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Symposium on Religion and Politics

WOMEN IN RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

"Islam and Female Imams"

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to comb the hair of the Prophet while she was menstruating, even as he pre- hand, concentrate on womanly virtue and domesticity. The image might be said

of strength or beauty is particular kind of strength, viewed on prey modesty

overcome the difficulty of weeding womanly virtues is a Shari'ah one

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heroines. Conservative perceptions of the wives and of Fátimah, on the other hand, are

As she was finally unable however to extend her influence she

as a wife of the Prophet to the politics of the Umayyads, which culminated

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... Tree of Pearls' conspired with the Mamluk army in Egypt to have all served as president or prime minister in at least one case or more. (Her name is
... however, these were the daughters of previous rulers. The freed women were kept the death of her husband secret while she repulsed a besieging Crusader

... Islam and in a sense of increments, developments that may herald real
... Occasional three women, Iraq, Naba Abdulla, ... Women are influenced by
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... Occasional three women, Iraq, Naba Abdulla, ... Women are influenced by

ness, incorporated the feminine principle

and/or reversed. Sufism also focuses on individual charisma, the sources

Some Sufi theologians, never

into their cosmological speculations. Consideration of the feminine emerges in the same mysterious work, this results

by women but by a fascinating way in the work of the mystical theorist Easton Islam

of doctrine and authority which has been exploited not

of the Sufi tradition in Islam

problem was to maintain

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the male and female principle in the structuring of the universe

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himself as an ideal was a heavy burden for the feminine women. He was pro

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in place in any Muslim state, and as a result, however, it is a very common misconception that Islamic law is based on the concept of God's law for society. In fact, Islamic law is based on the concept of God's law for the individual Muslim. The law is not a set of rules that governs the behavior of the community as a whole, but rather a set of guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual Muslim. The law is not a set of rules that governs the behavior of the community as a whole, but rather a set of guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual Muslim.

This is not, however, simply a study in the past. In North America, more women are now working than men. This is a significant change in the role of women in society. In the past, women were primarily responsible for domestic duties and child-rearing. Today, women are increasingly participating in the workforce and in public life. This change is a result of the influence of Western culture and the desire for equality between men and women.

Islam did not come with traditions to revive or create. It is a religion that is based on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. The law is not a set of rules that governs the behavior of the community as a whole, but rather a set of guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual Muslim. The law is not a set of rules that governs the behavior of the community as a whole, but rather a set of guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual Muslim.

Even among practicing liberals, the practice of marriage is still a central part of life. The law is not a set of rules that governs the behavior of the community as a whole, but rather a set of guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual Muslim. The law is not a set of rules that governs the behavior of the community as a whole, but rather a set of guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual Muslim.

The harsh and ill-treatment of women in various ways is a common practice in many cultures. In Islam, women are treated with respect and dignity. The law is not a set of rules that governs the behavior of the community as a whole, but rather a set of guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual Muslim. The law is not a set of rules that governs the behavior of the community as a whole, but rather a set of guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual Muslim.

Women are not to be treated as property. They are individuals with their own rights and responsibilities. The law is not a set of rules that governs the behavior of the community as a whole, but rather a set of guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual Muslim. The law is not a set of rules that governs the behavior of the community as a whole, but rather a set of guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual Muslim.

It is not fair to be used for any purpose. Women are not to be treated as property. They are individuals with their own rights and responsibilities. The law is not a set of rules that governs the behavior of the community as a whole, but rather a set of guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual Muslim. The law is not a set of rules that governs the behavior of the community as a whole, but rather a set of guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual Muslim.

Heritumata is a term used in Islamic law to refer to a woman's right to inherit property. This is a significant right that is not granted to women in many other cultures. The law is not a set of rules that governs the behavior of the community as a whole, but rather a set of guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual Muslim. The law is not a set of rules that governs the behavior of the community as a whole, but rather a set of guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual Muslim.

Advantages of the Islamic system are example among the many Muslim countries. The law is not a set of rules that governs the behavior of the community as a whole, but rather a set of guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual Muslim. The law is not a set of rules that governs the behavior of the community as a whole, but rather a set of guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual Muslim.

WOMEN IN ISLAMIC LAW AND BEYOND THE LAW. This section begins with discussion of the rules of the Shariah (Islamic law). The law is not a set of rules that governs the behavior of the community as a whole, but rather a set of guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual Muslim. The law is not a set of rules that governs the behavior of the community as a whole, but rather a set of guidelines that govern the behavior of the individual Muslim.

show to be defective, while some Shari'ah texts

traditional Islamic marriage - since, strictly speaking, such a contract can be

rule than divorce remains prohibited. In a period of three months (G

long as the marriage lasts.

228) during which the woman remains fully maintained in the marital

status. If divorced, she is not permitted to remarry until she has had a

fourth menstrual period. The above-mentioned provisions are not

applicable to a woman who has been divorced on the grounds of

irreconcilable differences or if she has been divorced on the grounds

of adultery. In such cases, she is permitted to remarry immediately.

It is also possible for a woman to be divorced on the grounds of

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used as a basis for a woman's financial independence.

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It is also possible for a woman to be divorced on the grounds of

hears and symbols of morality, play a central role in the drama. Punishment for sexual crime is typically aimed almost exclusively at females—exactly the

involves a burden, one can also extract from it a measure of punishment that

power by manipulating the female victim. The victimization of women is a central theme in the drama. The victimization of women is a central theme in the drama. The victimization of women is a central theme in the drama.

involves a burden, one can also extract from it a measure of punishment that

us as well as liberal groups' (1996: 274–50). Some women are also mentioned above, are unlikely to be convicted. In this is difficult to identify

involves a burden, one can also extract from it a measure of punishment that

law and order of legal proceedings. This case is a tragedy as a title, a reputation of heavily veiled, screened women in a

involves a burden, one can also extract from it a measure of punishment that

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Islam is an important part of the social system. In this is difficult to identify

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UNESCO figures of about a decade ago, literacy for women between the ages of 15 and 24 in Middle Eastern countries ranged from 36.2 per cent and 46 per

cent in the Muslim world today, where the only legitimate thought is Islamic thought.

This was an obligation to work within the tradition and that should be the case in Morocco, in 1985, 85 per cent of the population could read and write.

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One day We shall call all people according to their Imams. Whoever is given his book in his right hand will not be subject to the slightest injustice. But whoever was blind in this world will be blind in the next and completely astray from the path. (1 1)

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women is so they will not be prevented — by being blocked from sacred texts or houses of worship and study — from accessing the liberating message of obedience to God alone.

generation, Muslim women are confident that they have a right to study and speak about Qur'an interpretation, the *fiqh* and Islamic law. Confidence springs from the knowledge that it is not an innovation to have women authoritatively and publicly interpreting and teaching Islamic texts; rather, this is a renewal of the spirit of the early Islamic community.

At the same time as there is progress in opening the field of religious scholarship to women, there are significant challenges in developing institutions and forms of religious leadership through which women can exercise authority. Because there is no ordination in Islam and no universally recognized body that legitimizes scholars, scholarly authority is always relational. Bernard Weiss notes with respect to the legal scholars of classical Islam that,

The Muslim jurists enjoyed authority by virtue of the respect accorded to them by the rest of society ... [this respect was] born of genuine confidence in the expertise the jurists possessed, an expertise resulting from years of professional training. The jurists were the ones to whom one could turn when in need of legal advice or assistance. In the eyes of the lay masses, the jurists were indeed what they claimed to be, persons qualified to declare what the law of God was. Thus the social ground of juristic authority meshes with the formal ground.

Here Weiss identifies a number of things necessary for a jurist to be successful, in particular, professional training and the ability to help people with their problems. One limitation for many indigenous American Muslim scholars is that, lacking access to respected and professional Islamic seminaries or colleges, their credentials are seen as (and in terms of technical ability, often are) inferior to those of immigrant scholars. Some have tried to compensate for this deficiency with overseas training, but most Muslim women have not been successful at being accepted at such institutions, or they have found the perspective at these institutions too conservative and not particularly relevant to their American context. As a result, American Muslim women are perhaps even more eager than men to see the development of professional American Islamic educational programs.

Weiss's observation that Muslim religious leaders acquire authority to the extent that they are able to help people with their problems is profound. The ability of leaders to help others depends on a number of factors, including the strength of their social standing, political influence, communication abilities and institutional support. The main challenge for Muslim women, in earlier times and today, is not only to increase their knowledge, but also to increase their authority by attaining a position in society that enables them to effectively help others. Ruth Roded, for example, has shown that medieval Muslim women not only had trouble accessing religious learning as easily as men, but that those who were able to acquire a substantial education were almost completely excluded from holding office.^x

This does not mean, however, that only Muslim leaders who hold office have spiritual authority or are able to help people with their problems. Indeed, accepting an official position may diminish a leader's authority, if the position is under the authority of a discredited political regime, or if holding office is seen as an indication of excessive worldliness. In some Muslim communities, complete independence from any institution may be interpreted as a sign of piety, giving such a person a spiritual authority that can be powerful. However, if the community

considers an institution legitimate, there is no doubt that if women are excluded from office in

wanted to communicate to the Chinese Muslims that we would be combining our prayers according to the prophetic *sunnah* because we were traveling. We said the Arabic word *musafir* "traveler" and immediately the women understood our purpose and made sure that the late afternoon prayer (*'asr*) did not begin in the mosque until we had time to catch up on our delayed noon prayers (*dhuhr*). None of these women, and few from our group, could use the Arabic language for communication. However we all shared common core rituals, identified by the Arabic terms used in the Qur'an and the *sunnah*, and thus were able to both communicate basic information about our worship and were able to pray together.

But there is the catch to this story: if Muslims are so conservative and uniform in their worship, why is it that this exchange I had with Chinese Muslims took place in a "women's mosque," a phenomenon I had never experienced, nor heard of, before traveling to China? A greater paradox was to be found in the fact that, although these women followed the minority Hanafi legal position that women should not pray together in congregation, the woman's mosque was headed by *anu ahong*, literally, a "woman imam." I had never heard of such a thing — how could I understand this phenomenon within the context of the paradigms of religious leadership I had learned?

To begin to understand this apparent paradox, we might want to consider the relationship between the function and form of the imam. The term "imam" literally means "leader" in the Arabic language and is normally used to signify a person who is a leader in some religious field or practice. For example, a person can be a leader in scholarship; in this sense, the eponyms of the Sunni schools of law are called "Imam" (Ahmed, Malik, al-Shafi'i and Abu Hanifa). The term "imam" also applies to the person who performs the function of leading a congregational prayer. Many statements attributed to the Prophet Muhammad indicate the primary importance of the five daily prayers (*salawat*) as opportunities for forgiveness, spiritual refreshment and dialogue with God.^{xiv} That these prayers are primarily intended to strengthen the relationship between each individual and his or her Merciful Creator is demonstrated by the fact that they must be attended to whether one is alone or in the company of others. It is not obligatory that these prayers be made in congregation, unless one is in a setting that provides the necessary conditions for congregation. If we examine these conditions set by traditional Islamic scholarship, we see that maintaining a communal unity is an implicit goal. Thus, if one enters a setting where a congregational prayer is being held, one should join the group, and not establish another prayer group or pray by oneself. According to the *sunnah* of the Prophet, all congregational prayers, even if the congregation is only a few people, need to be led by one person.

Given the importance of congregational prayer in Islam, we expect Islamic tradition to pay significant attention to the requirements for leadership of the prayer. What I find fascinating and significant is that the requirements are almost always relational and contextual

The majority of legal schools consider it "recommended" (— a technical term indicating a religiously meritorious act) for women to pray together in congregation with one of them leading as imam, if they are not praying with the general (i.e., male inclusive) congregation. These schools base their position on a number of reports that the wives of the Prophet Muhammad led women in congregational prayer. Many of the Hanafi scholars who reject the practice of women praying in congregation do not mention the example of the wives of the Prophet. It seems in this matter, as with a number of other issues, the Hanafi school retains a position that was formulated on the basis of reasoning early in Islamic history when they did not

theologians against the heretics and innovators and things like that. Among the laudable (innovations) are writing books of (religious) knowledge, building *madrasas* (religious

transmit their faith to their children; Chinese Muslim leaders believed that women needed to be educated in their faith in order to teach their children; in accordance with Islamic (and Confucian) norms of gender segregation, women needed their own space to learn their faith; it was not suitable for men to staff women's mosques; communities appointed female leaders — "imams" — for the women's mosques. All of this was done without violating the traditional rules

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scholar might respond to this justification saying, "The sources you cite may be authentic, however, you fail to mention that during the time of the Prophet, women not only came regularly to the mosque for prayers, there were also women living in the mosque. All the men of that time

in doing this, no one can perform as 'abd/

khalfah, servant/agent of Allah.

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The Active Principle of Islam, or, Activating Islam

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will not be done by taking refuge in the mosque as a spiritual consolation

the Ultimate, applying the divine principles. I am still honing our examples
and will continue to do so. I have made a great deal of progress in my work, and I will
continue to do so. I will continue to do so.

Ultimately, I will continue to do so. I will continue to do so.

care to put down the weapons of jihad and take up the tools of work
and to share the experience of life with all
me.

gained the strength necessary to fight. These are the reasons I have
at the time.

For the sake of the future, I will continue to do so. I will continue to do so.

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