Women and Islamic Cultures

Disciplinary Paradigms and Approaches: 2003–2013

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SOCIOLOGY

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Introduction

The study of women and gender in Islamic contexts is relatively new in sociology, and it reflects very significant changes in the discipline, including increasing interest in globalization and transnational processes, as well as greater attention to culture, religion, and meaning. In fact, the study of Muslims and Muslim societies has been a small but growing subfield of sociology since the 1970s (Keskin 2012). Sociologists of women and gender in Islamic contexts are conducting qualitative and quantitative research in a wide variety of settings, and opening up the discipline of sociology to greater consideration of how gender and sexuality are connected to religion, the state, and economic life.

Sociology's founders, particularly Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, did not shy away from the study of non-Western traditions. Indeed, Weber was one of the first social scientists to discuss Islam. But as sociology became institutionalized in North American and European universities during the twentieth century, and American sociology attained global dominance, Western societies became the focus of the discipline. Sociology also shared a methodological nationalist orientation with other social sciences—meaning that the nation-state has been the analytical framework, and theories and concepts have treated it not just as an object of analysis but as a natural entity. As Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller (2002) maintain, this made it difficult for sociologists to grasp processes that are transnational or subnational in character. During the 1960s and 1970s, a few sociologists initiated research in non-Western settings, but the dominance of secularization and modernization theory as well as structuralist approaches meant that little attention was paid to culture or religion. Finally, the ascendancy of quantitative methods meant that studies of non-Western societies tended to be large-scale but limited to issues encompassed by standard surveys, such as health or economic development.

Since the 1980s, there has been strong, renewed interest in qualitative and historical methodologies, as well as a trend toward mixed-qualitative/quantitative methods, and increasing concern with topics such as gender,

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race and ethnicity, the self, culture, and religion. Indeed, sex and gender is now one of the largest sections of the American Sociological Association. Additionally, global economic and political changes have helped to draw the field's attention to transnational issues, and also resulted in challenges to secularization theory. Sociologists have also become comfortable with interdisciplinarity, and have often been quick to incorporate theoretical and empirical innovations from neighboring fields such as Gender Studies, Anthropology, and Political Science. (In fact, it can be difficult to define who is a sociologist, since sociologists often work in non-sociology departments, and sociology departments sometimes hire Ph.D.s from other fields. For the purposes of this entry, sociologists are those with a Ph.D. in sociology.) From such developments have emerged a growing number of prominent sociologists who write about Islam, Muslims, or predominantly Muslim societies, including Mark Juergensmeyer, Asef Bayat, Mansour Moaddel, Bryan S. Turner, Fatma Müge Göçek, Charles Kurzman, Marnia Lazreg, Sami Zubaida, Valentine Moghadam, Nilufer Göle, Christian Joppke, Yasemin Soysal, and Cihan Tuğal. These scholars have studied topics ranging from citizenship and rights to transnationalism, democratization, religion and the state, social movements, religious nationalism, and much more.

The sociological study of women in Islamic cultures and contexts is only a small part of this literature, but the work of scholars in this subfield has been significant both in and outside the discipline. It has shifted from an early emphasis on structural oppression and inequality to one that explores the intricacies of social change and women's lives in a variety of settings.

Influential Early Works

Some of the earliest studies of women and gender in Muslim contexts were by sociologists, and the debates they sparked have continued to resonate in the field. Fatima Mernissi's *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (1987) is considered a landmark in the field, and has been republished several times. Mernissi combines interview data and analysis of letters to a counseling service, along with an examination of Islamic religious texts. In one of the book's most cited chapters, "The Muslim Concept of Active Female Sexuality," Mernissi argues that women are constrained in Islamic cultures not because they are considered weak and passive (as in Christian traditions) but because their sexuality is

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seen as strong and dangerous to men. Elsewhere in the book, Mernissi argues that rapid modernization has destabilized old patterns of relations between the sexes in Morocco, leading to increased competition for education and employment. In her view, fundamentalism is men's response to such threatening changes. Mernissi was one of the first scholars to tackle the gendered aspects of fundamentalism, and her argument has been extremely influential. Yet the book has also come in for significant criticism. Some scholars argue that her depiction of Islam is an essentialized one that does not account for significant differences in interpretation and practice, even within Morocco. Others maintain that she reduces fundamentalism to a reaction to modernization, without seriously investigating fundamentalist religious beliefs. Mernissi's more recent writings, which are more historical and essayistic, have taken a different tack, seeking to recuperate the lost history of women's important roles in Islam (1992).

Valentine Moghadam's *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (1993) helped launch a very different explanation of women's inferior status in the Middle East. Moghadam attributes women's lower status not to any intrinsic properties of Islamic belief or practice, but rather to economic and political conditions. To understand women's status, Moghamam proposes instead a complex framework emphasizing the interplay of the sex/gender system, social class, economic development, and state policies within the capitalist world system. And she also draws attention to the expanding roles of women in the Middle East, including their participation in social movements, NGOs, and civil society organizations working for emancipatory social change. Moghadam continues to argue against what she sees as culturally deterministic approaches to studying Middle Eastern women, and more recently she has published significant research on women's work in the Middle East (1998), feminist activism in the region (2011), and globalization and social movements (2012).

Nilufer Göle's *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (1997) is an essential and prescient study of women's involvement in the Islamic revival in Turkey, and was one of the first sociological studies to explore Muslim women's religious beliefs in a particular social context. Based on interviews with young veiled women, Göle proposes that these women are rejecting the Western model of secular modernity that has been urged on Turks since the country became a republic, and that they are instead gravitating toward an Islamic version of modernity. For Göle, gender is an essential aspect of these competing modernities, as the Western model is

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predicated on the equality and visibility of women in public life, while the Islamic model is predicated on gender segregation in public spaces. Nevertheless, she emphasizes that young Turkish women choose to submit to Islamic doctrines of modesty for women, and she shows how they interpret Islam as encouraging them to take an active (though covered) role in public life, pursuing higher education and careers. Göle's work has been influential particularly because of her discussion of Islamic modernity, which anticipated the idea of multiple modernities. Unlike much other scholarship of the time, Göle's book shows how the practice of Islam in Turkey is a result of a specific historical and social context. Moreover, while many Turks in the 1990s argued that women who veiled were simply victims of patriarchal oppression, Göle was one of the first to suggest that such women were exercising agency in their choice to veil. Göle's work has helped to jumpstart discussions about Islam and modernity, as well as debates about Muslim women's agency, an important and continuing theme in the literature. In her more recent work, Göle has continued to critique Eurocentric versions of modernity and she has also written insightfully about the difficulties of Muslim integration in Europe (2011).

Recent Areas of Study

These early efforts have helped to spark the research of a new generation of sociologists interested in women in Muslim contexts. Among the primary, though often overlapping, areas of study in this recent literature are Muslim immigration to the West; social movements and civil society (including Islamist and feminist movements); the state and/or nationalism; and economic life and development (including work).

Muslim Immigration and Integration

Migration and the integration/incorporation of immigrants are among the most prominent subjects for sociological research more generally. The late twentieth century saw a surge in migration from less affluent to more affluent countries, producing important shifts in national ethnic and religious landscapes. Sociologists of women in Muslim contexts have contributed to the already voluminous literature on migration by studying Muslim women migrants, as well as debates over gender practices within Muslim migrant communities.

Muslim migrants in the United States became more visible in the aftermath of 9/11, in some cases encountering increased scrutiny. In the American

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context, Jen'nan G. Read (2000, 2004) has explored Arab-American women's decisions to veil, highlighting the complex negotiations involved in this decision, exploring the variations among women's viewpoints, and showing how the decision to veil or not often depends on how women interpret their ethnic/religious identities. In her study of Arab-American teenagers, Kristine Ajrouch (2004) maintains that ethnic boundaries are drawn by controlling girls' behaviors; interpretations of religious teachings are used to justify these restrictions. Nevertheless, she points out that such boundaries are also contested. More recently, Read has challenged the view that religious identity is paramount for Muslim Americans, arguing that they are far from uniformly religious, and that they are similar to other Americans in their views on social and political issues (Read 2007, 2008). Other scholars have followed in Read's steps, examining how veiling is used by American Muslim women to create autonomous selves (Williams and Vashi 2007) and how negative stereotypes after 9/11 made veiled Muslim women feel particularly insecure and unsafe in public spaces (Cainkar 2009). Mustafa Gurbuz and Gulsum Gurbuz-Kucuksari (2009) argue that because they are torn between dominant secular norms in the society and the values of Islamic faith, most American Muslim college girls see their headscarf practice as "liberating" and "empowering."

Other scholars have investigated religion, gender, and family practices among Muslim migrants. Nazli Kibria (2011) has examined the growing salience of Islamic identity for Bangladeshi migrants in the United States and the United Kingdom. Noting that transnational marriage is much more accepted among British Bangladeshis, she argues that second- and third-generation Bangladeshi immigrants demonstrate significant creativity and selection in the process of finding a marital partner (2012). Moreover, Kibria shows that in the British national context, the issue of transnational marriage has been far more politicized by concerns about forced marriage and the state regulations that have arisen in response to it. Also in the United Kingdom, Andrew Yip has studied religion and sexuality, including lesbian, gay, and bisexual Muslims. He has shown how lesbian and gay Muslims are able to interpret religious texts in revisionist ways that affirm their sexuality. He also argues that lesbian and bisexual Muslim women in the United Kingdom find themselves in a particularly complicated position, as Islamophobia and racism cement their sense of belonging to the Muslim community, but their sexuality puts them at odds with this same community (2008).

The latter half of the twentieth century also saw increased migration from majority Muslim countries to continental Europe, and many

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sociologists have studied the sharp controversies that have arisen over veiling and Muslim dress for women. Caitlin Killian (2003, 2006) shows that North African Muslim women in France are divided in their attitudes toward the veil, with some embracing it as a symbol of identity, and others rejecting it as an obstacle to integration. Killian argues that Muslim migrant women creatively manage their identities, engaging in selective acculturation and picking and choosing among cultural beliefs. Similarly, comparing veiling in France and the United States, Ajrouch (2007) proposes that national context and the history of ethnic stratification in each country shape both debates about veiling and actual practices. Taking a very different perspective on veiling, Fareen Parvez (2011) argues that Muslim women who wear the burqa in France are engaged in anti-politics, meaning that they attempt to reconfigure the private sphere against an intrusive state, to retreat into a moral community, and emphasize achieving spiritual serenity rather than political activism.

Social Movements/Civil Society/Collective Action/Democratization

The study of the varieties of collective action has always been a mainstay of sociology, and scholars of women in Muslim contexts have contributed greatly to this field. Certainly, one of the most notable elements of the revival of Islam and the rise of Islamic movements in the early twenty-first century has been women's strong participation in such forms of activism. Much recent sociological scholarship has investigated the nature and consequences of women's involvement in Islamic movements, as well civil society or grassroots activism in predominantly Muslim contexts (Charrad 2011, Moghadam 2012). These studies have helped to overturn the misconceptions that women in Muslim countries are not politically active, and that their collective action is controlled by more powerful forces. Issues of women's agency are central in this literature, with some scholars proposing that Western definitions of agency may be too limited to capture the complexities of women's activism in Muslim contexts, and suggesting that such activists commonly use multiple frames for rights and empowerment claims (Charrad 2011). Perhaps most importantly, sociologists explore the vitality of both secular and religious feminist movements in Muslim contexts, and also demonstrate how women activists have had a real impact in many places.

The Middle East and North Africa have been the focus of much of this work. A notable early study is Frances Hasso's work on Palestinian feminism, which investigates the long-term impact of feminist activism for

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individual women (2001). Women's involvement in recent democratization movements in the region has also begun to attract more attention (Moghadam 2011, Salime 2012), as has the relationship between gender equality and democracy (Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, and Meyer 2007). A number of scholars have chronicled the dynamic women's movement in Morocco, and its success in demanding reforms to family law (Sadiqi and Ennaji 2006). Zakia Salime's important study *Between Feminism and Islam: Human Rights and Sharia Law in Morocco* (2011) shows how the Moroccan Islamist and feminist movements have interacted and shaped each other, helping to build a broader movement for women's rights. Salime also examines how the global context matters for such movements, arguing that popular discourse about fundamentalism, terrorism, and the oppression of women compelled some Moroccan Islamist women activists to start discussing women's rights and empowerment, while feminists have begun to explore how Islam can support women's empowerment. A more recent article by Fatima Sadiqi and Moha Ennaji (2012) also argues that women's legal rights in Morocco are closely associated with issues of democratization. Egyptian women's activism has a long history, but has not been studied by many sociologists. However, Helen Rizzo has examined Egyptian anti-sexual harassment movements (2011) as well as women's activism for political rights and democratization in Kuwait (2005; see also Shultziner and Tetrault 2012). Also focusing on Kuwait, Alessandra Gonzalez (2013) looks at how a culturally conservative environment has spawned a small Islamic feminist movement.

Following in Göle's deep footsteps, sociologists continue to examine women's involvement in both secular and Islamic activism in Turkey (Gürbüz and Bernstein 2012, Turam 2008). Certainly, one of the deepest disagreements among scholars of Turkey is the issue of Islamist women's agency. In her intriguing (2002) *Living Islam: Women, Religion, and the Policitization of Culture in Turkey*, Ayşe Saktanber argues that Turkish Islamism is a type of "life politics" that is producing a new pious middle class. She shows how the success of the Islamist movement has blurred the boundaries between "the public" and "the private," while making women central to its reformist project. Yet because of such developments, she maintains, pious Muslim women have gained agency as they construct new roles for themselves and participate in the ongoing transformation of the Islamist movement. Berna Turam observes that women are central to the legitimization of both secularism and Islamism in Turkey. She maintains that while Turkey's founders "nationalized" secular ways of life,

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contemporary Islamists are nationalizing their faith-based ways of life, and discourses about women's place and role in society have played a major part in both of these national projects that were engineered exclusively by men (2006). Nevertheless, Turam maintains that the increasing interaction between secular and Islamist men has left Islamist women outside the politics of engagement, and thereby outside of power structures. Thus, women's increasing visibility as Islamic actors coexists with continued gender inequality and segregation.

A few sociologists have ventured further afield from the Middle East, to South and Southeast Asia. While India is not a Muslim majority society, its Muslim minority of approximately 150 million (13.4 percent of the country's population) makes it one of the world's largest Muslim societies. Raka Ray's *Fields of Protest: Women's Movements in India* (1999) has inspired many sociological studies of women's movements in the developing world. Ray's innovative analysis of women's activism in Calcutta and Mumbai shows how women's mobilization differs in these cities because of important differences in local political fields. However, Ray does not examine religion, either as identity or as part of political fields. More recent studies of South and Southeast Asia examine women's activism in a context of religious mobilization. For example, Afshan Jafar (2007, 2011) examines women's rights NGOs in Pakistan, arguing that Islamic fundamentalism poses a unique challenge, and examining the strategies they use to contest it. Similarly, Filomena Critelli and Jennifer Willett (2013) examine Pakistani women's rights organizations' strategies for change and how the historical, political, and social environments of their fields for protest shape these strategies. Rachel Rinaldo's research on women's activism in Indonesia examines how Muslim women activists draw on different interpretations of religious texts to support very different aims, ranging from gender equality to a more Islamic state and society. This work also shows how both Muslim and secular Indonesian women's organizations act as cultural brokers mediating transnational flows of Islam and feminism (2008, 2011, 2013).

States, Nations, Nationalism, and Citizenship

The study of states, nations, and nationalisms is also a rich part of the sociological tradition. Indeed, for some sociologists, the state is one of the most significant forces in the shaping of gender relations and women's status. An early collection of articles from a variety of scholars, including

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but not limited to sociologists, *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity, and Power* (Göçek and Balaghi 1994) helped move Middle Eastern studies forward in the 1990s, problematizing the supposed relationship between tradition and gender, and proposing attention to gender's intersections with power, identity, and politics in various national contexts.

Since that time, Mounira Charrad's *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco* (2001) has set the standard for consideration of how women and gender matter in nation-building in Muslim contexts. According to Charrad, the existence of progressive or regressive family laws in North Africa, which have a significant effect on women's status, is largely an outcome of nation-building efforts. In Tunisia, where the national state succeeded in exerting power over older kin-based centers of power, family laws were more progressive. In Morocco and Algeria, where the state either incorporated kin-based power structures or fought ongoing struggles with them, the state tended to adopt family laws based on conservative interpretations of Islam that disadvantaged women.

Family law is also a subject of study for Hasso, whose *Consuming Desires: Family Crisis and the State in the Middle East* (2011) compares struggles over family law in Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. Hasso proposes that states build their legitimacy and gain regulatory power as they codify Islamic law on families. She concludes that while this expansion of state power over family sometimes protects women from abuses such as child marriage, it ultimately makes women further dependent on hierarchical and authoritarian states.

Despite the rich scholarly literature on contemporary Iran, not many sociologists of women and gender in Muslim societies have turned their attention to this country. One of the exceptions is Haideh Moghissi, a feminist critic of fundamentalism who has studied the dynamic Iranian women's movement (2008). She is perhaps best known for arguing that feminism and Islamic fundamentalism are essentially incompatible (1999). She has recently revisited this idea, suggesting that the uncritical promotion of Islamic feminism may work to the detriment of the feminist movement more generally (2011). Turning attention to the practices of gender segregation in Iran, Nazanin Shahrokni and Parastoo Dokouhaki (2012) propose that increasing attempts by the Iranian state to exclude women from higher education are related to an escalating concern with a perceived crisis of masculinity.

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Singapore is not usually included as a place of interest to sociologists of women and gender in Muslim societies. Yet Muslims (many of Malay ethnic background) make up about 15 percent of the country's nearly 5.5 million people. Youyenn Teo's study of state and family policies (2011) shows how the Singapore government's family policies have shaped collective practices, habits, norms, and beliefs that bind Singaporeans to each other and to the state. Teo argues that the inequalities embedded within family policies, which naturalize gender, ethnic, and religious differences as "cultural" and in need of protection, help to stave off dissent and produce a sense of citizenship based on individual family units rather than collective identities.

Debates and practices of veiling are also of great interest for the many sociologists who study the state, and who explore how this issue relates to democratization, freedom of expression, secularization, and neoliberalism. Saktanber (2008) analyzes veiling in Turkey as part of the emergence of new state–society relations, as well as a sign of differences in understandings of rights and equality. Christian Joppke (2007) examines headscarf laws in France and Germany, arguing that liberal state neutrality is a field of struggle in which both proponents and opponents of the headscarf seek to vindicate their interpretations of neutrality, and that the recent laws against headscarves represent a backlash against rights-oriented versions of neutrality. Joppke continues this theme in his more recent book *Veil: Mirror of Identity* (2009) in which he compares different European responses to the headscarf and explores how it is linked to tensions around multiculturalism.

Another North Africa specialist, and one of the few sociologists to consider the nation of Algeria, is Marnia Lazreg. Her *Eloquence of Silence* (1994) examines the history of gender roles in that nation to consider the question of why Algerian women's active participation in the revolution did not lead to higher status. Lazreg suggests that gender roles are often suspended in revolutionary contexts, and thus women's lives don't necessarily change in any permanent way afterwards. Lazreg's book may help understand the outcomes of the current democratic upheavals in the Middle East. Lazreg has also become known in recent years for her critique of veiling. In *Questioning the Veil: Open Letters to Muslim Women* (2009), she argues that the global veiling trend has been driven by an organized campaign, and that the veil itself has become a tool for engaging women in a conception of religiosity that serves the political aims of certain groups in the Muslim world.

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Development and Economic Life

Muslim women's involvement in economic development, formal and informal work, and socioeconomic issues is another broad area of interest for sociologists. Sociologists have tended to take a critical approach to economic development, demonstrating its differential consequences for men and women, and showing that economic development is not inherently beneficial to women. Moghadam was one of the first sociologists to pursue work on this subject in the Middle Eastern context, and her studies of the impact of economic reforms on women's work in the region have been a touchstone for many scholars (Moghadam 1998, 2005).

The low rates of female labor force participation in the Middle East have been the subject of ongoing discussions among social scientists. This has especially been the case since the publication of the influential article "Oil, Islam, and Patriarchy" by political scientist Michael Ross (2008), which argues that the Middle East's oil-based economy discourages investment in sectors that are more favorable to women's employment. However, Charrad (2009) responds that such arguments overlook real variations in women's employment and political representation even among oil producers, and she also suggests that Ross's argument ignores the extent to which some states are intertwined with patriarchal networks and, in some cases, work to discourage women from working outside the home.

Recent sociological literature on women and economic life often takes an interview-based or ethnographic approach. Drawing on nearly two decades of qualitative fieldwork in Syria, Gallagher's *Making Do in Damascus: Navigating a Generation of Change in Family and Work* (2012) shows how women creatively manage family relationships and work within the constraints of a conservative culture. Gallagher proposes that instead of thinking of Syrian women as oppressed or as autonomous agents, we instead consider how collective identity, connections within families, economic resources, and regional politics shape their family lives.

Many majority Muslim countries in the Middle East and Asia have a long tradition of domestic service provided by poor rural migrant women. Gul Ozyegin has studied this issue in Turkey (2001), arguing that cultural and religious constraints on the mobility of rural women make their labor expensive and somewhat difficult to obtain, which actually gives them a degree of power in negotiating relationships with middle-class urban employers (usually women). Raka Ray and Seemin Qayum's *Cultures of Servitude: Modernity, Domesticity, and Class in India* (2009) explores the

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changing practices and meanings of domestic service in Calcutta, showing how the middle and upper classes consolidate themselves through their practices of servant and home management.

Recent sociological studies have also focused new attention on the rise of the middle class in India. Reena Patel (2010) examines women in India's call center industry, showing how new opportunities for employment do allow some women to expand their mobility, but also produce new social anxieties and attempts at regulating women's bodies. Similarly, in her study of information technology professionals in India (2012), Smitha Radhakrishnan shows how female IT workers reconfigure notions of respectable feminity and the "good" Indian family, while also accruing both material and symbolic privileges. Radhakrishnan also argues that this emerging middle class has constructed a transnational, homogenized version of Hinduism that is inextricable from its sense of being Indian, thus contributing to the escalation of right-wing Hindu movements. Such work demonstrates the importance of religion in the construction of class and national identity. While it makes sense that sociologists focus on India's Hindu majority, more research on the Muslim minority might also deepen these insights.

A very significant qualitative study of economic development in a Muslim majority society is Ann Tickamyer and Siti Kusujiarti's *Power, Change, and Gender Relations in Rural Java: A Tale of Two Villages* (2011). This unusual and careful longitudinal study compares the lives of women in two villages in the midst of Central Java's rapid economic modernization. They conclude that while Javanese women have important economic roles in their communities and contribute significant income to their families, a culturally prescribed gender ideology, reinforced by the state and religious institutions, continues to limit their power and status.

Bangladesh has also begun to attract the attention of sociologists. Fauzia Ahmed, working on rural Bangladesh, has studied microcredit and poverty alleviation programs and their impact on men and women, and is one of the only sociologists to write about the subject of masculinity in a Muslim setting (2008). Based on ethnographic fieldwork, she identifies different ways of being masculine in rural Bangladesh, and proposes that development agencies need to take these into account in microcredit programs.

Debating Women's Agency

As noted earlier, the question of agency has a long history in the sociological literature. Sociologists tend to view agency as being shaped by, embedded in, or constrained by social structures, but they disagree greatly as to

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how much ability individuals have to determine the course of their lives. Certainly, the nature and consequences of women's agency have been an essential topic of debate for scholars of women in Muslim contexts, and sociologists who study Muslims are familiar with the important critiques of Western conceptions of agency that have been introduced by postcolonial feminists such as Chandra Mohanty (1987) as well as more recently by scholars such as Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) and Saba Mahmood (2005). However, sociologists have not yet contributed very much to these discussions, though some are beginning to explore agency in specific settings. For example, in her study of low-income women in Syria, Sally Gallagher (2007, 2012) argues that by embracing cultural schemas that position women as dependent, and by defining their labor as not real work and their wages as insubstantial, women are able to circumvent norms regarding husbands as sole provider, maintain greater control over their wages, and thereby increase their household income. Thus, she argues, while the overall gender ideology does not change, women have found ways to access work and income opportunities, as well as interactions outside the household. Agency here operates within constraints, but it does seem to bring change.

Other sociologists examine the role of religion in women's agency, overturning long held conceptions about Islam as a source of disempowerment. Ayşe Saktanber (2002) shows how pious Muslim women in Turkey turn their religion into a resource by gaining control of private spaces and focusing on self-knowledge and self-actualization. Rachel Rinaldo's research on Indonesia (2008, 2013) shows how Muslim women activists use religious texts as a resource for arguments for women's rights and equality, and proposes that new forms of women's agency are emerging out of the intersections of Islamic politics and gender politics. Studying the incorporation of Muslim immigrants in Canada, Anna Korteweg (2008) examines how debates over tolerance often revolve around the belief that Muslim women lack agency, especially with respect to matters of family. She suggests that while Canadians tend to see agency as a matter of individual autonomy, Muslim women understand their own agency as being embedded in a particular religious and cultural context. Ironically, this is similar to how many sociologists also conceptualize agency, but it goes against popular Western understandings that foreground individual free choice.

In a comprehensive review article on gender in the Middle East, Mounira Charrad (2011) observes that women's activism in the region increasingly brings together multiple ideologies of rights, and that women

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are using religion in a variety of ways, both in daily life and activism. She argues that a key task for sociological work on the Middle East is to further address the relationship between structure and agency, particularly with respect to understanding how social structural conditions facilitate collective mobilization. Indeed, noting the ways that Muslim women seem to be using Islam as a means of empowerment or demanding rights, one of the intriguing questions she poses is, where do we witness the rise of Islamic feminism and how do we explain it? Nevertheless, a cautionary note is also sounded by Marnia Lazreg (2013), who is concerned that social scientists are relying on simplistic interpretations of Foucault to explain Muslim women's veiling. For Lazreg, this means that social scientists are increasingly viewing any purposive action as agentive or political, and ignoring the ways in which acquiescing to veiling is complicity rather than resistance.

Other Areas of Interest

Many sociological studies do not fall neatly into the categories discussed so far. Among these are more quantitative studies of popular attitudes, health, and gender issues in Muslim contexts. For example, demographer Kathryn Yount has explored attitudes toward domestic violence and female genital cutting in Egypt, as well as more general health issues affecting women in the region, including post-partum depression (2004, 2009, 2012). A fascinating study exploring the relationship between Islamic religiosity and gender egalitarianism among youth in Saudi Arabia and Egypt finds that for young men in both contexts, orthodoxy and mosque attendance are negatively associated with gender egalitarianism. In contrast, for young Egyptian women, self-identified religiosity positively affects gender egalitarianism, while for Saudi Arabian women, Islamic religiosity has no effect (Kucinskas 2010).

Not many researchers have explored the emerging terrain of sexuality among heterosexual Muslim women. In her study of virginity among young, educated Turkish women, Ozyegin (2009) finds that women who embrace new identities as non-virgins cultivate "virginal facades" to accommodate the old norm of virginity as well as the new rules of an emerging premarital sex culture. She suggests that the new culture makes it acceptable for young women to lose their virginity as long as it is within the context of love and emotional investment.

The study of religious subjectivity, personhood, and meaning has been prominent in disciplines such as anthropology, with scholars investigating issues such as what it means to be a religious person, the nature of

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religious agency and action, and religious notions of the self. Such questions are certainly also of great interest to sociologists of religion, but they have not been widely applied to the study of women in Muslim contexts. However, in an unusual and intriguing study of Sunni Muslim women in Senegal, Erin Augis (2012) examines how such women strive to build a religiosity centered on piety and social critique. The women Augis studies wear hijab in a manner influenced by the Salafi movement, and they have also appropriated prayer and other practices that are inspired by Saudi conventions. Augis argues that their adoption of these practices is at once a critique of Senegal's corrupt secular government as well as an attempt to become closer to God. Similarly, Fareen Parvez (2013) has recently turned her attention to prayer practices among Indian reformist Muslim women, examining the importance they place on practicing prayer correctly as part of their goal of a more direct relationship with God. These deeply nuanced and contextualized studies of Muslim female subjectivity present a significant contribution to the sociology of religious practice and belief.

Contributions of the Sociological Literature

The examination of inequality, stratification, and power differences has always been central to sociology. One of the great strengths of the sociological literature is its use of this critical lens to study women and gender in Muslim contexts, paying close attention to mechanisms of economic, cultural, and political inequality, as well as struggles for transformation and change. Sociologists such as Charrad, Hasso, Lazreg, Moghadam, and Tickamyer elegantly show how social structures and political systems systematically disadvantage women and/or promote particular sex and gender arrangements. Indeed, showing these connections between larger social structures and Muslim women's everyday lives is certainly one of the central contributions of sociologists. Sociologists have also been careful not to privilege religion as a simple cause of gender inequality. For example, Moghadam, Tickamyer and Kusujiarti, and Gallagher present Islam as one of many intersecting structural factors that influence sex and gender, while those who focus more on religious meanings and subjectivities, such as Göle and Salime, emphasize how Muslim practices and social movements are shaped by the broader political and social context. Sociologists who study gender and Muslim immigrants in the West, such as Read, Killian, Yip, Kibria, and Parvez have drawn attention to the particular difficulties these groups have encountered with integration and

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tolerance, while not losing sight of women's agentive capacities. Finally, sociologists such as Göle, Salime, and Moghadam have been at the forefront of examining Muslim women's increasing participation in social movements and civil society, challenging widely held assumptions about passive or victimized women in Muslim societies.

One of the greatest assets of the sociological tradition is the vast range of methodologies employed by scholars—from ethnography to interviews to historical studies, surveys and quantitative approaches, to discourse and media analysis. This diversity allows sociologists of gender and women in Muslim contexts to address a broad array of topics, and it also allows for quite different approaches to a particular issue, as is evident with studies of Muslim immigrants, veiling, or Muslim women's activism. Sociologists have been schooled to think carefully about methods, and many sociology journals require an expansive section on methodology in all the articles they publish. This disciplinary norm leads to many productive discussions about the benefits and constraints of various approaches. It also means that sociologists are usually explicit about their methodological procedures, as well as forthcoming about their own relationships as researchers to informants. These issues are especially important when studying populations who are often subject to misleading and inaccurate depictions, such as Muslim women. Indeed, sociologists who are reflective about methodology have the potential to lead the way toward fruitful discussions of the problems and possibilities of knowledge production in the social science of Muslim societies.

Finally, sociologists who study gender are very comfortable with interdisciplinarity, and the literature cited in this entry does much to incorporate theoretical and empirical insights from neighboring fields such as anthropology and political science. Thus, for example, sociologists working on South Asia or the Middle East bridge the world of regionally focused scholarship with more general debates in sociological or feminist theory, which helps their work become legible to a broader audience. Indeed, many of the works discussed here are very much part of the growing and extremely interdisciplinary field of studies of Islam and gender.

An Agenda for the Sociology of Women and Gender in Muslim Contexts

The most fundamental obstacle for the sociology of women and gender in Muslim contexts is that it is a small subfield within both the sociology of gender and the sociology of Muslim societies. Sociology emphasizes

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journal articles as much as or more than books, but this literature is not well represented in the discipline's most prestigious journals. As a result, although sociologists of women and gender in Muslim contexts have had some success in becoming part of interdisciplinary conversations, in most cases their work has not had great visibility or impact in the general field of sociology. Indeed, it is all too easy, especially for those whose work focuses on non-Western societies, to be pigeonholed as regional scholars whose work does not make a more general contribution to the discipline. For example, their work is often regarded as too specialized to be included in core survey classes such as the Sociology of Gender or Social Movements. Moreover, because sociologists of women and gender in Muslim societies study a wide variety of issues and geographical contexts, there is no readily apparent common theoretical agenda for this literature, and little ongoing dialogue between scholars, resulting in a scattered and fragmented subfield.

Within sociology, there is certainly rising interest in Muslim populations in the West, as well as in the phenomenon of Islamophobia, which is why these themes are some of the most prominent in the subfield, though not many of these studies focus specifically on gender or sexuality. Research on Muslims outside the West is relatively rare in sociology, and most of the existing sociological literature on Muslims is based on studies of the Middle East and North Africa. With a few notable exceptions, sociological studies of Muslim societies outside the MENA region are even rarer, reflecting the discipline's more general lack of attention to sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. There are also countless significant topics which have received far too little attention from sociologists of women and gender in Muslim societies, including sexuality, religious minorities, masculinity, secularism and secularization, the self, class difference, neoliberalism, and poverty.

These problems are largely a result of shifts within social science, but also stem from some of the foundational assumptions and practices of the discipline of sociology. The decline of area studies centers and the lack of funding for qualitative research mean that it is increasingly difficult for Western social scientists to pursue fieldwork outside their home countries. Sociology also emphasizes broad patterns and generalizations, often at the cost of deeper engagement with local histories and meanings. This is much less the case for sociologists who study Muslim societies, but at times this tendency is visible in their work as well. Most sociologists do attempt to contextualize their research in its political and/or economic

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milieu, but less often do they grapple more profoundly with local history and culture. This is particularly so when it comes to the case of religion. The study of religion, once central to sociology, became marginalized in the discipline in the 1970s and 1980s, and it has only recently begun to recover. Many sociologists of women and gender in Muslim societies, even those who use qualitative approaches, continue to treat Islam largely as a variable and/or to generalize about Islamic beliefs and practices, rather than investigating more fully what Islam means to people, the differences in how it may be practiced, and how it influences (or does not influence) social life and politics in a particular society.

Another potential source of difficulty for studies of women in Muslim contexts is that sociologists doing fieldwork outside the West or on unconventional topics are often strongly encouraged to frame their research as case studies of a more general phenomenon. While the case study strategy can be very successful in connecting such work to broader themes in the discipline, it can also make it difficult to discuss phenomena that fall outside existing theories or debates. This is probably the primary reason that many sociologists of women and gender in Muslim contexts have not published their work in the discipline's major journals.

Nevertheless, sociology is certainly becoming far more receptive to research from outside the traditional terrain of North America and Western Europe, as well as to underappreciated topics such as religion and sexuality. Since 9/11, the discipline's interest in religion seems to have been rekindled, and this has resulted in a growing number of scholars studying Islam, as well as religion, modernity, and secularization more broadly. The increasing emphasis on transnational processes and globalization, particularly within the sociology of gender, also provides a very significant opportunity for research on women and gender in Muslim contexts. Certainly, many of the scholars discussed in this entry have been at the forefront of examining how global discourses are both resisted and adapted in Muslim contexts, as well as how transnational and national political and economic arrangements matter for gender and sexuality in Muslim societies. Sociologists of women and gender in Muslim contexts are venturing into countries long ignored by the discipline, employing traditional and novel research methods, and helping to open the discipline to more consideration of how gender and sexuality are connected to religion, the state, and economic life. The ongoing controversies over Muslim women's agency and religious subjectivity would be enhanced by more contributions from sociologists, and the outcome of such discussions might also be

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beneficial for sociological theory more generally. The greatest challenges for the sociological literature on women and gender in Muslim contexts will be to encourage more scholars to engage in research in a broad array of settings, to consider how local settings are connected to transnational or transregional contexts, to increase visibility within the discipline by publishing monographs and articles in high-profile journals, and not least, to connect studies of women and gender in Muslim contexts to current theoretical debates and discussions in the discipline, while also bringing attention to endogenous concepts and realities.

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