

Egyptian Islamists and the Status of Muslim Women Question

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This paper will explore the gender discourse of contemporary Egyptian Islamists and argue that their gender discourse is not merely a religious and traditional discourse, but that this politico-religious Islamic ideology articulates a quite modern construct of gender equality. The gender discourse of a number of important Egyptian Islamists, al-Banna', Qutb, al-Ghazali, al-Qaradawi and Ezzat will provide illustrations of these modern developments. Modern elements incorporated in today's Islamist revivalist approaches create new understandings, neither purely traditional, nor purely modern, that are 'modern constructs' that attempt to remain traditional, while integrating specifically modern components. The presence of these two seemingly opposing and contradictory elements may account for the present popularity that Islamist discourses enjoy in many Muslims countries.

In the last century, a variety of ideologies flourished in the Muslim world that was still grappling with the long lasting effects of its encounter with the West. A number of discourses on gender, all purporting to better women's lives, were popular, at one time or another: the discourses of secularism, modernism, reformism, traditionalism, state feminism and even Islamism. In the early 20th century, Modernist voices were championing women's cause, at a time when Islamists began to make similar claims. Islamists have now become the new traditional, and often the most vocal, forces of contemporary Muslim societies, resistant to some, but not all changes. The religio-political activism of Muslims holding college and university degrees, many of whom are professionals and who belong to the new urban middle-classes, focuses on the rejection of any type of dichotomy between the religious and the secular realms. Islam must shape and mold all aspects of Muslim society and Muslims must strive, in any way they can, to achieve this goal. Contemporary Islamism, however, is far from being mere religious traditionalism. In what follows, it will be argued

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that contemporary Egyptian Islamist discourses are quite modern constructs. This can best be illustrated by presenting diachronically the gender discourses of a number of important Egyptian Islamists.

The founder of the foremost contemporary Islamist movement, the Egyptian Muslim brotherhood (founded in 1928), Hassan al-Banna (d. 1949) envisioned an Islamist project that would restore the past glories of the Muslim world.[1] This utopian ideology would become reality only by way of a return to the 'true' Islam and an elimination of any kind of foreign dominations over the Muslim world.[2] With such a utopian goal, the Islamist 'restorative' project was to develop into a highly political ideology. In an ever-changing world, Islamist activism continues to 'reaffirm' Muslim values and thus provides the movement with its deep moral underpinning that is not without any consequence for the status of Muslim women. Al-Banna wrote that the movement must struggle in order "that a free Islamic state may arise in this free fatherland, acting according to the precepts of Islam, applying its social regulations…," a political project that led the movement to be outlawed in Egypt in 1954.[3] The movement is still unable to officially participate in Egyptian political life.

The discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood movement emerged as a 'product of crisis' and the result of the 'cross-cultural interplay' between Europe and the Muslim world. This encounter led the Islamic world to espouse a 'revivalist mentality.'[4] The earlier formulations of the Islamist discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood movement remains quite typical of a number of contemporary Islamist discourses that are, for the most part, indebted to the earlier Islamist ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood movement. The cross-cultural interplay between the West and the Islamic world has helped shape the nature of the Islamists' traditional, yet simultaneously modern discourses on women.

Qatar-based Egyptian Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who recently turned down the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood,[5] and Egyptian Heba Raouf Ezzat, two contemporary Islamist figures, propose 'Islamically progressive' views on Muslim women's role, status, and rights in Muslim societies. A number of these views have gained in popularity among many segments of the Muslim population, but one may ask to what extent, and in what sense can their views on Muslim women, claimed to be 'progressive,' be truly modern? Claims made by contemporary Islamists al-Qaradawi and Ezzat can be shown to have their roots in the writings of earlier Islamists, such as al-Banna and his most important successor, Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), who wrote during the second quarter of the 20th century, and whose ideas found an expression in the social and political struggle of Zaynab al-Ghazali. The claimed 'progressive' views of earlier Islamists on women's issues have never really ceased to be part of the revivalist discourse of Islamists on Muslim women, as attested by the recent views of al-Qaradawi and Ezzat.

New discourses on women's role, status, and rights emerged out of the Muslim world's encounter with the West and its modernity (understood in a broad sense). This encounter triggered the emergence of novel cross-cultural developments, even in the religious realm. Various Muslim groups advocated a number of rights for women, albeit often within the traditional religious framework. For instance, the Egyptian Society for the Progress of Women (founded in 1908) tried to show Muslim women how Islam had historically provided them with more rights than their Western sisters.[6]

Appeal to the traditional discourse of the Islamic religious tradition to argue for more rights for women remains paradoxical, but not without its own justification. Kandiyoti has tried to explain women's adherence to traditional discourses, their relationship with women's rights and traditional Muslim societies by appealing to a

notion of 'patriarchal bargain,' whereby change is endorsed through the accommodation of traditional religious values.[7] Accommodation allows women to negotiate greater freedom from within the strictures of patriarchal society and with the values and principles it upholds. The same phenomenon occurs today in Iran. Khosrokhavar identifies this strategy as the actions of 'lateral actors' who possess, nonetheless, real agency: "formally respecting the social norms and rules and contesting them in a responsible manner … embedding it within Iranian tradition, religion, and culture … in such a way as to undermine it [that is, male domination] from underneath."[8] The strategy has remained a viable alternative all over the Muslim world throughout the last century. Paradoxically, this strategy appears to have increased in popularity in the last two or three decades, especially within the ranks of urban, middle-class women Islamists.

The increased demands for greater rights for women are indicative of on-going changes that have befallen the Muslim world.[9] Muslim women's lives have undergone tremendous changes during the last hundred years. Women were provided with education, became literate and entered the labor market in increasingly greater numbers. These changes have gradually altered Muslim attitudes towards women's role in society. These changes have fashioned a new awareness and played a role in the emergence of new gender discourses, a new 'episteme' with which to think about Muslim women.[10] At the outset of the 20th century, women of all political and ideological persuasions campaigned for women's cause. Egyptian women formed associations, started journals, wrote in the nationalist press, and associated themselves to political parties.[11] Islamist women joined in these new social and political activities during the latter part of the 1800s and the 1900s.

The project of the Islamists to 're-Islamize' Egyptian society, through Islamic education and the services provided by their charitable organizations, had but one goal: the establishment of a 'truly' Islamic society ruled by an Islamic government.[12] Capitalizing on human resources, the Islamist movement of the Muslim Brotherhood encouraged Muslim women to struggle, side by side with men, for the Islamic 'Call' (*da'wa*). Social activism was not prohibited. Women were permitted, even encouraged to be engaged in the social realm and, to a lesser extent, in the political realm, as long as their social and political activities for the Islamic cause were not undertaken at the expense of their domestic responsibilities. Al-Banna believed that "destroying the integrity of the family and threatening the happiness of the home" was one of the social causes of the dissolution of the Islamic state.[13] This new call for the social and political activism of women was, however, quite new and modern. The Islamist movement developed its own distinctive gender discourses, a mixture of traditional religious conservative ideas, along side modern ones, producing a new hybrid, neo-traditional gender discourse compatible with its 'restorative' ideological project.

In the early 1950s, Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) became the new leader of the Muslim Brotherhood. In his *Social Justice in Islam*, he identified human equality as one of the foundations of social justice in Islam.[14] Although he did not discard a number of traditional gender-biased conceptions, Qutb was, nonetheless, calling for greater gender equality, in line with new emerging discourses of equality between women and men. He provided explanations and justifications for some of the inequalities found in the Scriptures and the religious (legal) tradition. For instance, he explained the different shares inherited by men and women by appealing to men and women's different 'responsibilities.' He asserted that women have

a 'natural capacity and skills' for managing the household, making it possible for him to appeal to women's 'greater right to care' and man's 'right of management.' Qutb's 'distributive' notion of equality remains a staple of Islamist discourses. The notion of equality is often opposed to, or even replaced with a notion of 'complementarity,' that is, women and men are equal, yet different, thus providing some grounds for a justification of some of the religious inequalities. Qutb insisted upon equality, not only in religious and spiritual matters, but also in economic and financial matters, which he traced back to the Scriptures, where it is stated that both men and women share a common origin (Qur'an, 7:189), making each one of them an "equal half of the one 'soul'."[15] Islamist interpreters of the religious tradition and of the Qur'an will argue for some kind of Islamic women's rights. Their works have become models for hundreds of similar works on women in Islam whose sophistication and success remains to be analyzed.

In spite of the traditional roles of mothers and wives that it promoted, the Islamist discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood appealed to a growing number of Muslims. Their discourse provided Islamic 'empowerment' to Muslim women in the social and political spheres, as long as they were working for the Islamic 'Call.' Zaynab al-Ghazali, for example, joined the first Egyptian women's organization, the Egyptian Feminist Union, but was soon discontented as women's liberation movement is a 'deviant innovation,' the result of Muslim's backwardness. Al-Ghazali believes that the departure from the true teachings of Islam was the cause of women's suffering. The only solution to this suffering is the return to true Islamic teachings. Al-Ghazali's solution was to found her own Muslim Women's Association. Eventually, she joined the Muslim brotherhood (in 1949) as an active member, was arrested in 1965, tortured for belonging to a banned organization, and eventually released.[16]

Like the projects of al-Banna and Qutb, Zaynab al-Ghazali's project was the re-Islamization of society. Islamists were being discredited by the secular and modernizing forces for their backwardness, but they held steadfast to the belief that the real backwardness of Muslim society was the result of Muslims' estrangement from Islam. A renewed social activism was required to promote a return to Islamic values. The Islamists' call for women's social and political activism is, nonetheless, a product of modern times and has never been a historically significant element of the Islamic tradition. The new impetus provided by these ideas is illustrated with al-Ghazali's own life story. She included in her first marriage contract a stipulation that allowed her to obtain a divorce if her husband disagreed with her Islamic activism. Her second husband provided her with a written agreement that stipulated that he would help her in the Islamic 'Call.' After the death of her second husband, al-Ghazali could argue that she had fulfilled her religious duty in marriage, refused to remarry and dedicated the rest of her life to the Islamic 'Call.'[17] Women have used a number of 'Islamic' stipulations into their marriage contracts to better their conditions, but stipulations like those included by al-Ghazali are almost unheard. Islamist women are thus willing to use the resources of Islamic legal prescriptions to their own advantage, opening new Islamically defined opportunities that enables them to venture into traditionally inaccessible male public spheres.

The social and political activism of women such as al-Ghazali, in the name of the Islamic 'Call,' although a modern novelty, remains in line with al-Banna's and Qutb's vision of women's social activism for the Islamic cause. For al-Ghazali, women constitute a "fundamental

part of the Islamic call." She argued that women can be more active than men, because, in accordance with the Islamist vision of gender relations, men are the providers of the household. In addition, women's social and political roles constitute undeniably a highly ethical endeavor. Muslim women "build the kind of men that we need to fill the ranks of the Islamic call." Women are the pillars of a virtuous Islamic society. To fulfill their role in the rebuilding of the Islamic nation, women need to be educated, cultured, and knowledgeable about the precepts of the Qur'an, the Islamic tradition, of world politics, etc. Once they have fulfilled their god-given roles, the "first, holy, and most important mission is to be a mother and wife," something they cannot "ignore," they can then embark on their utopian mission.[18] It should come to no surprise that the roles of Muslim women as mothers and wives become religiously 'essentialized' roles. Domesticity becomes the envisioned horizon of women's natural and primordial activities.

Islamists are calling for greater gender equality in a number of specific social spheres. Women Islamists advocate gender equality, especially in the realm of education. The right to education no longer remains restricted to men alone. Al-Ghazali did send a memorandum to the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia to have girls educated.[19] In a sense, Islamists have internalized the modernizing aims of the modern Muslim states, embodied in their insistence on the nation-building values of education. Similar 'transformative values' can now serve the Islamist 'restorative' project which they often envision as resting more specifically on religious education. Al-Ghazali's own personal social endeavors for the Islamic 'Call' included teaching classes on the Qur'an.

Traditional religious Islamic views on women were undergoing a parallel process of change that was to accommodate notions of greater equality between the genders. During the 1960s and the 1970s, attitudes among the religious class continued to change. Mahmud Shaltut, rector of the Egyptian Sunni al-Azhar University from 1958 to 1963, and 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud, rector from 1973 to 1978, upheld what Stowasser labels a 'more egalitarian gender paradigm.' Their novel, albeit discreet discourses on women originated from within the wall of the thousand year old Sunni religious institution of higher education.[20] During the same period, the ideologue of the Islamic regime in Khartoum (Sudan) proposed similar Islamist views on gender equality in his *Women in Islam and Muslim Society*.[21] Other leading religious figures and intellectuals, like Muhammad al-Ghazali, a much read Islamist author throughout the last quarter of the 20th century, and Yusuf al-Qaradawi, both al-Azhar University graduates, although not part of the Egyptian religious 'establishment,' proposed novel Islamist gender discourses articulated in terms of women's and men's 'humanity and personhood.' In fact, it was only during the last twenty years "that the affirmation of women's political rights emerged in the clerical and Islamist discourse" which Stowasser wonderfully illustrated.[22]

Two contemporary proponents of a renewed Islamist discourse on gender equality, Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Heba Raouf Ezzat, co-founded the popular Qatar based web site on Islam.[23] Al-Qaradawi has become one of the Arab world's foremost media religious leaders (*ulama*) with his popular weekly TV program on Islam that reaches over 20 million Arabs, the Islamic version of American televangelists. Al-Qaradawi's status of cleric and the legitimacy provided by his Al-Azhar Sunni University training allows him to propose novel interpretations of Islam to a receptive audience. In the same manner, he can criticize traditional interpretations and the causes of their prevalence. He can propose interpretations that

attempt to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. In his 1994 *Collections of Fatwas* (2 vols.), al-Qaradawi rejected a number of traditional interpretations on women and politics that signaled a significant development within traditionalist circles.[24] Zaman has shown the relevance of ulamas, or religious leaders, as 'custodians' of change in the contemporary Muslim world,[25] while Hooker has shown how contemporary *fatwas*, or religious legal opinions, can reflect social changes.[26] The fact that a religious scholar of Islamist allegiance is voicing these new views indicates a growing consensus on these matters. An increasing number of religious leaders appear to have become more receptive to the reassessment of the place and role of women in Muslim society. One reason may be the efforts of a growing number of religious leaders to align themselves with new realities and understandings of women's contemporary political and social roles.

Al-Qaradawi advocates greater social and political roles for Muslim women who are engaged in the 'Call.' He condemns the increased shunning of women in Islamist gatherings and the views that advocate greater control and restriction on women's social and political participation. He criticizes the "misogyny [that] abounds in the pronouncements of many Islamic 'scholars' and 'imams' " that he believes are responsible for the fact that entire societies "have mistreated their female members despite the fact that Islam has honored and empowered the women in all spheres of life. The woman in Islamic Law is equal to her male counterpart."[27] Al-Qaradawi attempts to empower women within the Muslim community, especially in the public sphere, where women have historically been excluded. His position is reminiscent of the ones upheld by earlier Islamists, like al-Banna and Qutb who both envisioned a more active role for Muslim women who were working for the 'Call.'

Al-Qaradawi still needs to argue for this equality between women and men. He argues with theological and jurisprudential arguments that were put forward earlier by Shaltut (d. 1963) (for example, equality regarding 'blood-money,' the money that must be paid to the family of the victim to compensate a death, equal liability for one's actions, and equality of testimony, since women's "testimony is demanded and valid in court").[28] Al-Qaradawi rejects the idea of inequality, first, by means of an exegesis of scriptural passages (Qur'an, 33:33-34) that allows him to 'contextualize' revelation and to highlight historical counter-examples to seclusion. He then proceeds to present early interpretations that contradict later misogynic interpretations. He also provides an argument, from an Islamic legal (*shari'a*) point of view, that confinement is not the normal state of affair, but that it rather constitutes only a Qur'anic legal punishment for adultery (Qur'an, 4:1-5). The extension of exclusion is thus narrowed (but not eliminated) to its specific legal context. Finally, al-Qaradawi introduces the concept of modesty to replace the one of seclusion (Qur'an, 33: 33).[29] Although the Qur'an remains at the forefront of any Islamist interpretation of equality, attempts are made to overcome traditional unequal understanding of the place of Muslim women in Islam that find their origins in the Scriptures.

For Islamists, the blueprint for a truly Islamic society and the Islamic ideals of gender equality remains the Scriptures. The interpretative strategies with which they attempt to make sense of scriptural discrepancies in the face of their claims to gender equality reflect the measure of their willingness to engage with modernity. Al-Qaradawi does not discard unequal Qur'anic prescriptions, such as the testimony of two women equating that of one man or discarding women's testimony 'altogether' for major crimes and those requiring 'retaliation' (that is, the blood-money to pay to the family of the victim), but

instead provides what may be labeled 'naturalistic' reasons for these Qur'anic injunctions. By appealing to women's intrinsic 'nature,' he, cannot fail, in the end, to justify and legitimize these unequal prescriptions. He can only state that the explicit inequality of treatment between women and men found in some Qur'anic passages does not take anything away from women's 'humanity and integrity.' Attempting to salvage tradition, al-Qaradawi reasserts a certain type of gender inequality, although he attempts, at times, to argue that some aspects of Islamic Law 'do' recognize gender equality. A number of al-Qaradawi's arguments for equality rest on those that were developed by Shaltut. Al-Qaradawi does not, however, use Shaltut's refutation (for example, that a woman's testimony cannot be equated with that of a man) to draw the 'necessary' conclusion for a 'real' equality between women and men. This is indeed a prudent traditionalist reflex in view of his more traditional audience.

A tension inevitably subsists between new discourses on Islamic equality and those of traditional interpretations. A similar tension arises regarding al-Qaradawi's ideas on women's authority and gender differentiation. Al-Qaradawi's negotiations with modern and traditional understandings clearly illustrate possibilities of thinking outside the boundaries of the tradition, although he refuses to openly take more perilous stands. The main concerns of Islamists remain to ensure that women are provided with the social and political opportunities that will enable them to become productive contributors of society, first and foremost, as mothers and wives of steadfast Muslims, but also as active members of Muslim associations, working for the 'transformative' project that rests at the heart of the Islamic 'Call.' Islamists like al-Qaradawi may, in fact, be viewing women's social and political activism in a rather 'instrumentalist' fashion, in a manner not so different than al-Banna's own earlier position. Gender equality takes a second place to the requirements of the Islamic 'Call' which requires an increasingly greater number of socially and politically active Muslim women.

More recently, however, women Islamists have advocated their own brand of social activism and, as a consequence, have become Islam's new interpreters. Unhappy with the term feminism, they often deconstruct it in an attempt to take into account their own experiences and to 're-appropriate' their own Muslim identity. In so doing, these women challenge western understandings of the term. The gender discourses of these women Islamists put forward familiar ideas. For instance, Heba Raouf Ezzat promotes a number of al-Qaradawi's ideas. It may well be legitimate to ask what might the relation between al-Qaradawi's views and those of women Islamists on gender equality be. Al-Qaradawi's new 'womanist' discourse may, in fact, signal recognition by religious leaders of the inescapable challenges that the increased voices of Muslim women in general and Islamist women in particular create for Islam, al-Ghazali and Ezzat being two cases in point.

A political theorist lecturing at Cairo University and at ease with western scholarship, Ezzat belongs to the new generation of university-educated Islamist women who write about women in Islam. She analyzes gender equality in light of the Scriptures and those Qur'anic verses that promote an Islamic notion of 'gender complementarity,' a notion that pays full respect to 'housewifery' and motherhood. Ezzat's motto is to "liberate women, and still keep the family," the latter consisting of the primary and fundamental social structure of Muslim society.[30] The objective might be laudable in itself, but it determines, from the outset, the conclusions she will draw in her political analyses of women role in society. Although women 'can,' do 'have' the choice to hold a public office, their primary domestic responsibili-

ties prevent the majority of them to succeed in the political arena, as "only few women can practically manage both the responsibilities of family and jurisdiction [that is, holding a public office]."[31] Domesticity appears to be lurking not far away from her 'exception' rule.

Political opportunities, available to both women and men, at least for the few 'exceptional' women, need to be matched with similar social opportunities. A call for unlimited access to both education and employment now defines this new social equality between the genders. In this perspective, the veil becomes a means of 'empowerment' for women who can now "use the veil pragmatically to get room to maneuver, enlarge their scope of action and increase their independent mobility … in the social world outside domestic boundaries, a strategy that is legitimized by religious authoritative discourse."[32] Such statements exemplify Ezzat's use of the 'patriarchal bargain' to advocate change through a process of accommodation of traditional religious values and to negotiate greater freedom from within the strictures of the patriarchal society. The promotion of both education and women's social involvement (not merely employment) remains a main feature of today's Islamist gender discourse, but, as mentioned earlier, the emphasis on and legitimization of women's social activities goes back at least to the first quarter of the 20th century. Her renewed demands for the social betterment of women's situation, through education and employment, do not appear to be something significantly novel in the writings of Ezzat who belongs to the third generation of Egyptian Islamist. Such demands, nonetheless, point to the sustained relevance of a number of modern ideas present in Islamist discourses.

Ezzat's fight for woman's rights, albeit within the confines of the Islamic tradition, can be labeled a feminist struggle, as her aim remains the betterment of women's situation. Ezzat, however, understands feminism in Islamist terms. Feminism is the product of the secularization of western society, one of the stages of its development that is fundamentally incompatible with Islam.[33] For Ezzat, fighting for women's rights undoubtedly does not transform one into a feminist: "I am not an Islamic feminist"[34] and "I don't search [for ideas] outside Islam, and there's no such thing as Islamic feminism."[35] In a fashion akin to the criticisms made by critics of cultural relativism, Ezzat criticizes the universal claims that feminism makes, as mere historical and contingent products, based on her Islamist assumption that Islam's own version of women's rights is the only universal version of women's rights. This is where some of the limitations of her feminist understanding may rest.

Ezzat also attacks feminism for having been co-opted by the State. The State is responsible for the 'erosion' of Islamic Family Law and the State's curtailment of the activities of Islamic groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and has used feminism to achieve its goal. Historically, legal approaches have been privileged in the Arab and Muslim world in order to introduce legal changes in the States' efforts to promote more gender equality. Ezzat criticizes these legal approaches primarily because they did not address the real causes of inequality which have economical, political and social causes. Her major qualm rests with the erosion of traditional Islamic Family Law, the underlying assumption of her criticism of the State and feminism being that such legal changes would be unnecessary if Muslim states provided justice and equality (social, political, economic, etc.). A true Islamic state would and should uphold precisely the type of justice and equality which the Muslim Brotherhood movement is advocating. More fundamentally, however, her concerns rests with her belief that the existence of Islamism itself that is threatened: "the feminist movement has become one of the allies of the regimes against the 'fundamentalist' threat."[36] In addition to being an exter-

nal western threat, feminism becomes an internal threat, as an instrument of the State in its efforts to eliminate the Islamists.

The meeting of the discourses of tradition and modernity once again creates a tension. Like al-Qaradawi, Ezzat adopts, on the one hand, traditional values, those of motherhood, housewifery and the primacy of Islamic Family Law (without any discussion of its consequences for women) and, on the other hand, modern values, those of active social, economical and political roles for women. The latter modern values have certainly been historically absent from traditional interpretations of women's role, rights and status in Islam. The work of Lois Lamya al-Faruqi on Islamic identity and the 'alien' influences that have been imposed on Muslims exhibits similar tensions. Al-Faruqi identifies feminism as one of the "certain alien ideological intrusions on our societies, ignorance, and distortion of the true Islam, or exploitation by individuals within the society."[37] Her 'nativism'[38] pushes her to focus on, and appeal to genuine indigenous values and culture (associated with Islam), allowing her to state that "if feminism is to succeed in an Islamic environment, it must be an indigenous form of feminism" which most Muslim women would believe is Islam's true egalitarian principles of justice. For today's Islamists, Muslim women's salvation is in Islam: "prescriptions that are found in the Qur'an and in the example of the Prophet Muhammad [...] are regarded as the ideal to which contemporary women wish to return."[39] The tension between traditional and modern values is only one of the manifestations of a 'struggle for identity' for contemporary Muslims in the face of increasing western encroachment and an even more rapidly increasing globalization. This tension is also reflected in the gender discourses of Islamists.

The few examples provided illustrate how even contemporary religious Islamist discourses, although intrinsically traditional in nature, attempt to align themselves with contemporary values, such as gender equality and women's rights discourses. These examples provide some credence to Hymowitz's claim that "Islamic feminism can affirm the dignity of Islam, while at the same time bringing it more in line with modernity."[40] The manner in which Islamists achieve this goal still remains to be fully examined, but the preceding contextualization of some present day Islamist discourse, in the light of earlier Islamist discourses on women yields, however, unexpected results and illustrates how the contemporary views of al-Qaradawi, Ezzat, or al-Faruqi on Muslim women, their role, status, and rights find their roots in the earlier Islamist discourses of al-Banna', Qutb, and even al-Ghazali.

The modern elements incorporated in today's Islamist discourses on gender equality and women's rights, none of which are merely traditional discourses, are equally important to understand the Islamist discourse. Their revivalist approaches create new modern understandings, neither purely traditional nor purely modern.[41] Today's Islamist discourses constitute 'modern constructs' that attempt to remain traditional, while adopting specifically modern components.[42] Contemporary values such as education and the possibility for women to engage in social and political activities, especially for the Islamic cause, have become intrinsic parts of their new contemporary claims.[43] The presence of these two seemingly opposing and contradictory elements may account for the present popularity that Islamist discourses enjoys in many Muslims countries.

Notes:

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[2] Al-Banna, Five Tracts of Hasan Al-Banna', 31.

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[17] Hoffman, "An Islamic Activist," 237.

[18] Hoffman, "An Islamic Activist," 236-7.

[19] Hoffman, "An Islamic Activist," 244.

[20] Barbara Stowasser, "Old Shaykhs, Young Women, and the Internet: The Rewriting of Women's Political Rights in Islam," The Muslim World, 91.1/2 (2001): 99-119, esp. 101.

[21] Hasan Abdalla Al-Turabi, Women in Islam and Muslim Society, 1973, <http://www.jannah.org/sisters/turabi.html> (1 July 2005).

[22] Stowasser, "Old Shaykhs, Young Women, and the Internet," 101-2.

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