studies and feminist studies, is immense, a debt my notes partially suggest. Here I can only acknowledge those who have contributed directly to my work. Several people read the manuscript and helped me improve it. I am especially grateful to Judith Tucker for the critical care with which she read the entire manuscript and for her many detailed and insightful suggestions; Nikki Keddie, who read most of the manuscript and whose comments helped me focus my ideas; and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, who read several chapters and offered comments that stretched and enriched my thinking. I am fundamentally indebted, too, to conversations, arguments, and editorial suggestions from many friends and colleagues. I want to thank in particular Frédérique Apffel Marglin, Tosun Aricanli, Elizabeth Davis, Elizabeth Fernea, Peter Gran, Ahmad Al-Haidar, Giselle Hakki, Heba Handoussa, Mervat Hatem, Azizah Al-Hibri, Angela Ingram, Suad Joseph, Eileen Julien, Angelika Kratzer, Jane Lund, Afaf Mahfouz, Daphne Patai, Janice Raymond, Lisa Selkirk, Catharine Stimpson, Dorothy Thompson, and Sandra Zagarell.

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Wherever possible, I have used the familiar English forms of Arabic words and names; otherwise, I have used a simple system based on that of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. No diacritical marks are used. The letter *ayn* is indicated by ʿ, and the *hamza* is indicated by ʾ.

INTRODUCTION

I BEGAN THIS BOOK WITH THE INTENTION OF BRINGing together such information and insights as were currently available on the conditions and lives of women in Middle Eastern Arab history. The only general accounts of women in Arab or Muslim history available when I started to research this book (some ten years ago) were such works as Wiebke Walther's *Woman in Islam*, an attractively illustrated book, more anecdotal than analytical, which took little if any notice of the perspectives on women in history that contemporary feminist research on Western women, and to some extent on Arab women, had begun to elaborate.[1]

I soon realized that my task would not after all be as simple as I had first imagined and that a key focus of the book must be the discourses on women and gender, rather than, more straightforwardly, the presentation of a synopsis of recent findings on the material conditions of women in the different periods of Middle Eastern Arab history. Throughout Islamic history the constructs, institutions, and modes of thought devised by early Muslim societies that form the core discourses of Islam have played a central role in defining women's place in Muslim societies. The growing strength of Is-

lamist movements today, which urge the reinstitution of the laws and practices set forth in the core Islamic discourses, made the investigation of that heritage on women and gender seem particularly urgent and relevant.

Other factors contributed to my sense that a prime focus of this study of Middle Eastern Arab women in history must be the discourses and the changes in, and varieties of, the discourses on women. The debates going on in the contemporary Arab world between Islamists and secularists—between advocates of veiling and its opponents—and the ways in which the issues of the veil and women as they figured in these debates were apparently encoded with political meanings and references that on the face of it at least seemed to have little to do with women, again brought the issue of discourse to the fore. Similarly, the way in which Arab women are discussed in the West, whether in the popular media or the academy, and the sense that such discussions often seem to be centrally even if implicitly engaging other matters through the discussion of women—such as the merits or demerits of Islam or Arab culture—also highlighted the importance of taking the discourses themselves as a focus of investigation.

Discourses shape and are shaped by specific moments in specific societies. The investigation of the discourses on women and gender in Islamic Middle Eastern societies entails studying the societies in which they are rooted, and in particular the way in which gender is articulated socially, institutionally, and verbally in these societies. Some charting of the terrain of women's history and the socioeconomic and historical conditions in which the discourses are grounded was thus in any case a necessary first step. This in itself was a considerable task. Knowledge about women's history and the articulation of gender in Muslim societies is still rudimentary, although in the late 1980s there was a spurt of new research in that area. Nonetheless, existing studies of periods before the nineteenth century deal with random isolated issues or scattered groups and thus illuminate points or moments but give no sense of the broad patterns or codes. A recent authoritative tome on the history of the Islamic peoples by Ira Lapidus makes no reference to women or the construction of gender prior to the nineteenth century and devotes only a small number of pages to women after 1800. This treatment exemplifies the status of research on women and gender in Islam, reflecting the absence of work attempting to conceptualize women's history and issues of gender in any Islamic society before the nineteenth century and also the progress that has been made in conceptualizing a framework of women's history with respect to more recent times.[2]

Unearthing and piecing together the history of women and the articu-

lation of gender in Muslim societies, areas of history largely invisible in Middle Eastern scholarship, thus was a primary and major part of this enterprise. Both historically and geographically the field to be covered was potentially vast, precluding any comprehensive account. The broad framework of this inquiry, with its principal objective of identifying and exploring the core Islamic discourses on women and gender and exploring the key premises of the modern discourses on women in the Middle East, served to set the geographic and historical limits.

Within the broad limits of the Arab Muslim Middle East it was in certain societies most particularly, and at certain moments in history, that the dominant, prescriptive terms of the core religious discourses were founded and institutionally and legally elaborated, so it is these societies and moments that must here be the focus of study. Crucial in this respect were Arabia at the time of the rise of Islam and Iraq in the immediately ensuing period.

Some examination of concepts of gender in the societies that preceded and adjoined the early Islamic societies was also necessary to understand the foundations and influences bearing on the core Islamic discourses. A review of these was additionally desirable because the contemporary Islamist argument, which maintains that the establishment of Islam improved the condition of women, refers comparatively to these earlier and neighboring societies.

The region comprises a kaleidoscopic wealth of the world's most ancient societies, but the organization of gender has been systematically analyzed in few of them. Those surveyed in the following pages—at times extremely briefly and only to point to salient features or note parallels with Islamic forms—include Mesopotamia, Greece, Egypt, and Iran. They were picked for a variety of reasons, among them their importance or influence in the region, their relevance to the Islamic system, and the availability of information.

In more modern periods, crucial moments in the rearticulation and further elaboration of issues of women and gender in Middle Eastern Muslim societies occurred under the impact of colonialism and in the sociopolitical turmoil that followed and, indeed, persists to our own day. Egypt in this instance was a prime crucible of the process of transformation and the struggles around the meanings of gender that have recurringly erupted in both Egypt and other Muslim Arab societies since the nineteenth century. In many ways developments in Egypt heralded and mirrored developments in the Arab world, and for the modern period this inquiry therefore focuses on Egypt. Which moments and societies in the course of Muslim history assumed a central or exemplary role in the development of the core or dom-

inant discourses fundamentally determined which societies are focused on here.

The findings presented in the following pages are essentially provisional and preliminary and constitute in many ways a first attempt to gain a perspective on the discourses on women and gender at crucial, defining moments in Middle Eastern Muslim history. Part 1 outlines the practices and concepts relating to gender in some exemplary societies of the region antecedent to the rise of Islam. The continuities of Islamic civilization with past civilizations in the region are well recognized. Statements to that effect routinely figure in histories of Islam. Lapidus's *History of Islamic Societies* notes that the family and the family-based community were among the many institutions inherited and continued by Islam, others being "agricultural and urban societies, market economies, monotheistic religions."[3] The author might also have noted that the monotheistic religions inherited and reaffirmed by Islam enjoined the worship of a god referred to by a male pronoun, and endorsed the patriarchal family and female subordination as key components of their socioreligious vision. Judaism and Christianity, and Zoroastrianism, were the prevailing religions in the Byzantine and the Sasanian empires, which were the two major powers in the area at the time of the rise of Islam. In instituting a religion and a type of family conforming with those already established in such adjoining regions, Islam displaced in Arabia a polytheist religion with three paramount goddesses and a variety of marriage customs, including but not confined to those enshrined in the patriarchal family. That is to say, Islam effected a transformation that brought the Arabian socioreligious vision and organization of gender into line with the rest of the Middle East and Mediterranean regions.

Islam explicitly and discreetly affiliated itself with the traditions already in place in the region. According to Islam, Muhammad was a prophet in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and the Quran incorporated, in some form or other, many stories to be found in the Bible, those of the creation and fall among others. As a consequence, once Islam had conquered the adjacent territories, the assimilation of the scriptural and social traditions of their Christian and Jewish populations into the corpus of Islamic life and thought occurred easily and seamlessly. Converts brought traditions of thought and custom with them. For instance (to give just one example of how easily and invisibly scriptural assimilation could occur), in its account of the creation of humankind the Quran gives no indication of the order in which the first couple was created, nor does it say that Eve was created from Adam's rib. In Islamic traditionist literature, however, which was inscribed in the period following the Muslim conquests, Eve, sure enough, is referred to as created from a rib.[4] The adoption of the veil by Muslim women occurred by a similar process of seamless assimilation of the mores of the conquered peoples. The veil was apparently in use in Sasanian society, and segregation of the sexes and use of the veil were heavily in evidence in the Christian Middle East and Mediterranean regions at the time of the rise of Islam. During Muhammad's lifetime and only toward the end at that, his wives were the only Muslim women required to veil (see chap. 3). After his death and following the Muslim conquest of the adjoining territories, where upper-class women veiled, the veil became a commonplace item of clothing among Muslim upper-class women, by a process of assimilation that no one has yet ascertained in much detail.

What is or is not unique, specific, or intrinsic to Islam with respect to ideas about women and gender has already, then, become a complicated question. It is also clear that conceptions, assumptions, and social customs and institutions relating to women and to the social meaning of gender that derived from the traditions in place in the Middle East at the time of the Islamic conquests entered into and helped to shape the very foundations of Islamic concepts and social practice as they developed during the first centuries of Islam. All these facts emphasize the importance of considering Islamic formulations of gender in relation to the changing codes and practices in the broader Middle East. They suggest, too, that the contributions of the contemporary conquered societies to the formation of Islamic institutions and mores concerning women need to be taken into account, even with respect to mores that have come to be considered intrinsically Islamic.

For these reasons it was important to some extent to relate practices taking shape in early Islam to those of earlier and adjoining societies and thus to relate Islamic practices to the pattern of practices in the region. Moreover, to omit consideration of that larger pattern altogether would constitute a serious distortion of the evidence, for it would falsely isolate Islamic practices and by implication at least suggest that Islamic handling of these matters was special or even unique. (The variety and wealth of languages and cultures in the region and the consequent variety of disciplines, entailing specialist linguistic skills and other knowledges through which those cultures are explored, has perhaps contributed to the facility with which the Islamic and other societies of the region tend to be treated in scholarship as if they constituted separate, self-contained societies and histories.) Conceptually, therefore, it was important to outline practices in some earlier and contemporary cultures, even though in my discussion of non-Islamic or non-Arab cultures I would be compelled to rely entirely on secondary sources.

Part 2 deals with Arabia at the time of the rise of Islam, tracing changes that occurred when Islam was instituted and changes that accompanied its spread to the wider Middle East. It then explores the conceptual and social organizations pertaining to women and gender in Iraqi society in the Classical age—the region and period that witnessed the elaboration of the prescriptive core of Islamic discourses on women. The section concludes with an overview of salient features of the socioeconomic expression of the Classical Islamic system of gender and their consequences for the lives of women in some subsequent societies in premodern times. The societies examined are mainly those of Egypt and Turkey, primarily for the practical reason that some preliminary scholarship and data are available.

Part 3 takes as its starting point the turn of the nineteenth century and outlines the socioeconomic, political, and cultural changes that accompanied European encroachment on the Middle East. The focus here is almost entirely on Egypt. As numerous students of the modern Arab world have noted, there is compelling justification, culturally and intellectually, for regarding Egypt as mirror of the Arab world in the modern age, and this is certainly the case in analyzing the Arab world's dominant discourses on women.[5] Egypt was the first Middle Eastern Arab country to experience the consequences of European commercial expansion and to experiment socially, intellectually, politically, and culturally with the range of ideas that have tellingly marked or that have proved to be of enduring significance in the modern era, not only for Egypt but also for Arab societies as a whole.

The first region in the Arab world to experiment with social change for women, Egypt played and continues to play a central role in developing the key Arab discourses on women, while developments within Egypt with respect to women (as in other matters) continue to parallel, reflect, and sometimes anticipate developments in other Arab countries. Part 3 first describes the progress of social change for women over the course of the nineteenth century and traces the impact of those changes on women and on ideas about women. It next analyzes the eruption, in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, of the first major debate on women and the veil in the Arab world and the emergence, in effect, of a new discourse on women—here called the discourse of the veil—in which issues of culture and class, and imperialism and nationalism, became vitally entangled with the issue of women. The political and discursive elements from which the new discourse was forged and the conflicts of class and culture with which it was inscribed are also analyzed.

The remaining chapters trace the impact on women of the socioeconomic changes that have occurred over the course of the twentieth century and

then follow out the appearance and evolution of feminist discourses. Part 3 concludes with an account of the social background to the "return of the veil" and an analysis of the social and intellectual grounds informing the different perspectives on Islamism and Islamic dress, and an analysis, too, of the divisions between feminist women and women adopting Islamic dress.

It is unusual to refer to the Western world as the "Christian world" or the "world of Christendom" unless one intends to highlight its religious heritage, whereas with respect to the Islamic Middle East there is no equivalent nonethnic, nonreligious term in common English usage, and the terms *Islamic* and *Islam* (as in the "world of Islam") are those commonly used to refer to regions whose civilizational heritage is Islamic as well as, specifically, to the religion of Islam. My falling in with this usage is not intended to suggest that Middle Eastern "Islamic" civilization or peoples are more innately or unalterably religious than any other civilization or peoples.

The very structure of this work declares that ethnic and religious groups other than the Muslims belonged to and shaped the Middle East and its cultures as centrally as the Muslims did. The focus here on Islam and on Muslim communities connotes simply the intent to explore the dominant cultural tradition in the Middle East and is in no way intended to imply that the Middle East is or should be only Islamic. Although the issue of minorities is not specifically explored, the question of minorities has close notional ties to the question of women. In establishment Islamic thought, women, like minorities, are defined as different from and, in their legal rights, lesser than, Muslim men.[6] Unlike non-Muslim men, who might join the master-class by converting, women's differentness and inferiority within this system are immutable.

Of course, differences of class, ethnicity, and local culture critically qualify the experiences of women and give specificity to the particular ways in which they are affected by the broad discourses on gender within their societies.[7] Without in any way denying the fundamental role of such variables I should note here (in view of the lively current discussions and myriad interpretations of what "woman" is and who "women" are) that by definition, in that this is a study of the discourses on women in Muslim Arab societies and of the histories in which those discourses are rooted, "women" in this work are those whom the societies under review defined as women and to whom they applied legal and cultural rules on the basis of these definitions. They are those who—in Nancy Cott's useful retrieval of Mary Beard's phrase—"can't avoid being women, whatever they do."[8]

and that women should "never leave the confines of their homes except in emergencies," and that no one should be punished for rape until total absence of female visibility had been achieved in society.[49]

The idea of a separate university education for women began to be given priority, the government proposing to upgrade the women's colleges of home economics to university status—the object of this move being, women activists believed, to push women into subjects, such as home economics, considered suitable for them and to deny them places in mainstream universities teaching mainstream subjects. The move thus responded to male protests that women were taking up places at the country's better universities that should be freed up for men.[50]

Islamization of the penal code, introduced in 1979, and in particular the laws governing the conviction and punishment for adultery and rape, also had some appalling consequences for women. Four adult male Muslim eyewitnesses were required to convict anyone of adultery or rape, and the testimony of women for either was excluded. Women who accuse men of rape or who become pregnant are thus open to punishment for adultery, while men go unpunished for lack of evidence. The researchers whose work I report here cite a number of cases of monstrous brutality and injustice meted out by the Islamic courts under the penal code.

All the above laws and decrees, those of both Iran and Pakistan, directly reflect or are entirely compatible with shariʿa views as interpreted by establishment Islam. There is every reason to believe that any government declaring itself committed to Islamization, along either Sunni or Shia lines, would introduce similar laws for women.

Sixty-seven percent of the veiled university students responding to the questionnaire in Egypt agreed to the proposal that shariʿa law should become the law of the land, and 53 percent of the unveiled women agreed. It is surely extremely doubtful that either group has any idea of the extremes of control, exclusion, injustice, and indeed brutality that can be, in the present order of things, legitimately meted out to women in the name of Islam.

CONCLUSION

IN THE DISCOURSES OF GEOPOLITICS THE REEMERgent veil is an emblem of many things, prominent among which is its meaning as the rejection of the West. But when one considers why the veil has this meaning in the late twentieth century, it becomes obvious that, ironically, it was the discourses of the West, and specifically the discourse of colonial domination, that in the first place determined the meaning of the veil in geopolitical discourses and thereby set the terms for its emergence as a symbol of resistance. In other words, the reemergent veil attests, by virtue of its very power as a symbol of resistance, to the uncontested hegemonic diffusion of the discourses of the West in our age. And it attests to the fact that, at least as regards the Islamic world, the discourses of resistance and rejection are inextricably informed by the languages and ideas developed and disseminated by the West to no less a degree than are the languages of those openly advocating emulation of the West or those who, like Frantz Fanon or Nawal El-Saadawi, are critical of the West but nonetheless ground themselves in intellectual assumptions and political ideas, including a belief in the rights of the individual, formulated by

Western bourgeois capitalism and spread over the globe as a result of Western hegemony.

Islamic reformers such as al-Afghani and 'Abdu and the militant Islamists of today; intellectuals radically critical of the West, including Marxists such as Fanon, Samir Amin, and El-Saadawi; and liberal intellectuals wholeheartedly embracing the colonial thesis of Western superiority and advocating the importance of emulating the West all differ fundamentally in their political stance, but they do not differ in the extent to which, whether they acknowledge it or not, they draw on Western thought and Western political and intellectual languages. The revitalized, reimagined Islam put forward by the Islamic militants or by 'Abdu and his contemporaries is an Islam redefining itself against the assaults of the West but also an Islam revitalized and reimagined as a result of its fertilization by and its appropriation of the languages and ideas given currency by the discourses of the West. In the discourses of the Arab world comprehensively, then, whether they are discourses of collaboration or resistance, the goals and ideals they articulate and even the rejection of and often-legitimate anger at the West that they give voice to are formulated in terms of the dominant discourse—Western in origin—of our global society.

This is of particular relevance to Islamist positions. Marxists, secularists, and feminists generally concede, tacitly if not overtly, their grounding in Western thought, but Islamists, arguing for what they claim to be a restoration of an "original" Islam and an "authentic" indigenous culture, make their case, and conduct the assault on secularism, Marxism, or feminism on the grounds that these represent alien Western importations whereas Islamism intends the restoration of an indigenous tradition. But today, willy-nilly, as the Indian psychologist and critic Ashis Nandy has remarked, the West is everywhere, "in structures and in minds," and Western political ideas, technologies, and intellectual systems comprehensively permeate all societies.[1] There is no extricating them, no return to a past of unadulterated cultural purity—even if in this ancient and anciently multicultural part of the world such a project had ever been other than chimerical.

The Islamist position regarding women is also problematic in that, essentially reactive in nature, it traps the issue of women with the struggle over culture—just as the initiating colonial discourse had done. Typically, women—and the reaffirmation of indigenous customs relating to women and the restoration of the customs and laws of past Islamic societies with respect to women—are the centerpiece of the agenda of political Islamists. They are the centerpiece of the Islamist agenda at least in part because they were posed as central in the colonial discursive assault on Islam and Arab culture. I described in an earlier chapter how in the late nineteenth century the discourses of colonial domination coopted the language of feminism in attacking Muslim societies. Male imperialists known in their home societies for their intransigent opposition to feminism led the attack abroad against the "degradation" of women in Muslim societies and were the foremost champions of unveiling. The custom of veiling and the position of women in Muslim societies became, in their rhetoric, the proof of the inferiority of Islam and the justification of their efforts to undermine Muslim religion and society. This thesis and the societal goal of unveiling were, in addition, adopted and promoted (as I also described earlier) by the upper classes in Arab societies whose interests lay with the colonial powers; and they were opposed and the terms of the thesis inverted (and the importance of veiling and other indigenous practices insisted on) in the discourse of resistance.

The notion of returning to or holding on to an "original" Islam and an "authentic" indigenous culture is itself, then, a response to the discourses of colonialism and the colonial attempt to undermine Islam and Arab culture and replace them with Western practices and beliefs. But what is needed now is not a response to the colonial and postcolonial assault on non-Western cultures, which merely inverts the terms of the colonial thesis to affirm the opposite, but a move beyond confinement within those terms altogether and a rejection or incorporation of Western, non-Western, and indigenous inventions, ideas, and institutions on the basis of their merit, not their tribe of origin. After all and in sober truth, what thriving civilization or cultural heritage today, Western or non-Western, is not critically indebted to the inventions or traditions of thought of other peoples in other lands? And why should any human being be asked to do without some useful invention, political, technological, or of any kind, because it originated among some other tribe or, conversely, be compelled to practice a custom that has nothing to recommend it or even much against it for no better reason than that it is indigenous?

Rejection of things Western and rage at the Western world—an attitude that noticeably does not include the refusal of military equipment or technology—is understandable. Arabs have suffered and continue to suffer injustices and exploitation at the hands of colonial and postcolonial Western governments. But neither rage as a politics nor the self-deception and doublethink involved in relying on Western technologies—and indeed drawing on the intellectual and technical paraphernalia of the Western world in all aspects of contemporary life while claiming to be intent on

returning to a culturally pure heritage—and in selectively choosing which aspects of the past will be preserved (for example, the laws controlling women) are persuasive as policies capable of leading the Arab world from entrapment in powerlessness and economic dependence.

Similarly, with respect to the more distant past and the proclaimed intention of restoring "original," "authentic" Islamic ways for women, the Islamist position is again problematic. It assumes, first, that the meaning of gender inhering in the initiatory Islamic society and in Muhammad's acts and sayings is essentially unambiguous and ascertainable in some precise and absolute sense and that the understanding of gender articulated in the written corpus of establishment Islam represents the only possible and uncontested understanding of the meaning of gender in Islam. The evidence reviewed in the preceding pages lends support to neither assumption, however. The meaning and social articulation of gender informing the first Islamic society in Arabia differed significantly from those informing the immediately succeeding Muslim societies, including most particularly those of the society that contributed centrally to the articulation of the founding institutional, legal, and scriptural discourses of dominant Islam—Abbasid Iraq. The meanings of gender specific to Abbasid society and the distinctive meaning that the notion "woman" acquired in that society (a society in which the traditions of a number of religions and cultures, including the Judaic, Christian, and Iranian, blended inextricably and were absorbed into Islamic thought) were inscribed into the literary, legal, and institutional productions of the age—productions that today constitute the founding and authoritative corpus of establishment Muslim thought. The androcentric and misogynist biases of this society affected in particular the different weight given to the two divergent tendencies within the Islamic message. As I argued earlier, even as Islam instituted, in the initiatory society, a hierarchical structure as the basis of relations between men and women, it also preached, in its ethical voice (and this is the case with Christianity and Judaism as well), the moral and spiritual equality of all human beings. Arguably, therefore, even as it instituted a sexual hierarchy, it laid the ground, in its ethical voice, for the subversion of the hierarchy. In the Abbasid context, the regulations instituting a sexual hierarchy were given central emphasis while the ethical message stressing the equality of all human beings and the importance of justice went largely unheeded and remained, with respect to women, essentially unarticulated in the laws and institutions that were now formulated.

Unheeded by the dominant classes and by the creators of establishment Islam, that ethical voice was, in contrast, emphasized by some often marginal or lower-class groups who challenged the dominant political order and its interpretation of Islam, including its conception of the meaning of gender and the arrangements regarding women. From the start, the interpretation of the meaning of gender in the dominant society and other key issues, such as the proper political and social organization of Muslim societies, were contested. Establishment Islam's version of the Islamic message survived as the sole legitimate interpretation not because it was the only possible interpretation but because it was the interpretation of the politically dominant—those who had the power to outlaw and eradicate other readings as "heretical."

It is this technical, legalistic establishment version of Islam, a version that largely bypasses the ethical elements in the Islamic message, that continues to be politically powerful today. But for the lay Muslim it is not this legalistic voice but rather the ethical, egalitarian voice of Islam that speaks most clearly and insistently. It is because Muslim women hear this egalitarian voice that they often declare (generally to the astonishment of non-Muslims) that Islam is nonsexist. Only within the politically powerful version of Islam (and in its reflection in Western Orientalist literature)—a version with no greater claim to being regarded as the only possible interpretation of Islam than Papal Christianity has to being regarded as the only possible interpretation of Christianity—is women's position immutably fixed as subordinate. Just as with other monotheistic (and indeed non-monotheistic) religions, what the import of Islam was and what its significance for human societies might be are subjects that yielded varieties of interpretations in past societies and that again today are open to a range of interpretations, including feminist interpretations.[2]

Thus, the Islamist position with respect to the distant past is flawed in assuming that the meaning of gender informing the first Islamic society is reducible to a single, simple, unconflicted meaning that is ascertainable in some precise and absolute sense, as well as in assuming that the legacy was open to only one interpretation on matters of gender and that the correct interpretation was the one captured and preserved in the corpus of Muslim thought and writing and constituting the heritage of establishment Islam, created decades and indeed centuries after Muhammad, in the societies of the Middle East. In making these assumptions Islamists overlook the complexity of a gender system diversely and comprehensively articulated in social mores, verbal prescriptions, and the interplay between these, on the one hand, and the critical role of interpretation, on the other. Underlying the above assumptions—and in particular the belief that the laws developed in Abbasid and other societies of early Islam merely preserved and precisely

elaborated the pristine originary meaning of Islam—is the notion that ideas, systems of meaning, and conceptions of gender traveled to and were transmitted by other societies without being blurred or colored by the mores, culture, and gender systems of the societies through which they passed. In a similarly literalist approach, Islamists assume that identifying the rulings regarding gender current in the first Muslim society—rulings presumed to be ascertainable in some categorical fashion—and transposing and applying them to modern Muslim societies would result in the reconstitution of the meaning of gender inhering and articulated in that first society. Such an assumption fails to recognize that a society's rulings in matters of gender form part of a comprehensive and integral system, part of a society's variously articulated (socially, legally, psychically) discourse on gender, and thus that the transposition of a segment of the Arabian Muslim society's discourse (even if this were absolutely ascertainable) to the fundamentally different Muslim societies of the modern world is likely to result not in the reconstitution of the first Arabian Muslim understanding of gender but rather in its travesty.

The meaning of gender as elaborated by establishment Islam remained the controlling discourse in the Muslim Middle East until about the beginning of the nineteenth century. Unambiguously and on all levels—cultural, legal, social, and institutional—the social system it devised and informed was one that controlled and subordinated women, marginalized them economically, and, arguably, conceptualized them as human beings inferior to men. So negatively were women viewed within this system that even women of the spiritual stature of Rabiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya still could be deemed inferior to the least spiritually developed man in the eyes of an establishment spokesman like the theologian al-Ghazali. Evidently, dissent from this dominant view existed and found formal expression in the thought of such groups as the Sufis and the Qarmatians and in the thought of a rare philosopher, like Ibn al-ʿArabi. Evidently, too, informal resistance to the dominant culture was to be found within families and among individuals. That families economically in a position to contractually impose monogamy on their daughter's spouse or otherwise protect her interests in marriage sometimes did impose such terms is one indication of familial and personal resistance to the view of the dominant culture on the place and rights of women. Similarly, that some families educated their daughters despite the lack of any formal avenue for the education of women not merely to the point of literacy but to the point where they could become distinguished scholars and eminent women of learning is another kind of

evidence of resistance among people to the prescriptions and dicta of the dominant view of women.

The unraveling of this system began to occur with European economic encroachment in about the early nineteenth century. From that point forward, the consonance that had thitherto pertained in the Muslim Middle East between the discourse on gender espoused by establishment Islam and the social and institutional articulation of that discourse began to be steadily eroded. That erosion, leading to the gradual foundering of the old order and institutions, continues into our own day.

Muslim women have no cause to regret the passing of the customs and formulas of earlier Muslim societies or the foundering of the old order and its controlling and excluding institutions. In the course of the last century or so women in a significant number of Arab countries have attained civil and political rights and virtually equal access to education, at least insofar as public policies are concerned; cultural prejudices, however (as in other parts of the world, Western and non-Western), and inadequate resources continue to hold back women's education in some areas. Again, in a significant number of Arab countries women have gained or are gaining entry into virtually all the professions, from teaching and nursing to medicine, law, and engineering. Developments in these matters have occurred at slightly different rates in different countries, but broadly speaking, most Middle Eastern nations have moved or are moving toward adopting the Western political language of human and political rights and toward according these rights to women as well as to men.

There are two kinds of exceptions to this tendency. One is an exception with regard to a geographic region. The societies in the Arabian Peninsula, the area in the Middle East least subject to European economic, cultural, or political domination and least open generally to other cultures and ideas, continue to resist the current of change. Moreover, in response to increasing exposure to global influences in recent decades, the societies in the region, particularly Saudi Arabia, have attempted to erect yet-more-impregnable cultural and ideological walls. Although the peninsular countries have opened up education to women, in most other ways the old strictures remain firmly in place, and modern ideas about rights such as the right to vote, constituting part of contemporary political thought, have made no inroads. (Kuwait, however, prior to its invasion by Iraq, was beginning to move toward important changes for women.)

The other exception to the trend toward amelioration and extension of rights to women in Middle Eastern countries other than those of the Arabian Peninsula is with respect to Islamic family law—the laws governing

men's and women's rights in marriage, divorce, and child custody. These laws have remained profoundly resistant to change. Even though for a good part of this century liberals and feminists in many Muslim societies have persistently mounted attempts to introduce reforms, the laws developed in highly misogynist societies in the first three or four centuries of Islam continue to govern the relations between men and women. Only a few countries—Iraq, Syria, and Tunisia—have introduced modifications in their laws that improve on the laws of establishment Islam in varying degrees.

Family law is the cornerstone of the system of male privilege set up by establishment Islam. That it is still preserved almost intact signals the existence of enormously powerful forces within Middle Eastern societies determined to uphold male privilege and male control over women. Among political Islamist movements such forces are gaining ground. Where Islamist movements have led to the institution of "Islam" as the formal basis of political power—Iran, Pakistan under Zia ul-Huq—the governments have proceeded to transform the countries, as well as women's homes, into prison houses for women, where the confinement of women, their exclusion from many fields of work, and their unjust and inhumane treatment are the proclaimed laws of the land. In addition, the misogynist rhetoric they let loose into the social system implicitly sanctions male violence toward women and sets up women—rather than the corruptions and bankruptcies of the government—as targets of male frustration at poverty and powerlessness. Besides the costs to women themselves, limiting their access to remunerative work deprives their societies of the creativity and productivity that women throughout the world have proven themselves to be capable of.

Clearly, the Islam such governments set up bears no relation to an Islam reinterpreted to give precedence to the ethical voice of Islam. With respect at any rate to women, it is the technical, legalistic legacy of establishment Islam that political Islamism institutes once it gains power. There is one difference between these modern enforcers of technical Islam and their predecessors who developed the laws being reinstituted today. The encoders of the earlier Islamic period, hostage to societies in which misogyny and androcentrism were the uncontested and invisible norms, strove to the best of their abilities to render Islamic precepts into laws that expressed justice according to the available measures of their times. In contrast, their descendants, today reinstituting the laws devised in other ages and other societies, are choosing to eschew, when it comes to women, contemporary understandings of the meanings of justice and human rights, even as they adopt modern technologies and languages in every other domain of life.

Deferring justice to women until rights and prosperity have been won for all men, perpetuating and reinstituting systems immoral by contemporary standards in order to pander to male frustrations—these are sterile and destructive to no less an extent than the politics of rage and the disingenuous rhetoric of rejecting the West in favor of a return to indigenous culture while allowing the mental and technological appurtenances of the West to permeate society without barrier.

Just as the discourses within Arab societies are enmeshed in the discourses of the West and thoroughly implicated, in particular, in the history of colonialism and the discourses of domination that colonialism unleashed upon the Muslim Middle East, so, too, is the study of Muslim Arab women as it is pursued today in the West so enmeshed and implicated. As I described in an earlier chapter, the discourse of patriarchal colonialism captured the language of feminism and used the issue of women's position in Islamic societies as the spearhead of the colonial attack on those societies. Imperialist men who were the enemies of feminism in their own societies, abroad espoused a rhetoric of feminism attacking the practices of Other men and their "degradation" of women, and they used the argument that the cultures of the colonized peoples degraded women in order to legitimize Western domination and justify colonial policies of actively trying to subvert the cultures and religions of the colonized peoples. That posture was perfectly exemplified by Lord Cromer. Famous in England for his opposition to feminism, in Egypt, where he was British consul general, Cromer was a principal advocate of the need to end Islamic degradation of women and a declared champion of the importance of unveiling. It was the practice of veiling and the Islamic degradation of women that stood in the way, according to the imperialist thesis, of the "progress" and "civilization" of Muslim societies and of their populaces being "persuaded or forced" into imbibing "the true spirit of Western civilization."

That thesis was accepted and promoted not only by chauvinist male servants of empire but generally by members of Western civilization and also by natives of the upper and upper-middle classes inducted into the ideas of Western culture. European feminists critical of the practices and beliefs of the men of their societies with respect to themselves acquiesced in and indeed promoted the European male's representations of Other men and the cultures of Other men and joined, in the name of feminism, in the attack on the veil and the practices generally of Muslim societies. Whether the attack on Muslim customs and societies, and especially on their practices

regarding women, was made by imperialist men who were supporters of male dominance, by missionaries, or by feminists and whether it was made in the name of "civilizing" the natives, or Christianizing them, or of rescuing women from the religion and culture in which they had the misfortune to find themselves, invoking the issue of women served to license, and to impart an aura of moral legitimacy to, denouncing and attacking the customs of the dominated society and insisting that it change its ways and adopt the superior ways of the Europeans.

It was in this discourse of colonial "feminism" that the notion that an intrinsic connection existed between the issues of culture and the status of women, and in particular that progress for women could be achieved only through abandoning the native culture, first made its appearance. The idea was the product of a particular historical moment and was constructed by the discourses of patriarchal colonialism in the service of particular political ends. As the history of Western women makes clear, there is no validity to the notion that progress for women can be achieved only by abandoning the ways of a native androcentric culture in favor of those of another culture. It was never argued, for instance, even by the most ardent nineteenth-century feminists, that European women could liberate themselves from the oppressiveness of Victorian dress (designed to compel the female figure to the ideal of frailty and helplessness by means of suffocating, rib-cracking stays, it must surely rank among the more constrictive fashions of relatively recent times) only by adopting the dress of some other culture. Nor has it ever been argued, whether in Mary Wollstonecraft's day, when European women had no rights, or in our own day and even by the most radical feminists, that because male domination and injustice to women have existed throughout the West's recorded history, the only recourse for Western women is to abandon Western culture and find themselves some other culture. The idea seems absurd, and yet this is routinely how the matter of improving the status of women is posed with respect to women in Arab and other non-Western societies. Whether those societies did or did not, will or will not, abandon the ways of one culture in favor of those of another is commonly presented in Western-based literature as the crux of the matter of progress for women. To this day, the struggle against the veil and toward westernization and the abandoning of backward and oppressive Arab Muslim ways (the agenda propounded by Cromer and his like as the agenda to be pursued for Muslim women) is still commonly the framestory within which Western-based studies of Arab women, including feminist studies, are presented.

The presumption underlying these ideas is that Western women may pursue feminist goals by engaging critically with and challenging and redefining their cultural heritage, but Muslim women can pursue such goals only by setting aside the ways of their culture for the nonandrocentric, nonmisogynist ways (such is the implication) of the West. And the presumption is, too, that Islamic cultures and religion are fundamentally inimical to women in a way that Western cultures and religions are not, whereas (as I have argued) Islam and Arabic cultures, no less than the religions and cultures of the West, are open to reinterpretation and change. Moreover, the different histories of feminism in the Western world and in the Middle East suggest that the significant factors in Western societies that permitted the emergence of feminist voices and political action in those societies somewhat before their emergence in the Middle East were not that Western cultures were necessarily less androcentric or less misogynist than other societies but that women in Western societies were able to draw on the political vocabularies and systems generated by ideas of democracy and the rights of the individual, vocabularies and political systems developed by white male middle classes to safeguard their interests and not intended to be applicable to women. That women in Western societies are the beneficiaries of the political languages and institutions of democracy and the rights of the individual is commonly assumed to be proof that Western cultures are less androcentric or misogynist than other cultures, but political vocabularies and political and civil rights are quite distinct from the cultural and psychological messages, and the structures of psychological control, permeating a society. The notion that non-Western women will improve their status by adopting the culture, ways of dress, and so on of the West is based on a confusion between these different spheres. Of course, Arab Muslim women need to reject, just as Western women are trying to reject, the androcentrism of whatever culture or tradition in which they find themselves, but that is quite different from saying they need to adopt Western customs, goals, and life-styles.

The study of Muslim women in the West is heir to this history and to these discourses and to the ideas and assumptions they purveyed: it is heir to colonialism, to colonialism's discourses of domination, and to its cooptation of the ideas of feminism to further Western imperialism. Research on Middle Eastern women thus occurs in a field already marked with the designs and biases written into it by colonialism. Consequently, awareness of this legacy, and of the political ends silently being served by the assumptions, the narratives, and the versions of history and culture with which the Western discourse on Arab women is already inscribed, needs itself to be the starting point of any such investigation. At least, such aware-

ness is essential if we are to avoid complicity in the reinscription of the Western discourse of domination and if the study of women and the ideas of feminism are to be prevented from functioning yet again as a tool serving the political ends of Western domination. Of course we must also be wary of reinscribing the contentions of the Arabic narrative of resistance, which entails the wholesale affirmation of indigenous culture and with it the acceptability of injustice to women because indigenous. But few investigators working in the West are in danger of this latter possibility. The discourse of Islamic resistance, although a discourse of power within the Middle East, commands little authority here: a point that underscores the fact that discourses of power nest one within the other, the dominant discourse in the Middle East nesting within—indeed a dependent discourse of—the globally dominant discourse of the West.

The success of Western feminism, or at any rate its success in gaining legitimacy in the academy (what practical gains it has made particularly for women of the more economically deprived classes and for women of color is a more problematic matter), has meant that scholarship on women that is produced within a Western framework is itself now to some extent a discourse of authority in relation to other societies.[3] It would be a pity if this very success should lead, as Western-based feminists direct their gaze toward other women, to the elaboration of a literature rearticulating the old formulas in new guise and reinscribing the old story of the inferiority of Arabs and Muslims, supported now with the apparatus of scholarship. It would be a pity if instead of striving to disengage itself from such designs, feminism should fall once more to inadvertently serving the political ends of the Western political order and of Western-style male dominance. At the very least, perpetuating this approach would lead to the alienation of a younger generation of Arab women and men from feminism. The designs and manipulations of Western discourses, and the political ends being served by the deployment of feminism against other cultures, are today no longer hidden and invisible: on the contrary, to many non-Western people they are transparently obvious.

There can be few people of Arab or Muslim background (including, and perhaps even particularly, the feminists among them) who have not noticed and been disheartened by the way in which Arab and Muslim "oppression" of women is invoked in Western media and sometimes in scholarship in order to justify and even insidiously promote hostility toward Arabs and Muslims. It is disheartening, too, that some feminist scholarly work continues to uncritically reinscribe the old story. Whole books are unfortunately still being published in which the history of Arab women is told within the framework of the paradigm that Cromer put forward—that the measure of whether Muslim women were liberated or not lay in whether they veiled and whether the particular society had become "progressive" and westernized or insisted on clinging to Arab and Islamic ways. In its contemporary version this essentially still-colonial (or colonial and classist) feminism is only slightly more subtle than the old version. It may be cast, for example, in the form of praising heroic Arab feminist women for resisting the appalling oppressions of Arab culture and Islam. Whereas this is its stated message, the unstated message when the inherited constructs of Western discourse are reproduced unexamined is often, just as in colonial days, that Arab men, Arab culture, and Islam are incurably backward and that Arab and Islamic societies indeed deserve to be dominated, undermined, or worse.

In the context of the contemporary structure of global power, then, we need a feminism that is vigilantly self-critical and aware of its historical and political situatedness if we are to avoid becoming unwitting collaborators in racist ideologies whose costs to humanity have been no less brutal than those of sexism. It may be, moreover, that in the context of Western global domination, the posture of some kinds of feminism—poised to identify, deplore, and denounce oppression—must unavoidably lend support to Western domination when it looks steadfastly past the injustice to which women are subject in Western societies and the exploitation of women perpetrated abroad by Western capitalism only to fix upon the oppressions of women perpetrated by Other men in Other societies.

In its analyses of Western societies, feminism, or rather the many feminisms that there now are, has moved far beyond the somewhat simplistic approach of deploring and denouncing. Feminist analysis of Western societies now comprehends a variety of subtle and complicated analytical perspectives and positions. Among the most illuminating is the critique of the way in which feminism is implicated in the dominant political languages of Western societies and its inadvertent complicity in the ideologies and social systems that it explicitly criticizes; also illuminating is the critical analysis of the erosions and costs for women wrought by advanced capitalism. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, for instance, writing of U.S. society, observes that the history of the twentieth century "confirms that sexism, instead of receding with the triumph of modernity, has probably become more general and more difficult to locate in any single institution. If the so-called sexual revolution has loosened the grip of the nuclear family on female sexuality, it has not indisputably weakened sexism or acceptance of conventional gender roles." Late capitalist society, she notes, "has contrib-

uted a bitter twist to the centuries of female oppression. Consumerism, suburban residence patterns, declining family size, increased male occupational mobility, increased female education, declining parental control over children . . . rising divorce rates, and a host of other changes have been interwoven in a dense network of isolation and anxiety." Fox-Genovese fears that feminism itself, in its uncritical adoption of the ideals of individualism, may come one day to be seen as having "done the dirty work of capitalism—of having eroded the older communities and bourgeois institutions that blocked the way to a sinister new despotism."[4]

Research on Arab women is a much younger field. Analysis of this complexity is rare in work on Arab women, in which it is often assumed that modernity and "progress" and westernization are incontestably good and that the values of individualism are always unambiguously beneficial. The sum of what is currently known about women and gender in Arab societies—the many and different Arab societies and cultures that there are—is minuscule. The areas of women's lives and the informal structures they inhabit that are still unexplored are vast. And perhaps the posture of studying other cultures in order to identify their worst practices is not after all likely to be the best way to further our understanding of human societies. The noted Indian anthropologist T. N. Madan, reflecting on the ambiguous legacy of anthropology and the contribution the discipline might nevertheless make to a common human enterprise, rather than serving Western interests, suggests that a productive starting point could be looking to other cultures in an attitude of respect and in acknowledgment of their affording opportunities for critiquing and enhancing awareness of the investigator's culture. The study of anthropology "should not merely tell us how others live their lives: it should rather tell us how we may live our lives better," and ideally it should be grounded in the affirmation "that every culture needs others as critics so that the best in it may be highlighted and held out as being cross-culturally desirable."[5] Perhaps feminism could formulate some such set of criteria for exploring issues of women in other cultures, including Islamic societies—criteria that would undercut even inadvertent complicity in serving Western interests but that, at the same time, would neither set limits on the freedom to question and explore nor in any way compromise feminism's passionate commitment to the realization of societies that enable women to pursue without impediment the full development of their capacities and to contribute to their societies in all domains.

NOTES

Introduction

1. Wiebke Walther, *Woman in Islam,* trans. C. S. V. Salt (London: George Prior, 1981).
2. Ira Marvin Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). For a lucid account of the usefulness of analyzing gender in the study of history see Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75.
3. Lapidus, *History of Islamic Societies,* 3.
4. *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari* (in Arabic and English), 9 vols., trans. Muhammad M. Khan (Medina: Dar al-fikr, 1981), 7:80.
5. See, for example, Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 13–15.
6. On the status of minorities see Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).
7. Even the law as formulated in early Islam at times differentiated between women on the basis of class, permitting husbands, for instance, to beat wives with varying degrees of severity according to their class. It never became the wife's prerogative to beat the husband, however, whatever her class. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), esp. chap. 1, offers a useful discussion of the problematics for feminist theory inhering in analyses made in terms of the category "women."
8. Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 5.

pianism and promise of Islamic fundamentalism see Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy*, chap. 9, esp. pp. 139–47.

45. Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy*, 155.
46. Afshar's further studies pertinent to this subject (in addition to the work cited in the following pages) include "The Iranian Theocracy," in *Iran: A Revolution in Turmoil*, ed. Afshar (London: Macmillan, 1985), 220–44; and "Khomeini's Teachings and Their Implications for Iranian Women," in *The Shadow of Islam*, ed. A. Tabari and N. Yeganeh (London: Zed Press, 1982), 75–90, a collection that has other useful articles on the subject. Further useful studies of women in contemporary Islamic republics include Farah Azari, ed., *Women of Iran: The Conflict with Fundamentalist Islam* (London: Ithaca Press, 1983); Eliz Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1892); Guity Nashat, ed., *Women and Revolution in Iran* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1983); Val Moghedem, "Women, Work and Ideology in the Islamic Republic," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 20, no. 2 (1988); Patricia J. Higgins, "Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Legal, Social, and Ideological Changes," *Signs* 10, no. 31 (1985): 477–95; and Minou Reeves, *Female Warriors of Allah* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1988). There are numerous works on Islamism, or the Islamic Revival; among the most useful are Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, *Islamic Resurgence in the Arab World* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982); R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1985); Fred Halliday and Hamza Alavi, eds., *State and Ideology in the Middle East and Pakistan* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988); Sheeren Hunter, ed., *The Politics of Islamic Revivalism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989); James P. Piscatori, *Islam in the Political Process*, ed. Piscatori (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
47. Haleh Afshar, "Women, State and Ideology in Iran," *Third World Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (1985): 256; hereafter cited in the text.
48. Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?* (London: Zed Books, 1987), 82.
49. Ibid., 83–84.
50. Ibid., 89.

Conclusion

1. Ashis Nandy, *Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), xi.
2. I just referred to Orientalism's reproducing—and thereby also endorsing, even if inadvertently, in its own account of Islam—dominant Islam's view of itself as the sole possible and only legitimate version of Islam. Orientalism is most

familiar as the West's mode of representing, and misrepresenting, the Islamic world as a domain of otherness and inferiority; it is also familiar as a field of domination. But it should be noted that the discourses of Orientalism and those of establishment Islam are androcentric discourses of domination and that consequently in some ways they complement or endorse each other, even as in other ways they are at war.

3. For critiques of the politics of Western or white feminism and women of the non-Western world and women of color see Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987); and bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984).
4. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Feminism without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 137–38, 14, 31.
5. T. N. Madan, "Anthropology as Cultural Reaffirmation" (The first of three papers delivered as the William Allan Neilson Lectures at Smith College, Northampton, Mass., October 1990), 5–6.