Routledge Advances in Middle East and Islamic Studies

1 Iraqi Kurdistan
Political development and emergent democracy
Gareth R.V. Stansfield

2 Egypt in the Twenty First Century
Challenges for development
Edited by M. Riad El-Ghonemy

3 The Christian–Muslim Frontier
A zone of contact, conflict or cooperation
Mario Apostolov

4 The Islamic World-System
A study in polity-market interaction
Masudul Alam Choudhury

5 Regional Security in the Middle East
A critical perspective
Pinar Bilgin

6 Political Thought in Islam
A study in intellectual boundaries
Nelly Lahoud

7 Turkey's Kurds
A theoretical analysis of the PKK and Abdullah Ocalan
Ali Kemal Özcan

8 Beyond the Arab Disease
New perspectives in politics and culture
Riad Nourallah

9 The Arab Diaspora
Voices of an anguished scream
Zahia Smail Salhi and Ian Richard Netton

10 Gender and Self in Islam
Etin Anwar

Gender and Self in Islam

Etin Anwar

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

1 Gender thinking and the system it produces

This chapter seeks to examine how gender thinking shapes Muslims' deliberation on gender issues and its cohesive impact on the production of gender system and the constitution of the self. Gender thinking refers to the process of producing and reproducing public perception of the truth of how men and women's roles are appropriated in the Muslim world. This public perception evolves from the powerful influence of what Muslims consider valid and invalid, acceptable and unacceptable, lovable and hateful, and licit and illicit, as well as other norms as outlined in the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, and *Sharī'ah* and Muslims' diverse interpretations of them. While Muslims' expressions of Islam vary and are ingrained into local cultures, they perceive the correct interpretation of the Qur'ān as a thread that runs through all their lives.

The system that Muslim men and women are familiar with is gendered, since it is often defined based upon the politics of difference. Muslims use the politics of difference as a regime to produce a series of norms, values, rewards, prohibitions, disciplines, and punishments that shape male and female morality. This rhetoric perpetuates a public perception of the truth in which the natural differences of men and women entail different moral, social, cultural, and legal responsibilities in both private and public affairs. Muslims' emphasis on natural difference often in practice overrides the Islamic vision of human equality.

The gendered vision of the public perception of the truth is not an Islamic invention. It started long before the coming of Islam in seventh century Saudi Arabia. Marriage patterns, tribal relations, slavery, male seniority, female infanticide, and vendetta shaped women's lives and experiences during the pre-Islamic era. The pre-Islamic Arabs generally looked down upon women's moral qualities, "because the character of women is exactly the opposite to that which the Arabs considered as the model of the perfect men."[1] This misogynistic attitude infiltrated Muslim minds in such a way that women have persistently been defined in terms of the politics of difference between men and women in biology, the economy and politics. Of course, biological differences are innate, but this does not imply the economic or political supremacy of one over the other.

Not only did Islam improve the pre-Islamic practices respecting women's rights in the social and political spheres: its revolutionary vision of women as humans challenged the established view of the local culture whereby the female self was shaped through dependency on fathers, brothers, husbands, masters, and even tribes.

Within this context, women's honor and status were, on the one hand, closely related to the male members of their family and by extension their tribe, and on the other the chief factor determining the familial and tribal status. This gender thinking did not vanish with the progress of Islam. We see from the Prophet's life itself how his first marriage (to Khadījah) raised him in status into a respected circle. Later on, his marriages to a number of wives bestowed "honor and status" on them as *Ummu al-mu'minīn* (mother of the believers) and underpinned the honor and political alliances of the families and tribes from which his wives came. At the same times, his wives' actions affected the prophet's social, political, and divine status in the eyes of both his Muslim and non-Muslim neighbors.

What is at stake here is that the resilience of the pre-Islamic and local cultures with which Islam had been in contact perceived men and women as morally different. Women were categorized as the opposite of men (who were perfect), with the result that men had the power to define what was appropriate for women. This gender thinking has since been fixed in the Muslim mind, producing and reproducing relevant interpretations of the Qur'ān and selective recall of Prophetic tradition. Added to this gender thinking is a misogynistic attitude toward women that frequently addresses women as the other.

I argue in this chapter that gender thinking matters in interpreting the Qur'ān and in recalling the appropriate hadith to support one's authoritarian perspective on gender questions. Muslims' justification of their gendered views generates a politics of difference that in turn produces a wide divide between male and female worlds. Given that this mechanism appears to be consistent throughout Muslim history, I elaborate in the first section on the particular roots of the hierarchical and egalitarian gender system in Muslim communities. In the second section, I discuss sexual difference as a system that is well grounded in religious, social, philosophical, and socio-biological discourses. Finally, in the last section, I analyze the instituted concept of marriage that nurtures male superiority in both the private and public spheres, while portraying women as mothers and wives in the philosophical and Islamic discourses.

The roots of the hierarchical and egalitarian gender systems

Muslims' legitimate claims of hierarchical and egalitarian gender systems represent a valid attempt at interpretation of the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*, to which social and cultural values contribute greatly. Interpretation of this kind is obviously not scripture, since the application of this creative process to the normative, immutable, and divine Qur'ān involves human mind, experience, and gender thinking. What are now called the legal, scriptural, social, mystical, philosophical, ethical, religious, eschatological, and ontological dimensions of the Qur'ān in the history of the Muslim intellectual tradition all embody Muslims' quest for the meaning of the Divine. The Qur'ān is, indeed, a mine of ethics, law, eschatology, biology, philosophy, history, gender justice, and countless other categories of knowledge. Given this fact, Muslims' quest for gender justice often contains contradictory claims of gender hierarchy and egalitarianism, which in turn has an effect on gender system and self-becoming.

Gender hierarchy and its Qur'ānic foundation

The common source for the popular theories and practices of gender hierarchy in Muslim societies is said to be the social and legal provisions of the Qur'ān. Despite the fact that the number of legal and social verses (such as al-Nisā', 4:34, al-Nisā', 4:176, and al-Baqarah, 2:282) is quite small in comparison to the totality of the verses, their implication for non-egalitarian concepts and practices of gender system is enormous because they have traditionally been read in light of a hierarchical worldview. The impact of such readings generates authoritative legitimacies that govern an unequal and hierarchical gender system in Muslim communities at the personal, familial, and social levels.

The following verses are instances of the Qur'ānic verses that have been read according to such a hierarchical worldview:

> And Lo! Thy Sustainer said unto the angels: "Behold, I am about to establish upon earth [*khalīfah*—] one who shall inherit it." They said: "Wilt Thou place on it such as will spread corruption thereon and shed blood—whereas it is who extol Thy limitless glory, and praise Thee, and hallow Thy name?" [God] answered: "Verily, I know that which you do not know." And He imparted unto Adam the names of all things, then He brought them within the ken of the angels and said: "Declare unto Me the names of these [things], if what you say is true."
>
> (Q.S. al-Baqarah, 2:30–1)

> 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. And the righteous women are the truly devout ones, who guard the intimacy, which God [ordained to be] guarded. And as for those women whose ill-will you have reason to fear, admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; then beat them; and if thereupon they pay you heed, do not seek to harm them. Behold, God is indeed most high, great!
>
> (Q.S. al-Nisā', 4:34)

> ...and if there are brothers and sisters, the male shall have the equal of two females' share.
>
> (Q.S. al-Nisā', 4:176)

> And call upon two of your men to act as witnesses; and if two men are not available, then a man and two women from among [acceptable witnesses to you], so that if one of them should make a mistake, the other would remind her.
>
> (Q.S. al-Baqarah, 2:282)

Muslims' readings of the above Qur'ānic passages not only make the texts the center of a text-based legitimacy,[2] but they also generate public perception of the truth of how to treat women in Muslim societies. Such readings transform the specific historical contexts to which those verses responded and render them universal principles. In the process, Barazangi argues, "particular practices of certain expositions of Islam have replaced the underlying Quranic and prophetic principles. These practices have been transformed from temporal applications into principles themselves."[3]

As Muslims embrace particular truth as the only truth, women's daily experiences epitomize the truth of gender relationship and system in their communities.

Public perception of this truth is rooted in the following assumptions:

- Men's superiority arises from their biological origin as the primary creation, whereas that of females is secondary.
- Biological or sexual difference justifies male superiority in the perpetuation of the human race because men are seen as the moving principle of conception.
- Biological and sexual distinction justifies the division of labor in the family. Men are held to be superior because the Qur'ān gives men privileges over women in the following areas: economics, inheritance, power of divorce, the right to bestow a physical beating (on one's wife), and the right to act as witnesses.
- It is natural for husbands as the breadwinners to be in charge of the family's social standing and the morality of its members, whereas wives are the caretakers of the household and children.
- Sexual division of labor divides private from public, personal from political, appropriate from inappropriate, obedience from disobedience, virtuous from vicious, dignity from humility, and other categories that perpetuate the status quo of the hierarchical gender system.
- Men and women, therefore, are not equal in every respect.

Even though the abstraction of the hierarchical gender system is deduced from specific assumptions of human origin, the generative process and particular practices mentioned in the Qur'ān, gender-minded Muslims regard these particulars as universal. The acculturation of the particulars into what Muslims consider *Islamic* principles, along with prevailing local gender practices, has shaped Muslim women's life, experience, and knowledge.

While women regularly contribute to the status quo of this public perception of the truth, they have not actively been involved in the production of the knowledge that has shaped the epistemological status of women in Muslim societies. Muslim jurists, mystics, theologians, and scholars—who are mostly men—have been responsible for the interpretation of both the Qur'ān and the ḥadīth. Muslim women have not assertively produced their own interpretation; instead, they have become the object of male power, authority, and knowledge, whose effects are imprinted on their bodies. The confluence of perceived male superiority in sexuality, finance, marriage, politics, and leadership generates a hierarchical gender system, but also the constitution of the self. This existing gender system has benefited men, while condoning the subordination and alienation of Muslim women in most Muslim countries.

By contrast, the egalitarian principle in Islam has been uprooted from its religious, ethical, and social contexts. Muslim women have lived the whole of their lives within the existing hierarchical and patriarchal gender system, so that any challenge to the established system is hardly welcome. Equally important, women are used to receiving and implementing the power and knowledge produced by men. Women have, as a result, constantly been the object of religious interpretation and have continually been excluded

from the quest for knowledge, genealogy, history, jurisprudence, and religious views based on their own interpretations. Women never make their own history: it is made for them.

For centuries, Muslim women have tended to reflect the image that men have of them. Women have abandoned thinking and talking about gender equality, especially with the male members of their families (father, husband, uncle, older sons, etc.) because such talk is very sensitive and intimidating and even perhaps *un-Islamic*. Women's opinions hardly count. They are discouraged from expressing their own voice in the public sphere for fear of inciting evil. Women are also dissuaded from speaking for themselves because fathers, brothers, and other male members of the family speak on their behalf—not because they are able to recognize the wishes of women, but because Muslim men are empowered to decide on what is best for them. Women are reluctant to disagree with or talk back to authoritative figures in the family and society, because disagreeing and talking back is seen as "ill-mannered." Women, therefore, are expected to be silent, obedient, and subservient to what are perceived to be culturally, socially, and religiously accepted behavior, conduct, and action.

This leads us to the question: To what extent does the Qur'ān advocate mistreatment of women? Barlas, for instance, argues that the Qur'ān is egalitarian in nature and that it advocates women's liberation.[4] She acknowledges that while its teachings do not promote inequality and discrimination, it does have the potential to be read in a patriarchal mode. Mostly, such readings are derived from "the secondary texts, the *tafsīr* (Qur'ānic exegesis) and the *aḥādīth* (s. *ḥādīth*) (narratives purportedly detailing the life and praxis of the Prophet Muhammad)."[5] Granting for the sake of argument that the Qur'ān does, in fact, promise equality and liberation for men and women, I will try to identify here the bases of gender egalitarianism in the Qur'ān.

The Qur'ānic view of gender egalitarianism

This section elaborates on gender equality as a component of universal Islam. I argue that the Qur'ān speaks of equality of men and women in their origin, in their responsibility as created beings in their life on this earth and in their preparation for eventual resurrection. One may argue that while the Qur'ān treats and recompenses men and women equally when dealing with ethico-religious responsibilities, it appears to discriminate against women when dealing with social and legal obligations.[6] The issue at stake is whether the variations of social, legal, and political discrimination against women in Muslim communities are to be perceived as universal principles as the result of excessive particularism.

Some examples of Qur'ānic verses that articulate equality in gender relationships are as follows:

> O mankind! Be conscious of your Sustainer, who has created you out of one living entity [*nafs wāḥida*], and out of it created its mate, and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women. And conscious of God, in whose name you demand [your rights] from one another, and of these ties of kinship. Verily, God is ever watchful over you.
>
> (Q.S. al-Nisā', 4:1)

> Verily, for all men and women who have surrendered themselves unto God, and all believing men and believing women, and all truly devout men and truly devout women, and all men and women who are true to their word, and all men and women who are patient in their adversity, all men and women who humble themselves [before God], all men and women who give in charity, and all self-denying men and self-denying women, and all men and women who are mindful of their chastity, all men and women who remember God unceasingly: for (all of them) God has readied forgiveness of sins and a mighty reward.
>
> (Q.S. al-Aḥzāb, 33:35)

> ...And whatever [wrong] any human being [*nafs*] commits rests upon himself[/herself (*'alayhā*)]; and no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another burden...
>
> (Q.S. al-An'ām, 6:164)

> ...the rights of the wives [with regard to husbands are equal to the [husbands'] rights with regard to them...
>
> (Q.S. al-Baqarah, 2:228)

These verses offer the following metaphysical, social, ethical, and eschatological grounds for an egalitarian gender system.

- Both men and women, by virtue of their being in the world, are God's creatures.
- Men and women as persons (selves), partners, members of society, and servants of God are obliged to respect each other.
- Men and women will receive rewards according to their actions and behavior.
- Men and women are jointly responsible for preventing evil and promoting good.
- Men and women as persons, partners, members of society, and God's creatures and servants are, therefore, equally expected to maintain each other's rights in order to be recompensed in the hereafter.

These formulations provide a basis for human beings to treat one another equally in such a way that none will offend others due to their sexuality, ethnicity, race, or religion. All persons, who form the building blocks of every social institution, are expected to fulfill the duty of maintaining their own rights and responsibilities proportionally. Each person is expected to preserve his/her rights and responsibilities toward others at the personal, familial, and social levels.

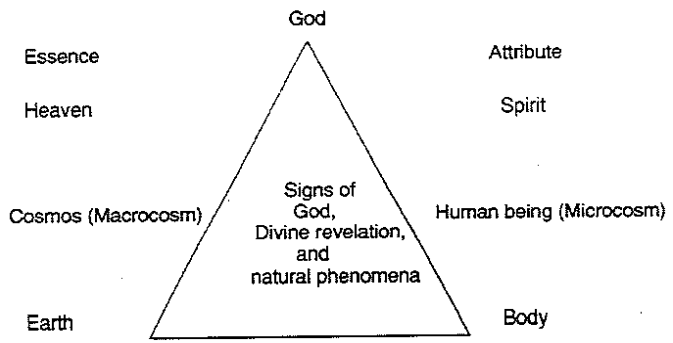
The egalitarian gender system is consonant with the ethical message of the Qur'ān. One example of this can be seen in Q.S. al-Aḥzāb, 33:35, in which God reveals the foundation for moral and spiritual equality. Feminists seeking to establish the principle of equality between men and women in Islam refer often to the following verse:[7]

> Verily, for all men and women who have surrendered themselves unto God, and all believing men and believing women, and all truly devout men and truly devout women, and all men and women who are true to their word, and all men and women who are patient in their adversity, all men and women who humble

> themselves [before God], all men and women who give in charity, and all self-defying men and self-defying women, and all men and women who are mindful of their chastity, all men and women who remember God unceasingly: for (all of them) God has readied forgiveness of sins and mighty reward.
>
> (Q.S. al-Aḥzāb, 33:35)

This verse offers a balanced view of virtuous behavior, which leads to rewards for all individuals, regardless of their sexual difference. By mentioning the same qualities for both sexes, it is clear that the verse identifies the foundations of morality as consisting in equal moral and spiritual obligations for human beings.[8] The implication of this verse is important in that ethical qualities such as piety, chastity, truthfulness, patience, charity, and kindness are not only appropriate for human beings as individuals, but are also relevant to their role as political and social beings. It also implies that women are vested with ethical, spiritual, rational, and social qualities that make them equally subject to blame, responsibility, reward, punishment, and discipline, just as men are.

A balanced egalitarian gender system in the Islamic intellectual tradition also relies on the depiction of the "sapiential tradition" regarding the nature of reality.[9] According to this framework, there are three basic realities: (1) God, (2) the cosmos or the macrocosm, and (3) the human being or the microcosm.[10] The relationship among these three could be portrayed in a triangular diagram in which God is at the apex and both macrocosm and microcosm are at the base as derivative realities. Other than God, everything, including human beings, perishes. In this sense, the created nature of human beings denies anyone the right to dominate others.



The above diagram shows that God manifests Himself in the Cosmos and human beings through His essence and attributes. God creates macrocosm and microcosm. He manifests Himself so that human beings see both macrocosm and microcosm as signs (*āyāt*) of God. By thinking about these signs, manifested in the phenomenal world and the revelation, human beings are supposed to understand God. The knowledge that is available to human beings through the macrocosm and the microcosm accords with the knowledge given to the prophets, from Adam to Muḥammad. For this reason, both natural phenomena and the divine revelation are signs of God that invite humans to contemplate God. As human beings are signs of God, their individual beings encapsulate all God's qualities. Both men and women have a unique role in the universe as God's representatives or vicegerents (*khulafā'*).[11]

Murata situates the issue of femininity within the framework of the three realities. She speaks of the duality of each reality, namely, God, macrocosm, and microcosm. Majesty and Beauty, for instance, are God's divine attributes, which are to be understood in terms of masculinity and femininity respectively.[12] Even though Majesty and Beauty are completely opposite, these attributes should be seen as a unity since they reflect God's Oneness (*Tawḥīd*). Similarly, the macrocosm also contains a binary opposition, in which the earth is usually identified as female and heaven as male. This polarity, however, is not to be interpreted as a total contrast, but a unity, in that male and female give rise to one of the relational pairs of the universe. The absence of either of the two would, in essence, make the creation of such a universe impossible.[13]

The materiality of the self too has the fluidity of masculinity and femininity. This fluidity generates an egalitarian relationality between men and women. Human equality is inherent within Islamic teaching, in the sense that individuals are responsible before God for their own selves (Q.S. al-An'ām, 6:164, Q.S. Ghāfir, 40:17, and Q.S. Ṭāhā, 20:15). Similarly, individuals, according to Islamic Sunnite doctrine, have equal access to God's Truth, regardless of sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, or gender,[14] in so far as they have the appropriate training, piety, and knowledge of Islam. In this sense, masculine and feminine tendencies are inherent in human disposition, although the construction of these tendencies is environmental. It happens that more individual men have been afforded the opportunity to interpret God's divine truth, leading not only to a lack of diversity in consciences, beliefs, and acts (despite the richness of Islamic doctrines), but also to perversity in the construction of masculinity and femininity, as will be seen in Chapter 4.[15]

Such an understanding of Islamic doctrines has shaped the way in which the fluidity of masculinity and femininity operates in Muslim societies. While universal Islam promotes gender egalitarianism as part of the harmony between God, macrocosm and especially microcosm, Muslims have adopted the concepts, expressions, and practices of gender that reflect their deliberative choices when dealing with women. In this sense, hierarchical and egalitarian theories and practices of gender system have always coexisted within Muslim cultures.

In a narrow sense, while Muslims have the crucial task of implementing the Qur'ān's teachings in daily life and of taking its universal ethical message into account, the Qur'ānic verses were themselves revealed over the course of almost twenty-three years on different occasions and addressing particular situations.[16] Yet, most interpreters (and I share their view) would contend that even though these revealed verses were inextricably linked to given sets of conditions, the ethics of the scriptural texts must be allowed to transcend those conditions in order to create a better and more just society. With this in mind, it is important to put Qur'ānic verses into their particular and universal contexts in order to find their meaningful divine messages.

Muslims generally view the authority of the Qur'ān as a unity, even though it was 'Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb (d. 644) who compiled the uncollected pieces (*ṣaḥīfāt*) of the Qur'ān

into its present form. While the Qur'ān is recognized as original in the sense that there is no revised edition of the Qur'ān, the literature interpreting it is extensive. The diverse interpretations of the Qur'ān often generate heterogeneous claims of what it means to be a Muslim man and a Muslim woman. These contradictions depend primarily on the way the interpreters read the Qur'ān and how its religious authority is carried over into everyday life. The Qur'ān itself never fails to inspire Muslims in their search for its divine meaning and truth.

Equally important in this connection are the Prophetic traditions (*aḥādīth*), which serve as further explanation of the Qur'ān and as a second authoritative source of Islamic teaching. History recorded Muḥammad's interactions with his wives, his speech with Muslim men and women and his wishes for the advancement of women's conditions. Yet while the Qur'ān progressed along with the Prophet's life, the significance of the ḥadīth emerged after the Prophet's death. In the absence of direct consultations with and inspiration from the Prophet, Muslims looked for answers from his family and the first generations of Muḥammad's friends (*ṣaḥābah*), trusting that they would know what the Prophet had done and would have done. The recollection of the ḥadīth itself was juxtaposed to situations of chaotic political dissension leading to civil wars (656–60 and 680–92). Mernissi succinctly describes the appearance of the ḥadīth as follows:

> With the historical events as background, we can now appreciate in their true measure the two contradictory tendencies that were at odds with each other in elaboration of the Hadith: on the one hand, the desire of the male politicians to manipulate the sacred; and on the other hand, the fierce determination of the scholars to oppose the elaboration of the fiqh (a veritable science of religion) with its concepts and its methods of verification and counterverification.[17]

Compilation of the Prophet's actions, habits, thoughts, and wishes was clearly constructed with this historical specificity in mind. Muslims were interested in preserving the Prophetic tradition to validate and/or invalidate their behavior and political gains. Hence, the memory, intellectual rigor, personal integrity, and virtue of the Prophet's *ṣaḥabah* were of paramount importance to the validity of the ḥadīth.

Yet, despite this effort to produce and reproduce the interpretation of the Qur'ān and the collections of valid aḥadīth in order to reveal the divine message as expressed in the Qur'ān and embodied in the Prophet's life, the production of knowledge regarding women's issues has been gendered. Its discourses nurture the rival tasks of embodying Islam as a revolutionary religion that once liberated women from their traditions in their local culture and of instituting Islam as correct doctrines and practices—usually by those who are in power with (or without) Islamic knowledge and authority. Here, the message of liberating women becomes secondary to the implementation of the embodied institutions. Women are systematically barred from the political bodies that produce and reproduce authority, that regulate men and women by way of religious dogmas, and that treat women and men differently. This is partly because hierarchical gender-minded Muslims sometimes

see the authority of *aḥādīth* as tantamount to that of the Qur'ān, when dealing with the issue of women. They hardly ever recount the extent to which the contents of the *aḥādīth* record the cultural, social, and political climate in which the Prophet and his companions lived. For this reason, it is important to recognize that there are *aḥādīth* whose contents and meanings cannot be taken for granted and/or separated from their actual contexts.

With the passage of time, the Qur'ān's verses have come to be interpreted independently from their historical contexts. The contexts are often unavailable to modern readers or are closed to them due to language or cultural differences.[18] The Qur'ānic text offers its meaning to readers, but those readers are prisoners of their personal experience and mindset; hence, individual verses do not always convey the same meanings for all readers. This explains why interpretations of the Qur'ān vary across Muslim cultures, even though these various interpretations should be understood as Muslims' valid attempts to understand God's Divine Will to the best of their capabilities.

While I share the passion for interpreting Qur'ānic texts as a means to embody the ethical teaching of Islam and to reveal the true meaning of the Divine Will, I strongly argue that Muslim interpretations of the Islamic teaching on gender issues shape not only the anti-egalitarian perspective that has persisted in Muslim cultures for the last fourteen centuries, but also that the female's self-becoming has left women with no choice but to give in to such a system.[19] The materiality of self-becoming consists of the resilient religious, cultural, philosophical, and socio-biological power and the production of women's experience and knowledge on the basis of their sexual difference and their extensional dependency to me in the family and society.

The politics of sexual difference and its impact on gender system

The existing hierarchical gender system highlights not only the male and female selves as manifestations of the sexual and material differences between men and women, but also as sites for social, cultural, and political construction. Even though sexual difference is naturally bestowed,[20] it establishes more than what material difference suggests; indeed, it carries with it certain regulatory norms that govern the progress of sexual development from childhood to adulthood. These biological differences are modified by social conventions; sex is "administered" by some sort of "policing mechanisms" that regulate the biological, religious, and economic domains through useful and public discourses.[21] In this sense, "sex" functions as an ideal construct that is materialized through time, while its materialization is accomplished through an enforced reiteration of certain norms and practices.[22] Given that gender thinking is among the most active and determinant principles for the appropriation of sex, I elaborate in this section on the religious, cultural, philosophical, and socio-biological constructs of sexual difference and on their comprehensive impact on gender system.

The religious category of sexual difference in Muslim societies serves to establish biological and material differences between men and women. The Qur'ān uses the word '*al-dhakar*' and '*al-unsā*' to designate a biological distinction between male and female respectively.[23] The word '*al-dhakar*' is the opposite of '*al-unsā*'.' Both signify

the categorical identity of male and female bodies.[24] Such a biological distinction can be seen in the scriptural account of the birth of Mary (Āl 'Imrān 3:36), as follows:

> But when she had given birth to the child, she said: "O, my Sustainer! Behold, I have given birth to a female [*al-unsā*']"—the while God had been fully aware of what she would give birth to, and [fully aware] that no male child [she might hope for] could ever have been like this female—"and I named her Mary. And verily I seek Thy protection for her and her offspring against Satan, the accursed."[25]

The phrase *laysa al-dhakar ka al-unsā*' is often translated as "the male child is not similar to the female."[26] In a similar vein, al-Ṭabarsī explains that being female is not the same as being male because the female is not as perfect as the male, in the sense that service to the Holy House (*Bayt al-Muqaddas*) is usually carried out by a male.[27] This service would not entail the same meaning if it were to be done by a female, especially when she menstruates or is in the midst of her postpartum period. Qatāda says that, culturallaysa, only men performed such devotions.[28]

When the phrase *laysa al-dhakar ka al-unsā*' is interpreted in gendered terms, it is generally understood to mean that "having a male child could not have been the same as having the granted female child."[29] This literal translation that "the male child is not and will never be like the female child" is embedded in Muslim unconsciousness. Such an interpretation reiterates and nurtures the common belief that male is generally superior to female and that the former is more perfect in every respect than the latter.[30] This reading of sexual difference as a normative criterion has been in play since Islam's early years. The gendered vision of sexual difference also nurtures the established view of the hierarchical principle of gender inequality to the extent that the materialization of male and female bodies revolves around biological difference. This distinction thus serves multiple functions, and is one of the many means used to impose order on society. It is also employed by such institutions as public perception of the truth and the economy, and is bolstered by the political regime. This cultural intelligibility engenders a multiplicity of signs and dominations empowering the body and mind.[31]

Public perception of sexual difference reiterates an exclusive and selective use of the Qur'ānic verses and the *ḥadīth*. Muslims restate certain *aḥādīh* that contain exclusions based on women's biological functions.[32] Women are stereotyped as lacking in reason, apt to go wrong or defective in various ways so that they tend to act on the basis of irrational judgment. Their faults inevitably lead them to commit vice—rendering them incapable of existing as independent beings. No woman is exempt from this deficiency. Since all women are perceived to be faulty, imperfect, and blemished, their leadership would be terrible and damaging for the community.

Interestingly, despite this gendered thinking, several contemporary Muslim women have excelled in leadership as prime ministers or presidents of Muslim-dominated states such as Tansu Çiller (Turkey's prime minister, 1993–5), Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan's prime minister, 1988–90, 1993–6), Khaleda Zia (Bangladesh's prime minister, 1991–6), Megawati Sukarno Putri (Indonesia's president, 2001–4) and Sheikh Hasina Wajed (Bangladesh's prime minister, 1996–present).[33] Certainly, most

of these women's political fortunes have benefited from their kinship relations to powerful male relatives. However, Muslims' humble acceptance of female leadership demonstrates that, with proper training, leadership is something that can be earned; it is not something that is associated with sexuality.

Muslim women are generally marginalized in the realm of political participation. Opponents of Muslim women's participation in politics regularly cite certain *aḥādīth* that are not friendly to women as the only truth, penetrating the Muslim subconscious in such a way that *ḥadīth* comes to seem independent of the Islamic vision of gender equality and justice. This process bolsters public perception of the truth of sexual difference as a system. Muslims embrace this truth to the extent that any deviation from it must be tantamount to deviation from the scripture. Daring to challenge the *ḥadīth* means defying Islam or risking the charge of denying the tradition (*inkār al-sunnah*) or even of being a *kāfir* (a non-believer). For this reason, Muslims rarely question the validity of *ḥadīth*, knowing the kind of religious and communal punishment he/she may face.

Muslims take *ḥadīth* at its face value. For example, when Abū Bakr, the narrator of the *ḥadīth*, commented on the defeat of 'Ā'ishah b. Abī Bakr at the Battle of the Camel (d. 656), he cited what the Prophet Muḥammad said regarding female leadership. The *ḥadīth* reads as follows:

> During the days (of the battle) of al-Jamal, Allah benefited me with a word I had heard from Allah's Apostle after I had been about to join the Companions of al-Jamal (i.e. the Camel) and fight along with them. When Allah's Apostle was informed that the Persians had crowned the daughter of Khosrau as their ruler, he said, "Such people who are ruled by a lady will never be successful."[34]

While this *ḥadīth* is often quoted and reiterated to exclude women's political participation, it remains questionable whether it was appropriate for the *ḥadīth* narrator to cite any *ḥadīth* that had historical specificity and was echoed in a different context.

Mernissi draws attention to the historical context in which the ḥadīth was first pronounced. Abū Bakr was a former slave who had led a humiliating life and had thereafter became a very well-known figure in Iraq after embracing Islam.[35] 'Ā'ishah contacted him and asked him to participate in her army by taking up arms against 'Alī (the chosen fourth caliph). 'Ā'ishah perceived 'Alī as an unjust leader because he did not persecute the killer of 'Uthmān (the third caliph). By that time (656 AD), public opinion was divided into supporters of 'Ā'ishah, supporters of 'Alī, and a neutral group. Abū Bakr neither responded to 'Ā'ishah's letter nor participated in the battle; instead, he quoted the above *ḥadīth* to justify the fact that the defeated party was led by a woman. Abū Bakr recalled and reiterated this ḥadīth one-quarter century after the death of the Prophet. The context of the ḥadīth itself was female leadership in the midst of political unrest (629–632) in Persia where two women had been appointed after their King had been assassinated. As for Abū Bakr's reliability, it may be pointed out that he was once flogged because of his false testimony against a companion, al-Mughīrah Ibn Shu'bah, who was accused of the crime of *zinā*.[36]

Just as Abū Bakr's integrity and honesty as the narrator of the ḥadīth are questionable, the content of the ḥadīth, if it is applicable to all Muslim women, does not seem to be an accurate reflection of the fundamental teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad. He taught equality between men and women as humans by abolishing the tradition of killing female infants, a custom practiced prior to the coming of Islam. He gradually introduced women's rights as a means toward empowering women's agency. He also summoned his followers to protect women by commanding his fellow Muslim not to kill women or children in wartime and to treat them well in everyday life.

Yet even though the context of the above mentioned *ḥadīth* has nothing to do with a Muslim woman's leadership, it became the most prominent example of the construction of sexual and gender difference, one in which the multiplicity of culture, religion, and politics may be seen to be interwoven.[37] Surprisingly enough, the focal point of the image is not 'Ā'ishah's involvement in the political arena, her religious authority or her piety rendering her an excellent model for Muslim women to imitate (for she reportedly regretted what she had done),[38] but the portrayal of her transgression and rebellious attitude. 'As Ā'ishah's political participation in the Battle of the Camel was portrayed by the tradition as leading to the greatest *fitnah* (social chaos) and was denounced for having caused much bloodshed in the early history of the Muslim community,[39] Muslim women have been generally barred from politics and particularly from the public space by virtue of their sexuality.

This account has two implications. On a personal level, women are relegated to an inferior status and are identified as sinful, sexually dangerous, irrational, defective, and easily susceptible to going astray. Women cannot be trusted to manage and lead their own lives because they tend to obey their illogical premises and impulses. As a result, women have hardly any authority in any field. Women generally comply with what male judges, shaykhs, scholars, and theologians have told them with regard to their bodies. To this extent, Butler is right in saying that "the judge does not originate the law or its authority; rather, he 'cites' the law, consults and reinvokes the law and in that reinvocation, reconstitutes the law."[40]

On a social level, the implication of the usual sexist reading of 'Ā'ishah's leadership in the Battle of the Camel—which has been interpreted, reinterpreted, and reinforced from time to time as an innovation (*bid'ah*)[41]—is that women are unfit for political and social roles. Some argue that women are not endowed with the skills to participate in public life and manage public affairs, so that women have no political significance in history.[42] Others refer to the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, practical experience, and the Islamic legal principles of the consensus (*ijmā'*), *maṣlaḥah* (*welfare*), and cutting pretext (*shadhdh al-dharā'i'*).[43] Such beliefs and interpretations have been materialized for ages.

Even though the retreat of women from public participation has caused a major setback for Muslim women in comparison to the way women participated in the public arena during early Islam, it has shaped the public perception of the truth that women's political participation is inappropriate and out of place. There are indeed exceptions where women have been admitted into public office, but these women have usually been connected to the male members of the family and benefited politically from kinship associations. The overwhelming practice, by contrast, is to

confine women within the biological and social regime that gives them no option but to make peace with family life.

The politics of sexual difference for some Muslims is not only religiously endorsed, it is also rooted in Muslims' social-cultural construct. The socialization of maleness and femaleness starts when children are born. This enduring identification is manifested in how gender identity and the learning of gender roles take shape.[44] Gender identity refers to the consciousness that one is either a boy or a girl with a corresponding role to play in the society where one is born and/or brought up. A child develops within the role that is socially and culturally assigned to each sex through the internalization of what it means to be a girl or a boy. Therefore, gender identity is formulated even as both males and females develop, internalize, and embody their expected roles in society.

Gender identity also carries value judgment, as certain cultures prefer one sex to the other. Even though the extent of male preference in Muslim culture is not as extreme as it is in other religious traditions where filial piety and ancestor worship can only be done by male descendents (in the case of Confucianism),[45] Muslims generally look at the male with a greater favor. Indeed, there are cases where having a female body in many Middle Eastern countries makes a human being "incomplete" or causes her to be seen as having "something missing."[46] In fact, it is a great embarrassment in some cultures for a family to consist mainly of baby girls.[47] Some families keep trying to have a baby boy after having several girls. This is especially true for many Muslim parents, who would freely admit that they prefer to have baby boys because it saves parents from such complications as financial liability, guardianship, wedding celebrations, and threat to family honor. Muslim parents perceive sons as a form of insurance that will assist them as they are aging. This extreme preference for boys reflects the enduring influence of pre-Islamic culture in which female offspring were perceived as a "potential source of the familial dishonor."[48]

Still, some Muslim parents welcome daughters, as may be seen in Southeast Asian Muslim cultures, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore.[49] In the societies where bilateral kinship relations and uxorilocal residents are common, such as in the greater part of Java, Sunda, Minagkabau, and South Sulawesi, female babies are sometimes more desirable, because when the parents get older, they can move in with their daughter's family. In other societies, where kinship hierarchy and partilocality are more dominant such as Bali, the Anganen of the Southern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea,[50] and North Sumatra, the parents' preference for male descendants will be stronger since this inclination goes along with the societal assumption of men's position in that particular society.

Whatever the parents' rationalization for preferring a boy or a girl, the fact remains that male and female sexuality marks anatomical distinctions of a biological nature. This sexual difference is only the beginning, since the sexual category to which the sex of person is assigned by social categories is in the making.[51] Gender is an active process of the "enactment of social categories" within historical and cultural contexts.[52] With this in mind, the appropriation of sexual difference perpetuates the status quo of the existing gender system, since it is enacted through the interplay of religious, cultural, and social norms that are profoundly ingrained in the everyday lives of Muslim men and women.

Given the social, cultural, and historical construct of sexual and gender difference, feminist theorists ask, "[if] gender is a cultural interpretation of sex or [if] gender is culturally constructed, what is the manner or mechanism of this construction?"[53] This question has traditionally been at the core of philosophical discussion. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* points out that the construction of gender is developed in conjunction with the view of the opposite: "man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of *man* to designate human beings in general, whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity...."[54] De Beauvoir depicts women's alienation, inessentialness, and inferiority as being the *other*. This *other* has always been an opposite, which arises out of the one. The *other* is the opposing significant, which is socially and culturally constructed and inscribed in every culture. As a result, men's and women's relations to humanity are defined in such a way that humanity embraces only the male, while women are identified relative to and dependent on men.

In contrast to de Beauvoir, who refuses to recognize women as "the other," Irigaray proposes to identify them as "another."[55] She argues that the negation of women as others implies the refusal of "another" as the equal of the masculine subject. It demands the stability of the fundamental form of human being as "one, singular, solitary, and historically masculine...with the many always subordinate to the one."[56] This ideal mode of humanity results in obedience to the singular model of subjectivity, which belongs to traditional philosophy and is historically masculine. Irigaray maintains that women should view themselves as *another* subject, which is irreducible to a masculine subject. Thinking of women as *another* also implies that women enjoy a position equal to that of men. In order that men and women become coexistent subjects, what constitutes humanity should be predicated on "the two." Here, the salient feature of the "two" is to be found in "sexual difference" which implies[57] that two subjects should not be situated in either a hierarchical or a genealogical relationship, and that these two subjects have the duty of preserving the human species and of developing their culture, while respecting their differences.

Even though de Beauvoir and Irigaray appear to discuss the idea of woman from opposite poles, both of them are concerned with the historical oppression of women. The core of their discussion is the way in which women have been constructed as reducible to masculine subjects. Both de Beauvoir and Irigaray attempt to escape from the epistemological structure of knowledge, which posits women as secondary to men in the history of philosophy. Such a position should not come as a surprise since the fundamental paradigm of philosophy is built on masculine reasoning. If de Beauvoir demands that women be recognized as components of a single humanity, like their male counterparts, Irigaray proposes that the idea of humanity be acknowledged to consist of two sexes and two genders. Both of them, therefore, seek a concept of humanity that is friendly to, and inclusive of, women.

The philosophical construct of female self-existence in Islam is also conceptualized on the basis of sexual difference. Even though Ibn Sīnā believed that the self (the soul) marks humanity which is equal for all humans in that they have self-knowledge, regardless of their mental state, he, like the majority of Muslims in his day and in the

contemporary world, viewed women as sexual, disloyal, and less rational. In his own words,

> Since woman by right must be protected inasmuch she can share her sexual desire with many, is much inclined to draw attention to herself, and in addition to that is easily deceived and is less inclined to obey reason; and since sexual relations on her part [with many men] cause great disdain and shame, which are well-known harms, whereas [sexual relations] on the part of man [with other women] only arouse jealousy, which one should ignore as it is nothing but obedience to the devil;...[58]

The Islamic prohibition against women having multiple sexual relations with several male partners carries with it the assumption that women are sexual beings. When it happens that women have sexual relations outside marriage, they can easily be condemned to corporal or even capital punishment, whereas the men with whom these women have sexual relations can go unpunished.

The idea that the female sexual drive subdues their rational capability has resulted in their being classified as irrational and emotional. Ibn Sīnā's view of the strength of female sexual desire is in line with the theory of form and matter. Form represents the male, whereas matter represents the female. The female always desires the male, just as matter yearns for form. This view is Aristotelian origin in that "The truth is that what desires the form is matter, as the female desires the male and the ugly the beautiful—only the ugly or the female not in itself but accidentally."[59] It should not come as a surprise that women are seducers who allure men to forbidden pleasure.

Aristotle's view on the inequality between men and women is grounded in the theory of the female's inability to exercise authority (*akyron*). Indeed, all parts of the soul—vegetative, animal, and human rational—are to different degrees present in women. However, women, like children, are unable to exercise their deliberative faculty, so they cannot have any authority. Children, especially male children, have the potential to be authoritative once they mature.[60] It follows that women's deficiency in authority obliges them to obey men's rules, while men are never subjected to the female demand for obedience, if there is any.

Central to the constructed role of Muslim women at the personal, familial and communal levels is the lack of authority. At the familial level, the hierarchical gender-minded fathers (and later husbands) have the authority to decide what is best for women. In this kind of environment, women are denied the opportunity to exercise fully their personal authority in knowledge, public affairs, and power relations. This systematic cycle has remained unchallenged for as long as the history of Islamic civilization.

Perceiving women as lacking in character and authority was not only regarded as philosophically sound, but it has also been "proven" by the socio-biologists who maintain that gender role is genetic in nature.[61] Embedded in biological difference is the inherent expectation that males are "to be aggressive, hasty, fickle, and undiscriminating," whereas females tend to be "coy, to hold back until they can identify males with the best genes."[62] This distinction in human behavior is based on three assumptions: "there are widespread genetic differences; genetically controlled

behaviours that have an effect on biological fitness; and genetic differences lead to behavioral differences."[63] The saying, "like father, like son," extends not only to shared physical characteristics, but also inherited character traits.

However, while it is true that generative self is genetically inherited from the parents, self-becoming is constructed within the locality of the self. Each self receives his or her genetic code that marks a human as human at the moment of conception.[64] The 46 chromosomes of each individual have a set of genes, consisting of 50,000–100,000 genes, known as the human *genome*.[65] This genome, which is stored in the nucleus of every cell, is the blueprint of a human being. And this genetic information contains certain characteristics, "the biological carrier of the possibility of human wisdom" and "a self-evolving being."[66]

Since genetic codes are something inherent within humans and tend to confer certain characteristics that are unique to the parents or their ancestors, socio-biologists claim that gender is biological. In this sense, humans exhibit the characteristics that are rooted in the genetic code. Yet while such a perspective could be true to the extent that some human characteristics are passed down through genes, the construction of these behavioral traits does evidently occur within the bounds of social relations and first and foremost in the family and its immediate environment.

The resilience of the religious, socio-cultural, philosophical, and socio-biological construct of sexual difference that nurtures and generates the existing gender system in the Muslim world is the concurrent effect of gendered thought with the emphasis on the social ordering of female sexuality. Mernissi argues that the construction of Muslim social order in Muslim communities is based on the assumption that women are sexual beings who pose a threat to society in general.[67] This assumption suggests further that, in order to establish and perpetuate social order, women's sexuality should be controlled, because it is the source of social chaos (*fitnah*), "a living representative of the dangers of sexuality and its rampant disruptive potential."[68] For this reason, women should be kept at home and confined to the household world; otherwise, they would invite disorder in society.

To say that women are a constant threat to the Muslim social order is, in de Beauvoir's eyes, to perceive women as "the other," in that men represent the positive, while women represent the negative. Men are considered to embody the positive because they are the main constituents of social order. Conversely, women are considered to be the negative, for they are seen, with their sexual distractions, to work against the orderliness of the society. Indeed, there are cases in which women are included within the Muslim social order. Yet, their inclusion is not seen as the primary agent, as men are, in dignifying humanity, but as agents destructive to the "social order."[69] Given that women's sexuality is seen as the active cause of the misery of society, women need discipline first and foremost in the family where sexual difference becomes the axis of a religious, social, cultural, and political regime of power.

Gender and power difference in the family

Gender thinking marks the appropriation of sexual and gender difference for any regime or system that is to be established at the personal, familial or communal

levels. I will, however, argue that the politics of gender difference operates forcefully at the level of the family, where gender expectations and appropriations become materialized. In normal circumstances, the politics of sexual difference is first instilled in the family, where women receive their extensional status as wives, mothers, and/or daughters in the family. They learn how to control their voice, behavior, contours, and dress; otherwise they can be subjected to punishment, discipline, blame, and responsibility. They also learn to accept public perception of what is socially, culturally, and religiously up to standard in terms of ethical and unethical, shame and dignity, honor and dishonor, responsibility and irresponsibility, and other embodied concepts.

Interestingly, gender thinking not only penetrates the theoretical and practical Islamic understanding of gender difference, but also extends to philosophical discourse on the truth the system of gender difference can produce. Muslim philosophers do not consider gender difference as an isolated issue, for they are interested in the multifaceted relations between Islam and philosophy. The difference between philosophy and religion lies in linguistic terminology.[70] Religion conveys philosophical truth in popular language, whereas philosophy seeks truth by way of reasoning. Adopting this line of thought, philosophers call for the rationalization of Islamic revelation.

The effort to philosophize Islam is more well-defined in Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics in that he integrates the necessity of the Prophet as a legislator, with special reference to the revealed nature of this legislation. He elaborates the idea that the *Sharī'ah* was beneficial for the masses and even for the elite. However, the philosopher sage should be able to deal with the details of the *Sharī'ah*, wherever revelation overrides reason.[71] Despite the different tones in the Islamic and philosophical expressions of the role of women in family and society, self-professed Muslims and philosophers, especially Ibn Sīnā, share something in common. In this section, I elaborate on the intertwined commonalities of the role of marriage in the Muslim family, male superiority in marriage, and the appropriate and ideal role of women as mothers and wives, all of which serve as "policing mechanisms" to perpetuate the existing gender system in the Muslim world.

Ibn Sīnā schematizes the marital institution based on the metaphysics of prophecy.[72] He asserts that the presence of the legislator as ruler over society is of absolute importance. The task of the ruler is to enact legislation, build the city, and divide the leadership between three groups: administrators, artisans, and guardians.[73] Each group would have a multiplicity of leadership until they could create a common ground for the establishment of a democratic and just vision for the city. To maintain the city, there should exist a common public fund, punishment for crime, and fair distribution of welfare. One of the tasks of the legislator is also to establish laws, including those on marriage, and to encourage people to obey these laws. According to him, marriage is the institution that perpetuates the species, through which the proof of the existence of God is manifested.[74]

Ibn Sīnā's view of marriage is very much in line with the majority of Muslims in that marriage serves as a means to produce progeny and to perpetuate humanity. The significance of marriage also embodies the doctrine of *Tawḥīd* (the Oneness of God)

and humans' responsibility toward Him at the Day of Judgment[75] in that different individuals with different sexualities, backgrounds, and worldviews are brought together by their human need for each other, embodying the Qur'ānic view of mutual affection and mercy—defined as the foundation of marriage (Q.S. al-Rūm, 30:21).

Ibn Sīnā also shares a common view of marriage with the Greek philosophers. It is, in fact, quite plausible that his writing on the management of the household responds to the philosophical discourse on women expressed by Aristotle and Plato. Aristotle, for instance, frequently discusses the relationship between men and women within the boundary of marriage. Husband and wife are the main components of the household. The bond between them is based on the marital relationship. The rule that governs this relationship is constitutional, just like the rule of the intellect over the appetite.[76] In practice, this kind of rule manifests itself in a discussion of the virtues of commanding and obeying, according to which men are expected to command and women to obey.[77] The relationship between female and male is traditionally unequal. In one of the passages, Aristotle confirms that "[a]gain, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; the one rules, and the other is ruled; this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind."[78]

Ibn Sīnā also responds to Socrates' proposal of the community of women in the new constitution of the state. Socrates believes that women have the potential to become successful if they receive the right training or education. Socrates is said to have used the following analogy to make his point:

> Do we expect the females of watchdogs to join in guarding what the males guard and to hunt with them and share all the pursuits or do we expect the females to stay indoors as being incapacitated by the bearing and the breeding of the whelps while the males toil and have all the care of the flock?[79]

By this analogy, Socrates intends to show that both males and females share all things in common. The difference is that we tend to treat "the females as weaker and the males as stronger."[80] If women, Socrates argues, receive education, like gymnastics, music, and the office of war in the same manner as men do, the former will surely be able to hold official jobs, just like men.

Indeed, Socrates recognizes the reality that men and women have different natures and that these differences may lead to different pursuits.[81] However, this difference in nature does not interfere with women's endeavor to pursue the same goals. This is to say that the difference is not found in the fact that the female bears and the male begets. This distinction has not yet been proven to be in conflict with equal pursuits.[82] Both men and women, to different degrees, have the ability to be guardians or administrators of a state, except that women have been inhibited by the biased stereotype that "the woman is weaker and the man is stronger."[83] At this point, we may notice that Socrates could not fully free himself from the notion that women are naturally weaker than men.

Socrates was aware of the different degrees to which men and women can pursue their pursuits. He did not however let this stop him in his goal to include women in

the new constitution. To achieve this goal, he believed that women should be part of a community of wives through the commonality of marriage and childbearing. Marriage would be arranged, and the lawgiver would match couples based on their similarities of temperament. The couple would then proceed to procreate. After the birth, the child would be surrendered to officials, either men or women, who would take care of the baby. All men would be able to claim the children born after the seventh and/or tenth month of marriage as their sons or daughters. The commonality of wives, marriage, childbearing, kinship, and property would reduce the tension of heredity, paternity, and other such disputable matters. The state would then be able to function in a just manner.

Ibn Sīnā would definitely have disagreed with such an arrangement, as would many Muslims. Marriage is indispensable in order to perpetuate the human species, but more importantly, it also provides an assurance of heredity and paternal origin for the child, and assures one clear-cut line of paternity. Marriage should also be a permanent union so that there will be less social dislocation. In fact, the most powerful mechanism for general good in his view is love: "love is achieved through friendship; friendship through habit; and habit is only produced through long association."[84]

Ibn Sīnā's strong support for marriage is coincidently analogous to Aristotle's refutation of Socrates' proposal for having women, children, and property in common. Aristotle bases his objection on three reasons. First of all, Socrates does not provide a valid argument by which the institution could operate.[85] As a means to an end, such instruments are impractical, because the nature of the state requires plurality. Socrates' premise "that the greater the unity the better the state" does not make sense, as state comprises different types of men and groupings.[86] These groups of citizens share something, if not everything, in common, as they inhabit one place.[87]

Second, the greatest unity also results in ambiguity in the familial relationship. Socrates' notion of the state demands that each person should refer to the same boys as their sons and call the same women their wives.[88] This kind of extended family creates a scenario in which the guardians would perceive all sons and daughters as their own,[89] according to Socrates, since each citizen would share an equivalent sense of belonging. Aristotle argues that the ability to claim parenthood is only possible within a particular relationship. It would be impossible for the first generation of citizens of the state to really feel that they belong to an extended family.[90] The familial bonds become less significant due to the fact that: "Whereas in a state having women and children in common, love will be diluted; and the father will certainly not say 'my son', or the son 'my father.' "[91]

The familial relationship would lose all meaning because there is no motivation for the father to take care of his sons or daughters.[92] In a similar manner, the children would also feel neglected and abandoned because they would experience maternal and paternal deprivation. Such a psychological condition does not provide a firm foundation for a good state.

Finally, Aristotle refutes the proposal of communal property, because it is much better for property to be privately owned than for it to be used in common.[93] Having

private property, to a certain degree, celebrates personal achievement and symbolizes love of the self. Ownership is an innate need of every being, since it is a means to have pleasure, to live well, and to be generous to family, relatives, and friends. Lack of property, according to Aristotle, will diminish temperance toward women and hinder the liberality of using property.[94] Here, Aristotle makes the strong point that it is important for men to have property so that they can modestly support women. But women are obviously not expected to have their own property, because, as Aristotle argues, if women were given the same liberty as men to engage in society and to have property, who would therefore look after the home? And even if Socrates were to retain private property while still making women common property, the men will attend the fields, but who will see to the house? And who will do so if the agricultural class have both their property and their wives in common? Once more: it is absurd to argue, from an analogy on animals, that men and women should follow the same pursuits, for animals have never managed a household.[95]

Aristotle obviously thinks that the most fitting role for women is to engage in activities in the household, rather than in public life. This role accords with his understanding of the nature of women and his earlier premise regarding women's lack of authority. A woman does not possess the ability to engage in public affairs because her role in the household, especially that of domestic laborer, requires different training from that necessary for intellectual pursuits. Aristotle does not seem to have admitted the possibility that women could also receive training similar to that of men so that both could pursue the same pursuits. He believed that what is universally proper for women is to be in the house. Hence, it would have been impossible, for him, to foresee the possibility that men and women could share household activities.

Ibn Sīnā shares many facets of thought with Aristotle. Both of them believed that a marital relationship is important for the establishment of the city. The familial bond gives a better chance for the family to maintain a marital relationship. Ibn Sīnā even mentions that it is important for the couple to maintain their marriage so that both of them can provide the best education for their children.[96] Both Ibn Sīnā and Aristotle also believed that women's primary task is to maintain the household, and that men's responsibility is to provide the means of subsistence. As men are responsible for financial security and commanding the family, women are expected to obey their husbands completely.

Ibn Sīnā and the majority of Muslims share the view of the truth of marriage as an institution that favors men's superiority rather than equality.[97] There are ample mechanisms that evidently support male superiority in marriage, such as financial responsibilities, inheritance, and divorce. The ability to be *qawwāmūn* (caretakers) has granted men higher status "*because* God has made the ones excel [*faḍḍala*] the others and because they support them from their means" (Q.S. al-Baqarah, 2:34).[98] According to Mawdūdi, the word *faḍḍala* means

> God has endowed one of the sexes (i.e. the male sex) with certain qualities which He has endowed the other sex with, at least not to an equal extent. Thus it is the male who is qualified to function as the head of the family. The female has been so constituted that she should live under his care and protection.[99]

A husband's economic responsibility for his female relatives is thought to warrant him biological and social superiority over women in general. With this in mind, every aspect of a man's life is appropriated in relation to his economic power and access to the public. The husband's financial support, in Ibn Sīnā's account, entails ownership of the female genitalia. This is certainly the logic behind the control of women's sexuality. If genitalia, which are the most powerful asset of women, can be bought by their husbands' maintenance and support, then women can expect no control over sexuality, body, liberty, and individual growth and even life itself.

Similarly, God's command that men receive a double share of inheritance has lent them superiority (Q.S. al-Nisā', 4:11). Yet, while men receive a greater share, they are expected to spend their share or what they earn on their family. In contrast, women need neither provide sustenance nor spend any inheritance on their families, unless they do so by choice. Thus, despite the practical reason for men's double share of inheritance, it is used to demonstrate male superiority and female inferiority, based on the assumption that God's favor toward men demonstrates their superior status. This assumption is flawed, however, for the law of inheritance is framed within a socioeconomic context in which women are not accustomed to economic independence. In fact, the inclusion of women as recipients of inheritance was intended to improve women's social condition at that particular time, when women in general were seen as chattels.

Equally important to mention is that the Qur'ān grants men the right to divorce women, even though it is often abused for male personal interests (Q.S. al-Baqarah, 2:228). Certainly, women can propose the marriage's dissolution (*al-khul'*) for a genuine reason by returning the dowry (*mahr*) that was given to them on the wedding eve.[100] But, divorce, which is a useful option for unresolved marital problems is effectively a male prerogative. Because husbands are in a position to divorce women, men often use this privilege to divorce women for any possible reason. Yet, what is easily forgotten is that the notion of divorce must be seen in light of the protection afforded by the Qur'ānic injunction: "the right of the wives [with regard to their husbands] are equal to the [husbands'] rights with regards to them" (Q.S. al-Baqara, 2:228). Even if a man has "precedence" (*darajah*) over the woman, this is only viable if a woman wants to maintain the marital relationship; otherwise, the divorce continues to proceed. However, as *darajah* is sometimes translated as "superior," men yet again abuse the institution of divorce in order to regulate women's lives and, in doing so, cause them emotional and psychological trauma.

But why should men be entitled to sever the marriage bond, whereas women may not? Women, according to Ibn Sīnā, cannot be trusted in the matter of divorce, because women are irrational, less inclined to follow reason, and get angry easily.[101] Ibn Sīnā is well-aware that women are not in charge of the divorce process, but acknowledges that the institution of divorce can easily be misused against women. For this reason, he argues that while divorce "must not be placed in the hands of the less rational of the two, the one more prone to disagreement, confusion, and change," judges are a necessary part of divorce proceedings, especially in cases of women's mistreatment by their partners.[102] The judges' involvement in the divorce process is to ensure that women's rights are not jeopardized when separation occurs. In cases where

the separation has already occurred, the opportunity to renew the marriage should be available, except for those couples who have divorced three times. In that case, the woman has to marry somebody else in a genuine marriage before being able to return to her previous husband.

Above all, God's ordinances granting the rights to financial sustenance, double inheritance and divorce to men oblige the latter to do what is right and to ensure women's well-being and their rights in the marriage. If, in reality, a man fails to serve God's ordinance and maintain justice in his reciprocal dependence with his family, the account will be between him and God. Clearly, God does not ordain the subjection and oppression of women as parts of His agenda, but encourages co-existent dependency and partnership between husband and wife at every level of interaction. In this respect, the Qur'ānic verses 3:34 and 2:228 are, as noted by al-Faruqi, meant to depict husband and wife as

> ...indeed complementary partners with equal rights. The difference between males and females is rooted in the socioeconomic distribution of communal responsibility rather than gender.... The ultimate aim of the socioeconomic construct of the Qur'ān is to create a system of interdependence in which the extended family unit is the norm and in which, therefore, the community is set to take full care of its members on both legal and moral grounds so whatever happens on the wider social and political scale, the individual is still protected. It adjusts the imbalance of biological tasks by countering them with socioeconomic responsibilities.[103]

Therefore, men's responsibility for financial sustenance, double inheritance, and divorce are not legalized in order to oppress women's biological nature and their roles, but to protect their rights so that women as daughters, wives, and mothers can advance their self-fulfillment in both the private and public spheres.

Despite the Qur'ān's exposition of the importance of mutual love and respect within marriage, there are avenues that can be used and abused to perpetuate the subordination of women. The repeated theory and practice of male superiority in leadership, guardianship, financial maintenance, inheritance, and divorce show male dominance over women. To rule is natural for men, because women, according to Ibn Sīnā, are easily deceived and less inclined to follow reason.[104] With their weak deliberative skill and irrational disposition, women are considered to be unable to manage their own lives. Because women cannot control their own bodies, or even their sexuality, they cannot be trusted as independent agents. Thus, immediate relatives become the extension of women's eyes, ears, and minds.

Ibn Sīnā's view concerning who rules whom is not alien to Mediterranean culture and philosophy. Aristotle too argues that it is more fitting for men to be rulers and for women to be ruled. The types of rule range from the despotic and constitutional to the royal.[105] The first type of rule is used to manage slaves, who are usually possessed by their masters. The second type, as mentioned earlier, is a "government of freemen and equals."[106] And the last is the rule of fathers over their children. While men enjoy the privilege of ruling over women and slaves, Aristotle makes a

clear-cut distinction, saying that by nature the female and the slave are different.[107] The females are free and equal to men in that they have the deliberative faculty. Slaves who are singled out for subjection[108] are considered to have no deliberative faculty at all.[109]

Even though men and women both possess the deliberative faculty, they do not share an equal degree of authority. Women's tendency toward irrationality prevents them from attaining authority. As virtue is the standard that decides who rules, men are automatically judged to be more deserving of this authority. It is thus justifiable to administer women's bodies, life, morality, and financial support by placing them in seclusion. When a woman is secluded from public life and confined to the household, she has no need to look for money or other means of subsistence. It remains a man's responsibility to provide for and to fulfill a woman's needs. But where men are responsible for the expenses of women, they are clearly superior to women. Because women, according to Ibn Sīnā's account, are no more than property to men:

> ...unlike man, she should not be a bread-earner. For this reason, it must be legislated that her needs be satisfied by the man upon whom must be imposed her sustenance. For this the man must be compensated. He must own her, but not she him. Thus she cannot be married to another at the same time. But in the case of man this avenue is not closed to him though he is forbidden from taking a number of wives whom he cannot support. Hence the compensation consists in the ownership of the woman's "genitalia." By the ownership of the genitalia I do not mean sexual intercourse. For the [pleasure] of sexual intercourse is common to both. The woman's share is even greater, as is her delight with the pleasure in children. By this I mean that no other man can make use of them.[110]

Ibn Sīnā's concept of women seems more radical than those of any other Muslim's scholars. His hostility towards women extends beyond marking women's bodies as sexual, dangerous, disloyal, and irrational. He bluntly states that a woman's genitalia are the property of a man, and yet to say such a thing is to imply that she, as a whole, is a piece of property or an object. Indeed, Ibn Sīnā states that a husband must "own" his wife's genitalia so that she will not make them available for other men. Yet, even if Ibn Sīnā expresses his concern for a couple's fidelity, why did he rest the argument upon the ownership of genitalia? On what basis should a husband own a wife's genitalia, a part that belongs to the female body and is external to the male body? Of course, we can all own something external to us and incorporate it into our bodies. However, a human bodily part cannot be subject to ownership unless we have it transplanted into our bodies, as in the case of organ or tissue transplants. The genitalia of a woman belong to her, however, and as a human being, she exists as an individual and as a separate entity from a man. Indeed, the bonds of marriage, in a sense, join two different bodies into one union. However, marriage in Islam does not dwell on the ownership of a woman's body and her organs, but on mutual and shared love and compassion.

The male superiority in marriage is reaffirmed by the appropriate (in the eyes of Muslim philosophers, at least) construction of women in terms of men's needs and interests in society. Like Muslims in general, Muslim philosophers generally view the most fitting roles for women—suiting their natural disposition and serving male interests at the familial and societal levels—as those of wives and mothers. Muslims' pride in motherhood and wifehood finds its profoundest support in the Qur'ān and the prophetic tradition. While the Qur'ān mentions motherhood in terms of women's reproductive ability (Q.S. al-Nisā', 4:1 and Q.S. Luqmān, 31:14), the cultural social construct demands that every woman become a mother.

The Prophet equates motherhood with the hardship a woman has to go through. Other *ahādīth* state that the woman who is pregnant and breastfeeds the baby for as long as necessary and dies in the process will receive a reward equivalent to that of a martyr.[111] Martyrdom in the time of the Prophet—whose life was dedicated to building and defending the newly founded religion, often at a great price—was yearned after by all Muslims, both women and men.[112] Muslim women, for their part, had asked the Prophet for the right to fight alongside men on the battlefield, but the Prophet's answer was to encourage them to reproduce instead, equating this with military service. At the same time, he did not rule out the possibility of women partaking actively in wars.[113] He even on many occasions brought his wives along on campaign. In this sense, he acknowledged the military skills of both men and women.

In the course of time, his wife, 'Ā'ishah, left her quarters to lead an army at the battle of the Camel. Her leadership required her to be on the front lines of the battle. One may wonder why 'Ā'ishah decided to get involved in a military expedition against 'Alī, who was also the Prophet's most beloved cousin and his son-in-law. What would the Prophet have said if he had been asked for his advice? Would he have forbidden 'Ā'ishah to participate in the war, for the reason she was a woman? 'Ā'ishah was the Prophet's favorite wife: her courage and intelligence stood out and, in fact, her religious authority remained strong even after the death of the Prophet. However, 'Ā'ishah's personal, political, and religious authority never generates a model of autonomy as a significant feminine trait, because the society in which she lived was in the midst of a transition into more segregated private and public spheres.

What the jurists construe from the prophetic saying is that the most appropriate role for a woman is to be a mother, while they care less about other prophetic examples that are friendly to women. The jurists' legal opinions are interwoven with other received notions, as follows:

- a wife's proper place is in the house[114]
- the potential harm a woman causes from going out and its prohibition[115]
- a good woman does not lay eyes on other men[116]
- a wife's obedience to her husband and its reward[117]
- the parents' obligation to marry off their daughters[118]
- the prohibition to spend a husband's earning without his permission[119]
- a wife's devotion to her husband in the house and its reward[120]
- a wife's obligation to educate children, especially after the death of her husband and its reward.[121]

While Muslim jurists nurture, reiterate, and perpetuate these prophetic teachings, Muslim men impose these values upon *their women*. Muslim women for their part do not feel that they are the object of the male imposition of prophetic teachings: they materialize them as the expressions of their unconditional devotion to God and the Prophet. With this in mind, Muslim women are never in the position to question the validity of the prophetic practical guidance. This reality is quite the contrary to what early Muslim women were accustomed to do, since they had direct access to the founder of Islamic authority.

The centrality of the Prophet Muḥammad in his newly founded community made him a religious and community leader whose thoughts and sayings constituted a "political body" that carried authority. Muslims came with all sorts of questions, including the issues of Muslim women and their rights. Not only was Muḥammad eager to answer them, he also frequently answered in a way that showed high regard for women. He was known for calling upon Muslims to be affectionate to their mothers, sisters, and wives. He also extended his compassion to Muslim women by treating them as humans and encouraging them to participate in education, public affairs, military, and the economy.

Showing kindness to close female and male relatives is a good habit and instills the virtue of kindness in others. It conveys the ethical message that if all Muslims learn to show respect to their female and male relatives out of duty, they will pay a similar respect to others. It is often said that husbands in the Muslim world do not respect their wives as much as western husbands do, but that at the same time, sons in the Muslim world respect their mothers more than sons in the West.[122] This statement begs for further explanation. If sons are trained to respect their mothers, it follows that they would pay a similar respect to women in general. Given the context of respecting and caring to one's mother in the middle of the war, the Prophetic saying of respecting and caring for mothers three times[123] conveys the ethical message of respecting women as class. In this sense, if sons are taught to hold their mother in high esteem, they would treat their wives, female friends, and daughters in good manner.

Even though the prophetic practical guidance shows that respectful of the mothers are due to their biological sacrifice for their children, it does not rule out the possibility to respect women as a whole. By this, it does not mean that all women should become mothers since many women could not bear children, just like many barren husbands could not beget offspring. Regrettably, wifehood and motherhood are withheld high as if women's worth as humans are determined by these two ideal roles. Philosophers look at these ideal roles of women on the ground of their disposition and characteristics, which eventually lead them to posit a universal concept of what is appropriate for women. In this regard, the concept of gender is constructed based on what women do rather than who they are. Even if women are seen as who they are, these women are described as the opposites of men, because the female nature is more fitted for childbearing, nurturing, and care taking. Their self-existence is also defined as the extension of the family whose dependency lends them financial support, control, discipline, and guardianship.

The conflated concept of a woman as a wife and/or a mother remains the locus of gender construction in Muslim societies. The importance of these roles as "the most

sacred and essential one" that shapes the future of the nation is a common view.[124] In the Middle East, the view of women "as wives and mothers, and gender segregation is customary, if not legally required."[125] Youssef shares a similar view with Moghadam's observation that[126]

> Tight control through an early and parentally supervised/controlled marriage, as well as strict seclusion before that event, instill the idea that only one life exists for the woman. Motivation is channeled in the direction of marriage by creating desire for familial roles, by extolling the reward accruing from the wife-mother status, by severe community censure of spinsterhood.

Muslim women in the predominantly Muslim countries, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, experience the same faith, just like their sisters in the Middle East in that they are succumbed to the conflated view of women as reproduces and mothers.[127] The same is true for Muslim women as minorities in China and Australia in which their lives are confined to the role of motherhood.[128] At any rate, motherhood appears to be woman's priority in every culture regardless of their religious affiliation. Eisentein argues that[129]

> ...the sexual division of labor that assigns childbearing/rearing and domestic labor to women applies cross-culturally and produces significant similarities in women's lives. Motherhood remains the domain of women.

Wifehood and motherhood are, therefore, not simply associated with women's reproductive organs, but mark their existence and identity in the world. Accordingly, not only are girls encouraged, and sometimes forced to get married, they are systematically domesticated to the household world. I am not arguing that being a homemaker as a wife and/or a mother is not rewarding. My concern is that the systematic "housewifization" and the mystification of a caring wife and nurturing mother negate women's self-determination, choice, and autonomy. Mothers and wives could definitely choose to be full-time mothers or wives as they wish depending on the priorities they are committed too.

The cultural and religious mystification of wifehood and motherhood restrict women's world to the household of her parents or, later, husband. Indeed, many women have access to public life to work, study, or perform other duties, but they do not enjoy the same liberty and opportunities as their male counterparts would enjoy. Women continue to be subjected to a multiplicity of restrictions and limitations because they are constantly seen as a potential threat for social disorder.[130] In Saudi Arabia, for instance, women are not allow to drive because

> [w]omen driving leads to many evils and negative consequences. Included among these is her mixing with men without her being on her guard. It also leads to the evil sins due to which such an action is forbidden. The Pure Law forbids those acts that lead to forbidden acts and considers those means to be forbidden also.[131]

Women are not allowed to work, but to remain in their houses because interaction with men at workplaces would be a "very dangerous matter that has dangerous consequences and negative results."[132] Similarly, if women were absent from the house, no one would take care of the family, especially the men. Since taking care of the family and being in the house suit the nature of women, they are destined to be morally responsible for it. If the family prospers, society will be more prosperous and there would be no promiscuity.

It is quite understandable that some women should want to stay home for religious and personal reasons, but to generalize that all women should do so is to ignore the need of some women to provide sustenance for their families. It is true that the patriarchal agnatic family system requires fathers and later husbands to provide finance, shelter, food, and clothing for those in their care. However, there are horrendous and irresponsible hierarchical and gender-minded Muslim fathers and husbands who get away from responsibility to care for their families. They leave women with nothing but the responsibility to care for the children's well-being and education. Women also often stay with their abusive fathers and/or husbands for the reason they do not have any capital to exit an abusive relationship. Muslim governments usually lack infrastructure and legal system that protect women from abusive families. Instead, violence against women is often justified with religious beliefs. Women cannot return to their parents' houses since such an act is the threat to the family's honor and good social standing.

Women's lack of ability to decide for their lives and of access to education and opportunities that upgrade their life's condition impinge on the self-realization of their potential. One may argue that this kind of life is not universal to all women. Certainly, exceptions exist. There are women who excel in religion, politics, wealth, and career. But, this is not what the majority of Muslim women have. If women were to work, they have to compete with other male prospective workers within the workplaces that are specifically designed for male workers. Many women have their jobs as the extension of their household responsibility, like cooking, taking care the family, and cleaning. While privileged Muslim women stay home, they also at the same time have imported their Muslim sisters from the less fortunate Muslim countries in wealth to do dirty jobs. While privileged Muslim women are forbidden to work outside the houses for religious reason and for preventing any unforeseeable dangerous consequences, some foreign Muslim sisters work, eat, and sleep in these houses. While privileged Muslim women travel for vacation or study abroad, these households' workers extend their services to cater their needs in the foreign countries. These foreign Muslim sisters embark to work in the unknown world to fulfill their religious obligation to care for the family left behind in their home countries.

However different the lived experiences women have illustrates the multitude of sexual, gender, and familial constructs in Muslim societies. Philosophical texts capture the intertwined pronouncement of what is appropriate and inappropriate for women in Muslims' context, as an expression of what the public perceives as the truth. In this sense, the confluence of Islamic doctrine, gender difference, and power relations perpetuates the status quo of gender thinking, expectation, and appropriation.

In this multiplicity of religious, cultural, and social expressions, women continue to be subjected to the production hierarchical theory and practice of gender at the private and public spheres.

Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that gender thinking shapes the ways Muslims interpret the expositions of particularism in the Islamic teaching and apply particular interpretation into the religious, social, and philosophical constructs of sexual and gender difference and the system it produces. In particular, I have elaborated how the religious legitimacy in the different locality in Muslim countries has an effect on the construction of sexual and gender difference that is materialized at the personal and familial levels.

As the appropriation of sexual difference entails gender difference, women's roles are conceptualized relative to men's roles and needs. Women as wives are frequently expected to be sexually available, economically beneficial, and efficient manager in household works, fertile child-bearers, as well as nurturing, caring, and loving mothers. Remarkably, many women embrace the constructed roles as rewarding. They internalize the care for household responsibilities, children and even elderly as fitting their natural disposition. They never in a wink think that the strict sexual division of labor tyrannizes them.

Many women tirelessly maintain the inherited status quo of the dominant hierarchy of gender as their own constitution of their self-becoming. Their participatory engagement in constituting male demands, needs, and interests drives women to becoming others without any reciprocal and mutual relationship. What is considered a "reciprocal and mutual" relationship at this point is the satisfaction and appropriation women get for meeting the male need. Even if women desire for "reciprocal and mutual" relationship in the sense that they could speak their mind to their parents, husbands, or male counterparts, they would hesitate to embody authority, rationality, and independence. Not because all these characters belong to men, but socially and culturally, women with these traits will find life more complicated. Hence, it is more convenient for women to comply with the ruling ideology and norms.

The existing status quo of sexual and gender difference as the system is not only exercised by men on their immediate family members, but also are among women who instill their ideal portrayal of women in their in-laws. Mothers share the kind of gender thinking in that they make every attempt to ensure that their sons continue the legacy of masculine depiction of ideal Muslim men who are in charge of their wives. The fathers and sons set a model in which mothers are the ideal women to which the gendered construction of being an ideal woman succumbs. For this reason, the whole construct of dominant and patriarchal gender system is so profoundly rooted in each individual so that to uproot it sounds impossible.

In this context, the conformity and acceptance to the cultural elevation of women in their capacity as wives and mothers as necessary for the perpetuation of the human race[133] find its justification in the gendered interpretation of the creation theories.

The appropriation of gender difference as a system reiterates the intentional creation of women and their origin depicted in the Adam story, as will be seen in Chapter 2. Embedded in this story is the partnership of men and women in reproduction, in which a woman's womb is intended to as the "place" multiply. It follows that the female's role in reproduction and its extended responsibility is not only natural, but is also religiously divine, socio-culturally rewarding, and politically fulfilling the female's interest in the household and the male's need to take care the public affairs.