A miserable profit," warning them that "They swallow into themselves Naught but Fire" (2:174; in Ali, 68). How people conceal revelation becomes clear when, referring to the Law given to Moses, the Qur'ān condemns the fact that "ye make it into (Separate) sheets for show, While ye conceal much (Of its contents)" (6:91; in Ali, 314). That is, concealment occurs when we read God's Message piecemeal and selectively, and thus in a decontextualized way. This emerges also from the warning the Prophet is asked to convey to "those who divided (Scripture into arbitrary parts),—(So also on such) As have made the Qur'an Into shreds (as they please)." As God warns them, "We will, of a surety, Call them to account, For all their deeds" (15:90–93; in Ali, 653). Reading without regard to the principle of textual unity and holism results both in concealing God's Message and also in distorting it; and who, asks the Qur'ān "Is more unjust than those Who conceal the testimony They have from God?" (1:140; in Ali, 56). To the same end, the Qur'ān also condemns those who "change the words from their (right) times And places" (5:44; in Ali, 255), thereby reframing the meaning of Scriptures. It is equally condemnatory of those who privilege its allegorical Āyāt over those of clear meaning as a way to "seek Causes of dispute in the Book" (2:176; in Ali, 68). In this context, the Qur'ān also reproaches those "who know not the Book But (see therein their own desires)"; and, as it makes clear, "they do nothing but conjecture" (2:78; in Ali, 38). For perhaps this very reason, the Qur'ān makes a distinction between itself and its exegesis, thus also between religion and our knowledge of it. Finally, the Qur'ān asks us to read for its best meanings, and while it leaves it to us to define what such meanings might be, it recognizes that not all the meanings we can derive from it will be appropriate. In sum, the Qur'ān not only anticipates the possibility that we will misread it, but it also attempts to avert this possibility by advocating some textual/moral strategies and cautioning against others. This is why I believe that the onus for reading the Qur'ān correctly lies with the reader, and also why I see nothing wrong in arguing that meaning lies in the Qur'ān, but the responsibility for recovering it properly lies with its readers.

If, for the sake of argument, we *were* to hold the Qur'ān responsible for its misreadings—on the grounds, for instance, that it uses allegory (even though it states that allegorical and clear verses must be read in conjunction), or because it uses words that have multiple meanings (even though it asks us to look for the best meanings), or because it sanctions certain

practices that can lead to abuse (even though its teachings also allow us to distinguish the specific from the universal within it)—what would that say about our own role in interpretation? What would that mean for a theory of our own moral responsibility to read for the best meanings? To what extent would a theory of textual responsibility (one that places the onus of misreading on the text itself) absolve us of the moral and ethical responsibility to do what is right? Could we have a hermeneutics, much less a hermeneutic spiral, if we assumed that meaning emerges from the encounter between human and textual subjects, but that the burden of misreading lies on the text alone? Moreover, if "we always read texts 'out of' a praxis and 'into' a praxis,"[7] are we not accountable for the praxes out of which, and into which, we read? Is it also not true that "we can have perfectly orthodox understandings of what Scripture is about and yet use these texts in the most perverse and sinful ways?"[8] Is the problematic of reading just a textual-interpretive one, then, or also an ethical-moral one?

In raising these questions, I obviously am suggesting that a theory of textual responsibility would free us from having to account for the knowledges and the social contexts of knowledge production that we create. It also would elide the fact that reading and knowledge creation are purposive exercises contingent on conscious (and subconscious) choices. The Qur'ān holds that morality (and evil) lies in making certain types of choices rather than others. In effect, morality is not the absence of evil, or of ambiguity, or of temptation; it is the willingness to choose what is right in the face of ambiguity and temptation and evil in the interest of leading a morally purposive life as individuals and as communities. The Qur'ān's concern with interpretive accuracy stems from its expectation that people will *act upon* their readings in order to lead such lives; that is, the hermeneutic and the existential are necessarily connected. However, we can only live in responsible and ethical ways if we also read ethically and responsibly; and we can only read responsibly and ethically if we (want to) live morally purposive lives. As such, hermeneutic choices are always also moral and ethical choices. A theory of textual responsibility, however, would free us from even having to make such choices, and to that extent, it would undercut views of humans as deliberative and morally reflexive agents, able to choose right over wrong.

Since I initially asked and addressed these questions,[9] I found similar concerns raised by Abdolkarim Soroush, an Iranian intellectual whose first book in English has become available to readers in the West only recently. I cite his work here both because it confirms some of my arguments and also

because it opens up to question the logic of some of them. Is "there a connection," he (2000, 76) also asks, "between a theory and its historical and practical unfolding?" To what extent are faulty practices attributable to the adherents of a doctrine rather than to the doctrine itself? As he says, "If we are going to maintain that an actual system springing from an idea has no relationship to the idea whatsoever, why then identify that system with that idea at all?" To Soroush, it is clear that we cannot absolve a doctrine "from the responsibility of allowing . . . abuses" (78). As he puts it, "False interpretations and improper conclusions, however sincerely drawn, are still, indubitably, fruits of the doctrine" (84). On this view, then, Islam itself "allowed both false righteousness and true virtue." He notes that, while the "seed of religion resists contamination . . . the plant that grows out of that seed opens a canopy for the virtuous and villainous alike" (86). And yet he wonders if we should in fact "hold ideologies responsible for everything done in their name . . . Is the history of a doctrine identical with the doctrine?" (81). In some ways, Soroush seems to suggest that it is. For instance, he argues that if it were possible to interpret Islam all over, its interpretive history would "not assume different forms or contents nor [would it] inaugurate a radically new history" (86). Such a theory of historical determinacy would suggest, of course, that a doctrine and its history are in fact inseparable. It would also, more dangerously, undercut our view of humans as moral agents by suggesting that we are caught merely in the "hinges of history" (to borrow a term from Ashis Nandy),[10] unable to do much about it. Yet, eventually, Soroush cannot bring himself to embrace a view that undermines the idea of human agency and, with it, the idea of morality (since, in the absence of agency, one cannot be moral). Thus, he recuperates the idea of agency by, among other things, distinguishing between Islam and its practice/readings on the grounds that, even though the "last religion is already here . . . the last understanding of religion has not yet arrived" (37). Indeed, he distinguishes not only "between religion and our knowledge of religion," but also "between personal knowledge of religion and religious knowledge" (34). This distinction allows him to posit religion as a complete and perfect system, and our knowledge of it as incomplete and also temporally and culturally bound, and to advocate, on this basis, for the latter's continual reform. In fact, at the heart of his philosophy of interpretation is the claim that religious knowledge is subject to "contraction and expansion" and that this flux is a natural part of the history of religion (34). (In this way, Soroush rehabilitates the role of human agency in history, even as he avoids making it infallible.) It is the failure to distinguish between reli-

gion and religious knowledge, as well as to register the ways in which the latter changes, he argues, that causes the most grief to Muslim "revivalists":

> Everywhere they turned they were haunted by agonizing questions: What is your claim and goal anyway? What is the "defect" in religion that you propose to repair? What error or ailment has befallen it that it has provoked this empathy and reformist zeal? What essential subject has escaped the Prophet's mind, what good or evil has religion left out that now demands your help in explicating or teasing out? And, anyway, if religion really does harbor such flaws and faults, why are you still committed to it? (31)

These are all questions I have been asked when presenting my own work to various audiences, both Muslim and non-Muslim, and have not always known how to address. Soroush makes it clear that we *cannot* answer such questions as long as we fail to realize that, "as a branch of human knowledge," religious knowledge also is "incomplete, impure, insufficient, and culture-bound" (32). And to the extent that this is so,

> rehabilitating religious thought; correcting misreadings; . . . redirecting religion towards its essence; rectifying misunderstandings; and tearing asunder the veils of ignorance and ill will are among the duties of the faithful and, as such, they are part of the history of religion. (86)

Thus, both misinterpretations of religion and attempts "to replace one understanding of religion with another" (33) equally are part of the history of any religion, including Islam.

That is the end toward which I undertook this work: in the hope that it will be among those egalitarian and antipatriarchal readings of Islam that will, in time, come to replace misogynist and patriarchal understandings of it. Yet, I remain aware that such a possibility is remote, at least in my own lifetime. The nature both of most Muslim states and my own standing in the Muslim community will make this difficult. Repressive states, I said earlier, are unlikely to give up their monopoly on religion or, more accurately, on religious terrorism, given the many uses to which they can put it. As for me, I belong to no sanctioned interpretive community, nor am I a male, or even a recognized scholar of Islam (the chances of being accepted as a scholar by most Muslims if one is not a man are slim to begin with).

However, as a Muslim woman, I have a great deal at stake in combating repressive readings of the Qur'ān and also in affirming that Islam is not based in the idea of male epistemic privilege, or in a formally ordained in-

terpretive community, or clergy. This means that "all Muslims may qualify" as interpreters of religious knowledge, or *mujtahid* (Esposito 1982, 126). Although I do not claim to be a *mujtahid,* like one, I believe that knowledge (*'Ilm*) can originate in revelation and reason, "observation as well as intuition . . . tradition as well as theoretical speculation" (Sardar 1985, 102–103). All these forms, however, only acquire equality in "a single matrix of values" when it is underpinned by a moral imperative[11] rooted in the idea of God's Unity, or *Tawhīd. A mujtahid* is thus, before all else, a believer imbued with a sense of God-consciousness, and a believer's right to interpret religion derives not from social sanctions (permission from clergies or interpretive communities), but from the depths of our own convictions and from the advice the Qur'ān gives us to exercise our own intellect and knowledge in reading it.

Sadly, however, few Muslims are willing to be a *mujtahid* today because religious knowledge has become a monopoly difficult to break, or break into. Moreover, the stakes in trying to do so are often very high. Yet, we cannot reinterpret Islam without rereading the Qur'ān, and many Muslims do in fact recognize the urgency of such an exercise given its abuses at the hands of many Muslim clerics and states to oppress women. This abuse frequently is justified in the name of communal solidarity and is perpetuated by drawing on the works of jurists, scholars, and exegetes of the medieval period. Clearly, we cannot hold these men responsible for having made what from the perspective of Muslims today are not always or necessarily viable arguments and choices. However, we can hold ourselves responsible for adhering blindly to arguments and choices that we know (from experience) undermine the Qur'ān's egalitarianism and thus also solidarities between Muslim women and men. Especially in a world where medieval epistemologies cannot help us to cope with the existential chaos generated by modernity and postmodernity, we need to be willing to rethink our own knowledge of Islam.

Yet, as I have argued, Muslims remain, for the most part, suspicious of change. It may be that this is the only system we know, and it works for too many people for us to want to change it. Or, it may be that too many of us have become habituated to hating the truth, as the Qur'ān tells us. In either case, we will be unable to change anything unless, as the Qur'ān says, we begin by changing what is in our own hearts, and by opening them to the truth. As Soroush (112) so exquisitely puts it, the "stunning beauty of the truth . . . lies beyond the veil of habits," and too many of us are enmeshed in this veil to see it.

Notes

Chapter 1

1. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary,* 2nd U.S. ed. (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1988), 1053. The first number in Qur'ānic citations refers to the chapter (*Sūrah*) and the second to the verse (*Āyah*). The Qur'ān is here speaking of those who rejected God's Signs.

2. "Traditional" here refers not to the Islamic tradition but to definitions of patriarchy as a tradition of father's rule.

3. "Islam" means submission to God's Will and "Muslim" someone who submits voluntarily to God's Will. By this definition, Muslims predate Islam inasmuch as the prophets revered by Jews and Christians (and by Muslims) submitted their will to God. I discuss the importance of maintaining the distinction between Islam and Muslims in the text below.

4. Hermeneutics is defined as the theory, method, and philosophy of interpretation; its subject matter includes how we interpret texts, what counts for a con/textually legitimate reading, and the role of preunderstanding in the interpretive process. See Josef Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique* (New York: Routledge, 1980); and Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation,* trans. and ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

5. In the text below, I explain why I define patriarchy in this way.

6. By this term, feminists usually mean to convey the relationship between sex/gender and reading. See Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1985).

7. Of course, we need to keep in mind the extremely low levels of literacy among women in most Muslim societies.

8. *Ijtihād* is the Islamic hermeneutics of critical reasoning and rethinking, especially in law; see Chapter 3.

9. C. Fawzi El-Sohl and Judy Mabro, eds., *Muslim Women's Choices: Religious Belief and Social Reality* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 18.

10. Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (New York: Methuen, 1980), 4.

11. This is Fatna Sabbah's claim in *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious,* trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (New York: Pergamon Press, 1984).

12. I borrow this phrase from Athalya Brenner, "Women's Traditions Problematized: Some Reflections," in *On Reading Prophetic Texts: Gender-Specific and Related Studies in Memory of Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes,* eds. Bob Becking and Meindert Dijkstra (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 55.

13. This is Kate Millett's characterization of monotheism in *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1970), 51.

14. I have borrowed this term from Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

15. Josef van Ess, "Verbal Inspiration? Language and Revelation in Classical Islamic Theology," in *The Quran as Text,* ed. Stefan Wild (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 189.

16. This is Fazlur Rahman's phrase in *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

17. In particular, my work is in dialogue with Amina Wadud, *Quran and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992).

18. See Chapter 5 on this point.

19. For my critique of Leila Ahmed's view that this period was egalitarian, see "Texts, Sex, and States: A Critique of North African Discourses on Islam," in *The Arab-African and Islamic Worlds: Interdisciplinary Studies,* eds. R. Kevin Lacey and Ralph M. Coury (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).

20. For Muslims, the unfixability of meaning does not indicate an absence of truth, as it does for postmodernists. See my "Muslim Women and Sexual Oppression: Reading Liberation from the Quran," in *Macalester International* 10 (spring 2001).

21. In Ali, *Qur'an,* 1031.

22. By this term I mean those Muslims who adhere to the notion of the canon's closure and thus do not favor new developments in religious knowledge. Although this is not a very helpful term, it is less charged and misleading than alternatives such as "orthodoxies" or "fundamentalists."

23. Al-Baydawi as quoted in Barbara Stowasser, "The Status of Women in Early Islam," in *Muslim Women,* ed. Freda Hussain (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), 26.

24. Stowasser, 26.

25. Ibid., 13.

26. My argument applies only to Sunni Islam and not to Shii. I use the term "canon" very loosely to refer to that body of religious knowledge (*Tafsīr, Ahādith, Sharī'ah*) that was formulated before the fourth Islamic century (tenth century c.e.) since Sunnis generally believe that the gate of critical reasoning, or *Ijtihād,* was closed at this time. Since one closure enabled the other, I sometimes refer to the closure of the canon even though what was considered closed was not the canon per se but interpretive methodology (see Chapter 3). Nonetheless, these closures not only impact Qur'ānic exegesis, but they also account for the remarkable continuity in Muslim religious discourses over the course of fourteen centuries. This is why I favor a historical approach to studying these discourses.

27. By "critical scholars" I simply mean those who rely on critique, reason(ing), and a questioning and reappropriation of tradition rather than on blind acceptance of tradition as canonical.

28. This reference to the Bible seems equally true of the Qur'ān. C. Boff, "Hermeneutics: Constitution of Theological Pertinency," in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World,* ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 34.

29. Wolterstorff uses this term in another context in *Divine Discourse.*

30. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Quran* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980).

31. Ibid., xi.

32. Kenneth Cragg, *The Event of the Quran: Islam in Its Scripture* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1994), 116.

33. The Middle Ages doesn't carry much meaning in relation to Muslim history, according to George Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). However, D. A. Spellberg, among others, calls Muslims the "true inheritors of a medieval process of Islamic interpretation," in *Politics, Gender and the Islamic Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 195. On the misogyny of the Middle Ages see Caroline Walker Bynum " '. . . And Woman his Humanity:' Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages," in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols,* eds. Caroline Bynum, Stevan Harrell, and Paula Richman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986). Leila Ahmed offers a compelling analysis of how this misogyny found its way into Islam in *Women and Gender.*

34. For a discussion of the mutuality of this process with respect to Jews and Muslims, see Steven Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis Under Early Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995) and Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

35. The phrase is that of Rashaand Sass, a student in my seminar on "Sexual/Textual Politics in Islam," at Ithaca College in 1996.

36. Fazlur Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History* (Karachi, Pakistan: Central Institute of Islamic Research, 1965).

37. Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1991).

38. Cragg, *Event of the Quran,* 14.

39. Ali, *Qur'an,* 383. This Āyah is addressed to Moses and refers to the law given to him (the "Ten Commandments").

40. This is Ricoeur's definition of a text in *Hermeneutics.*

41. I put the word "Islamic" in quotes since I assume that it is reasonable to regard only those norms and practices as Islamic that do originate in, or are sanctioned by, its own Scripture.

42. Jean Bethke Elshtain describes the historical form as a mode of production based on landholding in which

All of life was suffused with a religious-royalist ideology which was patriarchal in nature. A kingly father reigned whom no man could question for he owed his ter-

rible majesty and legitimacy to no man but to God. All lesser fathers within their little kingdoms had wives and children, or so patriarchal ideology would have it, as their dutiful and obedient subjects even as they, in turn, were the faithful and obedient servants of the fatherly-lord, the king.

In terms of this view, patriarchy and male domination are not the same. *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 213. In using this definition, I mean to emphasize only the idea of father-right, broadly conceived, not to generalize the model of feudal Europe.

43. As Gail Ramshaw notes, Martin Luther said, "God the Father is the model of all father figures who require obedience." Such misrepresentations of God have had consequences for relationships between women and men, as well as for their self-images. See Gail Ramshaw, *God beyond Gender: Feminist Christian God-Language* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1995), 77, 18.

44. In her later works, Zillah Eisenstein concedes that difference does not mean inequality. See *The Female Body and the Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). On various interpretations of equality, sameness, and difference, see Susan J. Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990); Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One,* trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985); Nicky Hart, "Feminism and the Spirit of Capitalism," in *Debating Gender, Debating Sexuality,* ed. Nikki Keddie (New York: New York University Press, 1996); and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Procreation and Women's Rights: A Response to Nicky Hart," in ibid. Meanwhile, "Simple equality principles have also proven inadequate for feminist practice in the area of sexuality," writes Angela Miles, *Integrative Feminisms: Building Global Visions, 1960s–1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 49.

45. Marshall Sahlins, *The Use and Abuse of Biology: An Anthropological Critique of Sociobiology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1976), 105.

46. I focus on these aspects of Divine Self-Disclosure because I have not yet explored others and because I view them as being foundational to the Qur'ān's descriptions of God.

47. Judith Antonelli, *In the Image of God: A Feminist Commentary on the Torah* (London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1995), xxxiii.

48. *Rabb* refers to Creator and Cherisher and is the word for God that the Qur'ān uses as consistently as Allah.

49. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics,* 212. Ricoeur, of course, is not speaking of the Qur'ān but of texts in general.

50. Read as a totality, argues Ricoeur, a text offers only a "limited field of possible constructions." Ibid., 213. What this means is that only some readings are contextually plausible.

51. R. Marston Speight, "The Function of *Hadith* as Commentary on the Quran, as Seen in the Six Authoritative Collections," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Quran,* ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 64.

52. Ibn Kathir as quoted in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir," in ibid., 56.

53. Ibid.

54. For the tensions that result from this method and how to resolve them, see Mustansir Mir, "The Sura as a Unity: A Twentieth Century Development in Quran Exegesis," in *Approaches to the Quran,* eds. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (New York: Routledge, 1993).

55. Intrinsic to all hermeneutic projects is the conundrum of the role of preunderstanding in structuring our expectations of, and encounter with, the interpretive process, or what Martin Heidegger called the problematic of the hermeneutic circle. See Bleicher, *Hermeneutics,* and Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics.*

56. I discuss the kinds of biases that Western audiences in particular are likely to have against a project like mine in "Muslim Women."

57. Mernissi, *The Veil.* The same Muslims who uphold this tradition as evidencing women's progressive role in early Muslim communities condemn their attempts today to approximate that role; history, it seems, is merely an alibi for them.

58. Rosemary Ruether as quoted in *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context,* ed. Gerald O. West. 2nd ed. rev. (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 1995, 110); her emphasis.

59. On the appropriateness of interpreting sacred texts in terms of authorial-intent discourse, see Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse;* T. Longman, "Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation," in *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation,* eds. Philips Long et al. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996); and Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics,* trans. Robert W. Yarborough (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1994).

60. Many Muslims do not view the translated Qur'ān as real. However, as the Qur'ān itself says, the archetypal or real Qur'ān remains with God. As such, reading the Qur'ān, "whether in Arabic or any other language is only an approximation of the original located with God, toward the understanding of which we can approach but cannot ultimately fully attain," as an anonymous reviewer wrote in support of my argument. Second, to believe that the Qur'ān is real only in Arabic is to confuse linguistic with epistemic privilege. The truth is that reading the Qur'ān in Arabic does not fix its meaning or eliminate exegetical differences as Muslim history attests (see Chapters 2 and 3). I believe the doctrine of the Qur'ān's universalism means that it is real and knowable in all languages.

61. Ali is Shia but his work has been adopted as the official translation of the Qur'ān by the "Wahabi" Saudi regime, which is venerated for its religious leadership by Sunni Muslims the world over.

62. F. Bonner and L. Goodman, "Introduction: On Imagining Women," in *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender,* eds. F. Bonner et al. (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 1992), 1–2.

63. Fazlur Rahman, *Islamic Methodology,* 77.

64. Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*

(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 167. Hodgen's reference is to Western anthropology's view of the Other as subhuman and barbaric, which remained, she says, unchanging in its core beliefs in spite of changes in knowledge. "Then, too, those who were faithful to tradition were cushioned from criticism," she notes. Ibid., 168.

65. Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 10; his emphasis.

Chapter 2

1. Since *Ijtihād* and innovation were discouraged after this time, it provides a cutoff point for examining the formative influences on the production of knowledge and the canon.

2. The first figure refers to the Islamic calendar and the second to the common era.

3. This is Paul Ricoeur's definition in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation,* trans. and ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 145.

4. This usage derives from Hugh Silverman, *Textualities: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 81.

5. Julia Kristeva coined this term to indicate how sign systems are transposed onto one another. See Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 156.

6. For a review of literature and its role in fostering misogyny, see Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991); and Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot, ed., *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam* (Malibu, Hawaii: Undena Publishers, 1979).

7. The *Tafsīr, Ahādith, Sunnah,* and *Sharī'ah* are not equal, however, and the *Sunnah* functions both as text and as extratextual context of reading. I discuss the *Sunnah* in Chapter 3.

8. F. Denny, "Islam: Quran and Hadith," in *The Holy Book in Comparative Perspective,* eds. F. Denny and R. Taylor (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1985), 95.

9. C. Fawzi El-Sohl and Judy Mabro, *Muslim Women's Choices: Religious Belief and Social Reality* (Oxford: Berg, 1994).

10. Ibid.

11. The Qur'ān, however, is not a law book in the sense of being "a collection of prescriptions providing a legal system," as John Esposito notes in *Women in Muslim Family Law* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 2. I discuss the *Sharī'ah* and the ways in which it departs from the Qur'ān's teachings in Chapter 3.

12. Schacht as quoted in W. Walther, *Woman in Islam* (Montclair, N.J.: Abner Schram, 1981), 21.

13. Commentators note differences in style and content of Āyāt in these two phases. According to Faruq Sherif, 88 Sūrahs are Meccan and 26 Madinan; thus 73 percent of

the Qur'ān's content is said to have been revealed in the Meccan stage. (The Prophet migrated to Madina because of opposition to his message in Mecca.) *A Guide to the Contents of the Quran* (London: Ithaca Press, 1985). In Section II, I discuss attempts to rethink Islam by distinguishing between these two phases.

14. Kenneth Cragg counsels reading the Qur'ān from back to front in order to be in historical step. Indeed, he refers to the Qur'ān "as history." *The Event of the Quran: Islam in its Scripture* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1994), 114.

15. It was Abu Bakr, the first caliph, who had the Qur'ān written down, but alongside his copy "existed other collections which belonged to private individuals," says Sherif. Each one regarded their copy as the most authentic, and it was left to Uthman to undertake "the task of providing a unified, authoritative text which would eliminate all competing versions." *A Guide,* 10. For the argument that the Qur'ān was compiled in an integrated manner under the Prophet's direction, see Mohammad Khalifa, *The Sublime Quran and Orientalism* (London: Longman, 1983). Khalifa does note that at the time of the Prophet's death, there was no written copy.

16. The Arabic word *kitab* means book, script, message, or record. As Farid Esack points out, it is "only towards the end of the process of revelation that the Quran is presented as scripture [*kitab*] rather than a recitation or discourse." "Quranic Hermeneutics: Problems and Prospects," in *The Muslim World* 83, no. 2 (April 1993): 123.

17. This confusion dates from the time when Mu'tazilite attempts to designate the Qur'ān as created, or within history, were defeated in the third/ninth century. See George Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

18. Of revelation Toshihiko Izutsu says that insofar as

it is *God's* speech Revelation is something mysterious and has nothing in common with ordinary human linguistic behavior, in so far as it is *speech,* it must have all the essential attributes of human speech.

God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964), 154.

19. This figure is the work of Ulises Ali Mejias-Butron.

20. Cragg, *The Event of the Quran,* 19.

21. Ian R. Netton, *Texts and Trauma: An East-West Primer* (London: Curzon Press, 1996), 5 (his emphasis).

22. Sachiko Murata says the Qur'ān "itself encourages interpretation going beyond the merely phenomenal level," and it also "points out that its own words are similitudes or likeness or analogies." Hence, "Islamic cosmological thinking has been based on the idea that things are pointers and not of any ultimate significance in themselves." *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships In Islamic Thought* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1992), 127, 25.

23. Here I am adopting Hourani's description of three different classes of texts in *Reason and Tradition.*

24. In the Qur'ānic sense, argues Fazlur Rahman, abrogation means that some Āyāt

were replaced by others at God's command; i.e., it is a *historical* development. *Naskh* "does not mean the juristic doctrine of abrogation" that developed later and "is an attempt to smooth out apparent differences in the import of certain verses." *Major Themes of the Quran* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 90. Khalifa, incidentally, notes that the word *naskh* is mentioned only once in the Qur'ān and refers to the cancellation of Biblical law by the law given to the Prophet. Khalifa, *Sublime Quran*.

25. Jay Harris, " 'Fundamentalism:' Objections from a Modern Jewish Historian," in *Fundamentalism and Gender,* ed. John S. Hawley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 158. Even among Jewish "fundamentalists" who view their Scripture as "a strictly monosemic text," notes Harris, traditional exegesis is based on a "commitment to a polysemic text." However, while both Jewish "fundamentalists" and Muslims view their Scripture as the inerrant word of God, Muslims do not claim, as the former do, that its interpreters are "capable of inerrantly ascertaining the inerrant claims of scripture" or that it is monosemic. Harris, "Fundamentalism," 158.

26. The story of the Queen of Sheba, argues Jacob Lassner, is a "test case of how Jewish memorabilia penetrated the literary imagination of medieval Muslims" (5). For instance, the *Targum Sheni* view her as "a threat to the natural order of the universe [whereas no] such dangers are manifest in the Quranic account" (40). Indeed, the Qur'ān says she is given "something of everything," like Solomon, including a magnificent throne. However, many Muslim exegetes understood such references to mean not that she had the same gifts as Solomon, or the license to rule, but that "she had the requisite implements for rule" and that her throne was "great because of its dimensions" (77).

One wonders, then [says Lassner] whether Jewish themes could have percolated into early Muslim tradition as part of an internal discourse among Jewish converts seeking reassurance for having chosen Islam, and/or as part of an informal dialogue between them and former co-religionists with whom they wished to remain in contact (125).

Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

27. Zuleikha was the woman who tried to seduce Joseph and whose husband condemned her "guile," which has generated a lot of misogynist *Tafsīr*. Indeed, Malti-Douglas argues in *Woman's Body* that Muslim misogyny has its literary origins in the story. See also Shalom Goldman, *The Wiles of Women, the Wiles of Men: Joseph and Potiphar's Wife in Ancient Near Eastern, Jewish, and Islamic Folklore* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1995). As Goldman says, though the woman's actions "are condemned in this story, the concept of *kayd* [guile] is generalized and applied to all women." In effect, " 'women's guile' is viewed as an inherent female characteristic against which men must be warned, and if possible, protected." Ibid., 47. Such a reading is unwarranted since (a) it is not the Qur'ān that accuses her of guile, (b) she

is an unbeliever, and (c) there is no basis in the Scripture for extrapolating from her behavior to Muslim women in general.

28. Reuben Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 177.

29. See Chapter 3 for a full discussion of all these issues.

30. This does not mean that Muslims have not challenged tradition or attempted to rethink it. See Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

31. Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen,* 6.

32. See Chapter 3 on the (re)writing of Muslim history.

33. I examine the *Ahādith* and their content and contexts here. I will discuss the *Sunnah* in the next chapter, in part because the *Sunnah* provides the context for the *Ahādith* and is not, strictly speaking, a text.

34. Muhammad Z. Siddiqi, *Hadith Literature: Its Origins, Development and Special Features* (Cambridge, U.K.: Islamic Texts Society, 1993).

35. See G. H. A. Junyboll, *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature: Discussion in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969).

36. F. E. Peters points out that the institution of the Caliphate, associated with Islam, came into being through consensus (*Ijmā'*) and that the Caliph remained "not a religious leader but the leader of a religious community." *A Reader on Classical Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 121.

37. See Levy, *Social Structure,* on the consensual aspects of the Arab-Muslim conquest.

38. The phrase is from C. Belsey, *Critical Practice* (New York: Methuen, 1980), 28.

39. This is the general definition of hegemony. See T. J. Jackson-Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American History Review* 90, no. 3 (1985): 577.

40. Junyboll, *Authenticity of the Tradition,* 12.

41. Ibid., 13–14.

42. Ibid., 18 (his emphasis).

43. Naeem Inayatullah encouraged me to think about the differences between biblical/European and Qur'ānic notions of time and their implications for an Islamic worldview and for my own analysis.

44. According to Izutsu, however, the Qur'ān does not label God's "speaking" to humans as an attribute. *God and Man.*

45. Not all Muslims share(d) this view. The Mu'tazilites viewed the Qur'ān as created by God, but they were overtaken in the third/ninth century by Sunni traditionalists who held that it was the uncreated Word of God. Hourani, *Reason and Tradition.*

46. There follows a list of male relatives before whom women need not observe these restrictions. I consider the meaning of these Āyāt in Chapter 5.

47. In his view, then, what rendered the female body pudendal was not its sex but the social class of its "owner"! This strange view may have something to do with al-Baydawi's misunderstanding of the function of the *jilbāb* (see in the text below).

48. In Ali, *Qur'an,* 103.

49. These Āyāt do not mean that the Qur'ān condones the sexual abuse of female slaves; to the contrary, it explicitly bans it. Nor does it mean, as al-Baydawi assumed, that the bodies of slaves were different from the bodies of free women in not being pudendal. The Qur'ān makes the distinction between slaves and free women based not on their bodies but on social practices. See in the text below.

50. Indeed, a Sūrah, *an-Nur,* was revealed in defense of 'Ayesha's honor (as was the Sūrah *Maryam* revealed to defend the honor of Mary); in both cases, God "spoke" on behalf of women.

51. Farid Vajidi quoted in Mazhar ul Haq Khan, *Purdah and Polygamy* (New Delhi, India: Harman Publications, 1983), 173.

Chapter 3

1. My aim is only to identify some broad historical trends that were critical in/to the growth of methodological conservatism; it is not to offer a history of Muslim societies. Readers looking for a historical chronology or a nuanced and differentiated analysis of Muslim history, then, are likely to be disappointed. They can, of course, pursue in detail the sources I cite here.

2. Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 8.

3. Ibid., 43. I explain in the text why this view is problematic.

4. Such a view of the *Sunnah* is, however, inappropriate from a strictly Qur'ānic perspective for reasons I consider in Chapter 4.

5. Brown, *Rethinking Tradition,* 138.

6. While this is Fazlur Rahman's summary of Western views of the *Sunnah,* he accepts them as correct. *Islamic Methodology in History* (Karachi, Pakistan: Central Institute of Islamic Research, 1965).

7. See Louise Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

8. F. E. Peters, *A Reader on Classical Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 245.

9. As I argue in Chapter 4, the Qur'ān's idea of obedience to the Prophet seems to differ from that of most Muslim traditionalists.

10. See Chapter 2 on this point.

11. I disagree with Rahman on this point since the problem as I see it lies not so much with the *Ahādith* (which also reflect *Ijtihād* and *Ijmā'*) as with al-Shafi's redefinition of the relationship between *Ijtihād* and *Ijmā',* as Rahman himself points out in *Islamic Methodology.*

12. *Taqlīd* means unquestioning acceptance of precedent; some scholars reject the consensus of earlier generations because it is based on *taqlīd.* However, Brannon Wheeler suggests that there is room for creativity even in *taqlīd,* in *Applying the Canon in Islam: The Authorization and Maintenance of Interpretive Reasoning in Hanafi Scholarship* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1996).

13. Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action*

and Interpretation, ed. John Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 99.

14. John Burton, *The Collection of the Quran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

15. Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism,* xi.

16. In spite of their abstract theological nature, many controversies arose from political questions such as the emergence of Shiism, argues Dominique Sourdel in *Medieval Islam* (London: Routledge, 1979), 84–85. Thus, "the schisms which took place in the heart of Islam . . . often took on dramatic dimensions in so far as their character was political as well as religious." Ibid., 97.

17. Ibid., 80.

18. The Mu'tazilites favored the use of reason and rationality in religious inquiry and emphasized free will; the Ashari, on the other hand, emphasized God's omnipotence and Will and the idea of predestination; they were more tradition and authority bound, and it was they, along with the Kharijites (who advocated submission to authority) who provided Sunni Islam with its theological and political content. State rulers favored many of these themes; for instance, the Umayyads endorsed the precept of determinism since "they feared that a stress on human freedom and initiative might unseat them." Rahman, *Islamic Methodology,* 99.

19. In fact, it is the tendency of "Muslim legal tradition" to view "the Quran as a law book and not *the religious source* of the law" that has done the greatest damage to women, argues Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Quran* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 47; his emphasis.

20. However, as Reuben Levy notes, the *Sharī'ah's* provisions are "widely neglected" in such areas as "marriage, divorce and the distribution of inheritance." *The Social Structure of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 244.

21. For a full discussion of Taha's position (which I outlined in Chapter 2), see M. M. Taha, *The Second Message of Islam* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1987).

22. John Esposito, *Women in Muslim Family Law* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 106.

23. See Chapter 1 on this point.

24. I define as real "fundamentalism" this unquestioning faith in the legitimacy of one's own interpretive authority.

25. Josef van Ess, "Verbal Inspiration? Language and Revelation in Classical Islamic Theology," in *The Quran as Text,* ed. Stefan Wild (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 189.

26. The "inquisition," or *Mihna,* consisted of religious tests being administered by the courts to scholars, and while some scholars were flogged and jailed, the *Mihna* did not remotely resemble the Spanish Inquisition. It was launched by al-Mamun, who believed in the doctrine of the Qur'ān's createdness and repudiated a link between the people and the Prophet's *Sunnah.* Not only did the *Mihna* fail, however, but Martin Hinds argues that its failure "brought to a decisive end any notion of a caliphal role in the definition of Islam and it permitted the unchecked development of what in due course would become recognisable as Sunnism." *Studies in*

Early Islamic History, ed. J. Bacharach et al. (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1996), 243.

27. Some *ulama* were concerned less with the state's preservation than with their own; thus, when the Mongols—led by Hulagu—sacked Baghdad in the seventh/thirteenth century, a Shii *alim* gave a *fatwa* (religious decree) to the effect that a just infidel ruler was better than an unjust Muslim ruler! Etan Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work: Ibn Tawus and His Library* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992).

28. This concept borrows from the works of Antonio Gramsci; I discuss it in detail in *Democracy, Nationalism, and Communalism: The Colonial Legacy in South Asia* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995).

29. Jacob Lassner argues that the "centralization of power and the cultivation of new political attitudes" was meant "to create for all public elements, a vested interest in the orderly process of government." *The Shaping of Abbasid Rule* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), 244. As Sourdel points out, the autocratism of society "cannot be said to be truly inspired by the principles of Islam; rather it was the result of the political order set up in Islamic countries." *Medieval Islam,* 159.

30. Collingwood as quoted in Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics,* 289.

31. Interpretive power by itself cannot explain the persistence of certain interpretations. In this context, what Fedwa Malti-Douglas says of Ibn al-Batanuni, an Arab writer known for his misogyny, seems to be true generally: "His misogynist recasting of sacred history can only operate because the cultural forces behind it are extremely strong." *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 7.

32. This is Ricoeur's summary of Gadamer's position in *Hermeneutics.*

33. The word "blasphemy" (*tajdif*) does not occur in the Qur'ān, nor does the punishment of death for apostasy, which derives from the *Ahādith.* Mustansir Mir, *Dictionary of Quranic Terms and Concepts* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1987).

Chapter 4

1. In Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary,* 2nd U.S. ed. (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1988), 676.

2. Ibid., 669.

3. Zillah Eisenstein, *Feminism and Sexual Equality: Crisis in Liberal America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 90.

4. Anne McGrew Bennett, *From Woman-Pain to Woman-Vision* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 7.

5. Penelope M. Magee, "Disputing the Sacred: Some Theoretical Approaches to Gender and Religion," in *Religion and Gender,* ed. Ursula King (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 107.

6. Caroline Walker Bynum, "'. . . And Woman his Humanity:' Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages," in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols,* eds. C. Bynum, S. Harrell, and P. Richman (Boston: Beacon Press,

1986), 1. There is, however, another way to look at God's designation as Father: as being symptomatic of the "return of the repressed on the instinctual level" (Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics,* 487). God's representation as not only father but also as spouse, argues Ricoeur, disassociates fatherhood from the act/concept of begetting.

> By means of this strange mutual contamination of two kinship figures, the shell of literality of the image is broken and the symbol is liberated. A father who is a spouse is no longer a progenitor (begetter), nor is he any more an enemy to his sons; love, solicitude, and pity carry him beyond domination and severity. (Ibid., 489)

"Fatherhood is thus placed in the realm of a theology of hope." Ibid., 490. Far from being easy, says Ricoeur, naming God father "is rare, difficult, and audacious, because it is prophetic, directed toward fulfillment rather than toward origins." Ibid., 491.

7. Ian Netton, *Allah Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

8. Below and in Chapter 5, I explain why this is significant to the Qur'ān's approach to (human) sex/gender.

9. The God of Abraham is also the God of the Qur'ān and hence of Muslims, as I argue below.

10. See Chapter 6 on this point.

11. This is one of the Hebrew views of God, but it has been applied to Islam by some Muslim feminists like Fatna Sabbah, *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1984). I critique Sabbah's arguments in "Texts, Sex, and States: A Critique of North African Discourses on Islam," in *The Arab-African and Islamic Worlds: Interdisciplinary Studies,* eds. Kevin Lacey and Ralph Coury (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).

12. In Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1992), 8.

13. The concept of (God the) Father in Christianity only arises because of the concept of (Christ the) Son, argue Carl A. Raschke and Susan D. Raschke, *The Engendering God: Male and Female Faces of God* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995). However, in Islam, the question of Christ the Son does not arise.

14. According to Netton, all Muslims share this paradigm. *Allah Transcendent.*

15. Such a view is a far cry from depictions of "the eternal feminine" in terms of "hyper-emotionalism, passivity, self-abnegation, etc.," as Mary Daly puts it in *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 15.

16. And, yet, Murata sees no problems with recognizing, and even reifying, gender dualisms in her own work, by using the concepts of yin and yang to describe God's Reality and by assuming that Muslim constructions of gender are unproblematic.

17. Many Muslim philosophers and sufis recognized the presence of the feminine and masculine principles in both women and men, but they theorized femininity and masculinity in ways that, instead of promoting a polar view, introduced duality into them. For instance, Rumi held that a woman

also has masculine qualities, but these are the negative masculine tendencies of the soul as incarnate in Iblis [the devil]. And a "man" has feminine qualities, the positive feminine attributes of the soul at peace with God.

> In Murata, *The Tao of Islam,* 317.

18. I assume, of course, that men also lose out in being defined in hyper-masculine terms.

19. This view arises also in misreading the Qur'ān's position on human nature and sexual rights and relationships, which I discuss in Chapters 5 and 6.

20. The phrase is that of Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983).

21. I have drawn on Dawne McCance for this idea and definition. *Posts: Re-Addressing the Ethical* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1996).

22. See Sabbah, *Woman,* for a discussion of this metaphor.

23. In Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Quran* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), 76 n. 50.

24. Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988), 23. It may be true, as Pateman argues, that the contract is a "modern means of creating relationships of subordination." Ibid., 118. However, it does not follow from this that the contract itself is patriarchal, as her argument seems to suggest. In this context, I am wary of those definitions of patriarchy that are so generalized as to have little specificity. Also, if we see everything as a reworking of patriarchy, we cannot ever hope to dislodge it, nor in fact to recognize challenges to it, such as those that I believe the Qur'ān poses.

25. Some new literature has come out since I wrote this chapter, in which women have begun to reread Abraham's narrative.

26. A tradition says the Prophet appointed a woman to be *imām* of her household. Kaukab Siddique and Jane I. Smith, "Women, Religion and Social Change in Early Islam," in *Women, Religion, and Social Change,* eds. Yvonne Y. Haddad and Ellison B. Findly (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1985), 31.

27. According to Asad, it was Abraham's *understanding* and not necessarily God's Will that led him to make the near sacrifice. Asad, *The Message of the Quran.*

28. Incidentally, Lot's (and Noah's) wives were punished for their ingratitude to God, not to their husbands, as commentators hold.

29. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Quran* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980).

30. The Qur'ān's references (e.g., 21:7) to men as prophets are meant to clarify that only humans (*bashar/rijaalin*) and not angels were sent as prophets since the words *bashar/rijaalin* have three meanings: man, humans, and complete person—and are "used in the Arabic language for both sexes." Rafi Ullah Shahab, *Muslim Women in Political Power* (Lahore, Pakistan: Maqbool Academy, 1993), 18. To assume that, since the Qur'ān does not mention woman prophets, it does not deem women worthy of prophethood is conjecture. If the Qur'ān's silence on this issue can be read as indifference, it can also be read as an awareness of historical conditions. Clearly, in

patriarchies women prophets would have been at greater risk than men, all of whom suffered torment at the hands of their people.

31. Khadijah's wealth did not alter the Prophet's status, however, since he did not inherit from her and lived in poverty until the end of his life. Reuben Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962).

32. The fact that the Prophet is viewed as a role model for both sexes, argues Barbara Metcalf, is a "telling indication of the extent to which women and men are regarded as essentially the same, however different their social places." *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi's "Bihishti Zewar": A Partial Translation with Commentary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 242.

33. Ibid.

34. Levy, *Social Structure,* 201.

35. Metcalf, *Perfecting Women,* 242.

36. See Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam,* trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985); and Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991).

37. As Wiebke Walther points out, when the verses about the Prophet's wives were revealed, the Prophet gave his wives a choice to remain with him or to leave; he "won them over with diplomacy and kindness" and not "by insisting on male superiority." *Woman in Islam* (Montclair, N.J.: Abner Schram, 1981), 75.

38. The presence or absence of one diacritical mark changes the meaning of an entire Āyah, then. M. H. Sherif, "What is Hijab?," *The Muslim World* 77, nos. 3–4 (July–October 1987).

39. Barbara Stowasser, "The Mothers of the Believers in the *Hadith,*" *The Muslim World* 82, nos. 1–2 (Jan.–April 1992): 14.

40. Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America's Changing Families* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

41. See George F. Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). However, as Fazlur Rahman argues, there is no reason for Muslims to believe in their own "theoretical infallibility." *Islamic Methodology,* 77.

Chapter 5

1. In Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary,* 2nd U.S. ed. (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1988), 178.

2. Susan Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), 79.

3. Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an: Traditions and Interpretations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 37. Stowasser here is referring to Muslim attitudes, but this view of the psycho-social difference between the sexes lacks a Qur'ānic referent as does the view of the principle of absolute sex/gender equality as "subversive," as she herself points out.

4. See Toril Moi's discussion of Helene Cixous in *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Lit-*

erary Theory (New York: Methuen, 1985). I already have discussed in Chapter 4 why binary modes of thinking run counter to Islamic ideas of unity, or *Tawhīd*.

5. The tradition of assigning reason to men is a mixed one since ecclesiastical and biblical teachings also hold that "man's reason is depraved." Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics,* trans. Robert Yarborough (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1994), 25.

6. Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1992), 43; her emphasis.

7. Stowasser uses this term in *Women in the Qur'an.*

8. For a discussion of the concept of mutual recognition and its relevance to democratic relationships, see Alan Gilbert, *Democratic Individuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). I find the term useful for identifying certain themes in the Qur'ān.

9. For instance, Jan Hjarpe holds that Muslim apologetics are carried out in one of four ways: comparing the real treatment of women through Western/Christian history with Islamic ideals; by arguing that, when correctly applied, the "Islamic pattern of life allows women a decent and secure position"; by claiming that the "Islamic view of women corresponds to their nature and genetical characteristics"; and by insisting on judging "true Islam" (of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*) rather than the real treatment of Muslim women. In this view *any* explanation is apologetic! Jan Hjarpe, "The Attitude of Islamic Fundamentalism towards the Question of Women in Islam," in *Women in Islamic Societies: Social Attitudes and Historical Perspectives,* ed. Bo Utas (Copenhagen: Curzon Press, 1983), 15.

10. See Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981).

11. I use the concepts of sameness/similarity interchangeably even though theorists do not consider them identical. See Zillah Eisenstein, *Female Body and the Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

12. For various meanings of *nafs,* see Zafar Ansari, "Introduction," and Absar Ahmad, "Quranic Concepts of Human Psyche," in *Quranic Concepts of Human Psyche,* ed. Z. A. Ansari (Lahore, Pakistan: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1992). While God created the first pair without parents, no other human was created without a mother, while Jesus was created without a father. What this might mean for theorizing the role of both parents is an area that Muslims need to explore further.

13. See Riffat Hassan, "An Islamic Perspective," in *Sexuality: A Reader,* ed. Karen Lebacqz (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1999); and Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

14. Mahmud M. Taha, *The Second Message of Islam* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1987).

15. This argument also is spurious because angels, who were created prior to humans, do not enjoy any epistemic/symbolic privilege over them in the Qur'ān.

16. I argued against this idea in Chapter 4.

17. As many of my students at Ithaca College (Fall 1999) pointed out, however, this

notion does not do justice to the Qur'ān's view of humans, which can best be presented by means of a nonsequential equation. To them, the fact that B follows A already suggests a hierarchy!

18. For different types of oaths and their significance in the Qur'ān, see Ali, *Qur'an,* 1784–1787.

19. Margaret Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 446. Hodgen uses this phrase to describe European constructions of the Other, but religious exegesis also uses time to establish a hierarchy of being between women and men.

20. Ibid.

21. I believe the doctrine of man's alienation from God, symbolized by the Fall, leads to Otherizing not only woman but also non-Christian Others; i.e., at the core of Western/Christian theories of alterity is the displacement onto non-Western/non-Christian people of this sense of alienation from God. By a series of mediations, this alienation now exists in its secular forms at the core of psychoanalytic theory, with its representations of the Mother as the Other. This is among the themes of my work in progress, "Time, Difference, and the Other."

22. C. A. O. Nieuwenhuijze, *Paradise Lost: Reflections on the Struggle for Authenticity in the Middle East* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 69.

23. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 101.

24. The concept of *dīn* is far richer than the term faith conveys since it indicates a mode of existence, a way of life; I use the word faith only because it is more familiar to Western readers.

25. In Islam, women and men must say the same prayers at the same times; I clarify this point because in Judaism women are obligated to pray "but not at fixed times or with fixed content as men are." Judith Antonelli, *In the Image of God: A Feminist Commentary on the Torah* (London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1995), 181.

26. The Qur'ān makes clear that its use of the term garden is a similitude; it also points out that there is no "crookedness" in its use of similitudes. For a discussion of the Qur'ānic metaphor of Garden, see Ali, *Qur'an,* 1464.

27. See Naeem Inayatullah for a discussion of the theme that diversity connotes degeneration in Western religious and secular discourse. "Diversity as Degeneration: Temporal and Spatial Representations of the Other in Medieval Foundations of European Social Theory," unpublished manuscript, Ithaca College, 1996.

28. This is often the basis for neoconservatives to question multicultural agendas in the United States these days.

29. This problem is not limited only to anthropology, however, and seems to be a function of liberalism itself. For the limits of mutuality in dialogue because of liberal relativism, see my "Muslim Women and Sexual Oppression: Reading Liberation from the Quran," *Macalester International* 10 (spring 2001).

30. The phrase is from M. Mac an Ghaill, *Contemporary Racisms and Ethnicities: Social and Cultural Transformations* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999), 50.

31. I borrow the phrase from Carol Gilligan, "Remapping the Moral Domain: New Images of Self in Relationship," in *Mapping the Moral Domain: A Contribution of Women's Thinking to Psychological Theory and Education,* ed. Carol Gilligan, et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

32. I examine this claim in Chapter 6.

33. Since the Qur'ān's teachings about sex are linked to its teachings about marriage, readers might want to read Section II (and I) in Chapter 6 before returning to the following discussion. I should also clarify that this is a relatively simple discussion of an enormously complex topic; my point is merely to emphasize those Qur'ānic teachings that are conducive to theorizing sexual equality or which are antipatriarchal.

34. In Antonelli, *In the Image of God,* 227, 229. L. E. Goodman points out that the Torah's prohibitions arise not in the idea of impurity but in the "mingling of blood with eros," which "may overlay images of violence upon our sexuality." Also, as he notes, impurity is assigned to the period, not to the woman. L. E. Goodman, *God of Abraham* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 225.

35. See Antonelli, ibid., for a different reading of this prayer.

36. However, as Reuben Levy notes, Muslim jurists have "hedged" about this permission with restrictions. *The Social Structure of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 79. Both women and men had to free their slaves before marrying them. Robert Roberts, *The Social Laws of the Qoran* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1971), 16.

37. For my critique of Geraldine Brooks's characterization of the "Muslim paradise," see my "Muslim Women."

38. That the Qur'ān is concerned only with "private parts" becomes even clearer when it clarifies that women need not cover up in front of "children who have not yet attained knowledge of women's private parts." Similarly, women who are "past child-bearing and have no hope of marriage" can "put off their clothes, so be it that they flaunt no ornament; but to abstain is better for them" A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: Allen and Unwin, 1955), 50, 55.

39. The Qur'ān here lists the men before whom such precautions are not necessary, and these include men one cannot take as future sexual partners (husbands).

40. Al-Baydawi as quoted in Barbara Stowasser, "The Status of Women in Early Islam," in *Muslim Women,* ed. Freda Hussain (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), 27.

41. The problem with this view is that it assumes that Muslim men can only remain moral if they are deprived even of the sight of a woman. If this is the premise, then Muslim men will never develop morally since even if they cannot see their "own" women, women of other cultures, especially of the West, always are visible to them.

42. As I argue in my critique of Ahmed, tribes also comprise men. See Barlas, "Texts, Sex, and States: A Critique of North African Discourses on Islam," in *The Arab-African and Islamic Worlds: Interdisciplinary Studies,* eds. Kevin Lacey and Ralph Coury (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).

43. See Fatna Sabbah, *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1984). For my critique of Sabbah, see "Texts, Sex, and States," ibid.

44. Montgomery Watt, *Companion to the Quran* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1994), 41.

45. One can also read this Āyah as assuming sexual control in men, who also are forbidden in another Āyah from sexually abusing their female slaves. This is in contrast to Muslim misogynist views of an out-of-control male sexuality, shared also by many rabbis in the Jewish tradition who sanctioned rape of war captives on the grounds that men could not control themselves. As an illustration of this view, they also credit King David with having had four hundred sons by women captives of war. Antonelli, *In the Image of God.*

46. Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam,* trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 187.

47. I have borrowed this expression from Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

48. As noted earlier, some Muslim exegetes, extrapolating from Joseph's story, endow women with *kayd,* allegedly a form of female guile or destructive intelligence. Thus, Fedwa Malti-Douglas argues that the "misogynist vision in Islam (and subsequently in the medieval Arabic literary consciousness) has its literary roots in the Joseph story in the Quran [that speaks of] women's guile." *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 19. On the basis of this view, many exegetes also posit a

consistent and under-lying binary opposition operating between woman and [God] . . . A sort of oppositional paradigmatic relationship exists between woman and God, as though closeness to one precluded closeness to the other. (Ibid., 59)

Even some modern Muslim scholars take the story as being representative of the eternal feminine. See Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam.* In the Qur'ān, however, it is the husband of the woman bent upon seducing Joseph who uses the phrase about guile; it is not the Qur'ān's idea of female nature. Ironically, the same woman (Zulaikha) is a sympathetic figure in classical Muslim thought as the symbol of longing and unrequited love. Annemarie Schimmel, "Eros—Heavenly and Not So Heavenly— in Sufi Literature and Life," in *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam,* ed. Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot (Malibu, Hawaii: Undena Publications, 1979).

49. There are, of course, some attributes that are unique to men in their capacity as human beings rather than, say, as angels; for instance, they have the ability to reason and make moral choices, but this ability extends also to women.

Chapter 6

1. Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1970), 33. As an example of a strict patriarchy, Millett gives Islam because "in Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia the adulteress is still stoned to death." Ibid., 43. Apart from the fact that stoning to death does not derive from the Qur'ān (a tradition says the Prophet ascribed it, in keeping with Jewish law, for punishing Jews caught in adultery), her argument confuses Islam with Muslim states; it says nothing about the Qur'ān's position on the role of fathers.

2. Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 213.

3. I accept the Qur'ān's teachings as egalitarian even though I apply modern Western/feminist insights to read it.

4. Islam treated marriage as a social contract in the seventh century C.E. whereas it would not be until the fourteenth century that it would acquire this form in Europe. In Islam, the contract includes conditions for its termination (divorce) which was not the case in the European marriage contract until the nineteenth century. See Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988).

5. I do not here deal with the issue of concubinage, since the practice no longer is accepted and I treat the Qur'ān's provisions on the subject as having been historically specific. And, while an anonymous reviewer of this manuscript was upset by my claim that marriages in Islam usually are monogamous, I will show that polygyny is not the usual mode of marriage in Islam.

6. See Jean Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981).

7. For the argument that the public/private separation does not explain women's oppression, see Linda Nicholson, *Gender and History: The Limits of Social Theory in the Age of the Family* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). For differing cultural notions of the public and private, and the problems with viewing them as fixed categories, see Shirley Ardener, ed., *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps* (Oxford, U.K.: Berg Publishers, 1993).

8. Barbara Metcalf, *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's* Bihishti Zewar: *A Partial Translation with Commentary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 7.

9. As Elshtain argues, recasting the public/private as the spheres of production/reproduction transforms their meaning. Central to this model, associated with Marxists and feminists, is a view of the family as a basic economic unity, and of women as having been universal objects of exchange even though much evidence suggests that this was not so. *Public Man.*

10. Fazlur Rahman argues that while the Qur'ān does envisage "a division of labor [and] difference in functions," it is not "against women earning wealth and being economically self-sufficient; indeed, the Prophet's first wife, Khadijah, owned a business and the Quran recognizes the full and independent economic personality of a wife or a daughter." *Major Themes of the Quran* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 49. However, the fact that the Qur'ān recognizes different functions does not mean it endorses them. Also, people view Islam as being compatible with both socialist and capitalist divisions of labor.

11. See Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

12. I discuss the father's obligations toward daughters in the text below. Incidentally, the *Sharī'ah* makes the father liable for much more: He has to maintain his infant

child, whether or not he has custody; the infant child of a son who cannot afford to maintain the child himself; a disabled or student son; an unmarried daughter of any age; and a widowed or divorced daughter, if ill. John Esposito, *Women in Muslim Family Law* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1982).

13. Clearly, this verse is inclusive of women.

14. This seems to be a reiteration of the moral in the Abrahamic narrative.

15. This distinction is expressed in Christianity in terms of the separation of Church and state, or distinguishing between what is God's due and what is Caesar's; the Qur'ān, however, does not make such distinctions.

16. *Taqwá,* I argued in earlier chapters, is the foundation of faith and moral personality.

17. While the Qur'ān locates procreation in the womb (female body), Muslim misogyny has sought to sever the connection between wombs and mothers, and also between woman's body/sexuality and procreation. Fedwa Malti-Douglas argues that the "dream of a world without sex is tied in the Islamic mental universe to that of a world without woman. The wish to separate creation or procreation from sexuality brings the Islamic view close that of its Christian cousin." *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 109. (I would disagree only with the use of the word Islamic since this is *Muslim* predilection.) In fact, such views predate Christianity; as Elshtain argues, Plato's ideal was "a kind of parthenogenesis where male elites could give birth to themselves." In Pateman, *Sexual Contract,* 89.

18. Rafi Ullah Shahab, *Muslim Women in Political Power* (Lahore, Pakistan: Maqbool Academy, 1993). As he notes, the woman's share is less than a man's in only one case, that of daughters. Of course, Muslim exegetes never read this provision regarding mothers as meaning that one woman equals two men!

19. See Kari Vogt, " 'Becoming Male': A Gnostic, Early Christian and Islamic Metaphor," in *Women's Studies of the Christian and Islamic Traditions: Ancient, Medieval and Renaissance Foremothers,* by Kari Borresen and Kari Vogt (Dordrecht, Holland: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993).

20. Malti-Douglas cites a number of influential Muslim works on this theme. For instance, Ibn Tufayl proposes a male utopia in which women grow on trees while male couples (brothers) represent an ideal social relationship. *Woman's Body,* 109.

21. At times, Sabbah's view of motherhood suggests that women can create life at will; given this view, it is not surprising that she feels that women can only be invested with power in a God-less and father-less universe. This, however, is a feminist inversion of the misogynistic fantasy of a world without women that she seeks to criticize. *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1984).

22. This view projects onto God male fears of women's sexual and reproductive powers; see Elshtain, *Public Man.*

23. In a *60 Minutes* documentary on Iran aired on May 10, 1998, a cleric allegedly claimed that a father who had killed his daughter had acted in accordance with Islam's teachings. However, the Qur'ān does not give parents the right to kill their children. This is in contrast to a tradition in the Torah that allows rowdy sons to be put to death on

their parents' consent. Judith Antonelli, *In the Image of God: A Feminist Commentary on the Torah* (London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1995).

24. Exegetes who argue that the Qur'ān attaches less significance to a woman's evidence than it does to a man's should consider the implications of this Āyah for their views.

25. The Qur'ān's idea of mutual love and care between spouses also infuses its teachings about Paradise when it promises believing families togetherness; however, it clarifies that everyone in the family is responsible for their own praxis.

26. According to Antonelli, the Judaism of the Old Testament also emphasizes the concepts of loving and honoring one's wife. *In the Image of God.*

27. M. Asad, *The Message of the Quran* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), 871 n. 11.

28. In the Qur'ān, this punishment is specifically for men, even though commentators do not distinguish between women and men. Mustansir Mir, *Dictionary of Quranic Terms and Concepts* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1987). In this context, it is significant that God also revealed two Sūrahs (Maryam and An-Nur) in defense of the honor of Mary and 'Ayesha, both of whom were subjected to male slander.

29. See Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

30. There are different types of divorce in Islam that include divorce by the man, the woman, mutual, and judicial (awarded by the court). Within the first type of divorce, there also are different models. Ramola Buxamusa, "The Existing Divorce Laws Among Muslims in India," in *Muslim Women: Problems and Prospects,* eds. Zakia A. Siddiqui and Anwar Jahan Zuberi (New Delhi, India: M.D. Publications, Ltd., 1993). See also John Esposito, *Women in Muslim Family Law* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1982).

31. Esposito, *Women,* 29.

32. The time period that women have to wait for the divorce to become effective is called the *iddat.* See below in the text.

33. This injunction is in contrast to the practice, in Judaism, of the man writing down the divorce, giving it to his wife and then "send[ing] her away from his house." Antonelli, *In the Image of God,* 466.

34. Some Muslim men, ever in search of ingenious openings, use the pretext that their wives are lewd to expel them from their homes, ignoring that the Qur'ān lays down strict guidelines for charging a woman in this way, as I note in the text later.

35. This practice is not only egalitarian for women but also protective of children. As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese argues, whenever "men have been unwilling or unable to [pay women to be mothers], women have tended to have abortions, commit infanticide, abandon or give up their children for adoption, or struggle along the best they could." As well, "Growing acceptance of single motherhood [is] liberating men from any stake in children at all." Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Procreation and Women's Rights: A Response to Nicky Hart," in Nikki Keddie, ed., *Debating Gender, Debating Sexuality* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 55–56.

36. This does not mean that mothers are to lose custody of their child after two years, as most Muslims believe.

37. Taking custody away from women on the grounds that they cannot support the child/ren violates the Qur'ān's teachings, then, since it unfairly discriminates against the mother. Moreover, in Islam, the father is charged with the upkeep of the child whether or not he has custody of the child.

38. The emphasis attached to paternity is taken as a sign by many feminists of patriarchal repression. However, as Antonelli points out, *"knowledge of paternity is a necessary pre-requisite for the demand that men take responsibility for the consequences of sex." In the Image of God,* xxv; her emphasis. A similar logic applies in Islam where the father's heirs are charged with the responsibility of taking care of his child/ren and divorced wife, should he die.

39. For a discussion of this form of divorce, see Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary,* 2nd U.S. ed. (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1988), 1510 n. 5330.

40. Many men have adopted the practice of pronouncing divorce three times at one sitting, which makes it irrevocable. This, however, is an abuse of the Qur'ān's teachings.

41. Here I understand the reference to be to sex, not to gender.

42. I am indebted to Demir Barlas for phrasing it this way in our private correspondence.

43. This is a questionable view. In ancient Athenian society, for instance, women's low status did not derive from men's control over the products of their labor, and it certainly does not in many Muslim societies where women do not, or are not allowed to, do waged labor.

44. Pateman, *Sexual Contract,* 32.

45. Laurie Shrage, *Moral Dilemmas of Feminism: Prostitution, Adultery and Abortion* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 165.

46. Elshtain, *Public Man.*

Postscript

1. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary,* 2nd U.S. ed. (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1988), 1340.

2. Ellman in Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 32.

3. M. E. Combs-Schilling, *Sacred Performances: Islam, Sexuality, and Sacrifice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 89.

4. Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Quran: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 29.

5. Alves as quoted in Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 23.

6. This line of argument, Naeem Inayatullah pointed out to me, is suggested by Ashis Nandy's discussion of utopias in *Traditions, Tyranny & Utopias: Essays in the Politics of Awareness* (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 1987).

7. Miguez-Bonino, "Marxist Critical Tools: Are they Helpful in Breaking the Stranglehold of Idealist Hermeneutics?" in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World,* ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 77.

8. James J. Buckley, "The Hermeneutical Deadlock between Revelationalists, Textualists, and Functionalists," *Modern Theology* 6, no. 4 (July 1990): 331.

9. I rewrote the Postscript in January 2001, having completed it (and most of this work) initially in 1999.

10. Ashis Nandy, *Intimate Enemies: Loss and Recovery of the Self under Colonialism* (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 1989).

11. I have borrowed this phrase from Munawar Ahmad Anees, "Illuminating Ilm," in *How We Know: Ilm and the Revival of Knowledge,* ed. Ziauddin Sardar (London: Grey Seal, 1991), 14.

Glossary

Ahādith — usually refers to narratives of the Prophet Muhammad's life and praxis

'aql — intelligence

awlīya' — protectors, guides, persons in charge (of one another)

Āyah — (pl Āyāt) sign; used for verse of the Qur'ān

azbāb al-nuzūl — occasions of revelation of Qur'ānic verses

dīn — religious faith conceived of as a way of life

fiqh — jurisprudence

Fitra — intrinsic nature

Hadīth — (pl Ahādith); tale/narrative; generally a record of the Prophet's life

hijāb — head veil

Ijmā' — social consensus

Ijtihād — process of critical reasoning

'Ilm — knowledge

insān — human (but often translated as "man" by Qur'ān scholars)

Islam — willed submission (to God)

Jāhilī/Jahiliyya — pre-Islamic Arabic society

jilbāb — cloak

kalām — dogmatic theology

khilāfah — vice-regent, trustee, moral agent

nafs — self, person

naql — imitation, imitativeness

Rabb — Cherisher and Sustainer; a commonly used Qur'ānic word for God

Sharī'ah — Islamic law

shirk — violation of the doctrine of God's Unity, or *Tawhīd*

Sunnah — customary practices; when capitalized refers to the Prophet's practices

Sūrah — Qur'ānic "chapter"

Tafsīr — to clarify; used to refer to exegesis, or interpretation, of the Qur'ān

taqwá — God-consciousness; the hallmark of moral individuality in Islam

Tawhīd—doctrine of God's Unity

Ummah—community of believers

usūl al-fiqh—rules of jurisprudence

wahy—revelation by (Divine) inspiration

Zulm—doing harm to others by transgressing their rights

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