

Women and Religion

“The Garment of Piety is Best”: Islamic Legal and Exegetical Works on Bodily Covering

Celene Ibrahim-Lizzio

Ph.D. student, Brandeis University

Abstract: This paper takes inspiration from critical feminist theory on the body, its social construction, and the modes of its regulation to argue that Muslim legal rulings regarding female adornment are inextricably grounded in the social location of its progenitors, such that free male bodies and sexual desires are recurrently privileged over and against the bodies and desires of other social groups. At the same time, I argue that these discourses can reinforce feminist claims about the affective power of the gaze in objectifying women as well as support feminist aims of protecting and advancing women’s human dignity.

Keywords: veiling, seclusion, modesty, Islamic law, ritual

O Children of Adam! We have certainly sent down to you garments to cover your nakedness, and for adornment. Yet the garment of Godwariness—that is the best. That is [one] of Allah’s signs, so that they may take admonition. ‘O Children of Adam! Do not let Satan tempt you, like he expelled your parents from paradise, stripping them of their garments to expose to them their nakedness... (Q. 7:26–27)¹

Unveiling Muslimah Theology

Much western feminist activism has dismissed practices of bodily covering as outmoded, antimodern, antifeminist.² Yet, in the midst of a feminist movement that prides

¹ ‘Ali Quli Qara’i, *The Qur’an: With a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation* (Clarksville, MD: Islamic

² One such example is the “Topless Jihad” protests, which received extensive coverage in major world news outlets. Femen, the sponsoring group who are self-proclaimed “sextremists,” reflect what authors such as Anita Harris and Angela McRobbie have described as the rhetoric of empowerment that dominates contemporary “post-feminist” popular culture in such ways that may encroach upon gains made by earlier iterations of feminism. On the production and regulation of femininity in post-feminist environments, see

itself on enhancing democratic modes of interaction and furthering equal opportunity for and among women, antiveiling activists have overlooked how veiling and vestment practices, and related ethics of comportment, can be a reflection of women's dignity and self-honoring, values that are core to the global feminist movement. From one angle, practices of Muslim bodily covering remain lodged in the snare of postcolonial power struggles that are exasperated by a deluge of anti-Muslim biases, some of which come in the guise of feminism.

Many formative religious canons—Muslim and otherwise—are characterized by a dearth of female authors and a predominance of male authors.³ In religious studies and across the academy, interest in women's experiences and their contributions to ancient, medieval, and pre-modern societies, continues to boom. Attention is now regularly paid to intersections of identities and to the histories of other marginalized groups who did not feature in the annals of military and political historiography. These trends in scholarship have allowed for increasingly vivid accounts of social and micro histories of women and other socially disempowered groups. While late twentieth-century religious scholarship has seen a dramatic upswing in women's writings, the trend remains that women, as a category, are underrepresented across many domains of knowledge production.⁴

Anita Harris, *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2004), and Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture, and Social Change* (London: Sage, 2009).

³ While there are many exceptions of women who ascended to positions of religious authority, these women are still significantly less in number than male scholars. For an analysis of women's epistemic authority in comparison to that of males, see Ahmed Ragab, "Epistemic Authority of Women in the Medieval Middle East," *Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* 8, no 2, (2010): 181–216. For a contemporary treatment see Meena Sharify-Funk, *Encountering the Transnational: Women, Islam and the Politics of Interpretation* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008).

⁴ For an analysis of the effects see Etin Anwar, *Gender and Self in Islam* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006). Anwar summarizes the deep-seated androcentrism that has configured—and in some cases constrains—women's possibilities: "Men, not women, have been the ones to engender knowledge, history, religion, civilization, and other institutions necessary for the survival of the society. Women are constantly

Islamic studies and constructive Islamic theology are rapidly expanding bodies of knowledge and provide robust opportunities for female participation.⁵ Female-centric approaches are a growing hermeneutic sphere of possibility, and it is within this framework that I situate my scholarship. *Muslimah* theology is a branch of theological studies that is conversant with other confessional and/or regionally situated feminist discourses and offers an intellectual platform to advance female-centric contemplations of piety, modes of leadership, and epistemological authority inspired by engagement with Islamicate heritages. This gynocentrism does not represent the social ideal of female superiority at the exclusion and expense of male engagement; gynocentrism aims to create a discourse wherein the contributions and perspectives of women in the sphere of religion are valued and actively solicited, not merely within the sphere of exclusively “women’s issues,” but across a spectrum of theological, judicial, and social issues. Simply because intellectual history has been dominated by men’s writing does not signify that all interpretation is androcentric. The discursive nature of Islamic scholarship invites plurality of opinion with regard to moral, ethical, and legal norms in the sphere of religion.⁶ Regional, cultural, sectarian, and historical variance allows space for women’s participation

depicted as lacking the reason needed to generate their own knowledge, culture, religious interpretations, and institution[s],” *Gender and Self*, 55.

⁵ Meena Sharify-Funk, “From Dichotomies to Dialogues: Trends in Contemporary Islamic Hermeneutics,” in *Contemporary Islam: Dynamic, not Static*, ed. Abdul Aziz Said, Mohammed Abu-Nimer and Meena Sharify-Funk, 64–80 (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 74–5.

⁶ Talal Asad has rightfully argued that Islam is a “discursive tradition,” whereby knowledge and purpose are “constituted and reconstituted not only by an ongoing interaction between the present and the past, but also by the manner in which relations of power and other forms of contestation and conflict impinge on any definition of what it is to be a Muslim,” in *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Occasional Papers, Washington D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University, 1986), 7 and 15. For an account of the formation and contestation of orthodoxy (with no attention to gender) see Ahmed El Shamsy, “The social construction of orthodoxy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter, 97–116 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

in the epistemic enterprise.⁷ Yet, some interpretation is overtly misogynistic, and often “establishment Islam” is a male-dominated enterprise wherein male authority is affirmed and solidified through the core principle of scholarly consensus.^{8,9,10} Even as some women do rise to hold considerable epistemic and religious authority, on the whole, women’s voices are still undervalued in many—but certainly not all—contemporary religious communities.¹¹

Here I explore how gender, honor, and legal status are conveyed through religious rules for bodily covering for household slaves, concubines, and free women. In the absence of a substantive repository of early Islamic women’s exegetical and juridical writing on the subject, I draw on works of social and intellectual history by Yedida Kalfon Stillman, Eli

⁷ For a nuanced account of women’s judicial participation see Mathieu Tillie, “Women before the Qāḍī under the Abbasids,” *Islamic Law and Society* 16 (2009) 280–301; see also Camilla Adang, “Women’s Access to Public Space according to al-Muḥallā bi-l-Āthār,” in *Writing the Feminine: Women in Arab Sources*, ed. by M. Marin and R. Deguilhem, 75–94 (London: I.B. Taurus, 2002). For a skilled revival of gender egalitarian perspectives see Sa’diyya Shaikh, “In Search of al-Insān: Sufism, Islamic Law, and Gender,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 4 (Dec. 2009): 781–822.

⁸ For an analysis of this dynamic see Denise Spellberg, “The role of Islamic Religio-Political Sources in Shaping the Modern Debate on Gender,” in *Beyond the Exotic: Women’s Histories in Islamic Societies*, edited by Amira El-Azhary Sonbel, 3–14 (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005). For an example articulation of men’s superiority see Muhammad ibn ‘Umar, Fakr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209), *Mafātih al-ghayb fī tafsīr al-Qur’an / Tafsīr al-Kabīr* Vol. 10, (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1981), commentary on 4:34, 90–94; see also Barbara Freyer Stowasser, “The Status of Women in Early Islam,” in *Muslim Women*, ed. Freda Hussain, 25–39 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984); and Etin Anwar “Public roles of Women,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, vol. II, ed. Richard C. Martin (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 734–35.

⁹ See this conception of “establishment Islam” as discussed in Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: The Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1992), 229.

¹⁰ Asma Barlas has taken up this subject at length, arguing that elite consensus has been achieved through a “repressive pluralism” which is predicated on the suppression of women’s participation, among other factors, *“Believing Women” in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 44; see also Barlas’ discussion of the role of patriarchal privilege in the interpretation of Muslim religious texts more generally in her discussion of the deployment of scripture in the interpretive tradition, *Believing Women*, 31–62.

¹¹ I do not insinuate that Muslim women need to be rescued from their religion or their communities. On the contrary, I espouse and authentic engagement with this interpretive tradition for the richness and the realms of interpretive possibility that it opens; furthermore, I am committed to working at the communal level to promote and develop women’s religious authority through as inspired by the tradition of female Islamic learning and scholarship.

Alshech, Baber Johansen, and Shiu-Sian Angel Hsu.^{12, 13, 14, 15, 16} I grapple with what this intellectual and historical legacy—and its gaps—can reveal for feminist activists and piety-seeking Muslims who are seeking to move discourse beyond the fetishization of female bodies. I argue that vestment in general can be a means of guarding privacy and dignity, and that veiling practices can subvert—rather than bolster—the status quos of sex and power relations.¹⁷

Unraveling the Basics

As with any other form of dress, styles and trends of veiling are diverse, both geographically and historically. Evidence suggests that face veils were in use among early Arabs, Persians, Mesopotamians, Israelites, Greco-Romans, and others, yet it is difficult to discern how popular head coverings were in any given period among general populaces.¹⁸ As Muslim wealth became concentrated in urban centers, vestimentary culture evolved, and veiling seems to have gained more significance in religio-political discourses.¹⁹ Just as

¹² Numerous pre-modern accounts illuminate how religious elites thought women and slaves should dress, as captured below; however, in another work it could be worth exploring how pious women and slaves *themselves* interpreted and enacted—or not—the prevailing religious guidelines for adornment.

¹³ Yedida Kalfon Stillman, *Arab Dress: A Short History from the Dawn of Islam to Modern Times* (Boston: Brill, 2000).

¹⁴ Eli Alshech, “Out of Sight and Therefore Out of Mind: Early Sunni Islamic Modesty Regulations and the Creation of Spheres of Privacy,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 66, no. 4 (2007): 11–24.

¹⁵ Baber Johansen, “The Valorization of the Human Body in Muslim Sunni Law,” *Law and Society in Islam* Vol. IV, ed. Charles Issawi and Bernard Lewis (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1996), 71–112. I am personally indebted to Dr. Johansen for his lucid explanations of Islamic legal thought.

¹⁶ Shiu-Sian Angel Hsu, *Dress in Islam: Looking and Touching in Ḥanafī Fiqh*, Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Utah, 1994.

¹⁷ For one such critique see Tayyab Basharat, “Hijab as an Instrument for Taking Women Off the Sex Economy,” *Guidance & Counseling* 21, no. 4 (2006): 201–209.

¹⁸ For an overview of female veiling in pre-modern Islamic society, see Stillman, 138–160, esp. 141. See also Alshech, 275.

¹⁹ For a discussion of shifting norms of dress in these periods see Stillman, 139–50. For an overview of elite fashions during the late pre-modern period, see Stillman, 76–85.

the vestimentary norms developed, so did the social significances of the veil.²⁰ For instance, Stillman notes the correlation of face veiling with social honor and privilege, observing that “the wearing of the [face] veil eventually had become so absolutely de rigueur in public that ‘uncovering the face’ (*kashf al-wajh*) by the High Middle Ages took on the general idiomatic meaning in Arabic of being exposed and thus humiliated, as in the English expression “losing face.”²¹

To be discussed below, the Qurʾān mentions clothing in upwards of twenty verses, yet the word *hijab*, which is most frequently used to specify a women’s headscarf in contemporary parlance, never overtly indicates an article of clothing or a manner of dressing. The word “*hijab*” in its Qurʾānic usage signifies a metaphysical barrier that separates an individual’s consciousness from a comprehensive understanding of God’s truth and majesty (see Q 7:46, 17:45, and 41:5), or a curtain dividing rooms of a dwelling to ensure privacy for residents (see Q 19:17 and 33:53). Hence, how the concept of *hijab* came to denote women’s proper Islamic attire in general, and a headscarf specifically, requires some unraveling.

Veiling Rationales

In contemporary parlance, *hijab* most commonly refers to a headscarf that covers the hair and neck, but not the face. The word *hijab* can also refer more broadly to a manner of dressing that seeks to minimize the visibility of the contours of a woman’s breasts, buttocks, hips, and legs through the adornment of loose, non-transparent clothing. In many

²⁰ For a discussion of the similarities between Muslim and Jewish views of women’s status and honor, see Stillman, 144. For a discussion of how dress in North Africa and Spain differed from the more eastern providences, see Stillman, 86–100.

²¹ Stillman, 20. For astute remarks on veiling as a cross-cultural and cross-religious phenomenon, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 194–97.

Muslim societies and communities, female bodily covering continues to be correlated with family honor, and female attire functions to secure privacy and convey piety. Nonetheless, the style, significance, and religious importance of hijab vary according to regional and sociopolitical factors as well as the intentions of the wearer. Thus, the hijab can be a marker of religious belonging, an indicator of a particular political conviction, a deterrent for unwanted sexual advances, or even as a fashion item.²² Alongside these purposes—and in fact undergirding them—for many piety-seeking Muslims head coverings are a gesture of obedience to God and a fulfillment of a divine command. Even women who do not regularly cover hair may still don a scarf when praying. The wearing—or not—of clothing serves to determine the ritual validity of obligatory prayer, to distinguish a woman's standing as slave or free, and to guard against the ill effects of desire potentially arising from illicit visual access to an improperly concealed body.

According to mainstream Islamic discourses, maintaining the correct degree of bodily covering is a requirement upon all post-pubescent persons with capability for discernment; although, what is “correct” varies somewhat for women. Islamic legal reasoning has retained a plurality, even as dominant positions on many given issues emerge over time. In short, men's mandated degree of concealment (navel to knee except in front of a sexual partner) is unchanging regardless of the onlookers or the legal status of the man himself; whereas women's religious requirements for dress are determined by her kinship and legal status in relation to potential onlookers, as discussed further below.

Historical Trends in Bodily Covering

During the early Muslim expansion, veiling was likely very closely associated with a

²² For various accounts, see Sajida S. Alvi, et al., eds., *The Muslim Veil in North America* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2003).

higher socioeconomic standing and free-versus-slave legal status. In later centuries, particularly as many Muslim-majority societies experienced European colonization and slavery began to dwindle out, the notion of “hijab” took on new significances.²³ Many elite women in the early twentieth century adopted European modes of dress, first by discarding the face veil, then eventually also by discarding the head covering entirely.²⁴ Yet even as the early decades of the twentieth century saw a downtrend in head or face veils, recent decades have seen its resurgence, even in Muslim-minority societies. Debates over the significance, virtues, and demerits of veiling, issues of forced adornment or removal of headscarves and face veils, and restrictions on covering in workplaces, have stirred legal controversies across the globe. In several countries, face veils and/or headscarves are even banned in select public institutions, inciting vigorous debates over individual and religious rights verses the rights of the employer or the state.²⁵

Head coverings are often portrayed as exclusively a female affair, but in various locales and periods head covering was the standard for men of social standing as well. As late as the seventeenth century the turban (*imāma*) was described as a “badge of Islam” (*sīmā al-Islām*) and as a “divider between unbelief and belief” (*ḥājiza bayn al-kufr wa'l-īmān*).²⁶ Men were reported to have covered their faces on occasion, and covering the face

²³ Stillman provides the most comprehensive account to date of the multifarious varieties of garments that are mentioned in key Arabic source texts spanning the early to late medieval periods of the Islamic empire. For a summary account of fashion and its symbolic values, see Charlotte Jirousek, “Clothing,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, Vol. 1, ed. Richard C. Martin (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 149–51.

²⁴ For a thorough analysis of contemporary aspects of the veiling discourse, with a particular focus on the Egyptian and North American cases, see Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: the Veil's Resurgence from the Middle East to America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

²⁵ For a review of several prominent cases, see Manisuli Ssenyonjo, “The Islamic Veil and Freedom of Religion, the Rights to Education and Work: A Survey of Recent International and National Cases,” *Chinese Journal of International Law* 6 no. 3 (2007): 653–710.

²⁶ See the discussion in Stillman, 139. See full discussion of early Arabian types of headgear, 16–21.

in public appeared to be advised for handsome men in many works.²⁷ In the modern period, this tradition of male headgear lost emphasis as colonial norms of dress became emblems of modernity and progress.

Veiling, Slavery, and Gendered Bodies

In his article, “Out of Sight and Therefore Out of Mind: Early Sunnī Islamic Modesty Regulations and the Creation of Spheres of Privacy,” Eli Alshech examines the exegetical discourse on female veiling, chastity, and bodily privacy in order to analyze the shifting rationales for female veiling and notions of privacy. Alshech notes that early classical exegetes before the eighth century CE understood the adornment guidelines specified in the Qur’an as reinforcing a social stratification that could ensure free and slave women “were approached by others in a way that was appropriate to their rank in the socio-economic order.”²⁸ From this perspective, veiling for early generations of Muslims was a matter of female social entitlement in economic, political, and legal hierarchies. That said, bodily covering and female seclusion hold additional moral and socioeconomic significances. A brief foray into the social history of slavery and customs surrounding elite women’s seclusion is necessary as a pretext to understanding the nuances of bodily adornment in Muslim texts and traditions.

Theological and Social Dimensions of Slavery in Muslim Contexts

Slavery as an institution is not explicitly condemned, much less abolished, in the

²⁷ Stillman, 21 cites al-Bukhārī among other references that mention the Prophet Muhammad himself veiling his face, although it is not clear from the context if this was for reasons of modesty or practicality.

²⁸ Alshech, 274. For instance, an unveiled woman would be assumed to be of slave standing, while a veiled woman would be free, and thereby sexual inapproachable. As discussed below, multiple sources suggest that a slave woman who acted as a servant (rather than a concubine), if veiled, would be seen as feigning a higher social standing that what was deemed appropriate to her station. Notably, the second Caliph ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644) is noted as having admonished a slave woman for falsely assuming the standing of a free woman by veiling. He is depicted in some sources as towering over the slave woman with a whip until she unveiled; for discussion see Hsu, 190.

Qurʾān. Rather, it is regulated in ways that ostensibly aim at ameliorating negative consequences unfree persons may experience as a result of their vulnerable social station. Arguably in an effort to institute—or at least encourage—such equitable treatment, the Qurʾān includes multiple considerations for safeguarding the innate dignity of slave persons. For instance, the Qurʾān recognizes marriages between slaves as well as between slaves and free persons (e.g. Q. 2:221; 4:25; 24:32). It also manifestly prohibits owners from forcing slaves into prostitution (Q. 24:33). These measures can be seen as being broadly consistent with the concern that the Qurʾān exhibits for the socially underprivileged and susceptible individuals in society, including the poor, infants, sick, elderly, and women.²⁹ From a Qurʾānic paradigm, there are few compelling reasons to interpret slavery (or womanhood or poverty for that matter) as a divine retribution. Slavery, from a Qurʾānic perspective, is simply a facet of human societies, one of any number of relations of power that needs to be regulated in both the legal and ethical realms.³⁰ The Qurʾān and prophetic traditions recognize different social and legal statuses

²⁹ The Qurʾān also permits the owner of a slave to have extra-marital sexual relations with her (e.g. Q. 23:5–6; 70:29–30), a provision that, while troubling to post-enlightenment sensibilities, could serve to socially integrate unfree persons. The children of a slave concubine and a free man were considered to be free, as was the mother (termed an “*umm walad*”) upon her master’s death, if he had not already freed her beforehand, as I will discuss below. Read in this manner, the Qurʾānic permission can be seen as an emancipatory provision aimed at the full integration of non-free persons into society. Rather than use the Qurʾānic regulation of so-called *milk al-yamin* (or “possession of the right hand”) to enforce unilateral male mastery of female sexuality, this verse could reflect the possibility for sexual union across substrata to enable the social integration of otherwise marginalized persons.

³⁰ Becoming enslaved through post-natal alienation, or being born the child of a slave father, has various legal and social consequences—liabilities, they might be called—that are perhaps not dissimilar from being born a woman in a patriarchal society or being poor in a capitalist society. In their concise overview of slavery in the Islamic context, Kecia Ali and Oliver Leaman observe that, as in the majority of pre-Enlightenment thought, “the Qurʾānic text assumes inequalities of status between human beings. These may be based on innate qualities such as gender, accidental facts of life such as wealth, or outcomes of social processes such as slavery. Justice did not demand precisely equal treatment of each of these individuals but rather fair or equitable treatment,” Kecia Ali and Oliver Leaman, *Islam: The Basic Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 67. See also Kecia Ali, “Slavery and Sexual Ethics in Islam,” in *Beyond Slavery: Overcoming Its Religious and Sexual Legacies*. Ed. Bernadette J. Brooten with the editorial assistance of Jacqueline L. Hazelton (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 108–122.

for enslaved as compared to free persons, yet such inequalities are not taken to imply inequalities in inherent dignity or disadvantage in a post-worldly realm.³¹ A considerable number of hadith celebrate the piety and religious acumen of particular slaves, and others promote the fair and equitable treatment of slaves in a way that mitigates the distinctions between free and slave, master and owned.³² Overall, the Qur'ān and hadith encourage manumission and do not portray slavery as a permanent condition (e.g. Q. 4:92; 58:3; 24:33). Naturally, the welfare, social capital, and future prospects of an enslaved person varied considerably based upon context and circumstance, but persons of slave status did become influential in their milieu, even to the extent that a considerable number rose to the top of socio-cultural institutions such as the military and ruling harems.³³

Slaves regularly gained great degrees of political power. In such situations, the legal status of the slave as unfree may have had little impact on personal autonomy, social mobility, or capacity for economic prosperity. Post-enlightenment thought moved in the direction of condemning slavery as immoral and resulted in a transnational movement to legally abolish slavery. Yet, even after the abolishment of slavery in most places, contemporary Muslim scholars and intellectuals join in continuing to grapple with the theological and historical legacies of institutional slavery.

Seclusion from the Unwanted Gaze

³¹ As in matters of blood money (*diyya*), for instance, where the slave man counts as half of a free man.

³² For example, one hadith encourages a pious master to educate, manumit, and marry his woman-slave, *Sahih Bukhari*, Book 46, no. 720. See also Book 3, no. 97. Another hadith narrated on the authority of al-Ma'rur instructs the master to feed and clothe the slave as a brother; see *Sahih Bukhari*, Book 2, no. 30, edited by Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Medina: Dar al-Fikr, 1981). Regarding the later, minimum permissible bodily covering for male slaves is the same as for free men, but the minimum for female slaves is not the same as requirements for free women: the hadith 'clothe your slave like your brother,' does not literally entail clothing your female slave like your sister.

³³ See a detailed discussion in Madeline C. Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Design of Difference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Practices of women's seclusion have come to be associated primarily with Muslims; yet women's concealment was practiced by elites across the geographical expanse stretching from the Eastern Mediterranean to Central Asia, including the civilizations of Assyria, Persia, Byzantium, and beyond.³⁴ The concept of a harem (Ar., "harīm") is polyvalent, referring to both the private living quarters of a residence, as well as the collective of women and children of a particular patriarch—not merely the sexual consorts. Some first-person narratives and artistic depictions sensationalize the harem as a place of ennui and rampant licentiousness; however, historical accounts show women of various harems engaging actively in educational pursuits, philanthropy, and political patronage.³⁵ Many depictions of the harem portray a space wherein imprisoned women are exploited as the hands of the patriarch, and while concubinage did indeed represent one aspect of life in some harems, this depiction is not entirely accurate.³⁶ Beyond sensationalism, the harem is simply a private residential space wherein the presence of non-familial adult males is

³⁴ As way of organizing kinship and domestic labor along patriarchal, polygamous lines, the dominant male of the household could have a number of wives and concubines, according to his economic means. The harem could also include other members of the patriarch's extended family. See Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 25–37.

³⁵ The institution of the harem increased in prominence in the Abbasid period and continued through the late Ottoman Empire, as imperial palaces became hubs of high artistry and opulence. In this context, the imperial and provincial harems of sultans and other political elites functioned as a manifestation of a particular dynasty's majesty, economic might, and tastes. More practically, the harem served as the space in which the dynasty's pedigree was cultivated and its power consolidated. Gifting women across harems, for marriage in the case of free women or concubinage in the case of desirable slave women, was a common means for elites to forge political alliances or strategically bestow favor or acknowledge patronage. See Julia Bray, "Men, Women and Slaves in Abbasid Society," in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900*. Ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 121–146.

³⁶ For peasantry, particularly non-Muslim peasantry on the fringes of Muslim dynasties, a potential concubinage may have provided a means for social empowerment. By securing status as *umm walad*, a mother of her owner's child, a concubine could no longer legally be sold and hence could secure a more stable legal position within the family or dynasty. She would be eligible for manumission upon her owner's death, or sooner. Through natal alienation, a few such concubines could even rise to become a mother of royal children, a phenomenon that was increasingly common from the middle of the ninth century until the late nineteenth century. See related discussions in Nadia Maria El-Cheikh, "Gender and Politics in the Harem of al-Muqtadir," in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900*. Ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 147–164.

prohibited.³⁷ In this cultural system, a patriarch would reinforce the family's social standing in part by having the familial womenfolk out of the view of unrelated men. The logic of women's veiling flows in part from this priority of keeping women of status out of the public gaze.

The extent to which this arrangement curtails female liberties or caters to masculine honor or avariciousness can be debated; however, portraying the harem—or veiling for that matter—as simply a matter of male privilege and female oppression is overly simplistic and ignores the cultural and religious values placed on privacy.³⁸ In this context, women and dependents' ability to be out of the public eye is associated with social prestige and family honor.³⁹ From extant historical sources is difficult to determine to what extent religious piety or socio-cultural norms were a driving factor for those who donned veils, but it is clear that norms and religious discourse on veiling for individuals of different genders and legal classes came to full fruition in these social contexts and in part reflect the prevailing social and gender norms of the period.

The Interpretative Enterprise and Its Dis/continuity

It is now possible to turn to some of the main exegetical underpinnings of female

³⁷ Elite and imperial harems also included an array of non-concubine domestic slaves, including eunuchs of different degrees of castration who served in a wide variety of roles within imperial harems. With a reputation for trustworthiness and a unique gender situation, eunuchs often prospered as close confidantes of the sultan and members of the political elite. While some attended to the secretarial and military affairs of the bureaucracy, others attended to affairs within the harem. Eunuchs, on account of their liminal gender, were the preferred choice as the intermediaries between harem women and society beyond harem boundaries. Fully castrated males, most commonly sub-Saharan Africans, were preferred for these more domestic roles on account of their perceived trustworthiness and asexuality, although eunuchs came from other regions as well. See Shaun Marmon, *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

³⁸ As discussed by Leila Ahmed in *Women and Gender in Islam*, 79–87.

³⁹ See Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), see specifically, "Age of the Queen Mother: 1566–1656," 91–112. See also Madeline C. Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Design of Difference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

bodily concealment. To do this, I turn to the seminal Qur'ān commentary of Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923, Baghdad), the earliest commentary that is preserved in full.⁴⁰ Ṭabarī's commentary is a critical source for scholarship. It compiles multiple interpretations of particular verses, preserving their chain of oral narrations back to the original context of the specific circumstances in the life of the early community to which the verse was thought to be responding. It is one of a very few commentaries that provides this abundance of contrasting narrations as well as the detailed documentation as to a narration's *isnād*, the oral chain of authenticity from one authority to the next back to the original source. While this does not necessarily guarantee the historical accuracy of the report, it does demonstrate key convergences and divergences between extant narrations. Ṭabarī's commentary was composed approximately five generations after the first community of Muslims, and hence his work also provides a window onto the concerns of his own milieu. Through this filter, the social and moral considerations that occupied early Muslims become partially accessible. I use his commentary below to glean the breadth of the interpretive enterprise regarding veiling and bodily concealment. His commentary on the passages of the Qur'ān that pertain to female veiling suggest several matters related to female veiling were disputed among Muslim scholarly authorities three centuries after the inception of Islam.

Privacy and the Hijab

⁴⁰ His commentary is known simply as *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, or by its full title, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*. For biographical information see Christopher Melchert, "Al-Tabari," in *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, Vol. II, ed. Richard C. Martin (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 671.

The word “ḥijāb” is mentioned seven times in the Qur’ān—never with the connotation of an article of clothing.⁴¹ As mentioned above, “ḥijāb” appears in the Qur’ān as a metaphorical barrier that separates the individual consciousness from comprehending God’s truth and majesty (e.g. Q. 7:46, 17:45, 41:5) and as a curtain dividing rooms of a dwelling to ensure privacy for the inhabitants (e.g. Q. 19:17 and 33:53). To reiterate, “ḥijāb” is not evoked by the Qur’ān to indicate an article of clothing, nor does it indicate a style of dressing; these are all meanings that later become ascribed to the word.

There are other Qur’ānic terms that refer to female garments (to be discussed below). The use of “ḥijāb” as connected to the concepts of privacy, sexuality, and female honor does have a Qur’ānic basis, such as in the following lengthy verse:

Oh you who have faith! Do not enter the Prophet’s houses unless permission is granted you for a meal, without waiting for it to be readied. But enter when you are invited, and disperse when you have taken your meal, without settling down to chat. Indeed such conduct annoys the Prophet, and he is ashamed of [asking] you [to leave]; but Allah is not ashamed of [expressing] the truth. And when you ask something of [his] womenfolk, ask it from them from behind a curtain (*min warā’ ḥijāb*). That is chaster for your hearts and their hearts. You may not annoy the Apostle of God, nor may you ever marry his wives after him. Indeed that would be a grave [matter] with Allah (Q 33:53).

In his commentary on this verse, commonly referred to by Ṭabarī and others as the “verse of the hijab” (*āyat al- ḥijāb*), Ṭabarī mentions that this verse pertained to a specific occasion in which guests were lingering late into the night after the Prophet’s wedding ceremony to one of his wives, and the Prophet was too shy (*shadīd al-ḥayā’*) to throw them out of his home.⁴² Proponents of female veiling and seclusion generalize this directive for the

⁴¹ See Bahar Davary, “Veil,” in *The Qur’an: an Encyclopedia*, ed. Oliver Leaman (London, New York: Routledge, 2006), 676–677; see also Stillman, 139.

⁴² Among the different authorities cited by Ṭabarī who relate this episode, there is some disagreement over which wife the Prophet had just married. Zaynab and Umm Salama are both mentioned in different

Prophet's wives to all believing women; however, the verse in its most direct meaning pertains to the unique role and situation of the Prophet.

Sexual Harassment and Vestment

From among the multiple Qur'ānic mentions of different articles of clothing, two terms in the Qur'ān refer to articles of clothing as worn specifically by females.⁴³ In both cases, the Qur'ān is not explicitly clear as to what particular types of cuts or styles are indicated, and interpretations of what exactly these articles of clothing look like vary widely. One of the debated terms is *jalābīb* (sing., *jilbāb*), which is a type of outer mantle. The verse appears in the following context where 'Alī Qulī Qarā'ī translates the word *jalābīb* using the Persian word "chadors":

Those who trouble (*yu'dhūna*) faithful men and women undeservedly, certainly bear the guilt of slander and flagrant sin. / O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and women of the faithful to draw closely over themselves (*yudnīna 'alayhinna min*) their chadors (*jalābībihinna*) [when going out]. That makes it likely for them to be recognized (*yu'rafna*) and not troubled (*fa-lā yu'dhayna*) (Q. 33:58-59).⁴⁴

In Ṭabarī's commentary on these verses, several different narrations allude to women being sexually molested as they went out into the night to relieve themselves. The details of this practice of sexual harassment, known as *ta'arruḍ*, are ambiguous, but from a female-

transmissions. There are also narrators who report that the incident involved the hand of the Prophet's wife 'Ā'isha inadvertently touching an unrelated man's hand when sharing a meal. A number of other narrations preserved by Ṭabarī relate various ways in which 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, a prominent companion of the Prophet and future Caliph, advocated veiling for the Prophet's wives; hence, some accounts mention that this verse was sent down in response to 'Umar's prayers. Among the myriad of episodes that he records, Ṭabarī does not seem to privilege any account over another.

⁴³ For a cursory discussion see Shawkat M. Toorawa, "Clothing," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Boston: Brill, 2011), accessed online January, 2015 at: http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=q3_SIM-00083.

⁴⁴ In Qara'ī's translation, it is not clear why "tormented" and "troubled" are translated differently, as they are the same verb. The Haleem English translation chooses the word "insulted" as follows: "those who undeservingly insult believing men and women..." (33:58) and "make their outer garments hang low over them so as to be recognized and not insulted..." (33:59), M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an* (Oxford World's Classics, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 271.

centric perspective, the Qurʾān provides a specific rationale for female covering that can be understood as an effort to promote physical and bodily security in the presence of an imminent threat to women’s bodily or sexual integrity.⁴⁵ It also suggests that by donning their garments (*yudnīna ‘alayhinna min jalābībihinna*), the women could be protected from being harmed. In this Qurʾānic context, women are told to don their outer garments as a pragmatic solution to instances of persecution. This raises the question if the command to adorn the outer garments is meant specifically for contexts of fear of persecution, or if it has a more general application.

In Ṭabarī’s work, the vast majority of narrations regarding this verse focus on the protocol for dress, rather than the rationale. Many narrations stress that women should cover all but one eye, such as one on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās: “if they need to leave their houses for something” they should “cover their faces from over their heads with their jilbāb, exposing one eye only.” Here women’s near-complete bodily covering is prescribed to the end that their domesticity is reinforced. This prescription also appears in later works of exegesis, including in that of Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Maḥallī (d. 863/1459) and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), two Egyptian Shāfiʿī jurists who together composed a highly regarded compendium of exegesis

⁴⁵ For a discussion of this verse in the commentary of al-Rāzī, which parallels Ṭabarī’s in many respects, see Etin Anwar, *Gender and Self in Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 105–7. Anwar summarizes the situation as follows, which is paradigmatic of much of Muslim feminist engagement with this verse: “The embodiment of this verse [Q. 33:59] marked the beginning of the materiality of the self as secluded body through a series of exclusions of women from public life. Initially, this seclusion was directed primarily toward the wives of the Prophet, based on several reasons: (1) the Prophet’s wives’ quarters were located very close to the Mosque wherein public activities took place, so the seclusion provided familial comfort and privacy for these elite Muslim women; and (2) the political and social situation in Medina was not fully secure. Women, regardless of their social status, were humiliated in public life and targeted with the *ta’arrud* [Is this exactly how she transliterates this word?]” (107). See a similar discussion of these verses and Fatima Mernissi’s commentary on them in Massimo Campanini, *The Qur’an: Modern Interpretations*, trans. Caroline Higgitt (NY: Routledge, 2011), 115–16. For another discussion of this verse, see also Asma Barlas, “*Believing Women*” in *Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 55–7.

that is taught today in many religious schools.⁴⁶ Alshech observes: “the sources dealing with modesty demonstrate some concern for the privacy of women, [although] the privacy at issue here is primarily that of men and their families.”⁴⁷ For instance, the issue of only leaving one eye is a clear example of the latter, for it disregards the benefits of women navigating their surroundings clearly with depth perception and visual range.

Veils and Sexualized Stares

Another word related to female attire in the Qurʾān is *khumur* (sing., *khimār*).⁴⁸ It appears once in the plural as a covering for *juyūb* (breasts or bosoms):⁴⁹

Tell [O Prophet] the faithful men to cast down their looks and to guard their private parts (*furūjahum*). That is more decent for them. Allah is indeed well aware of what they do. / And tell [O Prophet] the faithful women to cast down their looks and to guard their private parts (*furūjahunna*), and not display their charms (*zīnah*) except for what is outward (*illā mā ḡahara minhā*), and let them draw their scarfs [sic.] (*yaḡribna bi khumurihinna*) over their bosoms (*ʿalā juyūbihinna*), and not display their charms (*zīnah*) except to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husband’s fathers, or their sons, or their husbands’ sons, or their brothers, or their brothers’ sons, or their sisters’ sons, or their womenfolk, or their slave girls, or male dependants lacking [sexual] desire, or children uninitiated to women’s parts (*ʿawrah*). And let them not thump their feet to make known their hidden ornaments (*zīnah*). Rally to Allah in repentance, O faithful, so that you may be felicitous (Q. 24:30-31).^{50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56}

⁴⁶ Their interpretation of the verse in question states: “in other words, let them pull part of it [also] over their faces, leaving one eye [visible], when they need to leave [the house] for something.” See ‘Abd al-Raḡmān ibn Abī Bakr Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṡī, *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*. Translated by Feras Hamza (Louisville, KY: Fons Vite, 2008), 402.

⁴⁷ Alshech, 272. See also Anwar, *Gender and Self*, 110–11. Again there is a powerful link between privacy and honor on the one hand, and bodily covering on the other. By this logic, it is apparent why a slave woman, who is legally alienated from familial protection, would not be required to cover to the degree of a free woman, unless she was a concubine or *umm walad*, in which case she became a potential or actual familial member who is vested with the corresponding female honor and dignity of the family that must be preserved. This suggests that veiling is inherently linked to the patriarchal familial order.

⁴⁸ Hanna E. Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qurʾan* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 700.

⁴⁹ Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qurʾan*, 592.

⁵⁰ Haleem translates this phrase loosely as “beyond what [it is acceptable] to reveal,” 222.

⁵¹ Haleem translates this term as “coverings,” 222.

⁵² Haleem translates this term as “neckline,” 222.

These verses on bodily covering tie veiling explicitly to sexual desire and the unwanted sexualized gaze. The passage that is addressed to women mirrors the commandments given to men in the proceeding verse, i.e., cast down the gaze and guard the private parts (Q. 24:30-31); however, further protocols are then added for women's behavior and appearance, but these further protocols are relaxed for certain categories of onlookers. In short, women's charms should not be widely displayed, but may be displayed for certain persons of the extended family and household, including her slaves (there is a debate over the gender of the slaves here), and male dependents who lack sexual desire, possibly either because of sexual orientation or age. The context of the verse—its *sabab al-nuzūl* (*pl. asbāb al-nuzūl*), or “occasion of revelation”—is also unclear. One ubiquitous narration in relation to this verse, which also appears in Ṭabarī's exegesis, is that 'Ā'isha praised the pious wives of the first émigrés to Medina who, upon hearing the verse, were inspired to immediately rip (*shaqaqna*) their outer garments (*murūt*, sing. *mirt*) to create a *khimār*.⁵⁷

Among other ambiguities within these passages, it is not plainly obvious what the phrase “*illā mā ḡahara minhā*” signifies. There is a trend among later medieval jurists and exegetes, as I will point out in more detail below, to interpret the phrase to signify that a (free) woman's body is entirely subject to covering, but if something should accidentally

⁵³ Qara'i adds a footnote here that reflects a majority position in mainstream Muslim legal thinking: “it is not lawful for Muslim women to expose their charms before non-Muslim women, who may possibly describe what they see to their men,” 492.

⁵⁴ Slaves here, as in other Qur'ānic passages, are literally referred to as “what their (*f*) right hands own.” Qara'i adds the word “girls” here as a qualifier to slave, although it is not in the text of the Qur'ān. Again, this relates to an issue that is disputed among legal scholars, namely, whether this is intended by the Lawgiver as slaves in general or specifically women slaves.

⁵⁵ Haleem translates this phrase as “children who are not yet aware of women's nakedness,” 222. Qara'i glosses in a footnote, “boys who have not reached the age of virility,” 493.

⁵⁶ As translated by Qara'i, 492–93.

⁵⁷ Stillman suggests this account may be ahistorical given that women's garments of the period were likely wrapped such that cutting would not have been necessary to achieve the desired effect, 141.

show, or if she should have a necessity such as a medical issue or a need to reveal her face to testify, for example, then God is merciful.⁵⁸ Others interpret the meaning of the phrase as the basic contours of the body when covered with long, loose clothing. Still others interpret this phrase as an exception for the hands and the face of a free woman. In a minimalist perspective, if *zīnah* is understood as referring specifically to the breasts, then in this case, “except what is apparent thereof” can refer to the basic contours of the post-pubescent female body, specifically in the sexualized area of the chest, hips, and buttocks.

Pre-modern legal scholars, to whom I will soon turn, discuss this issue at length, but it is notable that the phrase remains an elusive one even for contemporary translators of the Qur’ān. This phrase, “*illā mā ṣahara minhā*,” gives exegetes a good amount of interpretive license. If this phrase is interpreted to suggest that free women cover in accordance with prevailing custom (*al-‘ādah al-jāriyah*), questions about what exactly constitutes “prevailing custom” and how this should be determined still remain. Accordingly, it is not explicit that the command to draw their coverings (*yaḍribna bi-khumurihinna*) over their bosoms (*‘alā juyūbihinna*) makes face covering mandated for women, although the dominant claim is that *khumur* was a known type of garment that did indeed cover the head.

Modesty as Concealing Beauty

Other ambiguities arise from the aforementioned verse (Q. 24:31). Among them is the wide semantic range of the term “*zīna*,” which may be translated as charms, embellishment, adornment, or finery, among other possible translations. “*Zīna*” has a wide

⁵⁸ See the related discussion in Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 27–8.

variety of usages across the many times that it is mentioned in the Qurʾān.⁵⁹ In the context of the verse above, Ṭabarī presents an extensive list of different opinions on the matter, which range from “zīna” being the external clothing (*thiyāb/ridāʾ*), eye makeup (*kuḥl*), rings (*khātim*), various types of bracelets and bangles (*qulb/sawār*), and/or skin dyes (*khaḍāb*), to it being anatomical parts of the body including face, palms, heels, and/or forearms. In one Qurʾān passage, zīna is required to be taken in all places of prayer (Q. 7:31, *khudhū zīnatakum ʿinda kulli masjid*). This command is taken by jurists to have important implications for clothing requirements during the ritual prayer. Here, one of the legal concerns is identifying the minimum degree of bodily covering that is necessary for the ritual prayer to be valid.

There is another matter to be reconciled. As verse Q. 24:31 (discussed above) restricts the display of women’s zīna, verse Q. 7:31 requires zīna in all places of prayer. In the former, females are told to hide their zīna, and in the latter, people in general are instructed to take their zīna. In a literalist reading of the text, a secluded place for women’s prayer is the only way in which the two commandments, “take your zīna...” and “do not reveal your zīna,” could be mutually upheld.

Upon close reading, there is yet another interpretive puzzle: the specific listing of persons in front of whom it is permissible for a woman to reveal her zīna (as stated in the Q 24:31) does not include the master of a concubine, while jurists across sects and schools assert that neither an owner nor the concubine need observe covering as sexual relations are licit between them.⁶⁰ Indeed, jurists generally came to the understanding that menial

⁵⁹ For a listing of 19 occurrences, see Kassis, 1335–36.

⁶⁰ See Hsu, 136–38, and 193. For the Qurʾānic context of sexual relations with slaves see Q 4:2, 24:33, and 70:29–30. For an analysis of and rules related to sexual access, ownership, and social exchange according to

slave women were excluded from the privilege of veiling, as mentioned above; yet, the Qur'ānic verse on *zīna* addresses the command to “believing women,” which is not a priori conditioned or limited to a specific social class or legal category of women. This suggests that rulings in the Qur'ān that address women in general were taken by jurists as only applying to free women. Another ambiguous aspect of this verse is whether the generic reference to slaves (lit., what their (*f.*) right hands possess, *mā malakat aymānuhunna*) includes male slaves or not, as the phrase *mā malakat aymānuhunna* does not indicate the gender of the person(s) owned. Here the essential question for exegetes becomes: Is a male slave permitted to see his female owner unveiled? ⁶¹

Most critically for any potential female-centric reading of these verses, the Qur'ān makes explicit the connection between visual contact and desire. Given that the Qur'ān instructs men to lower their gaze even before it instructs women to lower their gaze and conceal their *zīna* could suggest that concealment is an additional precaution against men's potential slip of gaze or deliberate defiance of the command. Here, women bear an extra injunction because of the relative likelihood of a male breach of divine law and because covering is a defensive measure that is in a woman's control. Although critics have

prominent Ḥanafī legal authorities, including Kasānī and Sarakhsī, see Johansen, 75–90. For historical context, see Shaun E. Marmon, ed. *Slavery in the Islamic Middle East* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999). See also Ingrid Mattson, *A Believing Slave is Better than an Unbeliever: Status and Community in Early Islamic Society and Law*, doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1999.

⁶¹ Aside from a practical matter of who can or cannot be inside a harem, the answer to this question also has implications for how the power of a slave should be understood. The fact that there is even a debate over the issue of the gaze of the slave man reveals his status as a liminal male. Alternatively, it could be that the Qur'ān regards slaves as intimate members of the household and hence they are counted as close kin by virtue of the master-slave relationship. The verse provides many possibilities to contemplate, but no decisive answers. That male slaves can gaze seems to be the more prevalent interpretation among exegetes and the society at large. This is evidenced by the social preference for eunuchs to serve as an intermediary for harems, as eunuchs, particularly those who were fully castrated, were not regarded as fully masculine on account of their sexual impotence.

interpreted this particular verse on female adornment as a patriarchal dictates, a female-centric exegesis could argue that female dignity and protection is a driving concern.

Concealing what is Private

This section calls critical attention to the manner in which religious law demarcates bodily zones of nakedness (*‘awrah*) for persons of different social and gender categories.⁶² Within this jurisprudential framework, the sexed human body and the legal and kinship statuses of that body are paramount, and the wearing—or not wearing—of particular garments has multiple significances. These include courteousness before God and persons, to make a ritual prayer act valid or invalid, to distinguish the female legal standing, and to protect the public order from the ill-effects of illicit visual access and desire. I argue here that requirements to use particular degrees of covering, as found in classical Muslim legal sources, were a product of the specific way in which the legal system recognized different social classes of persons. The discussion below dispels the myth that veiling, as discussed in classical Islamic law, is simply a matter of biological sex.⁶³ It also sets the stage for asking how adornment guidelines are to be understood in the contemporary era, in which medieval legal categories of class are no longer operative and where fundamentally different identity dynamics and intersections are at play.

The term *‘awrah* as used by classical exegetes and jurists in the context of bodily concealment differs from its usage in the text of the Qur’ān. *‘Awrah* appears in four places

⁶² This translation of *‘awrah* as “shame-zone” is coined by Johansen, and then also adopted by Alshech. The term also has a Hebrew cognate (*ervah*), meaning nakedness.

⁶³ An earlier version of this segment was presented as “Awra within Classical Muslim Jurisprudence: Implications for the Present,” at *Veiled Constellations: The Veil, Critical Theory, Politics, and Contemporary Society*, University of Toronto and York University (Jun. 5, 2010). The ideas were initially presented at a panel entitled: “*Women, Men and Veiling: A Muslim Feminist Inquiry into Class, Gender, and Religious Law*,” which was hosted by Harvard’s Center of Middle Eastern Studies, September 30, 2010. I am grateful to my fellow panelists, organizers, and attendees for their helpful comments.

in the Qur'an with the common theme of vulnerable exposure. Two usages involve particular houses in battle being *‘awrah* (Q. 33:13; *buyūtunā ‘awrah*; and Q. 33:14; *wa-mā hiya bi-‘awrah*). In another instance, the term occurs in the context of describing children who have not yet acquired knowledge or experience of the *‘awrah* of women (Q. 24:31; *iṭ-ṭifli alladhīna lam yaẓharū ‘alā ‘awrāti al-nisā’i*). Here, it would be difficult to semantically derive the notion of “*‘awrah*” as consisting of the near entirety of the woman, as asserted by later exegetes and jurists, unless one would also make the assumption that other parts of a man beyond his navel and his knees could not also produce a similar arousing effect.

The term “*‘awrah*” also occurs in the context of the three times in the day (rising, napping, and retiring) when persons are accustomed to disrobe and when other members of the household are instructed to ask permission to enter their quarters. The verse states, “three are *‘awrah* to you” (Q 24:58; *thalāthu ‘awrātin lakum*). Here the term “*‘awrah*” does not refer anatomically to the human body, at least not literally; instead it refers to times of day that are private.

‘Awrah is a matter of bodily and/or oratory concealment within interpersonal relations. Furthermore, its bearing within the law affects rules governing the conduct of a Muslim in ritual prayer and related devotional activities by reifying and integrating gender into the ritual and devotional sphere at a fundamental level.⁶⁴ Namely, the concept of *‘awrah* is evoked to preclude females from certain positions of visibility within the

⁶⁴ The concept of *‘awrah* as “something needing of concealment” is frequently extended to the voice of the female. This notion of a female voice as being ‘something in need of concealment’ has been—and continues to be—used to exclude post-pubescent females from public oratory roles on the rationale that the sound of the female voice is prone to trigger illicit male desire. There are commentators who go so far as to instruct the female to refrain from raising her voice in the presence of non-familial males, as her voice could potentially be sexually provocative. For an excellent analysis of the connection between the female sexual organs and the female voice, see Mahdi Tourage, “Towards the Retrieval of the Feminine from the Archives of Islam,” *International Journal of Zizek Studies* 6, no. 2 (2012): 11–13.

worshiping community, based on the claim that the visible female body would distract males from worship by giving rise to illicit desire within the prayer congregation.⁶⁵ In such fundamental, ritualized ways, the legal discourse on ‘awrah formalizes the impulse to veil and/or seclude post-pubescent free females. These restrictions do not apply to non-concubine slave females.

Gazing Upon Women as a Source of Social Disorder

As it relates to veiling, *fitnah* is understood to be the uncontrollable lust and the ensuing social disorder that can potentially arise from the public visibility of free females.⁶⁶ In the Qur’an, the concept of *fitnah* is linked to concepts such as sedition, apostasy, treachery, and dissention; however of the thirty-four mentions in the Qur’an, it is not used in the context of clothing regulations.⁶⁷ Yet within legal arguments related to veiling the notion of *fitnah* frequently acquires these significations. This trend can be seen with particular force in the late medieval period.⁶⁸ Here, rather than the emphasis on female security from male lewdness, emphasis is placed on male victimization from female seductiveness.⁶⁹ In their concern for avoiding social disorder, juristic emphasis is on particularizing female attire, rather than on deriving mechanisms for curtailing masculine behavior.

⁶⁵ See Valerie Hoffman, “Qur’anic Interpretation and Modesty Norms for Women,” in *The Shaping of an American Islamic Discourse: A Memorial to Fazlur Rahman*, eds. Earle H. Waugh and Frederick M. Denny (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1998), 89–122; see also critiques of this position in Sajida S. Alvi, Homa Hoodfar, and Sheila McDonough, eds. *The Muslim Veil in North America* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 2003), see esp. Part II, “Women Revisiting Texts and the Veiling Discourse,” 145–286.

⁶⁶ Alshech, 270.

⁶⁷ Ali and Leaman, 39–40.

⁶⁸ Stowasser, 28.

⁶⁹ See Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Societies* (London: Saqi Books, 2003), 54. Alshech notes that Islamic modesty norms were not created with the explicit aim of ensuring male dominance “by neutralizing women’s sexual power over men,” and that fear of social disorder (*fitnah*) on its own is “inadequate both because it provides only a partial understanding of what those regulations achieve and because it also fails to account for what they were meant to achieve,” 271.

Of the more than thirty references to fitnah in the Qur'an, most refer to trials through which God tests the character of believers, or signify the various types of social discord arising from iniquity and unbelief. Within literary and political discourses, fitnah is often evoked in descriptions of civil strife, religious schisms, rebellions, and other such disruptions to the political order. The concept of fitnah acquired additional significance in the late medieval period in the context of justifying stringent modesty regulations and mobility restrictions on females in the public sphere. In some contexts, "fear of fitnah" continues to function as a rationale for enforcing sexual morality through female veiling, domesticity, or prohibitions on women assuming oratory roles or pursuing professions necessitating interaction between sexes.

Covering for Different Social Classes

According to dominant opinions among jurists, 'awrah for females may range from the majority of the body, inclusive of the face and hands for the free woman to the pudenda only for the slave female. Varying degrees exist within those two extremes. For example, according to formative legal minds, a female who has birthed a master's child (*umm walad*) is regarded as non-transferable property and holds a promissory of freedom upon the master's death. She is commonly prescribed a similar amount of covering as the free woman, although jurists disagree on the extent of the covering as well as if her extra degrees of bodily covering are obligatory or merely preferred. Finally, a slave female purchased as a nursemaid or for household labor is ascribed the same 'awrah as a free or slave male: the navel to the knee or as little as the pudenda. According to consensus among

most prominent jurists, the breasts of the non-concubine slave are not *‘awrah*, signifying that this area of the body generally need not be covered in prayer or in public life.⁷⁰

Particularly according to late medieval and early modern commentators, the *‘awrah* of the free woman extends to non-anatomical features. For instance, Muḥammad Amīn Ibn ‘Ābidīn (d. 1836), a Damascene Ḥanafī whose popularity remains high particularly within the Indian subcontinent, specifically mentions the voice as included in the *‘awrah* of free females and concubine females.⁷¹ Both free and slave males’ *‘awrah* is consistently from navel to knee (*mā bayna surratihī wa-rukbatihī*) without distinction made according to class and social status. However, free females’ *‘awrah* is constructed to be a function of social class and relation to potential onlookers.⁷² Both as a theoretical enterprise and as a reflection of the material circumstances of the economically underprivileged, jurists regularly discuss modifications in clothing for the person of need who cannot find appropriate covering due to poverty or circumstance.⁷³

⁷⁰ See Hsu, 24–8; see also Stillman, 37; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyya, is one notable exception to this generalization. According to him, *‘awrah* for a beautiful slave woman is actually “two *‘awrahs*”, one like the man in prayer, i.e. between the navel and the knee, and the other equal to that of the free woman, i.e. virtually the whole body. Here, *beauty* is the criterion for determining veiling norms. See al-Jawzīyya, *I‘lām al-Muwaqqa‘īn*, vol. II (Bairūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘ilmiyya, AH 1414/1993 CE). (Bairut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘ilmiyya, AH 1414/1993 CE), vol. II, 46–7. Translation and citation provided by Baber Johansen in his seminar *Islamic Rules on Women*, Harvard Divinity School, 2009. The extent to which slave females actually did wander about bare breasted would have to be the subject of a separate inquiry.

⁷¹ Muḥammad Amīn Ibn ‘Ābidīn, *Radd al-muḥtār ‘alā al-durr al-mukhtār sharḥ tanwīr al-abṣār* vol. I (Cairo, AH 1307/1889 CE), vol. I, 298. Citations and translations provided by Baber Johansen in his seminar *Islamic Rules on Women*, Harvard Divinity School, 2009.

⁷² Ibn al-‘bn al (d. 1240 CE), a renowned Mālikī jurist and philosopher from Andalusia, refutes that *‘awrah* is at all different for different gendered categories of persons, which is a novel view. See Sa‘diyya Shaikh, “In Search of al-Insān: Sufism, Islamic Law, and Gender,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 4 (2009): 813–14.

⁷³ E.g. Ibn ‘Ābidīn, *Radd al-Muḥtār* vol. I: 186, for a discussion of necessity (*ḍarūrah*) and need (*ḥajah*) as it pertains to touch and sight of bodies in classical Ḥanafī sources see Hsu, 162–65.

Notably, jurists' discussions on the degree of covering required for public access and prayer demonstrate a preoccupation with female social status.⁷⁴ The ascribed social status of the female in terms of her standing on a spectrum between slave-status or free-status—rather than the distinction between male and female—is the primary factor in determining veiling etiquette. As Baber Johansen argues, this emphasis on female social class becomes particularly clear when examining the cases in which the female learns of her change in social status or in cases in which she holds an intermediary status between slave and free due to her status as concubine, in which cases there is no clear consensus among the elite bearers of the law as to the prescribed or recommended veiling etiquette.

The concubine who bears a child of the master (*umm walad*), as noted above, occupies an intermediary position in the social hierarchy due to her impending manumission upon her master's death. Hence, her prescribed dress is typically more than that of a concubine who has not birthed children from the master, yet she does not bear the same obligations as a female of free-status. Here, not only is female social status directly tied to her reproductive capabilities, but more immediate for the theme of this inquiry, the degrees of bodily covering explicitly function as visible demarcations of female social status.⁷⁵ This social standing determines veiling etiquette chiefly for the performance of the obligatory ritual prayer, suggesting the close link between the ritual performance and the attempts of the elite to inscribe gender and social status upon the body of the devotee.

⁷⁴ In an unpublished paper, Naila Baloch also notes this preoccupation in the works of Muwaffaq al-Dīn 'Abdallāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Qudāma (1147–1223 CE), a Ḥanbalī jurist and commentator from the Levant who spent a significant portion of his professional life in Bagdad, as well as 'Umar ibn 'Alī ibn 'Ādil (d. c. 1500 CE), a Ḥanbalī jurist from Damascus who treats veiling in his *al-Lubāb fi 'ulūm al-Kitāb*, vol. 14 (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1998).

⁷⁵ See related discussions in Barlas, 55, 159–62. See also Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1991).

According to some prevalent opinions, these standards for bodily covering are to be maintained even when a person is alone, implying that God “sees” the body of the person in an analogous manner as one person would see another person, and that inappropriately exposed bodies are an affront to God.

Toward a Contemporary Ethic

My discussion has thus far concerned historical veiling practices as well as gendered and status-based prescriptions for bodily covering within classical exegetical and legal discourses. I have shown how religious elites have reinforced female veiling for free women and concubines as a marker of social status, and how this preoccupation is derived through a drastically different lens on bodily covering than the one that is presented by the text of the Qur’ān and the interpretations of prominent early exegetes. With this background, it is now possible to embark on a reconsideration of the religious ethos, moral rationales, and ethical dimensions for contemporary female bodily covering.

Women-centric Scholarship and Deliberation

At a 2012 Boston University conference entitled “Muslim Women and the Challenge of Authority,” participants probed core issues regarding the roles of women as religious authorities and interpreters within Muslim communities, past and present. These issues included basic questions such as: “What authority do Muslim women have to interpret religious texts? What authority do traditional interpretations of scripture and law have over Muslim women? What ritual, social, public, and political authority do women exercise? How do mass education and new media affect women's activities? Who has the authority to

speak on behalf of or about Muslim women?"⁷⁶ The notion of "Muslim women" espoused in these questions may seem, at first take, to be homogenizing, but the questions were intended as a starting point to deconstruct the social expectations at play, name the structural dynamics, and to understand better the stakes of conformity or deviance, action or inaction.

I am cognizant of two dynamics holding each other in tension. The first is that religious authority is being rapidly transformed by globalizing trends in the current digital age. The second: that hurdles still remain for full recognition of the legitimacy and inherent value of women's contributions to spheres of religious knowledge. Here, the hurdle is that religious discourse is and has been entrenched in masculinist privilege within and well beyond Muslim societies. Such a scenario has resulted in a consistently male-dominated interpretive slant. Women-centric perspectives on the legal and exegetical dimensions of bodily covering are still grossly underrepresented, even as many women have produced aesthetic and scholarly works that complicate and enrich the public discourse on the personal and psychological dimensions of veiling. Yet, to focus only on free women's dress and free women's bodies reinforces social mechanisms that allow for non-free persons to be held with less esteem and dignity. Hence, in delving into the discourse on veiling, my aim is to raise questions related to the integrity of the Muslim interpretive legacy with regard to the status of slave persons. Did it go far enough to secure the dignity of slave persons, and how can it speak to contemporary forms of slavery?⁷⁷ How Islamic legal thought can interface with contemporary feminism on bodily covering norms remains to be

⁷⁶ For papers and proceedings from this conference, see Juliane Hammer and Riem Spielhaus, eds. "Muslim Women and the Challenge of Authority," *Special Edition of The Muslim World*, vol. 103, no. 3 (2013).

⁷⁷ For one reflection on this theme, see Ali, "Slavery and Sexual Ethics in Islam," 108–122.

more fully explored. Specifically, the connections between visual gazing and an individual's sense of self-dignity is also worthy of empirical investigation.

Irreducible Complexity

In my approach to veiling ethics, I resist the binaries, absolutes, and generalizations that are often present in conversations regarding whether or not head coverings and associated garments (gloves, etc.) are a religious requirement. In fact, both extremes of the discourse are correct in their own right: such adornment is a religious requirement in the sense that many Muslims endorse such practices and understand them to be part of their religious devotion. Such adornment is not a requirement in the sense that membership in the community of Muslims is not predicated upon it. A reductive conception of what constitutes proper Islamic dress has served the purpose of rallying support around a particular political, revivalist agenda that is in some instances concerned with the wellbeing of women and in others with the objective of guarding masculine privilege. Muslim women in particular are the objects of discursive surveillance and are treated as if they were the legitimate repository of a host of cultural anxieties related to honor and shame. On the other hand, the objective of de-veiling women by encouraging them to do so, making their daily lives difficult when they do veil, or insulting them in a personal manner or as a group, can be even viler than the forces that compel veiling.

From a related angle, I do not tout the slogan that women are not forced to veil but do so by choice. This is not only a gross generalization; it misrepresents political realities and ignores a host of latent social and familial pressures, professional constraints, and

economic factors that may influence an individual's adornment choices.⁷⁸ Broadening the conversation about the religious ethics and values involved in adorning gendered bodies is necessary.⁷⁹ To focus merely on headscarves or face veils on Muslims is to indulge in colonial and imperial fascinations with Muslim Otherness and the rather obnoxious trope of veiled, voiceless women in need of saving.⁸⁰ Islamic discourses on bodily covering can indeed inform broader theological and social conversations about promoting human dignity, particularly for women. But most importantly, with all of the focus on clothing and external appearance, it is key for Muslims to bear in mind that "the garment of piety is best" (Q. 7:26).

⁷⁸ I am sensitive to the arguments of Marnia Lazreg, *Questioning the Veil: Open Letters to Muslim Women* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). However, unlike Lazreg, it is not my aim to promote unveiling.

⁷⁹ Veiling discourses and practices impact the religious lives of many Jewish women and men, Mennonite Christian women, some Catholic women religious, and Sikh men and women.

⁸⁰ For a discussion of how this trope fits into contemporary geopolitics see Mino Moallem, "Whose Fundamentalism?" *Meridians* 2, no. 2 (2002): 298-301.

Bibliography

- Ahmed, Leila. *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence from the Middle East to America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.
- _____. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
- Ali, Kecia. "Slavery and Sexual Ethics in Islam." In *Beyond Slavery: Overcoming Its Religious and Sexual Legacies*. Edited by Bernadette J. Brooten with the editorial assistance of Jacqueline L. Hazelton, 108-122. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010.
- _____. *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.
- ____ and Leaman Oliver. *Islam: The Basic Concepts*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Alshech, Eli. "Out of Sight and Therefore Out of Mind: Early Sunni Islamic Modesty Regulations and the Creation of Sphere of Privacy." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 66, no. 4 (2007): 11-24.
- Alvi, Sajida S., Homa Hoodfar, and Sheila McDonough, eds. *The Muslim Veil in North America*, Toronto: Women's Press, 2003.
- Anwar, Etin. *Gender and Self in Islam*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- _____. "Public Roles of Women." In *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*. Vol. II. Edited by Richard C. Martin, 734-735. New York: Macmillan, 2004.
- Barlas, Asma. *Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.
- Basharat, Tayyab. "Hijab as an Instrument for Taking Women off the Sex Economy." *Guidance & Counseling* 21, no. 4 (2006): 201-209.
- Bray, Julia. "Men, Women and Slaves in Abbasid Society." In *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900*. Edited by Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith, 121-146. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Campanini, Massimo. *The Qur'an: Modern Interpretations*. Translated by Caroline Higgitt. NY: Routledge, 2011.
- Davary, Bahar. "Veil." In *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*. Edited by Oliver Leaman, 676-677. New York: Routledge, 2006.

- El-Cheikh, Nadia Maria. "Gender and Politics in the Harem of al-Muqtadir." In *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900*. Edited by Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith, 147-164. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Fiorenza, Elizabeth Shüssler. *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007.
- Haleem, M.A.S. Abdel. *The Qur'an: A New Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. 1st edition 2004.
- Hammer, Juliane and Spielhaus, Riem, eds. "Muslim Women and the Challenge of Authority." *Muslim World* 103, no. 3 (2013).
- Hartsock, Nancy C.M. "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism." In *Feminism and Philosophy: Essential Readings in Theory, Reinterpretation, and Application*. Edited by Nancy Tuana and Rosemarie Tong, 69-90. Bolder, CO: Westview Press, 1995.
- Hoffman, Valerie. "Qur'anic Interpretation and Modesty Norms for Women." In *The Shaping of an American Islamic Discourse: A Memorial to Fazlur Rahman*. Edited by Earle H. Waugh and Frederick M. Denny, 89-122. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998.
- Hsu, Shiu-Sian Angel. *Dress in Islam: Looking and Touching in Ḥanafī Fiqh*. Doctoral dissertation, The University of Utah, 1994.
- Ibn Qudāma, Muwaffaq al-Dīn 'Abdallāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad. *al- Muḡhnī*. Vol. I. Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, n.d.
- al-Jawzīyya, Ibn Qayyim. *I'lām al-Muwaqqā'in*, Vols. I and II. Bairūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, AH 1414 /1993 CE.
- Jirousek, Charlotte. "Clothing." In *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*. Vol. 1. Edited by Richard C. Martin, 149-51. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004.
- Johansen, Baber. "The Valorization of the Human Body in Muslim Sunni Law." *Law and Society in Islam*. Vol. IV. Eds. Charles Issawi and Bernard Lewis, 71-112. Princeton: Markus Wiedner Publishers, 1996.
- Kassis, Hanna E. *A Concordance of the Qur'an*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983.
- Al-Khaṭīb, Muḥammad Al-Shirbīnī. *Muḡhnī Al-Muḡtāj ilā Ma'rifat Alfāz Al-Minhāj*, Vol. I. Cairo: Al-Bābī al-Halabī wa-Awlāduhu, 1958.

- Lazreg, Marnia. *Questioning the Veil: Open Letters to Muslim Women*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Leaman, Oliver. *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*. London, New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Marmon, Shaun. *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- ___ ed. *Slavery in the Islamic Middle East*. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999.
- Mattson, Ingrid. *A Believing Slave is Better than an Unbeliever: Status and Community in Early Islamic Society and Law*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1999.
- Melchert, Christopher. "Al-Tabari." In *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*. Vol. II. Edited by Richard C. Martin, 671. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004.
- Mernissi, Fatima. *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* Translated by Mary Jo Lakeland. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1991. 1st ed. 1987.
- ___ . *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Societies*. London: Saqi Books, 2003.
- Moallem, Mino. "Whose Fundamentalism?" *Meridians* 2, no. 2 (2002): 298-301.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002.
- Peirce, Leslie. *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*. London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Qara'i, 'Ali Quli. *The Qur'an: With a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation*. Clarksville, MD: Islamic Publications International, Khatoons, 2005.
- Rāzī, Muhammad ibn 'Umar, Fakr al-Dīn, *Mafātih al-ghayb fī tafsīr al-Qur'an / Tafsīr al-Kabīr*. Vol. 10. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1981.
- al-Shāfi'ī, Muḥammad ibn Idrīs. *Kitāb al-Umm*, Vol. I. Edited by Muḥammad Zuhri Al-Najjār. Bayrūt: Dār al-ma'rifa, n.d.
- Shaikh, Sa'diyya. "In Search of al-Insān: Sufism, Islamic Law, and Gender." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 4 (2009): 781-822.
- Ssenyonjo, Manisuli. "The Islamic Veil and Freedom of Religion, the Rights to Education and Work: A Survey of Recent International and National Cases." *Chinese Journal of International Law* 6 no. 3 (2007): 653-710.

- Stillman, Yedida Kalfon. *Arab Dress: A Short History from the Dawn of Islam to Modern Times*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2000.
- Stowasser, Barbara Freyer. *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Suyūṭī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr. *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*. Translated by Feras Hamza. Louisville, KY: Fons Vite, 2008.
- Ṭabarī, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr. *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān / Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*. Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, Beirut, 1997.
- Toorawa, Shawkat M. "Clothing." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*. Edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe. Boston: Brill, 2011. Accessed May 9, 2011, http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=q3_SIM-00083.
- Tourage, Mahdi. "Towards the Retrieval of the Feminine from the Archives of Islam." *International Journal of Zizek Studies* 6, no. 2 (2012): 1-25.
- Tuana, Nancy and Rosemarie Tong, eds. *Feminism and Philosophy: Essential Readings in Theory, Reinterpretation, and Application*. Bolder, CO: Westview Press, 1995.
- Wadud, Amina. *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006.
- . *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Zilfi, Madeline C. *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Design of Difference*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.