

review, she raises the question of which system should hold sway when demands of a specific religious tradition appear to conflict with the equal rights of women.

On the whole, while the work is somewhat uneven at times, it raises some use-

ful and timely issues and plays an important role in anticipating future directions in academic research and scholarship.

**Mark E. Hanshaw**  
*Texas Wesleyan University*

## Gender and Islam in Africa: Rights, Sexuality and Law

**Edited by Margot Badran**

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011, 336 pages,  
ISBN 9780804774819.

---

Accepting the responsibility of writing a review of a book like this volume edited by the outstanding scholar Margot Badran is both challenging and pleasant. Margot Badran is currently a senior scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (Middle East Program) in Washington, and she has become well known in the academic and non-academic *milieu* for her contributions on women, gender, and feminism in Islam and Muslim societies. In particular, there has been an increasing interest in her writings, such as in her two books *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (Oneworld, Oxford, 2009), a selection of her scholarly work over more than two decades, and *Feminism beyond East and West: New Gender Talk and Practice in Global Islam* (Global Media Publication, New Delhi, 2007), which brings together a collection of her public intellectual work, mainly essays published in the Egyptian *Al Ahram Weekly*.

In the imaginary and complex sceneries of the great Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges, books are conceived as gateways to different worlds. In publishing *Gender and Islam in Africa: Rights, Sexuality and*

*Law*, Margot Badran has not only made a valuable compilation of papers from a conference organized at the ISITA (Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa), but she has also presented a volume that illustrates how a multidisciplinary approach to studying issues such as gender, sexuality, and Islam can facilitate the perception of the complex and subtle ways in which African women's lives are constructed, represented and contested. Thus, this is a scholarly book that will open, in the "borgean" sense, a gateway to new worlds for both non-academic readers and researchers.

Margot Badran's edited volume gives a complex picture of Africa. In addition to reflecting on current theoretical and methodological tendencies, *Gender and Islam in Africa* also puts forward new innovative approaches to the critical exploration of several relevant and controversial issues, such as corporeality and sexuality. Moreover, it offers very interesting data.

This volume is composed of three parts: a first section entitled "Women reproduce knowledge", a second section entitled "Re/constructing women, gender,

and sexuality”, and a last section entitled “Shari’a, family law, and activism”. Chapters variously focus on knowledge production (Chapter 1, Beverly B. Mack), marginality and agency (Chapter 2, Ousseina D. Alidou), Islamic feminism (Chapter 3, Raja Rhouni), gender violence in marriage (Chapter 4, Sa’diyya Shaikh), moral woman hood in popular songs (Chapter 5, Lidwien Kapteijns), gender ideology and praxis in the Tabligh Jama’at (Chapter 6, Marloes Janson), visual culture (Chapter 7, Heike Behrend), Shari’a activism (Chapter 8, Margot Badran), monogamy and secret marriage (Chapter 9, Corinne Fortier), democracy and reform (Chapter 10, Julie E. Pruzan-Jorgensen), and family laws (Chapters 10, 11 and 12, Julie E. Pruzan-Jorgensen, Benjamin F. Soares and Rashida Manjoo).

As stated before, one of the main virtues of this book is that it constitutes a good example of multidisciplinary as contributions come from the fields of history, anthropology, sociology, political science, linguistics, literary criticism, gender studies, religious studies, feminist studies, film studies, and the law, and they are informed by different theoretical and methodological frameworks and perspectives. Data are gathered from different African countries like Nigeria, Niger, Morocco, South Africa, Somalia, Gambia, Mauritania and Mali. Even if the book starts off with a chapter that examines female intellectual production in the early 19th century, it generally focuses on the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Both its view of the African continent as a whole and its focus on the contemporary contexts make the book an important and unmissable reading.

As Badran points out, women and gender in Africa as a field of research

and academic inquiry goes back several decades. Islam, sexuality, and law have been points of serious debates in African societies’ scholarship, and this book brings together scholarship at the intersection of women’s and gender studies, Islamic studies, and African studies. As a result, the book shows an exciting convergence of interests.

It is important to stress the fact that most of the authors seem to write with a view to challenging different existing “givens”. Thus, in implicitly and explicitly questioning previous approaches, the book enhances and advances scholarly debate on relevant, but much discussed and non-comfortable issues. Indeed, the authors successfully move beyond scholarship on “Muslim women” and leave behind simplistic ideas on women’s agency and autonomy. Interestingly, they succeed in moving away from a simple focus on woman-as-victim of Islam, presenting new possibilities for shifting the debates around issues of gender, rights and Islamic laws.

*Gender and Islam in Africa* is a valuable resource for scholars interested in gender and Islam and, more generally, to social scientists working on Africa. The articles in this volume highlight the fact that women themselves have contested discourses, practices, and laws, and have promoted influential advances in their societies, such as in engaging in public transformative acts in the cultural, political, and economic domains through social networks in religious or secular spaces (Ousseuna D. Alidou); in negotiating gender ideologies in daily practices (Marloes-Janson); in claiming a depatriarchalized Islam (Margot Badran); or in legally using the subtleties or ambiguities of Islamic jurisprudence to make their wishes prevail

(Corinne Fortier). All the articles in this volume, in various and different ways, endeavor to shed light on the socially significant aspects of African women's actions and ideas.

In sum, *Gender and Islam in Africa* offers a refreshingly new perspective on a broad range of issues and will be a welcome contribution to many fields within the social sciences and humanities. I am convinced that this book will reward those whose interests lie in exploring women's agency, and that it will also bring a re-

ward to those whose concern with gender lies in challenging the current notions and stereotypes. Last but not least, Margot Badran's edited volume enhances critical understanding of the ways in which African women have promoted the ideals and practices of equality, human rights, and democracy within the framework of Islamic thought.

**Araceli González-Vázquez**

*Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Sociale,  
Collège de France*

## **The Rise of Islamic Capitalism: Why the New Muslim Middle Class is the Key to Defeating Extremism**

**By Vali Nasr**

New York: Free Press, Council on Foreign Relations Books; 2010, 320 pages, ISBN 9781416589693, \$16

---

On November 30, 2006, Catholic Pope Benedict XVI made a historic visit to the Sultan Ahmed Mosque in Istanbul. The Pope's historic visit to what tourists call the "Blue Mosque" was designed to symbolically ameliorate tensions caused by the Pope's controversial speech a few weeks prior in Germany. During the visit to the mosque, the Pope turned toward Mecca and gave a silent prayer for two minutes. As he and his entourage began leaving the mosque, the Papal leader pointed to an inscription on a wall and asked for the translation of the phrase written there, which was "A merchant is the beloved of God" or "al-kasib habiballah" (p. 12).

This historic moment is used in Vali Nasr's book *Islamic Capitalism* to illustrate the point that Islam has deep entrepreneurial roots. The revival of this spirit

he argues is the most important trend in the modern Muslim world. The growth of a new Muslim middle class he believes will both undermine terrorism and dissipate the influence of radical Islam on political discourse in the Muslim world.

Vali Nasr, an Iranian-American professor at Tufts University in Boston, argues that during the second half of the 20th century several Muslim countries underwent an impressive transition from closed and statist economies to more open and liberal economies. This new Muslim middle class is rising in the Gulf, Turkey, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere in the Muslim world by embracing the global economic order. Nasr's book omits, perhaps, the rapidly growing Muslim middle class amongst Muslim diaspora groups in the European Union and North America,