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The Myths of Muslim Women Liberation: Why Islamists Resist the Western Concept of Universal Women's Rights

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The Myths of Muslim Women Liberation:

Why Islamists Resist the Western Concept of Universal Women's Rights

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<u>Introduction</u>

Introduction

This thesis seeks to understand the Islamist ideological framework governing their interpretation of women's rights by analyzing three possible conditions which cultivate a sense of relative deprivation among Islamists. I have chosen to use the term Islamists instead of fundamentalists due to the negative and politicized biases surrounding the term fundamentalist. As pointed out by Bruce Lincoln in his book *Holy Terrors: Thinking About Religion After September 11*, the term fundamentalist has inflammatory connotations which render it of little value to an unbiased, scholarly analysis about maximalist interpretations of religion, a term I will elaborate on later. To define relative deprivation, I will look to Walter Runciman's theory of relative deprivation, Craig Webber's classification of relative deprivation as an outcome, and Charles Tilly's polity model. Through these theories, I will explain the macro-level appeal of Islamist ideology and extrapolate how Islamists define women's rights by adding onto the relative deprivation theory and providing causes for Islamists' sense of deprivation.

Moderates vs. Islamists: Defining Terms and Establishing Identities

Within Islam, there are two broad, overarching interpretations of what constitutes women's rights: Moderate interpretation and Islamist interpretations. According to Tariq Ramadan and Khaled Abou El Fadl, moderate Muslims, unlike Islamists, seek to move beyond a literal, selective, and narrow interpretation of the Quran because they acknowledge that the Quran is not a stagnant text whose original context must be exactly replicated in the modern world. Rather, moderate Muslims view the Quran as an evolving text whose values and messages transcend the specificity of the era in which they were written to inform any society. Moderates

emphasize the Quran's moral and ethical messages because they perceive them as innovative for the time period in which the Quran was written.

When examining the role of women's rights in Islam, Moderates believe that the standards of justice and equality which guided the Prophet remain as references for present day interpretations of the text. By studying the complete religious history and judicial traditions, Moderates aim to create a non-discriminatory understanding of women's rights.[1] By prioritizing the spirit rather than the immediate cultural and historical context in which the Quran was written, Moderates analyze women's rights to sexual pleasure and choices regarding marriage, divorce, contraception, or abortion by combining the text with the cultural environment of modern society.[2] Without acknowledging that the socio-cultural context in which the Quran is being read and used has changed, the *ulama* cannot hope to support women's autonomy or combat female illiteracy, unemployment, or financial inequality.[3]

For example, Moderates argue that a strictly male-centric reading of the Quran ignores how modern society has redefined male-female power relationships. Moderates believe that women are autonomous beings and find evidence to support their claims in *hadiths* which explain how the Prophet Muhammad listened to the struggles of women and provided them with solutions which elevated their place in society.[4] Rather than attempting to resolve contemporary

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[1] Ramadan, Tariq. *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. 213-14.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] "The Ulama are the chief religious authorities in Islam which include scholars, teachers, jurists, judges, preachers, imams, and advisers to rulers. They are viewed as the heirs to Prophet Muhammad and are meant to advise people about God's commandments and prohibitions by issuing opinions and judgments in matters of dispute or legal necessity."- Campo, Juan E. "Ulama." *Encyclopedia of Islam*. New York: Facts on File, 2009. 683-85. Print.
[4] *Hadiths* are sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad documented by his followers after his death and form a supplement to the Quran known as the *Sunnah.* For more information see Esposito, John. "Hadith." *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. 2003. Print.

societal issues by replicating an idealized past, Moderates work to express the spirit of Quranic principles within the changing landscape of today's global society.

An example of Moderates articulating the Quran's spirit in today's global society is their refusal to view women solely as bodies, only to be referenced when discussing how women should behave, dress, and act within their duty as wives. Instead, Moderates recognize that women play an active and independent role in religion. The internal state of a woman's spirituality cannot be gleaned based on an outward appearance of modesty. Moderates disavow purely Islamist interpretations of religious texts which strictly confine the woman to the dependent body of a relationship, instead arguing that a woman indeed possess personalities and feelings. A woman should never be exclusively referenced within a, "strictly ritualistic framework codified in tradition."[5] Women as humans have a right to sexual pleasure, the freedom to decide who they marry, if they divorce, use contraception, and seek an abortion.[6]

Unlike Moderates, Islamists view the Quran as a handbook for life, whose role is to dictate and regulate the human agent, while the human body serves as a mindless instrument meant to understand and implement the text verbatim.[7] Islamists claim that the only correct way to follow God is via adherence to their literal, selective, and narrow interpretation of religious texts. Through their uncompromising reaction against modernity, Islamists espouse a supremacist ideology and desire a reversion to the past in hopes of gaining salvation through its emulation.[8] The supremacist ideology, which inspires Islamists to envision themselves as superior interpreters of the text, transforms their comprehension of God into a means to validate

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[5] Ramadan, *Radical Reform,* 217.
[6] *Ibid*., 214.
[7] , El Fadl, Khaled Abou. *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005. 96. Print.
[8] *Ibid*., 16.

their image of how God's word is meant to be executed upon the earth. Because the laws of the Quran represent God's will and were created to safeguard public welfare, pious believers are obligated to follow the literal interpretations of the text.[9] Perceived as a fringe, "other" entity by moderate Muslims, Islamists seek to reverse the secularization of the Muslim world.

Islamists affirm that their belief system is the only correct way to govern society, and resist change due to their perception that modern interpretations of the Quran are movements towards Western appeasement intended to delegitimize and attack Islam.[10] They see modern interpretations as illegitimate because they do not comport with Islamist hermeneutics. Seeking to preserve what they imagine to have been the pure sanctity of "Original Islam", Islamists consider any viewpoint which differs from what they perceive as true to be contaminating.[11] Their self-privileging identity as the authorized and correct interpreters of the Quran creates a strong dichotomy in social classification. As a result of their self-affirming reading of the text, any Western influence, value, or theory which contradicts the Islamists' narrow definition of "correct Islam" supports their self-identification as the antithesis of the West. Because Islamists define themselves as what they are not, anything that Islamists perceive as Western constructs, such as human rights, feminism, or democracy, are viewed as suspicious, and Islamists are dubious about its appropriateness for Islam.[12]

The Islamists' distrust of secular law reflects the Islamists' belief that a God sanctioned society can only be achieved through perfectly practicing rituals and rules for worship as

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[9] *Ibid.,* 99.
[10] El Fadl, *The Great Theft,* 13.
[11] El Fadl, *Great Theft,* 18.
[12] El Fadl, *The Great Theft,* 97-98.

articulated through *Shariah*.[13] Rather than utilizing morality to govern their understanding of *Shariah*, Islamists use the literal law to govern their moral understandings. While Moderates live out the spirit of *Shariah*, leaving room for interpretation and allowing for the code's modification, Islamists see the message as achieving perfection when was originally written. As a result of its infallibility, Islamists extol that *Shariah* cannot be changed or interpreted to say anything other than what it exactly says. As a result of the law's divine origin, there is no need to analyze the instructions for obtaining salvation, since they have been precisely expressed through the law.[14] This attitude also characterizes the literal interpretation of some Quranic verses and *hadiths* to create discriminatory rulings against women and introduce misogynistic overtones to the Islamic tradition.[15]

The adherence to *Salafism* and the emphasis on the exact recreation of the Islamic society described in the Quran and the *Sunna* stems from the Islamists' desire to rebuild the idealized era of the Prophet and his companions in today's modern society. Originally, *Salafisim*, a term which refers to the time period in which the Prophet, his Companions, and their successors lived, began as movement for Islamic reform. The founders, Muslim reformers Muhammad Abduh, Jamal L-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Rashid Rida, Muhhamad al-Shawkani, and Jalal al-San'ani, advocated for a reinterpretation of the Quran and *Sunna* that was not bound by previous interpretations, but rather, took into consideration the demands and needs of modern society. Yet by casting off previous jurisprudence, the original *Salafists* idealized the time of the Prophet and

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[13]*Shariah* translates to the straight path and is seen as the way to live according to God's will. It is eternal, immutable, and unchanging, thought to come directly from God's mind. It is the ideal law. For more information see El Fadl, *The Great Theft,* 150.

[14] *Ibid.,* 129.

[15] Ali, Shaheen Sardar. *Gender and Human Rights in Islam and International Law: Equal before Allah, Unequal before Man?* The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2000. 22. Print.

created an environment where anyone could claim to be a legitimate source of religious authority, capable of interpreting and issuing religious decrees.[16]

Though *Salafisim* cast off Islamic juristic tradition, it was not hostile to competing interpretations of Islam. But religious concessions for the sake of political gain perverted the renaissance movement.[17] As *Salafism* aligned with *Wahhabbism*,[18] the reform movement transformed into a belief system that was "invariably intolerant, supremacist, oppressive to women, opposed to nationalism, hostile towards most forms of creative artistic expression, and rigidly literalist [Islamist]."[19] Both the *Salafis* and the *Wahhabis* desired to recreate a golden age of Islam, ignored historical juristic traditions, and responded to the challenges of modern society by referring to the allegedly simple original meaning of the Quran. As the original *Salafists* died and their writings disappeared, new *Salafist* writings were usurped by the *Wahhabbi* movement.[20] The opportunity for, and rhetoric of, reform were thus co-opted by supporters of what we can now call the Islamist movement.

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[16] El Fadl, *The Great Theft,* 76.

[17] El Fadl, *The Great Theft,*." 77.

[18] Wahhabi theology was established by an eighteenth-century evangelist Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab. He declared that Muslims had strayed from Islam's true path and had to return to "true Islam" to regain God's favor. To achieve this, 'Abd al-Wahhab insisted that Islam had to be cleansed of what he considered corruptions like mysticism, intercession, Shi'ism, and other heretical practices. In reaction to what he saw as the destabilizing effects of modernization, 'Abd al-Wahhab sought definitive and incontestable truths from certain texts that he deemed applicable to all individual and societal issues. In addition to his selective elevation of religious texts, 'Abd al-Wahhab considered anything that was not a product of "Arabia proper" inherently dubious. For 'Abd al-Wahhab, "a literal implementation of the commands and practices of the Prophet, and a strict adherence to correct ritual practice," was necessary to reclaim Islam. For Wahhabism, the Quran and the *Sunnah* were more like life instruction manuals than moral and spiritual guidelines. Legal precedents whish did not support Wahhabi ideology were simply dismiss as heretical fallacies. For more information see El Fadl, *The Great Theft,* 45-47, 54.

[19] *Ibid.,* 86.

[20] *Ibid.,* 80.

<u>Maximalists, Criminals, and Challengers: Analytical Lenses Used in this Paper</u>

As shown through my explanation of the two schools of thought, Islamists espouse maximalist beliefs and seek to impose their version of the truth upon the wider *umma* community.[21] Bruce Lincoln, a scholar of religion in the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, coins the term "maximalist" to describe a religious perspective that believes religion should dictate all aspects of life due its claim on truth and authority. These claims are made through transcendent (going beyond concrete boundaries of human understanding and history) rhetoric or discourse. What renders a discourse transcendent is the ability of the orator to convince his audience that their claim is the epitome of the ultimate truth. "Claims of transcendence require both a person to make the claim and a person to receive it positively; if the audience doesn't agree, then the claim was unsuccessful."[22] As a result of their distrust of the secular state's capability to govern a society in accordance with God's will, Islamists respond to the threats of modernity by utilizing religious texts to grant legitimacy to their political agendas.[23]

Walter Runciman is an important theorist within the social psychological discussion of relative deprivation. Though not the first person to use this term, he was the first theorist to apply it to social justice in his book, <u>Relative Deprivation and Social Justice</u>. Coining the term "reference groups", Runciman defines relative deprivation as the state which results when a person realizes that a more fortunate community than the group they are a part of exists and presents the possibility of relative prosperity. In this situation, the group from which a person

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[21] "The umma is an overarching community of the faithful which holds great importance alongside doctrines of individual responsibility before God. The umma is a joining of all believers, without regard to sect, caste, class, ethnicity, gender, or nationality." - Campo, Juan E. "Umma." *Encyclopedia of Islam*. New York: Facts on File, 2009. 687-90. Print.

[22] Personal Interview with Tennyson Jacob Wellman February 26, 2012.

[23] El Fadl, *The Great Theft,* 46.

gathers their standards of self worth and value is the "normative reference group".[24] The

normative reference group will only be a part of relative deprivation if its members are aware of

a comparative reference group against which they can measure themselves, therefore creating a

sense of deprivation that lasts until the deprived person can succeed in catching up to the more

prosperous reference group.[25] The key idea of relative deprivation is

> If A, who does not have something but wants it, compares himself to B, who does have it, then A is 'relatively deprived' with reference to B. Similarly, if A's expectations are higher than B's, or if he was better off than B in the past, he may when similarly placed to B feel relatively deprived by comparison with him.[26]

Critical to a sense of relative deprivation is that the person experiencing relative deprivation has

a subjective sense of deprivation rather than a necessarily objective deprivation. It is not the

tangibility of their deprivation that matters; rather it is their expectation which dictates their

deprivation. By expecting to receive something, a person will feel more discontent when that

something does not materialize.

Relative deprivation demands that another group or individual exist to serve as a

"comparative reference group".[27] Though the term encompasses the word group, it is not

necessary for the comparative reference group to be an actual group composed of multiple

members. It could also be an individual who possess what the relatively deprived desires. The

significance of the comparative reference group is that it provides evidence of what could be by

providing a comparison standard with which the deprived can contrast their group or self. A

possible cause for the identification of a comparative reference group by the normative reference

group is the existence of one extremely visual individual or a large group of people who are

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[24] Runciman, W. G. "Concept of Reference Groups." *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice: A Study of Attitudes to Social Inequality in Twentieth-century England*. Berkeley: University of California, 1966.12. Print.
[25] *Ibid.,* 9.
[26] *Ibid.,* 10.
[27] *Ibid.,* 11.

publically promoted or elevated in class, religious, or socio-economic stature while the seemingly minority normative group remains stagnant.[28] The public elevation increases the likelihood that the normative reference group will develop a sense of relative deprivation, regardless of whether or not the perception that an unequal or biased promotion exists is empirically valid. As long as there is the assumption that opportunities for mobility are selective and exclusive, relative deprivation will manifest itself.

In his article, "Revaluating Relative Deprivation Theory", Craig Webber extends the application of relative deprivation theory and applies it to criminology to examine the emotions which inspire people to commit crimes. Webber seeks to use relative deprivation to understand the role that social structure plays in contributing to the psychological factors which account for a criminal's sense of relative deprivation.[29] He agrees with Runciman's analysis that relative deprivation exists when Person A compares themselves to another group or person who is seen as being more privileged than Person A, and that the experience of relative deprivation is based on the *perception of deprivation* rather than actual deprivation.[30] He deviates from Runciman, however, by not classifying relative deprivation as a theory, but instead, labeling it as an outcome of societal comparisons. The experience of relative deprivation is an outcome which results from the decisions and choices that a person makes, rather than a state of theoretical existence.[31] The person chooses to value themselves in the very least equal, if not superior, to the comparative group, and therefore, the individual is just as worthy of receiving the privileges denied to them.

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[28] *Ibid.,* 19.
[29] Webber, C. "Revaluating Relative Deprivation Theory." *Theoretical Criminology* 11.1 (2007): 98. Print.
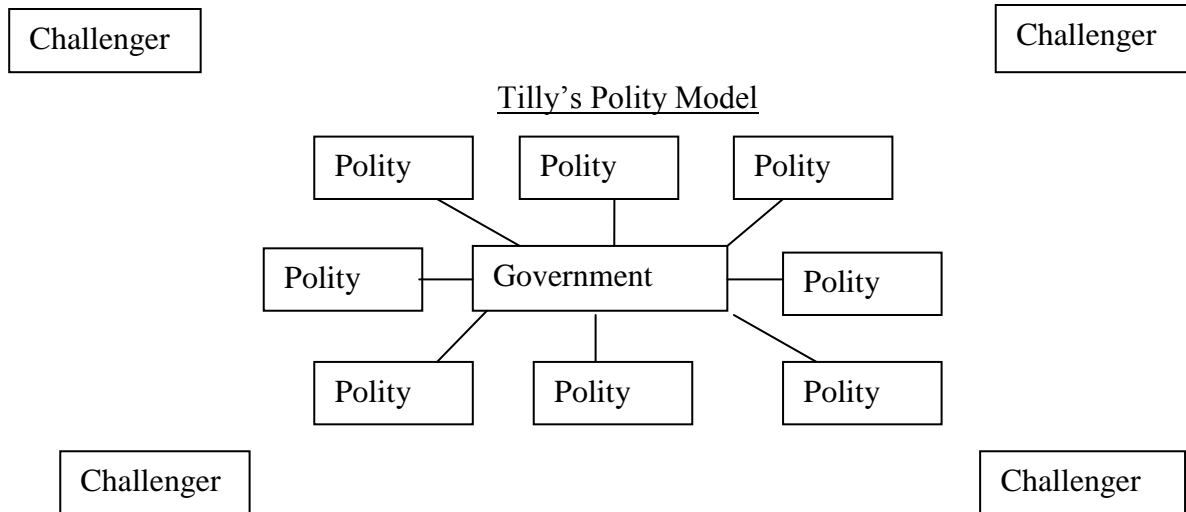[30] *Ibid.,* 104.
[31] *Ibid.,* 107.

Within the criminology framework, Webber argues that individuals who experience a shared sense of relative deprivation can join together in solidarity to carry out crimes against the privileged group. Participating in crime together increases this feeling of solidarity and can create a support system where individuals can experience the value which they think they deserve. The unity created by the group identity is strengthened by the self-reflection that each individual experiences by seeing their values and ideology reflected back at them from their fellow group members.[32]

The out-group identity created by a shared experience of relative deprivation creates a reference group that can serve as a challenging contender for power. Within Charles Tilly's polity model, a challenging contender for power is an individual or group of individuals within the population which want to utilize resources to influence the government, yet lack the legitimacy to be successful. Unlike the challengers, the polity is a set of contenders who are successful in their claim to governmental legitimacy. The government is the central organization which has a monopoly over violence, power, and other means of coercion over the population.[33] Together, the government's position at the center of the model, combined with the polity's access to government resources, and the challengers' identity as an out-group combine to create Tilly's polity model.

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[32] *Ibid.,* 112.

[33] Tilly, Charles. "Does Modernization Breed Revolution?" *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies*. Comp. Jack A. Goldstone. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986. 45-53. Print.

Challenger

Challenger

Tilly's Polity Model

Polity   Polity   Polity

Polity   Government   Polity

Polity   Polity   Polity

Challenger

Challenger

Within this model, the challengers gain the capacity to contend with the government or polity's access to resources by acquiring their own resources and accumulating enough land, labor, arms, and money to defy the polity's and government's control. Placing Islamists within Tilly's Polity Model, the Islamists are seen as challenging contenders for power. Islamists believe that their interpretation of Islam grants them a superior claim to legitimate authority, and they leverage this claim in their role as challenger. As a challenger, Islamists are often deprived of the same rights granted to the general polity, such as equal representation or participation in government. Their radical belief system which advocates for the overthrow of the state further contributes to their exclusion. The denial of rights and participation increases their sense of deprivation.

<u>Chapter 1: Islamists Who?</u>

<u>Historical Contexts for their Rise and Conditions for their Continuance</u>

One of the key characteristics of Islamists is their sense of relative deprivation with reference to both contemporary (non Islamic and other Muslim) groups and idealized historical groups. Islamists' sense of deprivation lies in their expectation of how they deserve to be treated. A literal reading of the Quran provides them with evidence that the class structure created by the Prophet Muhammad promoted a religious hierarchy. Though tolerance was extended to members of other monotheistic religions, these populations were not members of the ruling class. What differentiates the Islamists from Moderates is that Islamists hold this state as an ideal and want to recreate this situation in modern society whereas Moderates acknowledge that it occurred but do not see it as a useful blueprint for modern society.

According to Fred Donner, a Near Eastern historian, the Hudaybiya agreement signed by the Prophet Muhammad with the Quraysh tribe[34] in 628 A.D. marked the beginning of his successful expeditionary campaign to expand the area under his movement's control. Though the terms of the agreement promised a decade of peace, the Prophet Muhammad accused the Quarysh tribe of violating the agreement and, in response, invaded and conquered Mecca. His military and political power only grew after this conquest. He launched a series of campaigns to the north of the Arabian Peninsula, and offered commanding positions or material gains to ensure the loyalties of the conquered populations. While monotheistic "People of the Book", Christian and Jewish populations, were tolerated, polytheists were attacked and forced to accept

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[34] The Quraysh tribe ruled over Mecca and was the guardian of the Ka'bah. Prophet Muhammad was a member of a sub-tribe within the Quraysh tribe, and the leaders of the Quraysh originally opposed the Prophet's invitation to conversion, forcing him to flee to Medina. After surrendering to the Prophet in 630, members of the Quraysh tribe went on to become the caliphate in the Umayyad and ʿAbbasid dynasties. For more information see Adamex, Ludwig W. "Quraysh." *Historical Dictionary of Islam*. Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2009. 258-59. Print.

the concept of one God.[35] This trend of unifying monotheistic populations under a nascent

Islamic civilization continued even after the Prophet's death.

Towards the end of the Prophet Muhammad's life, his success in conquering opposing

nations created a militantly pious movement which was determined to establish a new political

order and society that was in compliance with God's revelations. The community of Believers

which followed the Prophet's teachings viewed itself as the superior religious ideology of its

time, and therefore, saw itself as elevated above the sinful world by its righteousness. Under the

authority of the Believers, conquered populations were required to either obey prayer duties and

pay purifying taxes to atone for their previous sins or face execution.[36] As the movement's

military prowess grew, followers of the Prophet Muhammad brought the entire Arabian

Peninsula under its control. This quick and overwhelming success was taken as a sign that their

expansion and conquest was in accordance with God's will, an assumption which granted

legitimacy to their rule and might have made some groups more willingly accept defeat.[37] As the

Believers ascended to power, their hegemonic rule demanded that anyone living under their

authority accept the three tiered class structure which recognized the core of the Prophet

Muhammad's followers, or the Believers, as the top tier. The second tier was comprised of tribes

or individuals who quickly submitted to the new regime and supported it through its expansion.

The lowest tier included tribes and communities which resisted the expansion and, as

punishment, were often taken as captives or slaves.[38]

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[35] Donner, Fred McGraw. *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 2010. 49-50. Print.
[36] *Ibid.,* 49-50.
[37] *Ibid.,* 101.
[38] *Ibid.,* 102-103.

Though a majority of the expansion that occurred under the 7th century Islamic civilization was the product of violent conquest, this was not necessarily the case as it expanded beyond the Arabian Peninsula and into Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Iran. In contrast to the diverse, polytheistic tribes which inherited the Arabian Peninsula, the communities that inhabited the Fertile Crescent were already adherents to a monotheistic belief system. Though they were required to pay taxes to the new hegemonic system, affirm their belief in one God, and affirm their commitment to living piously, they were included in the Believers' expansionary movement.[39] As the Byzantine, Sasanian, and Zoroastrian communities fell under the control of the start of an Islamic civilization, the Believers worked toward fulfilling God's prophecy that they would "inherit the earth."[40]

The history of a society ruled by rightly guided Believers provides Islamists with a historical memory of how God intended society to conduct itself. Prophet Muhammad's rapid military expansion and the establishment of a social hierarchy which privileged Believers over non-believers creates a stark contrast to the deprivation Islamists experience as a result of their persecuted and repressed status in modern society. This past societal framework provides Islamists with the expectation that they are entitled to an elevated importance in society since they live out true Islam and are attempting to resurrect God's ideal society.

In addition to memories of grandeur and power which provide an expectation of how society should be, three conditions create a sense of relative deprivation and a favorable environment for proselytizing literal interpretations. The first is a fear that the threat of Western imperialism, whether it is real or imagined, is responsible for marginalization, and any feelings

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[39] *Ibid.,* 110-111.
[40] *The Qur'an.* Trans. M.A.S. Abdel Haleem. New York City: Oxford University Press, 2004. 33:25-27.Print.

of inadequacy will only grow as the Western imperialist regimes thrive. The second condition polarizes experiences of inadequacy into the "us versus them" mindset of a cosmic war where the Islamists are the ultimate victims in a war to defend their culture, history, and way of life rather than their individual lives. State-sponsored persecution and torture which targets Islamists contributes to their belief that they are the only true defenders of Islam fighting against a great evil. The enormity of the war renders a loss inconceivable, yet simultaneously, victory is only possible with the intercession of God. The third condition is that the exclusion of Islamists from political institutions further radicalizes their political beliefs as they view themselves as persecuted outsiders on the fringes of the political system. Their feelings of exclusion cause them to desire regime change and challenge the established system through radical and reactionary ideologies.

The three conditions listed above emphasize Islamists' sense of deprivation as Western imperialism, state repression, and political exclusion are blamed for stripping away the honor and prestige that the Islamist population previously held in society. This expectation of honor enhances the Islamists', "…sense of impotent powerlessness directed at circumstances that are beyond one's control, such as the economy, the government, etc."[41] Seemingly undervalued and abused by society, Islamists feel powerless and attacked, with no support system outside of their community. The long term duration of their feelings of active repression stirs resentment for their conditions and treatment. By binding together and isolating themselves from their oppressors, Islamists can unite to form an empowering political movement which offers hope for change and the reinstitution of their historic superiority. The protracted abuse turns resentment into a mobilizing force to regain self-control over their living circumstances. As a result of their

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[41] Webber, *Does Modernization Breed Revolution?,* 100.

disenfranchisement, Islamists desire control over women because they desire the power and political legitimacy that they believe the state denies them. Seeking to end their feelings of disenfranchisement, Islamists restrict female autonomy because female participation in the public sphere undermines and challenges their claims to authority. The treat of Western imperialism further enhances Islamists' sense of relative deprivation as they see Western expansionism as a threat to their Islamic civilization.

The Clash of Civilizations: The Impact of Perceived Western Imperialism on Radicalization

Harvard political scientist and former National Security adviser Samuel Huntington coined the term "clash of civilizations" in his book, *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996). As the U.S-Russian rivalry came to a close, the clash of civilizations arose to take its place, and, according to Huntington, conflicts between different cultural entities became the most dangerous and important occasions for war. After the Cold War, Huntington declared that a new world order had formed which divided the world into eight major civilizations, and elevated cultural distinctions as the most important qualifier for identifying separate civilizations. These civilizations were the West, Latin American, African, Islamic, Sinic, Hindu, Orthodox, Buddhist, and Japanese. For Huntington, the two overarching cultural entities which frame the clash of civilizations are the West and the rest. While "the West" is comprised of stable, developed, and wealthy Western states, "the rest" are anarchical nations rife with tribal, ethnic, and religious conflicts.[42]

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[42] Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996. 19-39. Print.

Islamists also view the world through a clash of civilizations lens. The perceived threat of Western imperialism causes Islamists to feel like victims in their own society and contributes to their belief that they face imminent destruction at the hands of the antagonizing Western occupiers who are intent on weakening and destroying Islamic civilization. "The Middle East, like many other areas of the globe, suffers in part from the effects of modernization, lack of political participation, poor economic growth, foreign indebtness to the West, the competition for arms, and increasing urbanization."[43] The rapid modernization of post-colonial societies in the Middle East led to the implementation of puppet leaders protected by Western interests. Caring more about the money in their coffers then their citizens, these leaders built authoritarian regimes dependent on foreign aid and a willingness to use force against their own citizens.

Toby Craig Jones, a scholar on the political intersections between the environment, state formation, war, and Islamism, states that the West, primarily the United States, militarized authoritarian regimes throughout the Persian Gulf to protect their oil interests and ensure that pro-Western regimes maintained control over oil-wealthy states. Though these brutal regimes may have lacked domestic legitimacy, the United States viewed these oil autocrats as a lucrative arms market and as, "oil producing states have faced repeated internal and external threats, including domestic unrest, invasion, and regional or civil war, or at least the imminent prospect of turmoil."[44] As these leaders consolidated their power through abusive means, the West stood by and looked the other way in exchange for a share in the regimes' oil wealth, use of strategic military bases, and a market for Western products and companies.

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[43] Milton-Edwards, Beverley. "Contemporary Politics in the Middle East. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2000. 2. Print.
[44] Jones, Toby C. "America, Oil, and War in the Middle East." *The Journal of American History* 99.1 (2012): 208-18. Web.

In his 1993 New York Times Op-Ed and Editorial, Samuel Huntington predicted that the world was at the cusp of a clash of civilizations where Western civilization would find itself engaged in a bloody conflict against all other civilizations. Disagreements between civilizations over the role of religion, gender equality, and history would boil over after festering for centuries. As the world became smaller due to advances in technology, awareness of and animosity towards other civilizations would increase and expose economic and social discrepancies between local and international identities. In response to these threats, Huntington predicted that religious fundamentalist movements would take advantage of these divisions and rush to desecularize the world.
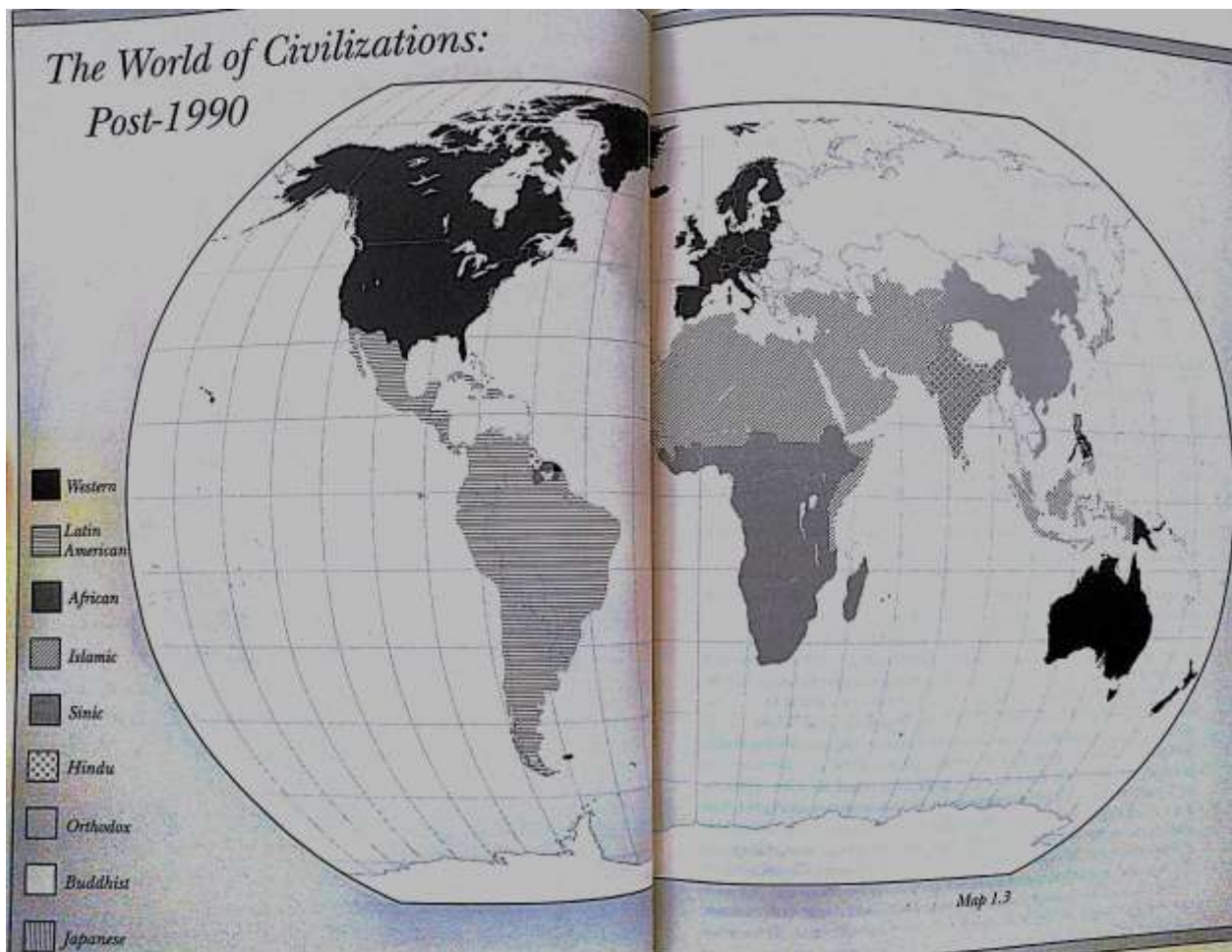
Figure 1.1: A map of the world showing the borders of civilizations, as delineated by Samuel Huntington. Map from Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996. 20-39. Print.

Specifically, Huntington describes the clash between Islam and the West as one marked by intense rivalry and a history of violent conflict. Without distinguishing between a moderate or Islamist conception of Islam, Hunting generalizes his idea of an "Islamic Civilization" by accusing Islam of conceiving itself as a superior way of life. Its pattern of conflict with Western civilization stems from its universalist claim that it is the one, true path that humanity should follow. In the twentieth century,

> the Islamic Resurgence has given Muslims renewed confidence in the distinctive character and worth of their civilization and values compared to those of the West. The West's simultaneous efforts to universalize its values and institutions, to maintain its military and economic superiority, and to intervene in conflicts in the Muslim world generates intense resentment among Muslims.[45]

Quoting "a leading Egyptian journalist, Mohammed Sid-Ahmed"[46], Hunting seeks an Islamic community representative to support his claim that the Islamic community is engaged in a clash with Western civilization. Though the journalist separates religion from cultural imperialism, Huntington identifies Islam as anti-Western overall, with an agenda to fight against Western aggression. He claims that the entire Islamic civilization views the West as "materialistic, corrupt, decadent, and immoral,"[47] and that there are no Western allies or supporters in the Islamic world. Everyone in the Islamic civilization is out to destroy the West.

Though Huntington's argument essentalizes the world by framing it as the defensive West against all other civilizations, seeing all Muslims as the same, and declaring Islam as perpetually in conflict with the West, these flaws are often accusations made by Islamists about Western expansionist ideologies which seek to hinder their resurrection of Islam's golden age. While Huntington extols Western efforts to promote democracy and liberalism as universal

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[45] Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations,* 207-218.
[46] *Ibid.,* 213.
[47] *Ibid.*

values, Islamists perceive these endeavors as attacks against their power and values. Corrupt political regimes upheld by Western powers provide a physical and tangible manifestation of the Islamists' feelings of relative deprivation as their efforts to recreate the "golden age of Islam" are actively threatened by Western powers. Through this world view, Islamists have created a reactionary identity defined in opposition to the West with no room for deviation from their brand of Islamic discourse.[48] Their strict interpretation about what constitutes true Islamic discourse views any form of secularism as an import from the same Western imperialism which breeds institutionalized repression through authoritarian governmental systems. Because Islamists define themselves as the antithesis of the West, they oppose anything that they perceive as Western.[49] Therefore, support for female autonomy and social mobility are viewed as products of Western secularism whose purpose is to weaken and destroy Islam.

Technically, this fear of extinction at the hands of Western civilization is not completely without a basis in reality. Historically, Western powers have long been active colonizers and invaders of Islamist territory. In 1798, armies under Napoleon invaded Egypt, and colonization continued into the nineteenth century. As the British developed economic markets and industrial endeavors in the Middle East, specifically Egypt, in 1882, dependence on European trade and economic expertise led to Egypt's bankruptcy and the eventual seventy-year occupation by England. By the 1830s, France solidified its occupation of Algeria by exporting French settlers to Algeria and replacing the indigenous Muslim rulers with French settlers who were extensions of the French state.[50] With these French settlers came the implementation of French culture and

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[48] Ramadan, Tariq. *What I Believe*. New York: Oxford UP, 2010. 35. Print.
[49] El Fadl, *Great Theft*. 256.
[50] Milton-Edwards, *Contemporary Politics*, 20.

customs over the Algerian people as the colonizers attempted to force their interpretation of modernization and secular values upon the Algerian, Muslim population.

The defeat of the Ottoman Empire led to the implementation of puppet governments by imperial powers, and the division of the Middle East according to European interests. As colonial powers dismantled and defeated the Turkish controlled Ottoman Empire, they replaced it with artificial political structures and systems which elevated puppet elites to the role of authoritarian rulers who governed for the benefit of European powers. As European colonizers exercised their sense of entitlement over the Middle East, the use of Orientalism as a legitimating ideology for colonization brought Christian missionaries to the Arab world who were intent on converting, "the barbarians of the East and were largely insensitive to the traditions of Islam as faith and system of government."[51]
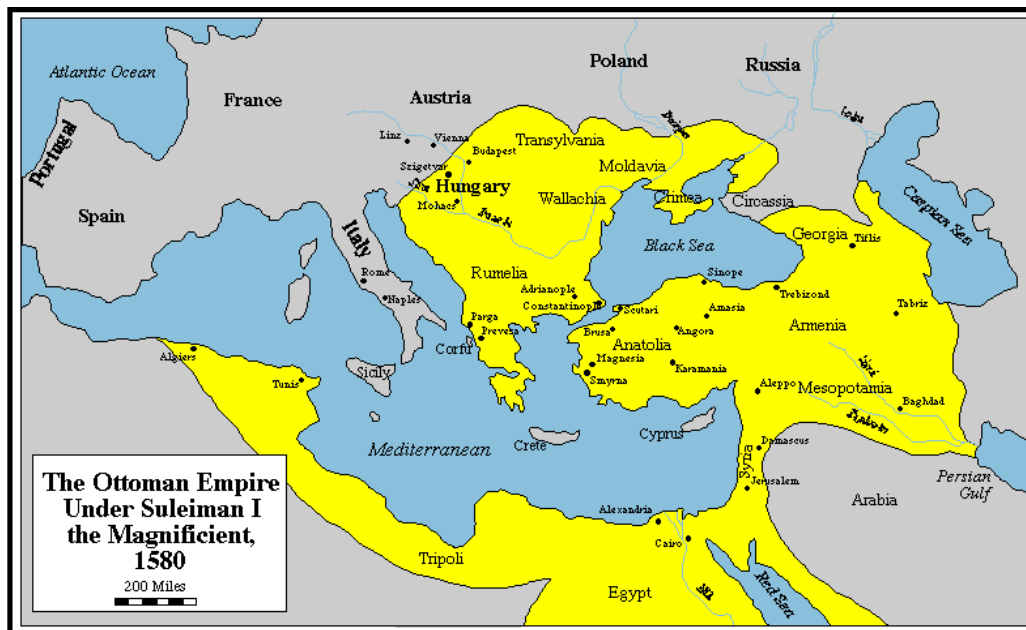
Figure 1.2: Map Of the Ottoman Empire at its greatest extent. Map from: http://www.dartmouth.edu/~gov46/ottoman-empire-1580.gif

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[51] *Ibid.,* 2.
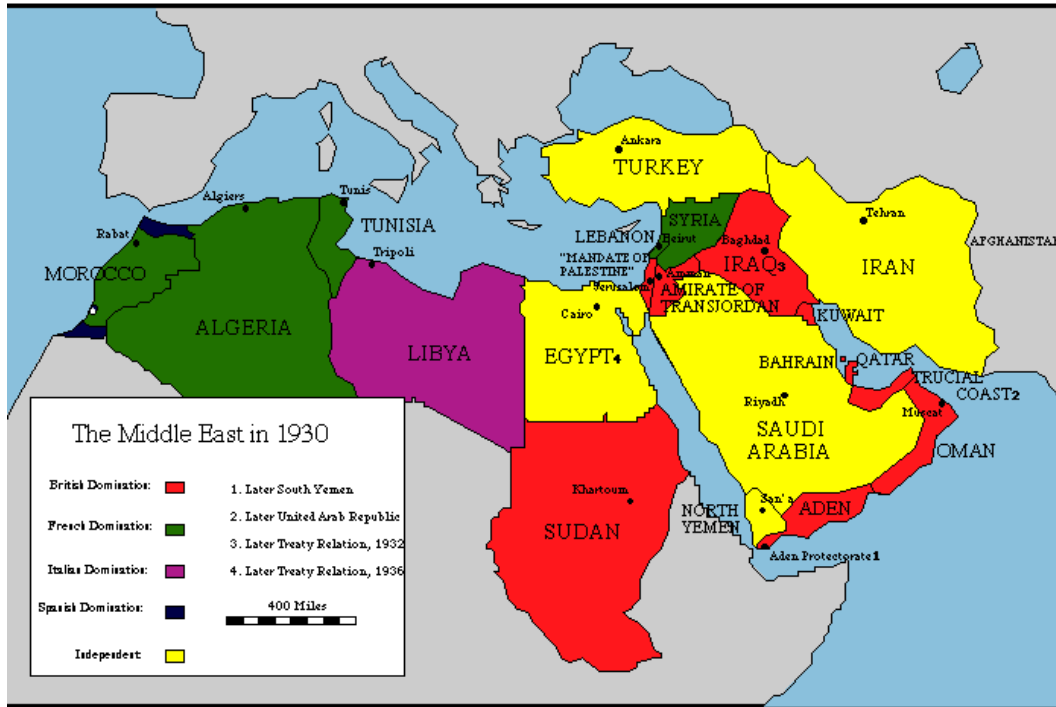
Figure 1.3: Map of the newly divided Middle East after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. Map from: http://www.dartmouth.edu/~gov46/mideast-1930.gif

Though England and France had promised Arab independence in exchange for Arab support to overthrow the Ottoman Empire, after the Ottoman's defeat, it quickly became clear that neither party intended to honor their previous agreements with the Arab states. The European powers proceeded to delineate boundaries of new nation-states without a regard for pervious existing ethnic and religious backgrounds. With European imperialism came Europeanization of politics, economy, culture, and society. As European governments controlled their local puppet leaders, European leaders advocated for the abolition of traditional tribal and clan identities in exchange for the Western approved definition of a nation-state.[52] Thus, Western sponsored puppet rulers who ignored the previous five centuries of Islamic rule in favor for European style governments replaced the Muslim controlled Ottoman Empire. These rulers directly attacked and dismantled traditional systems of governance and repressed the native Arab

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[52] *Ibid.,* 27-29.

population. The modern day creation of Israel, a child of Western expansion, the invasion of Iraq, and the stationing of U.S. troops on Saudi Arabian soil further confirmed the impending takeover of the Middle East by the West.[53]

The domestic affairs of even the smallest Western country provide support for Islamists' claims that the West is intent on destroying and delegitimizing Islam. The Danish cartoon scandal in which a Danish newspaper published twelve cartoons featuring images of the Prophet Muhammad legitimized Islamists' perceptions that they were caught in the middle of a clash of civilizations with the West as the evil aggressor. When combined with President Bush's rhetoric invoking "Judeo-Christian" values, the cartoon controversy proved to the Muslim world that the West was "out to get us".[54] The reappearance of the cartoons two years after their original publication and two years after Middle Eastern governments officially forgave the Danish government further provided evidence to support Islamists' claims that moderate Muslim or secular governments were unfit to rule the Muslim world. Islamists used this controversy and the governments' acceptance of the West's apology as proof that current government institutions were nothing more than Western puppets determined to mock and undermine the sanctity of Islam. This view rejected the claim that the moderate governments which ruled over a majority of the Middle East were not the defenders of Islam that they claimed to be, but rather, were illegitimate sources of government who used their authoritarian power to suppress the true defenders of Islam and the rightful leaders of the Muslim world.

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[53] El Fadl, *Great Theft,*166.

[54] Klausen, Jytte. "The Freedom Agenda Rebound." The Cartoons That Shook the World. New Haven, [Conn.: Yale UP, 2009. 169. Print.

Figure 1.4: A Sample of the images featured in the Danish cartoon controversy. Images from http://creepingsharia.wordpress.com/mohammed-cartoon-collection/

This feeling of institutionalized inequality and repression by Western supported leaders contributes to Islamists' feelings of relative deprivation by increasing resentment of the illegitimate authorities' monopolization of power. The perceived deprivation of opportunity and power is enhanced as Islamists compare themselves to Westernized, secular, citizens who seem to not receive the same demeaning abuse that plagues Islamist movements. This perception of inequality contributes to the cosmic war sentiment that Islamists are the only warriors in a battle to defend the ultimate truth and win back the prestige and power that Islamists feel they are owed.

The Cosmic War: The Role of Authoritarian Regimes in Feeding Islamists

Islamists believe that authoritarian regimes in the Middle East are Western puppets responsible for their sense of victimization and deprivation within their home society. This belief contributes to their perception that they are engaged in a cosmic war to defend their culture, history, and way of life. The Islamists' judgment of their cosmic war as Islam versus the rest combines with their history as victims of colonization to reinforce their opposition to any reforms these governments offer. This includes opposing government efforts to increase gender equality or religious freedom. This perceived history of injustice and further marginalization contributes to Islamists' sense of relative deprivation.[55] The repression of Islamist movements by political secularists further radicalizes Islamists who envision themselves participants in a cosmic war against authoritarian secularism.

As explained by Mark Juergensmeyer, an earthly conflict is likely to be elevated to the status of a cosmic war when the conflict involves a defense of culture rather than individual live.

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[55] Shehadeh, Lamia Rustum. "Sayyid Qutub." *The Idea of Women in Fundamentalist Islam*. Gainesville: University of Florida, 2003. 62. Print.

Losing the war is inconceivable and the enormity of the struggle makes it seem that victory is only possible with the intercession of God.[56] The setting of a cosmic or apocalyptic war elevates moral responsibility beyond the temporal plane where the Islamist is fighting against the state, and redefines the actors as those fighting for a greater power and those fighting against it. The Islamist gains the upper hand by becoming the authority that sets the parameters for what can be considered moral within the idea of a just war. By claiming to be the absolute good, Islamists are able to delegitimize the state's monopolization of force since in the cosmic war the state is on the wrong side, rendering it an illegitimate authority. [57] As pointed out by Juergensmeyer, understanding the divisions created by Islamists' movements between them and the greater society allows outsiders to understand the perception within communities that they are under attack and in need of defensive responses to the external intrusion.

When Tunisia gained independence in 1956, the new regime implemented a strategy of rapid secularization. The secularization of institutions included decreasing Islam's influence over personal status code, dismantling *Shariah* courts, and suspension of state donations to religious institutions. The decreased visibility of pilgrimages and Ramadan fasting supported claims that the government was on a path to westernize Tunisia.[58] These state sponsored cultural changes were seen as attacks on Islam meant to undermine the religious authority. These were not benign changes to a penal code, but rather were the first steps in eradicating a centuries old religious civilization and culture. In reaction against what was seen as a state supported attack on tradition, the appeal of literal interpretations of Islam increased as a counter reaction to the state's

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[56] Juergensmeyer, Mark. *Terror In The Mind Of God: The Global Rise Of Religious Violence*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. 164-165. Print.
[57] *Ibid.,* 148-66.
[58] Ayubi, Nazih N. M. *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*. London: Routledge, 1991. 113. Print.

regulation of cultural and traditional ideologies. In this case, the state's actions were viewed as the actions of an external aggressor which intended to wage war on the history and destiny of an Islamic Tunisia.

The utilization of torture and imprisonment by authoritarian regimes in several Muslim countries also enhances the Islamists' senses of victimization and wrongful attack. In conjunction with imprisonment, institutionalized discrimination reaffirms the Islamists' sense of alienation and persecution.[59] Because authoritarian regimes must silence any opposition in order to maintain their power, Islamists are targeted by the governing regimes as dissenters and challengers of authority who need to be criminalized in order to maintain the accepted status quo. This despotism validates the perception that the government is an antagonistic agent determined to undermine the Islamist agenda. The state becomes the Islamists' enemy whose existence is representative of an anti-religion society which threatens the Islamists' quest to reinstate the golden age of Islam. The concept of a society at war with the Islamists elevates the Islamist to a stature of power equal to the state, thus validating the Islamists' perception that their mission has a legitimate cause and justification for the use of force and eventual overthrow of current state institutions.

The setting of a cosmic war permits Islamists to adopt a rationalization which justifies their ultimate goal of societal upheaval and a return to a maximalist application of Islam. As stated in the introduction, a maximalist interpretation demands that all aspects of life be conducted in accordance with the truth claims and authority of religion. Since the state does not comply with the maximalist view of Islam, Islamists respond to the threats of modernity by

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[59] El Fadl, *Great Theft,* 260.

utilizing religious texts to grant legitimacy to their political agendas.[60] The state of war invokes the Islamists' power and grants them a collective identity of supporters who have suffered and been humiliated by the state yet who continue to persevere in the face of repression. Their future triumph is made even more momentous by the imaging of a victorious cosmic war; a triumph over man's inauthentic laws, and the establishment of a society controlled by Islamists fulfilling God's will on earth.

This cosmic war mentality transforms the Islamists' physical experience of torture and repression at the hands of the state into an allegory of the impure and corrupt repressing the pure and the truthful. Because Islamists view themselves as defenders of authentic Islam, there is no possibility for defeat since a loss in the struggle for Islam would result in death for the Islamists, dissolution of their ideal Islamic society, and an undoing of everything they believe. The experience of torture further personalizes the Islamists' struggle by directly targeting individuals and creating a climax in which individual action and resistance to the state could potentially overthrow the system and stop the repression. The personal identification with resistance and violence elevates the Islamists' reform of state institutions to a cosmic war.[61] The state becomes the unholy who represses the Islamists out of a fear of the truth which must be silenced.

This state sponsored repression and torture also creates martyrs whose legacies are transformed into rallying points which command loyalty. Martyred Islamists have a transcendent power superior to the earthly state regime. What renders a discourse transcendent is the ability of the orator to convince his audience that their claim is the epitome of the ultimate truth. "Claims of transcendence require both a person to make the claim and a person to receive it

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[60] Lincoln, Bruce. *Holy Terrors: Thinking About Religion After September 11*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. 5. Print
[61] Juergensmeyer, *Terror In The Mind Of God,* 164.

positively; if the audience doesn't agree, then the claim was unsuccessful."[62] By elevating fallen

Islamists to the status of martyrs, Islamists utilize the image of conquered violence and God's

support to claim transcendent authority and recruit followers to their ideology.

Figure 1.5: Sayyid Qutub in prison in Egypt. Born October 9, 1906-Executed August 29 1966. Picture from http://www.nybooks.com/multimedia/view-photo/3838/

Sayyid Qutub is an example where torture and repression further radicalized his anti-

Western and anti-secular views, and whose death made him a martyr and the father of the

modern *jihad* movement. Blamed for an assassination attempt on President Gamal Abdel Nasser,

Sayyid Qutub was arrested and imprisoned during a government crackdown on the Muslim

Brotherhood. His decade long sentence in Liman Tura Prison in Tura, Egypt made him a victim

of torture, abuse, and inhuman neglect, and transformed his desire to modernize Islam into an

irreversible commitment to radicalism. Witnessing the severe abuse of fellow Muslim

Brotherhood members which resulted in the death of over twenty Brothers further enhanced his

sentiments of isolation and alienation from a regime complacent and supportive of the abuse

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[62] Personal Interview with Tennyson Jacob Wellman February 26, 2012.

against him and his Brothers.[63] His increasing resentment of those free outside of prison yet who

did nothing to assuage his perceived unjustly imprisonment and torture, labeled the government

as a slave to ignorance and an obstacle to the establishment of God's Islamic system.

When Sayyid Qutub began his writing career, his poetry, stories, and articles reflected a

promising career as a secular author or journalist. Themes of liberalism, romanticism, and

individualism exposed his acceptance of Western writers over his psyche. His writings of the

1920s and 30s reflect his belief that, while religion could reform an individual's soul, it should

not be involved in every discussion. He did not believe in judging the piety or religiosity of

others, and mainly devoted his writing to supporting a secular Egyptian nationalistic ideology.[64]

"O, you who are tender with animals/ Do not forget people who might groan and are hurt/ Dogs

in Egypt might receive care/ While its people are deprived and shattered/ If there is some dignity

in Egypt/ It will get angry and blood will boil on its side."[65] Though his poem showed his

criticism of the Egyptian government for ignoring the socio-economic situation in Egypt, this

early poem showed no trace of the radical religiosity to come. Rather, it placed its hope for

reform within the hands of an Egyptian secular awakening which would realize its dignity and

potential to cast off its shackles of poverty and oppression.

The death of his mother and his travels to the United States, however, altered his

attitudes towards secularism and his acceptance of Western thought. His exposure to what he

viewed as moral depravity, materialism, racism, and pro-Zionism he experienced during his visit

to the United States disgusted Qutb and made him question the trust and allegiance he had placed

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[63] Shehadeh, *The Idea of Women,* 50.
[64] Musallam, Adnan. "Qutb's Childhood and the Emergence of a Poet and a Critic." From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005. 50-52. Print.
[65] Musallam, *Qutub's Childhood,* 39.

in the West. Slowly, he began to see the West as a dying hegemon who was destined to be replaced by the rising Eastern authority.[66] The Western imperialistic influence in Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt, and its support of the creation of Israel proved to Qutub that the West was the source of moral decay. Though his writing began to reflect his increased Islamicization in response to his shock, it increased exponentially as a direct result of his experience in Liman Tura Prison.

While incarcerated, in 1964 Qutb wrote *Ma'alim fi al-tariq* (Milestones on the Road) and called for the inevitable establishment of an Islamic society and an overthrow of the current governing system through *jihad*.

> This religion… is a declaration that sovereignty belongs to God alone and that He is the Lord of all the worlds. It means a challenge to all kinds and forms of systems which are based on the concept of the sovereignty of man; any system in which the final decisions are referred to human beings, and in which the sources of all authority are humans, deifies human beings by designating others than God as lords over men.[67]

This change in discourse showed that the torture and imprisonment he faced erased any remaining loyalties to or faith in secular institutions. The state-sponsored persecution he experienced proved that the post-colonial Egyptian government was nothing more than a puppet to Western imperialism, unfit to usher in the Islamic Revolution. No longer a supporter of any secular institutions, Qutb now believed that only a system of governance created in accordance with God's Islamic system would be able to implement and adhere to Islamic ideals.

Sayyid Qutb's radical calls for *jihad* and an overthrown of the Egyptian government drew the attention of the Egyptian government. After a second arrest and imprisonment, Qutb was executed on Monday, August 29, 1966. His death, however, was not enough to diminish the

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[66] *Ibid.,* 50-52.

[67] Quṭb, Sayyid. "Milestones." *The Sayyid Qutb Reader: Selected Writings on Politics, Religion, and Society.* Ed. Albert Bergesen. New York: Routledge, 2008. 35-42. Print.

impact of his revolutionary ideas and the dissemination of his writings. Instead, his death turned

him into a martyr for the Islamic resurgence movement. Posthumously, his writings were

translated into Persian, English, Dari, and many other languages, and were used as the manifesto

springboard for Islamist groups in Europe, the Philippines, the Taliban, and Al-Qaeda's

international network. His premature death permitted these radical groups to usurp his writings

and interpret them in any way necessary for the benefit of their movements.[68] The state's

decision to execute Qutb proved to Islamists that current state institutions actively persecuted

"good" Muslims striving to live by God's way and were unfit for the establishment of an Islamic

civilization.

Figure 1.6: Zaynab al-Ghazali, born January 2, 1917- died August 3, 2005. Picture from
http://this.org/magazine/2010/04/08/6-progressive-religious-movements-throughout-history/

Zaynab al-Ghazali, an Egyptian activist closely associated with the Muslim Brotherhood

and founder of the Muslim Women's Association, also experienced torture at the hands of the

state, and, as result, became a stauncher supporter of the secular state's destruction. Imprisoned

for refusing to spy on the Muslim Brotherhood, in her memoirs, Ghazali claimed that while

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[68] Musallam, *Qutub's Childhood,* 71-172.

imprisoned and torture, she experienced, "… images and dreams of prophets and saints welcoming [her] into the Garden of Eden, or images of the just Islamic society being established upon martyrdom… [and] perceived [her] prison sentence an integral part of jihad."[69] Her experienced further politicized her interpretation of Islam, and her resilience in the face of torture made her believe that she was a soldier surviving God's test who would go on to usher in a new era of Islamic authority. Rather than diminishing her Islamist ideology, the experience of torture strengthened it as she fully committed herself to undoing all secular society and uniting the Islamic world in one Islamic state.

The experience of torture and state repression creates a division between the comparative reference group and the membership reference group. The comparative reference group, "… is that group which we compare our situation in terms of the attributes possessed by that group, [while] a membership reference group is [the group in which we belong]."[70] The torturers or employees of the state who carry out the institutionalized repression becomes the comparative reference group to the Islamists' membership reference group since they have access to state resources and are socially elevated by the state to have power over the Islamists.   The Islamists' perception that the torturers are wrongly elevated since they perpetuate the unjust secular laws that subjugate the Islamists' movement further aggravates Islamists' sentiments of wrongful inferiority. While the comparative reference group roams the streets free and without repression, the Islamists are wrongly locked up for trying to resurrect their idealized Islamic society. Islamists' sense of deprivation increases as the secular population stands by while Islamists are rounded up and further excluded from political participation.

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[69] Shehadeh, *The Idea of Women* 126.
[70] *Ibid.,* 62.

The Politically Excluded: The Role Political Exclusion Plays in Fueling Islamist Ideology

The state's decision to torture and imprison Islamists rather than allow them to participate in the political process further disenfranchises and alienates Islamists' movements. As shown in Tilly's polity model, this disenfranchisement renders Islamists' movements contenders for power. An example of how the banning of a political party can increase its radicalization is Hizb al-Nahda (the Renaissance Party). Founded in Tunisia by Rashid al-Ghannoushi, the party was not recognized by the government, and as a result, was not permitted to participate in elections. The government's crackdown on party members who managed to evade the ban by running as independents sparked and renewed determination to change the system. As Rashid al-Ghannoushi stated, "Until now, we sought only a shop, and we did not get it. Now it's the whole *suq* that we want."[71] The exclusion of his political party further proved that state intuitions were immoral and hostile towards Islam. Therefore, in order to create a government that was in accordance with Islam, gaining a few seats in Parliament was no longer sufficient.

The exclusion of Islamists' political parties further expands those who qualify as members of the comparative reference group. While torture and repression labeled the perpetrators of torture as compliant with the comparative reference group, the exclusion of Islamists' parties and organizations makes the entire civilian population who is permitted to participate in politics guilty by association. Since anyone who participates in the political process possess the legitimacy and power that Islamists desire, they are immediately a part of the comparative process that generates resentment and feelings of relative deprivation. The in-group society as a whole becomes an obstacle to Islamists' goals and wrongfully diverts respect from the Islamists towards the secularists, and specifically towards non-Islamist women.

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[71] *Ibid.,* 172.

The participation granted to women is particularly threatening to the Islamist movement since, according to Islamist theory, women are only permitted to participate in external society after they have completed and accommodated her husband's demands and womanly duties. In their idealized Islamic society, aside from the Prophet's wives, women were second class citizens whose weak and vulnerable nature demanded that they be placed under the care of superior men. The betterment of women over Islamists is the ultimate relative deprivation as it spits directly in the face of their literal, selective, and narrow reading of the Quran.

__Chapter 2: A Guidebook for Female Piety:__

__The Rules for Women Under Islamist Interpretations of Islam__

Relative deprivation explains the actions of Islamists at a micro level. The sensation of relative deprivation can cause Islamists to believe that the worth of their lives is diminished and unappreciated by the state. Yet by grounding their identities in a maximalist interpretation of religion, and by viewing the world through a maximalist lens, Islamists are no longer valueless, but rather, are invaluable. By identifying themselves as fighters for Islam, their suffering is no longer pointless but is a part of a greater picture that will end with the fruition of a civilization governed in accordance with Islamist values.

In his book, *Holy Terrors: Thinking About Religion After September 11,* Bruce Lincoln explores why people commit acts of terror in the name of God. Through an analysis of the documents left behind by the hijackers, Lincoln explains how their interpretation of religious discourse, "construed mass murder and terrible destruction as religious practices and also provides insight into the way al Qaeda constitutes itself as a religious institution that acts on behalf of a broader religious community (the Islamic *ummah*)."[72] Their selective and literal application of religious discourse to their daily lives reaffirms their commitment to not only creating a society governed in accordance with God's will, but also fought for with God's blessing. The Islamists' world view allows them to define power not in terms of material support such as weapons, wealth, or numbers, but to measure power in terms of piety and devotion to living out God's law and desire.[73] Since Islamists consider themselves to be the only true believers who correctly live out God's path, they possess a greater power than the secular forces which dominate society, exclude them from political participation, and persecute their population. Their world view gives them hope that they will ultimately win the cosmic war.

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[72] Lincoln, *Holy Terrors,* 8.
[73] *Ibid.,* 12.

In addition to supporting their perception that they are society's correct authority, the Islamists' fusion of religious discourse with their lifestyle also delineates the world into those who support the Islamists' cause and the enemies who oppose their mission Though the sensation of belonging to a movement that goes beyond your person generally eliminates feelings of exclusion or powerlessness for most individuals, a group identity transforms an Islamist specifically from simply an unvalued individual into a soldier working with his comrades to create an ideal society led by the rightly guided Islamists. Together, they are the, "believers, the faithful, allies of God, and God's faithful servants… merged with the pious heroes who made possible Islam's initial triumphs and become their reinstantiation."[74] By offering access to a divine, alternative authority which loves rather than abuses the Islamists, their interpretations of the Quran and the Sunnah provide Islamists with a support group of like minded believers who unite to fight the, infidels, non-believers, and allies of Satan.[75] By applying Craig Webber's understanding of relative deprivation as an outcome of societal comparisons to Bruce Lincoln's analysis of maximalist interpretations of religion, you can see how religion empowers Islamists by giving their existence and mission a divine purpose. Their adherence to their specific, normative interpretation of how Islam *should be* transforms them from petty criminals who deserve to be abused into their self-identification as members of a greater whole who seek to enact God's will on earth.

Islamists' sense of relative deprivation stems from their position as a challenger group which seeks to overthrow the *jahiliyyah* government and replace it with the "correct" application

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[74] *Ibid.,* 13.
[75] *Ibid.*

and interpretation of religion.[76] Following Islamist logic, if today's modern society is as bad as the pre-Islamic world, then Islamists must abolish the entire modern system, including its progressive norms such as gender equality which they perceive as nothing but the Western values which uphold the *jahiliyyah* society. By paralleling themselves with the Islamic warriors from the 6th century, Islamists shape all aspects of their identity, including what they consider to be appropriate gender roles, around alleged 6th century norms. Thus, their interpretation of patriarchy is rhetorically or imaginatively rooted in a tradition of male dominance grounded in a reactionary rejection of the West which is misidentified as historical memory.

Islamists emphasize that a woman's primary identity is serving as her family unit's base because their religious lens turns the traditionally male dominated culture of the 6th century into a stagnant, ancestral tradition whose foundation in divine commandments gives it a transcendent and infallible status.[77] As they seek to rebuild their interpretation of Islam's ideal state, Islamists react to their subjective sense of perpetual victimization by the state, Western imperialism, and exclusion from the political process, with an aggressive form of patriarchal protectionism. In reaction to their perception that the current world is not functioning as godly society, Islamist seek to end society's immorality by restructuring what is commonly understood to be the foundation of society: the family unit. This is not an uncommon feature of various reactionary movements, as it is often claimed that, "societies can guard against the corrosive possibilities of untrammeled eros by making sexual relations a social, moral, and legal concern."[78] By taming sexual desires, ending degenerate male-female interactions, and reinstituting appropriate societal

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[76] According to Bruce Lincoln, *Jahiliyyah* is, "the barbarism and spiritual ignorance that preceded Islam and offered savage-but misguided and unsuccessful-resistance to the Prophet, armed followers, and his message." For more information see Lincoln, *Holy Terrors,* 13.
[77] *Ibid.,* 55.
[78] *Ibid.*

norms,[79] Islamists believe that they can reverse society's alleged decline and end the corrupting lust brought on by the exposed female.

According to Islamists, female empowerment must be avoided because it is seen as a western construct that is unnatural and alien to Islam, and threatening to their resurrection of the Islam's golden age. Utilizing a patriarchal interpretation of the Quran to elevate the role of man over the role of women, Islamists turn the outward appearance of the female body into a representation of her internal piety, judge a woman by how she carries her body and acts in public as a symbol of family honor, and declares that a woman's uncovered body is a danger to society. These declarations reinforce the Islamist idea that women must maintain their traditional rule as silent occupiers of the man's home whose task is to raise the children and not threaten the man's role in society.

The Men Won the War: Islamists' Patriarchal Interpretation of the Quran

The patriarchal protectionist interpretation of the Quran permits the manipulation by Islamists of traditions and historical memories for political purposes in order to diminish women's movements for equality.[80] As defined by Cain, et al. (1979: 406), "… patriarchy is a set of social relations with a material base that enables men to dominate women. Patriarchy, therefore, describes a distribution of power and resources within the family. Men maintain power and control of resources, and women are effectively powerless and dependent on men."[81] In contrast to the Moderates' elevation of the Quran's morals and lessons over specific social forms, Islamists abide by a selective and patriarchal textual interpretation which elevates the male gender to a position of superiority by looking to 6th century social institutions as explicit

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[79] *Ibid*.
[80] Shehadeh, *The Idea of Women,* 8.
[81] Oyekanmi, Felicia Durojaiye. "Institutionalization of Gender Inequality in Nigeria: Implications for the Advancement of Women." *Population Review* 44.1 (2005): 57. Print.

and divinely ordained models. The Islamists' patriarchal interpretation promulgates that God has willed women to be subordinate to men in social and legal standing due to the females' allegedly natural physiological and psychological inferiority. As a result, the elevation of the male Islamist as women's protector and guardian is divinely sanctioned. Therefore, any rhetoric which emphasizes a woman's right to motherhood while condemning her participation in the public sphere is understood as not anti-woman, but simply fulfilling God's will to protect and care for women.[82]

Islamist interpretations integrate the patriarchal context of the time period in which the Quran was written into their understanding of women in any time period, analyzing the presence and role of women through their relationship to men. By claiming that their actions are resurrecting the golden age of Islam, Islamists can use a cultural and religious script to normalize the male domination of female bodies. In their article *Deconstructing Militant Manhood,* Lara Montesinos Coleman, University of Bristol, U.K., and Serena A. Bassi, University of Warwick, U.K., examine gendered power relations to explain how privileged masculine identities perform at the macro level of states, international institutions and transnational corporations. Coleman and Bassi argue that, "Power-laden performances through which gender is produced are intricately bound up with cultural scripts… the reiteration of gendered cultural scripts… bolsters other effects of gender-based oppression on women". [83] The Islamists' use of a narrow and selective reading of the Quran creates a gendered script that claims legitimacy through religious and cultural traditions. As stated by Fedwa Malti-Douglas, a professor of Gender Studies and Comparative Literature at Indiana University Mauer School of Law, the superior male identity

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[82] Davary, Bahar. "Muslim and Christian Women: The Image of God and the Common Legacy of Patriarchy." *Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies: Alam-e-Niswan* 15.2 (2008): 67-68. *EBSCO*. Web. 24 Feb. 2013.
[83] Coleman, Lara, and Serena Bassi. "Deconstructing Militant Manhood." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13.2 (2011): 205-08. *Ebsco*. Web. 24 Feb. 2013.

validates and governs the female existence, turning the body into an object constructed by and for the male.[84] This view is echoed by Tariq Ramadan in his book *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation.* He argues that the male dominance of Quranic interpretations allows male Islamists to subjectively read religious texts in a manner that causes the justification of the privileged role of men and the inferiority of women.[85] According to Khaled Abou El Fadl, Islamists' selective reading of the *Sunna* ignores stories of the Prophet's mercy and benevolence, and instead concentrates on *hadiths* which highlight his vengeful and chauvinistic teachings, even if those teachings have been proven false by traditional forms of jurisprudence.[86]

Sayyid Qutub used a patriarchal interpretation of the Quran to confine women in the primary role of bearers and care-givers of children. An Egyptian author, educator, Islamist theorist, poet, and the leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and '60s, Qutub is often regarded as the father of the modern day Islamist movement. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Sayyid Qutub is an example where torture and repression further radicalized his anti-Western and anti-secular views. His decade long sentence in Liman Tura Prison in Tura, Egypt made him a victim of torture, abuse, and inhuman neglect, and transformed his desire to modernize Islam into an irreversible commitment to radicalism. While incarcerated, in 1964 Qutb wrote *Ma'alim fi al-tariq* (Milestones on the Road) and called for the establishment of an Islamic society and an overthrow of the current governing system through *jihad*.

Symptomatic of his relative deprivation, Qutub reiterated that a woman must fulfill only the duties that are appropriate for her gender in order to avoid excessive competition with the

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[84] Malti-Douglas, Fedwa. "Female Body Male Gace." Medicines of the Soul: Female Bodies and Sacred Geographies in a Transnational Islam. Berkeley: University of California, 2001. 16. Print
[85] Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 228
[86] El Fadl, *Great Theft,* 55.

men in society. As part of his ideal Islamic society, Qutub argued that due to females' natural attributes and inclinations towards nurturing, any skills or education that a woman gains must directly increase her child rearing skills. According to Lamia Rustum Shehadeh's translation of Sayid Qutub's works, in contrast to the woman's responsibility to stay home, it is the responsibility of the man to care for and provide for the woman due to the males' naturally superior physicality and mental state. For their own protection, women thrive in an environment where they are sheltered and isolated from society. The female's overly sentimental nature renders her unable to act as a guardian or as an independent being, and to place this burden of independence on her would be a violation of her natural rights.[87]

The use of "science" to support Islamists' claims of female inferiority further permits them to denounce their critics' accusations that Islamists are anti-women. Unlike moderates and non-Islamists who have, in their view, corrupted proper and divinely ordained societal structures, Islamists desire to protect and shelter women since they are the basis of the family unit, and thus the basis of society. According to Islamist opinion, all societal ills are the fault of moderates, liberals, and non-Muslims because these groups upset God's ordained natural order and gender hierarchy. To combat the repercussions of an unbalanced society, Islamists claim that the woman must be protected in order to ensure that she is exposed solely to appropriate Islamic values and teachings, and to perpetuate these values in future societies. Since the biological make up of the female renders her unable to protect herself, this protectionist rhetoric elevates the man, and by extension, the Islamist leadership.

The patriarchal protectionism interpretation renders women appendages to the men in society, valued as husband helpers who confine their sphere of influence to the private home. If

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[87] Shehadeh, *The Idea of Women,* 60.

women internalize this doctrine and pass on this comprehension of appropriate gender roles, Islamists can increase their power through the repetition of social processes. Theoretically, the augmentation of their power base could alter the current system of political rule by producing subjects compliant with Islamist ideology who act in accordance with Islamists' wishes.[88] By ensuring that women stay at home, raise the children, and show obedience to and dependence on her husband, Islamists can guarantee that future societies will be indoctrinated with Islamists' values and deference to Islamist leadership. As a result, Islamists claim that stability and peace for society will return.

God Only Loves She Who is Unseen: The Female Body as a Representation of Internal Piety

Female veiling creates the ultimate dichotomy between the public and private spheres of life by literally hiding the woman from the public and confining her to the private sphere even when she is physically outside of the home. The male domination of Islamic scholarship permits Islamists to interpret vague Quranic verses that discuss appropriate female behavior to create an ever increasing exclusion of Muslim women from the public sphere of life. The disappearance of women behind the veil is a physical and symbolic exclusion of the female being in public life.[89] Since modesty is considered the most important quality that women can posses, conservative dress is the most outward way that a Muslim woman can show her commitment to modesty. Even though Islamic dress for women can fall anywhere on a scale from just a basic headscarf to *niqab*, the full body and face veil, Islamic dress is used as a way to judge if a woman is, "good

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[88] Coleman, Lara, and Serena Bassi. "Deconstructing Militant Manhood". 205-08.
[89] Ali, *Gender and Human Rights.,* 76.

and modest… who understands the importance of appropriate relations between the sexes, of confirming in this external way one's allegiance to Islam."[90]

Islamists automatically use the outward appearance of a woman to determine her relationship with God and her internal piety a one-to-one equivalence. A woman who chooses to discard her veil is also accused of discarding her tradition and faith. An uncovered woman is seen as an immoral degenerate who cast aside her tradition in exchange for Western values. Thus, Islamists have reinterpreted the empirical diversity *within* Islamic traditions over time and space as a binary between "true", i.e. Islamist, tradition and Western-infected deviance. Though Islamists desire to confine a woman's body to the strictly private and domestic sphere, their identification of the female body as a tool to measure her piety strips the body of its right to privacy, instead rendering it a public possession which all of society can judge.

The act of covering the body to hide it from the male gaze transforms the body into a public statement, drawing attention to the very act of concealment, so that the hiddenness is expressed openly for all eyes to see. While an uncovered woman becomes the victim of sexual objectification, a covered woman finds herself subject to religious objectification in which her body is a display of her confirmation to Islam. Interestingly, though both men and women can fall victim to lust and sexual desire, it is only the woman who must be confined and segregated since a woman's veil does not only protect her, but also protects society from the temptation of women as *fitna.* [91] *Fitna* is a problem or threat to the community and a source of divisiveness.

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[90] Haddad, Yvonne, and Jane I. Smith. "Women in Islam: The Mother of All Battles." *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint* 01.01 (1996): 138. Print.
[91] According to Hans Wehr A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, *fitna* is defined as temptation, trial, charm, charmingness, attractiveness, enchantment, captivation, fascination, enticement, temptation, infatuation, intrigue, sedition, riot, discord, dissension, and civil strife. For more information see Hans Wehr, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic. 3 rd Ed. Beirut: Librairie du Liban (1980)

Anything that is *fitna* is a source of sexual enticement, a corruptor of society, and a danger that breeds civic and social strife.[92]

Islamists view women as a source *fitna* because women are seen as sources of temptation for men. Women are labeled as, "… heaving bundles of sexual enticement and allure", who need to be punished, "…for the sexual fantasies men have projected [upon] them."[93] Because of a woman's ability to provoke a corporal desire within the man, if a woman experiences sexual harassment or any transgression against her, according to Islamists' interpretations of Islam, it is her fault alone for tempting the male gaze. The female temptress beckons the husband to pursue an extramarital affair and entices a father to molest his daughter. The man is immune from responsibility because it is the woman's body which is the source of sin and debauchery.[94] An unveiled woman threatens the fabric of society by unleashing *fitna*. Thus, male regulated veiling is necessary to protect society and the female from the lust her body creates.

An exposed woman threatens society and the family unit by arousing male sexual temptations and increasing the possibility of inappropriate extramarital encounters. The veil protects society from a man's untamed lust by ensuring that the temptress is unable to corrupt society by segregating her and imposing self control. Segregation also ensures that a woman who enters into marriage enters into the union virtuous and pure, in adherence with Islam. By elevating a woman's wardrobe choices to a judgment of her morality, she becomes the object of erotic desire. The claim that uncovered women fall victim to harassment and unwanted attention supports the image that Islamists are not trying to subjugate women, but rather are trying to protect the bearers of society.

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[92] El Fadl, *The Great Theft,* 257.
[93] El Fadl, *The Great Theft,* 260.
[94] Malti-Douglas, *Medicines of the Soul*, 130.

The Town's Gossip Defines Her: Women's Body and Actions as Symbolic of Family Honor

Both moderates and Islamists claim that Islam's decree that a woman covers "the charms of her body"[95] are not intended to censure woman, but exists to protect and preserve a woman's safety. However the interpretation of what constitutes appropriate veiling and the extent men play a controlling role in regulating a woman's wardrobe differs between the two schools of thought. Islamists believe that pleasure and joy must be regulated in accordance with God's laws otherwise a woman's passions and weakness might lead her down the path of degenerate delirium.[96] Unlike censure, regulation is not understood as an expression of reprimand or punishment handed out by man, but rather, regulation is done in accordance with God's will in hopes of living out God's desire and eradicating the sources of *fitna* which threaten the establishment of a society governed by "true Islam". Like all religious literalists, Islamists use Western society as the standard of immorality and blame the sexual liberation of women for AIDS, pornography, and high divorce rates. According to Islamists, a dishonorable Muslim woman is one who emulates her Western counterpart as she rejects Islamic values and shames her family by acting promiscuously.[97] A woman's modesty is representative of the family unit she belongs to, and thus, by shielding the woman from any near occasions of sin, the community preserves the moral and spiritual future of the children.

According to Hasan al-Banna, a Sunni revivalist who founded the Muslim Brotherhood, women should not desire to excel in excessive education or a professional career. In her book, *The Idea of Women in Fundamentalist Islam,* Lamia Rustum Shehadeh outlines al-Banna's

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[95] *Ibid.*

[96] *Ibid*

[97] Shaaban, Bouthaina. *Both Right and Left Handed: Arab Women Talk about Their Lives*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991. Print.

biography. Born in 1906 in a small town northeast of Cairo, he began his career as an Islamic scholar at a young age. For his early education, al-Banna attended a Qur'anic school, and upon graduation, enrolled in a teachers college called the Dal al-'Ulum seminary. Upon graduation, he taught at an elementary school by day and taught night classes on Islam to merchants and civil servants. At age 22, he founded the Society of Muslim Brothers, whose mission was to reinvigorate Egypt's secular society with Islam. As his organization's popularity grew, al-Banna organized paramilitary units, and by 1948, he successfully established a clandestine organization which raided the homes of his opponents, bombed movie theatres, attacked hotels, and harassed unveiled women. He was eventually assassinated.[98]

Hasan al-Banna characterized as anything above the basic education needed to educate her children about the correct way to live out Islam or any education that would put her in competition with men. Rather, to uphold family honor, a proper family must be comprised of a mother whose primary objective in life is to attend to her home and family. Her natural place is in the home, and it is only after she completes her natural duties and finds herself with some spare time that she is permitted to pursue activities outside of the home.[99] The Muslim Brotherhood claims that the justification for the belief that women thrive in the home environment is actually based in biological and psychological facts. Unlike men who possess strength, reason, logic, and independence, women are physically weak and psychologically preordained to be dependent, vulnerable, and emotional.[100] By giving priority to her maternal duties, a woman recognizes and fulfills her natural role and predisposition for dependence, and only then, becomes an asset to her community.

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[98] Shehadeh, *The Idea of Women,* 13-14.
[99] *Ibid.,* 8.
[100] *Ibid.,* 19.

Zaynab al-Ghazali, also a leading teacher and propagator of the Muslim Brotherhood's mission in Egypt, supported al-Banna's claims that the different natures of men and women made each gender predisposed to succeed in certain jobs. At just 18, Zayanb al-Ghazali founded the Jama'at al-Sayyidat al-Mulimat, the Muslim Women's Association. She viewed feminism with suspicion and claimed that it was another Western ploy to colonize the Arab and Islamic World.[101] She reiterated that any woman who took on men's work was a curse upon society and responsible for society's moral decline. Though there may be certain instances during the fight to establish an Islamic state that a woman may be required to function outside of a home, her primary responsibility is always first and foremost as a domestic. Al-Ghazali claimed that women's inability to correctly fulfill their roles as wives and mothers had resulted in the destruction of the family unit, and thus, their actions were responsible for everything threatening the creation of an Islamic state.[102] As her organization grew in membership and influence, Hasan al-Banna offered to merge her organization with the women's branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Though she refused to merge organizations, she pledged her allegiance to him and the mission of the Muslim Brotherhood to resurrect Islam's golden age.[103]

The belief that women are predetermined to be inherently psychologically weaker than and dependent on men creates a hierarchy between the sexes which reinforces the male dominance over Islamists' interpretation of women's appropriate role. Because Islamists see themselves as victims of the West, state sponsored persecution, and exclusion from the political process, women remain one of the last groups that Islamists can assert control over. The use of alleged biological evidence to substantiate Islamists' claims of female inferiority show that the

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[101] *Ibid.,* 121-22.
[102] *Ibid.,* 129.
[103] *Ibid.,* 121-22.

weakness of the woman lies at her bodily core. Her value is equal to her body's adherence to Islamist interpretations of what constitutes as appropriate female behavior. Therefore, as a result of her mental weakness and emotional instability, women must be regulated by a superior force which can control her body and ensure her mental stability by confining her to the role of nurturer.

Women who leave the home are seen as a direct threat to Islamist ideology since a society which functions with female involvement in the public sphere contradicts Islamists' statements that a society which does not adhere to the natural order of gender hierarchy cannot survive. The physical and psychological weakness of women should mean that they cannot handle the trials or stresses of working in the public sphere, and the women who are employed should complain of victimization and sexual exploitation since their visibility provokes untamable lust and *fitna*. As a result, these women should desire to take on the veil and confine themselves to the home. Therefore, an employed woman who is successful at what she does and does not complain of objectification is a direct contradiction to Islamist rhetoric. Her existence undermines Islamists' claims that they are the only correct interpreters of God's will since God should not permit such an unnatural defiance to be successful or productive.

By placing the blame for society's failures on the actions of women, Islamists can create a physical enemy that is easily controlled and defeated. Though the ultimate goal of the cosmic war is the overthrow of secular society, the defeat and containment of women provides victory in smaller scale battles. The subjugation of women elevates the men to positions of authority, granting men who may feel like powerless victims of the regime purpose and power. The elevation of these men to the rulers of their household, even if in their external life they may hold subpar jobs or be unemployed, renders the Islamists as the force that empowered these men. This

sense of gratitude generates a loyal body of supporters and labor which Islamists can use to spread their ideology and increase their power. A woman that does not conform to this ideology is a direct threat to this delicate cultivation process.

Zaynab al-Ghazali argues that it is the husband's duty to regulate the extent that his wife veils herself, and it is the wife's duty to obey her husband's determinations. According to her, a husband should ensure that his wife dresses in accordance with Islamic law by veiling her entire body aside from her face and hands in loose, non-perfumed fabrics. Any woman who exposes herself is labeled as a blemish to Islam that must be rejected and condemned.[104] This emphasis on the importance of veiling is used to encourage women to emulate the lifestyle and virtue of the Prophet's wives. By encouraging women to become the physical manifestation of the Islamists' ideal woman, Islamists create a visual presence that asserts their authority and presence within society. As more women adhere to the veil, the physical control of the Islamists becomes more apparent. This physical presence can launch the Islamists' movement out of the position of a repressed minority and into the role of the superior majority.

According to Khaled Abou El Fadl, Quranic laws governing female conduct were intended to protect and safeguard women from abuse and harm. Because the Quran was written in an era of history that was dangerous for women, rules of female seclusion created a body of law that protected the women from exploitation and inequality.[105] This same logic is applied by Islamists to modern day justifications for veiling. Aside from encouraging women to emulate the Prophet's wives, female veiling is intended to protect women from falling prey to the false Western liberation of women. As the West decries the veiling of Islamic women as barbaric

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[104] *Ibid.,* 132-33.
[105] El Fadl, *Great Theft,* 253.

repression, the veil takes on its own identity as a symbol of Islam fighting against Western imperialism and protecting its women from the threat of neo-colonization. A woman who refuses to veil is seen as betraying her religion and siding with the enemy, unworthy of seeking protection from within her community if she falls prey to sexual assaults as a result of her exposure.

Because Allah Said So: Islamists' Interpretation of the Quran to Control the Female Body

By recreating a divinely ordained world order, Islamists hope to end their experience of relative deprivation and political illegitimacy by using a literal and selective interpretation of the Quran to create a society where they are the governing body rather than a challenger group. Their self-identification as the final bulwark against the tide of Western promiscuity which threatens the foundation of their religion and way of life governs their attitudes towards the female body. The intrusion of Western fashions, values, and habits into what is viewed by the Islamists as their sphere of influence contributes to their perception that the West is out to usurp the Arab and Islamic World. Motivated by their desire to regain the power lost after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Islamists justify their behavior by selectively interpreting the text to justify their preconceived notions about what is appropriate for society.[106]

Sayyid Qutb points to the alleged debauchery of Western society as evidence of what happens when neither sex adheres to its appropriate gender role. Rather than seeing the positive aspects of female empowerment and women in the workforce, Islamists see the female presence as a demeaning exploitation and as a threat to the natural order of society. No longer confined to the safety of their homes, Islamists believe that women become victims of prostitution and find

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[106] *Ibid.,* 47.

themselves employed in sectors that exploit their femininity and sexuality. When women are no

longer under the protection of or dependent on men; both genders fall into a cycle of sin and

immorality because female autonomy destroys the basic family unit.[107]

You Have The Right To: Women's Rights Under Islamist Islam

Islamic jurisprudence, or *fiqh,* literally translates to intelligence and knowledge. The term

Islamic law refers to,

> … an amorphous body of legal rulings, judgments, and opinions that have been collected
> over the course of many centuries… The Islamic legal tradition is expressed in works that
> deal with jurisprudential theory and legal maxims, legal opinions (*fatawa*), adjudications
> in actual cases, and encyclopedic volumes that note down the positive rulings of law
> (*ahkam*). [108]

Following El Fadl's definition of Islamic law, El Fadl proceeds to divide Islamic law into two,

distinct categories, *fiqh* and *Shariah*. *Shariah* translates to the straight path and is seen as the way

to live according to God's will. It is eternal, immutable, and unchanging, thought to come

directly from God's mind. It is the ideal law. Unlike *Shariah, fiqh* is humanity's attempt to live

out and fulfill God's law. It is not divine or immutable since it is human law, stemming from the

minds of humanity, and therefore, can be erroneous.[109]

As outlined in the introduction, moderate Muslims and Islamists disagree on what

constitutes women rights within Islam. In addition to these two trends in Islamic discourse, there

are also eight schools of thought which can be consulted to establish a body of women's rights as

human rights. [110] When analyzing the *Sunnah*[111] and the Quran to evaluate what constitutes as

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[107] Shehadeh, *The Idea of Women*, 62.
[108] El Fadl, *The Great Theft,* 149.
[109] *Ibid.,* 150.
[110] Ahmed Al-Mukhaini. Chairman at SASLO Legal Training Center, Muscat, Oman. Personal interview. Muscat 7 Dec. 2011

human rights in Islam, moderate Muslims use a combination of jurisprudence traditions to find the most common trends throughout the multiples schools of thought. Through this process, moderates acknowledge that, because humans cannot access God's mind, they cannot infallibly claim to implement and know the eternal law.[112] Because all laws are written by humans, moderates believe that the rulings and judgments of *Shariah* law which were originally codified over a thousand years ago cannot be directly applied to modern day issues. Instead, they must use the jurisprudential tradition to extrapolate the values of *Shariah* and apply them as best as they can. For moderates, *Fiqh* is not a stagnant occurrence, but rather, a continuous discovery which seeks the best way to apply the spirit of the laws to questions surrounding the ethics of modern day conflicts.

Though theoretically, Islamists do differentiate between Divine law and human law by believing that *fiqh* applies to all issues not explicitly addressed by God, in reality, this distinction is minimal since Islamists believe that, "… *fiqh* is applicable to no more than 10 percent of all legally pertinent issues. Conversely, Shari'a [Shariah] covers 90 percent of all human affairs."[113] Because only ten percent of the law is up for debate, Islamists believe that a majority of *Shariah* was already perfectly revealed in the 7th century, when the Quran was written. As a result of this revelation, the law is immutable and perfect thus justifying the Islamists resistance to modernity.

In her book *Gender and Human Rights in Islam and International Law: Equal Before Allah Unequal Before Man?* Shaheen Sardar Ali outlines three categories for classifying what constitutes as appropriate rights for women under the law. The first category, protective laws,

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[111] According to Khaled Abou El Fadl, "the Sunnah is a body of oral traditions describing what the Prophet and his Companions said and did." For more information see El Fadl, *The Great Theft,* 31.
[112] El Fadl, *The Great Theft,* 150-151.
[113] *Ibid.,* 151.

reflects society's conceptualization of women as a group that is incapable of engaging in certain activities. The second category, corrective laws, identifies women as a separate group that needs special treatment. The third category, non-discriminatory laws, is exemplified in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and includes provisions which reject the contextualization of women as a separate group, and declares that men and women are entitled to equal treatment.[114] When applying these categories to Islamists' interpretations of what constitutes appropriate rights for women in Islam, laws regarding women's rights fall within the protective and corrective categories. This combination creates a discriminatory approach to women's rights which interprets certain injunctions, rules, and regulations of the Quran and Hadith to make women unequal to men.

The ideological leaning of the interpreter dictates whether the *Sunnah* or the Quran are restrictively or liberally interpreted and applied to women's rights. Moderates attempt to extrapolate the liberal teachings of Islam, recognizing that women are autonomous humans with an independent and equal spirituality whose rights are an organic aspect of Islam. In contrast, Islamists believe that movements to increase female equality are products of secularism and inorganic to Islam. Following their logic that ninety percent of the laws needed to govern a society in accordance with God's will have already been revealed, Islamists believe that what constitutes as appropriate for women's rights perfectly exists in the Quran, and thus it is not necessary to use *fiqh* to determine what God has ordained as women's rights. Unlike *Shariah* law which is immutable and unchangeable due to its divine origin, human rights norms which deviate from Islamists' selective, narrow, and literal definition of women's rights are derived from the

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[114] Ali, *Gender and Human Rights.* 42-49.

whims of humanity, and therefore lack comparable authority.[115] Where women's rights granted

through Shariah law are based upon God's will, universal human rights are created to preserve

the individual rather than the community, and thus, are seen as entitlements rather than duty

based rights.[116] The idea that Shariah law stems directly from God and exists in a perfect form,

unaltered by human influence provides it with a transcendental and universal quality.

By nature of its transcendence, the literal application of Shariah law renders any human

law that does not conform to it illegitimate since a manmade law cannot compete with Islamic

law's metaphysical superiority. As a result, this argument can support the claim that modern

women's rights movements attempt to undermine legitimate claims to authority with their invalid

rulings to remove women from their traditional roles and activities and grant them equality in the

traditionally male-dominated public sector. Therefore, Islamists can argue that treaties like

CEDAW are not applicable to Islamic societies since God has already granted women all the

rights that He has deemed appropriate. In contrasts, CEDAW is a non-binding manmade treaty

that attempts to defy God's will and impose Western interpretations of gender equality as part of

a larger movement to usurp all of Islamic society.

The image of human rights as entitlements stems from the Islamists' rejection of Western

imperialism. The freedom and equality encouraged by Western feminist movements is seen as a

demand for excessive entitlements which directly contribute to the moral depravity of Western

society. According to Islamists, the female independence that is legalized in Western charters

and treaties is nothing more than a request to indulge in extra-marital affairs and abortions which

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[115] *Ibid.,* 25.
[116] *Ibid.,* 25, 29.

commodify the female body and deprive Westernized women of their pride and dignity.[117] "And these sexually liberated women could, in an instant, turn into whores or prostitutes in men's eyes; their sexuality remains a potential source of shame and social disgrace."[118] To Islamists, women's rights encompass a woman's right to have a family and be protected and kept by their husbands. Her right is to raise and educate her children, and instill within them appropriate Islamic values and teachings in order to ensure that they grow up to become the basis of a future Islamic society. These rights protect her from becoming a sexual object that is a victim of male chauvinism and patriarchy.

This attitude towards women's rights stems from a literal reading of the Quran and the *Sunnah* which portrays women as socially and economically inferior to men. The influence of culture, traditions, and customs over what is perceived as appropriate for women, combined with the domination of male Islamists over legal jurists, judiciary, and clerical positions also contributes to how women's rights are conceived.[119] This male domination allows Islamists to use selective textual readings which ignore any passage that appears favorable to women in order to justify discriminatory cultural practices, create protective and corrective interpretations of women's rights, and perpetuate a cycle gender inequality. This means that, out of the six thousand six hundred and sixty verses of the Quran, Islamists can elevate the six verses that reinforce gender hierarchies above the others to determine a restrictive interpretation of the proper position of women in Islam.[120]

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[117] Haddad, Yvonne, and Jane I. Smith *Arab Women,* 138.
[118] Shaaban, *Both Right and Left Handed,* 164.
[119] Ali, *Gender and Human Rights.,* 40-43.
[120] *Ibid.,* 43.

When combined with legal structures, the application of patriarchal Quranic interpretations can severely limit female participation in the public sector. The discriminatory nature of personal status laws echoes a patriarchal structure of authority which discriminates against women in areas of inheritance, divorce, marriage, and child custody laws. The literal application of the exact laws that were written during the time of the Prophet reinforces a tradition of female subordination. The delineation of duties and rights according to gender guarantees that male privilege will be upheld.[121] As a result, women's rights are placed in a category separate from men's rights. Not even the 1990 Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam finds the two genders to be equal in rights.

An example of a discriminatory application of rights to women is the rights granted to each partner in a marriage. According to Sayyd Qutub, while a woman should not be married against her will and witnesses should be present to verify the marriage, upon being married, a woman is to automatically assume a subservient role to her husband. Though she is permitted to experience sexual pleasure from her husband, a woman is not permitted to annoy her husband by refusing or withholding sex from him.[122] To punish the wife, however, the husband is permitted to withhold sexual relations from his wife as punishment for disobedience, and he is permitted to beat her, though not with the intent of causing harm, just enough to show his superiority. If the wife remains disobedient, the husband is permitted to divorce her as the ultimate punishment.[123]

Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, a Shi'ah leader in Lebanon, stated that, "Islam provides for gender equality in all things, except for the duties of motherhood and fatherhood." Sheikh Hussein Fadlallah also argued that a wife was obligated to have sexual

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[121] Kazemi, Farhad. "Gender Islam and Politics." *Social Research* 67.2 (2000): 458. Print.
[122] Sardar, *Gender and Human Rights.* 46.
[123] Shehadeh, *The Idea of Women*, 64.

relations with her husband. Because this was her primary duty above all other responsibilities, she was not permitted to undertake other tasks, such as a job outside the home, which would interfere with the immediate satisfaction of her husband's desire. If the woman refuses her husband's sexual advances or desires, the husband is entitled to beat her to avoid committing adultery and restore the balance of the home. As a wife, a woman must not expect any reward for her service to her husband, even if her husband does not serve her. She should not think it is her place to decide when to leave the house since she cannot know when her husband will want sex, a demand she is obligated to fulfill. Sheikh Hussein Fadlallah reiterates that if a woman fails to satisfy her husband, he is permitted to scold her, withhold sex, and finally beat her as punishment for defiance. [124] By trying to refuse her husband advances, a woman attempts to take on a male-esque role that threatens the relationship's power balance and results in her loss of femininity.

This identification of appropriate behaviors for men and women in marriage creates a discriminatory classification of women's rights in marriage. Though a woman has the right to willingly marry, upon entering into a marriage, she loses all autonomy. In contrast to the husband's freedom to withhold sex, seek a divorce, or beat his wife, a woman is not permitted to dictate sexual relations, must buy her freedom from her husband by bribing him with her dowry or any other material possessions, and must accept the beating. Though Islamists say that the husband must not beat his wife with the intention of hurting her, there is no attempt to define what constitutes beating a woman too much. Each man is permitted to use his own judgment as to when he has crossed the line from desiring to punish his wife to desiring to hurt his wife.

The right to demand a divorce is another right that does not support equal treatment of men and women. According to Islamists, the right to initiate a divorce lies exclusively with the

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[124] *Ibid.,* 205.

husband since he is the provider and the logical leader. Because women are prone to be controlled by their emotions, a woman is too emotional and irrational to seek a divorce. A woman can only seek a divorce under conditions of abuse, but even then, she must first seek family counseling to make sure that she is making the right decision. Any divorce is considered null if the woman was menstruating at the time of the divorce. Although Islamists claim that a woman can leave her husband by offering up her dowry as retribution for the divorce, by not permitting women to work outside of the home and rendering them completely dependent on the man, a divorced woman is left destitute with no means to independently support herself or her children. This situation entraps women into staying in horrible marriages, therefore undoing or negating the free will with which she originally entered into the marriage.

In regards to the idea that women have a right to pursue education, Islamists argue that a woman has the right to an education only if it will enhance her maternal skills. As Zaynab al-Ghazali describes the type of education that is appropriate for a woman, "… a wife should be an elegant flower… Only fools will equate the education of women with the education of men… We need special programs that will prepare women for their tasks… to create a loving motherhood… and build happy families."[125] A woman has no right to demand an education that would equate that of a man's due to her inferior intelligence and natural dependence. Rashid al-Ghannoushi further explained the amount of education women should receive by declaring that women deserved to obtain only enough secular education to adequately maintain her home, while focusing extensively on Islamic education. For al-Ghannoushi, Islamic education encompassed how to pray, how to be a faithful housewife, and how to dress.[126] It did not mean an education in Islamic jurisprudence or scholarship, and it was not intended to provide a basis

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[125] *Ibid., 131.*
[126] *Ibid., 177.*

for economic independence since, an education that prepared women for a career outside the home also prepared them for sexual exploitation. Their exodus from the home setting was the downfall of society causing rampant extra marital sex, use of contraception, and the devaluation of a woman's honor by negating the importance of her virginity. Uneducated women who are incapable of reading the Quran cannot provide an alternative interpretation of the Islamic tradition that the Islamists use to justify their claim to true Islamic authority. In contrast, a man is not only encouraged but is required to pursue an education and work outside of the home.

According to Islamists, there is no place for women's movements within their Islamic doctrine. As Zaynab al-Ghazali stated, "… the women's liberation movement is a deviant innovation that took root because of the backwardness of Muslims."[127] The literal interpretation of the Quran causes Islamists to believe that the Quran has already granted sufficient rights to Muslim women, and thus, any attempts to augment or alternatively interpret these rights corrupts Prophet Muhammad's original message. A product of secularism, women's movements that advocate for increased female autonomy are seen as tools of the state intended to dismantle Shariah law and further threaten the Islamist agenda. By challenging traditional gender norms and roles, women's movements also challenge Islamists' claims to political authority on the basis of a traditional interpretation of the Quran.

Because the Quran has already stated that women are inferior to men in intelligence, logic, and physical strength, any attempts to elevate women to a position that is equal to men is seen as illegitimate and rooted in man's law rather than in God's law. The belief that the Quran is God's final revelation, already whole and complete in everything it decrees, supports the

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[127] *Ibid.,,* 129.

Islamist claim that women have already achieved all their necessary and proper rights.[128] As a result, there is no need for women to further campaign for increased rights. Rather, these actions are viewed as contradictory to God's will and undermining of His authority.

Further, women's movements are seen as byproducts of Western imperialism, sent to the Islamic world to destroy the family and tear apart future Islamic societies by attacking it at its roots. Rashid al-Ghannoushi argued that women who sought liberation by adopting Western values actually chose enslavement and shame. In reality, according to Islamists, Western liberation further objectified the woman by exposing her to nudity and eroticism, and enslaving her to capitalism. The pervasiveness of women in the workforce lead to their exploitation through inadequate pay. In contrast, the Islamist movement sheltered and protected women from this form of oppression. Rather than tricking her into a false sense of freedom, as the women's rights movements do, Islamists argue that their movement grants women true freedom since it makes them subservient to no one but God by placing women in their natural state.[129] By keeping them minimally educated and defined by their relationships with men, Islamists claim that they are not repressing women but are granting them the freedom to live as God intended.

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[128] *Ibid.,* 131.
[129] *Ibid.,* 178.

<u>Conclusion</u>

An analysis of three possible conditions, all of which create a sense of relative deprivation among Islamists, is not only helpful to understanding the Islamist ideological framework governing their interpretation of women's rights, but also shows that there is no universal form of female liberation. As the West insists on liberating the "repressed Muslim woman", its actions only strengthen the Islamists' perception of victimization in their own society. Although the West may claim its democratic and liberal values are universal, Islamists perceive these endeavors as attacks against *their* maximalist values and beliefs. The Islamist reaction against Western imperialism and what they perceive as puppet rulers who have no authority or right to torture and exclude them from political participation shows that an external, top down movement for gender equality will only increase Islamist resistance. As the Islamists embrace a world perspective of cosmic war, external actors who promote female autonomy will be viewed with hostile distrust, and actually used as examples of why cosmic war is necessary and just.

Because of their staunch reaction against the West, Islamists will never trust universalist conceptions of women's rights. The universalist position on women's human rights holds that, "All members of the human family share the same inalienable rights… All women are entitled to the rights set forth in international covenants and conventions such as the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political rights, and the 1981 Convention on the elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women."[130] Yet Islamists argue that these conventions are Western treaties written by Western actors for Western society, and thus, have no validity in an Islamic

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[130] Mayer, Ann E. "Cultural Particularism as a Bar to Women's Rights: Reflection on the Middle Eastern Experience." *Women's Rights, Human Rights: International Feminist Perspectives*. By Julie Peters and Andrea Wolper. New York: Routledge, 1995. 176-88. Print.

culture. From an Islamist perspective, there is no such thing as universal norms of women's human rights; there are only Western interpretations of what constitutes as universal.

An alternative approach to augmenting women's rights is to encourage Moderates to advocate for a cultural relativist position on women's rights. Cultural relativism argues that, "human rights standards can vary among different cultures... it is possible, even required, to take into account all relevant factors when deciding if a situation is discriminatory or not, including the social and cultural conditions in a country."[131] Because Moderates are a part of Islam's religious culture, they can interpret religious texts in a manner that promotes culturally acceptable notions of gender equality and female empowerment. Their identity as an internal actor grants them more credibility that dubious, non-Islamic sources who may be accused of promoting an ulterior agenda.

My advocacy for a relativist approach to female liberation does not indicate an endorsement of the Islamists' interpretation of women's rights. Although it is a woman's prerogative to decide if she wants to embrace traditional gender norms and remain in the home's private sphere, I disagree with the Islamists' notion that women are too physically and intellectually weak to participate in the public sphere, and therefore should be prevented from doing so. The Islamists' use of a selective, narrow, and literal reading of Islamic texts to claim that their definition of women's rights shelters and protects women from oppression is hypocritical. In reality, by advocating for and enforcing social policies that result in women being minimally educated and defined by their relationships with men, Islamists are not only limiting women's ability to choose their own goals, but are also creating situations where women

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[131] De Varennes, Fernand. "The Fallacies in the "Universalism Versus Cultural Relativism" Debate in Human Rights Law." *Asia Pacific Journal on Human Rights and the Law* 7.1 (2006): 67-84. Print.

are trapped in potentially abusive and exploitative living situations with no legal or socially licit course to remedy their situations. By defining women's rights solely as the right to raise children, get married, and be taken care of by their husbands, Islamists advocate for a discriminatory legal system which engenders a patriarchal authority structure and reinforces alleged 6th century female subordination traditions. As I have shown in this paper, the Islamist definition of women's rights creates a double standard where men are permitted to treat women however they desire, but women cannot litigate men, withhold sexual relations, initiate a divorce, or receive equal consideration in child custody cases. Rather than freeing women, the Islamists' delineation of gendered duties and rights upholds male privilege as a compensatory response to perceived deprivation, wherein masculine privilege over women stands as a model for proper social relations with Islamist privilege asserted over non-Islamists.

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