

Introduction

Woman's Identity and the Qur'an

During the past few years evidence has emerged that young Muslim female scholars and activists are increasingly using the two main sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the Hadith (the authentic tradition of the prophet Muhammad) in their daily lives. In America as well as in other Muslim societies, Muslim women are bringing positive change to the conception and practice of Islam. However, it would seem that most of these young women have not yet identified themselves with Islam; that is, they rely in their interpretations on traditional arguments about the Islamic texts, according to which oral or textual interpretations have authority on a par with the Qur'an itself. Consequently, these women are actually reinforcing conventional perceptions of Islam without introducing a new reading of the text in space and time, as the Qur'an directs all believers to do (Qur'an, 96:1, 3; 17:14, 71).

My book is the work of a Muslim woman attempting, as Frederick Denny (1989) describes Fazlur Rahman's work, to relate anew the Word of God to the world of the second quarter of the fifteenth century AH.¹ Although I agree with most of the scholarly work of Fazlur Rahman (*Islam and Modernity*, 1982; *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 1980; *Islam*, 1966; *Islamic Methodology in History*, 1965 and 1995; and others), I take issue with some of his interpretations by presenting a pedagogical reading of the Qur'an (see chapter 2). I am also adding a new dimension to Rahman's reading and that of others. Denny (1989, 100) states that the "work of the Muslim intellectual, both in the sense of *ibada* and *ijtihad* (an act of faith and of an intellectual discourse or individual reasoning), is composed equally and inseparably of both the *perceptive and the formulative intelligence*. Its greatest effort is relating anew the Word of God to the world in each generation." Because I speak as *murabbiyah* (an educator), I intend this book to affirm the self-identity of the Muslim woman as an autono-

mous spiritual and intellectual human being through Islamic higher learning, and I also intend to further the task of relating the dynamics of Qur'anic pedagogy—learning, knowing, teaching, and living Islam.

Islamic higher learning here means accessing the Qur'an and the entire range of early Qur'anic sciences that included what, in later historical contexts, was separated into *naqli* and *'aqli*. Since the human-endowed capacity to rationally internalize (*'aqli*) the textual meaning (*naqli*) is a prerequisite to making a conscious moral choice of the Qur'anic worldview, separating these two components resulted in a dual problem. First, Islamic higher learning did not fully take place among the subsequent generations of Muslims who did not receive the message directly from prophet Muhammad. Second, women were excluded from the entire process and, eventually, from either component of this higher learning, particularly the process of making meaning of the text. Thus, I pursue this project not only as *'ibada* and *ijtihad* but also from within the mandate to understand and to communicate the "gift" of the Qur'an pedagogically (Denny 1989, n32). A pedagogical reading of the Qur'an involves a process of making the learner aware of and able to theorize on Qur'anic principles and to distinguish these principles from a knowledge of the Qur'anic rules in order to facilitate interpretations and the conditions for their application (see chapter 5).

In earlier writings I have argued that Islamic higher learning is a human right and a responsibility for the Muslim woman. That is, a woman has a basic right to participate in the interpretation of the Islamic primary sources, the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition, in order to gain and claim her identity with Islam (Barazangi 2000, 1999a, 1997). Because my task could not be completed in the three decades I have spent deepening my understanding of reading the Qur'an ontologically (philosophy of value) and epistemologically (philosophy of knowledge), nor will it be completed in my lifetime, I regard this project as also a gift,² namely, the gift of dynamic learning and knowing Islam as a rational, living belief system.³ Only through individual autonomous moral and cognitive integration and a sound leadership initiative can this belief system be made practicable.⁴ I refuse to approach the learning and teaching of the Qur'an as a job to be "done" in a cursory manner or to "sacrifice myself for the survival of the species," as Arkoun (1994) suggests. I would also argue that because the thinking of women (or of men, for that matter) has not grown out of a mind-set of self-sacrifice for the sake of getting the job done, Qur'anic dynamics, especially in social fabrics involving gender, were rarely, if ever,

realized among Muslims. Qur'anic dynamics require active participation, a participation that has been denied to women in general. Consequently, Qur'anic dynamics are not fully incorporated in societies that claim Islam as a way of life.

The purpose of this book is neither apologetic nor dogmatic moral coercion. Instead, I seek to regenerate the dynamic interrelation of the pedagogy (the arts of learning, knowing, and teaching), the epistemology, and the ontology of the Qur'an with those who have consciously chosen its worldview and attempt to live that worldview. Furthermore, this book intends to move the perception of Muslim woman from the ideal of the virginal, pious female, and from the reality of the follower with a proxy morality, that is, from an image relegated to and manipulated on the margins of Muslim societies, to that of the active agent, a believer who affects a change in history.⁵

My method is that of engaging in *ta'ammul* (reflective understanding) and *ta'amul* (action-oriented) learning with those who choose to take the same route toward the same goal, focusing in particular on certain Muslim interpretations concerning Islam and women.⁶ My goal is to understand why these Muslim interpretations and intellectual discourses did not lead to completing the task of changing attitudes and policies concerning gender within the societies that call themselves Muslim. My pedagogical reading of the Qur'an, my method, and my curriculum explain why the woman's voice was not included in the early structure of Islamic religious knowledge even though, according to Leila Ahmed (1992, 72), some women contributed to the content of that knowledge. I would like to point out here that I am intentionally staying clear of the argument that patriarchy in the Arabian society or among Muslim males was behind gender injustice, not only because other historical evidence may prove otherwise, but mainly because I use gender neither as a unit of analysis nor as a premise for rereading the Qur'an.⁷ Essentially I employ a pedagogy of religio-moral cognizance or rationality in order to explain, first, how individuals cannot change their views about the world and its structure without changing the structure of the context in which they live. Otherwise, they remain outside the existing structure, which will be maintained in its status quo. Second, with my approach I explain that the latter process is exactly what happened among Muslims when they, particularly the women, did not actually change their perception about the meaning of "*La 'ilah 'illa Allah*," there is no god but God.⁸ By accepting the authority of text interpreters as though their authority was as binding as the authority

of the Qur'an itself, the practice of "*La 'ilah 'illa Allah*," the basic tenet of the affirmation of God's sovereignty, has veered away from its Qur'anic intention.

The Theme of the Book

Given that the majority of examples presented in this work are taken from among North America Muslim women, I start by explaining my theme in the context of the early American women's movement. I then present my arguments by moving between the early Muslim community in Arabia (ca. 632) and the contemporary Muslim community in North America as well as in Syria (the two places where I have done most of my empirical research).

Beth Waggenpack (1989, xiii) quotes Elizabeth Cady Stanton as saying "Self-development is a higher duty than self-sacrifice." In response to Stanton's argument I would contend that development of self is not only a higher duty than self-sacrifice but that self-development calls for and requires identification of self in order to be realized. In the following few paragraphs I want to examine the significance of Stanton's argument with reference to the Qur'an as the primary *living* text of Islam.

On the dedication page of volume 2 of Stanton's *The Woman's Bible* (1972 edition), Stanton writes: "Genesis Chapter I says Man & Woman were a simultaneous creation. Chapter II says Woman was an afterthought. Which is true?" Since others use Stanton's quote and identify her question "Which is true?" as central to their work (e.g., Matthew et al, 1998:8), I find it necessary to begin my pedagogical reading of the Qur'an with the story of Creation and its concomitant concept of *khilafah* (trusteeship, vicegerency) in the Qur'an.

The Creation story in the Qur'an, found in "Al-Nisa'" (The Women), 4:1, is presented as follows:

O Humankind (*Ya'yuha al-nas*), be conscious of [or in equilibrium with] (*ittaqu*) your Guardian God (Allah), who created you *of a single* personal entity (*nafs wahidah*). Created, of the same entity, its [grammatical feminine gender] mate (*zawjaha*), and from them scattered abroad many men and women, and be in equilibrium with Allah by whom you are accountable to one another, and the wombs (*al-'arham*); surely Allah ever watches over you.

In quoting both Stanton in *The Woman's Bible* and the Qur'an, I continue one traditional intention and change another. That is to say, I continue in

the intention of the Qur'an by reading it in space and time; I continue the traditional intentionality of my Muslim foremothers and fathers who saw the reading of the Qur'an as basic to practicing it; and in one way, I continue Stanton's tradition in that she sees the reading and rereading of the text as fundamental to changing the status of women who accept the Bible. At the same time and despite the acceptance of variant readings of the biblical story, I still depart from Stanton's apparent intention to incorporate women's perception by specifically calling it *The Women's Bible*. I also depart from the conventional Muslim readings and interpretations. That is, it is not my task or that of any other human being to edit the Qur'an, for it offers the Word of God as the source of value and knowledge to all believers. The fact that Qur'anic words are eternal and may not be changed or edited does not make them static in their intended meaning or place them in an absolute realm beyond reading in space and time. Rather, the words of the Qur'an should be read and constantly reread and reinterpreted in space and time. Without such engagement (rereadings and reinterpretations), humans may not be described as moral and rational beings who consciously identify with and directly access the Qur'an, and thus benefit from its guidance. This capacity for moral and rational derivation of a meaning from the eternal words and the immediate acting on the derived meaning to change one's behavior is what qualifies a human being as a Muslim by choice, that is, a self-identified Muslim. The Qur'anic emphasis on the human as being created of one single entity (*nafs wahidah*), as stated in verse 4:1, provides internal evidence for this argument. Had the prophet Muhammad and early Muslims solidified their beliefs and praxis into a normative standard, the Qur'an would not have come to life (Rahman 1995, 11).

Thus, the central question of my book is not "Which is true?" nor which view of women should be included. My central question rather is "*Who has the authority to reread and interpret the Qur'anic text and how is it to be done?*"

To avoid misunderstanding, let me explain again what I mean by intended tradition, self-identity, interpretation, and change.

I, and other Muslim women who identify themselves with the Qur'an, need not change the "intended tradition" of the Qur'an or be accounted of doing so that we will be viewed as active agents. Rather, what needs to change is first and foremost the widely held belief that only select elite males are authorized (males who bestow upon themselves the exclusive authority) to interpret the text. Thus, a fundamental task for believers is to reinterpret all the verses relevant to the topic of who has the authority to

read and interpret the Qur'an. This is obviously a subject of another book, and yet it is at the crux of this book.⁹

It is not the "Islamicity" of a person and her faith that is being put to the test by the argument for self-identity and self-identification. Rather, what is being put to the test are the assumptions through which that person identifies with Islam as well as the manner in which she (or he) draws her (or his) rationales for everyday affairs directly from the Qur'an. In order to bring about such a change in assumptions, we need to address the historical development of Islamic thought and how Muslim males have arrived at the currently prevailing exclusionary conclusions.¹⁰ I will discuss this historical development by addressing three fundamental issues: one, the story of Creation and the principle of trusteeship or vicegerency; two, female moral autonomy and the principle of modesty; and three, individual autonomous consciousness and its balance with social heteronymous action (socially imposed norms), while seeking equilibrium with Allah's guidance (*taqwa*), as discussed in reference to the verb "*ittaqu*" (in 4:1 of the Qur'an).¹¹

By "interpretation" I do not mean to propose a conventional atomization of verses or chapters of the text of the Qur'an. Instead, I look at the Qur'an as a collective, cohesive guidance possessing its own system and providing a course of action (*minhaj/shari'a*) for each individual to learn within a particular framework and to engage by acting on what one learns within that guidance. Note that the Arabic term *shar'* or *shari'* is often confused when making reference to what is known as "Islamic law." The constructs "Islamic law" and "*shari'a* laws" do not represent the Qur'anic *Shari'a* (with a capital S), meaning the collective guidelines of the Qur'an that encompass an intertwined moral and legal bind once the individual accepts the guidelines as his or her belief system, nor do they represent the Qur'an's principles. "Islamic law" or "*shari'a* laws" (with lowercase s) are mainly used by Orientalists in reference to jurisprudence opinions, documented in books of *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and supported by some Qur'anic verses and Hadith narratives. By giving those opinions a legal character, known in the West as "law," Orientalists and most contemporary Muslims have confused the Qur'anic *Shari'a* (guidelines) with other legislation or canonized laws.

Finally, by "change," I propose a transformation in history that changes presuppositions as well as social structures in order to mitigate historical stagnation. As the making and writing of history is a changing process, I aim at effecting change in both conceptions and attitudes concerning

women and of women, and not merely a superficial change in individual behavior and organizational structure.

Therefore, and because of this latter reality, and given these prerequisites, that is, to live the intentionality of the Qur'an, the first chapter of this book addresses the conditions for reading pedagogically and the methods used in such reading. The second chapter addresses the story of Creation and trusteeship in order to set the groundwork for women's involvement in planning and executing the course of action in the *minhaj* to achieve *taqwa*. In the third chapter, I examine the issue of autonomous morality and modesty, especially in attire, since the polarized discourses about woman's dress have been the most troubling and most limiting to Muslim women in their endeavors. The purpose and intent of these discussions is to restore *taqwa* (equilibrium) as the measure by which the Qur'an distinguishes one individual from another and sets the standard by which to discuss whether or not an education can even be considered Islamic (chapter 4). Islamic education—or self-learning, according to the Islamic curricular framework that I propose—helps individuals to put into practice and exercise the role of the trustee (*khalifah*) by acquiring the capacity to balance individual autonomy and social hegemony or heteronomy within the natural and divine laws (chapter 5).

I conclude this work by explaining how the Muslim woman's self-identity and self-identification with the Qur'an may bring about and sustain fair changes both in the understanding of Muslim women and in their realities. My argument also clarifies that I do not concern myself with "Islamic feminism" as defined by Fernea (1998) and others, even though they attempt to address Muslim women's issues from the women's own perspectives. In the concluding chapter I discuss why both Muslim male interpretations and academic feminism have failed to account for Muslim woman's self-identity.

The Rationale for Reading the Qur'an Pedagogically

Several groundbreaking writings by Muslim women scholars in recent years have brought forward views of Muslim women that contradict the image of an oppressed cultural group or an oppressing patriarchal religion (e.g., Hassan 1982; Ahmed 1992; Wadud-Muhsin 1992 and Wadud 1999; and Webb 2000). These writings, significant as they may be, have not been able to change the generalized image of the "veiled women of the harem," an image that some Orientalists and Western media continue to promote.

Nor have these writings changed the image of the Muslim woman as dependent member in the Muslim social structure, an image that many Muslim apologists and followers of precedent (*muqallidun*) want us to maintain. The root of these images is to be found in the way in which the majority of Muslim women, including many intellectuals, have been taught to perceive women's role in society and in the religion. Changing these images, therefore, calls for a change in perceptions and realities that can take place only when Muslim women themselves change how they identify themselves with the Qur'an. I began my pedagogical reading of the Qur'an after exploring the process and history of education and educating in Islam, particularly with regard to Muslim women, and in response to the existing scholarship by and about women in Islam. It is a journey between polarized views about Muslim women in the past and present. As my research demonstrates, only a few Muslim women have been able to relate a basic knowledge of Islam to public affairs. By being excluded from participating in policy making (that is, the interpretation of the text) and from leadership positions, Muslim women have not been able to change perceptions and attitudes or their own realities. I have therefore concluded that without identifying themselves with the Qur'an, the self-realization of Muslim women may not take place.

In the West Islam is commonly viewed as a patriarchal religion incompatible with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, in particular, with the demands for women's rights.¹² Hence, my question: "How can the scholarship activism of self-identified Muslim women change current perceptions of Islam and women from North America to South Asia?" I argue first that women's involvement in decision making (that is, participating in the interpretation of the Qur'an as well as in discussing the human rights documents) is critically needed in many Muslim communities and societies, and second, self-identification with the Qur'an offers a way to eliminate the secondary status of women because it is based on defining the issues from *within*. Thus, identification with the Qur'an is, I would maintain, a prerequisite to defining the issues by and for Muslim women, and it is more likely to generate more substantive and lasting change than any other model. Third, I argue that the attempt to transplant Western secular systems of education and Western feminists' views into Muslim communities and societies through the academic institutionalization of the study of Muslim women ignores the spiritual and intellectual worldview of the people who identify with the Qur'an and will not lead to lasting "solutions" to the problem of the secondary status of women.

In contrast to those Muslim males who would often respond with an apologetic or confrontational approach to colonialism and imperialism, female scholar-activists who are self-identified Muslims have often opted for the Qur'anic stipulation to use religio-civil parameters for social change. These Muslim women (such as the American and Syrian grassroots groups with which I collaborate), and other Muslim women who embrace the Islamic worldview as central to their identity, could reverse the process of generating polarized images about Islam and Muslim women by critically examining and adapting human rights documents and by critiquing gendered interpretations and human rights violations internationally as well as locally. By reading the Qur'anic foundational principles pedagogically, and by interpreting from the place of that mandate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations General Assembly 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (United Nations 1995, 1996), and U.S. and Canadian women's proposed amendments to their countries' constitutional mandates (e.g., Waggenspack 1989), these women scholar-activists may succeed in bringing back the mutual consultation process of *shura* among all Muslims, women and men. Furthermore, by discussing not only issues such as property ownership and inheritance, divorce and custody of children, and testimony and leadership in Islam but also issues of the autonomy of belief, freedom of expression, and public participation, they bring into the purview of Western "democratic" societies such as the United States, Canada, and others, the essence of Qur'anic justice, including Qur'anic gender justice.

This process is more critical than the mere establishment of equal rights or the democratic process of majority voting, because it calls for a partnership that involves all individuals in a community and is not limited to a few, namely the elite. This process also is more critical than the argument of Orientalists, such as Bernard Lewis (2001), merely to reform, liberate, or democratize Islam through changes in the status of women after the Western model. First, Lewis seems to apply Rosenthal's (1960, 2) understanding of the Hebrew meaning of *herut* (freedom, meaning submission to the law) to the understanding of the Arabic/Islamic meaning of free (*hurr*) or free will (*hurriyah*). In Islam, however, the order is exactly the opposite. Free will is a prerequisite to accepting, understanding, and employing the moral guidance of the message of the Qur'an, and this acceptance becomes legal and binding only after the individual makes the conscious choice to accept or reject the message, not because it represents the law. Second,

Western discourses, particularly feminism that relies on the politics of difference, as is the case in the nation-state civic democracy, often dismiss Muslim women's self-identity as "religious." Third, as will be discussed further, despite minor changes, the attitudes of the majority traditional male *ʿulama* (scholars of Islamic sciences) and policymakers have not changed. They still consider preserving customary traditions tantamount to preserving the Qur'an, the law, or the constitution. This is why some Muslim women, including some of my coresearchers, resist Western feminism and the nation-state form of democracy, as well as Muslim male elite conception and practice of the consultative process (*shura*)—wherein participation is limited to the select few, and women's participation is an "addon" or serves only to address "women's" issues.

Given some similarities between Qur'anic principles and those proposed in human rights documents, we may further conclude that when self-identified Muslim women bring the above ideas into the purview of Muslim societies, more sustainable changes will be achieved for women in Muslim societies as well as for women in general. The data presented in this work will, among other things, also establish strong evidence to substantiate my argument that the history of early American suffragettes share common ground with that of contemporary Muslim women everywhere. In addition, data on early and recent historical events in Muslim societies in the East and the West indicate that Muslim women scholar-activists who identify themselves with the Qur'an can effect as much of a change in the struggle for human justice as in the struggle for women's rights and gender justice, particularly in the American experience.

That said, I would caution against the hasty assumption that mere inclusion of Muslim women as the subject of study in a new field of academic endeavor, such as the recently developed field of Middle East women's studies, can bring about the changes intended by the self-identified Muslim women. This inclusion may well co-opt such changes in present-day institutional structures. Neither would such changes yield a sustainable and just effect if a number of Muslim women were simply included in governing parliaments or consultation councils (*majalis al-shura*). Rather, the changes intended by the self-identified Muslim women require an understanding of the worldview of these Muslim women and of how their views differ from the views of Muslim feminists who are not self-identified Muslims or those who condone universal-solidarity approaches to social transformation without a specific and explicit ontological grounding and self-identity. Furthermore, such changes require that Muslim elites

modify their views of women's trusteeship, morality, and authority to participate in the interpretation of Islamic texts.

Educational Discourse of Muslim Woman's Self-Identity: Did This Discourse Actually Occur?

Individual Muslim women and Muslim women's groups of different disciplines and backgrounds are increasingly seeking avenues of change that are closer to self-identification than feminism. The collection of essays published by Webb in 2000 may serve as a case in point. The essays in Webb's volume were conceived in 1995–96, and, interestingly enough, the "event that served as the final catalyst in the development of this volume was the enthusiastic audience response and near mandate to publish the papers delivered by the panel on 'Self-Identity of Muslim Women' at the 1995 Annual Middle East Studies Association (MESA) meeting" (Webb 2000, xiv).

By relating cultural studies to the rethinking of women's participation in and their interpretation of primary Islamic texts, some contributors to Webb's volume also took another step toward changing their position. For example, Mohja Kahf, a contributor to Webb's volume and a participant in the "Self-Identity of Muslim Women" panel, opened another window to understanding Arab Muslim women's literary work as significant "for modern Arabic cultural studies." In her pragmatic analysis of the memoirs of Huda Sha'rawi (1879–1947), Kahf not only rereads Huda's autobiography but also relates this work to the role Huda had in making a significant contribution to the course of events of her time (1998, 54).

Maysam al Faruqi, another contributor to Webb's volume and a participant in the "Self-Identity of Muslim Women" panel, added another perspective to the understanding of the study of Islam. Her two essays, "Self-Identity in the Qur'an and Islamic Law" (2000) and "From Orientalism to Islamic Studies" (1998), show the role that traditional Muslim interpretations and Western studies of Islam have played in creating misconceptions about Islam and Muslims, and emphasize the role and mandate that women have in rereading the Qur'an.

As a third contributor to Webb's volume and the organizer of the panel on self-identity, I captured this trend by tying the change in the image of Islam and Muslims in the United States to a change in the perception and the realities of Muslim women everywhere (Barazangi 1998a). In the editorial of the same publication, the 1998 special edition of *Religion and*

Education, I emphasized moral and intellectual autonomy of women as a prerequisite for Islamic education. In other works I drew a relationship between self-identity and democracy (1999a), and explained how women's higher Islamic learning is a prerequisite for their acquiring their human rights (1997, 2000).

Other Muslim women scholars have written about pioneering Muslim female figures of different eras and in different areas, and have emphasized the significance of Muslim women in history. Nevertheless, to my knowledge none have approached these figures from the angle of their pedagogical significance. Sonia Amin (1996, 8–10), for example, opens a fourth perspective to understanding Bengali Muslim women's pioneering educational and literary work in the same era as Huda Sha'rawi in writing about "the new woman in literature." Amin argues that the work of the women figures of the time, as exemplified in the work of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880–1932), is significant "for cultural studies of the new Muslim identity," but she chooses to address this historical significance by way of attributing the universalistic approach of Rokeya and her contemporaries to the secular trend of the time. While there might be truth in this, the fact that Rokeya and her other contemporaries were not part of the curriculum for the next generations of Muslims is not coincidental. Their omission indicates that some elements are missing in the reports on these scholars and their activism. Amin may have overlooked the possibility or misidentified the fact that Rokeya was identifying with the Islamic universal principle of egalitarianism, and that this principle was the actual driving force behind the conscientiousness of Rokeya's activism. Regardless of whether this was an oversight, and whatever the principles that might have informed Rokeya's intentional cognizant morality, the obscurity of Rokeya's and others' work for social change instigates my question concerning the pedagogical significance of these Muslim women.

Because of the historical interaction between the West and Islam, U.S. missionaries pioneered efforts toward modern education of Muslim girls (see, for example, Houghton 1877, and Jessup 1874) and have recently advocated women's rights in Muslim countries by supporting efforts to export "democratic principles" and "human rights values" to Muslim countries.¹³ In this context, the question of exporting Western ideals is not the only one of special significance. Rather, the question that gains special significance concerns how Western women have borrowed and might be borrowing—knowingly or unknowingly—from the Qur'an the demands for voting, property ownership, name preservation after marriage, divorce and

custody rights, and other issues of gender justice. When traced on intellectual, philosophical, and pedagogical levels, the special significance of that line of inquiry might reveal the importance of understanding Muslim woman's potential contribution, or the lack thereof, to history.

Knowledge, Policy Making, and Leadership Initiative

Perhaps it was because of, or in spite of, these missing elements in reporting that Rokeya's and similar works were ignored by both Muslims and Westerners or remained concealed and unexplored. Muslims did not want to admit their malpractice of Islam (be it the extremists' attempt to prevent women from learning how to read and write, or the *muqalliduns'* attempt to prevent women from fully participating in the interpretation and understanding of Islamic texts); and Western colonialists, Orientalists, and missionaries did not want Muslim women to be liberated from within the Islamic worldview. Meanwhile, some of Islam's principles were borrowed or translated into democratic principles and modern women's demands while Islam was chastised as patriarchal and antithetical to democracy, human rights, and gender justice. To focus on the pedagogical significance of Muslim women figures in history, therefore, means to construct a discourse for self-identity and identification with the Qur'an and with Islam as a worldview and a culture regardless of geographic or ideological affiliation. The construction of this discourse aims at understanding the content of and the assumptions that underlie the knowledge to which these pioneering women figures were or were not exposed. We need to answer whether or not these women figures and their female contemporaries had direct contact with Islam's primary sources. How did they interpret their sources? They probably did have contact with primary sources, but what other sources and interpretations did they rely on and draw from when they constructed these individual and collective narratives of historical events in Islam and within the given time and place of other histories? Why is it that the significance of these Muslim women historical figures remains anomalous and that their work did not translate into major social and legal changes for Muslim societies as had been the case in Western women's movements in less than a century? Or did these Western women bring an actual substantial change in their societies?

I believe that the construction of a discourse from self-identity from within Islamic reality will help in charting a course of knowledge and providing guidelines for changing the image and the reality of the Muslim

woman as well as the concept of Islam with which she identifies. Furthermore, it will help effect a fundamental change in the perception of Muslim women, namely, to change the mind-set operating with notions of second-class citizenry in order to embrace and practice the gift of autonomous human trusteeship as the Qur'an emphasizes in the second chapter (2:30). To chart these guidelines requires that each individual critically examine her own assumptions and their sources, hence the necessity to access the primary sources directly. To do so constitutes the first step toward self-identification with the Qur'an and with Islam. Historical documents tell us that this step was hardly taken by Muslim women. Is this indeed the case, and if so, why?

The relationship between knowledge and public policy has become so subtle that only a few scholars seem to have discussed it with regard to Muslims (e.g., Eickelman 1985) and to Muslim women (Barazangi 1982 through 2000). Yet this relationship is pertinent to the core issues of Muslim women and is essential whenever and wherever matters such as the mere right to literacy and schooling versus active participation in the interpretation of the Qur'an and modernity versus tradition are invoked. For example, in discussing Louis Dumont's (1986) notion that order in modern society is based on a complementary relationship between modern and premodern perceptions, George Stauth (1992, 4) asserts that this tense complementary relationship is present in the discourse of [Western] modernity and Islam. I would argue that this assumed complementary relationship has been expanded to include the postmodern issues of gender equality, and that most male scholars and religious leaders perceive and propagate the female's role as complementary to that of her male guardian. With the exception of the biological role of woman in reproduction and the caring for a child, the notion of a male-female complementarity in the sociopolitical order, while reflecting the views of many male Muslim scholars and leaders, actually contradicts the basic Qur'anic principle of human autonomous trusteeship in the natural order of justice and in mutual domestic consultation (Barazangi 1996, 80). The argument for complementarity also contradicts Webb's description that my "propaedeutic argument not simply for women's right to education but for the right of Muslim women to higher religious education (active participation in the ongoing 'reading' and interpreting of the Qur'an) as the foundational means to becoming the spiritually and intellectually autonomous person mandated in the Qur'anic view of the individual, male or female, as 'trustee' of God" (Webb 2000, xvi).