

Women and Religion in the Middle East and the Mediterranean

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Ingvar B. Mæhle and Inger Marie Okkenhaug (eds.)

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Innhold

Introduction: Gender, Religion and Social Change in the Middle East and Mediterranean <i>Ingvar Mæhle and Inger Marie Okkenhaug</i>	7
Women in Classical Athens – In the Shadow of North-west Europe or in the Light from Istanbul <i>Jørgen Christian Meyer</i>	19
Female Cult in the Struggle of the Orders <i>Ingvar Mæhle</i>	49
Mission and Education as Liberating Strategies: The Case of Mabel Warburton <i>Inger Marie Okkenhaug</i>	67
Between tradition and modernity: A radical Muslim view on the Interpretation of Gender Roles in Islam <i>Åsne Halskau</i>	85
Women as Ritual Performers <i>Ingvild Flaskerud</i>	99
“You shall not abuse any widow”. Biblical traditions and women’s human rights <i>Eva Maria Lassen</i>	121
Can a woman decide upon her marriage? <i>Susanne Dahlgren</i>	141
Sufism in the District of the Conqueror. The Construction and Use of Historical Mirrors <i>Catharina Raudvere</i>	155

WOMEN AND RELIGION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

Introduction: Gender, Religion and Social Change in the Middle East and Mediterranean

Ingvar Mæhle and Inger Marie Okkenhaug

The papers published in this anthology all address two central questions: Is religion the sacred justification of oppressive patriarchal societies? Or does religion provide a possibility for independent action, an arena for autonomous female activities? From a Western point of view it is easy to answer the first question in the affirmative and the second in the negative. Western, liberal, and democratic societies are often seen to be founded on the rejection of tradition and the deliberate displacement of religion from the public to the private sphere. In concordance with this view, tradition, and the influence of religion are regarded as obstacles to the implementation of women's rights in Middle Eastern societies. With examples drawn from ancient Greece and Rome, ancient Judea, and 19th century Turkey, Palestine and Iran, the participants in the Bergen workshop on Gender and Religion, the 12th of September 2001 demonstrated that this is not the whole story. If we are to enter into a dialogue between East and West on the topic of women's rights, we need to know more about the possibilities that are realised *within* tradition. This may point the way to a more constructive discourse also on other, politically more pressing issues with Middle Eastern societies in general and Islam in particular

The increasing polarization between the Western World and the Arabic countries after the 11th of September 2001 has strengthened the Western belief that Islam is a major part of the problem. Compromise and consensus to both political and social problems may however be found if Islam is treated as part of the solution to these problems. The first step towards a better understanding is to realize that the extremist voices on either side are rarely representative of the majority opinion even within the male community. The second step is to realize that male statements on women's place in society must not be taken as adequate descriptions of the social reality experienced by women. The third step towards a constructive dialogue is to take seriously the attempt by Moslem intellectuals, like Riffat Hassan (presented in Åsne Halskau's essay), to conceptualise human rights and women's rights in the language of their own tradition. In a word: Tradition is a plurality, not a monolithic, patriarchal and authoritarian structure.

Feminism has served the West well, and may also be beneficial to the Middle East. The mainstream feminist insistence on equality of rights, as pointed out in Christian Meyer's essay, may however, obscure our understanding of the division of space, labour and social functions between the male and female sphere in traditional societies. The women's confinement to the "home is not a similar restriction in a Turkish village like Catalcam as it would be in a suburb of a European city. "The home", where the women rule supreme, comprises approximately 75% of the village in geographical terms, and in economic terms perhaps even more. Men and women do not compete, as they do in modern industrial societies, in the same arenas. They compete within their respective arenas, and it is not evident that the male arena is the most important. In Christian Meyer's view, the practical exclusion of women from politics and interaction with the governmental apparatus, does not make the female sphere subordinate to the male sphere. The two spheres, rather, are co-ordinated and based on autonomy, equilibrium and co-ordination. The male chitchat in the teahouses is of little significance and the men's involvement with the larger world outside the village is not something to be envied.

The gender-based division of Catalcam society has nothing to do with the fact that Turkey is predominantly Moslem. Christian Meyer argues that a simi-

INTRODUCTION

lar division between the male and female spheres is found in the pagan Greek and Roman sources. In his dialectical interpretation the social superstructure is a function of the economic base. There may or may not have been continuities from ancient into modern times in Turkey; we have no way of knowing. Meyer's point is that urbanised or semi urbanised pre-industrial rural economies with a similar mode of production will, with a high degree of probability, produce similar social superstructures, even when they are separated by thousands of years, or by oceans, mountains and languages. Religion may reinforce existing social mores, and more specifically the relationship between men and women. More often than not, however, the religion itself is a function of these social mores or its current interpretation is an adaptation to them. One may add to Meyer's argument that the legal strictures on female behaviour was institutionalised first, not by the Quran, but by the Law Code of King Hammurabi, the ruler of present day Iraq, in the second millennium BC, and also by the Hittites (Turkey) in the middle of the Second Millennium BC and by the Assyrians (the Entire Middle East) in the beginning of the first millennium BC. Most of the regulations were however probably in existence in social practise prior to their codification, and many of the paragraphs, especially concerning adultery, rape and the extensive powers of the male head of the household, are found again in the Iron Age Democracies and Aristocracies of Greece and Rome.

The Rulers of the Middle East depicted themselves as the righters of wrongs and the protectors of widows and orphans. The historian Eva Marie Lassen shows how the god Jahve gave the Israelites similar obligations, and she discusses the relation between the protection of widows in Judaism and early Christianity on the one hand and the rights of women in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) on the other. Although there are sufficient similarities between Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism and so forth on basic values, to make dialogue between protagonists of the various religions and the advocates of the Human Rights charter possible, there are, as her test case shows, also important differences. While the biblical norms of the Old Testament focus on the protection of the widow and the fulfilment of her needs, Human

Rights, in addition, stresses the principle of equality between the sexes and each individual's right of self-determination. Whereas the Bible speaks of a general obligation, within the framework of a minimal state-apparatus to support the widow, in modern Human Rights each individual has specific rights versus the state. Lassen points out that the difference between a religious obligation and a Human Right is not as clear-cut as it would seem on the surface. Despite attempts to make Human Rights legally enforceable, this remains an unfulfilled ideal. We may add that the focus on Human Rights issues in the West has typically been in regard to political rights rather than social and economic rights, and the struggle has primarily been associated with the activities of Amnesty International and not The International Red Cross and other humanitarian aid organisations.

The early Christian communities debated whether widows should remarry or devote themselves to religious contemplation and work for the congregation. Although the Christian church, with their praise of sexual abstinence, opened up spheres of action for women outside the family, this sphere was fairly limited. The ideal remained that women should live quietly within the family as wives and mothers. Widows were a liability, both economically and morally. Lassen shows, moreover, how the Pastoral letters introduced different categories of widows, thereby limiting the number of worthy recipients of community charity. This makes the link between the New Testament and modern Human Rights even less straightforward. Her point, however, is not that Human Rights can be read directly out of the Old Testament, New Testament or the Quran, but that the believers in these and other Holy Scriptures are indispensable allies in the struggle for human rights. This is why an awareness of the similarities as well as the differences between Scripture and Human Rights is indispensable if progress is to be achieved. Lassen's essay may be read both as a warning to Human Rights activists against rejecting religious traditions wholesale and as a warning against the relativistic tendency, exemplified in Christian Meyer's essay, to downplay the destructive power of patriarchal society.

Ingvar Mæhle's essay on female religious cults in the social and political struggles of archaic Rome starts with the premise that there must be something

INTRODUCTION

wrong as well as something useful, in both of these approaches. Rights matter, but they are not the only determinants of social reality. There may be separate spheres, and informants in the male sphere probably tend to underestimate the power of the female sphere, but that does not make the spheres equally powerful. The fact that the male sphere enjoys a virtual monopoly of symbolic power says something about the relation of power between the sexes. The subordination model applied by feminist scholars to ancient societies finds ready confirmation in the misogynist writings of ancient literature. The ancient societies are measured by their non-conformity with modern norms and the result is a moralistic, rather than a historical picture of the ancients. The alternative, more anthropological approach, proposed by Christian Meyer, is to take the traditions seriously and investigate what really goes on between men and women. His induction from contemporary experience to historical reality remains a hypothesis, or an analytical model if you like. But this is a minor point, willingly conceded by Meyer himself. Mæhle points out, however, that just as the ancient authors confirm the feminist scholars worst suspicions, even the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, we may add, could subscribe to his model of harmonious equilibrium. The crux of the matter, according to Mæhle, is not whether the spheres are in equilibrium, but exactly where the point of balance in this equilibrium is.

As an alternative model for the ancient world, he proposes the encapsulation model, adapted from F. G. Bailey's description of local government in *Stratagems and Spoils, A Social Anthropology of Politics* (1968). Viewed from this perspective the female sphere enjoyed a considerable amount of internal self-government but little immunity against male incursion into their realm. Although female social networks were powerful, and according to Mæhle played a significant part in the power struggles in the early Roman Republic, their place in the hierarchies of these networks was not only determined by their social skills and administrative abilities, but just as much by their husbands' place in the official hierarchies in the male sphere. Unlike men, their place in society was not only determined by birth, age and gender, but also by their sexuality. Virginity, marital fidelity and motherhood were not merely descriptive terms, but also the basis for legal rights, religious functions and social status.

Although the encapsulation model is presented as an alternative to both the subordination model of the feminists, brilliantly exemplified in several works by Eva Marie Lassen and the equilibrium model of Christian Meyer, this does not mean that Mæhle proposes to replace these other models from scholarly discourse. While the subordination model may be more useful in an analysis of Taliban Afghanistan (now no longer in existence) despite the Taliban leaders claim of equilibrium, and the encapsulation model may be more appropriate for ancient Rome, despite the Roman writers insistence on subordination, the equilibrium model may indeed be the most useful in studying villages such as Catalcam in Turkey. The models, in Niels Bohr's words, are complementary. The application of different models on a particular research object gives different results. Ultimately, they should all be taken into account, and their merit judged by their results rather than ideological preconceptions.

Catharina Raudvere's essay on Sufism in Istanbul applies this theoretical, cross-cultural discussion to everyday life in the Fatih district of Istanbul. This is one of the oldest and most pious part of the city, and also a stronghold of the Islamic party. The Sufi concept of order, *tarikât*, has generally been translated with "brotherhood", and these formalised and hierarchical male Sufi orders have been the main focus of scholarly study. The aim of Raudvere's anthropological fieldwork in the 1990s was to discover how a Sufi "sisterhood" in Istanbul worked. She found an independent group of Sufi women more loosely organised into a foundation, a so-called *vakif*. This *vakif* was subsequently formalised, according to the participants themselves, in order to secure the economic and religious independence of the foundation.

This religious activism is a form of female liberation within the Sunni tradition, and runs counter to western style modernisation. Rather than freeing women from the grasp of Islam, the strictures imposed by the Turkish republican regime on religious activities in general and Sufi orders in particular, drove religious women even further into the domestic space. The forced invisibility of religious foundations, in which women had participated for centuries, aborted the possibility for an autonomous women's movement. One of the counter reactions to this secularisation is female empowerment through religious activism. The Sufi *vakif* may therefore point towards the future, a modernisation on

INTRODUCTION

the women's own terms, even though the activists themselves claim to be recapturing an idealised past. Whether or not the parallel political counter reaction at the polls points towards the future, remains to be seen. What both these phenomena illustrate, however, are the wishes of large segments of Turkish women and men to conceptualise the future in the terms of their own tradition. The West needs to understand that modernity does not have to be secular.

While the anthropologist Catharina Raudvere's essay focuses on the economic, organisational and spatial context of a female Sufi ritual, the historian of religion Ingvild Flakerud creates a detailed picture of a specific ritual, the female commemoration of Imam Hussein's martyrdom. Raudvere's ritual takes place among Sunni Moslems in the secularised republic of Turkey, whereas Flakerud's ritual-performers are Shia Moslems in the Islamic republic of Iran. Moreover, Sufi ritual is essentially esoteric, in marked contrast to the Muharram-celebration of Imam Hussein's martyrdom, which involves the Shia-community at large. Despite these differences in method and theme, the two essays reveal important similarities, the most important of which is the realisation that religious activities has the potential to empower women within their own sphere of competence. This is clearly brought out in Flakerud's observation that the common picture of the down-trodden Iranian woman, passively watching the men's ritual from behind the veil, only corresponds to the reality of gender-mixed rituals. In her own words: "If the researcher would focus on female gender-specific contexts a whole world of women's ritual competence and practise would inevitably open up."

She then proceeds to elaborate on the gender-specific part of this important ritual for us, the details of which we will not anticipate here. In view of the discussion above, however, it is important to note the role of the *maddah*, the woman who by virtue of her religious competence, singing voice and above all, charisma, leads the ceremonies, educates the participants and wins renown for her excellence. Clearly this is a case of an autonomous action by the female sphere, with its own hierarchies and independent resources. It hardly matters what the male community may say or think about it. Nonetheless, the fact remains that women are excluded from all official, religious functions. This is a disadvantage for which unofficial religious cults, extensive networks and a cer-

tain measure of internal self-government in the female sphere cannot fully compensate. Flaskerud's findings, on the other hand, remind us that the reality is much more complex, and is perhaps even more promising, than the spokesmen of the Iranian regime will allow for.

Feminism has its roots firmly planted in European and American soil, but our particular kind of feminism, with its stress on individual rights and equality between the sexes in all areas of society, is not the only variety in existence. Ida Blom defines feminism as a foundation for action to redress the gender imbalance in women's access to power and rights in society. She includes strategies built on acceptance of women and men as basically different types, as for instance argued in Christian Meyer's paper discussed above. Her definition thus comprises both relational and individual feminism, which she sees as coexistent not only within groups of women but also within the individual woman.¹ Relational and individual feminism can be seen as the "two faces" of feminism.² While the individualist feminist tradition stresses individual human rights, relational feminism emphasises women's rights as *women*, defined principally by their childbearing and/or nurturing capacities, and the idea that women are fundamentally different from, and even superior to, men. This superiority has been linked to their traditional roles as mothers and housewives.³ While the individualist feminist model is difficult to reconcile with the teachings of Islam, many Moslem reformers in the 19th and 20th century have endorsed the relational model.

There are, however more radical voices. Riffat Hassan's brand of feminism does not limit itself to the improvement of the living conditions within the female sphere and the strengthening of the female sphere versus the male sphere. She claims that the Quran itself guarantees the equal rights of women in all areas of society and that the subordination of women, masked as "eq-

¹ I. Blom "Feminism and Nationalism in the Early Twentieth Century: A Cross-Cultural Perspective" in *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 7 No. 4 : 81-94.

² Ibid: 82.

³ K. Offen "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach" in *Signs* 1988 vol. 14, no. 1: 119-157 and E. Lønnå *Stolthet og kvinnekamp: Norsk kvinnesaksforenings historie fra 1913* Oslo 1996: 85.

INTRODUCTION

uity”, is based on patriarchal interpretation and not the word of Allah. Åsne Halskau presents a female, Moslem scholar who insists that the traditional spheres should be transcended, not as a revolt against Islam, but as a return to the “Spirit” of Islam. In a word: Individualist feminism is hard to reconcile with the teachings of Islam, only because the teachers have misrepresented Islam. Rather than give up on individual freedom and equal opportunities, she advocates a return to the sources and a treatment of the Quran as an “open text” rather than a closed book, interpreted by the patriarchs once and for all.

Inger Marie Okkenhaug addresses the religion versus feminism controversy from a Western perspective, and a colonial, missionary and maternalistic perspective at that. In her case study of the missionary and educationalist Mable Warburton’s work in the British Mandate of Palestine, she discusses whether the British middle class women who took upon themselves “the white woman’s burden” can properly be described as feminists. Barbara Ramusack pointedly formulated the problem in her study of British women activists in India:

Is it possible for women from one race or ethnic group to effectively promote reforms or institutions designed to modify or improve the conditions of women of another race or ethnic group in a colonial society that embodies such a pervasive dominant-subordinate power structure?⁴

Her analytical categories “cultural missionary”, “maternal imperialist” and “feminist ally” have been adapted by several historians who focus on British social reformers’ and missionaries’ efforts to promote social reforms within an imperial relationship.

According to Ramusack’s definitions, the “cultural missionaries” wanted to transfer British models of social and political improvement for women to the colonies, while the “maternal imperialists” saw the indigenous women as immature daughters who needed socialisation in order to reach their adult rights and responsibilities.⁵ These two categories tend to overlap, and Ramusack her-

⁴ K. Ramusack “Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies: British Women Activists in India, 1865-1945” in N. Chauduri & M. Strobel (ed.) 1992: 119-136.

⁵ Ibid: 120 Ramusack defines “cultural missionaries” as women who preached the gospel of women’s uplift based on models evolved in England.

self ends up preferring to enclose the “cultural missionaries” within the term “maternal imperialists.” This is a female counterpart to the paternalistic autocracy that characterised British political imperialism in India, which was justified as a preparation of child-like Indians for self-government. The third category, “feminist allies”, were women whose personality and skills made them able to understand and sympathise with the local women, and who created institutional and personal alliances in order to achieve improved conditions. An individual woman, however, might embody two, or all three, of the categories.

The usefulness of the term “maternalist imperialist” as an analytical category is questioned in two prominent works on western women and colonial history, namely in Billie Melman’s *Women’s Orient: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918* and Kumari Jayawardena’s *The White Woman’s Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia During British Rule*. Both authors’ argue that the term “maternalist imperialist” tends to homogenise the experience of the First World Woman. Especially their view of Eastern women is thus over-simplified and plead that *there were other, different ways in which women had engaged in the colonial project*.⁶ Jayawardena argues that there was a genuine empathy with, and wish to elevate the status of, indigenous women. In her thorough empirical study of missionaries and social and political reformers in South Asia, Jayawardena shows that also the female missionaries were conscious of the status of local women: *their work for women in health and education reflected awareness about women’s problems*.⁷ These women would be “feminist allies” according to Ramusack’s categories.

Okkenhaug concludes that Mabel Warburton was a feminist ally in Jayawardena’s sense of the word, and may even, in the wider definition of feminism given above, be described as a feminist. Warburton’s work for Palestinian women, though organised within a colonial, missionary and maternalist structure, nonetheless benefited the girls who received education in her schools. Her activities not only had a liberating effect on Arab women, but were also a part of her own libera-

⁶ Ibid: xxv.

⁷ K. Jayawardena *The White Woman’s Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia During British Rule* (Routledge) London/NY 1995: 25.

INTRODUCTION

tion from the paternalistic structures of British society. Religion legitimised the missionary women's increased freedom of movement, which in turn paved the way for their employment in other professions. Although the relations between the missionaries and the indigenous population were vertical, in the form of patron-client relationships, Warburton's reforms were anti-racist, based on respect and equal treatment. She was able to share "the white woman's burden" of enlightenment with the indigenous women on an equal basis, and thereby contributed to their empowerment.

The British administrators in Colonial Aden, taking upon themselves "the white man's burden", had a less fortunate influence on the women's position. Susanne Dahlgren's study of legislation and litigation in Colonial Aden (1937-1960) demonstrates, through a selection of court cases, that the British administrators declared policy of non-interference with the "custom and religion" of their subjects, or wards, was only a myth. The Anglo-Muhammadan legal practise was clearly a distortion of the religious practises prevalent in Aden before the colonial encounter, and in the judicial system British judges interpreted local customs according to their own interpretations. Their interpretations of local customs, involved a distorted and prejudiced conception of male-female relations, based on very conservative ideas of "the Moslem Woman".

Dahlgren's findings suggest that religion became an additional device of oppression in patriarchal Aden, not despite of, but because of the British administration. The patriarchal structure of the colonial power reinforced, through the medium of incompetence and cultural arrogance, the patriarchal structure of the colony. In Raudevere's study of Turkish Sufi women, in Flaskerud's study of Iranian Shia-women, in Halskau's presentation of a Muslim feminist and in Okkenhaug's study of Christian missionaries, we have seen that religion can also serve as an instrument of female empowerment. Whether religion reinforces female oppression or provides opportunities for women, or a combination of both, depends on time, place and circumstances. The cross-cultural essays by Meyer, Lassen and Mæhle, comparing the ancient and modern world, discuss this basic point from a theoretical and historical perspective. While it may be possible to pin social changes in gender relations to religious changes in isolated cases, generally, the sources do not permit such inferences.

WOMEN AND RELIGION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

More importantly, what we learn from our sources or informants depend on which model we apply. When we study “the others” we are simultaneously studying “ourselves”. The more methodologically pluralistic the approach is, the richer and more nuanced understanding will be gained.

Women in Classical Athens – In the Shadow of North-west Europe or in the Light from Istanbul

Jørgen Christian Meyer

Being a woman in classical Athens cannot have been much fun, if one can rely on the majority of the accounts of women's position in the Greek city-state. The Athenian democracy, traditionally held in high esteem in many other ways, was a democracy of the minority. Women, foreigners and slaves had no influence or true civil rights. They lived in the shadow of the Parthenon and the Acropolis.

Sarah B. Pomeroy's influential monograph, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (1976) paints a dark picture. Men held a monopoly on politics and influence in the public sphere, and women lived in a society completely dominated by men. From childhood, girls were raised to their role of producing new citizens for the *polis*. Athenian society was extremely exclusive and only rarely allowed foreigners a share in the privileges of the citizens. Thus it was important to ensure that the women gave birth to legitimate heirs. This led to great limitations on young women's freedom of movement and on their sexuality during their reproductive years, whether they were married or unmarried (Keuls 1985). Women were kept isolated indoors, according to Pomeroy even in a special part of the house, the so-called *gynaikonitis* (Pomeroy 1976, 80). If a family had no male heir, the daughter,

epikleros, who thus carried on the paternal line, was forced to accept being married off to the closest male relative to ensure that the family's financial resources were kept within the family. At puberty, the young girls were married to men who were around thirty years old or more. Although it was quite easy for both parties to obtain a divorce, the starting point created an unequal balance of power between the man and the woman in marriage. Moreover, the woman was totally dependent on a guardian, *kyrios*, if she wanted to make contact with society outside the *oikos*.

But women in Athens did not constitute one homogeneous group. Some women had far greater freedom of movement and influence in this male dominated society. Aspasia, the great politician and general Pericles' mistress in the fifth century BC, is especially well known. She was a *hetaera*, which is a citizen's permanent mistress, more or less an equivalent to the courtesan in later French society. Many of the *hetaerae* were well versed in poetry, music and social conditions in general. In the men's world, they could participate in debates from which a woman citizen was completely cut off. On the other hand, perhaps with a few exceptions, the *hetaera* had foregone the possibility of bringing legitimate heirs into the world and become part of a normal household. Many have pointed out that the borderline with prostitution proper was blurred and that the status as *hetaera* was not a true alternative for Athenian women of middle-class families.

Quite apart from the *hetaerae*, there also was a difference between rich and poor families and perhaps also women from families with metic status. Women from poor families could not live up to the norms of society, but, on the other hand, were able to leave the house to sell bread and agricultural products and to participate in the work in the field on an equal footing with the men. For women of the middle and upper classes the situation was very different and not enviable:

The empty life of the Greek woman of the upper or middle class, deprived of interest or gratifications, was not even repaid by the knowledge that her relationship with her husband was exclusive. This was not necessarily because he had a relationship with another man, though that happened often enough; quite frequently he had relationships with other women that were socially and even, in part, legally recognised. (Cantarella 1987, 46f.)

WOMEN IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

From this viewpoint, it was an advantage for a woman to belong to the lower classes in classical Athens.

Older authors such as AM. Gomme (1925) and H.D.F. Kitto (1951, 219 ff.) tried to paint a brighter picture of the Athenian woman's position in society. Gomme referred to distinctive female characters such as Medea, Clytemnestra, Antigone and Electra in Greek tragedies: In Attic tragedy women come and go from their houses at will and play an important and public part (Gomme 1925, 98f). But the tragedies represent a special genre in which the intention is not to portray ordinary life. The female characters inhabit a place in a tragic, symbolic universe where the tragic authors' intention possibly was to turn the social order upside down. The audience is thrown into a state of shock and horror and thus the tragedies became a way to indoctrinate the citizens with the polis' true social values (Bouvrie 1990). Another problem is that the remaining sources are hardly edifying reading. The passage most frequently cited is Pericles' famous funeral speech, from 431 BC, to the widows during the Peloponnesian War:

Perhaps I should say a word or two on the duties of women to those among you who are now widowed. I can say all I have to say in a short word of advice. Your great glory is not to be inferior to what God made you, and the greatest glory of a woman is to be least talked about by men, whether they are praising you or criticising you. (Thuc. 2.46)

But not only that, the young Athenian girl was brought up under careful supervision to see as little as possible, hear as little as possible and question as little as possible:

'How, Socrates, he said, 'could she have known anything when I took her, since she came to me when she was not yet fifteen, and had lived previously under diligent supervision in order that she might see and hear as little as possible and ask the fewest possible questions? Doesn't it seem to you that one should be content if she came knowing only how to take the wool and make clothes, and had seen how the spinning work is distributed among the female attendants (Xenophon, Oec. 7.5).

Aristotle, though not himself a citizen, stresses the clear disadvantage of the female compared to the male. He believes that women are failed "males" and thus struggle with a significant handicap (*Hist. An.* 775a4-17). A woman's natural characteristics include envy, shiftiness, a greater tendency to pity and tears, cunning, despondency and lying. She needs to eat less because she is less

likely to do much (*Hist. An.* 608a11-608b18). One need hardly mention that the man's characteristics are the exact opposite. Semonides, from Samos, has nothing positive to say about women in his description of the creation from the 7th century BC and concludes:

Yet, this is the worst plague Zeus has made, and he has bound us to them with a fetter that cannot be broken. Because of this some have gone to Hades fighting for a woman. (7.115-118)

The woman mentioned here is the beautiful Helen, who was abducted by Paris of Troy. Semonides' contemporary, Hesiod from Boeotia, is just as critical. In his epic *Works and Days*, he presents a Greek myth about the fall of man. It was, of course, a woman, Pandora, who opened the box that held all the evils that might haunt mankind (77-105). Even though Xenophon paints a slightly more sympathetic picture of the relationship between husband and wife as two complementary creatures who in their differences complete each other inside *oikos* (Oec. 7-10) this does not change the overall picture. A few have even used the word misogyny to describe the attitude towards women not only in Athens but also in all of the Greek culture (Cantarella 1987).

This rather biased view should surely be modified. New studies show a much more detailed and varied picture (Gould 1980; Humphreys 1983; Just 1989; Sealey 1990). It has been pointed out that Pericles' speech should be judged on the basis that he is speaking to widows (Andersen 1987) and also that the source material for a special, permanent female section in the Athenian house is very doubtful, both in written and archaeological sources (Isager 1978; Walker 1983; Just 1989, 123; also Kent 1993). Women's importance to the existence of *polis* and its basic unit *oikos* is often stressed in economic and social life, and not just on the reproductive level. In the state cult, women performed important functions, especially in connection with the Panathenian festivals when the Athenian patron goddess, Athena, was celebrated, and at Thesmophoria, the feast for Demeter, which was meant to increase fertility among humans and in nature. The latter, very important festival excluded men. Ensuring the city-state's fertility and existence was thus not possible without women's participation. Others have pointed out that it was the requirements of the *polis* and not the power of men that determined the roles of the sexes.

WOMEN IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

The restrictions of the free woman's life in Athens did not reflect a devaluation of women. In democratic Athens, the requirements of the *polis*, the citizens' common interest, takes precedence. It is a state with a complete answer to the life of the members. So women's conditions can only be understood within a general view of *polis*. (Andersen 1985, 31; also Bouvrie 1990, 35ff. Finley 1977, 58). Here responsibility is transferred to *polis* as an institution. Many, especially feminist orientated academics, highlight the rise of state systems as the reason for the inequality in the balance of power between man and woman, and women are often given far more prominence in the earlier phases in the development of the human race, several even work with the existence of a matriarchy or at least a period in which women played as influential a role in public life as men (Lerner 1986; Cantarella 1987, 11-23). However, the fact that almost all surviving sources are written by men, and mirror men's perception of reality, precludes the possibility that future research may significantly alter the message of the ancients. A few attempts to show a dawning feminism and a rebellion against the *polis*' masculine set of values are not at all persuasive (Keuls 1985, 381 ff).

So it is surprising that Athenian women put up with what we must clearly define as oppression. Was the city-state's collective upbringing and the general socialization of the girls and the young women really so efficient that women did not appreciate their inferior position and thus were not able to formulate an alternative? Or was the collective system of power in the city-state so powerful in its laws, norms and rules that it was able to suppress any attempt to change status quo? I do not believe this, although I cannot prove it. But it is my conviction, that we have asked the wrong questions and that we, in particular, have used a totally wrong framework of understanding in our interpretation of the sources.

Of course, the concrete evidence in the sources is important. But it only makes sense when the sources' value is placed in a larger cultural framework. The sources are signs of a cultural context - they are not identical with that context. In other words, no matter how minutely the sources are studied, we cannot expect to discover this cultural understanding which in return is to make sense of the statements in the sources. We enter into the classic hermeneutic circle where details must be judged in relation to the entity, which in turn consists of the sum total of the details. The manifesto that the past must

be judged on its own merits is well and good, as it makes us more aware of the fact that societies may function according to principles quite different from our own, but logically it is impossible. The past will always be judged on modern premises. Luckily, modern premises are ambivalent and allow us to make some important choices before we study the sources. Thus the first question we pose is not to antiquity and the existing sources, but to ourselves. What modern basis for understanding have we previously used when dealing with women and men in classical Athens? What does it consist of, and what are its origins?

We, in the democracies of northwest Europe, look upon ourselves as the heirs to important parts of the classical culture. We speak of a classical legacy with both Greek and Roman components which includes how we view humanity, philosophy, political beliefs, judicial systems etc. With that, we have indirectly said that our society would have been very different without this cultural ballast. Rightly or wrongly, this understanding has governed the study into the cultures of the classical world. The most important centres for classical research are not in Athens or Rome; they are in Germany, England, and France and, in recent decades, also in the United States. Until now, foreign departments and academies in Greece and Italy have functioned on our academic, and thus also cultural, terms. If one seeks international academic recognition, it is important to be accepted in e.g. Cambridge and Princeton and cited in the works produced by those academic institutions.

The Greeks do not protest, even though their attitude to foreign academic's "right" to dig into the Greek past has become more ambivalent in recent years. The idea that classical Greece represents a common European heritage suits the Greek self-understanding and their strategy of cultural, political and geographical demarcation in relation to Turkey. The paradoxical result of this northwest-European dominance is that classical Greece "inherits" our culture, rather than the other way around (also Herzfeld 1987, especially 61 ff., Roberts 1994). Few critical voices have been raised. In his article, *The Mediterranean as a Category of Regional Comparison: a Critical View* from 1989, the Portuguese anthropologist Joao de Pina-Cabral is strongly provoked by the Anglo-Saxon view of important aspects of Mediterranean culture. As an example, he cites the stereotype picture of "the Mediterranean family", of femininity/masculinity combined with honour and dignity as it is portrayed in most academic dissertations. He asks whether these phe-

nomena are really that different from the behavioural patterns seen in English pubs dominated by members of the working class.

The borderline between antiquity and modern times is blurred. Our understanding of the so-called “traditional” aspects of individuals and family in Mediterranean cultures are often the basis on which we judge classical sources (Walcott 1970), combined with our culture's view of what makes a society a just society. The harem of the Islamic and Oriental society becomes an archetypal example of the imprisonment of women in Athens, as a negative term of reference (for instance Pomeroy 1975, 58). This does not mean that the reference necessarily is wrong, but that we must be aware that we study other peoples and their history in accordance with our own premises. This point has both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, a significant distance is often required in order to discover phenomena and behavioural patterns of which the “players” themselves are not aware. A parallel example of this is the psychologist's exposure of important unconscious facets in a patient, which the patient is unable to express. On the other hand, we lack a corresponding distance to our own culture and this is a serious limitation on the scope of questions asked and possible solutions envisaged in our research. Only a few of “the others” have studied us. The Indian social anthropologist Prakash Reddy has studied a small village in Denmark. Indian Anita Desai has written about the Norwegian family. Reddy and Desai have both found that the difference between what people think, say and do is immense (Desai 1986; Reddy 1991). Desai also points to the authorities' intervention in close relationships between people. The state guarantees the rights of the individual and she concludes:

The individual's chances of success or defeat are solely in the hands of the authorities, owing to a state which takes upon itself duties and responsibilities, doubt and pleasure which still belong to the family in less organised parts of the world. But the state has not dismissed the individual. That it cannot do.

(Desai 1986, 34)

This is perhaps very far from the view we ourselves hold on the importance and the role of the individual and individuality in our culture. Athenian women did not live in the shadow of Acropolis or the Athenian democracy, together with slaves and others who did not enjoy full civil rights. They have lived in the

shadow of modern North-West European, industrialized nation states and democracies with representative governments and parliaments, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, written in accordance with the premises of said societies, as well as the modern women's movement and feminism.

If one thinks that the basic values on which we have built our society are universally valid, geographically as well as historically, then the conclusion will remain fixed: Being a woman in classical Athens was not much fun. But, I suggest, there is a better alternative: The light from Istanbul, the light of the culture which modern Greece and many in north-west Europe see as the antithesis of classical inheritance, the eastern Mediterranean culture, the Islamic culture (Herzfeld 1987, Danforth 1984. Against this see Said 1978). My starting point is the fact that classical Athens did not hold a monopoly on the view of women as expressed in classical sources. This view of women may be found in later pre-industrial agricultural societies, e.g. Italy (Coloru 1987) and Greece (Walcot 1970, with reference to anthropological studies), although Joao de Pina-Cabral, with some justification, criticizes those who look upon the Mediterranean as one coherent cultural area. Not least does one meet it in those parts of Turkey and the Middle East where industrialization and modernisation still has not radically changed the old agrarian communities.

Even though these small isolated agrarian societies were somewhat static, they still existed in a symbiotic relationship with changing political systems of government throughout history. In short, they are societies with a history. Part of their history is also the encounter and co-existence with the large monotheistic religions, Islam and Christianity. This naturally gives rise to the question of whether it was the great religions that determined the view of man and woman and their division of power. However, I do believe that the real ability of monotheistic religions to govern small societies on a micro level if they themselves did not want it, is greatly overestimated. Theological or philosophical reflections on the nature of men and women on a macro-level is the privilege of an intellectual elite. Aristotle's and Plato's philosophical contemplations cannot be seen as a mirror image of society in antiquity as a whole, just as the works of Thomas Aquinas, Kant and Kierkegaard cannot be used as direct sources to how ordinary people thought and acted on a micro-level in their respective societies. A reconstruction of the average Dane's mentality and way of thinking in the last century, based solely on Kierkegaard and

his like-minded colleagues, would indeed provide an interesting result. Furthermore, the notion that Aristotelian misogynous views constituted the attitudes of the later Western civilisations, greatly exaggerates the influence of philosophy on the development of social structures.

All societies consist of several communities or cultures, which do not necessarily have the same self-understanding. The large society that contains the power elite, government departments and officials, and possibly a religious elite consisting of a professional clergy, must also adjust to the small communities. In spite of everything, both Islam and Christianity represent very flexible views of the world. Thus modern Islam consists of modern fundamentalist movements which invoke so-called constant basic values, of western orientated, industrialised, urban communities with a somewhat more secular view of the world and of small village communities with strong aspects of popular beliefs difficult to support in the Quran. The same is true of Christianity. Man does not normally turn schizoid because he is subjected to one view of the world in the mosque and lives according to different norms and rules outside the mosque. One of man's most crucial cultural characteristics is his ability to suppress contradictions in the chaotic world in which he lives. He can change colour like a chameleon, more often than not without knowing it.

Thus the small village communities in the Middle East in our own days do not necessarily represent antiquity, nor Islam as one great dominant religion, but they are an important alternative to the narrow West European framework of understanding the Ancient World. It really does not matter whether continuity has existed. I do believe, however that they do represent a common way of organising human communities in the pre-industrial era in both the Middle East and large parts of Europe. The important thing is, whether this new framework of understanding makes sense of the sources and whether by using it, new, but not necessarily all, aspects of the sources are revealed.

After these theoretical contemplations, I will invite the reader on a journey of the mind to the village of Çatalçam in the Taurus Mountains, 100 kilometres north of Adana in central Turkey. From 1985 to 1996, I regularly conducted field work in this village, with some detours to the eastern provincial capital of Diyarbakir, and also to Kurdish Iraq, where the grand old lady of Danish ethnology, the

WOMEN AND RELIGION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

late Henny Harald Hansen, lived as a member of several families, both in small mountain villages and in the local capital (Hansen 1958 and 1961).

My first meeting with the village culture of Çatalçam took place in the teahouse. The teahouse, *kahve*, overlooks a dusty village square, together with the mosque and a few general stores, which sell necessities the households themselves, do not produce. In the teahouse, no women are present. In the village square they are only seen by the central well carrying water to the houses or washing clothes and carpets in the running water. The visit is made as short as possible and they prefer to be in pairs with a corner of their headscarf covering the lower part of their face. If they have to pass through to reach another part of town, it is done with great determination, looking straight ahead.



The square in the village is dominated by male activities. A game of cards has ended at the kahve, and the losers are preparing to dispense a watermelon.

WOMEN IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

The teahouse and its surroundings are definitely male territory. Here men spend their time playing cards, smoking cigarettes, promenading, cultivating friendships, competing, bickering or just being, when their work is not required in the fields, which is the case for the greater part of the year. The views uttered here are typically male. The man is the sole head of the house. He chooses marriage partners for daughters and sons, and he is in full control of family resources. The woman's place is in the house and she is regarded as a weaker individual, physically as well as mentally, to whom one cannot leave important decisions or heavy work. They would surely have agreed with the views of Aristotle, if they had known them!



The well not only provides water but it is also the main wash yard for larger items like carpets. It is an important meeting place for women from different households.

WOMEN AND RELIGION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

This masculine world does not disappear when, as a stranger, one is invited into the home for a meal for the first time. When one steps into the house, the women are almost always busy cooking, baking bread, spinning or weaving. The oldest man in the house does the talking and introduces the family in the largest room of the house. He may call on the oldest woman or a shy daughter to bring beautiful rugs woven by the women in the house. The men eat first while the women serve or keep in the background in nearby rooms. Both men and women express the belief that a woman's place is in the home. Agriculture and husbandry are men's work and are the prestigious work.

This first meeting with the foreign culture calls up associations to Pericles' funeral speech as quoted above and Homer's *Odyssey* where Odysseus' son Telemachus admonishes his mother:

Nay, go to thy chamber, and busy thyself with thine own tasks, the loom and the distaff, and bid thy handmaids ply their tasks; but speech shall be for men, for all, but most of all for me; since mine is the authority in the house. She then, seized with wonder, went back to her chamber, for she laid to heart the wise saying of her son. (*Od.* 1. 354-361)

Women who fetch water from the well, women who bake bread and women who spin and weave, are activities we also can find portrayed on Greek vase paintings and in small terracotta statuettes. The goddess, Pallas Athena, often reveals herself to Odysseus in the guise of a young maiden carrying a pitcher when she offers him advice (*Od.* 7.14-20). I am also reminded of the Roman politician Cato the Elder's acid remarks in 195 BC on why things have gone wrong in Rome:

Citizens of Rome, if each one of us had set himself to regain the rights and the dignity of a husband over his wife, we should have less trouble with women as a whole. As things are, our liberty, overthrown in the home by female indiscipline, is now being crushed and trodden underfoot here too, in the Forum. It is because we have not kept them under control individually that we are now terrorised by them collectively. - And yet, even at home, if modesty restrained matrons within the limits of their own rights, it would not become them to be concerned about the questions of what laws should be passed or repealed in this place. (*Livy* 24.2)

Based on my own cultural background, my first reaction was that being a woman in Çatalçam cannot be much fun. At first glance, the Oriental or Islamic society looked to be archetypal of female confinement and male dominance just like

WOMEN IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

Athenian culture. Of course, I soon realised that life is much more complicated. An episode from Diyarbakir may illustrate this. I was passing one of the smaller mosques in the residential quarter in Diyarbakir outside prayer time. Through a narrow doorway I caught a glimpse of the courtyard. Two groups were relaxing in the shadow of the entrance to the main building, a group of women and a group of men, separated from each other. This surprised me, because this mosque was not one of the specific ones to which women go on pilgrimage to pray for a happy life, and normally the mosque with its courtyard is reserved for the male population. Shortly thereafter I mentioned it to one of my chance acquaintances, who had a small shop nearby. He simply repudiated it. I do not think that he was trying to lie to me. He just presented reality to a stranger according to his male point of view.



The grandmother busy at the distaff. She is the undisputed head of the younger female members of the family and all the activities related to them.

This reminds me of Desai's and Reddy's observation of the immense difference between what people think, say and do in our own society.

However, the problem is more complex than that. Longer stays in the village, which meant that I changed status from being an outsider or just a friend of the son to, after many years, be declared first "uncle" and later "son" of the house, has convinced me that something in this appraisal of female confinement and subordination is fundamentally wrong. It was the mother not the father who every time, with a hug and a kiss on the cheek, changed my status within the family. It brought to mind the advice given to Odysseus both by the goddess Athena and princess Nausicaa when he, as a complete stranger, needs to be accepted in the royal Phaeacian palace:

WOMEN AND RELIGION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

But when the house and the court enclose thee, pass quickly through the great hall, till thou comest to my mother, who sits at the hearth in the light of the fire, spinning the purple yarn, a wonder to behold, leaning against a pillar, and her handmaids sit behind her there, too, leaning against the selfsame pillar, is set the throne of my father, whereon he sits and quaffs his wine, like unto an immortal. Him pass thou by, and cast thy hands about my mother's knees, that thou may quickly see with rejoicing the day of thy return, though thou art come from never so far if in her sight thou do win favour, then there is hope that thou wilt see thy friends, and return to thy well-built house and into thy native land. (Od 6.303-315)

The queen shall thou approach first in the palace (Od. 7.53-77)

It is the queen, Arete, and not the king, Alcinous, who is the key to Odysseus' admittance.

What I had first witnessed was “role-playing” in a small part of the male sphere and the family sphere, that is, when a total stranger was visiting. But situations like this are only fragments of social life. I had met one of the many “subcultures” of which Çatalçam society consists.

When I had the privilege to come into closer contact with a different subculture, the female sphere, I received a greater cultural shock. That it was sharply divided from the male sphere was expected. But the fact that it existed not on men's but on women's terms was surprising. Life in the teahouse and the village square is less enviable to the women, when they can visit each other and pursue female friendships, not only within the village but also in neighbouring villages. The teahouse is the place where representatives of the state meet the village inhabitants. This is also where children are registered for school, where the young men are conscripted for military service and rudimentary social services pay out benefits. The teahouse is the centre for negotiations over collective projects, such as the building of a dam that will allow better use of water resources for irrigation. Finally, the teahouse is the place where families in serious disputes try to find a solution through mediation or judgement by a representative for the state, often the local chief or mayor who is elected for a four-year term of office. Despite all this, the women apparently do not envy the men their teahouse. Why not?

Normally disputes are settled internally through a mediator, either a highly respected male member of the family, if it has to do with the male sphere or a highly respected woman, if it concerns the female sphere. Involving the state bu-

WOMEN IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

reocracy is avoided if at all possible. Normally women leave the contact with the state to the men, whom they expect to look after the family's interests. The relationship between the mother and the father in my host family was clearly built on respect. From each other they expected mutual fulfilment of their very different responsibilities. Only once did I experience that women directly involved themselves in the teahouse negotiations. The mistresses of the families whose fields



Women rarely pray at the village mosque. The grandmother performs her religious duties in the house on behalf of the female members of the family, using a goatskin as a prayer rug.

would disappear under water behind a new dam turned up to argue their case. They claimed that the compensation payment offered to these families was insufficient. Result: The building of the dam was called off, even though my friend, the local chief, had staked his personal prestige on the project.

Boys belong to the female sphere until puberty. Thus it is the women, unlike the men, who have an in-depth knowledge of the availability of suitable marriage candidates. On several occasions during my stays it was the mother who in fact arranged the marriage of a son or daughter, even though it is the father who officially conducts the negotiations about the size of the dowry. One of my friends in Diyarbakir was forced to marry a distant relative against his will. His mother threatened him, saying that if he did not marry he would have to leave the house. His father was of a different opinion but had clearly given in.

Everyone else was convinced that the marriage would break down within a year. A Sardinian woman, Maria Coluru, describes a similar situation:

My father did not oppose the marriage. But father was not the one to decide. My mother said. I do not like him. If you want him, marry him, but in this house he shall never set foot (Coluru 1987,70)

It is the mother who in her belt carries the key for the chest where the family's money and precious jewellery are kept. When the son needed money, he had to stand with his hand stretched out and was clearly unhappy about the amount he was granted out of the chest. If one asks the mother what the key is for, she answers that it is the key to Heaven. The son never thought of telling me that it was the mother who controlled important parts of the family resources. I found out accidentally, because the chest was placed in my bedroom.

In the bazaar in Diyarbakir, I saw a confident young man buy a shirt from one of the many stalls. Behind him stood an older woman dressed in black, clearly his mother. When the time came to pay, it was she who pulled out a purse from the heavy folds of her dress. When the son received the change, she immediately put out her hand and banknotes and coins disappeared into the purse. They then continued through the bazaar, the son in front, the mother behind.

Power and influence depend a lot on personality traits and, moreover, there are mechanisms for regulating them. A man who has to bully his family in order to get his way, risks being the laughing-stock at the teahouse, the male sphere, where he spends most of his time. The same is true of women in the female sphere. Internally in the two spheres there is a hierarchy, clearly visible to an outsider. Older people dominate the young. The son neither talks nor smokes when the father is present. A younger son neither talks nor smokes when an elder son is present or he moves to the other end of the teahouse where his elder brother cannot see it, even though the older brother knows very well what is going on. Brothers frequently have completely separate groups of friends even when they live in the same house. The same is true within the female sphere where for instance a daughter-in-law is subordinate to the mother-in-law. But apart from this, here too personal qualities determine the balance. It is often said that the family is the basic unit in Turkish society and that family and kin are important channels for power and influence. To a certain degree this is true, especially in comparison with our modern industri-

WOMEN IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

alised society where the individual, after a certain age, can base his existence on a wide public safety-net. It is important to stress that the Turkish village community also consists of individuals who see themselves as individuals. But they are dependent on other social networks. Both men and women pursue close, but far-reaching contacts outside the family through a complicated web of friendships, favours and reciprocal favours of a personal nature. The historical horizon of a family rarely goes back more than three generations. That is sufficient to connect the living members of the families. Of course, brothers are expected to stick together. On the other hand, it is in this field that serious conflict often arises, among other things about the inheritance. I am reminded of Hesiod, who is in conflict with his brother. In the epic *Works and Days* he gives the following advice:

Let the wage promised to a friend be fixed; even with your brother smile - and get a witness; for trust and mistrust, alike ruin men. (370-373)



Shoeing a piece of cattle. The situation is staged. The women performing the task gave way to the men when the picture was taken. It would probably not have happened if the photographer had been a female.

WOMEN AND RELIGION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

As an outside observer and participant in the social game, it is quite easy to work out kinship and relate to it. It is much more difficult and very frustrating to operate within the various systems and grades of friendships. As an outsider, one is totally devoid of the cultural understanding needed in order to manoeuvre, and feels like a pawn in a contradictory game, the rules of which one does not always know, apart from the fact that the friendships are as important a part of life as is kinship. From an outsider's point of view, both kinship and friendship may appear as a strait-jacket curtailing the individual's freedom of action. They should, however be regarded as normative rules or very general guidelines for conduct (Bailey 1980, 3 ff., see also Knudsen 1989, 312 ff). An intelligent "player" knows exactly how to exploit and bend the normative rules to attain his or hers pragmatic end without being disqualified by society.

What is expected of the individual and his behaviour is not static but rather determined by the actual situation just as in our own culture. A few episodes may illustrate this point. In the neighbouring village a group of women were shoeing an ox, the indispensable traction force in fanning. The sight did not surprise me, as women make up a very large part of the labour resources in agriculture, not just in



Women rarely pray at the village mosque. The grandmother performs her religious duties in the house on behalf of the female members of the family, using a goatskin as a prayer rug.

processing. But men do not talk about it. Officially, in the male sphere and in relation to outsiders, agriculture is masculine work. When I wanted to photograph the situation, the scene changed completely. Three men were called and they are the ones that are caught in the photograph (also Gould 1980, 49).

Another time I walked back from the teahouse at dusk with one of my male acquaintances. One of the large ovens in which women

from many families bake bread to last several days, stood in front of his house. That evening a lot of activity was under way, led by a very confident lady, my friend's wife, whom I had met previously. We sat down on the periphery of the group of women and children. After having exchanged the usual pleasantries, I asked her how many children she had. She replied that she had given birth to six children but that it had been hard work. The husband felt that it was time for him to appear on the scene. With a leer, he explained that it had been hard work for him too and accompanied the statement with a vulgar gesture. He should not have done that. He had to leave the arena in a rain of pebbles to the great amusement of the other women. Clearly this was the women's space just like the mountain pasture. Here things were done according to their rules. On the occasions when I was lucky enough to experience the baking of bread alone among the women, I was struck by the great frankness that characterised their conversation. Men's prowess, also on a sexual level, was discussed. My host's wife was teasingly asked what she did when her husband was away now that I was part of the family. I have never experienced similar conversations in the teahouse or among men.

As mentioned earlier, both men and women regard the house or home as the women's only province, but as the episodes described above show, things are not all that simple. The house is not a static materialistic entity defined by its outer walls. The household arena changes geographically depending on the situation, i.e. the specific occasion and the people present. The men sleep and eat in the house, but apart from that they spend a major part of their time with other men in the centre of the village. Early in the morning, when they have left the house and congregated in the village square with its kahve and shops, "house" denotes all of the geographical area in which ordinary habitation is placed. Alley-ways, streets, common ovens, all become the natural place for women and children to congregate. Men only use a few major streets, even if short cuts are available. They do not stop by unless it is absolutely vital and then make things as short and businesslike as is possible. One of my experiences was when one of my friends refused to accompany me into a house where something I wanted a closer look at was taking place. To my repeated question as to why he would not come, he at last answered: Only women are present

and I know none of them. In quantitative terms, the women dominate 75 per cent of the village. To be “in the house” often only means to be away from the village square and surrounding alley-ways. The same is true in the non-industrialised parts of Diyarbakir. The men's space is the central area with the bazaar, public buildings, mosques, teahouses and eating-places together with the broader of the streets, which lead into the town centre from the residential areas. The remainder of the town belongs to the women. Settling down here is not all that difficult once one has learned the rules in the village.

If strangers, who are not defined as kinsmen or part of one of the family's closer network of friends, come to visit the boundaries move. The main room in the house where the meal is served becomes a male arena. After having served the meal, which the women very often already have helped themselves to during the cooking, they retreat to the adjoining rooms and do not join in the conversation with the exception of the oldest woman who on this occasion represents the women of the house. To outsiders it may look as if the house is divided into a male and a female section. To a certain extent this is true in this particular situation. Everything depends on the occasion and not least the position of the guest in relation to the host family. Opening and closing doors make the house a very flexible and elastic entity which may be adjusted to suit present needs. On larger festive occasions, such as weddings and religious festivals, the yard of the house is divided into two spheres in the same way. Men and women sit in separate groups and eat separately. If dancing occurs, men dance with men and women dance with women, often in a provocative chain. Flirting and courting between young men and women is extensive but conducted in a controlled fashion.

Henny Harald Hansen's description of Kurdish villages in Iraq and the house's place as the women's arena adds yet another aspect. She narrates how a woman, after having asked permission of the man of the house, “the nominal head of the extended family”, visited some family in a neighbouring village. The visit was extended to include some other villages and she came home later than agreed:

When she arrived home she was greeted by strong accusations from the indignant husband. When my interpreter, the eldest and most intelligent of the daughters, in-

WOMEN IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

tervened he was forced into humiliating retreat. This was when I truly understood how insecure men's standing was and how weak their position inside the house was against a predominance of women. The impression was, that women joined forces at home while men were isolated on the defensive. What use was it then, that they had unlimited possibilities of using their spare time in the town's cafes, on the streets or in Sulaimaniyah's park, which was given over to women and children only one day a week. There they only met other men who had the same standing in their respective homes. The women did not visit cafes. But why should they? They had much more fun at home or paying visits. (Hansen 1958, 217 f)

Henny Harald Hansen likewise describes an extensive network of visits and women's gatherings. This meant that the women knew virtually everything worth knowing about the immediate community. Thus, as a close colleague has expressed it, the walls of the house do not imprison the women, it keeps out the men. The French-Tunisian film, *Halfaouine, the Boy on the Roof Terrace*, from 1990, where the local baths are also part of the women's arena, conveys the same impression. Moreover, the film gives a brief insight into how difficult it is for a young man to move from the comparatively safe women's sphere into the men's adult world. A female student watching the film exclaimed: 'I would not like to be a woman there'. This is understandable, but who would want to be a man there with our cultural background.

The house is a flexible entity and it is also used as a kind of veil. As previously remarked, women in Çatalçam do not visit the centre of the village unless they are fetching water from the central well or washing clothes. They prefer to visit the well in pairs and often pull their headscarf over their face. Several times in Diyarbakir, I followed women walking from the central bazaar to their houses. In the bazaar, which definitely is part of the male sphere, several wear *pardah*, i.e. clothing which lightly covers the wearer from head to foot with a transparent piece of cloth over the face. As soon as the women reach the parts of the town, which are not dominated by males, the undressing begins. First the face is uncovered and later the upper torso. From a male viewpoint, the clothing underneath may be quite provocative and sophisticated. However, older women, who have gone through the menopause, are often seen without a veil in the area around the bazaar.



A mother with a son shopping in the bazaar in Diyarbakir.. Women entering the male-dominated bazaar often use the veil. It gives them privacy. Men do not have the same possibility when they enter the part of the city dominated by women. They are not supposed to make any stops on their way home to the house, unless they are going to visit friends or relatives.

The veiling of women ensures that society is divided into two well-defined spheres within important areas. Young men and women, who are not related, do not meet each other except under tightly controlled conditions within the family. Of course, this is because most marriages are arranged marriages and because legitimate heirs are very important in many societies in the Asian-European cultural sphere (Goody 1976; Goody & Tambiah 1978). But it would be very wrong to look upon the veil as a way in which men may isolate women. Women are, of course, isolated from the male sphere, but men are also isolated from the female sphere. Men cannot hide behind their clothes when in parts of the town dominated by women. In contrast, women have the opportunity to move anonymously in the otherwise male-dominated parts of town. Finally, the veil does not isolate women

WOMEN IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

from other women. The use of the veil is often seen either as an Islamic invention and tradition, thus dating from the period after Mohammed's death in 632 or an Eastern tradition stemming from Syria, Palestine and Byzantium which, through the Arab conquests and the spread of Islam, became common in Arab and neighbouring countries. However, the tradition is “western” as well. In Homer's world the veil, *kredemnon*, relates to a chaste woman. When Penelope descends from her room to the court-yard, which is dominated by suitors, she does not go alone and she always ensures that she covers her face:

And from her upper chamber the daughter of Icarius, wise Penelope, heard his wondrous song, and she went down the high stairway from her chamber, not alone, for two handmaids attended her. Now when the fair lady had come to the wooers, she stood by the doorpost of the well-built hall, holding before her face her shining veil; and a faithful handmaid stood on either side of her (Od. 1.328-336).



Wedding in Diyarbakir. Women dancing with women. The female guests stay in one part of the central courtyard, the male guests in another. In addition, the banquet is served separately for men and women.

Of course, Penelope, as an attractive “widow”, has to attend carefully to the correct moral stance, but that applies to Nausicaa and her handmaidens, too, when they go to the river to wash the laundry and afterwards enjoy a leisurely time:

Then when they had had their joy of food, she and her handmaids, they threw off their headgear and fell to playing at ball, and white-armed Nausicaa was leader in the song. (Od 6, 99-100).

My aim is not in any way to idealise the relationship between man and woman in a Turkish family through these short glimpses into life in the village of Çatalçam or the eastern provincial capital of Diyarbakir. In some families the relationship works, in others it does not. Some families have a tyrannical master, others a tyrannical mistress. In that respect, they are no different from a large number of families in our own society. With my cultural background, I will continue to be an outsider looking in, just like G. Prakash Reddy and Anita Desai. I cannot change that. But my point is that what we have here is a structurally very different type of family and society, which in important areas consist of two uneven, isolated spheres between which lie a fine balance of power and influence. This is how I would like to put it: In the Turkish society which I have been allowed to study and in the Kurdish society as described by Henry Harald Hansen, “equality”, to use an expression from our culture, between man and woman or between the male and the female sphere is brought about through diversity and separation of the sexes. The logic of the bipartite society reigns. In general, men spend more time with other men, women with other women. Men make friends with men, women with women. Men obtain influence through male networks of friends, women through female networks. Men are part of a male hierarchy, women of a female hierarchy. Within the female sphere the older women dominate the younger women; the same is true of the older men in the male sphere. Of course, no one family or individual fit this description completely. It should be regarded as the general picture derived from my observations, determined, no doubt at least partially, by my northwest European cultural background.

Our division of society into a so-called private and a public sphere is without meaning in this type of society (also Lamphere 1974, 97 ff). We may talk about a state community and a local community, macro and micro spheres, female and male spheres reaching far beyond the biological family. In our part of the world

WOMEN IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

power relates to influence in something we call a “public” sphere in contrast to a “private” sphere, which most often is confined to within the outer walls of the house. The factories and workplaces of the industrial world and, lately, the growing bureaucracy of the welfare state, have replaced the home as the central place of work. Work outside the house requires training in the society of the state and it is work that provides the individual with identity and prestige - it has become almost identical with having a social life. In telephone books in many western countries, it is common to list profession and it is quite difficult to find the word “housewife”.

From the Arab world comes a saying which describes a somewhat different attitude: He who works cannot be regarded as having an existence. To work is not the opposite of death. To live is the opposite of work. To work is the same as being dead. Biological and social life is not identical. Here the word work denotes paid work for others, not farming, and we find the same attitude in both Greek and Roman sources. Xenophon expresses it as follows:

For the trades known as the trades of artisans are decried and with good reason held in low esteem in the cities. They disfigure the body of those who practice and pursue them, by compelling them to spend the whole day sitting by the fire. When the bodies get softened in this way the souls lose a great deal of their strength. And especially, artisans' trades leave one very little time for friends and for the city, and the result is that men like these seem very inadequate in their relations with friends and when it comes to defending the city. We then reached the following verdict: for a gentleman there is no work or science better than agriculture, and it is from it that men procure the necessities of life. (Oec. 4.2-3; 6.8, see also Cicero Off. 1. 150 f.)

Since the last century, the public sphere has spread its tentacles far into all corners of society. It legislates for individuals and the relationship between individuals within the family. The schools have taken over an important part of children's upbringing and social education and, in general, the family has lost a major part of its power over the children. Once they have reached a certain age, they do not need the family any more, but instead they have become completely dependent on what the outside world offers in the way of education and work. The state and the public authorities have increasingly become an omnipresent power, especially in the modern "Welfare states" and a very large part of public resources pass through the state in the form of taxes, duties, benefit payments etc. Influencing the decisions of the state constitutes power over the

families. The key to a just and good life is hidden in the state or public sphere. No longer is it something personal.

Turkish women have paid the price for this, as the state gradually erodes their traditional roles. The family loses power and thereby women lose power because, it has always been the men who had the dominating influence in what one might call the state sector, while the women had the dominating influence in the family. It is hardly surprising, that it was only when the modern systems of state emerged that women really began to demand influence in public life on an equal footing with men.

I have no doubt that we must apply the logic of the bipartite society, not just on Athens (Gould 1980; Just 1989, 105-125), Rome, but also on many other pre-industrial societies with a comparable rudimentary state apparatus. It is easy to imagine the Greek town divided into zones where men dominate on *agora* and the larger streets with surrounding shops, while the rest of the town "belongs" to the women. We must not try to discover the balance of power between men and women by judging the level of uniformity. The view of society and women, as expressed in the written sources, is in many ways similar to the world my Turkish male friends expressed in the *kahve* and the village square. This view expressly ranks women lower than men, a fact which is not surprising, as it is formulated in a male sphere that compared to our society, only sporadically comes into contact with the female sphere.

The female sphere described in the female sphere's own terms is virtually non-existent in our sources. In only a few places does one sense the tip of the iceberg. In a 4th century BC court case there is a brief reference to a conversation among women, across family and household, during a visit one woman paid another (Demosthenes, 55.23-24,27). One does not get the impression that such visits were unusual (Gould 1980, 49). An instance of female involvement in high politics is found in a brief remark in the correspondence of Cicero. Cicero, Brutus, his mother Servilia, and wife Porcia, Cassius, and his wife, Junia Tertia, Servilia's daughter, met in Anzio 44 BC discussing the humiliating appointment of Brutus and Cassius to very junior offices. Cicero comments, rather casually in a letter to Atticus:

Servilia promises she will see that the appointment to the corn-supply shall be withdrawn from the senatorial decree. (15, 11)

WOMEN IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

Cicero obviously had no doubt that Servilia was as good as her word, and the appointments were accordingly withdrawn. Brutus and Cassius were both made provincial governors in charge of Roman Legions, which meant that the triumvirate of Anthony, Lepidus and Caesar's heir Octavian, the future emperor Augustus had to win a civil war before they usurped the Roman State and divided its territories between them. Servilia was clearly a powerful woman with numerous and personal connections to the centre of political decisions, the Roman Senate. I do not think that this alone is due to a so-called more liberal position of the Roman housewife, as compared to the Greek housewife. This is not my main point, however. Rather, this observation stresses the importance of female networks, which our sources rarely reveal. Without the correspondence of Cicero, Servilia would have been seen as a much more common Roman housewife, only famous for her supposed infidelities with Julius Caesar.

In comparison, Penelope's withdrawn life in the house of Odysseus should be seen in the light of the fact that her position was undecided. If Odysseus is dead, she should, as a widow, return to her father's house. A widow's prestige is low and they are regarded as dangerous, crafty and scheming (also Andersen 1987). But as queen her position is quite different. This is how she herself expresses it:

Even so my heart sways to and fro in doubt, whether to abide with my son and keep things safe, my possessions, my slaves, and my great, high-roofed house, respecting the bed of my husband and the voice of the people, or to go now with him whosoever is best of the Achaeans, who woos me in the halls and offer bride-gifts past counting. (Od. 19.526-529)

Penelope gives the impression that it is her own, rather than Odysseus' house with its handmaidens and slaves she guards. But Homer's epics, which may have their root in the dark centuries, no more represent pictures of everyday life than do the tragedies. They deal with basic values surrounding friendship, the exchange of gifts and *oikos* and contain exciting stories about the Trojan War and Odysseus' long journey home. Homer belongs to a special genre too, but it is unlikely that Arete has been given her role for purely dramatic reasons (also Foley 1984, 59ff.) Homer's epics were very popular throughout antiquity, but we do not know what the audience in classical Athens found important. They have undoubtedly been as selective as we, too, can be when, for instance, we

read or listen to passages from the Bible. Unconsciously, one selects the things that match one's perception of reality. The remainder one overlooks or refrains from thinking about.

All in all, we will hardly be able to judge the influence of the female sphere in classical Athens on the basis of the sources. The crucial question is whether the state sector has had anything like the same influence, as we know it in modern times. Did the *polis* regulate, and thus perhaps, unintentionally, reduce the real meaning of the female sphere? Was the state sector the only arena for true power or were there perhaps, in the micro-societies below, other channels of influence, perhaps even more important for every day life in classical Athens? Lastly, who would want to be a man in classical Athens? What expectations did he face, not just from *polis*, but also from the men in the male sphere and the women in the female sphere? What limitations were there on his room for manoeuvre and from which sectors of community-life was he excluded.

I have only found space to pose some new questions, not in the shadow of northwest Europe, but in the light from Istanbul. Perhaps being a woman in classical Athens was less bad - also in the light from Acropolis.

Epilogue

I owe the inhabitants of the village of Çatalçam and especially Halil, Ayşe, Mahmut and Sebahat Demirer a debt of gratitude for their friendship and confidences. Throughout the years, they have meant more to me professionally than many years of academic studies. This paper is dedicated to the late Ayşe Demirer.

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WOMEN AND RELIGION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

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Female Cult in the Struggle of the Orders

Ingvar Mæhle

Did Roman women play a part in the Struggle of the Orders? Could female religious cults be a vehicle of social and political change? Is it possible to discover, behind the elitist, male misogynist perspective of our sources, Roman women acting independently, on their own terms? The aim of this paper is not to conjure up new sources and propose verifiable statements on what life really was like for the women in ancient Rome. Certainty and knowledge is beyond our reach. The aim of this paper is rather to sketch the possible social and political significance of female cult. If nothing else, I at least hope to stimulate an awareness of the depths of our ignorance in this field. At best, I will provide a more fruitful model of understanding than the existing alternatives.

During the early Roman Republic, the period between the expulsion of the Kings in the beginning of the 5th century BC and the last secession of the plebeians in 287 BC, the political system changed from an exclusive aristocracy of birth to a competitive oligarchy.⁸ The old nobility by birth, the patricians, now had to compete for public office alongside men who had risen from the commons, the plebeians. Although the outcome of the struggle was far from a democratic system in Athenian terms, at least it made popular support more

⁸ Cornell 1995: 342.

important for the ruling class and gave the citizens a wider choice of candidates in elections. The political exclusion of the commoners was enhanced by social prejudice, legal barriers against intermarriage between the orders and patrician monopoly of the major religious cults. Women played a crucial role in overcoming these barriers, not as electors or magistrates, but as wives, mothers and daughters. The social and religious barriers to sharing political power in the male sphere could not have been overcome without the co-operation and active participation of the female sphere. I will investigate whether the female members of the patrician and plebeian elites can be described as major players or just pawns in this conflict.

Female influence in the public sphere is described by all our sources either as an evil in itself or, when the positive effects cannot be denied, as rare exceptions from the norm. Livy, who is our main source regarding the struggle of the orders, gives us only occasional glimpses into the female sphere, and then obviously from a traditional male perspective. But it is possible to disclose, between the lines in his *History*, a more continuous influence exercised by highly organised female networks. In a period where one rarely finds reliable information even about what happened in public life in the male sphere, we should not expect to discover exactly what was done by whom behind the scenes. We might plausibly argue that a wise patrician *pater familias* would listen very carefully to his wife's and perhaps also his daughter's views before he gave her to a plebeian upstart. Removing the legal and social ban against intermarriage may have even been promoted by the patrician mothers and daughters themselves, because of a scarcity of suitable patrician males. After the match, as Livy relates, they probably demanded that the plebeian husbands should be given equal opportunities to compete for office. The rise of these new men in the course of time reduced the patricians' hold of the magistracies and therefore perhaps contributed to further diminish the number of eligible patricians. The patrician bachelors may have welcomed the increase in the choice of brides for both personal and political reasons.

Speculation, however, even when it is constructive, can only serve as preliminaries to systematic investigations. The formal exclusion of women from politics makes such investigations almost impossible. Women did, however,

participate in public life in matters of religion, and fortunately the annalists have handed down to us some crucial events. The conflict that erupted between the matrons in the chapel of Patrician Modesty, *Pudicitiae Patriciae* in 295 BC, illustrates how women through the religious cults could make an impact on the balance of political power in their own terms. I will use this conflict as the starting point of my investigation. Livy tells the story, not omitting his insights into female nature:

Virginia, Aulu's daughter, a patrician wedded to a commoner, Lucius Volumnius the consul, had been excluded by the matrons from their ceremonies, on the ground that she had married out of the patriciate. This led to a short dispute, which the hot anger of the sex soon kindled to a blaze of passionate contention. Virginia boasted, and with reason, that she had entered the temple of Patrician Modesty both a patrician and a modest woman, as having been wedded to the one man to whom she had been given as a maiden, and was neither ashamed of her husband nor of his honours and his victories. She then added a noble deed to her proud words. In the Vicus Longus, where she lived she shut off a part of her mansion, large enough for a shrine of moderate size, and, erecting there an altar, called together the plebeian matrons, and after complaining of the injurious behaviour of the patrician ladies, said "I dedicate this altar to Plebeian Modesty; and I urge you, that even as the men of our state contend for the reputation of valour, so the matrons may vie for that of modesty, that this altar may be said to be cherished – if it is possible – more reverently than that and by more modest women." This altar, too was served with almost the same ritual as that more ancient one, so that no matron but one of proven modesty, who had been wedded to one man alone, should have the right to sacrifice. Afterwards the cult was degraded by polluted worshippers, not matrons only but women of every station, and passed finally into oblivion.⁹

Virginia was married to the illustrious general Volumnius, and had indeed no cause to be ashamed of her spouse. Volumnius was probably in alliance with the Fabii against the Claudii¹⁰, and Livy made much of the enmity between Volumnius himself and Appius Claudius.¹¹ In the previous year, Appius Claudius had to be forced by his own soldiers and officers to receive help from

⁹ Liv. 10.23.4-10.

¹⁰ Curti 2000, 87.

¹¹ Livy 10.18-19.

Volumnius and his troops in the war against Etruria. The Claudii were notorious for their arrogance and scorn of plebeian upstarts, and enjoyed great influence with their fellow patricians. Although Livy doesn't explicitly say so, it is tempting to conclude that Appius Claudius masterminded the conflict to hurt Volumnius. Appius Claudius was already known to be the staunchest opponent to the *Lex Ogulnia* which in 300 BC opened two of the most important priestly colleges, the *pontifices* and *augures* to the plebeians. The man who built the Via Appia and the first aqueduct, and carried out the census in a way that gave greater voting power to the people and much offence to the nobles, did not tolerate plebeian rivals to steal his thunder. Courting the people's favour was according to Claudius a patrician prerogative. As presented by Livy, the exclusion of Verginia from the community of patrician matrons on account of her marriage to a plebeian, is merely an appendix to the larger struggle over the *Lex Ogulnia* five years earlier. Modern scholars have consequently disregarded the women's contribution in the struggle.¹²

A different interpretation is, however, possible if Livy's account is not taken too literally. Livy may have placed the episode in 295 BC, the year after Volumnius and Claudius had their famous quarrel, only because it seemed to fit his story. Livy is notorious for placing events at random, for his repetition of events, and even for constructing "facts" to fill the gaps in the narrative.¹³ Whether or not the conflict reached its peak in 295, there are several reasons for treating the episode as an independent action by the female sphere. First, it is unlikely that the patrician matrons should wait more than 70 years before making their point. The plebeians had supplied consuls almost regularly since 366, and the first of them, Lucius Sextius, the sponsor of the law that made

¹² Treatment of the Pudicita-cult is absent in standard reference works such as the Cambridge Ancient History, W. Eders Staat und Staatlichkeit in der frühen römischen Republik, H.H. Scullards A history of the Roman World 753 to 146 B.C. and T. Cornells The beginnings of Rome. It is mentioned in passing by J. Linderski (p. 259) in his contribution to K. Raaflaubs Social Struggles in Archaic Rome – New Perspectives on the Conflict of the Orders and also in a footnote (p. 190. n.149) by K.-J. Hölkeskamp in his Die Entstehung der Nobilität.

¹³ Liv. 3.44-48: A plebeian Verginia opposed the lustful wishes of one of Appius Claudius ancestors in 449 BC and her death caused a secession of the plebs. Is this just a coincidence?

this possible, was married to Fabia, a patrician.¹⁴ The reason why we hear nothing of any exclusion of her from the society of patrician matrons may of course be due to the great power of the Fabii. Nevertheless, it seems strange that the patrician matrons took no part in any controversies regarding social status and rights of worship before all the great issues were finally decided in favour of the plebeians. If they could act in 295, they could have acted earlier, and they probably did, if not through the network associated with the *Pudicita*-cult, then through another.

Second, the establishment of the original *Patriciae Pudicitae* was, in my view, itself a part of the campaign to keep the plebeian upstarts at bay.¹⁵ If it was not intended as such, the new deity could simply have been called *Pudicita*, along with other personifications of abstract concepts, like *Concordia* from 367 BC and *Salus* from 302 BC. The cult was clearly a provocation from the start, and it was probably not the only device employed by the patrician matrons to assert their status. This is not to say that all patrician matrons were of one mind regarding the plebeians. Some patricians fought them as a matter of principle; others cemented alliances by giving their daughters in marriage to them. Whether or not the patrician mothers agreed to such decisions¹⁶, they would as mother-in-laws have to become tolerant of plebeian consuls, pontiffs and augurs, if not out of respect for the head of the family, at least to protect their daughters from social ostracism. Probably both female opponents and protagonists of the equalisation of rights between the orders used their influence earlier than 295.

Third, the conflict also has to be seen in terms of the peculiarities of Roman marriage law. As wife of a plebeian, Verginia enjoyed certain privileges not shared

¹⁴ Liv. 6.34. According to Livy this marriage was the cause of the struggle that ended with a sharing of the consulate between the orders. Marcus Fabius Ambustus' younger daughter complained that her plebeian husband was barred from the path to honours that lay wide open to her older sister's patrician husband. Fabius decided to aid Lucius Sextius.

¹⁵ Possibly the patrician shrine was, as R. Baumann and R. Palmer states (Baumann 1992), founded shortly after the position trials of 331 by the curule aedile Fabius Rullianus. This is however not mentioned by Livius, and some kind of worship of the chief feminine virtue, Modesty, must anyway have been considerably older.

¹⁶ Which formally were within the powers of the *pater familias* alone.

by all of her fellow patrician matrons. Whereas the *confarreatio*-marriage practised by the patricians only¹⁷ transferred the absolute power of the bride's life and property from her father to her husband, a more flexible form of marriage was used in mixed marriages. It is outside the scope of this paper to go into the legal technicalities in Roman marriage law. The point is that patricians generally would avoid transferring all power over their offspring to plebeians. This made divorce and separate estates a practical possibility, and may have given the patrician brides more independence in relation to their husbands. It also prevented her from losing status as a patrician.¹⁸ The patrician matrons' action against Verginia was an attempt to fill this loophole. In the course of time and the steady decrease of pure patrician blood, this informal kind of marriage without *manus*, i.e. the transfer of parental power, became customary among the nobility. For the women concerned this meant that they could exercise a certain economic independence and could not be legally killed by their jealous husbands for real or imagined adultery. Back in the bad old days of the early republic, this may have been reason enough for a patrician woman to marry a plebeian like Volumnius. The rise of the plebeians to political eminence entailed greater independence for their noble wives than what was possible in the strict marriages within the closed cast of patricians. Progressives among the patricians might very well have welcomed this.

Participation in religious cult was a powerful indicator of social status, not only in the male, public sphere, but also in the female sphere. The women who controlled these cults had the power to increase or detract from a woman's social status by allowing or forbidding her to take part in the rituals. We have no information about other female cults involved in the political struggles of this period. This does not mean that controversy was restricted to the *Patriciae Pudicitae*, only that this episode was mentioned by Livy, almost in passing, to account for the establishment of a parallel plebeian cult. The cults must have been powerful instruments to formalise status, not only by regulating access, but also by locating the participants in the internal hierarchies. However, it does not automatically follow from this that the female cults were independent

¹⁷ Presumably as an instrument to build up a closed cast.

¹⁸ Linderski 1986: 259-60.

or that they made any substantial impact in the public sphere. An assessment of the relative importance of these cults ultimately depends on what model is used to investigate relations between the sexes.

According to the traditional view, as presented by one of the foremost authorities on Roman Religion, John North, little or nothing was under women's control: the priests were all male, except for the Vestals who had to be conceded a quasi-male status to mark them off from their sisters. Women could certainly make vows and dedications in private contexts; and there are even hints that private cults were specially women's responsibility. The new Greek rites, however, brought with them Greek priestesses, who had to be given Roman citizenship, and a distinct place in public ceremonial and procession for the women of Rome. There was, of course, nothing threatening about this: male priests were in ultimate control; and the Ceres cult gave ritual reinforcements to the family and reproductive roles of women.¹⁹ The general opinion seems to be that female cults were either subordinate to the male religious authorities, or were only concerned with women's traditional roles and functions in a patriarchal society, or were peripheral to mainstream religious and public life. Religion reinforced the systematic subordination of women that existed in all other areas of community life.

This power-oriented subordination-model agrees both with feminist ideology and the outlook of our almost exclusively male sources.²⁰ According to this view, there is no female freedom and power to speak of when there is no equality between the sexes. Recently, however, this view has been challenged by a number of authors, perhaps most consistently by the writer of the previous article in this volume, J.C. Meyer. We should not look for equality, but equilibrium in the gender-based division of labour, social space and power.²¹ According to Meyer, equilibrium of separate, autonomous spheres is a better model than subordination of the female sphere by the male. The exclusion of women from the male, public sphere was, to a certain degree, compensated by

¹⁹ North 1989: 619.

²⁰ See fig. 1.

²¹ See fig. 2.

the exclusion of men from the female sphere. What happened here, in more private surroundings and on the women's own terms was arguably much more interesting and valuable. According to Meyer, we should use information from contemporary patriarchal societies to fill in the blanks, and correct the exclusively male perspective in our sources.



Figure 1: Subordination of the female sphere

His observations, derived from anthropological fieldwork in a traditional village in Turkey, are in fundamental agreement with Henny Harald Hansen's studies of Kurdish women²². Although women were described by the men as inferior, weak and feeble-minded, constricted to the house and subservient to their husbands, they were nonetheless predominant in 75% of the village, controlled most of the families resources and had their own independent networks and hierarchies. The determination of an outsider's status in relation to the family was within the discretion of the *Mater familias*. The women's confinement to the "house" only meant that they kept a distance to the village square when possible, or just wore a veil. This experience with social reality in a formally patriarchal society is highly relevant to the study of women in ancient Rome.

²² Hansen 1958; 1961.

FEMALE CULT IN THE STRUGGLE OF THE ORDERS

If the female sphere is better described as co-ordinated rather than subordinated to the male sphere, it means that the equalisation of social status between the orders could not have been successful without the acknowledgement and co-operation of the upper class female networks. If a patrician wife lost the status she was borne with by marrying a plebeian, or if the wife of a plebeian magistrate did not rise in social status in the same way as the wives of patrician magistrates, this must have detracted from the status of her husband as well, even when his status was not actively challenged in the male sphere. The reverse, an acknowledgement from the female sphere of his wife, confirmed the husband's status in the process. The principles laid down in the *Lex Ogulnia*, important though this law was, had to be endorsed by the female sphere to be realised in full.

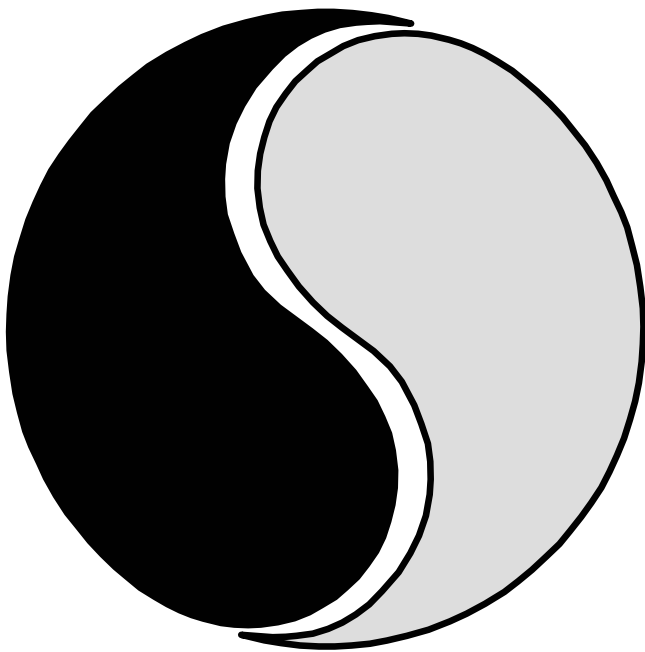


Figure 2: *Equilibrium of coordinated spheres*

Rome's upper class matrons, moreover, were managers of households with numerous economic enterprises, lower-class dependants, or clients, and contacts far and wide. Their husbands could not rule the city and conduct its wars without delegating most of the authority concerning these matters to them. Roman politicians of later ages boasted of their generosity and magnanimity, formalised in their morning-reception, the *salutatio*, of "friends" from all the rungs of the Roman social ladder. It must, however, have been a brave man indeed who without prior introduction turned up at a nobleman's house uninvited to beg for a favour. An introduction could, of course, be arranged through a client or friend of the patron, but then the petition had to be formally made and perhaps explicitly rejected by the patron or his official rep-

representative. This could be an embarrassment to both parties. All this potential awkwardness could be avoided if the plea was channelled through the female sphere. The client-to-be would send his wife to the matron or a go-between, and a friendly reception of the request could be prepared in advance. This allowed the patron to agree “spontaneously” to help, after thorough deliberation before the favour was officially asked.

To the extent that a Roman politician’s chances were increased by his ability to acquire clients, his wife played a crucial role in using her networks to increase the household’s status in the community. The expulsion of Verginia from the patrician cult of *Pudicitae* was an attempt by a clique of patrician matrons to reduce the status of Volumnius household. Obviously, they were too late, if the incident indeed occurred in 295. More importantly, however, the establishment of a parallel plebeian cult probably had wide repercussions. First, it made matrons married to plebeians more independent of recognition by the patrician matrons. Second, it allowed plebeian matrons to build up their own networks on the basis of plebeian religious cults, further diminishing the patrician hold of religion. This paralleled the development in the male sphere. Third, these plebeian religious cults were probably more successful in incorporating the overwhelmingly plebeian majority of matrons. The patricians were too few and exclusive to accomplish this. The plebeian cult-leaders could use this to attach more clients to their households and thereby increase the social power of their husbands. Social power, religious worship and political populism could thus jointly destroy the last barriers to the birth of a new political system. This could work both to the advantage of plebeian upstarts and patricians with a popular bend. A plebeian or (if such a status were truly realised) ex-patrician wife could be a valuable political asset.

This perspective allows us to make sense of seemingly pointless anecdote by the rationalist and equally misogynist Greek historian Polybius. In 213, the young Publius Cornelius Scipio stood for the curule aedilship, although he was only 22 years old. Polybius thought that Publius’ elder brother Lucius already was a candidate, but didn’t have as much popularity as Publius. Publius therefore decided that he would help his elder brother by running for office together with him. The story is obviously based on a misunderstanding of a reference in

the Scipio family archive. Lucius was not a candidate and was probably younger than Publius. The rest of the story, however, is primarily focused on religion. According to Polybius, Publius had to trick his mother into preparing a white toga for him by playing on her religious superstition:

Seeing that his mother was visiting the different temples and sacrificing to the gods on behalf of his brother and generally exhibiting great concern about the result – he had only to concern himself with her, his father having left for Spain...he as a fact, told her that he had twice had the same dream. He had dreamt that both he and his brother had been elected to the aedilship and were going up from the Forum to their house, when she met them at the door and fell on their necks and kissed them. She was affected by this, as women would be, and exclaimed, “Would I might see that day” or something similar. “Then would you like us to try mother?” he said. Upon her consenting, as she never dreamt he would venture on it, but thought it was merely a casual joke – for he was exceedingly young – he begged her to get a white toga ready for him at once...²³

Polybius demonstrates his contempt both of women and religion, and his point is to prove how his hero, Scipio Africanus The Elder cynically used the superstitions of others to achieve his own rational objectives. We know, however, that it was M. Cornelius Ceteghus, from the same lineage or *gens*, but not from the same *familia*, who was elected to the second curule aedilship, and that Publius Scipio was the only Scipio running for this magistracy this year. His candidacy was strongly opposed by the tribunes on account of his youth, but his popularity overcame these difficulties.²⁴

If his mother was sacrificing at the various shrines and temples for the success of her son, it was on behalf of the future Conqueror of Carthage, Scipio Africanus himself. Add to this that he actually asked her, in his father’s absence, to be allowed to run for office, and the following picture emerge: Scipio had to ask for his mother’s permission to use the family’s economic and social resources in the election campaign. His success was partially connected to his mother’s religious activities. Whether or not the gods intervened on the family’s behalf, these activities brought the *mater familias* into contact with a number of women connected to the

²³ Polyb 10.4.4-5.4

²⁴ Liv. 25.2.6-8.

female religious cults. When the fictitious candidacy of a fictitious elder brother is removed, the story reveals that Scipio's mother plays the leading role in the drama. For some reason this explanation didn't suggest itself to Polybius.

Scipio Africanus' wife Aemilia was, according to Polybius, reputed to be extremely wealthy, and she

...used to display great magnificence whenever she left her house to take part in the ceremonies that women attend, having participated in the fortune of Scipio when he was at the height of his prosperity. For apart from the richness of her own dress and of the decorations of her carriage, all the baskets, cups, and other utensils for the sacrifice were either of gold or silver, and were borne in her train on all such solemn occasions, while the number of maids and men-servants in attendance was correspondingly large.²⁵

We don't know whether this powerful lady had anything to do with the repeal of the Oppian law in 195 BC²⁶ This law had been passed in 215 BC after the twin military disasters at Trasimene and Cannae, and stated that "no woman should possess no more than half an ounce of gold or wear a parti-coloured garment or ride in a carriage in the City or in a town within a mile thereof, except on the occasion of a religious festival".²⁷ According to Livy the matrons organised an impressive demonstration:

The matrons could not be kept at home by advice or modesty or their husbands' orders, but blocked all the streets and approaches to the Forum, begging the men as they came down to the Forum that, in the prosperous condition of the state, when the private fortunes of all men were daily increasing, they should allow the women too to have their former distinctions restored. The crowd of women grew larger day by day; for they were now coming in from the towns and rural districts. Soon they dared even to approach and appeal to the consuls, the praetors, and the other officials, but one consul, at least, they found adamant, Marcus Porcius Cato...²⁸

Livy does not explain why the tribunes proposed to repeal the law, or why the male citizens agreed to this. Why they should care about this is a mystery to us. Nor does

²⁵ Polyb. 31.26.1

²⁶ Liv. 34.1

²⁷ Liv. 34. 1.3.

²⁸ Liv. 34.1.5-7.

FEMALE CULT IN THE STRUGGLE OF THE ORDERS

he mention any of the female leaders to whom Cato must be referring to as the dignified and modest women in the crowd.²⁹ But we may guess who they were.

Though the female sphere was socially, religiously, and in a more restricted sense, politically important, it was not autonomous. The male and female spheres were not in complete equilibrium, because there was also an element of sub-ordination. The equilibrium model should be linked to the traditional subordination model to allow for the full complexity of gender relations in patriarchal societies. The female sphere doesn't either have to be parallel to the male sphere and enjoy full autonomy, or be subordinated and totally dependant on the male sphere. It can also be encapsulated and exercise substantial autonomy within conditions determined by the male community.³⁰ This encapsulation model has the advantage over the subordination and equilibrium model in that it avoids making women mere pawns in the male social game, while it acknowledges the importance of formalised rights and coercive power.

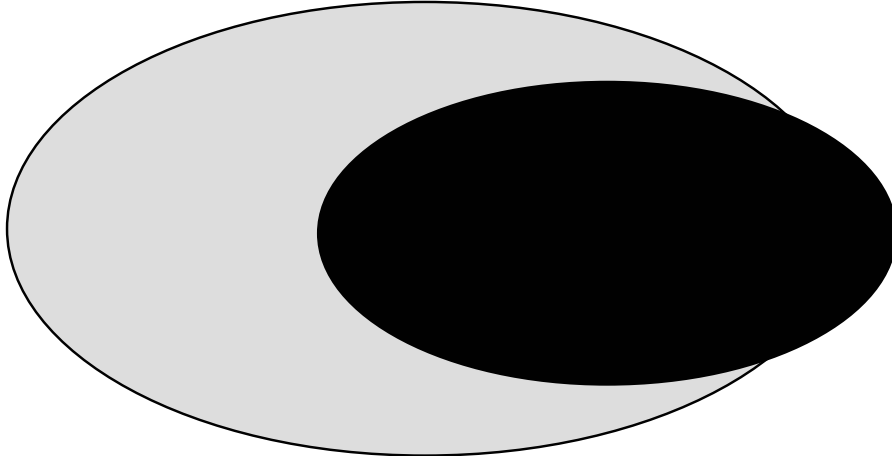


Figure 3: Encapsulation of the female by the male sphere.

²⁹ Liv. 34.2.8.

³⁰ See fig. 3

It is profitable to analyse the female sphere according to the same principles that F.G. Bailey applies to local politics in his *Stratagems and Spoils – A Social Anthropology of Politics* (1969). In such *encapsulated political structures*, the players follow internal rules, establish their own hierarchies and fulfil their tasks in relative independence of the central political structure. At the same time, the rules of the local game can be changed by the central structure, resources necessary to the local structure can be withdrawn, and the individual players' connections to the central structure can strengthen their position locally and vice versa. Nobody can deny that what happens in this encapsulated structure is important, or that it enjoys a substantial measure of self-government. The central structure can of course use its power to interfere in the encapsulated structure, but the encapsulated structure can also influence the balance of power on the central level, or try to resist attempts at central interference. The religious activity of women in ancient Rome was conditioned by similar rules:

- 1) **Internal self-government:** Although all religious activity had to be sanctioned by the *pontifex maximus*, the male high priest of the Roman state, the details of ritual, administration and hierarchies within the cults were probably left for the worshippers themselves to sort out.³¹ The explicit exclusion of males from a number of ceremonies attests to their internal autonomy and self-government. The story of the establishment of *Pudicitiae Plebeiae* indicates that it may have been normal for religious cults to be established by women without recourse to male authority.
- 2) **Impact on the public (male) sphere:** The female cults were not marginal in Roman society. Women were often called upon to perform ritually at times of crises in the State.³² The cults were instrumental in organising and integrating the female part of the community, determining status and providing networks for their leaders. These networks were both important for

³¹ Staples 1998, 1-8.

³² Staples 1998, 7

FEMALE CULT IN THE STRUGGLE OF THE ORDERS

the women concerned and could also be used for the benefit of their husbands. This must have been important in the struggle of the orders.

- 3) **Ideology and practise:** The female cults did not endorse every part of the patriarchal ideology, which would mean, among other things, toleration of male adultery with concubines, death penalty for women caught drinking wine and slave-like subservience to the nominal head of the household. Their rituals were the antitheses of this. The cults did, however, reinforce the separation of the male and female sphere ritually, but from a distinctly female perspective. The ideology of the patriarchal society was therefore not identical with the ideology expressed by the males. It had a female counterpart, and this was perhaps closer to the social reality experienced by real husbands and wives. The looser bonds between husband and wives practised in mixed marriages from the fourth century BC onwards, helped to further undermine the social reality behind male, misogynist propaganda. The so-called plebeian revolution meant greater freedom for upper-class women.
- 4) **Encapsulation by the male sphere:** The self-government enjoyed by the female cults was an internal autonomy, ultimately dependent on the goodwill of the males in power. The worshippers could be suppressed collectively through legislation or by religious sanctions from the high priest. A cult very popular with women and people from the lower ranks of society, the Bacchanal, was banned in this way. The worshippers could also be suppressed individually by their husbands. If the husband was unwise and chose conflict over harmony, he could act the tyrant unchecked in his own household. Undoubtedly there were also tyrannical wives and wives with enough independence to leave the household, but this was a small comfort to all those women who couldn't. The men were, as a rule, able to overcome any opposition from the women, if they choose to do so.
- 5) **Dependence on men:** The opportunities open to women in the economic, social, and religious fields were, as with men, dependent on their parentage. In this way an upper-class woman might, if not suppressed by a fa-

ther, husband or mother-in-law, lead a freer and more fulfilling life, than a nominally free, but poor man. Unlike men, however, their place in society was not only determined by birth, age and gender, but also by their sexuality. Virginity, marital fidelity and motherhood were not merely descriptive terms, but were also the basis for legal rights, religious functions and social status. In the final analysis, a woman's rights were determined by these factors: Did the woman concerned have sexual intercourse with none other than her husband? Did this husband occupy the appropriate places in the social, political and religious hierarchies?³³ Had she given birth, and if so – how many of the children lived and what was their sex?

In the Pudicitae cult, Verginia qualified as a worshipper because she had only been married once and was faithful to her husband. She was disqualified because her husband was plebeian. Her establishment of a rival cult did not challenge the principle that a woman's rights and status should be based on her sexuality. It only allowed for the determining factor, the man, to be plebeian. She could do this, and be the leader of a religious cult because she belonged to the elite and was married to a consular. The autonomy exercised within the cult and by Verginia was internal. It was encapsulated, but not eclipsed by male power. And it was probably an important factor in the power-struggle of the males in 3rd-century Rome.

³³ The secret December rites of Bona Dea, essential for the well-being of the community, were conducted exclusively by women, in the house of a praetor or a consul. Vestal Virgins on behalf of the Roman People performed the sacrifice. Cic. *Har. Resp.* 17.

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WOMEN AND RELIGION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

Mission and Education as Liberating Strategies: The Case of Mabel Warburton

Inger Marie Okkenhaug

During the nineteenth century a middle class with a deep Christian conviction ruled Britain. The members of the upper middle class looked upon themselves as moral leaders fit to rule, not only in England, but also in the expanding colonial areas. This Christian Evangelicalism emphasised personal piety, based on scripture and centred religiosity on social justice and obligations.³⁴ Thus these middle class representatives were uplifted and constrained by a religion that stressed social responsibility as a mark of piety.³⁵ Women were also spurred into social action, for some motivated by a sense of divine mission, a calling, inspired by female role models in Christianity. Before this a woman's vocation had been to act within the private sphere, in the household as spouse, mother and housewife. Now these roles were united in the caring mother who also had

³⁴ Nancy Boyd *Josephine Butler, Octavia Hill and Florence Nightingale* London 1984, p. 54

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 12.

a social responsibility outside the home. These obligations included the plight of the urban poor as well as the heathen in the colonies.

The movement of missionary women into the colonies cannot be separated from the entry of middle-class women into philanthropy and the professions that took place at the same time. An important part of the transformative power of the missionary project was its sanctioning of transgressive behaviour as religious exceptions to gender rules. According to Susan Thorne, it was the pious woman's "duty" to overcome her "natural diffidence" in order that she might better serve the mission cause; and scores of women embraced the opportunity to do so with open arms.³⁶

However, even if British women missionaries had found a role for themselves in the public space, they lived within a patriarchal society. The Empire was essentially a patriarchal structure founded upon masculine ideologies, while the dominant evangelical culture was the moral justification for British imperialism. The nucleus of evangelicalism was the ideology of separate spheres, which was reinforced by the doctrine of women's submission to men.

Thus, as Guli Francis-Dehqani reminds us, despite immense divergence between the Middle East and Great Britain, the position of women was closer than either culture seemed to realise.³⁷ In both Britain and the Middle East the separate spheres ideology was more strictly adhered to among the middle and upper classes. Under colonial rule this merge of patriarchies could result in the "progressive" Western power in fact enforcing new laws on Arab women that were more suppressing than the local tradition. In Aden and Palestine, for example, British rulers interpreted women's rights under Islam in a more conservative manner than the local Muslim leaders. Thus women were subject to a double set of patriarchal structures, both Western and Middle Eastern.³⁸

³⁶ S. Thorne "Missionary-Imperial Feminism" in M. Taylor Hubert and N. C. Lutkehaus, eds. *Gendered Missions: Women and Men in Missionary Discourse and Practice* Ann Arbor 1999 s. 45

³⁷ G. Francis-Dehqani *Religious Feminism in an Age of Empire: CMS Women Missionaries in Iran, 1869-1934* University of Bristol 2000, pp 42-43.

³⁸ Susanne Dahlgren "Women, Court Practice and the Anglo-Muhammadan Law in Colonial Aden (1937-1960)" in this volume.

A central notion within mission rhetoric was to improve the deplorable situation of women in heathen, oriental patriarchies. Thus several historians have argued that missionary women defined themselves in relation to non-Christian women whom they considered subordinate and dependent. However, I will argue that some Christian women were able to recognise the similarities in the two patriarchal societies. Individual women made use of the same strategies, as they knew from England, to improve Arab women's situation. In addition missionaries and teachers provided role models of independent, responsible women. And, as A. L. Flemming has pointed out the education they offered provided local women with opportunities for lifestyles significantly different from women's traditional lifestyles.³⁹ This process included a challenge to both local and colonial patriarchal structures.

Within the British colonial setting there were strong forces both among the colonial hierarchy and among Anglican mission organisations that did not want to provoke the patriarchal Muslim society by introducing secondary, theoretical education for girls.⁴⁰ However, during British rule in Palestine (1918-1948) especially one female missionary had a very different notion of Arab women's schooling and possibilities in life, namely Mabel Warburton. Inspired by the English educational pioneers, she belonged to a group of women who combined mission with an ambition to educate women all over the world. Warburton might be exceptional when it comes to the success and influence she enjoyed within the Anglican missionary establishment. But there were also other women equally capable and dedicated, challenging British as well as local patriarchal structures in every corner of the British Empire. Historians have to a great extent ignored these highly educated and influential women. By focusing on Mabel Warburton's biography and educational scheme, this paper is an attempt to shed light on a religious based woman's lib-

³⁹ L. A. Flemming "New Models, New Roles: U. S. Presbyterian Women Missionaries and Social Change in North India, 1870-1910" in L. A. Flemming (ed.) *Women's Work for Women Missionaries and Social Change in Asia* Colorado/London 1989.

⁴⁰ See for example R. Lunde *Between Tradition and Modernity: Girls' Education in the Northern Sudan, 1899-1956* Unpublished MA thesis Bergen 2001.

eration that cut across racial divides. What was the ideological background of this educational pioneer and how did she deal with one of the main hindrances to equality between British and Arab women, the colonial racial hierarchy that also characterised the Anglican mission?

Anglican mission in what was before 1918 “Ottoman Syria” focused increasingly on “Christian influence” and not direct proselytising, since the Jewish and Muslim population, as well as the Christian Arab Orthodox community were very hostile towards any evangelising attempts. After World War one the goal was to maintain a “Christian presence” through health and educational work.⁴¹ While the friends of the mission at home still believed in conversion, there was no attempt at proselytising in the mission schools in Palestine. Here the emphasis was on British “civilisation” and culture.⁴²

Patriarchy

Patriarchy can be defined as the male's formal control over women and family, exercised by fathers, husbands and brothers. In the so-called “classical patriarchy”, the extended family gives the senior man authority over everyone else, including younger men.⁴³ The clearest instances of classical patriarchy today are found in North Africa, the Muslim Middle East and southern and eastern Asia. It is also a model that fit nineteenth century Christian Europe.

As several scholars have argued, the word patriarchy is ideologically loaded and problematic. Deniz Kandiyoti argues that the term patriarchy tends to imply a unitary and universal system. The differences in the ways women are subordinated have been interpreted merely as the outcome of different expressions or stages of the same system. This has resulted in an overly abstract and mono-

⁴¹ See I. M. Okkenhaug *"the quality of heroic living, of high endeavour and adventure": Anglican Mission, Women and Education in Palestine 1888-1948* to be published in August 2002, Brill, Leiden.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Deniz Kandiyoti in N. R. Keddie and B. Baron (eds.) *Women in Middle Eastern History* New Haven/London 1991, s. 26.

lithic conception of male dominance, which confuses rather than reveals the intimate inner workings of different gender arrangements. Kandiyoti argues that a more useful point of entry for the identifications of different systems of male dominance may be found through analyses of women's strategies in dealing with them.⁴⁴

Line Nyhagen Predelli and Jon Miller adopt the same method in a study of nineteenth century Protestant missionaries. They argue that while the term patriarchy is unavoidable in the history of missions, in some usage the term conjures up unrealistic static and deterministic structures of oppression, in which men are omnipotent and women are fundamentally and irretrievably subjugated. This description diverts attention from the active agency used by women to advance and protect their own interests. The term must be framed in a way that allows for paradox, so that both liberating and oppressive forces can be investigated. Predelli's and Miller's solution is to adopt a conceptual connection that merges the idea of patriarchy with the notion of gender regime. In their study of mission organisations in the nineteenth century context, what emerged was contested gender regimes, or rather *contested patriarchies*.⁴⁵ The power of the patriarchs was continually challenged, directly or indirectly by the supposedly powerless women of their group.

In nineteenth century England the issue that first challenged the traditional patriarchal order was the question of education for women. The female missionaries belonged to the first generations of women who were educated in public schools and not at home as earlier. As education for girls and young women was also to be one of the main areas of missionary activity, it has been used as a central indicator of the legacy of Christian missionaries. However, some scholars have concluded that *missionaries were largely responsible for merely*

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 27.

⁴⁵ Line Nyhagen Predelli and Jon Miller Piety and Patriarchy: "Contested Gender Regimes in Nineteenth-Century Evangelical Missions" in M. Taylor Hubert and N. C. Lutkehaus, eds. *Gendered Missions: Women and Men in Missionary Discourse and Practice*, Ann Arbor 1999, p. 69-70.

*“modernising” the domestic dimension of Middle East women’s identity*⁴⁶ In other words, offering education that was not liberating but compatible with the existing patriarchal structures. A central question here is: *Were Christian missionaries keeping women subordinate by creating “good wives and mothers” or were they championing women’s rights to education, and promoting ideas of equality?*⁴⁷

Warburton, Mabel Clarisse: A Short Biography

Mabel Clarisse Warburton, missionary, educator and social reformer, was born in 1879 in Hertford. Her father, whose occupation was given as “Gentleman”, died before she was born and her mother died at her birth. Her grandmother raised her and an elder brother, who became institutionalised at a young age.

Mabel Warburton attended the Cheltenham Ladies’ College from 1895-97 and was greatly inspired by its famous Principal and pioneer of women’s education, Dorothea Beale. Like Beale, Warburton was profoundly religious, in the mould of the moderate Church of England. A combination of religious conviction, sense of service and pioneering zeal for women’s education, led Warburton, who never married, to join the British Syrian Mission. At the age of twenty-two, after a period in Egypt, she was appointed Headmistress of the British Syrian Training College at Beirut, a position she held until War broke out in 1914.⁴⁸

In January 1918, after the British occupation of Jerusalem, Mabel Warburton was one of the first British women to be allowed into Palestine to engage in rescue work. In co-operation with several Anglican mission organisations, Warburton founded and partly financed a high school and college for girls, the Jerusalem Girls’ College, where she was Principal from

⁴⁶ E. Fleischmann “Our Moslem Sisters: women of Greater Syria in the eyes of American Protestant missionary women” in “Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations”, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1998, p. 319.

⁴⁷ K. Jayawardena *The White Woman’s Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia During British Rule* London/New York 1995, p. 21.

⁴⁸ Jerusalem and East Mission (J&EM), XL/1, Emery box 2/4, p. 121, St. Antony’s College, Middle East Archive, Oxford.

1919 till 1926. This institution, which was open for both Arab and Jewish pupils, offered a liberal, English education and high academic standards, including a teacher's training course, for girls from the middle - and upper class.

Mabel Warburton modernised the traditional missionary role by insisting on academically trained teachers as well as the equal treatment of Arab and European staff-members. She was described by a colleague as *a very cheerful, extrovert woman, deeply religious, friendly to everybody. She had a fat and rather ugly fox terrier called Jim, who always accompanied her on long country walks around Jerusalem. She spoke Arabic well, and never seemed to be conscious of difference in race or national outlook.*⁴⁹

While the Middle East and especially the "Holy Land" had a long tradition of educated, middle class British women engaging in missionary and educational work, Mabel Warburton was not really "one of them." According to the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, Warburton had the qualifications, the vision, and the gifts of *a missionary and educational statesman.*⁵⁰ Her talents as organiser and educationalist within the Anglican Church were consequently given a wide range in the period from before 1900 till the 1950s.

In 1934, Warburton became Educational advisor for the Anglican Church in the Middle East, and as Secretary of a new Diocesan Board of Education Warburton was given a key role in reviewing and planning Christian education in the Middle East.⁵¹ After the Second World War, Warburton established the Ahliyyah School for Girls in Amman. In her survey of education in Palestine published in 1937, Warburton's vision of Christian schools was explicitly stated. It was *to implant in the pupils, the future leaders of the country, Moslem, Jew and Christian, that width of outlook, balance of mind, and sensibility to the claims of others, which will help to build up a better understanding between the peoples of the Holy Land.*⁵²

⁴⁹ Emery 2/4, p. 122, St. Antony's College, Middle East Archive, (StAP) Oxford.

⁵⁰ *Bible Lands* January 1962.

⁵¹ J&EM, XXXVII/5.

⁵² J&EM, XXXVII/5.

Warburton's life story gives us several important clues to her successful career and constructive cooperation with the Anglican patriarchy. For one, her social status: Belonging to the upper middle class was typical of her generation of highly educated women. This gave social self-confidence even to young women who went out to the mission field without experience. In Warburton's case this social background also meant economic independence. Second, her parents had left her a large sum of money that gave her great financial independence. Warburton was able to establish the college in Jerusalem (to a great extent financed by her alone), a school in Amman and build homes for herself both in Jerusalem and London. This also meant that the mission organisation depended on her financial goodwill.

Warburton's family situation was a third factor that gave her freedom to pursue a missionary and educational career. In contrast to her female colleagues who needed their fathers' permission to go out as missionaries, she was independent and used this freedom to work in the Middle East. Warburton did not need to stay at home looking after parents or siblings, which was the usual fate of an unmarried daughter. Besides these social and family based factors, Warburton's educational background is crucial in understanding her success in negotiating patriarchy.

The Ideal: Cheltenham Ladies' College

In England the inter-war period experienced a reintroduction of the "cult of domesticity". This, however, encountered considerable "subterranean resistance."⁵³ Heads and teaching staffs of many girls' schools were primarily interested in providing an academic education for girls and for turning out a new generation of career women like themselves.⁵⁴ The older generation of headmistresses put up a clear resistance, their views being *scarcely in accord with the prevailing view of the times that a woman's place was in the home.*⁵⁵ Warburton belonged to this generation

⁵³ S. Thorne 1999

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ D. Beddoe *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars, 1918-1939* London 1989, p. 41.

and her background from the Cheltenham Ladies' College (CLC) is central in understanding the educational profile of the Jerusalem Girls' College.

The prestigious Cheltenham Ladies' College was geared to high scholastic achievement for the daughters of *Noblemen and Gentlemen*.⁵⁶ Warburton not only hired teachers educated at the CLC, but the subjects offered were similar to the CLC and she established an Old Girls' Guild modelled on the CLC. She was very conscious of her Cheltonian background and kept referring to it. The inspiration from and identification with the pioneers of women's education in England is clear:

How many of us Englishwomen scattered over the world feel that we owe the inspiration of our life work to the education given in one of those great English Schools established in the early days of women's education by pioneers such as Miss Beale and Miss Buss. (I speak as an old Cheltonian.)⁵⁷

Dorothy Beale (1831-1906) was the *celebrated second principal* of CLC.⁵⁸ She was profoundly religious, in the High Anglican mould, and was inspired by a sense of mission.⁵⁹ Beale was also the founder of what was to become St. Hilda's College, one of four "women's halls" of learning at Oxford, where pupils from Cheltenham could continue their studies. Beale's educational ideology, which emphasised duty and service, was shared by other female educational pioneers at the time, and in these schools, according to Felicity Hunt, *often the greatest energy was directed at preaching high standards of service and duty to the girls*.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ A. Clarke *A History of the Cheltenham Ladies' College 1853-1953* London, 1953, p. 26. The subjects taught were scripture, English, Latin, French, geography, history, music and needlework, with German, Italian and dancing as "extras".

⁵⁷ J&EM, XLII/1. "Women's Education in Palestine" by M. Warburton, asking for donations to British Girls' High School and Training College, Jerusalem, 1923.

⁵⁸ See McDermid, pp. 110-111.

⁵⁹ C. Dyhouse "Miss Buss and Miss Beale: Gender and Authority in the History of Education" in F. Hunt (ed.) *Lessons for Life: the Schooling of Girls and Women 1850-1950* Oxford 1987, p. 28.

⁶⁰ F. Hunt 1987, p. 7.

The motto of the Jerusalem Girls' College (JGC), *I serve*, was the old Cheltonian ideology transferred to Palestine. A central part of Dorothea Beale's educational philosophy was to educate women who would, in turn, educate the next generation. This duty was assumed by succeeding generations of students, many of who became teachers in schools and colleges, not only in England, but also all over the world.⁶¹

Warburton was a part of this educational pioneer movement. She wanted to educate Palestinian women, who would then educate and enlighten women in the Middle East, primarily by being teachers, but also as career nurses, doctors and social workers, and even as unpaid charity workers - an activity that was easily combined with a domestic life. Even so, domestic work was only one among many opportunities, where paid employment clearly had a priority. The openings Cheltenham College had given to English women were possibilities envisaged for the JGC graduates. Warburton told her students that *there is much for women to do in the world in these times*.⁶² "In the world" meant both in the domestic arena, but also the "outside world" and the list included the medical profession, nursing, teaching, government and municipal work, inspecting schools, welfare, law, research, accountancy, secretarial work, domestic work, literary work, business, arts and crafts, agriculture and gardening, committee work, relief work and social work.

Mabel Warburton was not alone in exporting the CLC ideal to areas outside Britain. By the time she had graduated in 1897, the influence of the CLC was widespread. Forty headmistresses of important schools in Britain and overseas were from CLC, thirty former students had become missionaries, sixteen had become doctors and several famous scholars.⁶³ The Ladies' College, Colombo, established by the Church Missionary Society in 1900, was modelled on the CLC and its first principal was also a product of the CLC. This College was similar to the JGC in being multi-national and multi-religious. The College in Colombo was also aimed

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² J&EM, XL/3. "British High School and Training College: First Annual report, Old Girls' Guild 1923-24." President, Miss Warburton's, letter to the Guild.

⁶³ Jayawardena 1995, p. 48.

at the upper classes, both Christians and non-Christians. By the late nineteenth century parents from this social background were starting to request a college on a level with boys' public school preparing boys for the Cambridge local examination, and in some cases for studies in Indian and British universities.

At both institutions the Protestant ethic of hard work prevailed. The inspiration for further studies came from the staff members who had been part of the movement for higher education for women, in which the "battle of the sexes" featured prominently- namely, competing with and excelling the men in higher education. Local girls caught the spirit of academic success.⁶⁴ The JGC teachers' wish to compete with the men's school was present from the early years. This is seen in Emery's comment from a Diploma Giving Day at the Girls' College, Jerusalem, in the early 1920s: (...) *one table with geography & physiology note books, with maps & diagrams, & with the Diploma exam papers, & that had a great crowd of people round it, especially men, - for though the men are better at maths & Arabic, we always do better in other things, & they are very jealous.*⁶⁵

Education and religious inspiration from Cheltenham combined with Warburton's independent personality also influenced her dealings with the Arab population. The issue of race was related to Warburton's evangelical background that stressed the equality of every individual, regardless of race or gender. This is not to say that her relations with the Arab population had been typical of the missionary community in Palestine. On the contrary, Mabel Warburton brought substantial change in the English missionaries' relations to the Palestinian teachers.

Race

There are really no preconceived conceptions of different "races" in the Middle East, since intermarriage and conversion among different peoples have long historic roots going back to the early Islamic conquest.⁶⁶ According to Billie

⁶⁴ Jayawardena 1995, p. 49.

⁶⁵ Emery 1-3. Letter to mother 28.6., early 1920s, StAP.

⁶⁶ Ellen Fleischmann, comment in Bergen 1999.

Melman's study, English women were aware that notions about race, which they themselves applied to for example the Indian Raj, could not be used in the Middle East, where the line of colour was shifting and where whiteness did not necessarily signify power. While Ellen Fleischmann argues that the British attitudes about Muslims and Christians during the Mandate were *oddly racialized-they considered these two groups and the Jews as "races"*,⁶⁷ Melman maintains that Western women (and men) did not simply import notions of race to a directly ruled colonial subject. They negotiated between prejudice and a multifarious social and cultural structure already found in the Middle East.⁶⁸ The evangelical writers in Melman's study described their relations with Christian and Jewish women in Palestine as a "mother- and daughter"-relation, which combined the idea of protective care with that of parental authority. In Victorian Britain the metaphor of motherhood was typically applied to relations between middle-class reformers and philanthropists and working-class women. In the Middle Eastern context, the mother-daughter metaphor acquired novel meanings:

The female relationship of protection and deference replaces the patriarchal construct typical of the oriental family and society in general. The evangeliser thus replaces the biological father and the religious mentor.⁶⁹

This hierarchical relationship was also typical of the pre-World War Anglican missionary's relations to the Palestinian (Christian Arab) teachers. The English women were not only "mothers", they had also taken on the paternal authority of the employer, denying the Arab teachers their personal names and giving them the meanest duties:

Previously the British staff had always been addressed by their surnames, and collectively referred to as "The Ladies", and the ladies had done few, if any, playground duties. The Palestinian staff, on the other hand, had been addressed as

⁶⁷ Ellen Fleischmann, comment in Bergen 1999.

⁶⁸ B. Melman *Women's Orient: English Women and the Middle East 1718-1918* London 1995, p. xxviii.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 203.

MISSION AND EDUCATION AS LIBERATING STRATEGIES

“Miss Kareemeh” or Miss Rosie” without a surname, and had been referred to as “the teachers”, and they had done all the playground duties.⁷⁰

The pioneer Warburton had sufficient authority to initiate a lasting change in the relations between European and “native” teachers. This difference between the pre-war missionaries and the new generation is explicitly expressed by a younger teacher, S. P. Emery⁷¹ who clearly defined herself as different from the old generation:

During that first year Miss Warburton had modernised some customs which the “pre-war” missionaries had taken for granted. ... Miss Warburton swept all this away, at a memorable staff meeting. From now on, all members of staff would be addressed in the same way, with surnames, not Christian names, and all would take their due part in school duties. It was a real step forward, and was much appreciated by everybody on our staff, though it met with criticism from some country schools, where the old ways died hard.⁷²

The Church Missionary Society's school, headed by a Miss McNeile at Bethlehem, was one example of a mission school where the racial stratification was kept; English teachers were *Ladies* while the Palestinians were *teachers*. During Christmas 1919 Emery stayed there and was surprised by this division. The revolutionary aspect of the JGC in regard to keeping a low national profile and introducing the same titles for the all nationalities is seen by Emery's indignation at a missionary committee meeting six years later, when she still was teaching at the JGC. The issue was to prepare statements on “the missionary, - his personal life and demeanour, in relation to non-Christians”, a topic Emery felt strongly about:

I got thoroughly worked up about the way English people, missionaries and others, treat Palestinians on their staffs. These get treated either as perfect beings, or else much oftener, as rather stupid underlings. In our school we all assume to be equal, that is, the junior English staff and the junior Arabs are equally junior, and when

⁷⁰ Emery, 2/4, StAP, p. 21.

⁷¹ S. P. Emery later became principal at the English High School for Girls in Haifa, also run by the Jerusalem and East Mission.

⁷² Emery, 2/4, StAP, p. 21.

WOMEN AND RELIGION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

we meet together each of us has a right to her opinion. Ours is the only household in the country where that is so, I am afraid. The reverse does untold harm. In other places only English staff attend staff-meetings, and the Palestinians are simply issued orders. The result is that the local staffs are often discontented and disloyal in their work. However, perhaps we will reform the situation.⁷³

During her time as Principal at the Anglican English High School in Haifa, Emery tried to follow these ideals of equal relations between the non-English and English teachers. A practical and visible start was to revise the practice of playtime duties:

I (...) made a list of staff playground duties, and as I was accustomed to in Jerusalem I gave all the members of staff equal duties. This was an innovation, and the British members of staff complained that they had never done playground duties, and Haifa was very hot. The new plan was accepted, but reluctantly.⁷⁴

The pre-war missionary generation's prejudices and attitudes to the "local" population were also found in the British community that came to Palestine after 1918. In dealings with the Arab population, many of the career officials *had a sense of mission and an implicit faith in the psychological ascendancy they derived from knowledge, a knowledge which seemed all the more powerful because it was believed to be unilateral.*⁷⁵ One British teacher gives the same description of the British community relations with the "local population" in Jerusalem. Despite being determined to *avoid the harsh segregation, which was rife in Egypt, (...) some of our colleagues believed this doctrine more in theory than in practice.*⁷⁶

During the 1930s a former JGC student was teaching at the British Community School, mainly for children of British missionaries and government officials, and run by the JGC. She was rejected by some of the parents because she was half Arab, but she kept her job.⁷⁷ Thus Warburton's girls' college seemed to be more progressive than the British Mandate community,

⁷³ Emery, 2/4, StAP, p. 75, 10.5.1925.

⁷⁴ Emery, 2/4, StAP, p. 136.

⁷⁵ K. Tidrick *Heart-Beguiling Araby* London 1981, p. 207.

⁷⁶ H. & N. Bentwich's Archive, A 255/47, Israeli State Archives. H. Bentwich Diary, p. 12.

⁷⁷ E. Mead in interview with Okkenhaug, Kingham, 1.2.1996.

which has been described as governed by a *coherent imperial ethos that enjoyed attitudes of superiority and prescribed rigid, socially approved behaviours for virtually all contingencies*.⁷⁸

How did this view of racial equality influence Mabel Warburton's educational scheme in Palestine? If one compares her ideals of Arab women's education with the British colonial schools, there are striking differences as to the perception of Arab women's educational needs and rights.

The Director of education, H. Bowman's previous posting before Palestine was as Director of Education in Iraq, also a British Mandate after the World War.⁷⁹ When Bowman arrived in Baghdad in 1918, Gertrude Bell, who by then was chief advisor to the British administration in Baghdad, interviewed him.⁸⁰ Bowman became an admirer and friend of the legendary Bell and he was clearly inspired by her views of Muslim women and education:

Her [Bell's] chief request from me was to do all I could for the Moslem girl. "We must give the girls an opportunity for self-expression; if you know the *harims* as I do, you would have pity upon the women. Nothing has been done for them - nothing; here at last is the opportunity. What a chance for them! Do not let them miss it. Give them schools - the right kind of education; teach them domestic science, housecraft, hygiene - all the things they need, and have never had. You will find them willing and eager to learn, and of course it can only be done by women."⁸¹

The civilising mission of British rule was to elevate the status of women. In practical terms this implied basic skills in modern hygiene and domesticity.

⁷⁸ A. J. Sherman *Mandate Lives: British Lives in Palestine 1918-48* New York 1997, p. 33.

⁷⁹ A. L. Tibawi *Arab Education in Mandatory Palestine: A Study of Three Decades of British Administration* Oxford 1956, p. 30.

⁸⁰ Gertrude Bell, with her first-class degree from Oxford and a career in the British colonial administration, was an exceptional woman for her time. See for example D. Birkett *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers* London 1991.

⁸¹ H. Bowman *Middle East Window* London 1942, p. 178. Gertrude Bell had for a brief period in 1915 been attached to the Arab Bureau. She stayed in Iraq from 1916 till her death in 1926, first as a "Special Duty Officer", Arab Bureau and later officially as "Oriental Secretary", i. e. chief advisor on Arab affairs to the administration in Iraq. See for example S. Goodman *Gertrude Bell* Leamington Spa 1985.

Despite strongly voiced demands from the Arab population for academic education for women, Bowman adopted Bell's emphasis on domestic ideas for women's schools. At the Arab Women's Training College in Jerusalem the subjects reflected the modern domestic approach. In addition to Arabic, English and the normal school subjects, special attention was paid to housecraft and domestic science.⁸² The training centre for teachers in rural schools provided a simpler course along the same lines. Ironically, this was the legacy from a woman who was one of the first professionally trained women archaeologists from Oxford, who gained international recognition as traveller and explorer – the quintessence of male spheres. However, when it came to other women's access to the same kind of life Gertrude Bell was very conservative. In England she was active in the fight against women's rights. In the Arab world, Bell promoted a feminine ideal for the Muslim woman firmly planted in the domestic sphere.

This is a contrast to the Anglican educational scheme for and ideals of Arab womanhood, as expressed by Mabel Warburton, who in the 1930s worked hard to secure Palestinian women access to a university education. This was to be done by establishing a British University in Jerusalem.⁸³ While Warburton and the Anglican establishment worked to secure Palestinian women a university education, the British government in Jerusalem never managed to meet even the official minimum of four years schooling for Arab girls. Neglecting female education was a legacy from Turkish rule; however, thirty years of modern government did not materially improve matters.⁸⁴ Despite demands from all sections of the Arab population for an increase in women's education, the Government tried to use Muslim opposition to women's education as an excuse for the low priority.⁸⁵ Looking at the anti-academic trends concerning women's education in England, it seems clear that the British colonial rulers had their own prejudices that caused neglect of the issue of girls' schooling.

⁸² Bowman *Middle East Window* p. 259.

⁸³ Okkenhaug 2002, chapter 6.

⁸⁴ Tibawi 1956, s. 228.

⁸⁵ Tibawi 1956, p. 229. See also Mogannam 1937, pp. 252-55, and Wilke 1994.

Conclusion

As in Palestine later, the British government in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), though initially unwilling to establish a girls' high school, supported the Church Missionary Society's project for such a school in 1900. The fact that this organisation was also involved in the JGC indicates that the institution in Palestine might have been modelled on the well established "sister college" in Colombo. This shows that women missionary educationalists had succeeded in their active agency of challenging mission patriarchy in terms of academic education for local women. The various local patriarchies must also have been challenged and won over, as Indian and Arab girls were sent out of their homes to go to school and even to universities. Whose "active agency" had been at work here is, however, another story. Even so, Mabel Warburton's biography shows a British woman missionary who used her religious and educational background to advance women's interests, regardless of racial background.

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Between tradition and modernity: A radical Muslim view on the Interpretation of Gender Roles in Islam

Åsne Halskau

The positions of Muslim women and the gender roles within Islam are constantly being negotiated. The debate concerning gender roles can be seen in specific periods of history and in specific geographical areas, and it always has to be studied within its own unique contexts. After W.W.II many Muslim nations began to pursue different paths of modernisation inspired by western models. National liberation and emerging forms of nationalism provided the context and idiom for political and social development in many areas, from politics to gender relations. In no area, however, was the force of tradition felt more strongly, and the clash of civilisations more apparent, than that of the status and roles of women. Secular modernists, and more Islamist oriented Muslims, viewed each other with mutual scepticism. The latter held that the modernisation paradigm, with its Western values of freedom, equality, and self-determination was a threat to the Muslim community and the Muslim family.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Haddad and Esposito. 1998: Introduction

I will present one important voice within this discourse - the Muslim feminist and human rights activist Riffat Hassan. She is an intellectual figure and not a religious leader. Although she is originally from Pakistan, she was educated in England and presently lives in the USA. Her opponents within the Islamic discourse use her Western orientation against her. Hassan, on the other hand, is careful to retain her Muslim identity in that she formulates many of her arguments within the framework of the Quran. She claims the right to re-interpret the Quran through the method of *ijtihad* and argues that gender relations within Islam are distorted due to centuries of patriarchal misinterpretations. This essay will outline the main features of her reinterpretation of what Muslim gender roles within Islam ought to be, and discuss whether her feminist theology represents continuity or change in relation to earlier Muslim feminist traditions. First I will, however, place Riffat Hassan within the Islamic discourse in general.

Riffat Hassan within the Islamic discourse

The status ascribed to women by the Muslim faith is much disputed, also among Muslims themselves. The Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi noted, *the controversy has raged throughout this century between traditionalists, who claim Islam prohibits any changes in the sex'roles, and the modernists, who claim that Islam allows for the liberation of women, the desegregation of the society and the equality of the sexes* (1975:xv).⁸⁷ Riffat Hassan is well aware of this controversy. Ideologically she can be placed within the modernist camp of Islamic scholars,⁸⁸ and her historical roots can be traced back to the *Islah*-movement thriving at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

A critical, if not sceptical attitude towards the Hadith-literature is typical for this branch of Islam. Women within this movement discovered that institutions like the veil and segregation between men and women were not prescribed directly in the Quran. Instead they held that these practises were the

⁸⁷ Coles and Mack 1991: 30

⁸⁸ Svensson 1996, Halskau 1999

result of men's patriarchal interpretations of the Quran. More importantly, the *Islah*-movement and its adherents developed a new attitude towards the Quran and other religious sources. Many of the arguments and attitudes developed in this period are still used today in the discourse between traditionalists and modernists. One of the most important points of disagreement is the question of historical context and interpretation of the religious sources. The modernists claim that society in Mecca and Medina at the time of the Prophet held very specific political, social and religious conditions. In other words – history creates time-specific cultural contexts, which have to be taken into consideration when reading the Holy Scriptures.⁸⁹ According to the *Islah*-movement, and later the modernists, the veiling and segregation of women is bound to a specific period of Islam and therefore no longer necessary. Consequently, Muslims must attempt to find moral principles, rather than literal interpretations of the text, when reading the Quran.

Riffat Hassan justifies new and feminist interpretations of Islam by stating that the Quran is an *open* book. She makes reference to the earliest centuries of Islam, when the method of *ijtihad* was practiced, as a fruitful and positive period in the history of Islam: *These Muslims read the Quran as an 'open', rather than a 'closed' text and strove continually to understand its deeper meaning.*⁹⁰ It is important to capture the "Spirit" of the Quran, in order to achieve the correct interpretations of Islam. To Hassan this "Spirit" is egalitarian:

Not only does the Quran emphasize that righteousness is identical in the case of men and women, but it affirms, clearly and consistently, women's equality with men and their fundamental right to actualise the human potential that they share equally with men. In fact, when seen through a non-patriarchal lens, the Quran goes beyond egalitarianism. It exhibits particular solicitude toward women and also toward other classes of disadvantaged persons.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Stowasser 1994: 132

⁹⁰ Hassan, Riffat. "Members, One of Another': Gender Equality and Justice in Islam". Internet 02.18.98. Religious Consultation:\\www.consultation. Page 3.

⁹¹ Hassan 1995: 12

This line of reasoning opens up the possibility of interpreting the Quran as basically an equality-seeking document, also in the more specific areas of economic life, politics and ontological equality between the genders.

Hassan also makes a distinction between the Islamic ideal described in the Quran, and later influence from non-Islamic sources resulting in patriarchal traditions. The latter has been fused into Arab culture mainly through the Hadith-litterateur. The distinction she makes between the Islamic ideal and Muslim practice results in an apologetic attitude towards Islam, but only the Islam Hassan finds in the Quran. Thus her roots can be firmly placed within the modernist version of Islam.

Feminism(s)

Riffat Hassan explicitly describes herself as feminist. Within Western contexts feminism generally means equality between men and women within the fields of education, the right to work, equal roles within the marriage, the right to vote, etc. Feminism in Muslim countries, on the other hand, has been linked to both Islam and nationalism. Further, within the Muslim world of feminism, one does not think in terms of the Western “equality” between men and women, but rather in terms of “equity”. This refers to some sort of balance in the relationship between men and women; gender-roles should be complementary according to the Muslim feminist view.⁹²

Generally speaking, feminism in the Muslim world has been linked to nationalism and Islam. Kumari Jayawardena observes: It is in the context of resistance to imperialism and various forms of foreign domination on the one hand, and to feudal monarchies, exploitative rulers and traditional patriarchal and religious structures on the other, that we should consider the democratic movement for women’s rights and the feminist struggles that emerged in Asia.⁹³

⁹² Further reading: Smith, Jane I. 1979. “Women in Islam: Equity, Equality, and the Search for the Natural Order.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 47/4.

⁹³ Jayawardena 1986: 8

Margot Badran, on the other hand, claims that: In Egypt the rise of women's feminist consciousness preceded the development of a nationalist consciousness. From the beginning women grounded their feminism first in Islam and later in nationalism.⁹⁴ According to Badran, Egypt is a pioneer country in regard to developing a feminist tradition. Badran and Jayawardena agree, however, that feminism must be seen in context both with the development of the Islah-movement, and its new attitudes towards religious sources, as well as the growing nationalism. One can perhaps say that through the Islah, with its new attitudes to the Quran and Hadith, men and women were given new tools for reflecting upon gender-roles. Through the nationalist movements women were given organisational experience and a justification of their beginning public appearances. In general, the early feminist traditions in Muslim countries were what might be called "relational feminism", as described in the introduction. Women (and men) should change their roles but not as individuals – rather as parts of a broader social and political program.

Riffat Hassan's Feminist theology

Riffat Hassan's attitudes regarding Islam as a tool for feminist consciousness and activity have already been indicated. Holding *that the Quran does not create a hierarchy in which men are placed above women*⁹⁵, she represents continuity with the earlier feminist tradition in the Muslim world. This attitude constitutes a basic feature in her feminist theology, more so in Hassan than among other feminist Muslim thinkers. Compared to Nawal El-Sadaawi, the link between Islam and women's rights stands out as a hallmark. Sadaawi argues that polytheistic religions are more humane in their attitude towards women, and that during the development of the monotheistic faiths women lost many of

⁹⁴ Badran and Cooke 1990: xxvii

⁹⁵ Hassan in Cooley 1991: 53

their former held rights.⁹⁶ Sadaawi thus formulates an ambivalent attitude towards Islam and its ability to secure women's rights.

A more complex picture of Hassan's attitudes towards gender-roles appears however when we consider her views regarding women's education and work outside the home. She not only finds women's right to work sanctioned in the Quran, but also the right to dispose of their own income.⁹⁷ Furthermore, the *purpose* of education has obtained a new dimension as compared to the earlier Muslim feminist tradition. According to Hassan, women should undertake education on quite advanced levels in order to be able to participate in theological discussions regarding gender roles.⁹⁸ The intention of the "relational feminism" of the *Islah*-movement was that women should receive education in order to be good mothers and wives. Hassan, on the other hand, formulates a program of "individual feminism" on Muslim terms. Education becomes important to every person so that she can independently analyse and understand her history and her religion. To Hassan it is no longer the community that decides whether or not women should be educated – it is the women themselves. Although Hassan's feminist, individualist theology has its roots in the relational feminism of the *Islah*-movement, it is far more radical in its reinterpretation of gender-roles and normative Islam.

The Islamic normative tradition builds partly on the concept of the *um-mah* or the Muslim community. In this tradition, men and women's positions are first and foremost measured in relation to their rights and duties towards the community.⁹⁹ Muslim relational feminism shared this vision of the community. Liberation of women was not a goal in itself but was rather part of a larger process, the ultimate goal being liberation from the colonial powers. It constituted a tool to obtain the superior goal - political liberation from the

⁹⁶ el-Sadaawi, Nawal 1982. "Women and Islam". In *Women and Islam*. Aziza al-Hibri, Pergamon Press. Page 193.

⁹⁷ Hassan 1995: 128

⁹⁸ Hassan 1995: 12

⁹⁹ Voll 1994: 15 og 16

West.¹⁰⁰ These basic attitudes towards both women and men as part of the *ummah* were kept intact within the *Islah*-movement.

“Normative Islam”, however, must not be confused with a geographical entity, the Middle East and parts of Asia. On the contrary, “normative Islam” refers to an analytical tool that can help us analyse and deconstruct Riffat Hassan’s construction of a new feminist theology. There are certain philosophical tendencies and norms, which we can call unifying principles and common themes included in the term “normative Islam”. These can shortly be listed as 1) a strongly monotheistic tradition, 2) a view that the Quran is literally God’s words, 3) an idea about unity or *tawhid* reflecting the essence of God, and 4) the concept of a Muslim community or *ummah*.¹⁰¹ Historically speaking, these themes were fused into the theological school of the Ash’arites, an orthodox school of theology within Sunni Islam, which had its beginnings in the end of the ninth century. The Ash’arites, also called the traditionalists, had contempt for the independent reasoning and the reliance of Greek thought characteristic of the theologians of their time. Instead they argued for sole reliance upon a literal interpretation of the Quran and upon the authority of the Prophet’s Sunna. Furthermore *only by entering the fold of the Ummah and meshing his efforts with those of the righteous community could the individual effectively participate in human history*.¹⁰²

More precisely, the individual pious Muslim became more directed by the Muslim community at large, or as Yvonne Haddad puts it:

If one individual deviates, the whole community suffers the consequences. The group is intimately bound both by common commitment to the goals revealed by God and by a sense of responsibility and guardianship for one another. Each is accountable both to and for the other; the mutuality of commitment and responsibility is seen as an agent binding the Ummah to the purpose of God.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Smith 1979: 10

¹⁰¹ Voll 1994: 16

¹⁰² Haddad 1983: 140

¹⁰³ Haddad 1983: 142

In terms of values and norms then, what is called normative Islam is more determined by the wants and needs of the community or *ummah*, than what the individual pious Muslim desires. How does Hassan relate to this? Is her form of feminism liberation of women as independent individuals, isolated from the rest of the Muslim world, or is it part of a larger program building on considerations towards the *ummah*?

Riffat Hassan does not perceive her interpretation of Islam and the Quran as a break with religion in any way. My impression is that Hassan is oriented towards a kind of feminism that is more independent of other factors than what was the case in earlier Muslim feminism. Her strong criticism of *ulama* and Muslim societies in general, as well as her new attitudes concerning women's education, points to this. However, there are other tendencies in her feminist theology, partly pointing in the opposite direction. Hassan is always concerned with placing women's fight for rights in a larger context. This appears, amongst other things, when she talks about the establishment of peace as the Quran's final goal. "Peace" is impossible to obtain, Hassan claims, without the establishment of "justice" first, and in this process both men's, women's and children's rights play a key-role:

It is important to note that there is more in the Quranic legislation pertaining to the establishment of justice in the context of family relationships than any other subject. This points to the assumption implicit in much of the Quranic legislation, namely, that if human beings can learn to order their homes justly so that the rights of all within it – children, women, men – are safeguarded, they can also order their society and the world at large justly. In other words, the Quran regards the home as a micro cosmos of the 'ummah' and the world community, and emphasizes the importance of making it 'the abode of peace' through just living.¹⁰⁴

The concept of *ummah* refers to the global community of Muslims. Hassan, on the other hand, creates a link between Muslims as such and the global community; for her, it refers to the global community or the international context. In this part of Hassan's feminist theology we have another case of both continuity and change

¹⁰⁴ Hassan 1995: 12 (My italics)

compared to earlier feminist traditions. The continuity is represented by the fact that Hassan frames her feminism in a larger project: the establishment of global peace, while the change lies in the shift of context from the strictly Islamic world of *ummah*, to the global or international world community.

Globalisation and Feminism

Compared to the early feminist tradition within Muslim countries, Riffat Hassan's feminism and interpretation of Islam shows little concern with nationalism. This development is linked to the process of globalisation; national boundaries mean less today than they did a century ago, and both people and ideologies are exchanged cross-culturally. Hassan's primary concern seems to be the individual men and women and their rights within the community, not first and foremost their duties towards the *ummah*. In other words, her feminism is individualist rather than relational. This is an attitude typical within the Western philosophical tradition, and it has often been linked to the project called "modernity". Individualism, anti-traditionalism and openness to change and progress were the fundamental concepts in this project. As Mike Featherstone observed:

Modernity was held to entail a relentless de-traditionalization in which collective orientations would give way to individualism, religious belief to secularisation and the accumulated sediment of mores and everyday practices would surrender to progressive rationalization and the quest for 'the new'¹⁰⁵

Modernity, however, is not everything "Western" and the philosophical tradition of the Western world must not be confused with the geographical area of North America and Western Europe. The same tendencies have also been found in the Middle East and Asia. Hassan's version of Islam, in fact, can be described as one type of modernity, constructed on the philosophical basis of both Normative Islam and Western Modernity. Hassan wants to reach as many people as possible in her mission to spread the universal message of the Quran.

¹⁰⁵ Featherstone 1995: 72

Since the ideology of this Muslim feminist thinker to a certain extent can be characterised as secularised, her ideology might even find some resonance within groups of Western feminists. Here, however, there exists a paradox within Hassan's system of values. On the one hand, her interpretation of Islam may be seen as an adaptation to the modernity of the West with its focus on equality rather than equity. On the other hand, she is continually undertaking a re-sacralization of what she calls Islamic doctrines. Ultimately, Hassan finds her values sanctioned in the Quran, and thus by God. The ideology might be adapted to ideals formed within the Western philosophical tradition, but the form of the argumentation and the presentation is still very much Islamic.

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WOMEN AND RELIGION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

Women as Ritual Performers

Commemorating martyrdom in female gender-specific rituals in Shia-Islamic Iran

Ingvild Flaskerud

Introduction

This chapter addresses Shia-Muslim women as ritual performers in Iran. The context is female gender-specific rituals commemorating Imam Hussein's martyrdom, celebrated during the first ten days of the lunar month Muharram.¹⁰⁶ In these rituals women acted as hosts, leaders, assistants, servants, lay participants and economic supporters. Looking at how these rituals were organised and performed I focus on what roles women held, what kind of knowledge and skills they possessed, and how they transmitted and renewed their knowledge and skills. By analysing these factors we can get a clearer understanding of which strategies participants apply or develop to

¹⁰⁶ The material was collected from rituals in three different locations in Shiraz in 2000 and 2002.

fulfil the rituals' functions, and how they act as competent and responsible members of a religious community.

To which extent someone is a competent religious actor is open to judgement. Asad suggests that a practice is Islamic because it is authorized by the discursive traditions of Islam and is so taught to Muslims.¹⁰⁷ Taking a similar position I understand ritual competence as something locally evaluated according to local ideas about acceptable ritual performance. The focus will thus be on how Muslim tradition and piety are locally understood, transmitted and renewed in a female gender-specific ritual context. Nevertheless, what is said here about competence may also apply to other contexts within the Shia and non-Shia Muslim traditions. For sure, certain knowledge is cultivated and valued in most Muslim communities. This includes for example knowledge of the sacred text, the Quran, and its language, Arabic.¹⁰⁸ To participate in a wider Shia-Muslim community also implies being familiar with religious history and hagiographic literature. In Iran and elsewhere ethics, political ideology and gender models have been and are inspired and legitimated with references to this historical body of the religious tradition.¹⁰⁹ Knowledge of this tradition connects local belief and practice to the world religion it is part of.

¹⁰⁷ Talal Asad "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam". Occasional Papers Series. Centre for Contemporary Arab Studies. Georgetown University, Washington DC pp 1-22 1986.

¹⁰⁸ Richard T. Antoun *Muslim Preacher in the Modern World* New Jersey 1989. John R Bowen *Muslims through Discourse* New Jersey 1993. Michael Cook *The Koran* Oxford 2000. Kristina Nelson *The Art of reciting the Quran* 1985.

¹⁰⁹ See for example Saadia Khawar Khan Chishti "Female Spirituality in Islam" in Seyyed Hussein Nasr *Islamic Spirituality* 199-219, New York 1987. Erika Friedl "Ideal Womanhood in Postrevolutionary Iran" in Judy Brink and Joan Mencher *Mixed Blessings: Gender and Religious Fundamentalism Cross-Culturally*, 143-178 New York 1997. Mary Elain Hegland "Two Images of Hussein: Accommodation and Revolution in an Iranian Village" in Nikki Keddie, *Religion and Politics in Iran: From Quietism to Revolution*. New Heaven 1993. Hisae Nakanishi "Power, Ideology, and Women's Consciousness in Postrevolutionary Iran" in Herbert L. Bodman and Nayereh Tohidi *Women in Muslim Societies. Diversity within Unity* London 1988. Vernon James Schubel *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam. Shi'i Devotional Rituals in South Asia* Columbia 1993. Gustav Thaiss "Religious Symbolism and Social Change: The Drama of Husain" in Nikkie R. Keddie *Scholars, Saints and Sufis* Berkely 1972.

Several studies have presented Shia-Muslim men as leaders, participants and spectators of the calendrical commemoration ceremonies during Muharram.¹¹⁰ Men meet in mosques, in public popular ceremonial places like *husseinieh* (named after Hussein) in homes, and participate in street processions and passion plays. It would seem that women's participation is confined to the passive role of spectators or entirely characterized by their absence from various religious celebrations. The impression one receives is that the rituals of Muharram are male-dominated and that women play little or no roles in them. However, when observing men's processions in Shiraz on the tenth of Muharram 2000 my friend, a Shirazian woman in her late twenties, expressed her enthusiasm. This was a new experience to her. She had always been too busy arranging and participating in the women's gatherings to find time to watch the processions. And, she added, her husband was not comfortable with her mixing in an overwhelmingly male crowd. Her remarks suggest that in the study of Muslim women and their religious life in Iran it is important to distinguish between gender-mixed and gender-specific contexts. In general, Muslim women should not attract the attention of strange men. And when appearing in non-family, gender-mixed situations, which they often do, they should take care to apply a modest dress code and behaviour. This clearly makes the possibility of women leading public, gender-mixed rituals and even participating in such rituals rather unlikely. However, it would be erroneous to think that women play no role in rituals and even in their leadership. If the researcher would focus on female gender-specific contexts a whole world of women's ritual competence and practice would inevitably open up.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ See Peter J. Chelkowski *Taziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran*. New York 1979, Heinz Halm *Shiism* Edinburgh 1997, Moojan Momen *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* Worcester 1985, David Pinault *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety* 1992, and *Horse of Karbala* New York 2001, Yann Richard *Shi'ite Islam* Oxford 1995.

¹¹¹ The last two decades has produced several studies on Muslim women and rituals in the Middle East. Examining different rituals and various aspects of women's religious activities, they show that women are most active in female gender-specific contexts. This perspective is also relevant for studies on Muharram rituals. See for example Anne H. Betteridge "The Controversial Vows of Urban Muslim Women in Iran" in *Unspoken Worlds. Women's Religious*

The rituals examined in this study are expressions of popular religion and piety. Although Middle Eastern women now attend mosque rituals more often than before, women's roles in official religion are still rather limited compared to what takes place in popular religious contexts. Iranian females can graduate from religious or theological schools.¹¹² But men still rank above them in official religion. Women could nevertheless earn their salaries teaching Quranic courses at women's religious schools and by leading female gender-specific religious gatherings like those I will describe below. Such gatherings take place in homes or in public popular religious ritual buildings like the *husseinieh*, *zeinabieh* and *fatimieh*, dedicated to Hussein, his sister, Zeinab and mother, Fatimeh. Also men attend ceremonies outside the official religious realm. In Shiraz, male gender-specific associations called *heiat* arranged religious meetings in someone's home, at a shrine, a *tekkieh* (a small house or a shed temporarily put up on the side of a street) or a *husseinieh*.¹¹³ For calendar celebrations they may invite other *heiat*s to their ceremonies and arrange separate ceremonies for women. This parallel model of organizing male and female religious

Lives, eds. Nancy Auer Falk and Rita Gross 1989, and "Women and Shrines in Shiraz" in *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East*, eds. Donna Bowen and Evelyn Early, 239-247 Bloomington 1993. Mary Elain Hegland "A Mixed Blessing: The Majales, Shi'a Women's Rituals of Mourning in Northwest Pakistan" in *Mixed Blessings: Gender and Religious Fundamentalism Cross-Culturally*, eds. Judy Brink and Joan Mencher pp 179-196 New York 1997. Zahra Kamalkhani *Women's Islam: Religious Practice Among Women in Today's Iran*. London 1998, and "Women's everyday Religious Discourses in Iran" in *Women in the Middle East*, ed. Haleh Afsar 85-95 London 1993; Vernon James Schubel *Religious Performance in contemporary Islam*, Columbia 1993 Nancy and Robert Tapper "The Birth of the Prophet: Ritual and Gender in Turkish Islam" *Man* (n. s.) 22: 69-92 1987. Azam Torab "Neighbourhoods of piety. Gender and Ritual in South Teheran" Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of London 1998, and "Piety as Gendered Agency: A study of Jaleseh ritual discourse in an urban neighbourhood in Iran" *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2: 235-251, 1996, and "The Politization of Women's Religious Circles in Post-revolutionary Iran" in *Women, Religion and Culture in Iran*, eds. Sarah Ansari and Vanessa Martin Surrey 2002

¹¹² Hegland 1999, Kamalkhani 1990, Torabi 1996

¹¹³ A *heiat* is a male gender-specific association organized on neighbourhood or occupation basis for the purpose of religious instruction and ritual celebration.

gatherings forms part of the Shia-Islamic popular religious expression in Iran and must lead to a revision of the idea that women's religious activities are private whereas men's activities are public. Indeed, a female gathering at someone's home, in a *husseinieh*, *fatimieh* and *zeinabieh* should not be regarded as more private and less public than male gatherings in the same locations.

The first part of this chapter introduces the ethnographical field with a general presentation of Muharram celebrations in Shiraz. The second part draws attention to female gender-specific ceremonies, and gives a summarized presentation of commemorating ceremonies held in three different locations. The focus of the third part is how ceremonies are organised to create viable opportunities for participants to involve in performances. I identify different roles participants hold and discuss the purpose of taking up these roles and of changing them. I also look at what knowledge and skills is considered important in order to perform the ceremonies and how knowledge and skills is transmitted and renewed. This will also involve a study of the ceremonies' preparatory stage, in which participants hold other roles than in the ceremonies and thus provide other samples of knowledge and skills than what is expressed in the ceremonial context.

The ritual context; commemorating martyrdom

Throughout the year Shia-Muslims celebrate birthdays of the holy figures, such as the prophet Muhammad and the members of his family, and commemorate the days of their death. Amongst the more elaborate rituals are those related to the commemoration of the martyrdom of Hussein, who was the third Imam and grandchild of Muhammad. He was killed in 680 A.D by the troops of caliph Yazid on the plains of Karbala (today in Iraq). The major rituals take place during the first ten days of Muharram, which is a time of mourning. Religious buildings, shops and public offices are decorated with black banners to express grief. Most grown-ups dress in black: men in black pants, shirts and jackets and women in black coats and scarves sometimes covered by a black veil, *chador*. Throughout the day, as well as in the evening and during the night, people come together to mourn. Both men and women visit the mosques and shrines to listen to a (male) *rowzeh-khan* chanting stories from the

battle at Karbala. This is typically a moving moment, mainly engendered by the emotional power of the chanter, which can bring many of the listeners to tears. Men and women must sit in different zones, separated by a curtain or a low wall. Although both groups can hear the *rowzeh-khan*, the women cannot see him as he stands or sits among the men.

In addition, men meet in *husseinieh* and *fatimieh* where sometimes a *mul-lah* reads from the Quran and gives a lecture. A *rowzeh-khan* is usually present, singing after the lecture. While weeping, participants beat their chest with one hand in a kind of self-flagellation called *sineh zan*. Every evening, during the first nine days of Muharram, men also gather at the *tekkieh*, the centre of a neighbourhood's *heiat*. It is typically decorated with black banners and colourful posters, presenting the story of the battle and depicting key figures like Imam Hussein and Abul Fasl Abbas. Men and boys of different age form two rows in the street. Led by a male *maddah* who chants poems, *nowheh*, they perform various forms of self-flagellation like chest beating, *sineh zan* and chain beating, *zandjir*, while slowly moving down the street to the beat of a drum. It should be noted that the beating and self-flagellation are highly stylised and almost resembles a dance. Self-inflict pain or bleeding is not allowed.¹¹⁴ Women and men are out watching their relatives and neighbours. But as the voice of the *maddah* and the beat from the drums are carried out in the night, many women are on their way to someone's home, a *husseinieh* and *zeinabieh* to participate in female gender-specific rituals. Some of them may have already visited other gatherings the same morning or afternoon.

¹¹⁴ The Iranian practice, regulated by the authorities of the Islamic state, is thus different from practises observed by David Pinault among Shia-Muslims of Hyderabad, India. There men publicly cut their chest and forehead, bleeding. *Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community*, New York 1992. It also differs from popular processions of Catholics in Spain, Latin America or the Philippines.

Female gender-specific rituals

Locations and participants

The female gender-specific rituals discussed below took place in three different locations of which one was a privately owned permanent place of worship, a *zeinabieh*, the other a private home where the courtyard was transformed to a ritual place for the occasion, and the third being a home where the living room was used for rituals in Muharram. A pious man built the *zeinabieh* in 1974. Since his death, the widow and the two daughters have been managing it. The building was used on a weekly basis for Quran lessons for women, and for celebrating the birthday of prophet Muhammad and members of his family and commemorating the day of their death. Several of the objects and facilities utilized during lessons and rituals were ex-votive gifts, *nasr*, from women who frequented the place, presented to show gratitude for the fulfilment of a request for help from one of the holy intercessors in Shia-Islam. This could include electricity, a little library with religious books, wall decorations, tea, sweets, and payment to some of the *maddah*. The intercessors addressed in the ceremonies in this study were Imam Hussein, Abul Fasl Abbas (Hussein's half brother), Ali Asghar (Hussein's baby boy), and Qasem (Hussein's nephew). Also the ceremony held in the private home was a *nasr*. Apparently, about thirty years ago the owner made a request to Imam Hussein asking for a new home, promising to give a ceremony every year during Muharram. The request was fulfilled several years ago and she had since then invited neighbouring women to ceremonies during Muharram. Her ceremonies had become occasions for other women to ask help and present alms. Finally, the ritual in the courtyard was arranged in the memory of a pious woman who used to arrange commemoration rituals. A group of friends had brought together her ritual equipment and one of them offered to use her courtyard as the location for the ritual. Again, the ritual was arranged with the support from all the participants. *Nasr* was

thus an important material condition for arranging ceremonies as well motivating people to participate.¹¹⁵

Although women could appear as spectators at some male gender-specific ritual performances, such as the street processions, and men and women could attend the same *rowzeh* in shrines and mosques, men were not admitted at female gender-specific performances in this study. Participants were of all ages, but in the early afternoon young mothers with children, and elderly women prevailed while students arrived after school hours. They were a mixed group of people from Shiraz and people originating from Bushehr, a town on the shores of the Persian Gulf. They lived in the same neighbourhoods and visited the same rituals. Some frequented all three of the rituals' locations in this study; others only went to one or two. The same held for leaders, *maddah* and assistants, *zakirs* and servants, *khidmate kar*.

General characteristics

The ceremonies can be described as *matam*, mourning ceremonies, but they were also occasions for merit gathering, *savab*, and opportunities for receiving blessing, *tabaruk* through the distribution of *nasr* to participants. The ceremonies demonstrated small variations in terms of dramaturgy. There was always a leader, *maddah*, present as well as *zakir*, assistants and *khidmate kar*, servants. All rituals included story telling, *rowzeh*, and reciting mourning poems about the battle, *nowbeh*, in addition to different forms of self-flagellation, *sineh*, and ritual dance. Three rituals, one in each location, also included particular ceremonies to commemorate the killings of Imam Hussein's nephew Qasem, and the baby son Ali Asghar. However, each ritual was different from the other in several respects. The quality of each performance was clearly dependent on material or economic conditions and

¹¹⁵ A similar importance of *nasr* is pointed out by Kamalkhani, 1993, pp 85-95 and Torab informs us about how intercession rituals are included in the *jalaseh*, a religious meeting where discussions takes place under the supervision of a leader, and *sofreh*, a votive meal 1998, pp 178-181.

rituals were said to have been more beautiful a few years ago, when people's economical situation was better. The length of each ritual varied according to how many *maddah* had been invited or how long they could stay before rushing off to another ritual. Content differed slightly; a *maddah* was free to include a talk on issues of personal choice, and recite verses from the Quran and phrase songs according to her own preferences. The atmosphere was dependent on the leader's charisma and the response of the participants. On a few occasions a *maddah* or arranger criticised participants for not engaging wholeheartedly in the ritual and reminded them of the sacrifices of Imam Hussein and his supporters, and that the ritual represented a great occasion for improving life conditions, both at a personal and a communal level. Bushehrian ceremonial traditions were being introduced and applied in all three locations. The reason given was that they were more elaborate and beautiful than the Shirazian rituals, and as such was believed to provide the participants with a nicer experience and a better opportunity for asking help.

Women as ritual performers

The following description is based on observations I made of commemoration ceremonies during the first ten days of Muharram. The host would usually stand at the door to greet visitors, following common funeral customs. A *khidmate kar* would often approach the visitors with rosewater, which was sprinkled on their face and clothes. Visitors placed themselves on the soft carpets on the floor, often after having kissed the pulpit, *minbar*. Other *khidmate kar* served tea and sweets. Whereas the tea was *nasr*, making and serving tea was regarded as *savab*, a meriting act performed for your own benefit and to improve your condition. It was an honour the participants competed for and one *khidmate kar* expressed her hopes that Imam Hussein would accept her service, meaning fulfilling her requests to him. The ritual proper started when the *maddah* arrived. But while waiting for her, other women sometimes took a seat at the *minbar*, picked up the microphone and recited from the widely used book of supplications, *Mafatih al-Jinan* (Keys to the Garden of Heaven), reciting the Arabic text in a melodic voice according to the

standard way of reading this book.¹¹⁶ Like the *maddah* they used one of the lower steps of the pulpit since the upper one was reserved for the rare occasions when a *mullah* (male) paid a visit to open a ritual or give a talk.

A *maddah* opened by inviting visitors to join in the praising of God, the Prophet and his family and asking salvation for people in this life and for the spirits of the dead. The first *maddah* usually gave a talk on a social or political issue. This could reflect personal ideological attitudes, such as displaying tolerance and respect towards other religious traditions in Iran, like Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, on the basis of similarities between them and Islam, or in contrast reflecting a clearly conservative stance by pointing at young boys and girls' efforts to talk to each other on the street as an example of moral decay in society. The *maddah* could also read from the Quran, for example chapter 110, called Nasr (Help), which says that it is with God's help that mankind enters God's religion, and it encourages people to praise the Lord and seek His protection, or chapter 32, called Al-Sajdah (The Adoration), which points to God as the creator and guardian of mankind, and promises reward for the believers and punishment for the ungodly. In their comments the *maddah* related the Quranic messages to the Shia-Islamic belief in the twelve Imams as God's servants, and as supporters and protectors of religion. They reminded the visitors that through their mediating position believers could seek God's protection and forgiveness. The present rituals were thus related to the Revelation, and as such placed firmly within the Islamic tradition. Then followed a *rowzeh*, a recitation of the story about the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and the sufferings of his family and companions. The *maddah* could elaborate on the worries of Imam Hussein's family members before their departure from Mecca to Karbala and hence referred to the idea that Imam Hussein was destined to be martyred at Karbala. The hagiographic literature likewise tells about how his grandfather, the prophet Muhammad, and his mother, Fatimeh, lamented his death already in his childhood. A *maddah* could also take on the voices of Imam Hussein and

¹¹⁶ Mafatih al-Jinan is printed in Arabic with translations in Farsi. It contains prayers to be read on particular days of the week, on holy days, and prayers for protection and help.

his family members expressing their determination to go to Karbala and participate in the battle.

“Hussein came to Zeinab and said: I want to go on a trip. Zeinab said: I am afraid for this trip. Oh, Ali Akbar went through the camp with the horse and said: I want to go with my father. Hussein said: Everybody who wants to come is welcome! Abbas came and said: I want to come with you and be your standard bearer. Zeinab went to Hussein and said: Brother, my dear, I have heard that this trip is dangerous. I want to come with you. Did you ever see that you went anywhere and I was not with you?

In this *rowzeh* members of Imam Hussein’s family can also be seen as models for believers today. As one *maddah* said, it is important that Muslims pray every day, but if something happens to Islam they should support Islam with material things and even with their lives. Of the persons mentioned in this *rowzeh*, only Zeinab survived Karbala. She is said to have spread the news about the killing of Muhammad’s family members, and the tradition of keeping their memory alive in mourning ceremonies is attributed to her.

The *maddah*’s task was to engage participants emotionally in order to gradually bring them into the mental state of mourning where they could express their grief and sorrow for the sufferings of the holy figures at the battle, and thus communicate their attachment to these figures in particular and the Shia Islamic creed in general. At this stage many participants wailed and moaned, but emotions escalated even more during the following *nowheh*. A *nowheh* is an elegy intended to engage the heart and feelings of participants. It did not have the narrative form of the *rowzeh*, but focused on events and drew attention to the courage and sufferings of Imam Hussein and his supporters. While participants had listened to the *rowzeh*, they now joined in the *nowheh* by repeating lines or responding to lines. In the example below the tragic conditions of Imam Hussein’s death are lamented. Coming from Mecca, he was a stranger at Karbala, and died in a foreign land. It also refers to the hard conditions of his death, due to the enemies’ blockade of water from the Euphrates River.

Maddah: Hussein is the friend of strangers,
The king of martyrs, my dear Hussein
Answer: Hussein! Hussein! Hussein!

WOMEN AND RELIGION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

Maddah: Thirsty Hussein!

Answer: Hussein! Hussein! Hussein!

Maddah: The Stanger Hussein!

Answer: Hussein! Hussein! Hussein!

It was not uncommon for a *maddah* to relate the tragedy to participants' own life experiences, and after this poem the *maddah* added "Vow to God, any mother amongst you who saw their child die". Since the revolution of 1979 the term "martyr" has been applied to those who lost their lives when supporting the revolution as well as fighting in the war against Iraq between 1980 and 1988. The *maddah* thus established a connection between Imam Hussein as "The King of Martyrs" and many of the participants' life stories as mothers of martyrs. During *nowheh* the participants performed a flagellation called *sineh ruye pazadan*, which involved hitting the tights repeatedly three times followed by a pause, while seated on the floor.

The ceremonies as described until now were typical for the first days of Muharram, whereas the ceremonies between the seventh and the ninth, when members of Imam Hussein's group were killed, could be more elaborate. From the seventh day they introduced the standing flagellation, *sineh sarpay* or *azaye sarpay*, which involved standing in a circle or circles beating the chest with the hand, and *lat*, slapping one's cheeks with the hands. Another variation of standing flagellation was the *sineh dour*, moving round in the circle, beating one's chest with the hand. During the standing flagellation the *maddah* often stepped down from the pulpit and participated in the dance, leaving the microphone behind. The tempo increased gradually and the voices rose. Commemorating the deceased at Karbala, they would end with mentioning Imam Hussein until they stopped in exhaustion. They closed the ritual by raising their hands and praising God.

During performances the *maddah* was assisted by a group of four to six women called *zakhir*. These sat on the floor in front of her and, while facing her, repeated her praises, responded to her song and sometimes sang together with her, encouraging the others to join. They lead the others in sitting flagellation and organized the standing flagellation by coordinating movements, tempo and rhythm.

In all three locations the ceremonies on the eight and ninth day consisted of two particular parts. The first was a pantomime representing the marriage between Imam Hussein's daughter Fatimeh, and her cousin, Qasem. They were married at Karbala, but Qasem was killed on their wedding day. The other was the commemoration of Hussein's baby boy, Ali Asghar, killed at Karbala by an arrow through his throat when Hussein went to the enemy to beg for water for the thirsty baby. I was informed that Qasem usually was commemorated on the eight day and Ali Asghar on the evening of the ninth, but for practical reasons they could also perform the two ceremonies during the same meeting

The pantomime of the wedding involved several women who had otherwise appeared as general participants but now changed roles and became performers. Two elderly *zakirs* brought in two younger women dressed up as Qasem and Fatimeh. Both wore green robes and veils covering head and face. Accompanied by *sorood*, a happy song performed at marriage ceremonies, now about the marriage of Qasem, a procession of about ten women entered the room carrying plates on their head with candles, flowers and sweets. These were *nasr* and carrying a plate was considered an honour and an opportunity to ask for help, in the same manner as serving tea. I was told that many women had had their wishes fulfilled in the *zeinabieh* described in this study and there was a list of women waiting to perform different tasks. The women made a walk around the room and others tried to touch the holy plates. By touching one could ask Qasem for help, clean one's hearts and comfort oneself. As such it can be seen as a parallel to the custom of touching the bars surrounding a sarcophagus at a shrine.¹¹⁷ *Zakirs* advised Qasem and Fatimeh during the ceremony, while the *maddah* sang *sorood* and later *nowbeh*. There was first an element of happiness in the celebration; during the wedding rosewater was spread on the people, while these called out happy cries, *kel*, clapped their hands and

¹¹⁷ A sarcophagus in a shrine is often surrounded by bars. It is placed in the middle of the main room within the reach of the female and male section alike. People gather around it to touch the bars and ask for help and comfort. Some kneel down weeping, some tie small pieces of green fabrics to the bars or rub the bars with a cloth to be taken home.

sang merry songs. After the ceremony Qasem prostrated himself on a prayer rug. Then he and Fatimeh were led out.

The celebration then turned into a mourning ceremony. People placed themselves in circles on the floor performing two kinds of *sineh dour*. The *maddah* informed which *sineh* to apply, of which one was simple, with beating the chest on the forward step and answering the *nowheh* on the step back. The other was double, beating the chest on both steps, and answering on the back step. *Zakirs* led the group from the inner circle.

Maddah: Tonight is the night of sadness

Answer: Woe to the unique Hussein

Maddah: Zeinab tore her face

Answer: Woe to the unique Hussein

Maddah (taking the role of Hussein): You will not see my face any more

Answer: Woe to the unique Hussein

Maddah: Woe to Qasem

His wedding party became a sadness ceremony

Answer: Woe to the infant Asghar

Answer: Woe to the unique Hussein

The *sineh dour* could be finished by *lat*, the slapping of the cheeks with both hands to express sadness. But not all participants possessed the necessary skills to perform the ceremonies, especially not when Busherian *sineh* were performed. In one such case the group got out of order during the *sineh dour*. The *maddah* stopped singing and slowly performed a poem by Hafez to let the group make a few rounds to practice the movements.¹¹⁸ She continued the *nowheh* when the group caught up with the rhythm, thus making the ceremony itself an occasion for learning and transmitting religious competence.

The other special ceremony was the commemoration of Ali Asghar. Upon arriving many women had walked over to kiss a cradle decorated with green fabrics. Now they gathered around it and the *maddah* took out a nicely dressed

¹¹⁸ Shamsaddin Muhammad, called Hafez, is one of Islam's greatest mystical poets. He lived in Shiraz and died there in 1389.

little doll, representing Ali Asghar. Playing the part of Umm Leila, his mother, she passed the doll around and people kissed it. Then *sineh sarpay*, standing flagellation, was performed. One *maddah* took on the role of Imam Hussein's sister Zeinab who was presented as confused, singing the boy a lullaby, not yet having accepted his death. Participants wailed and slapped their faces. The ceremony was an occasion for both asking Ali Asghar's help and thanking him. I was told that barren women often supported the rite, and of the successful experience of a woman who after fourteen years gave birth to a child by the help of Ali Asghar. Moreover, women who had lost a child would also participate and express great grief, finding the ritual an occasion to seek comfort. The ten days of commemoration was over by noon on the tenth of Muharram, Ashura, and women met at a communal meal.

Creating viable opportunities; the significance of organizing structure, roles, knowledge and skills

It is possible to identify three themes in these commemoration ceremonies: mourning, intercession and blessing. These themes relate to central core beliefs in Shia-Islam. The Shia understands God's message, the Quran, through the personal histories of the prophet Muhammad and his family, called *ahl al-beit*. This means that to be a Shia-Muslim is to offer allegiance to a person as well as to a message.¹¹⁹ Of particular importance are the first Imam, Ali, his wife and the daughter of Muhammad, Fatima, and the other eleven Imams, of which Imam Hussein is the third. Also other members of the *ahl al-beit* function as mediators and intercessors. One way of expressing allegiance is to participate in happiness and sadness ceremonies celebrating the birthdays of these persons or commemorating their death. Such participation produces religious merit, *savab*. In addition believers can address the holy persons during rituals and ask help for themselves and their family in this life, and ask mercy for the soul of dead relatives.

The performances in this study were carefully organized to create viable opportunities for all participants to express sorrow and allegiance with the holy per-

¹¹⁹ Vernon James Schubel *Religious Performance in contemporary Islam* Columbia 1993 p 17.

sons, to gather merit, *savab*, ask for help and mercy, present *nasr* as a gift in response to help, and receive blessing, *tabaruk*. Skilful leaders brought participants into the state of mourning, but expressing sorrow also required interaction between leaders and participants and direct involvement in ritual performance. In addition different tasks were believed to create opportunities for intercession and merit gathering and it was important to give participants access to those tasks. The ceremonies were thus organised to allow participants to change roles during a ritual or from one ritual to another, creating a rather fluid hierarchical system. Examples are women who took turns acting as *khidmate kar*, making and serving tea, carrying trays, acting as Qasem and Fatimeh, and *zakirs* leading the group when the *maddah* left the pulpit to join the ritual dance and perform self-flagellation. This dynamic structure also made it possible to replace a *maddah* temporarily, if someone was considered more skilful. This adopted structure of handing out roles and changing roles demonstrates a sense of communal responsibility for distributing good opportunities amongst participants. The same responsibility was expressed in the arranger's careful control over the distribution of *nasr*, such as sweets and fruits to visitors. Perceived as conveying blessing, *tabaruk*, the *nasr* was carefully distributed to everyone.

Roles were depending on people's knowledge and skills. *Maddah* were invited to act as leaders and all five in this study had received Quranic training, either in a Quran school or from their parents. They mastered reading Farsi and Arabic and knew how to recite the Quran in the form *tartil*.¹²⁰ Some had theological training from theological colleges in Qum and Shiraz. They gave talks and presented comments (*tafsir*) on the sacred text. All knew the *du'a*, recommended prayers in *Mafatih al-Jinan*, and were familiar

¹²⁰ A maddha explained that they preferred to use the *tartil* form (also called *murattal*) because it has a relaxed tempo, is speech bound and well-suited for communicating the content of the Quran. It is easy to pronounce and understand for a non-Arabic speaker. The alternative would have been what she called "be soat", meaning with melody. This corresponds to the style *mu-jawwad*, which applies a melody and manipulate the parameters of recitation in order to affect the listeners emotionally. See Micheal Cook, *The Koran. A very Short Introduction*, Oxford 2000. Kristina Nelson *The Art of Reciting the Quran*. Austin 1985.

with religious history, the Shia-Islamic understanding of history and the meaning and importance of the life of prophet Muhammad, his family and the twelve imams. Those performing *rowzeh* and *nowheh* mastered a repertoire of religious narratives and poetic songs. Each *maddah* had her own songbook. It was usually inherited from someone in the family, with new additions made by the present owner. Although the poems addressed different themes and followed different melodies, they were familiar to participants by experience. Several of the *maddahs* had good voices and some were praised for their charisma.

Zakirs assisted *maddah* through *rowzeh*, *nowheh* and *sineh*, but controlled the performance when *maddah* joined the standing flagellations. This required knowledge about performance traditions. However, a ritual should not only be performed in the “correct” way, but also take place in the “right” setting. Knowledge of how to create a functioning setting, which objects to use and how to prepare and arrange them, was therefore important. Preparations were carried out by the arranger under the supervision of *zakirs* and by other women from the neighbourhood. They would meet the day preceding a ceremony to prepare plates of sweets, fruits and candles, dress up a doll representing Ali Asghar, and make the cradle and the bridal-chamber. However, arranging was not only a matter of knowing what to use and how to put things together. The items in use were *nasr* and rendered sacred, and the practical work of putting together decorations was perceived as meriting. The work of arranging the cradle for Ali Asghar and the *hajleh* for Qasem thus attracted many women. The work was accompanied by *zakirs* or sometimes other women from the neighbourhood, reading from the Quran and *Mafatih al-Jinan*, joined by neighbourhood women. The preparation of the rituals thus shows that also the preparatory stage had a sanctifying power and was used as an occasion for meriting action, asking help and thanking for the fulfilment of wishes. It also demonstrates that religious knowledge and skills were not confined to ritual experts, but were shared within the community.

In general religious knowledge and skills were transmitted through unofficial structures. Some *maddah* had received formal training, but narra-

tives and poems were passed on to a *maddah* from a family member, often a mother or an aunt, or collected from hagiographic literature available at the public libraries. The *Zakirs* were all above the age of fifty, and said they had learned their skills from elder women in their family. Participants learned how to read the Quran in informal Quran classes, how to arrange rituals by taking part in preparations and how to perform by participating in rituals. Younger women learned by being guided by and observing elder women and girls were included in preparations and at rituals. For example when the preparations of the bridal chamber was completed in the home, two girls, about 8 years old, performed a pantomime as Qasem and Fatimeh.

In these practices, it is clear that women do not only pass on to other women a tradition but they also tend to actively renew it. One *maddah* expressed her consciousness of the nature of her audience and said she gave new melodies to poems in order “to apply to the new taste of our generation”. Women’s independent position as ritual performers was also illustrated by the introduction of the new elements from Bushehr, changing the appearance and content of local tradition in Shiraz. Several *zakirs* with Bushehrian background were responsible for the changes, but the renewal was backed by *maddahs* from Bushehr and Shiraz who expressed patience in giving people time to learn new lyrics, melodies and *sineh*. However, also lay-participants engaged in the local debate over “correct” tradition. They could sanction innovative elements by not visiting the rituals or give their approval by learning them and performing them. Their knowledge of tradition but independence in opinion and practice can be appreciated in the decisions to move rituals from dates in which they would be traditionally performed to other days, which were more convenient for the audience.

Concluding remarks

In the dominant understanding of gender in Iran women are, by nature, perceived as subordinate to men.¹²¹ In the religious field this means for example that women cannot hold official religious positions which would require men to follow the women. But this does not necessarily mean that women will be simply silent observers of rituals. Gender-specific contexts give women opportunities to take up a wide set of roles in religious spheres, roles that involve control, power and influence, and in the commemorations rituals in this study women acted as the hosts, leaders, assistants, lay participants and economic supporters. In self-governing, self-sufficient Muharram ceremonies women expressed and maintained the spiritual relationship between man and God and in this way play an active part in promoting religious consciousness, affection and piety. As such female members of the community not only take responsibility for mediating religious competence amongst women, but also transmit and renew Islamic tradition.

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WOMEN AND RELIGION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

“You shall not abuse any widow”. Biblical traditions and women’s human rights

Eva Maria Lassen

In today’s world, the continuous development of human rights takes place within both religious and secular contexts. The international community as well as national institutions and non-governmental organisations have come to regard religions as potential allies in the struggle to implement human rights universally. Representatives of the world religions, for their part, in increasing number see human rights as a concept which they not only are obliged to form an opinion about, but which may also play an integrated role in the continuous development of their religions.

The inclusion of religious traditions in the human rights debate draws attention to the profoundly complex position of women in these traditions. Generally speaking, religions in some respects acknowledge and enhance what we today call women’s human rights while in other respects dispute them. This dichotomy is reflected in modern interpretations of religious traditions, and hence women’s human rights challenge adherents of the different religions to examine their traditions critically. At the same time, the inclusion of religious voices in the human rights discourse challenges human rights institutions in their religiously neutral interpretations of women’s rights. In this way, women’s

human rights hold an exciting - and sometimes extremely controversial - place in the discourse about the relationship between human rights and religions.

Women's human rights are an expanding field in human rights law and discourse, a development that is reflected in a growing number of academic contributions to the field. This development is concurrent with a sharp increase in women's studies in the academic community at large, including history and theology. Benefiting from the prominent position of women studies in the context of human rights as well as history and theology, this essay suggests ways in which women's human rights may be meaningfully discussed within the framework of the biblical norm systems. The first part of the essay gives an overview of the relationship between human rights and religions as developed over the last fifty years, and outlines the development of women's human rights within this period. In the second part, the focus is on the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament, the sacred scriptures of Jewish and Christian traditions. To delimit the area of investigation, this part will concentrate on the widow, who in both modern international law and the Bible belongs to the groups of potentially vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals.

A historical overview: from 1948 to the present

In 1947, The Third Committee of the UN General Assembly –in the process of drafting a Universal Declaration of Human Rights - debated whether it would be appropriate to refer to a deity in Article 1 of the declaration, which proclaims the principle of equal dignity and rights of all human beings:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

The Brazilian delegate proposed that the article include a reference to the biblical creation story and read as follows: "All human beings are created in the image and likeness of God." The Chinese delegate opposed this, on the grounds that not all cultures cultivate the idea of a godhead, nor indeed with the belief that the human being is created in the image of God - clearly a Judeo-Christian understanding of humanity. Moreover, he argued, the political philosophy of many modern societies is religiously neutral or strictly secular. A reference to the creation story might therefore unintentionally detract from the universality of the declaration. The

“YOU SHALL NOT ABUSE ANY WIDOW”

Chinese argument prevailed, and the Commission consistently refrained from using religion as a legitimising basis of human rights: the language of international human rights law, as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is in religious terms neutral.¹²²

In the first decades after 1948, human rights consequently developed largely disengaged from religious traditions - a fact which proved an obstacle to the implementation of human rights in countries where religious values suffuse, not only the private but also the public sphere. In the same period, the different religious communities were in the process of finding their feet vis-à-vis human rights.¹²³ Slowly, however the official UN as well as many other human rights agencies came to view human rights, as expressed in the Universal Declaration, as closely linked to the world's different cultural and religious traditions. Likewise, they began to emphasise the importance of the continuous contribution of religious traditions to the further development of the human rights concept. The following statement by Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General is illustrative:

Human rights, properly understood and justly interpreted, are foreign to no culture and native to all nations. The Declaration itself was the product of debates between uniquely representative groups of scholars, a majority of whom came from the non-Western world. They brought to this historic assignment the recent memories of world war and the ancient teachings of universal peace. The principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are deeply rooted in the history of humankind. They can be found in the teachings of all the world's great cultural and religious traditions [...] Tolerance and mercy have always and in all cultures been ideals of government rule and human behaviour. Today, we call these values human rights.¹²⁴

Human rights scholars in increasing numbers subscribe to the same view, celebrating the unique contribution offered by religions to human rights, cf:

¹²² For the debates concerning Article 1 of the Third Committee, see Glendon 2001: 144-49

¹²³ See Tergel 1998, in particular pp 48-51.

¹²⁴ A statement by Secretary-General Kofi Annan on the fiftieth anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. 10 December 1997, the University of Tehran, Iran. Source: UN home page.

WOMEN AND RELIGION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

Religions invariably provide universal sources and scales of values by which many persons and communities govern themselves. Religions must thus be seen as indispensable allies in the modern struggle for human rights. To include them - to enlist their unique resources and to protect their unique rights - is vital to enhancing and advancing the regime of human rights. (Witte 1996: XVIII).

Representatives of the world religions have to a large extent contributed to the establishment and continuous endorsement of this view. Thus a growing support of human rights is offered by religious institutions, many examples of which are found in, for instance, the three monotheistic religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Tergel 1998).

The idea of human rights as a distinctly legal concept of rights has been relaxed in recent decades by the increasing inclusion of non-legal studies in the human rights discourse. This has eased the way of religious language into the human rights norm system. An example is the notion of responsibility that is deeply embedded in most religious traditions. The notion of responsibility can according to some scholars be translated, although not necessarily without effort, into the notion of human rights:

All of the great religious traditions share a universal interest in addressing the integrity, worth, and dignity of all persons and, consequently, the duty toward other people who suffer without distinction... by developing concepts of duties, these religious traditions provided a [sic] inherent beginning for discussions about rights... ideas about human duties led quite naturally to ideas about human rights. (Lauren 1998: 5; 9).

However, despite a growing support for human rights, none of the world religions speak with one voice in the matter. Human rights are part of an ongoing discussion within religious communities, fractions of which are sceptical or even explicitly hostile towards them – to the notion as a whole, or to single aspects of the human rights catalogue. Even those who argue in favour of an interdependence of the two norm systems acknowledge that there are many, sometimes apparently insurmountable, differences between religious traditions and modern human rights. It should therefore come as no surprise that while the link between religious traditions and human rights holds a strong position in the human rights *discourse*, it has seldom found its way into *legally binding* documents. In practice, it has proven more than difficult to create a consensus about religious values that can be translated into concrete human rights con-

“YOU SHALL NOT ABUSE ANY WIDOW”

ventions. This also applies to women’s human rights, which constitute an area of potential conflict between the two norm systems. The unequal treatment of men and women is part of many religious traditions, and aspects of this inequality are unacceptable, or at least debatable, in the context of human rights.

Women in modern human rights

Generally speaking, international human rights law involves two parties: the state and the individual. It is commonly assumed that all human rights are linked with one or several of the following forms of state obligations: the state is obliged to *respect* the rights of the individual, to actively *protect* the rights of the individual, and to *fulfil* the rights of the individual (Craven 1995: 109). The rights of women are closely linked to their position within the family, which, irrespective of the cultural basis, is considered sacrosanct in international human rights law, and entitled to the state’s protection, cf.:

The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State. (Article 16.3).¹²⁵

The principle of non-discrimination is a key principle of human rights. With regard to equality between men and women, this means that the state must not penalize gender differences and also that affirmative actions may be pursued with in order to accelerate *de facto* equality between men and women. Although the indivisibility of human rights - embodying both political and civil rights and social and economic rights - was stressed in 1948, in practice the political and civil rights were the main focus of the period. In recent decades, social and economic rights have become more central, and these rights are particularly important to the enhancement of women’s rights, for instance with regard to property and inheritance. Several important human rights documents particularly aim at enhancing women’s rights, notably the Convention on the Eradication of All Discrimination against Women of 1979. Women’s right to

¹²⁵ The term “natural” has two meanings: it emphasises the biological (sexuality, procreation, and birth) as well as the social dimensions of family (Lagoutte and Arnason 1999: 342).

self-determination as well as their right to be included in decision-making institutions are accentuated in many human rights documents.¹²⁶

The widow's situation is *implicitly* dealt with in provisions which aim at promoting the *equality between spouses*. Thus many international and regional documents aim at ensuring equality within marriage, for instance with regard to equal ownership of property acquired during marriage. This, of course, has implications for the wife's potential later status as widow. *Equal rights of men and women*, also in case of death of the spouse, are established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 16.1), which also affirms the widow's right to *an adequate standard of living*.¹²⁷ Similar considerations are addressed in other documents.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ See e.g. Programme of action of the United Nations International conference on Population and Development. Chapter IV, "Gender equality, equity and empowerment of women". 1994.

¹²⁷ "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control." (Article 25.1).

¹²⁸ To take an example, in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the widow's property rights are emphasized as a means to live independently in dignity. Such considerations have also been the concern of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The Committee's Comments on Article 16 states the following: "... any law or custom that grants men a right to a greater share of property at the end of a marriage or de facto relationship, or on the death of a relative, is discriminatory... There are many countries where the law and practice concerning inheritance and property result in serious discrimination against women. As a result of this uneven treatment, women may receive a smaller share of the husband's or father's property at his death than would widowers and sons. In some instances, women are granted limited and controlled rights and receive income only from the deceased's property. Often inheritance rights for widows do not reflect the principles of equal ownership of property acquired during marriage. Such provisions contravene the Convention and should be abolished."

Women in biblical traditions

The Hebrew Bible holds a prominent position in Jewish tradition and serves, together with rabbinic traditions, as a starting point of much human rights discourse and scholarship.¹²⁹ No single Jewish authority speaks on behalf of modern Judaism as a whole, and many voices are heard in the debate about the relationship between human rights and Jewish values. However, in the 1940s Jewish groups and individuals were in the forefront of the struggle to establish an international human rights law as legally binding upon the states, and generally speaking a strong support of the principle of human rights can be found among Jewish groups, religious as well as non-religious. This also applies to the human rights of women. In practice, however, exactly this area has proven problematic, notably in the Rabbinic courts in the modern state of Israel where women's limited right to seek and obtain a divorce is a severe discrimination of the married women.

As far as the Christian churches are concerned, the Catholic Church with its approximately one billion members has since the Second Vatican Council of the early 1960s offered a strong support of the human rights principle (Tergel 1998: 6-202). Similarly, other Christian churches have expressed support of human rights (for instance The Lutheran World Federation and World Council of Churches. Tergel 1998: 203-295). In practice, however, the concept of human rights has also proved controversial within the Christian churches, including some human rights of particular relevance to women for instance the role of women in family and society and within the hierarchies of the churches. The human rights teaching of Christian churches are largely linked to readings of the Christian Bible. The biblical creation stories, to take a notable example, is the point of departure of the Catholic Church in her insistence of equal rights and dignity for everyone.

The Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible, then, are central to modern Jewish and Christian attitudes to human rights. It follows that biblical scholarship is valuable to modern interpretations of human rights. Interestingly, his-

¹²⁹ See e.g. Breslauer 1993; Cohn 1984; Falk 1981; Goodman 1998; Novak 1996.

torical and theological studies of women, gender and family have been among the most flourishing and innovative areas of biblical and Classical scholarship for the last three decades, and thus studies of biblical and Classical scholars have paved the way for answering questions of relevance to women's rights. In what follows, we will analyse the position of widows in the Bible. Widows are in both modern international human rights law and the biblical norm systems seen as potentially disadvantaged individuals.

Biblical Israel

Widows at risk

Celibacy was not an ideal in biblical Israel, and most women presumably married. Because of the high mortality in ancient societies, a large number of these women must have become widows at some point in their lives. The Hebrew term for widow was *'almānâ*. Whether the term refers to all widows, or only to the widow who after her husband's death was offered no protection from her or her husband's family is debatable (van der Toorn 1995: 22 f).

The poor and virtuous widow, along with the orphan, were seen as prototypes of the socially underprivileged members of society. The image of the poor widow does not unvaryingly reflect reality, and the Bible mentions several widows of some means. It has been suggested that the widow was an ambiguous figure in ancient Israel, and that one reason why her poverty and virtue are stressed was male fear of female independence (van der Toorn 1995: 28). If, however, a life in misery was not the inevitable fate of all widows, their position would in many cases have been precarious. As a rule, a woman had limited inheritance and property rights, and did not inherit from her husband (Cohn 1984:170). If the husband died, his widow was entitled to retrieve the dowry which she had brought into the marriage and which might consist of slaves, jewellery, clothing, and land. But the fact that the widow became a stereotype of someone whose rightful due was denied, may be a sign that she would regularly have had difficulties in reconstituting the dowry from the husband's estate (as suggested by Westbrook 1991:142 ff and 150 ff). In addition, the prohibi-

“YOU SHALL NOT ABUSE ANY WIDOW”

tion against creditors taking a widow’s garment for a pledge (Deut. 24:17) suggests that her disadvantaged position could be exploited *outside* the family.

A number of *concrete norms and laws* aimed at helping the widow in need. These rules fall into two categories: the *prohibition against abusing* the widow and the *obligation to come to her rescue*. At a general level, they were addressed equally to individuals inside and outside the family, and linked to justice:

You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry; my wrath will burn and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans. (Exod. 22,22-24).

As this quotation illustrates, images of God as the widow’s protector and avenger strengthened the instruction to show compassion for the widow (see also Ps 68,5; Deut. 10,18). It should be noticed that as God’s protégé the widow did not have to *qualify* – for instance by meeting certain age requirements, moral qualities, or number of children - in order to be entitled to help and protection. In this regard, the Hebrew Bible’s attitude to widows differed, as we shall see below, from some later Christian traditions.

Protecting the widow: family strategies

Some norms regulating the treatment of widows were specifically meant to be practised *within the family*, namely the obligation of the deceased’s family to restore the widow’s dowry and the Levirate marriage. The Levirate marriage deserves particular attention: If a man died childless, and if he had brothers, the eldest brother must marry his widow. The firstborn son of the new couple was to be named after the deceased, so that his name would not die out of Israel.¹³⁰ A brother-in-law could refuse to fulfil his obligation (cf. Deut. 25:6-10). The

¹³⁰ “When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband’s brother to her, and the firstborn whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.” (Deut. 25:5-6).

Levirate marriage explicitly shows concern for the deceased man's name, but it has been suggested that it also gave the widow a *right*.¹³¹ The consequence of practising the Levirate marriage might well have been that the single and childless woman was saved from widowhood in misery. It may be argued, however, that far from providing the widow with a right, she might also have found herself in a marriage forced upon her.

Helping the poor

The widow was included in a number of norms concerning the obligation to help the poor. This applies to the obligation of the Israelites to provide the poor with a share in agricultural goods. The biblical norms of property rights limited these rights in three directions, namely by the rights of God, by the property itself (the property must not be abused) and by the rights of those in need (Gonzales 1990: 20 f).

The Land of Israel was profoundly linked to faith in God's promise: the land symbolised all the goodness of life, the blessing of God (e.g. Deut. 8:7-8). According to ancient tradition, God promised the land to Abraham and renewed this promise to Moses, and when the Israelites took possession of their land, they received it as a gift, a fulfilment of God's promise (Deut. 9:4. Hamel 1990: 94. Clements 1989: 349). The allotment of the Land to the tribes is described in the books of Numbers and Joshua. From this tradition was born the notion of individual property rights and, equally important, supposedly the idea of the equal distribution of the land.¹³² This idea had consequences for the attitudes toward

¹³¹ "The levirate law imputes rights to a widow. She has a right to marriage with her husband's surviving brother. We can see that the right is hers, because the shift in priorities that brings the law into disuse is already underway when the biblical legislation is recorded: When marriage to her brother-in-law is not feasible, she is called upon to waive her right, with suitable symbolic acknowledgment of her entitlements (Deut. 25:4; cf. Gen. 38:8)." (Goodman 1998: 60).

¹³² The historical and social background of the Bible is, in the words of Ahituv, the "tribal-communal organization of the Judahite-Israelite peasantry. Even after the system collapsed with the destruction of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, its ideas were still fostered. Its princi-

“YOU SHALL NOT ABUSE ANY WIDOW”

concentrated wealth: God opposes the concentration of wealth among the privileged few, and people who have been marginalized from society, unattached as they are to the land, are treated unfairly. Helping the poor by means of agricultural goods – such as grain, olives and wine - signified a reconstruction of justice, and the Israelites would be blessed if they offered assistance to those in need (cf. e.g. Deut. 24:19). As a way of helping the poor, the farmer must exercise a certain “carelessness” while harvesting, thereby leaving some of the crop for the poor.¹³³

A different kind of support consisted of tithes, a well-developed institution in ancient Israel. The tithe collection was part of a religious duty, which again shows the strong tie between religion, law, and land: the land never really ceased to belong to God, who was considered the ultimate owner. Every third year, a tithe should be given for the benefit of the poor, including the widow.¹³⁴

ples of justice and equality were projected backwards to the forefathers in the heroic period, to Moses and Joshua, at the very beginning of the national history.” Ahituv 1992: 27. But see Amit, who claims that the tribal ideal was *not* indicating equality. Amit 1992: 58.

¹³³ Biblical law mentions two procedures, the first one mentioning the poor and the alien: “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien; I am the Lord” (Lev. 19:9-10; see also Lev. 23:22). The other procedure mentions the alien, the orphan and the widow: “When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow” (Deut. 24. 19-20; in verses 21-22 the same persons are mentioned in connection with products from the vineyard). The method used suggests that this kind of help to the poor was somehow arbitrary: the farmer might be more or less careless while harvesting.

¹³⁴ “At the end of every three years you must take all the tithes of your harvests for that year and deposit them at your doors. Then the Levite (since he has no share or inheritance with you), the stranger, the orphan and the widow who live in your towns may come and eat and have all they want. So shall Yahweh your God bless you in all the work that your hands undertake.” (Deut. 14:28-29). “When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year (which is the year of the tithe), giving it to the Levites, the aliens, the orphans, and the widows, so that they may eat their fill within your towns...” (Deut. 26:12).

The Bible does not suggest what the poor were supposed to do in the intervening two years.

It should be noticed that whilst the obligation to help the poor by means of agricultural products and tithes encourages a redistribution of resources, it does not change the basic structure of ownership, for instance by altering the inheritance rights of women.¹³⁵ Moreover, only actions, not omissions, could lead to punishment, and hence the poor could not sue the wealthy for lack of support. Although the fear of divine reprisals should not be underestimated in a theocratic society such as ancient Israel, few earthly punishments seem to have been applied if the obligations to help the needy were not fulfilled.

The Hebrew Bible and modern human rights

To sum up, the Hebrew Bible contains rules aimed at alleviating the widow's potentially disadvantaged position. These rules include the prohibition against abusing the widow - socially, economically and legally - and the obligation to contribute to her sustenance. Some of these regulations express norms, which may be translated into international human rights law without too much difficulty. At a general level, they are included in the human rights principle that the state shall abstain from interference in the rights of the individual and, moreover, shall protect him or her against others. At a more specific level, we find them in the widow's right to an adequate standard of living.

Naturally, the content of the regulations, the framework within which they are motivated, the identification of duty-holders and the mechanisms taken into use to implement the rules, are different in the two norm systems, ancient and modern. First, the content of the norms differs in so far as the biblical norms focus on the protection of the widow and the fulfilment of her needs. Human rights do too, but in addition stress the principle of equality between men and women. This principle was not endorsed in biblical Israel, and this is reflected in the norms concerning the widows. To take an example: in order to alleviate the disadvantaged situation of the widow, the Israelites are

¹³⁵ For theories of redistribution and entitlements, see Sen and Dreze 1999: 2 ff.

“YOU SHALL NOT ABUSE ANY WIDOW”

enjoined to facilitate a redistribution of resources, but this does not include a call for changing those property and inheritance patterns which have disadvantaged the widow in the first place. Nor is the widow's self-determination an issue in the Bible.

Second, the underlying structure of two norm systems means that the duty-holders are different. In modern human rights, it is ultimately the responsibility of *the state* to secure the rights of the widow. The assumption is that a strong state exists. At no time in the biblical period was the state sufficiently developed to administer or carry out substantial obligations towards the widows even if it had so wished. Most norms of the Torah are in the singular and are addressed to each *individual*, and it is individual members of the community who are responsible for the protection of the widow and the fulfilment of her basic needs. Depending on the nature of the rules, they are expressed as positive *obligations* to act, or as *prohibitions*. In modern human rights, the focus is turned around, emphasising the *rights* of the widow.

Third, the mechanisms offered to assist the implementations of the norms are different in nature. Whereas in biblical Israel, many norms concerning the widow were not legally enforceable, it has since 1948 been the aim of the international community to develop human rights which are legally binding upon the state and eventually enforceable by means of legal instruments (by implementing international conventions in national legislation).

It is important to notice, however, that in practice the gulf between the two norm systems is not necessarily so wide. First, even if the legal norms aimed at protecting the marginalized were not always observed in biblical Israel, the ideal could be a powerful means of transforming practice, precisely because the ideal created a disturbing *imbalance* between current reality and the ideal. Second, despite the modern effort to develop legally binding and enforceable human rights, these rights express particular ideas about society rather than necessarily embracing its total reality. This applies to a certain extent to political and civil rights, but in particular to social and economic rights, to which the widow's right to an adequate standard of living belongs.

The New Testament

In the Hebrew Bible, the widow is positioned, as we have seen, between family and society, and family members and the Israelites are identified as duty-holders when the needs of the widows are addressed. In many New Testament texts addressing widowhood, the widow is positioned between family and the congregation of believers. Accordingly, the potential duty-holders are individual family members and members of the congregation. The notion of the state as duty-holder is not directly relevant to the norms regulating the life of widow within the community - although state influence, notably through legislation, is visible.

In the following we will investigate the norms concerning widowhood in New Testament letters, representing two periods in the community-building of the early Christian churches; Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, written in 54 CE, and the Pastoral Letters, dating from the end of the first century or the beginning of the second century CE and probably originating in the Pauline communities in Asia Minor.

In praise of widowhood: the Pauline communities

In his First Letter to the Corinthians, written in 54 CE, Paul argues that as the unmarried person is able to dedicate him- or herself fully to the Lord, the widow chooses wisely if she does not remarry:

To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practising self-control, they should marry... the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband... A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord. But in my judgment she is more blessed if she remains as she is. (1 Corinthians 7:8-9; 34; 39-40).

The passage indicates that members of the Pauline congregation debated whether widows should remarry. This is interesting since remarriage was the dominant - although not undisputed - norm of the surrounding society. Thus Paul's view on prolonged widowhood differed from, for instance, the Augustan family laws, which urged the widow to remarry within a short time after the

“YOU SHALL NOT ABUSE ANY WIDOW”

death of the husband.¹³⁶ The Augustan laws only applied to Roman citizens. How many members of the Pauline communities were Roman citizens is debatable, but Corinth was a Roman *colonia*, and hence it is likely that at least some members of Paul’s congregation were Roman citizens, *cives Romani* (Brown 1988: 54). To the extent that Roman law influenced the mentality of the provinces, Paul’s advice would have been radical to non-citizens as well.

Paul, then, made widowhood spiritually and socially valuable. His view should be seen together with the experiments carried out within the community, letting women act as, for instance, prophetesses and teachers - a state of affairs, which created controversy and opposition within the congregation.¹³⁷ Such experiments would have allowed individual widows to make use of the independence embedded in widowhood (as described by Paul in the above-mentioned text) and take active part in community-life, for instance by teaching and hosting the congregation.

Qualifying widowhood: the Household Codes of the Pastoral Letters

In the so-called Household Codes of the Pastoral Letters, the attitude to remarriage is very different from the view expressed by Paul.¹³⁸ Younger widows are told to remarry and have children. Moreover, the families themselves, and not the community, are supposed to take care of widows in need. Only if that failed is support from the congregation a possibility – and then only a possibility, for in order to receive help from the community, the widow has to qualify in a number of ways:

¹³⁶ The legislation imposed financial and other disadvantages against those who practised prolonged widowhood. Lassen 1997: 107 f. It should be noticed that Paul might have been influenced by another Roman ideal – opposing the Augustan legislation – namely the *univira*-ideal, according to which the widow abstained from remarrying out of love for her deceased husband. Also Jewish traditions – for instance the Book of Judith - might have influenced Paul.

¹³⁷ The scholarly debate about the position of women in the Pauline communities is extensive. See e.g. Brown 1988: 52 ff; Meeks 1983 70ff; Petersen 1985: 157.

¹³⁸ For New Testament Household Codes of an earlier date, see Ephesians 5: 21 – 6:9. Colossians 3:18 - 4,1.

WOMEN AND RELIGION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

Honour widows who are really widows. If a widow has children or grandchildren, they should first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some repayment to their parents; for this is pleasing in God's sight. The real widow, left alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day; but the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives... Let a widow be put on the list if she is not less than sixty years old and has been married only once; she must be well attested for her good works, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the saints' feet, helped the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way... But refuse to put younger widows on the list; for when their sensual desires alienate them from Christ, they want to marry and so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge... I would have younger widows marry, bear children, and manage their households, so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us... If any believing woman has relatives who are really widows, let her assist them; let the church not be burdened, so that it can assist those who are real widows. (1 Timothy 5: 3-16).

Remarriage, then, was recommended for younger widows, and a number of requirements had to be met if a widow was to qualify for support by the congregation. The age qualification alone would have excluded most widows. As has been pointed out, the text *is a key passage in the study of the social position of the widow*, because it illustrates how in the history of the Church the widow was to be treated differently and be looked at differently, depending on whether she was young or old, poor or rich, married once or several times, with or without children, and with or without relatives (Bremmer 1995: 36).

As was the case with Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, the position of the widow should be seen in the context of the overall position of women within the Household Codes, the purpose of which was "to embed the Christian tradition within the structures of the family" (Barclay 1997: 76). The Household Codes endorse an ideal of submission of wives to husbands, children to parents, and slaves to masters (1 Timothy, chapter 2 – 6). This ideal stretched into the community: just as a woman is not allowed to exercise authority her husband, she is not allowed to act as teacher within the congregation. She must live quietly, and her motherhood will bring her salvation (1 Timothy 2:11-15). In this way, the authors of the Household Codes attempted to exclude women, including widows, from participation in decision-making within the community.

The New Testament and human rights

The position of women in the New Testament texts provides an excellent illustration of the complexities and ambiguities that accompany the debate about the relationship between Christian traditions and women’s human rights. In the early Pauline communities, as illuminated by Paul’s Letters to the Corinthians, there were experimenting roles for women, who could hold positions as teachers, prophetesses and hostesses, and hence take part in the congregation’s decision-making processes. With regard to the widow, we find the advocacy of a phenomenon, which was to be of lasting influence in the Church: it is better to be unmarried than married. The widow chooses wisely if she does not remarry, free as she then is to pursue a life dedicated to working for the future Kingdom. Individual widows might have been able to take advantage of the positions within the community available to women.

The view that widowhood was preferable to remarriage prevailed in the future history of the Church. It competed, however, with another ideal, expressed in the Household Codes and resembling ideals of the surrounding society: widows must remarry, and, generally speaking, women are to live quietly within their families as wives and mothers. They are not allowed to hold positions of authority – in the family over their husbands, in the congregation as leaders. In other words, female independence in the form of prolonged widowhood, and female partaking in decision-making processes are disapproved of.

Another feature of the Pastoral letters was to have long-lasting influence on the position of widows, namely the catalogue listing different categories of widows. Categorizing people within a given society is a potential basis of discriminating against certain groups of individuals. Age, moral behaviour, and former marital characteristics were among the criteria that had to be met in order to be included in the list of widows entitled to sustenance from the community. The fact that the widow had to qualify in order to receive help stands in contradiction to the Hebrew Bible, which does not distinguish between different groups of Israelite widows, but treats widows as a group of individuals alongside other disadvantaged groups. We may say that while the principle of non-discrimination in biblical Israel did not exist as far as equality between men and women was concerned, it did exist in the sense that every

human being, including the widow, on the basis of his or her humanity, was entitled to protection against social abuse and against falling below the sustenance level.

It is neither straightforward nor unproblematic to link New Testament readings with modern human rights, including the rights of women. This is not only due to the fact that we are dealing with two entirely different worlds, as far as genres, time, and settings are concerned. It is also due to the fact that the Bible, far from being a homogenous text, contains many genres and different and sometimes competing ideals, about society and about women. Moreover, some aspects of the norms regulating the lives of widows resemble the values underlying modern human rights (for instance the entitlement to an adequate standard of living), whereas other aspects are in contradiction of modern human rights (that applies, for instance, to the lack of equality between men and women). It is also clear that just as the religions have been proclaimed as “indispensable allies” in the struggle for human rights, so biblical and Classical studies of women, gender and family are indispensable allies in the continuous endeavour to reach a fuller understanding of both divergences and links between modern human rights and biblical traditions.

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“YOU SHALL NOT ABUSE ANY WIDOW”

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Can a woman decide upon her marriage?

The case of compulsory marriage in the Anglo-Muhammadan court system in colonial Aden¹³⁹

Susanne Dahlgren

Throughout the British colonial presence in Aden (1839-1967), the principle of not touching the 'custom and religion' was the declared policy. Religious practices, local customs and family regulation were stated to stand outside the colonial rule. Part of the colonial administration, the British introduced in Aden what is called the Anglo-Muhammadan law, along the lines in other parts of the British Empire¹⁴⁰. This legal system limited the judge's position to mem-

¹³⁹ My paper is based on anthropological fieldwork carried out in Aden (during 1988-1989, 1991, 1992, 1998 and 2001, about two years in all), and on archival research done in the India Office Records in London.

¹⁴⁰ For comparison, see Michael R. Anderson *Islamic law and the colonial encounter in British India* WLUML Occasional Paper No 7 1996, Sally Falk Moore Individual interests and organisational structures: Dispute settlement as 'eventsof articulation' in *Social anthropology and law* Ian Hamnett (ed.), London: Academic Press 1977 and Kristin Mann and Richard Roberts (eds.) *Law in colonial Africa*, Portsmouth: Heinemann 1991.

bers of the British bar and brought solicitors and barristers from India to Adeni courts. Local scholars of Islamic law, local qadi included, were excluded from the court system and allocated the role of a mere marriage registrar, the *mad-hun*. Legal education took place abroad, contributing to the absence of local people in the judiciary.

The Anglo-Muhammadan legal practice involved an eclectic use of whatever *fiqh* manuals were at hand in English or French translations¹⁴¹. The presence of a large Indian population in Aden brought to Adeni courts *hanafi* school interpretations alongside *shafi'i* interpretations, the majority school of Adeni population.

The idea that the British actually observed the policy of not touching the 'religion and custom' has persisted in literature after the collapse of the colonial rule in Aden. In this paper, I want to argue the contrary. In the Anglo-Muhammadan legal practice the British judges applied Islamic law according to English legal conventions. It can even be stated that the Anglo-Muhammadan legal practice had an impact on how Islam was allowed to be practised in the first place as it limited the role of the *ulama* (religious scholars).

In this paper I will look at some court cases that deal with the legal question of consent to marriage. The cases to be discussed were all adjudicated in the Supreme Court of Aden during the late colonial period and remain documented in Aden Law Reports I-IV¹⁴². I will argue that the British judges, with little knowledge of the actual 'customs and religion', in fact interfered with the

¹⁴¹ R. Knox-Mawer *Islamic Domestic Law in the Colony of Aden International and Comparative Law Quarterly* Vol. 5 pp. 511-518, 1956, H.A. Al-Hubaishi *Legal System and Basic Law in Yemen* Worcester 1988 and Brinkley Messick *The Calligraphic State. Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* Berkeley 1993.

¹⁴² Colony of Aden *Law Reports Volume I* (1937-1953), (I Aden L.R.) Aden 1955; Colony of Aden *Law Reports Volume II* (1954-1955), Containing Cases Determined by the Supreme Court of the Colony of Aden (II Aden L.R.) Aden 1956; Colony of Aden *Law Reports Volume III* (1956-1958), (3 Aden L.R.) Aden 1962; and State of Aden *Law Reports Volume IV* (1959-1960), (4 Aden L.R.) Aden 1964. is a considerably good historical source with the judge's deliberations in detail. From these records it is not possible to retrieve the litigants' or their advocates' views outside the formal claims that they made during the litigation.

prevalent gender relations, as their understanding of these relations was based on a rather negative reading on the justice “the Muslim woman” was allowed in both religion and custom.

The Anglo-Muhammadan legal practice during the colonial era

Throughout the colonial era, a variety of sources of law was applied in Aden Colony. Colonial law prevailed primarily in relation to public and administrative law, while other areas of legislation, such as family relations, were considered to belong to the sphere of ‘religion and custom’,¹⁴³ which the British were not eager to touch in their attempt to avoid communal unrest¹⁴⁴. This policy was drafted in Bombay Regulation 4 of 1827, section 26, which stated that the court, in the absence of specific enactments, should apply the “usage of the country” and the “law of the defendant”¹⁴⁵. The announced British policy was that all civil matters were to be regulated by Islamic law and the local custom in case of Muslims, and by appropriate legislation of other religious groups, in order to allow various religious communities the means of settling family disputes in their own way. These were distinguished from issues considered to have a political character that subsequently belonged to colonial administration. For historical reasons, legal development and practice in Aden followed Bombay and the decisions taken in its High Court¹⁴⁶. During 1839-1932 Aden was under the government of Bombay. The control was then transferred to the governor-general of India in Council until 1937 when Aden became a Crown Colony ruled directly from the Colonial Office in London¹⁴⁷.

¹⁴³ Cf. Abdalla S. Bujra *The Politics of Stratification. A Study of Political Change in a South Arabian Town*. Oxford 1971, p.125.

¹⁴⁴ S.H. Amin *Law & Justice in Contemporary Yemen: People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen and Yemen Arab Republic*. Glasgow 1987, p.31.

¹⁴⁵ J.N.D.Anderson *Islamic Law in Africa*. Colonial Research Publication N:o 16. London 1954, p.2.

¹⁴⁶ op.cit. 1954: 33, 37.

¹⁴⁷ Geographical handbook series. *Western Arabia and the Red Sea*. Naval Intelligence Division. Produced and printed for official purposes during the war 1939/45. Oxford 1946, p.309.

The British viewed Aden as ‘ethnically’ and religiously divided in similar terms to India and applied legislation and legal practices in Aden that originated from British India. In India, the system was drafted in the Hastings Plan of 1772, in which civil and criminal courts were charged with the tasks of applying indigenous legal norms in matters regarding inheritance, marriage, caste and other religious institutions. ‘Indigenous norms’ included “the laws of the Koran with respect to Muhammadans” and “the laws of the Brahmanic Shasters with respect to Hindus”¹⁴⁸. In Aden, this meant administering a judicial system in which local Islamic scholars were excluded from the court practice that applied a specific type of Islamic law that in India was called Anglo-Muhammadan law. These courts appointed British judges and Indian barristers and therefore it would be misleading to call this system “an organised hierarchy of shari’a courts”, as al-Hubaishi does¹⁴⁹.

The British courts that were set up in Aden relied upon a legal scholarship that included English translations of Arabic and Persian manuals, a variety of legal commentaries, and precedent court cases as recorded in courts of Aden and British India, and occasionally even in Britain.¹⁵⁰ The declared colonial policy was not to make any deviations from the *shari’a* in legislation. Ordinances issued throughout the colonial period had the intention of reproducing parallel legislation in Aden as in India and British East Africa¹⁵¹. As J.N.D. Anderson, a British jurist whose book *Islamic Law in Africa* (1954) was used as an authoritative reference book in Adeni courts, describes the intentions of the British: “*Shari’a law appears in South Arabia largely as the tool of the centralized government (...)*”¹⁵². According to Anderson, shari’a was easier to control administratively than the customary law (*urf*), and besides, it gave the colonial rule the chance to pose as a

¹⁴⁸ M. R. Anderson 1996, p. 5.

¹⁴⁹ H.A. Al-Hubaishi 1988, p.183.

¹⁵⁰ For India, see M. R. Anderson 1996, p.4.

¹⁵¹ J.N.D. Anderson 1954, p.34, Isam Ghanem *Social Aspects of the Legal Systems in South-West Arabia with Special Reference to the Application of Islamic Family Law in the Aden Courts*. Unpublished Master’s dissertation, SOAS 1972, p. 87.

¹⁵² J.N.D. Anderson 1954, p.11.

champion of Islam, a manner imitated from Saudi Arabia and the Kingdom of Yemen¹⁵³. This obviously made it easier to motivate the state of affairs in courts where the judiciary consisted only of British judges and Indian barristers¹⁵⁴.

The Family Court

During the British colonial period, the Supreme Court discussed family dispute cases, including judicial divorce, maintenance, custody, adoption, guardianship and inheritance¹⁵⁵. The Magistrate's Court issued maintenance orders. The court system followed the Indian model as designed by the British, with a British judge heading the court and with (principally) Indian solicitors and barristers acting as legal practitioners in the court¹⁵⁶. The court language was English. The Indian model also included following the Islamic legal school of the litigant¹⁵⁷.

A field of litigation where the practice of consulting Hanafi doctrine brought rulings more favourable to women than the Shafi'i school, is the issue of *jabr* (compulsion, compulsory marriage) and on the other hand, the matter of guardian's consent to a woman's marriage. However, the British judges were strict in consulting the Hanafi doctrine only in case the parties concerned or one of them was professing that school, and in case of *jabr*, only if the husband was a *kufu'* (equal). The first case to be studied is Civil Suit no. 577 of 1958¹⁵⁸. It is a case where a father wanted his daughter's marriage to be dis-

¹⁵³ op.cit., 12n, see also Brinkley Messick 1993, pp. 65-66.

¹⁵⁴ J.N.D. Anderson op.cit., 34, also in Ghanem op.cit., 116.

¹⁵⁵ Naguib A.R. Shamiry The Judicial System in Democratic Yemen, in *Contemporary Yemen: Politics, and Historical Background*, (ed.) B.R.Pridham. London, Sydney and University of Exeter 1984, p. 177.

¹⁵⁶ Herbert J. Liebesny Administration and Legal Development in Arabia, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. IX, n:o 4, pp. 385-396 1955, p.387.

¹⁵⁷ Islamic law was applied only to Muslims and varied according to the doctrine the litigant 'was raised'. The British treated other religious minorities such as the Hindus, Jews and Christians in a similar vein respecting the procedure the British considered to be customary in each minority group's family relation matters.

¹⁵⁸ 3 Aden L.R.: 71-72 and Ghanem op.cit., pp.117-118.

solved by court order on the basis that it was contracted without his consent. Both the father and the daughter were Hanafis. Judge Campbell, Chief Justice of Aden, ruled that the marriage was valid both in terms of the relevance of the guardian's consent and that the husband was *kufu*' (in this case equal to his wife's social status).

The daughter was 17 years and 10 months when she contracted the marriage, and according to the judge "*she had attained puberty*". In his verdict the judge relied, on the one hand, on two Hanafi manuals. These were *Mohammedan Law* by Syed Ameer Ali¹⁵⁹ and *Hedaya*¹⁶⁰ published by the New Book Company in Lahore. On the other hand, he consulted a precedent case from Bombay judiciary,¹⁶¹ in which a husband brought a suit against his father-in-law for the unlawful detention of his wife. In the verdict of the Bombay case the judge had stated (as reproduced in the present case records):

"according to the doctrines of the Hanafi Moslems a female after arriving at the age of puberty without having been married by her father or guardian can select a husband without reference to the wishes of the father or guardian though according to the doctrines of Shafei a virgin whether before or after puberty cannot give herself in marriage without the consent of her father."¹⁶²

This lawsuit shows the legal problem under which circumstances a woman can choose her husband herself without consulting her guardian. As the judge in Bombay noted above, according to the Shafi'is, a virgin before or after her puberty cannot give herself to marriage without her guardian's consent. This is an interpretation that is applied in many other similar cases recorded in Aden Law Reports and it often comes up in seeking precedence from an earlier court case

¹⁵⁹ Syed Ameer Ali *Personal Law of the Mahommedans. Mohammedan Law* Calcutta and Simla 1929. This is a rather recent Hanafi law manual written by an Indian scholar and member of the Judicial Committee of His Majesty's Privy Council who, contrary to the principles of Islamic law, consulted precedent cases in his discussion of various aspects of Islamic law (see 3 Aden L.R.: 44).

¹⁶⁰ I.e. al-Hid ya wal-Fath, the famous Hanafi manual in Pakistani print.

¹⁶¹ Case B.H.C. 236 (R.4.Bom. L.R. [Bombay Law Reports] 611).

¹⁶² 3 Aden L.R.: 72.

from the British colonial empire. Relying on a precedent case is not a valid method in Islamic jurisprudence. Still among the Adeni *ulama*, consulting other schools alongside the prevailing Shafi'i school irrespective of the school of the litigant was common practice. According to the renowned Adeni scholar of late 19th century Shaikh al-Mekkawi and his book *The Mohammedan Law of Inheritance, Marriage and the Rights of Women*, it is recommended that the future bride be consulted by sending some 'trustworthy women' to sound her¹⁶³. The jurist adds that the guardian should not organise a marriage in case there is any enmity between him and the woman to be married, or between her and the husband.

In the above civil suit no 577 of 1958 the Judge ruled that the father of the wife whose marriage he wanted to dissolve had lived in Ethiopia for the last eight years during which time he neither had kept any contact with his family nor provided maintenance to them. The father even claimed in the court to have divorced his wife, the mother of the daughter, but the wife who was present in the court denied it. To prove his claim, he had invited his sister to the court to give testimony regarding his divorce, but failed himself to appear in court (he was represented by an advocate), a fact the Judge noted with disapproval.

Still, the judge does not consult the above local Islamic legal manual in his verdict. Instead he finds support from a precedent case from India and relies on the Hanafi law manuals that were quoted in that particular case. He reaches his verdict by applying methods that belong to the English legal practice. His procedure manifests his poor knowledge of the methods of Islamic law and, on the other hand, his disregard of the available local manual of Islamic scholarship.

In another similar case, civil suit 154 of 1959, daughter aged 19 of a well-known family in Aden petitions the court to declare that the marriage her father contracted for her to be null and void. The case is slightly more complicated than the above one as the daughter, plaintiff in the suit, had another man whom she wanted to marry. Earlier she had asked her uncle, her father's brother, for help. The latter took his father, the woman's grandfather, with him

¹⁶³ Shayikh al-Mekkawi *The Mohammedan law of inheritance, marriage and the rights of women* Syria 1899:254, according to 4 Aden L.R.: 65 and Ghanem op.cit., p.120.

and went to see the Qadi of Aden, Muhammad Bahamish to ask him to perform marriage between his niece and the man she had chosen. Knowing the family well, the Qadi refused. He saw that the proper guardian of the woman, her father, was not with her. The Qadi sent for the father (first defendant in the court case) who went to see him and stated his refusal to the marriage. Instead, he attempted to persuade the Qadi to contract the marriage between his daughter and a man (second defendant in the case) he had chosen. The Qadi, who knew that the woman had not agreed to this marriage tried to delay the marriage and suggested to the father that the families should endeavour to settle the matter among themselves.

In these circumstances the second defendant went to another Qadi, Shaykh Abdul Fatah al-Hitari, who acted as an unofficial Qadi according to his own nomination. He subsequently performed the marriage between the second defendant and the plaintiff. This marriage was performed at midnight in the absence of the bride and her mother and without the consent of either. The court now had to decide whether to accept the suit, brought forward by the plaintiff-daughter, declaring the marriage null and void. All the parties in the case were Shafi'is.

In the court session, the judge, acting Chief Justice Wickham entered into a lengthy discussion on Islamic law of whether a father can perform a marriage to a daughter who is virgin (*bikr*), but is legally an adult. In order to emphasise the complicated nature of the case, the judge characterised the plaintiff the following way:

“For some time the plaintiff’s father had intended to marry her to the second defendant (the candidate chosen by the father – sd). When the suggestion was first made to the plaintiff I do not think she raised any objection. She is however a girl of some education who has been to school and is able to speak English. She came to know an Indian whose name is M. and decided he would make a more suitable husband than the second defendant”. By asserting this, the judge indicated that a modern educated woman, who is legally an adult, should be allowed to choose her husband herself.

He further declares: “It may well be abhorrent to many people that in modern times a woman can be married to a man whom she does not like without her consent. It is not however my task to consider whether the law is good or bad,

but simply to decide what it is and apply it accordingly". Having stated his attitude, the judge then proceeds to consult literature available to him in the court on both Shafi'i (the school of the plaintiff and the defendants) and Hanafi law. These include Minhaj et Talibin, Hedaya, Mohammedan Law by Ameer Ali, Baillie's Digest of Moohummudan Law, Wilson's Anglo-Mohammedan Law, Tyabji's Muhammadan Law and the Adeni jurist Shaykh al-Mekkwawi's The Mohammedan Law of Inheritance, Marriage and the Rights of Women. He read all except the last one as they have been applied and interpreted by other British judges acting in various courts in British India. He noted that there is no agreement among these authorities to the question of whether a father can arrange the marriage of his virgin daughter, a legal adult, without her consent. He then contrasted the present case with a precedent from an Indian court¹⁶⁴ in which the judge had reached the conclusion that such a marriage is null and void. The judge in Aden court concludes that the Indian court ruling was based on a disregard to what the authorities maintain and decided to dismiss the suit with costs. The marriage thus remained valid. At the end of his lengthy judgement he declared "I arrive at my conclusion with reluctance; but I have no doubt what the law is, and it is my duty to apply it".

This judgement is a good example of judge-made law that the Anglo-Muhammadan legal practice produced in Aden. In his decision, the judge contrasts his interpretation of Islamic law with the one of a British judge acting earlier in Madras and spends considerable amount of court time in deliberating who is correct. The principal issue of disagreement between the two involves the question of what value 'recommended' act bears in Islamic law. Since both treat the issue as a legal question according to the conventions of the British legal procedure, it is evident that the ruling has very little connection with normal procedures of shari'a law.

¹⁶⁴ AIR Madras 1285 from the year 1928.

The case of an infant

Islamic legal schools differentiate between a virgin (*bikr*) and a non-virgin (*thayyiba*) woman in regard to requirement of consent to marriage and the right to contract a marriage without the guardian's consent. In case the woman is no longer a virgin (*bikr*), but a *thayyiba*, that is, a woman who has lost her virginity and who is socially considered to already have been married, the Shafi'i, too, maintain that her consent is required. Different schools of Islamic jurisprudence also separate the status of an infant and a woman who has passed puberty. It is widely held that the sign of puberty is first menstrual cycle. Upon reaching puberty, a young woman, however, has not yet reached maturity and interpretations differ whether a girl is at that stage physically mature for marriage and thus carrying a child.

Civil suit n:o 190 of 1960¹⁶⁵ provides an interesting case of a law suit concerning the validity of a marriage which was contracted against the will of a 14-year old woman. Here the English judge takes time to consider which school of Islamic jurisprudence applies since the plaintiff of the case, the young woman who sought to have her marriage declared void, claimed she was brought up by her mother as a Hanafi while her father was a Shafi'i. The case is interesting from that point of view, too, that the judge reaches a quite contrary decision to the one in the above case even though he consults the same books as the judge in the previous case. This shows how the English judges' eclectic method of consulting Islamic law manuals and making reference to precedent cases was poorly connected with the British ideals of equity and justice which were declared to guide pursuance of justice also in the colonial peripheries¹⁶⁶.

As the plaintiff, aged 15 when the suit was adjudicated in court, is considered an infant her mother who is her de facto legal guardian represents her in court. The plaintiff contests the marriage her father had contracted for her on three

¹⁶⁵ 4Aden L.R. pp. 43-47.

¹⁶⁶ As J.N.D. Anderson put it: "... the views of two or more jurists have often been so combined in a single matter as to produce a result which is, in effect, wholly new." (The Muslim World, Vol. XL, n:o 4, p. 244, as quoted in R. Knox-Mawer 1956, p. 516).

grounds: firstly, since she was brought up as a Hanafi Muslim she could not be married without her consent although her father was a Shafi'i; secondly, that she was too young to be married; and thirdly, that her father had married her to the defendant (the husband) in order to escape the payment of maintenance to her.

As stated earlier, the judge of the case, Acting Chief Justice Gillett reaches a different conclusion from the judge in the above case even though he uses the same methods. He even deliberates that his conclusion that the marriage is void would have been the same had the plaintiff been a Shafi'i. The judge elaborates: "*I note that even the Shafii doctrine lays down that it is 'commendable' that a father or guardian as to marriage of a Shafii girl should consult her wishes before marriage, although it is not compulsory*". Out of the three causes the plaintiff presents to the court, the judge first dismisses the issue of immaturity for marriage. The medical certificate produced for the court in which the doctor recommends postponement of the marriage does not convince the judge.

The Judge takes the first claim of the plaintiff most seriously. He states that the girl, when reaching puberty, is fully entitled to change her school but since that has not happened, he now has to decide whose school of law shall be considered, the daughter's or the father's. To substantiate his argument, he seeks support from a precedent case from India. It is an interesting case in which a daughter, one month after attaining puberty, went to a Qadi in Bombay with a written note signed by herself denouncing her school of religion (Shafi'i) to become adherent of the Hanafi school¹⁶⁷.

Judge Gillett, however, considers the present case different from the precedent since the plaintiff had been living with her Shafi'i father. He rules that she should be regarded "*by the Shariah law*" as a Shafi'i, too, since she had not 'renounced' that doctrine. But since the plaintiff bases her claim on the fact that her mother raised her as a Hanafi, the Judge reaches the conclusion that her announcement of being a Hanafi cannot be disregarded and no renunciation of Shafi'i school is needed. It is noteworthy that the father had divorced the plaintiff's mother some ten years earlier and that he had unsuccessfully

¹⁶⁷ R.4 Bom. L.R. 611.

tried to apply to the Supreme Court for guardianship of his daughter who was in the guardianship and custody of her mother. As a result of the divorce, the court had ordered him to pay maintenance to the daughter. The father, however, had obtained an order from the Magistrate's Court, only a fortnight after the marriage, releasing him from his obligation to pay further maintenance for the plaintiff because she was now married. The daughter, represented by her mother in court, used this fact as proof that there was enmity between her and her father. This fact made the Judge consult Shaykh al-Mekkawi's book regarding the conditions that have to apply in order for a marriage that was contracted without the consent of the bride to be declared void. As a result of these deliberations, the judge finally announced the marriage to be void on the basis of two of the claims put forward by the plaintiff.

It is interesting to note that the Judge in the above case decided to follow the law of the plaintiff, a 15-year old girl who in the court normally would had been treated as an 'infant'. This practice was, however, not unusual and followed the practice from British India. In order to apply the principle, the Adeni judges simply had to refer to a precedent case from any of the Indian constituencies.

Conclusions

Even though Islamic law allows room for interpretation and presentation of legal facts in a way that can favour or disfavour the litigant, it was more often the case that the British judges did not use these opportunities to protect a female litigant. On the basis of the lawsuits discussed in this paper, it is difficult to agree with J.N.D. Anderson, the British jurist who has studied colonial legal practice in Aden in the early 1950s. According to him, the court in Aden, when dealing with the legal issue of an adult woman's consent to marriage, had started to follow the Hanafi view even when all the parties were Shafi'is. The reason, he suggests, was the tendency among British judges to be influenced by the British ideas of equity and justice. In case no other positive evidence was

available, the judges, according to Anderson, relied on 'modern' Muslim jurists such as the Indian scholar Ameer Ali and his book *Mohammedan Law*¹⁶⁸.

Another perspective to the above question, and a more realistic one to me, comes from Ghanem who at one stage acted as a member of the Adeni judiciary. He suggests that the practice of following Hanafi rather than Shafi'i law was a result of most advocates being Indian and trained in Hanafi law, and secondly, the dearth of English language reference books available for English judges in Aden courts, in particular in regard to Shafi'i law¹⁶⁹. In the law suits discussed in this paper it is evident that the litigants were aware of the possibilities Hanafi doctrine provided.. This knowledge they must have obtained from the advocates who assisted in the court.

On the basis of reading the family dispute cases as reproduced in the Aden Law Reports and commentary of the state of legislation in colonial Aden¹⁷⁰ the image emerges of a colonial administrator with limited knowledge of living terms of the local population, a tendency to rely on foreign methods in applying Islamic law and a pessimistic attitude as to how little justice the local 'custom and religion' actually allocates woman¹⁷¹.

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¹⁶⁸ J.N.D.Anderson 1954, p. 36.

¹⁶⁹ Ghanem op.cit. pp. 128-129. Also Knox-Mawer op.cit., p. 511 states similarly.

¹⁷⁰ In particular J.N.D.Anderson op.cit., Knox-Mawer op.cit, Liebesny op.cit and Ghanem op.cit.

¹⁷¹ Knox-Mawer puts this negative attitude this way: "A legal handbook, without modification over seven centuries, still regulates much of the domestic life of the people of Aden" op.cit., p. 511.

WOMEN AND RELIGION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

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Sufism in the District of the Conqueror. The Construction and Use of Historical Mirrors

Catharina Raudvere

Contemporary Istanbul is simultaneously a bursting metropolis and a desired object of nostalgia. It is a melting pot of global economy, political turmoil, Ottoman heritage and worn modernism. With Orhan Pamuk's novel *The Black Book* in one hand and one of John Freeley's historical guidebooks in the other, the visitor can approach this conglomerate of ancient traces, Ottoman revivalism and modern architecture in search of the soul of the city. A major feature in what made and still makes Constantinople such a desirable location to all kinds of admirers is the many traces of Sufi history in its cityscape. The image of Sufism as profoundly connected with the city has been invigorated by all paintings, photos and postcards distributed inside and outside Turkey. But how do today's Sufis relate to this legacy?

My first personal encounter with women practising Sufi rituals was through a video film.¹⁷² It was shown at a seminar and was shot by members of

¹⁷² This essay is an extract from my forthcoming monograph *The Book and the Roses. Sufi Women, Visibility and Zikir in Contemporary Istanbul*. Transactions, The Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 2002.

a Turkish *derviş*¹⁷³ order (*tarikāt*) themselves. This mode of self-documentation contested the traditional “scholar-in-the-field” image and inaugurated the first reflection on the possibility of fieldwork for my own part.

To See But Not Be Seen

As the ritual in the film proceeded, men in a crowded room moved their bodies more and more intensely. The repetitive act of chanting “the most beautiful names of God” (*zikir*¹⁷⁴ in Turkish) was accompanied by the ascending bodily motions of the men who initially formed seated circles. In the middle of the performance, while the rhythm rose continuously, the men stood up and started to turn in circles, acting out more and more intensely. The ritual ended in the choreographic formation of a compact spiral while the participants repeatedly and rhythmically cried: “Hay, Hay, Hay”, meaning the Living One. The ceremony was orchestrated by the master (*şeyh*) of the order who conducted the concentric circles of praying men, the musicians (drums and hymn singers chanting choruses as well as individual songs) and the Kuran recitation. Despite the many agents involved, it all came out in a well-structured wholeness directed by a simple clasp of hands of the *şeyh* or only a nod from him. *Zikir* first appeared to be a mono-gendered prayer meeting for men of all ages; small boys tried to follow as best they could at the fringe of the circle. However, at the top of the television screen I eventually caught a glimpse of a gallery with women sitting behind a wooden latticework, following the ritual with somewhat more restrained movements. No faces could be seen, only the silhouettes. When asked, Professor Geels who led the seminar could only confirm: the women’s part of the dervi lodge (*tekke*) had not been accessible to him.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ In order to mark the context of the term the Turkish form, *dervi* is used throughout this essay to avoid confusion it with the loose and more romantic understanding of what a “dervish” is in contemporary English.

¹⁷⁴ The transliterated Arabic form *dhikr* is frequently used in literature on Islam and Sufism.

¹⁷⁵ Professor Antoon Geels at the Department of Religious Studies, Lund University, led the seminar the autumn of 1989. The results of Geels’ psychological analysis of the film and his complementary field studies are published in Geels 1996. His approach is “a multi-dimensional

SUFISM IN THE DISTRICT OF THE CONQUEROR

Sufism has become a well-known concept all over the world in the wake of orientalist travel writers, hippies and lately through world music and various forms of New Age; few phenomena from the sphere of religion have a nimbus like Sufism among readers in general. Immediately the sound of the ney-flute is heard, the sophisticated symbols of the miniature paintings are visualised, and the roses and nightingales of Sufi poetry come to mind. Despite these stirring expressions, the societal influence and political implications of Sufism cannot be neglected. As soon as a distinct group is observed, loyalties and ties of dependence other than religious ones become apparent. It seems that not all dervishes dance.

I was struck by the exhaustive ritual in the film, but was also curious about the activities of the women hidden in the gallery. My initial question was simply: What did the women do? I could not free myself from the matter and the recollections of the film, and later decided to make the Sufi women the subjects of a new project. Although my ideas about the issue have undergone considerable changes during the various phases of fieldwork and writing, my focus has continuously been on the zikir ritual. Surrounded as it is by Western conceptions, as many aspects of Sufism are, it has been the more everyday aspect of zikir performances in all its complexity that has kept my curiosity alive. "Ritual action involves an inextricable interaction with its immediate world, often drawing it into the very activity of the rite in multiple ways", as Catherine Bell concludes when closing her study *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (1997:266). As I open the present, the searchlight is directed towards a group of middle-class women facing local tradition (religious and other) as both opportunity and limitation, and orienting themselves in the districts of a huge city where the global impact on ways of living has become more and more apparent.

model of analysis in order to study different types of intense religious experience" (1996:54) and he does not bring up the issue of gender or gendered space in his analysis of the Halveti Cerrahi dervishes. Antoon Geels "A Note on the Psychology of Dhikr: The Halveti-Jerrahi Order of Dervishes in Istanbul", in Tore Ahlbäck (ed.) *The Problem of Ritual*, Turku.

Restrictions and Borders.

The Legal Status of Sufi Groups in Turkey

When approaching contemporary Istanbul as a field of study in search of Sufi women, the absence of women in comparable analyses¹⁷⁶ was not the only determining condition for the formulation of the project, but to an equal extent the legal status of certain Sufi-related rituals and the associations behind them. Among the earliest reforms forced through by the Kemalists in order to put an end to the influence of the *tarikats* on social and political life was the closure of all establishments connected with Sufi groups. Deniz Kandiyoti has in a critical essay discussed the impact of these long-term changes on women: “the authoritarian nature of the single-party state and its attempt to harness the ‘new woman’ to the creation and reproduction of uniform citizenry aborted the possibility for autonomous women’s movements”.¹⁷⁷ The prohibitions made the women of Sufi-oriented circles and *tarikats* more invisible than ever and confined their rituals to space that could be defined as “domestic”. In official discourse public space was the domain of “the modern Turkish woman”, not female *dervişes*. The prohibitions were primarily aimed at all outward signs of Sufi presence in the social web. In an act, No. 677 in the Penal Code effective from December 1925, three particular localities were mentioned: the *derviş* lodges (*tekkes*), shrines of venerated persons connected to the *tarikats* (*zaviyes*) and the tombs of saints and sultans (*türbes*). These kinds of establishments were closed irrespective of whether they were managed as endowments or were considered to be private property. Only mosques (*camis*) and small mosques (*mescits*) remained lawfully open for communal prayer, under the supervision of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, DIB).¹⁷⁸ In the same act

¹⁷⁶ Though several valuable monographs were published during the period of fieldwork.

¹⁷⁷ Deniz Kandiyoti “End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey”, in Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.) *Women, Islam and the State*, Philadelphia 1991 p 43.

¹⁷⁸ The DIB was established in 1924 in order to organise the state control of public Muslim service and “functioned to legitimate the reforms that were introduced, one after the other”. tar Gözaydın “Official Secularization Process in Turkey: Presidency of Religious Affairs”, in Rikard Larsson (ed.) *Boundaries of Europe?* Stockholm p141. DIB’s function is stipulated in

the use of a number of Sufi-related titles indicating the status of *eyhs*, spiritual guides (*mürşids*), dervishes and attendants was prohibited. The list of titles is very long and not only mentions the various leading functions of a *tarikât*, but also all kinds of fortune tellers, healers and charm makers who from an authoritarian secularist perspective were thought to represent the kind of superstition (*batıl itikat*) that flourished in the meeting-places of the dervishes. The illegal re-opening of a *tekke* brought a heavy fine and at least three months in prison. Wearing a dervish costume likewise became illegal and punishable. It was not only the garment with distinct religious connotations that was targeted by advocates of rapid modernisation; Ottoman dress for both men and women was in general considered old-fashioned. The Kemalist reformers strove to replace the Ottoman *fez* with the Western hat or cap, but the popular resistance against this was considerable, although not always pronounced in religious terms. Kemal Atatürk himself was keen to pose in photographs in a Western-style suit and bowler hat as a modern, i.e. Western, man. As Martin Stokes rightly comments, this was “the paradigm example of Atatürk’s exquisite understanding of the power of the manipulation of symbols”.¹⁷⁹ The male headgear conflict soon became the headscarf debate of its time. It can be noted that women’s traditional forms of head covering (the rural variants of headscarves or the Ottoman veil) were never mentioned in any legal texts, though Western clothes and haircuts were strongly promoted by the Kemalists.¹⁸⁰

The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, Article 136: “The Department of Religious Affairs, which is within the general administration, shall exercise its duties prescribed in its particular law, in accordance with the principles of secularism, removed from all political views and ideas, and aiming at national solidarity and integrity.” The full translation of The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey can be read on the official website of the Turkish Republic: <http://www.turkey.org/start.html>. The official website of Diyanet İleri Başkanlığı can be found at: <http://www.diyamet.org>. A lengthy presentation of the functions of the Directorate is offered in the *slâm Ansiklopedisi* (published by the DIB’s Diyanet Vakfı). See also Ahmed Uzunoğlu Diyanet Vakfı, *slâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 9: 460-464, 1994 and İrfan Yücel Diyanet İleri Başkanlığı, *slâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 9: 455-460, 1994.

¹⁷⁹ Martin Stokes *The Arabesk Debate: Music and Musicians in Modern Turkey* London 1992 p 25

¹⁸⁰ In the years after the introduction of the law, however, attempts were made in some municipalities to introduce regulations concerning women’s garments.

Some of the saintly tombs have been reopened since the 1950s because of their historical or artistic importance,¹⁸¹ but the rest of the prohibitions from 1925 still remain pro forma. It appears to have been common knowledge during the whole Kemalistic era that Sufi gatherings took place and many right wing and/or nationalistic politicians were (and still are) affiliated with the tarikats. All this was tolerated as long as the orders did not act openly as organisations, but individuals of the tarikats did so through the legal political parties. However, during the 1990s the limits of the tarikat regulations were constantly challenged. Today the turbans of the tarikats and mosque functionaries are common in the streets where the present fieldwork took place, especially the Nakşibendi costume with its characteristic green cloak, sometimes worn with wooden clogs and an emblematic walking stick. Hence, the historical background of the locality studied is twofold. The Ottoman Sufi legacy is visibly present in the cityscape with its mosques, memorial buildings, libraries and so forth, as is Kemalism,¹⁸² with Atatürk omnipresent on photographs in every official room, and buildings belonging to modernisation projects such as state-run schools and hospitals, serving as icons of the development and progress that was thought to be the end of religion. In large as well as in little things, both legacies had impact on the group studied.

A Circle of Friends. Establishing a Zikir Community

What started as an interest in a formal Sufi tarikat soon shifted towards an informal group (*cemaat* or *meclis*) of women with only peripheral connections to the traditional orders. Tarikat is often translated “brotherhood”, as if no sisters were involved. Yet, it would be a great mistake to assume that the women always are in the gallery at a proper distance from the core of events, though the arenas for women’s rituals may be less visible, and also less accessible, from the

¹⁸¹ Hilary Sumner-Boyd & John Freely *Strolling Through Istanbul: A Guide to the City*, London 1989 p. 257.

¹⁸² Kemalism is the conventional English term for the secular state-centralistic nationalism that has dominated Turkey since 1923. In the 1930s *Kemalizm* was known as *Atatürkizm* in a period when the focus on President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (d. 1938) peaked.

outside. Orders, or sub-branches, have often formed basic structuring categories in the study of Sufism and Sufis, and for good reason. Such an approach offers some given limits and forms a workable method of structuring the flow of information. On the other hand, the formal internal hierarchies then tend to dominate the representation, with less attention paid to other modes of social interaction. It is not necessary to study Sufi groups as orders; informal gatherings and temporary constellations have always existed, among women and men alike. Handbooks on Islam describing Muslim prayers tend to focus on congregational worship, with the mosque service as the prototype. The communal purpose of religion, associated with “the five pillars (or demands) of Islam” (*İslam'ın beş şartı*), is often emphasised and connected to the theological concept of unity (*tevhid*). This is undoubtedly one of the most central dogmas in Muslim faith, expressed both in sacred texts and in daily ritual practice, though it may not solely be associated with public prayer to the extent that individual or informal representations fade away or other spaces for prayer appear less weighty. Women’s collective prayers are to a much lesser extent documented and analysed since by tradition they more rarely pray the daily *namaz* as a joint ceremony, but rather engage in other forms of prayer. Though, meetings in private homes have often been considered, by scholars and Muslim theologians alike, as a general social activity rather than a religious one.

From the beginning of the study I had a specific interest in women’s ritual life in Sufi traditions, past and present, but not necessarily in Sufism as a theological system. Very soon, due to experiences during the preliminary fieldwork, the study came to comprise the crossroads of Islamism (*lamcılık*) and Sufism (*tasavvuf*) in contemporary Turkey. The empirical material for the present study comes from fieldwork in Istanbul, where I studied some young women in a small, independent Muslim group over a period of five years in the mid-1990s. The introduction to the women’s group was more or less an accident, as will be discussed below, but highly significant for the period considering women’s ways of networking religious activities, now moving in larger circles outside the extended family and the immediate neighbourhood. Women’s recent forthright religious activism has opened up new forums of at least semi-public character: places where women can meet with women from other back-

grounds than their own. Political analyses, as well as my own experience from Istanbul, indicated that the political development could never be ignored in a study of a contemporary female Sufi milieu, and politics most certainly did colour the conditions of the fieldwork from the very beginning. Women as actors on the religious scene are far from new, though the conditions of late modern urban life entail a radical change. The phrase “women’s religious activism” is here intended to be an indication of the aim of the study: to analyse the women’s collective activities in semi-public forums, not to discuss the individual religious experience of Sufi-related rituals.

What had been a circle of friends meeting in a private home changed during the time between the preliminary fieldwork and the second encounter with the women in the zikir circle. The split was not caused by difference in theological opinions, but in the vision of the dimensions of the future activities. Some of the younger women had grand visions of what they could contribute to their neighbourhood and they managed to convince some of the mothers with long term experience in mobilisation of pious women preparing the ground for something more large-scale than informal prayer meetings. Male members of the one of the leading families helped by making contact with the authorities. A vakıf was founded in August 1995 in order to announce the group as a more formal unit and give economic stability to the various activities that were planned at the time. After a brief period in a second private milieu an apartment was acquired and established as a permanent location for the group.

In Memory of the Hoca

The vakıf’s meeting place was not immediately easy to find for a first-time visitor, situated as it was on a small, quite dark, street with apartment-houses not more than twenty or twenty-five years old. There was hardly any commercial life on this narrow and short street, but it was just off a road with shops that could supply most necessities for everyday life and only two blocks away from the busy boulevard that runs through Fatih towards Edirne kapı. This is a classical route through Istanbul, lined with not only commercial enterprise but also mosques, medreses, libraries and other manifest memories of the Ottoman ar-

chitectural heritage, some of them dating back to the time of Mehmet the Conqueror. In addition to these ideological aspects, it is easily accessible by means of public transportation. Few, if any, visited the vakıf's meeting place by accident; visitors were instead taken there by a relative or friend, and were hence also properly introduced to the responsible women. A new visitor was always defined in terms of family relations, as "the sister-in-law of X" or "a school-mate of Y's sister", rather than by reference to social status or profession.

The vakıf's meeting place was located in a historical district of Istanbul marked by the radical demographic shifts in Constantinople/Istanbul in the last hundred years. It was not surprising to find this kind of Muslim women's activities in this particular district, generally known to Istanbulers as a very "pious" part of the city and a stronghold of the Islamic party. Whether or not people have been there, they usually have an opinion about the inhabitants of the district. Secularists frown and call it *çar aflı mahallesi*, a covered (i.e. with headscarf) block. The location of the meeting place was a very important aspect of the identity that formed the group as part of the counter discourse against secular establishment. Situated as they were in an environment with long-term continuity of religious activities the women could allude to these century long customs. However, the social and cultural context was new in many respects and late modernity has added new dimensions to everyday life for men and women alike.

The vakıf in its spatial understanding was a meeting place for women from different social and educational backgrounds, united by their theological fellowship and regular rituals. A conjunct "culture", as it has been stressed in theories on the disruption and ambiguity of late modernity, served as a unifying factor in a swarming world outside the doors of the vakıf's apartment. Alberto Melucci suggests the less visible elements outside the political domain that constitute "the creation of cultural models and symbolic challenges in the 'new movements'" (1989:45). The attraction of the group on its followers was communicated through a set of symbols that were closely related to the organisation as such. The memory of the hoca was the key symbol kept in trust by the women.

The establishment of a formal vakıf was the most considerable milestone in the history of the group, a more significant change than any split, donation or governmental shift. It was an apparent major step for the women from the

realm of private homes to a more public sphere that made their meetings accessible to hitherto unknown individuals. In contrast to Ottoman terminology, relating to the bequest of establishments and buildings, the modern connotation of the term vakıf was a permanent hallmark indicating that the activities were approved by the authorities. In return it was a commitment to fulfil the imposed obligations, and once commenced not so easy to end.

Practising Sufism in the District of the Conqueror

Despite the excursions and visits to mosques all over Istanbul, the vakıf and the women's activities were primarily connected to the Fatih district. Here several members of the core group had their families and homes, and here they had their spiritual and ideological home. Neither Sufi assemblies nor Islamic mobilisation were considered controversial activities in the neighbourhood, not even when executed by women.

Fatih, on the fourth of Istanbul's seven hills, is somewhat run down, but not really a poor district. Today's first impression of the Fatih district may be that it is quite run down and profoundly affected by the rapid urbanisation. It is overcrowded and the traffic problems are severe. Nevertheless, the district is part of the historical city with its monuments and memories of Istanbul as a Muslim city. Outsiders tend to condemn the area as "poor and religious" (*fakir ve dindar*), if not using stronger words and calling it reactionary (*irticaî*). Mostly this is said by people with few or no contacts at all in Fatih. From another angle the district bears the imprints of the Muslim middle class of the last hundred years. The architecture and structure of the district presents layers of social history. There are families with at least a two-generation history in the district, which today have a distinct impact on various groups. Members of locally well-known families, among them some of the leading women of the present vakıf, represent symbolic capital and links to Muslim tradition that legitimise the authority any Sufi association must rely on.

SUFISM IN THE DISTRICT OF THE CONQUEROR

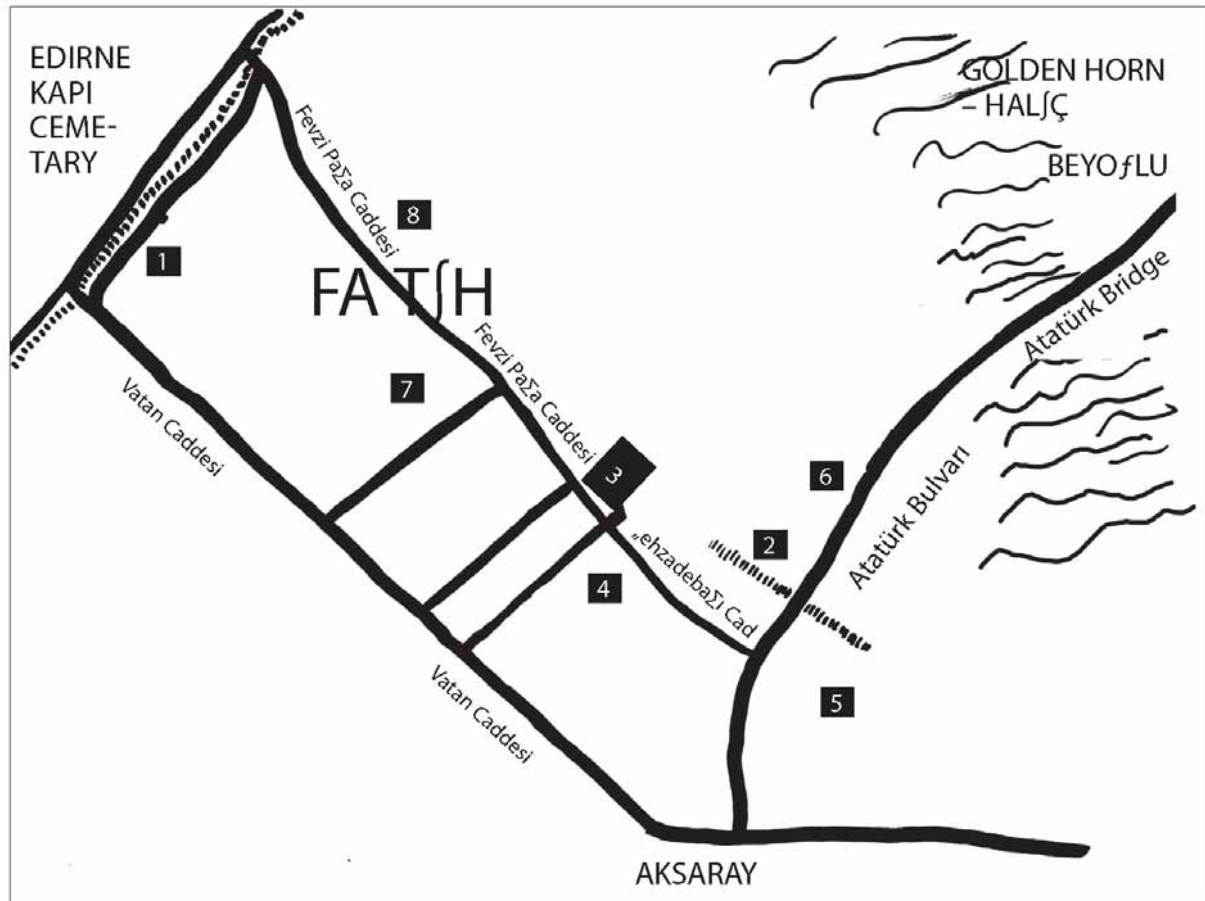


Illustration: Map over the Fatih district indicating landmarks from antiquity, Byzantium, Ottoman times as well as modernist landmarks

It has been said that “a city’s streets, monuments, and architectural forms often contain grand discourses on history” (Boyer 1994:31), a statement which is certainly true of Fatih. The district has a cityscape dominated by the historical mosques alongside with relatively recent forms of commercial interests: flashing neon signs and grand shopping windows. The Kemalistic ideology has also left traces in architecture and spatial organisation. The traffic is, as everywhere in Istanbul, heavy: exhaust fumes, noise and jams. Once it was a green district. Where the traffic on Vatan Caddesi – the border between Fatih and Aksaray – now rumbles was until the 1960s a stream. Today the few trees that remain are in the courtyards of the mosques. Do an Kuban writes in his book on Istan-

bul's urban history about the technocratic attempts to accomplish what was then conceived as a modern effective structure and that the Vatan Caddesi "brought the image of a highway into the oldest part of the city [...] and destroyed it".¹⁸³ When the women spoke of rescuing old-time values, the manifestations of modernity outside the windows of the vakıf's meeting place could serve as examples of what they were aiming at. Nostalgia for bygone glory led them to forget their otherwise strong appreciation of technology.

"The density of urban life, of communications, education, fashions, and of the social and cultural emulation of the West, as well as the ever-present social mix of Muslim and non-Muslim, created an atmosphere in Istanbul that was quite unique".¹⁸⁴ This is not a description of contemporary Istanbul, but of the nineteenth century; a "thick" structure that "produced a unique configuration of personal and domestic life which was to persist until the 1940s".¹⁸⁵ This was also the case with Fatih, though nowadays there are hardly any non-Muslims in the area. Nowadays it is the Muslim history that is emphasised as the grand discourse, not the multi-ethnic. There are several historically important mosques in the Fatih district: Iskender Paşa, Amcazade Hüseyin Paşa, Hırka-ı Şerif to mention a few. Many small mosques have been restored in recent years due to the efforts of DIB, the local municipality run by the Islamic party and Islamic vakıfs. An increasing number of pilgrims visit the old mosques and mausoleums connected to them. These pilgrimages are supported by the leadership of the mosques as long as the veneration does not transgress the border of what is considered superstition.

¹⁸³ Doğan Kuban *Istanbul: An Urban History* Istanbul 1996 p. 427.

¹⁸⁴ Alan Duben & Cem Behar *Istanbul Households: Marriage, Family and Fertility 1880-1940*, London 1991 p 7.

¹⁸⁵ Alan Duben & Cem Behar *Istanbul Households: Marriage, Family and Fertility 1880-1940*, London 1991 p 7.

SUFISM IN THE DISTRICT OF THE CONQUEROR



Photograph of Fatih Camii in modern times

The area has been of fundamental importance for the Muslim identity of the city and still carries the presence of historical narrative.¹⁸⁶ The district is named after the Fatih mosque,¹⁸⁷ and the mosque in turn is named after Mehmet the Conqueror, Mehmet Fatih, who entered the city on 29 May 1453 with his Ottoman troops and, in Muslim historiography, liberated it. M. Christine Boyer writes in her monograph *The City of Collective Memory*: “In the City of Collective Memory, we find that different layers of historical time superimposed on each other or different architectural strata (touching but not necessarily informing each other) no longer generate a structural form to the city but merely culminate in an experience of diversity”.¹⁸⁸ Aya Sofya was proclaimed the Great Mosque immediately after the conquest, though keeping its Greek name. Not much later, however, a mosque was planned to surpass the former Byzantine church. The mosque in memory of the conquest and the conqueror was built between 1463 and 1471. “When the whole *külliye* [mosque complex] was erected it occupied an area of 100,000 m²”.¹⁸⁹ Although an earthquake destroyed the original mosque in 1776 and a new one was built, the area remained the intellectual, social and economic heart of the district up until World War II. Still today, besides its historic and symbolic value, Fatih Camii hosts several religious activities. It is an important site for Friday prayers; there

¹⁸⁶ For surveys of the history of the Fatih district see: Halil nalcık “Istanbul” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*², vol. 4 p. 229, 1978; Hilary Sumner-Boyd & John Freely *Strolling Through Istanbul: A Guide to the City*, London 1989 p. 247ff.; Zeynep Çelik *The Remaking of Istanbul* Berkeley 1993 p. 23ff.; Philip Mansel *Constantinople: City of World’s Desire, 1453-1924* London 1995 p. 29ff.; John Freely *Istanbul: the Imperial City* London 1996 p. 185ff.; Do an Kuban *Istanbul: An Urban History* Istanbul 1996 p. 206ff.

¹⁸⁷ “Fatih Camii and the other great külliyes [mosque complexes] became the civic centres of the Muslim city, which was divided into thirteen nahiye, or districts, each of which was subdivided into a number of mahalle, or neighbourhoods. Each of the nahyie, with one exception, was named after the mosque complex that formed its centre and focus”. John Freely *Istanbul: the Imperial City* London 1996 p. 185.

¹⁸⁸ M. Christine Boyer *The City of Collective Memory: its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* Cambridge, Mass 1994 p 19.

¹⁸⁹ Halil nalcık. Halil “Istanbul” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*², vol. 4 p. 229, 1978.

are other weekly prayer ceremonies and well-attended Kuran classes. There are minor pilgrimage tours to the türbes, and west of the outer courtyard there is still a huge open market every Wednesday, Çarşamba Çarşısı. Among the visitors to the market this kind of shopping was associated with the same nostalgia as the mosque complex itself; it was considered traditional in contrast to the Americanised supermarkets of suburbia. Food, kitchen utensils, home technology and other items can be purchased here at reasonable prices. The commerce fills several crowded streets, and in contrast to most other spaces in the area, this is a place where men and women mingle comparatively closely in their search for bargains.

“The Vakfiye of Fatih exhibits, indeed, a very large urban program for reconstruction on the part of the Conqueror. The sultan tried to create incentives for the settlement of the city. If the *Külliye* of Fatih and other lesser complexes built by his viziers offered services for the welfare of the citizens, the commercial incentive was no less important”.¹⁹⁰ With these extensive building programmes the city and its monuments were successively introduced as one of the leading sites in the Muslim world.

“Muslim life in the city continued on in its traditional neighbourhoods until the post-Second World War years” Duben and Behar claim.¹⁹¹ With the uncontrolled urbanisation of the last forty years, only fragments of the Ottoman household structure are visible in the architectural landscape. Yet the women of the vakıf organised their activities with what they conceived to be Ottoman ideals as models. The grand complexes of religious and social institutions that surrounded the major mosques in pre-republican times functioned as their historical mirror.¹⁹² With this külliye as a prototype¹⁹³ the women could

¹⁹⁰ Doğan Kuban *Istanbul: An Urban History* Istanbul 1996 p. 229.

¹⁹¹ Alan Duben & Cem Behar *Istanbul Households: Marriage, Family and Fertility 1880-1940*, London 1991 p 32.

¹⁹² Halil İnalcık. Halil “Istanbul” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*², vol. 4 p. 229, 1978.

¹⁹³ Kirsten Hastrup writes: “Prototypes reflect clusters of experience, and show how asymmetries prevail within the categories, asymmetries that could neither be predicted nor read from the position of classical linguistic theory, which attributed categories with almost mechanically reflective potential and believed them to be exhaustive” Kirsten Hastrup *A Passage to Anthropology: Between Experience and Theory* London 1995 p. 30. The historical monuments in the

preach, teach, nurse and feed – always with keen attention to the spiritual and material needs of their local community. The attitude was a pronounced “anti-modernism” on an emic discursive level, but it is conceived as a late modern phenomenon in the analytical model used in the study.

When the women mirrored their activities on times past in order to seek Osmanlı ideals, it was Fatih Camii that they held up: “Fatih Camii had all of the facilities for a civic centre, for in addition to the mosque and its medreses and other religious and philanthropic institutions it also had a large market with 280 shops, 32 workrooms, and four storehouses, the income from which went to support the rest of the külliye”.¹⁹⁴ Nothing less than being a miniature of such a centre that could support all aspects of human needs was the goal.

Illustration

A restored plan of the külliye at Fatih Camii at the height of its grandeur (after Öz 1964).¹⁹⁵ John Freely writes: “the külliye of Fatih Camii consisted of eight medreses (theological schools) and their annexes, with a hospice (tabhane), public kitchen (imaret), hospital (darüşşifa), caravansarai [for travellers to rest at], primary school (mektep), library (kütüphane), public bath (hamam), çarşı (market), and a graveyard with two türbes (tombs), one of which was to be Fatih’s last resting place”.¹⁹⁶

All predominant functions of the külliye were subsequently added to the vakıf enterprise, either at the vakıf’s meeting place as such or in other locations. One “investment” (in terms of capital, status and – not the least – personal efforts) led to another. By being successful the vakıf evoked expectation of continua-

Fatih district obviously function as focal points for identification (to be measured against, to integrate in historical narratives and legends, to contrast with the monuments of Kemalism) and communication (symbols, terms and the like associated with this form of Ottoman life were vital signs when presenting their establishment and their programmes).

¹⁹⁴ John Freely *Istanbul: the Imperial City* London 1996 p. 185.

¹⁹⁵ Tahsin Öz *Istanbul Camileri* Ankara 1964.

¹⁹⁶ John Freely *Istanbul: the Imperial City* London 1996 p. 185.

tion and expansion. After only a few years the dimensions of the undertakings had grown far beyond the original, more modest, visions.

The most important similarity to an Ottoman establishment was the construction of a room for Sufi prayers. This was not a permanent place but a room in the apartment was ritualised every Friday afternoon in order to be a proper space for women's zikir practices. This space was comparable to the meydan in a tekke establishment and the gatherings organised always emphasised commemoration of the hoca as a "friend of God" (*veli*), and his teachings. Relics from the hoca were kept behind glass and were honoured in a mode that suggested both similarities, and not with the veneration at the graves (*türbes*) of saints, şeyhs, sultans and national heroes (*gazis*). As will be discussed in the following, the hoca was venerated in the sense that he was remembered as a teacher and as an ideal, and he was perceived to be a protector of the vakıf.

The vakıf's meeting place by all means functioned as an educational centre. It was certainly not a primary school like the mektep and did not offer anything comparable to higher Muslim education. Yet the core group of the vakıf, with their *ders* and *sobbet* meetings, did what they could to fill the gap of ignorance that the secular school system had left behind when it came to religious knowledge. In this sense the vakıf's meeting place served as a *dershane*. The library (*kütüphane*) with its study hall offered the same facilities to our day school girls as did the old establishments to young men a hundred years ago.

Food distribution to feed the poor was organised as an equivalent to the public kitchen (*imaret*) of the külliye. The market around Fatih Camii could be compared to the *börekçi* where the women of the vakıf were fully engaged in bringing in money to the enterprise. Hospital and medical services were the only point of discrepancy. The vakıf had neither the capacity nor the wish to provide such facilities

Mahalle: a Model for Social Differentiation

If the women of the vakıf in their ambitions strived to fulfil their demands to their neighbours with the külliye as a model, the Islamic movement as a whole looks back to the Ottoman era for normative ideals and models. The

fact that social practice and living conditions are something quite different today does not seem to darken the vision.

This highly idealised image of social life in the past also includes the concept of mahalle, a miniature community that consists of some blocks. This organisation of social life in unambiguous categories based on ethnic and religious affiliation made it easy to define a person as either in-group or out-group. In their study of family patterns in Istanbul, Duben and Behar note: "The *mahalles* were the centres of economic and social life. Largely divided along ethnic – not class – lines, they were communities with a certain degree of autonomous control over their day-to-day affairs and a degree of communal solidarity, with a myriad of informal mechanisms for monitoring and regulating public morality".¹⁹⁷ All this is not very far from the visions of Muslim networking today. Though, in multicultural Constantinople: "The mahalle was an organic unity, a community with its own identity, settled around a mosque, a church or a synagogue. The individuals of this community were linked not only by a common origin (in many cases), a common religion and a common culture, but also by external factors making for social solidarity. The meeting-place of the community and the symbol of its unity was the place of worship, the repair of which and the maintenance of whose staff were the joint responsibility of the inhabitants, and after which the mahalle was named".¹⁹⁸ Most mahalles had a school, a communal fountain, vakıf endowments, and a night watchman.¹⁹⁹ The mahalle

¹⁹⁷ Alan Duben & Cem Behar *Istanbul Households: Marriage, Family and Fertility 1880-1940*, London 1991 p 30f.

¹⁹⁸ Halil nalcık. "Istanbul" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*², vol. 4 p. 234, 1978.

¹⁹⁹ Interesting comparisons can be made with the social structure and political processes in the Mamluk empire in Ira Lapidus' *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* Cambridge, Mass. 1967, especially the discussion on the organisation of the quarters, "closely knit and homogeneous communities" (1967:85ff.). Not only were Jewish and Christian groups distinguished, the Muslims lived according to ethnic separation as well. Through their isolation "they were analogues of village communities inside the urban agglomeration" (Lapidus 1967:95). One may note that the urban-rural dichotomy is a fundamental analytical concept in this discussion too.

in many respects constituted a miniature society²⁰⁰ but, in contrast to the contemporary Islamism, it recognised other faiths than the Muslim.

The mahalle ideal can be seen as an analogy to the way many NGOs work with the goal of establishing control over at least some issues in a constantly changing metropolis. These block units constituted more or less independent universes in their own right.

Especially women had few reasons to cross the borders to the outside very often. The mahalle world represents a system where everyone “knew their place” and it corresponds to a great extent to the authoritarian society many of the Islamic NGOs argue for. In a complementary society, such as the vision of the mahalle, there is a “place” for everyone, in the local community and in family life. There are also obvious external signs of an individual’s position, like clothes and other symbols, in order to avoid illegitimate or unsuitable encounters. This historical utopia and desire for uncomplicated solutions may be compared to slogan argumentation: despite severe simplifications, it has a great influence over people’s concepts and views. A great deal of the Islamic critique of contemporary Turkish society is aimed at its complexity, its indistinctness and its ambiguity. Thus is it necessary to establish historical counter-images from the Medina of the Prophet or from an idealised conception of *Osmanlı* life in the nineteenth century.

Sufism as a daily practice in Turkey today is unfortunately often concealed between orientalist romanticism and Kemalistic bias. Ambiguous and contradictory images of Sufi groups are thereby produced and reproduced. For a long time the milieu in Yakup Kadri Karaosmano lu’s novel *Nur Baba* (1922) was the prejudiced prototype for the backward and superstitious lives within the tarikats. Based on oral jocular stories about Bekta{i dervi es, the novel petrified common pejorative clichés of tarikat members as newly urbanised Anatolian peasants and the lodge as the site of corruption and decadence. The object of the present study is to study women’s position in religious activities by what they define as proper space public life. It is an

²⁰⁰ Suraiya Faruqi *Subjects of the Sultan: Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire*, London 2000 p146ff.

attempt to write against the popular image of ecstatic Sufis involved in esoteric speculation. The aim is to show a well-structured enterprise organised by women who by this engagement constitute a particle of the larger Islamic movement.

The women's message to their local audience recommended a return to the sources: to the Kuran and to *sünnet* (the normative acts of the first Muslims) and to a life in accordance with the pioneers of Islam. This attitude linked them to the broader Islamic movement that praises the image of the *selef*, the first three generations of believers representing "authentic" theology and practice. Despite the fact that these characters were indisputably Arabic, the activists of the vakıf integrated the image of the *selef* in their nationalistic discourse as the pure and righteous beginning of all good societies. These women did not admire the current *Zeitgeist*; indeed, they defined it as depraved and repulsive. Instead they pointed to institutions and practices which, seen from their position, have stood firm and remained unaffected by influences from Kemalism and modernisation. They built their world-view on a double historical utopia: on the Medine model from the Holy Scriptures and on images of Ottoman life. Namely, the Ottoman *millet* system (a complicated categorisation of people according to religion, in "nations", *millet*) of social stratification by social order. It clearly defined a person in terms of relations and duties towards family and community – and thereby the spaces of action.

The mosque complexes from the pre-republican era, *külliye*, with all their religious and social institutions (the mosque itself and other spaces for prayer, holy graves, libraries and schools, public kitchens for the poor, hospitals and baths) constituting a centre of local life, appeared to be a desirable model for the vakıf activities. With this historical mirror the women of the vakıf could teach, preach, help, nurse and feed – activities that are usually connected with civil society. The women of the vakıf as anti-modern viewed these ambitions and, as they saw it, they took part in an on-going cultural and political resistance against the decadence of modernity. From my perspective, though, both the lives of the individual women and the ac-

SUFISM IN THE DISTRICT OF THE CONQUEROR

tivities of the vakıf were to a great extent part of late-modern Turkish society with its new spaces for Islamic women's visibility.

The ability to handle the urban landscape, with its historical monuments and memories of conflicting interests and ideologies, has become a necessity in order to conquer space for Islamic women's activism. But the city is certainly not only a prism in the historical mirror; it is highly present in the dream about the future.

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