

1 Introduction

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This **book** examines the relationship between Islam, the nature of state projects and the position of women in the modern nation states of the Middle East and South Asia.

Placing the state at the centre of our analysis may require some justification. Despite the growing interest in recent 'Islamisation' policies adopted by a wide range of governments and in their implications for women, studies of women in Muslim societies have by and large neglected the role of the state and remained relatively untouched by the growing body of feminist scholarship on the subject. The latter highlights the reproduction of gender inequalities through various dimensions of state policy, through 'gendered' constructions of citizenship and through the dynamics of incorporation of national and ethnic collectivities into modern states.'

Instead, the treatment of women and Islam has for a long time been dominated by ahistorical accounts of the main tenets of Muslim religion and their implications for women. A predominantly exegetical approach is shared by fundamentalist apologists defending what they see as the divinely-ordained inequality of the sexes?. Muslim feminists attempting a progressive reading of the Quran, the *Hadith* and of early Islamic history? and a few radicals who argue that Islam is intrinsically patriarchal and inimical to women's rights!

This tendency has produced a rather paradoxical convergence between Western orientalisks, whose ahistorical and ethnocentric depictions of Muslim societies have been the subject of an extensive critique: and Muslim feminists and scholars with a genuine interest in radical change. Whatever the strategic merits of engaging with conservative ideologues on their own terrain, this approach is ultimately unable to account for the important variations encountered in women's conditions both within and across Muslim societies. Nor is it able to conceptualise the possible connections between Islam and other features of society such as political systems, kinship systems or the economy.

There is, on the other hand, a substantial body of research on Muslim societies which addresses the changing condition of women in specific geographical locations and historical periods, dealing with material issues such

as women's labour force participation, education, demographic behaviour and political activity.⁶ Such studies do not necessarily privilege Islam as an analytic category but insert gender into broader discourses about social transformation. These include modernisation and dependency theory, and incorporate elements from a variety of feminist perspectives. However the specificity of Islam, whether it appears in the form of local cultural practices justified in religious terms, as items of legislation derived from the *Shari'ah* (the canonical law of Islam) or as a more diffuse ideology about cultural authenticity, is seldom explored systematically.⁷

There is at present a growing recognition that the subordination of Muslim women can neither be read off solely from Islamic ideology and practice, nor be entirely derived from global processes of socio-economic transformation, nor for that matter from the universalistic premisses of feminist theory.⁸ None the less current scholarship continues to reflect a genuine difficulty in conceptualising the role and specificity of Islam in relation to the position of women. While we cannot pretend to resolve this complex issue, we aim to address a limited but crucial aspect of it.

The unifying argument of this volume is that an adequate analysis of the position of women in Muslim societies must be grounded in a detailed examination of the political projects of contemporary states and of their historical transformations. In this respect, the countries covered illustrate very different paths of evolution. Some have emerged from declining empires (Turkey, from the Ottoman empire), or dynastic rule (Iran, from the Qajar) and others from direct colonial domination (Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and the countries of the South Asian sub-continent). Some, like Turkey and Egypt, have a long history of modernisation of state and society, while others are relatively new territorial entities. Their current political regimes likewise cover a wide spectrum. However, they have all had to grapple with the problems of establishing modern nation states and forging new notions of citizenship. This has led them to search for new legitimising ideologies and power bases in their respective societies. It is around these common concerns that we situate our individual analyses, with the ultimate aim of contributing to the development of a comparative agenda.

We propose that the post-independence trajectories of modern states and variations in the deployment of Islam in relation to different nationalisms, state ideologies and oppositional social movements are of central relevance to an understanding of the condition of women. The ways in which women are represented in political discourse, the degree of formal emancipation they are able to achieve, the modalities of their participation in economic

life and the nature of the social movements through which they are able to articulate their gender interests are intimately linked to state-building processes and are responsive to their transformations. The case studies presented in this volume illustrate important variations on these themes. They also suggest elements for a comparative exploration of four central issues to which the remainder of this chapter will be devoted.

ISLAM, NATIONALISM AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

In a broad survey of feminism in the Third World, Jayawardena links the emergence of feminist movements to anti-imperialist and nationalist struggles, a general move towards secularism, a new concern with social reform and modernity and the ascendance of an 'enlightened' indigenous middle class.⁹ Muslim societies certainly share in these general tendencies.¹⁰ At the turn of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, reformers of women's condition in the Muslim world emerged from the ranks of an educated, nationalist, male elite. Their concern with women's rights, centering around the issues of education, seclusion, veiling and polygyny, coincided with a broader agenda about 'progress' and the compatibility between Islam and modernity.

It is customary to present the reformist zeal of the modernisers and the defensive entrenchment of the conservatives as two sides of the same coin: a reaction to the economic and cultural penetration of the West. Some reformists sought to transform their societies by emulating the West, although more often than not the preferred device was to argue that the principles enshrined in the Western model are compatible with a 'modernist' reading of Islam.¹¹ The conservatives, on the other hand, perceived such reformism as a wholesale attack on the integrity of the Islamic polity and a capitulation to Western cultural imperialism. Cole also points out that the controversy around the status of women in turn-of-the-century Egypt was characterised by fairly clear class divisions. Whereas those in favour of women's emancipation tended to be members of the new upper middle class who were integrated into the Western sphere of influence, both economically and culturally, the opposition emanated from petit bourgeois intellectuals who felt marginalised and threatened by it.¹² In any case, the 'woman question' emerged as a hotly contested ideological terrain where women were used to symbolise the progressive aspirations of a secularist elite or a hankering for cultural authenticity expressed in Islamic terms. These fraught beginnings are often evoked to account both for the continuing centrality of Islam in debates concerning women and

the family, and the ambivalence surrounding the issue itself in an ongoing search for identity **in** the Muslim world.

What is easily overlooked by a perspective that emphasises exogenous influences is that Muslim societies were also involved in distinct and varied processes of economic change, nation-building and secularisation. **Sonn** presents secularism both in the East and West as an integral part of the process of the breakdown of central, religiously legitimised empires and the emergence of geographically limited states attempting to achieve national unity around new notions of sovereignty and citizenship.¹³ In a perspective that is particularly useful for our purposes, Anderson speaks of the transition from sacred communities and dynastic realms to the 'imagined community' of nation states.¹⁴ These imagined communities are predicated upon both a consciousness of separateness and identity and a sense of communion and horizontal solidarity among their members. They **require** a different conception of time and space as well as the mobilisation of new images and symbols to 'think' the nation. In Muslim societies, as elsewhere, cultural nationalisms have flourished and generated their own symbolic universe. In the process of creation of modern nation states, cultural nationalisms have achieved a spectrum of distinct and shifting syntheses with Islam which are still a subject of contestation and redefinition. New ideologies have emerged to legitimise and support new forms of state power. The terms of the 'woman question' were forged in the process of this search for identity and legitimacy. Attention therefore needs to be paid to the nature of these formative experiences.

In Turkey (Ch. 2) where the process of secularisation went furthest, the shift from a multi-ethnic empire to an Anatolia-based nation state involved a progressive distancing between cultural nationalism and Islam and culminated in Kemalist republicanism. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk not only dismantled the central institutions of Ottoman Islam by abolishing the caliphate and secularising every sphere of life, but took measures to heighten Turkey's 'Turkish' national consciousness at the expense of a wider Islamic identification: the compulsory romanisation of the alphabet, the new dress code and an elaborate rereading of Turkish history stressing its pre-Islamic heritage were elements of the cultural mobilisation in the service of the new state. The secularisation of the family code and the enfranchisement of women were thus part of a broader struggle to liquidate the theocratic institutions of the Ottoman state and create a new legitimising state ideology.

In Iran, Reza Shah's nationalist-statist programme, despite its avowed similarity to the Kemalist project, fell short of radically transforming the organisation and structure of the Shi'a clergy which was, in any case, quite

different from that of Ottoman Sunnism. Almost an adjunct of the state in the Ottoman case, the clergy retained its organisational and financial autonomy in Iran, with profound consequences for the shape of things to come. Najmabadi (Ch. 3) also notes that the distinction of Shi'ism from Sunni Islam made it possible for Iranian nationalists at the turn of the century to base their nationalism on an appropriation of pre-Islamic Iran, into which they could integrate the presumably distinct features of Shi'ite Islam. The fact that Reza Shah's power was consolidated not on the basis of a social movement but of a military coup, and that he put the army at the centre of his political project, provided a weak basis for legitimacy which was further eroded under the 'sultanic' rule of the last Pahlavi. The transition to the Islamic Republic led to a total 'moralisation' of the 'woman question' and a radical break with earlier discourses about progress and modernity.

In the Arab world, where cultural nationalism and Islam now appear as practically interchangeable terms,¹⁵ there have also been shifting definitions of nationhood. Mernissi acknowledges that in Morocco opting for 'Arabness' was convenient in terms of finding a place and identity in the Arab world, just as the French colonisers found it expedient to stress the divisions between Arabs and Berbers for their own purposes.¹⁶ Similar divisions exist in Algeria, also a former French colony. Egyptian national sentiment is also a complex amalgam, involving a dissociation from alien (albeit Muslim) Turkish rulers, pride in the pharaonic past and a connection to a broader Arab heritage crystallising around a common language and history, that of Islam itself.¹⁷ Whatever the differing emphases of nationalist movements with respect to the links between Arabism and Islam, the former at the very least co-opted the latter, as is evident in the doctrine of Arab socialism in its Nasserite or Ba'thist versions.

Hijab notes the resistance of all Arab states to breaking with *Shari'ah* law in the case of the personal status codes, even when they have completely secular civil, commercial and penal codes.¹⁸ She attributes this resistance to a total interpenetration between Islam and Arab cultural identity and the need to protect the latter from imperialist onslaughts. As a result, articles of personal status codes often conflict with the constitutions of Arab countries. While the latter guarantee equal rights for all their citizens, the former extend privileges to men in the family (in the areas of marriage, divorce and child custody) which are denied to women. This duality is illustrated by Badran's discussion of family legislation in Egypt (Ch. 8). Molyneux's analysis of family law reform in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (Ch. 9) also reveals the necessary concessions to Islamic codes

and local customs in a context where the state attempted to use legislation as a tool of socialist transformation.

The tensions between religious affiliation and national identity are nowhere more apparent than in the South Asian sub-continent, where women have clearly borne the brunt of both their imperatives and contradictions. The juxtaposition of the studies on Pakistan, Bangladesh and India in this volume provide a stark demonstration of this statement.

In pre-partition India, Islam was a communally based religion which served as an 'ethnic marker'. In the case of Pakistan it became integral to nationhood itself. Despite the fact that the call for a separate Muslim state reflected the aspirations of many secular Indian Muslims, Islam was increasingly evoked as a legitimising, if tenuous, ideology for Pakistani unity and integrity. Jalal (Ch. 4) points out that it was no accident that Zia ul-Haq's 'Islamisation' package took women as its prime target. Establishing Islamic credentials through retrogressive legislation primarily affecting women was a logical step in a context where the control of women and of their appropriate conduct had long been used to demarcate the identity and boundaries of the Muslim community.

Bengali Muslim identity in Bangladesh has been more problematic. Kabeer (Ch. 5) notes that the quasi-colonial ties of dependence with Pakistan and the fact that the latter had appropriated the mantle of Islamic purity for itself enhanced the contradictions between Muslim and Bengali identity. Resistance to Pakistani cultural hegemony produced a rallying of nationalist forces around the symbols of a distinct Bengali identity. It is only within this highly charged context that we can appreciate the significance of Muslim Bengali women joining the independence movement. Protest marches just prior to independence from Pakistan witnessed these women dressed in their red and yellow traditional saris, wearing *bindis* on their foreheads (commonly the adornment of Hindu women in India) and singing Bengali nationalist songs. Kabeer analyses the tentative nature of current Islamisation policies in Bangladesh against this background of tension between Muslim and Bengali identities, and in the context of the country's increasing impoverishment and reliance on foreign aid.

Chhachhi (Ch. 6) explores the construction of communal identities in India and the particular implications for women of the minority status of Indian Muslims. She notes the uneasy tension in Indian nationalism from its inception between secularism and communalism. Although the Indian national movement was secular in its objectives, it capitalised upon Hindu communal sentiment and used the symbols and language of Hindu revivalism. Images of both Hindu and Muslim womanhood became central

to the construction of not only distinct but antagonistic identities. The logic of communal politics thwarted any progressive attempts to redefine and expand Muslim women's rights, since this issue readily turned into a confrontation of majority and minority interests. This confrontation found its latest expression in the public outcry occasioned by the case of Shah Bano, a divorced Muslim woman who had pressed for her maintenance rights under the Indian Criminal Procedure Code, and resulted in a separate Muslim Women's Protection of the Right to Divorce Bill passed in 1986.

It should be quite clear from the foregoing that while the boundaries of Islam and the nation are indeterminate and their juxtapositions variable, the centrality of women in guaranteeing the integrity of both is not. The compelling association between women's appropriate place and conduct, however defined, and notions of cultural authenticity is a persistent theme which deserves further exploration.

WOMEN, ISLAM AND THE POLITICS OF AUTHENTICITY

There is a consensus among scholars that the age-old antagonism between Islam and Christendom, much of it a history of colonial domination and continuing ties of dependence with the West, created an area of cultural resistance around women and the family. These came to represent the ultimate and inviolable repository of Muslim identity.¹⁹ Both colonial administrators and Christian missionaries attempted to reform the sexual mores and family traditions of Muslims as part of their 'civilising' mission. The interest in liberating oppressed Muslim women produced in the minds of many Muslims, a close association between feminism and cultural imperialism. Any attempt to change the position of women could henceforth be imputed to imperialist or neo-imperialist designs, the local collaborators of such a project being tainted with cultural inauthenticity, if not outright betrayal. A new set of terms evolved to indicate this alienation, among which were *alfranga* in Turkey, *M'Tournis* in Algeria and *gharbzadegi* in Iran. Although these carry different degrees of opprobrium, all denote a shameful aping of the West. Leila Ahmed voices the dilemma of feminists in the Middle East in poignant terms when she states: 'It is only when one considers that one's sexual identity alone (and some would not accept this) is more inextricably oneself than one's cultural identity, that one can perhaps appreciate how excruciating is the plight of the Middle Eastern feminist caught between these two opposing loyalties, forced almost to choose between betrayal and betrayal'.²⁰

Although the West is frequently presented as the 'Other' in discourses

on cultural authenticity, the problem is in fact a much broader one. The term representing the threatening and invasive Other can, in fact, take very different forms. Anti-imperialistic pronouncements about the West **are** often a thinly disguised metaphor to articulate disquiet about more proximate causes for disunity. These include the existence of indigenous social classes with different cultural orientations and conflicting interests, and the coexistence of religiously and ethnically diverse collectivities in the very bosom of the nation. Discourses on women's authenticity are therefore at the heart of a utopian populism which attempts to obliterate such divisions by demarcating the boundaries of the 'true' community and excluding the 'Other within'. This 'Other' may appear in different contexts as the Hindu, the Levantine, the Copt or the Jew, but it may just **as** readily refer to deviance among Muslims themselves. This aspect of populist ideology, then, serves above all **as** a mechanism of social control.

Islam has been a consistent vehicle for popular classes to express their alienation from 'Westemised' elites. It marks the great cultural divide between the beneficiaries and casualties of the changing socio-economic order, of comprador and upper-caste bureaucratic interests versus the traditional middle classes. In the populist discourse of the Khomeini regime, Islam represents the ideology of the 'people' confronting the corrupt, 'Westem-struck' (*gharbzadeh*) elite of the Shah era. The deportment and dress of women became laden with great symbolic significance since they were explicitly singled out **as** the most dangerous bearers of moral decay (as the 'painted dolls of the Shah'). Precedents and parallels to this discourse abound, from depictions of the Westem-aping elite of the post-*Tanzimat* novel in Turkey to the manifestos of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Islamic authenticity may therefore be evoked to articulate a wide array of worldly disaffections, from imperialist domination to class antagonism. This opens **up** the possibility of expressing such antagonisms in moral and cultural terms, with images of women's purity exercising a powerful mobilising influence.

The privileged place of women and the family in discourses about cultural authenticity may therefore be explained through a wide range of different factors converging to single out this area as a critical one. Despite important differences in the degrees of interference of colonial states, it often represents one of the few areas of relative autonomy left to societies whose ties of political and economic dependence severely restrict their choices in every other sphere. For instance, the history of Ottoman legal reforms (Ch. 2) starting with the *Tanzimat* (1839) illustrates the Turkish response to Western pressures, resulting in changes in every aspect of commercial life but not in the fields of personal status, family

and inheritance laws. It is not surprising that the *ulema* (Muslim clergy), whose powers in Ottoman society were severely restricted by the *Tanzimat* reforms, claimed the sphere of personal status and family legislation as their own. More to the point, this was the only area where conservatism could create the broadest possible political consensus. The cold facts of Ottoman economic and political dependence decisively restricted the arena in which traditionalists could raise the banners of cultural integrity and relative autonomy.

In the contemporary Muslim world, where ties of external dependence have deepened and women have become much more visible in the public realm, the attractions of reasserting control in this sphere are ever present. The material bases of the traditional patriarchal controls to which women **are** subjected are being eroded by processes of socio-economic transformation, and existing authority thresholds are being tested by the exigencies of modern life.²¹ Yet women continue to represent the 'privacy' of the group and the focal point of kinship-based primary solidarities as against a more abstract and problematic allegiance to the state. Herein lies the dilemma of the modern state, which must confront and to some extent eradicate these particularisms in order to create more universalistic loyalties and to liberate all the forces of development, including the labour potential of its female citizens. This brings us to a consideration of the incursions of the state into the private realm of the family and of its consequences and limitations.

WOMEN, FAMILY AND THE STATE

The process of subordination of the family to the state and state intervention through family legislation have been the subject of detailed analyses in both the capitalist West and in socialist states.²² The object of such intervention is to expand the control of the state over the socialisation of its citizens and to free them from the shackles of social customs and practices which **are** deemed to impede social progress and development. This feature of **state** practice has received relatively little attention in the study of Muslim societies, despite its far reaching implications for family and gender relations.

A striking and uniform feature of early feminist tendencies in the Middle East is not merely that they tried to accommodate Islam but that their concern with women coincided with the search for a new family form which would produce a 'healthier' and more viable nation. A nationalist/feminist alliance of progressive men and women produced a new discourse on women and the family which was predominantly

instrumental in tone. Women's illiteracy, seclusion and the practice of polygyny were not denounced merely because they so blatantly curtailed the individual human rights of one half of the population, but because they created ignorant mothers, shallow and scheming partners, unstable marital unions, and lazy and unproductive members of society. Women were increasingly presented as a wasted national resource. Jayawardena also links the demand for 'civilised housewives'²³ to the needs of the male reformers of the local bourgeoisie who wanted to enhance their own civilised image: the enlightened modern man was demanding his counterpart, the 'new woman'. The family form most suited to deliver this modernity was the nuclear family, based on stable monogamous unions, the free choice of spouses and companionate and egalitarian relationships among family members.

These ideas remained in the realm of polemic for a long time in societies with small urban populations, weak industrial bases and vast rural hinterlands with varying degrees of integration to markets. The limited outreach of the premodern state left many aspects of their citizens' lives untouched, especially the regulation of marriage and family life which remained firmly under local kin control. It is notable that customary law often accorded women even fewer rights than the *Shar'iah*, upholding the patriarchal privileges inherent in the latter whilst failing to honour their rights to inheritance under Muslim law. Neither the state nor the Muslim clergy acted to break the hold of local communities over the control of marriage alliances and women.

Joseph raises a number of important questions regarding the greater ability of Middle Eastern communities to resist the control of states than their European counterparts.²⁴ In her discussion of Goody's work on the development of marriage and the family in Europe,²⁵ she invokes the absence of strong centralising institutions such as the Catholic Church, competing for the control of alliances and family wealth. She also notes the greater interpenetration between the Muslim clergy and Islamic states which were themselves relatively unsuccessful in controlling their periphery. Zubaida's broader discussion of the 'externality' of pre-modern Middle Eastern states also illustrates their limited impact on local communities.²⁶ It is by and large as late as the nineteenth-century that we witness the first attempts at deeper penetration of society, which gained significant momentum after the emergence of modern nation states.

Tucker's work on nineteenth-century Egypt documents the expansion of state power under the rule of Muhammad Ali and examines its contradictory implications for women.²⁷ The destructuring of local communities and the loosening of traditional family forms occurred as unintended

consequences of capitalist penetration into the countryside rather than the direct result of state policies. On the other hand, the interventionist policies of Muhammed Ali encouraged the recruitment of women into public works, state-run industries and into the expanding sectors of health and education, acting to remove them from total and exclusive control by their families. At the same time, the repressive apparatus of the state actually restricted the range of their more traditional activities and informal associations.

The first systematic but unsuccessful attempt at direct state intervention through family legislation took place in the Ottoman empire with the 1917 Family Code (Ch. 2). The Committee for Union and Progress (CUP) aimed to follow their political revolution of 1908, marking the transition to constitutionalism, with social reforms that would remould and renovate Ottoman society. This included the replacement of the traditional patriarchal Ottoman family by the nuclear, monogamous 'National Family' (*Milli Aile*). The 1917 Code could not abolish polygyny, since this would conflict with the *Sha'riah* law, but attempted to curb it by stipulating conditions which would make its practice more difficult. It also had separate sub-sections applying to Christian and Jewish subjects who were bound by their own religious laws. This attempt was met by pervasive resistance both from the traditional sections of the Muslim clergy and by the minorities, who considered state interference in this area as an intolerable curtailment of the autonomy of their own religious authorities. The struggling Ottoman state, which was soon to be overthrown, was unable to wrest control from religious and communal interests. The minorities were able to obtain a repeal of the clauses pertaining to non-Muslim marriages in 1919 under Allied occupation of the capital. The rural hinterland remained untouched by this Code. This was also the case, for a very long time, with the secular 1926 Civil Code of the Turkish Republic.

The attempts of post-independence states to absorb and transform kin-based communities in order to expand their control have, not surprisingly, had an important bearing on state policies relating to women and the family. Joseph's comparative analysis of Iraq and Lebanon (Ch. 7) illustrates the close connections between elite strategies for state-building and policies directed at women and the family. In Iraq, the Ba'th agenda for state construction required the mobilisation of female labour for economic development in a context of continuing labour shortages. The state-party also had an interest in wresting the allegiance of the population away from particularistic loyalties (to tribes and ethnic groups). Women were recruited into state-controlled agencies in an effort at resocialisation through rapid expansion of public schooling as well as more general vocational and political education. However, legislative reforms

in personal status laws remained modest and attempts to undermine the allegiance of the population to traditional kin-based groups came up against the widespread mistrust of the state instilled by the pervasive climate of political repression, an important point to which we shall return. In Lebanon, where the state incorporated the religious/ethnic heterogeneity of society in its formal structure, the government relinquished matters of family and personal status to the religious authorities of the various communities. Subsidising private education was given preference over building a cohesive system of national education. This was consistent with a strategy by the ruling elite to maintain the balance of sectarian power in the state.

Molyneux's discussion of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (Ch. 9) illustrates a state project that stood apart in the Arab world in that its experience of socialist rule, unlike 'Arab socialism', made reference in its official doctrine to Marxism-Leninism rather than Islam. The socialist state used legal reforms as a vehicle of change, aiming to extend central legal authority into **rural** areas where religious, customary and tribal law prevailed. With respect to women, this meant a challenge to traditional kin control and the creation of new possibilities for their emergence as economic and political actors. The 1974 Family Law incorporates important provisions aimed at loosening traditional **kin** control over marriage and achieving greater equality in the marital contract. This legislation in fact made some concessions to Islamic law and local customs both in the formulation and in the application of the law. However radical the intent of the central authority might have been, accommodation to the relative strength of traditional communities, and the recognition of disparities between regions (in particular between rural and urban areas) appear to have proved necessary.

In a comparative analysis of Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, Charrad argues that variations in the balance of power between the national state and locally-based communities during accession to independence are responsible for the significant differences in the family laws of the three countries.²⁸ Tunisia, which has achieved the most progressive family legislation with the 1957 Personal Status Law, is also the country where primordial communities appear to have had relatively less political autonomy and leverage and where the nationalist movement **was** led by a powerful party which was least reliant on them for political support.

The interventionist measures deployed by post-independence states, through direct family legislation or more general education, employment and population control policies, have been limited in their emancipatory potential for a variety of reasons. First, measures for the emancipation

of women did not as a rule coincide with a drive for democratisation and the creation of a civil society where women's gender interests could be autonomously represented. On the contrary, these measures were mostly part of the general thrust of 'dirigiste' and frequently authoritarian and repressive regimes. The same governments which granted women new rights proceeded to simultaneously abolish independent women's organisations where they existed, whilst setting up state-sponsored women's organisations which were generally docile auxiliaries of the ruling state-party. This tendency is well illustrated in Joseph's discussion of the General Federation of Iraqi Women and its links with the Ba'th Party. This was also evident during the single-party era in Turkey, under Reza Shah in Iran and under Nasser in Egypt, who immediately after granting women suffrage in 1956 moved to outlaw all feminist organisations. It is also significant that the only progressive attempt at family law reform in Pakistan with the 1961 Family Law Ordinance took place under the military rule of Ayub Khan. Authoritarian rulers might have ventured into territory where others feared to tread. However, although they might wish to harness women to economic development efforts or simply project a 'modern' image, they would be unlikely to risk affronting the patriarchal sensibilities of their constituents by radically tampering with male prerogatives in the family. It is ironic that such prerogatives were frequently justified with reference to Islam and respect for the *Shari'ah*, when in fact the customary laws regulating the lives of the vast majority of women were more notable by their breach rather than strict observance of Muslim law. This concern would, however, account for the resilience of customary laws and practices in the spheres of marriage and the family as well as the relative laxity in the enforcement of state laws if and when they confronted patriarchal interests.

Second, communal controls over women continued to flourish and were in some instances intensified. This took place in a context riddled with contradictions. On the one hand, processes of capitalist penetration frequently led to the destructuring of local communities, the aggravation of social inequalities and a weakening of kin solidarities. The 'protective net' which households were supposed to extend over their more vulnerable members - women, children and the elderly - grew increasingly threadbare as impoverishment and emigration forced all family members to fend for themselves. The material basis of traditional authority relations within the family between the young and the old and between genders was subjected to persistent assault. On the other hand, primary groups and particularistic allegiances assumed an increasingly prominent role in mediating citizens' access to resources such as jobs, credit, schooling, health and other social services. The failure of modern states to create and adequately redistribute resources intensified tensions and cleavages

expressed in religious, ethnic and regional terms, and often stymied the secular pretensions of radical nationalist projects. As the state itself uses local patronage networks and sectional rivalries in its distributive system, citizens also turn to their primary solidarities both to protect themselves from potentially repressive states and to compensate for inefficient administration. This reinforces the stranglehold of communities over their women, whose roles as boundary markers become heightened. Chhachhi's analysis (Ch. 6) of the growing communalisation of politics and civil life in India illustrates this process well. Significantly, she notes that whereas the traditional exercise of patriarchal authority tended to rest with particular men – fathers, husbands and other male kin – the communalisation of politics, particularly when backed by state-sponsored religious fundamentalism, shifts the right of control to all men. Indeed, clergy and police in Pakistan or Iran may assume expanded functions of direct control over women's dress and deportment, elements of control more commonly exercised within the confines of the household and the immediate neighbourhood. Some have argued that the very erosion of the traditional structures of patriarchy has created a favourable climate for the emergence of a conservative backlash against the emancipation of women articulated in the idiom of religious fundamentalism.²⁹ While this may account for some of the popular appeal of conservative ideologies, it cannot fully explain their different degrees of incorporation into actual state policies.

Contemporary policies and ideologies relating to women are being formulated in an increasingly complex field of forces where governments respond to the contradictory pressures of different sections of their internal constituencies as well as to their international ties of economic and political dependence. The final section of this chapter will concentrate on an analysis of these cross-pressures.

WOMEN, THE STATE AND THE INTERNATIONAL NEXUS

Mernissi presents the progressive-regressive movements with respect to women's emancipation in Muslim societies as the expression of an insoluble impasse: 'Every political setback generates a new necessity to liberate all the forces of development in Islamic nations. But paradoxically, every political setback inflicted by infidels generates an antithetical necessity to reaffirm the traditional Islamic nature of these societies as well.'³⁰ We will argue in this section that neither the will to develop nor the reaffirmation of

an Islamic identity can be understood without a consideration of the global context in which modern nation-states operate.

Although a discussion of the local forces promoting the rise of Islamisation policies remains outside the scope of this chapter,³¹ two general points must be noted. First, cleavages between oil-rich and resource-poor states in the Middle East and South Asia have had an important effect on the flow of migration, aid and political influence in the region. Migrants have gone from poorer countries such as Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Turkey to the oil-rich countries of the Gulf, whilst a reverse flow of cash and political influence has left its imprint on their polities. This has served to strengthen the cultural and political prominence of local forces and parties representing Islamist platforms and prompted diverse accommodations with Islam in aid-dependent countries. Second, this influence was achieved through the medium of an internal constituency frequently nurtured by conservative governments as a bulwark against the radical left. The delicate tightrope act that some governments followed, oscillating between the suppression of all oppositional movements and ideologies, the judicious extension of patronage to some Islamist tendencies, and attempts at defusing the more radical Islamist groups by upstaging them and hijacking their platforms are illustrated in the case studies on Egypt (Ch. 8) and Bangladesh (Ch. 5).

At the same time, the international monitoring of local economies has reached unprecedented levels, from the structural adjustment packages of the World Bank to stabilisation measures advocated by the IMF and development projects sponsored by a wide variety of Western donor agencies. This has been accompanied in many instances by a drastic redefinition of priorities: departures from tight state control over the economy, extended access to private enterprise and foreign investment and an emphasis on export-led strategies of development. The gender effects of such state policies have been widely documented³² and have been the subject of heated polemics on women and development which cannot be dealt with here. However, the international institutional framework within which these debates are carried out and its effects on government policies must be noted.

Since the International Women's *Year* in 1975 and the following United Nations Decade for Women, the women and development lobby has put pressure on national governments to recognise the role of women in combating poverty, illiteracy and high birth rates. Governments have also been invited to eliminate all forms of legal discrimination based on *sex*. In 1973, the Percy Amendment to the US Foreign Assistance Act required that US bilateral aid should pay particular attention to and promote projects

integrating women into development efforts. Monitoring bureaucracies were set up within the US Agency for International Development and the foreign aid departments of all the main European and Scandinavian donor nations. Although these are still marginal to mainstream development funding, the growing vitality of women's movements in both industrialised and Third World countries put gender issues on the policy agenda. The 'official' feminist rhetoric which had been the exclusive province of post-independence states has now moved to supra-national monitoring bodies with seemingly contradictory consequences at the local level.

The case of Bangladesh (Ch. 5) is particularly instructive in this respect. The coup that brought Zia ur-Rahman to power coincided with the 1975 declaration of the United Nations Decade for Women. Zia-ur-Rahman built up considerable political capital by championing the causes of the women and development lobby. But he also needed the support of right-wing elements, including the army, to counter the opposition of the Awami League. Meanwhile, oil states like Saudi Arabia had joined the ranks of major aid donors and increased their political leverage considerably. Zia embarked on a progressive dismantling of state secularism and his successor, Ershad, finally declared Bangladesh an Islamic state in 1988. Both Zia's and later Ershad's strategies constituted a blatant balancing act between the conflicting gender ideologies implicit in different aid packages: thus the development projects encouraged women's participation in the labour force and the public sphere, while aid from richer Muslim countries strengthened the *madrassas* (religious schools) and those religious parties advocating stricter controls on women. The government now finances the Islamic Foundation – which published tracts condemning family planning – while supporting US-funded attempts at population control.

Jalal (Ch. 4) also notes that in **Pakistan** the establishment of a Women's Division as part of the Cabinet Secretariat to safeguard women's interests and promote development programmes coincided with the passage of the most discriminatory 'Islamisation' laws. The Hudood Ordinance of 1979 made no distinction between rape and adultery and made it practically impossible for women to press rape charges; the law of evidence passed in 1984 reduced the weight of women's evidence to half that of a man's; the law of *qisas* and *diyat* passed in the same year specifies compensation for bodily injury to a woman as half that for a man, and makes the testimony of Muslim women witnesses to a murder admissible for a lesser punishment than the testimony of Muslim men.

The creation of local machinery to channel development funds which are in principle designed to have empowering consequences for women and the

increased presence of women in the workforce can often be seen to coexist with measures strengthening the patriarchal features of society. There is neither a contradiction nor a mechanical connection between these sets of events. The donor governments and agencies of the West act to harness women directly to their vision of a more effective, though not necessarily more equitable, international economic order. The very manner in which the recipients of aid **are** integrated into that order increases the likelihood of unstable and repressive regimes. Most are caught up in a corrosive cycle of foreign debt. The development policies they favour have by and large led to more visible disparities in wealth, which fuel widespread resentment and discontent, often in the absence of democratic channels of expression. The legitimacy crises engendered by these processes have favoured the rise of organised oppositional movements with Islamist platforms, as well **as** attempts at social control by governments emphasising their own commitment to orthodoxy. The arena in which these political projects can most easily be played out and achieve a measure of consensus is, **for** reasons already spelt out, the control of women.

It should be clear from our discussion that presenting the workings of world capitalism, individual states, the class system, sectarian communities and male-headed households as ultimately convergent on the grounds that they represent different facets of patriarchal domination would be a dangerous oversimplification. The case studies in this volume indicate that their operations can be antagonistic as well as collaborative. More importantly, women are neither homogeneous nor passive victims of patriarchal domination. They are full-fledged social actors, bearing the full set of contradictions implied by their class, racial and ethnic locations as well **as** their gender. This has important implications **for** women's movements, which **are** to a large extent determined by the wider social context of which they form a part.

In all the countries covered in this volume women have been active participants in nationalist movements and struggles for national independence. Their ability to organise and act in pursuit of broader goals which may not be directly related to their gender interests is therefore not in question. The more vexing issue of whether women have also **been** able to develop political platforms and movements to further and articulate their common gender interests³³ elicits varied evaluations from the authors. Jalal argues, for instance, that in the case of Pakistan the class accommodations of the predominantly urban and middle-class participants of women's movements, despite their undeniable achievements, have limited the radical potential of their demands. Kabeer suggests, on the other hand, that in Bangladesh women's groups were able to flourish

in the spaces created by development projects and that women's NGOs were able to initiate innovative forms of organisation and mobilisation. In Iran, Iraq and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen it is possible to see the operations of 'official', state-sponsored women's organisations, although these examples of **state** co-optation of women's movements are by no means exceptional or isolated. In a wide-ranging discussion of Egypt, Badran shows how women's organisations and movements have spanned the whole political spectrum, from liberal nationalism and the communist left to radical Islamist movements within a more pluralistic framework. She contends, moreover, that autonomous feminist platforms have exhibited both vigour and resilience in the Egyptian context. Her discussion of Islamist women also suggests that women do not merely submit to the strictures of religious fundamentalism **as** interpreted by men but are active participants with their own versions of the ways in which Islam might further their gender interests. *Also* commenting on the assertive element of choice exercised by women taking up the veil in Egypt, el-Guindy states; 'Therefore, a woman in public has a choice between being secular, modem, feminine and frustratingly passive (hence very vulnerable) or becoming a *mitdayyinan* (religieuse), hence formidable, untouchable, and silently threatening. The young women who are now in public and because of social change will remain there, made the choice and **it** became a movement.'³⁴

If some women's response to their vulnerability is a retreat into the protective certainties of religious conservatism, others may be motivated to struggle for a social order in which they no longer need the veil to legitimise their public presence and to fend off male aggression. Women will continue to be divided over the definition of their gender interests, over the nature of social arrangements which best serve them and over their visions of a better society. It is important to remember that their various movements **are** responses to similar sets of contradictions, and that their discourses **are** circumscribed by the political cultures of their societies. Ultimately, feminist movements in Muslim societies, as elsewhere, will take their place alongside the social forces struggling for civil and democratic rights in their respective countries.

NOTES

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 10. On the class background of reformers see: J. R. Cole, 'Feminism, Class and Islam in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 13 (1981) pp. 387–407; P. R. Knauss, *The Persistence of Patriarchy: Class, Gender and Ideology in Twentieth Century Algeria* (New York Praeger, 1984).

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