



MODERNIZING WOMEN

*Gender &
Social
Change
in the
Middle East*

Valentine M. Moghadam

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Social Change
in the Middle East

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Modernizing Women

Women and Change in the Developing World

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ALN	Armée de Liberation Nationale (Algeria)
AWC	Afghan Women's Council
AWSA	Arab Women's Solidarity Association
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (UN)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DRA	Democratic Republic of Afghanistan
DOAW	Democratic Organization of Afghan Women
DYO	Democratic Youth Organization (Afghanistan)
EAP	Economically active population
EOI	Export-oriented industrialization
EPZ	Export processing zone
FIS	Front Islamique du Salut (Algeria)
FLN	Front de Liberation Nationale (Algeria)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GNP	Gross National Product
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INSTRAW	United Nations Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women
ISA	International Sociological Association
ISI	Import-substitution industrialization
NIC	Newly industrializing country
NIF	National Islamic Front (Sudan)
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting States
PDPA	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
PDYR	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
RAWA	Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan

TNC	Transnational corporation
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNFT	Union Nationale des Femmes Tunisiennes
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
UNU	United Nations University
WFS	World Fertility Survey
WID	Women-in-development
WIDER	World Institute for Development Economics Research



Preface

The subject of this study is social change in the Middle East, North Africa, and Afghanistan, its impact on women's roles and status, and women's varied responses to, and involvement in, change processes. It also deals with constructions of gender during periods of social and political change. Social change is usually described in terms of modernization, revolution, cultural breakdown, and social movements. The standard literature on these topics does not examine women or gender, as feminist and women-in-development scholars have noted time and again. I hope this study will contribute to an appreciation of the significance of gender in the midst of change. Neither are there many sociological studies on the Middle East or studies on women in the Middle East from a sociological perspective. Myths and stereotypes abound regarding women, Islam, and the Middle East. This book is intended in part to "normalize" the Middle East by underscoring the salience of structural determinants other than religion. It focuses on the major social-change processes in the region to show how women's lives are shaped not only by "Islam" and "culture," but also by economic development, the state, class location, and the world system. Why the focus on women? It is my contention that middle-class women in the Middle East are consciously and unconsciously major agents of social change in the region, at the vanguard of the movement to modernity.

I have written this book for a wide audience: those who study gender and social change, students of the Middle East, women-in-development researchers, and those bureaucrats and policymakers with time to read. Thus, the book is descriptive, explanatory, and at times policy oriented. Policy implications are especially noticeable in the chapters on employment (Chapter 2) and the changing family (Chapter 4), as well as in the case study of Iran (Chapter 6).

The idea for the book originated in April 1990 over a delicious Moroccan meal at a restaurant in Paris with Moroccan sociologist and feminist Fatima Mernissi, author of the classic *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female*

Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society. She asked me why, despite all the journal articles I had published, I had not yet written a book on the subject of women and Islam. She then pushed aside plates, bowls, and glasses, brought out a notepad and pen, and proceeded to list the subjects of my various articles in one column and suggestions for chapter headings in another. Fatima even proposed a title for my future book; all I can recall of it now is that it included the word "Islam" and that I balked at that. But I did promise a sociological approach to women in the Middle East.

The next source of inspiration was Kumari Jayawardena, Sri Lankan political scientist, historian, and feminist. I had been asked by the Institute of Development Studies of the University of Helsinki to conduct a seminar series for the fall of 1990. Kumari wisely suggested that I organize the lectures around chapter themes for the book, adding that her own famous book, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, took shape in just this manner. I took her advice and began to write lectures with the book in mind, continuing to work on the project during 1991.

That year I received an announcement from Lynne Rienner Publishers that Mary Moran, whom I had met in 1988–1989, when I was a postdoctoral fellow at Brown University's Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women, would be editing a series called "Women and Change in the Developing World." Coincidentally, my book's working title at that time was *Women and Social Change in the Middle East*. I took this coincidence to be a good sign, wrote to Mary, and sent her the first draft of the manuscript. After I received a challenging and very helpful external review, I was off and running with the second draft. I can only hope that I have not disappointed these friends and colleagues.

Various other associates have read chapters, shared their work, and discussed ideas with me. I am indebted to the participants of the first UNU/WIDER conference I organized, called "Identity Politics and Women," which convened in Helsinki in early October 1990. The papers prepared for that conference and the discussions that took place were enormously stimulating and helped shape my thinking about the gender dynamics of Islamist movements. Debra Kaufman has twice invited me to be on an ASA panel she has organized on gender and fundamentalism, and our discussions have helped refine my ideas about the unintended consequences of Islamization and women's activism. Margot Badran carefully read Chapter 5 and offered valuable suggestions for its improvement. For assistance during research travel in North Africa, I am grateful to Fatima Mernissi, Myriam Monkachi, M. Abdelhay Bouzoubaa, Cherifa Bouatta, Doria Cherifati-Merabtine, Nassera Merah, Alya Baffoun, and Alya Chérif Chamari.

Eric Hobsbawm, Sheila Rowbotham, Judith Lorber, John Foran, David Gibbs, and Wally Goldfrank read and commented on an early version of the chapter on revolutions; David Gibbs also read the chapter on Afghanistan.

The chapters on employment, the family, and Iran have benefited from materials and suggestions from Hooshang Amirahmadi, Azita Berar-Awad, Mounira Charrad, Shahin Gerami, Deniz Kandiyoti, Massoud Karshenas, Nabil Khoury, Victor Mirza-Moghadam (as always), Carla Makhoulf Obermeyer, Mohammad Razavi, Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, Nayereh Tohidi, and John Waterbury. I have also benefited from discussions with various visiting scholars at WIDER, especially Ajit Singh, Amiya Bagchi, Amartya Sen, and Martha Nussbaum, and with colleagues in Finland, especially M'hamed Sabour of the University of Joensuu and Tuomo Melasuo of the University of Tampere. Of course, I alone am responsible for any errors.

I am enormously indebted to my institution, UNU/WIDER, for providing an academic's dream of resources and facilities, including research travel, an excellent secretarial staff, and the most supportive and encouraging boss imaginable, Lal Jayawardena, the outgoing director of WIDER. Arja Jumpponen, research secretary, has worked with me on the project since its inception; I am most grateful for her diligence, perseverance, and good humor. In the summer of 1992, Anne Kirjavainen, a graduate student at the University of Turku who had an internship at WIDER, checked and updated the tables on employment and the demographic data. Such an environment allowed me to complete the present book while carrying out other responsibilities and research projects at WIDER. Finally, I am most grateful to the editors at Lynne Rienner Publishers for their careful attention to the manuscript.

This book is dedicated to two women who brilliantly combine scholarship, activism, and teaching: Fatima Mernissi and Kumari Jayawardena; and to Afghan women whose dreams of empowerment and equality have been deferred.

Val Moghadam



Transliteration and the Iranian Calendar

The system of transliteration adopted in this book is a modified version of that recommended by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. All the diacritical marks are deleted, with the exception of the *ayn* and the *hamza* when they appear in the middle of a word, denoted in this book by a prime mark. It is difficult to be consistent when transliteration involves Arabic, Dari, Persian, and Pushtu, but I finally settled on the following spellings: ayatollah, burqa, gharbzadegi, hezbollah, hijab, jihad, Khomeini, Mutahhari, Pushtunwali, qabila, qawm, Quran, Shari'a, walwar.

The Iranian solar (*shamsi*) calendar year starts on March 21. An Iranian year may be converted to the international year by adding 621. Thus the Iranian year 1367 refers to the period March 21, 1988, to March 20, 1989, or, as a shorthand, 1988. In 1992 the Iranian year was 1371.



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▲ 1

Introduction and Overview: Recasting the Middle East

*Men are the managers of the affairs of women
for that God has preferred in bounty
one of them over another. . . .
And those you fear may be rebellious
admonish; banish them to their couches,
and beat them.* —Quran, Sura 4, verse 38

God . . . makes it the duty of the man to provide all economic means for [his wife]. . . . And in exchange for this heavy responsibility, that is, the financial burden of the woman and the family, what is he entitled to expect of the woman? Except for expecting her companionship and courtship, he cannot demand anything else from the woman. According to theological sources, he cannot even demand that she bring him a glass of water, much less expect her to clean and cook. . . .

—Fereshteh Hashemi, Iranian Islamist intellectual, 1980

The study of social change has tended to regard certain societal institutions and structures as central and then to examine how these change. Family structure, the organization of markets, the state, religious hierarchies, schools, the ways elites have exploited masses to extract surpluses from them, and the general set of values that governs society's cultural outlook are part of the long list of key institutions. In societies everywhere, cultural institutions and practices, economic processes, and political structures are interactive and relatively autonomous. In the Marxist framework, infrastructures and superstructures are made up of multiple levels, and there are various types of transformations from one level to another. There is also an interactive relationship between structure and agency, inasmuch as structural changes are linked to "consciousness"—whether this be class consciousness (of interest to Marxists) or gender consciousness (of interest to feminists).