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MUSLIM WOMEN'S ISLAMIC HIGHER LEARNING AS A HUMAN RIGHT: THEORY AND PRACTICE
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MUSLIM WOMEN'S ISLAMIC HIGHER LEARNING

AS A HUMAN RIGHT: THEORY AND PRACTICE

NIMAT HAFEZ BARAZANGI

Summary

Limited access to Islamic higher learning is argued to be the basis for the Muslim woman's inability to emancipate and to self-identity as a Khalifa (trustee)--a Qur'anic mandate (or potential) of human existence. Muslim woman's reliance solely on others' interpretations to guide her spiritual and intellectual needs, be it those of Muslim or of non-Muslim men and women, is by itself an evidence that Muslim woman's right to understand, to consciously choose, and to actively act on her choice of Islam is being compromised. Full access to the Diin, the Islamic belief system, calls for the Muslim woman to take part in the interpretation of Islamic teachings of the Qur'an and the Hadith and to maintain the pedagogical dynamics of Islam, rather than being limited to maintaining the human re-production, the Muslim family structure, or the individual human rights as suggested by others.

My understanding of woman's gender justice vis-a-vis "liberation" within the Islamic worldview is based on epistemological reading (the philosophy of knowledge) of the Qur'an. The rationale behind the demand for woman's access to knowledge is derived from the Islamic framework. The methodologies of the discipline of education and learning and the struggle for human dignity that define the parameters for Muslim woman's emancipation are grounded in that framework. To examine her role as a human entity in the Qur'an does not merely concern the Muslim woman's "freedom of expression;" it concerns the woman as an autonomous spiritual and intellectual human being who can effect a change in history. The intent of this chapter and of my overall research is to make a contribution towards an educational and pedagogical interpretation of the Qur'an for women living in the post-modern era and thereby to produce an action plan for the Muslim woman to regain her identification with Islam. My analysis of empirical data concerning Muslim women's perception of Islam, the contemporary North American Muslim woman, in a historical context serves to clarify the meaning and the implications of Islamic higher learning regardless of these women's educational level. Preliminary observations suggest that the majority of Muslim women's movements do not aim to eliminate the tension between the two sexes by claiming sameness in the struggle for equality. Rather, their goal is Taqwa (to balance) the tensionback in favor of woman, as the Qur'an intends in the first place when human beings, male and female, were entrusted with individual rights and responsibilities toward themselves, each other, and the universe. I will argue that one of the basic principles of Islamic justice is gender justice. The interpretations of these "equal" rights and responsibilities, however, stem from different perspectives of Islam. Muslim women groups are scattered on a continuum from the idealized polemic Muslim to the idealized static Western perspectives. Few are those who are making efforts to exact the balance between these perspectives.

The pedagogical implications of this research lies in : (1) intervening among Muslim men by coaching them to rethink and to act within the balanced perspective of Islam and its first source, the Qur'an, away from both the many layers of Muslim "taqlid " (following precedence) and from Western interpretations of Islam, (2) facilitating for Muslim women the environment and the means to realize their identity as autonomous spiritual and intellectual beings, and to realize the vastness of their task in educating themselves and others in Islam--encluding changing the entrenched paradigm of understanding Islam studies and its practice, and (3) integrating human-rights activists' concerns within the Qur'anic concerns for a just human society, where justice means the balance and fair play in the ideals and realities among all humans.

Introduction

Muhammad Arkoun (1994b:62) asks: "How many women, either in the Third World or in Western societies have mastered the biological, anthropological, historical, and sociological genesis of the condition of women in order to lead the battle for emancipation at the appropriate levels and in the interest of promoting the human being?" Arkoun offers his ideas on the role of women in Islam as a "man who learned and retained a great deal from my illiterate mother. "

As invaluable and challenging as his ideas might be, and despite his valuing of women's sacrifices of self-realization to assure the survival of the human species, I find it difficult to accept Arkoun's rationale for why women's role under Islam has not changed. His assertion that the Qur'an "could not modify two essential aspects of entrenched and centuries-old conditions: elementary kinship structures and control of sexuality " (Arkoun, 1994b:60) is not a satisfactory explanation. It is particularly unsatisfactory since history indicates that these two conditions were indeed changed by the Prophet Muhammad and among early Muslims. Given that the Qur'an clearly indicates such a change in women's role when it asserts that the human creation comes from, or made of a SINGLE soul and grants the human trusteeship for all, why do Muslim societies and male intellectuals condone the social practice of those contemporary Muslim men who do not abide by the control of sexuality as they demand it of the Muslim women? And why is it that only the female is expected to sacrifice her self-realization as a person for the survival of the species, when the Qur'an clearly entrusts both sexes to carry on the burden of the trust (2:30) in a mutual consultation (62:38)? Finally, if women in Muslim societies are expected to sacrifice their self-realization for the good of society, why is it that when Muslim societies deteriorate in their moral and social relations it coincides with woman's guardianship being viewed as the responsibility of the man?

On another plane, Hanna Papanek (1984: Abstract) wrote on the question of "women's emancipation": "Future work on issues concerning women and development requires an internationally oriented scholarship on women that is closely tied to both research and practice. American universities have not served us well in building that scholarship--both because of failures to include international orientations and teaching and research concerning women."

Just as Arkoun's Rethinking Islam brings fresh air to the understanding of Islam outside the Western and the Muslim "reason, " Papanek's evaluation in Women-In-Development and Women's Studies (1984:5) was still largely valid in 1995, the year of the Fourth Women World Conference. Papanek points to the lack of a link between forces to develop a "body of research on both theory and policy." Though some work has been done in the last decade toward this end, there is also the lack of a link between the general advocacy for women's rights and a thorough investigation as to how different women, individuals and groups, perceive these rights. It is not only essential for women in development to realize that "women's issues" have arisen as a result of vast changes brought about by development, as Papanek suggests, but it is as necessary that women in "area studies," and women in "human rights" realize that "international women's issues" have also arisen amidst the one-sided views within the academic "area studies" and within a generic human rights advocacy. Orientalism and its related missionary and colonial movements made major contributions to these one-sided views both by perceiving Islam as frozen in the thirteenth to the sixteenth century and by explaining the pedagogy of Islam largely with Greek philosophical tools, and within the framework of Christian missionary and colonial policy. The challenge before the Muslim woman is not limited to changing policies or legal status, but includes changing the entrenched paradigm of understanding Islam and its practice. Thus, the focus on policy changes, as suggested by Papanek, should be combined with a focus on "What policy?," in "Whose interest?," and "With which paradigm and methodology?"

The need to develop research paradigms that make gender central to analyses of social change, one area of the common ground suggested by Papanek, implies a continuous reflective process that assesses the application of such paradigms across the international body of women. Papanek sums it up: "We cannot have it both ways: arguing for a universally applicable set of explanations for the position of women while taking universal applicability as a given and, therefore, failing to take the trouble to check ideas against empirical fact." (1984:Abstract)

To this end, developing research paradigms that make the Muslim woman central to the analyses of social change within Muslims societies and Muslim minority communities calls for historical understanding of the orientalist- missionary movement in Muslim countries during colonial and post colonial periods and their lasting effects. The goal of this historical analysis is not to be apologetic, but to understand the nature and development of the idealized, frozen in time Islam created by this movement. Such a historical analysis and understanding will allow us to free Islam both from its static and dogmatic codified law and to re-open the dialogue within its flexible pedagogical system. Arkoun (1994a:49) points out and laments the fact that it is in imitation of this idealizing movement that "countries like Saudi Arabia and Libya have encouraged missionary activities previously unknown to Islam." In fact, it was in imitation of European institutionalized religion and its biases toward women that predominantly Muslim male leaders were encouraged by colonialists to impose more restrictions on Muslim women, particularly concerning Islamic higher learning, restrictions which were unknown in Muslim societies until the Spanish Inquisition. This is evidenced in the sharp drop in the number of scholalry or influential females reported in Muslims biographies.2

I am not invoking here the centuries-old reciprocal exclusion and "otherness" between the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, nor the post colonial dichotomy between Islam and the West. Rather, I want to draw the attention of the academic and "scientific" community, as well as the human rights advocates, to the fact that their claim for intellectual separation of "reason" and religion, as Arkoun (1994a:51) put it "ceases to operate once [their Western thought] is confronted with Islam." I am also trying to draw the attention of the imams (male Muslim leaders) and ulema (religious scholars) to the fact that their claim for authority on "authentic Islam " ceases to be plausible once their polemic, fixed-in-time interpretations are confronted with the awareness of the Qur'anic intention that it be open for continuous interpretation at all times and places by both males and females.

In this essay I use the above arguments and historical analysis to address the issue of applicability of the "universal" human rights document, the United Nations "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women "(CEDAW),3 to Muslim women in general. I will specifically address the rights to education, as charted in the document, and how it has overlooked Muslim woman's rights to Islamic higher learning (i.e., deeper knowledge of Islamic primary sources--the Qur'an and Hadith) as apriori for regaining her natural endowments as a human and as a Muslim. As evidence for my arguments, I use examples from the Muslim males' generated imitation of the perceived rights to education as outlined in the document "Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights (UIDHR) "4 that was prepared by the Islamic Council.

Examining the role of woman as a human entity in the Qur'an does not merely concern a Muslim woman's freedom of speech and sexuality, or access to balanced education; it concerns woman as an autonomous spiritual and intellectual human being who will effect a change in history. The task of my research entails more than an examination of the related parts (verses) of the Qur'anic text vis-a'-vis the above two documents. My intention in analyzing empirical data concerning Muslim women's perception of Islam is to make an epistemological 'reading' of the

Qur'an that will be meaningful to women living in the post-modern era and that will produce an action plan for the Muslim woman to regain her identification with Islam.5

The North American (the United States and Canada) Muslim woman is the case-in-point here. I have been specifically interested in whether or not these North American Muslim women were and are able to benefit from the North American environment to further their Islamic higher learning as defined earlier and as I will extrapolate further below when I discuss specific cases. Those who see it ironic that a 'secular ' environment could benefit the understanding of religion and of Islam as a worldview and belief system may also see it as ironic that these North American Muslim women expect to contribute to their new environment and to the historical change in the interpretation of Islamic sources, despite the Western and Muslim male views of them as passive, dependent beings.

Given that there are a variety of social and economic applications of the Islamic worldview, one might wonder if my attempt could become as premature an attempt of a general theory and policy-making as the universally-claimed documents. In order to address this concern, I start with outlining the metaphysical (philosophy of principles and values) and epistemological background of this study. Second, I will discuss the discrepancy between the Islamic worldview, on one hand, and the "universalist-secular-humanist " and the inherited Muslim religious views of education as a human right, on the other hand. I will specifically look into the implications of these views for gender justice, as proposed in both the CEDAW and UIDHR Documents. I have explored elsewhere the inconsistancy between the ideals of Islam concerning education and woman and their practice in contemporary Muslim societies and communities (Barazangi, forthcoming). I will discuss here their implications in two cases drawn from my field work with North American Muslim women and their daughters in the historical context of the orientalist/missionary hegemonic influence and the Muslim limiting interpretation of the "text. " I will conclude by illucidating the relation between Islamic "universalism" as stated in the Qur'an and plurality in application. The shortcomings of the "universal " human rights of education will be evident as I argue for Islamic higher learning as an apriori human natural endowment that needs to be objectified.

Philosophical Conceptions of Education, Feminism, and Islam

It would be a mistake to attempt an analysis of the Muslim woman's education in isolation from what is happening in other relevant fields of study such as feminist studies of education and "Islamization of knowledge, "6 or without taking into consideration the effects of economic restructuring policies and the "New Right " movements in many Western countries and the re-assertion of conservative morality around the world. Particularly instructive is the case of contemporary Muslims' emphasis on women's returning to a "traditional" form of dress, whether or not it satisfies the Islamic dictum of a modest public appearance, and to return to the "home, " whether or not that home satisfies the Islamic conditions of mutual expectation and consultation.

Madeline Arnot (1993: 1) states that after "twenty years of feminist education research, policy development and innovative school practice, it seems appropriate to evaluate the impact and significance of this worldwide struggle for social justice.

Similarly, after two hundred years of missionary education and more than fifty years of "universal," compulsory schooling in the Muslim world, it seems timely to evaluate the results of these systems of education and their actual impact on the Muslim woman . At the same time, the recent global economic restructuring policies and the consequent political unrest and

educational reforms also require a considered response from those committed to promoting greater social equality and from those who are promoting the return to "Islamic education."

Though feminist studies of education "has managed to cross its national boundaries and has constructed a common agenda for the English speaking academic world (in, for example, New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Canada)," (Arnot. 1993, 1) few studies, to my knowledge, have constructed a common agenda for Muslim women. Even when an agenda has been proposed and/or constructed, it has been produced by Muslim males dealing with education from an idealistic, dichotomized (between religious and Western "secular ") perspective or by Westernized feminists (Muslims or non-Muslims) who operate from "area studies " framework.

Peggy McIntosh (1994) wrote: "As a girl or woman learns to read, she learns to imagine alternatives to her situation. But if what she reads leaves her out, she may see these alternatives as unreal--making her more, not less, disempowered, the more she "learns." The dichotomy between the ideals and practice in Muslim female education persists even in the most recent agenda developed by organizations in the East and the West, Muslims and non-Muslims.(Barazangi, forthcoming). This dichotomy and the agenda are explained respectively by my definition of Islam, education, and Islamic education, and by relating them to feminist studies and feminist views of education.

Islam and education:

Islam and education are linked in a shared process because, on one hand, Islam as a worldview may not be realized without its pedagogy (the arts of teaching and learning) and, on the other hand, education has no meaning if it does not penetrate the individual's worldview and envoke change in perception of human relations. Through this change in perception, education is expected to bring equality among humans, particularly between the sexes. I believe that only when education succeeds in bringing about social change and social justice will it actualize the reality that justice is as fundamental to the Islamic worldview as the existence of a Just Supreme Being, The God (Allah). Such an education is what I call 'Islamic education. ' Thus, education does not become Islamic when it is taught by Muslims nor for Muslims, nor when its content is the subject of Islam as a "religion". Rather, education becomes Islamic only when it fulfills the premise of producing an autonomous individual who intellectually and spiritually makes the choice to be khalifah (trustee/vicegerent) and to follow the course of action toward achieving social justice as described in the Qur'an and objectified by the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).

Feminist studies and Islam:

Feminist studies and Islam struggle with and against each other in that both are oriented toward a better future for the female by rejecting human hierarchy. From the normative Islamic pperspective, human hierarchy is rejected as counter to the Qur'anic view of creation and human beings. Feminism here is used in its broadest sense as a creative theory of human relations which aims at transforming social structures that do not consider the individual contribution, particularly that of females. Yet, because Islam and feminist studies appear to struggle against each other due to both the projection of Islam as a patriarchal religion, and projection of feminism as anti Islamic in its values, one of my tasks is to show that the basis of feminist thinking are implied in the Qur'anic conception of justice as objectified by "the autonomous trustee" of the Qur'an ("Allah said to the angels:I will create a khalifah on earth " 2:30). My claim that the basis of feminism lies in the Qur'an is not intended to read history in a backward

manner, as Arkoun (1994b: ix) describes the Muslim apologists, nor to invoke an upheaval among Muslims who do not accept the use of "feminism " to describe the Qur'an. I am merely re-iterbreting what Rahman (1996:17-18) stated: The basic principle in the Qur'anic view of Islamic justice is the equality between the sexes. It is worth noting here that my frequent reference to the Qur'an instead of Islamic ideals is intended to distinguish the Qur'an and the prophetic model (documented in the authentic Hadith) as primary sources of the ideal and practice, respectively, from their interpretations by Muslim males and Orientalists as secondary sources.

Feminism and education:

Feminism and education share one history, since females are the cradle of education, and education is organically connected to feminism. Education here is defined as the process of conceptual change that transforms individuals and societies from one state of affairs into another. Hence, I am not propagating that education is a woman's "territory, " nor that females are only suitable for a career in education. Rather, I am emphasizing this organic connection between females' struggle to change conceptions, and education as a conceptual change process that enables females to realize themselves as the trustees in the Islamic educational process.

I argue here that the tension between Orientalist and contemporary Western ideals of Muslim societies, and Muslim societies' ability to build stable social organization is a by-product of Westerners' and Westernized Muslims' insistence to "liberate" Muslim women from their Islamic culture instead of helping them emancipate from within their own worldview of Islam and the West.

The compounded effect of the historical deterioration of Muslim women's education in general, and Islamic education in particular,7 seems to result also in another tension, namely the contemporary tension between Muslims' ideals and their practice, such as the case of the contemporary claims of "islamization," on one hand, and between the West's ideals for itself and its ideals for others, on the other. This tension has resulted in dismissing the Islamic perspective of religion and its meaning of social construction in the understanding of the Muslim woman's role and the meaning of her Islamic higher learning. Achieving Islamic education and gender equality in Islamic higher learning becomes a priority because without this equality between the sexes, the balance between individuals remains threatened by the non-Islamic attitude of superiority of one human being over another and by the one-sided (the male's) interpretation of the text and the word of the Qur'an and the Hadith.

Islamic View of Autonomous Individual

My reading of the Qur'an and the Hadith indicates five basic principles--outlined in the Qur'an and extrapolated in the Hadith--that were to permeate the life and thought of the autonomous individual who could make moral and intellectual choices in a just society:

1. The creation of male and female of a single soul (Al Nisa','Women, ' 4:1).8
2. The individual right and obligation to learn and be educated in the teaching/legislation (Al-Alaq/Iqra', 'the Clot ' /Read,' 96:1-4). Also, Aisha, the Prophet's wife and major transmitter of early Islamic history and values said: "modesty did not prevent the women of Ansar [the people who supported the prophet's message] from learning").
3. The individual right and responsibility to take the oath of accepting or rejecting Islam, voting (Al-Mumtahina 'the Woman to be examined,' 59:12). The Prophet Muhammad dedicated a special day for women to discuss with him and to vote on his message and accept him as a Muslim community leader.

4. The individual's ability to receive and dispense of inheretance (Al Nisa', 4:7).

5. The individual's membership in the Islamic sisterhood and brotherhood with no distinction of gender, race, class, or color (Al-Hujurat 'inner apartments,' 49:10).

These principles explain not only the need and priority of Islamic higher learning, but the unity of the Islamic philosophy, despite its theological and historical diversity, as explained by Renard (1994:32). Within the above perspective of social organization and of education as a means to approximate the ideals of a just society, we can specifically affirm the role of woman and woman's education for gender justice in a Muslim society, or for that matter in a Muslim community within a pluralistic society such as the United States and Canada.

The universal woman may also benefit if she chooses to realize that the realities of Muslim women's lives do not always represent these principles, and that these principles are not limited to faithful Muslims nor any ethnic/national group, since God is beyond particular faith and ethnic association and beyond gender. Allah is called 'He' because of the nature of the Arabic language, which assigns male or female to all nouns and pronouns (Cornell, 1994:63). The concept of absolute transcendence has profound implications for one's understanding of both divinity and human dignity.

This awareness of the unitary truth of God was deemed by early Muslims so important as to constitute the essence of knowledge itself. (Cornell, 1994:64) Such a realization makes Islamic higher learning not only essential for, but prior to human understanding of one's own nature and reality in relation to the universe. Islam's strongest argument in favor of "Tawhid (the theological claim of the Oneness of God) is that the believer does not have to resort to the abandonment of logic in order to maintain her faith. " Furthermore, if Allah (God) created the world in order to be known, as the Islamic teachings assert, then "it is necessary that human beings be given the capacity to recognize and understand the Truth that brought about their existence." (Cornell, 1994:66). The Qur'an--'the reading' that never ceases--came down from Allah as a mercy for humankind, and continually informs the human being such that she can better serve her role in changing history as she realizes herself as a person who consciously chooses to be a Muslim and creatively acts on this choice.

CEDAW, UIDHR, And Gender Justice

The title and the intent of CEDAW document, "The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women" is not in tune with the Islamic worldview of gender justice that calls for universal social, economic and political justice on two grounds: First, the "elimination of discrimination " does not necessary result in gender justice because it only constrains certain practices by legal acts. Second, the document emphasizes the role of the state in the implementation process. To assign the 'state' as the guardian of such elimination of discrimination is problematic, given that the present Muslim states do not govern according to Islam and yet they act as authorities protected by "Islamic law. "

Gender justice in the Islamic view means the regaining of equality between the sexes beginning with birth (Qur'an, 4:1) and ending with membership in the Islamic sisterhood and brotherhood where there is no distinction of sex, class, race and color within any form of social organization (Qur'an, 49:10). CEDAW provides practical steps, spelling out in Article 10 the specifics of how discrimination might be eliminated in the field of education. I am, however, concerned with the ambiguity of legal changes when "Islamic law" is addressed. As long as Islamic law (known as Shari`ah) is defined as the "totality of ordinances derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah (Prophetic tradition)" (UIDHR 1994:149), the Muslim woman has no hope of becoming part of this process of legal change. There are two reasons for this: First, women are

considered by many of these ordinances as dependents rather than as partners in the interpretation process. Second, even though 'Islam' and 'Islamic' indicate the worldview of one of the world's largest population which encompasses a unity of principles and plurality of practice without excluding membership of those whose faith is not Islam or those who are not males, the general practice in Muslim societies, especially in the last fifty years, is that more and more groups, especially women, are being excluded from this process by the muqallidun (followers of precedence), using the Shari`ah as an excuse. (Barazangi, 1996) The real issue then, is how do we expect male legislators to enact items a-h in Article 10 of the CEDAW document (e. g., (a) the same conditions for career) when the whole idea of a career for Muslim women is dismissed under the disguise of Shari`ah.

The Islamic conception of "gender justice" as outlined above is not discussed in the CEDAW document or in any previous UN or 'human rights' documents; the development of those documents apparently did not and does not consider the Islamic conception of human existence, purpose and rights and responsibilities. The prevalent philosophy guiding the whole concept of a universal organization (the "United Nations") is by itself an indication of viewing human beings and human relations within the philosophy of the secular "nation-state " concept (Sonn, 1996:69). Although by "secular," the ecumenical philosophy is assumed to be separate from the mundane human functions and the political governing, as Sonn argues, the underlying Judeo-Christian philosophy that accepts and postulates the separation of church and state is part of the guiding principles of the UN document. This claimed separation in the Western views is central to the problem at hand. As Arkoun (1994a:51) observes, this separation of the "intellectual and psychological within Western thought ceases to operate once 'the West' is confronted with Islam--then people slip into a consensus which on the one hand pre-supposes all the values [of democracy, liberalism, etc.] as achievements and on the other sees them rejected and menaced by fundamentalist barbarism. "

Understanding Islamic gender justice from this "supreme Western thought" point of view is not only problematic for the Muslim woman--as she finds herself at the crossroad between the Muslim and Western 'reason'--but, more importantly, it offers neither religious nor secular mental instruments of emancipation, as Arkoun (1994a: 53) asserts. I am not implying here an intrinsic gender injustice in both Christianity and Judaism. Rather, I am pointing to both the theological foundational assumptions as discussed, for example, by Hassan (1994:19), and the influence of Judeo-Christian traditional practices on Muslims' practices, as apparent in some Muslims writings--following Christians' separation of the science of theology and the practice of ethics--wherein "Islamic ethics has generaly been ensconced in Islamic law rather than ethical discourse."(Sonn, 1996:65)

The example of ordinary Muslims' repeating the ordinary Christian belief that Adam was God's primary creation and that Eve was created from Adam's rib (Hassan, 1994: 20) suffices to indicate the central problem here when attempts are made in understanding Islamic views on gender from outside the Islamic framework (i.e., the story does not exist in the Qur'an). Compounded with this is the fact that many scholars, Muslims and non Muslims, for example Smith and Haddad (1982), use the concept of Eve [Hawwa', the Hebrew/Arabic counterpart] in discussing women in Islam, despite the non-existence of this concept in the Qur'an, thus preventing an understanding of Islamic view on gender. Ironically, other scholars who claim to interpret the Qur'an as a primary source use these secondary sources as the basis of their interpretations. Barbara Freyer Stowasser (1994), for example, bases the views of Eve in her Women in the Qur'an on Smith and Haddads' discussion of Eve. She further relies on their conception of Eve in understanding gender justice in Islam!

The educational implications of such foundational misunderstandings become more dangerous when Muslim women on both ends of the continuum, between rejecting and defending Islam, believe and reiterate these concepts as "Islamic. " This is why Islamic higher learning is needed to enable Muslim and non-Muslim women to bring-out evidence against these myths about women's creation that are basic to changing attitudes about women and gender relations and, as Arkoun (1994b:53) suggests, to by-pass the arguments and divisions maintained in Western Christian contexts.

Since Islam, in the words of Fazlur Rahman (1996:11-12), intended first and foremost to establish justice in the social order among all humans (realities) that would approximate the natural (intrinsic, ideal) justice of the creation, the first priority of a universal document is to address "gender justice" instead of "human rights." In Islam, the right to choose the Islamic worldview is an individual responsibility that is objectified only by a conceptual and attitudinal change of human relations on the part of the individual. The universalists' human rights philosophy may never approximate the natural justice because human biases contained in national, socio-economic (development), race, faith, and most of all gender identities have not actually changed the individual attitude and conception of gender.

Furthermore, the idea of gender justice is not limited to Muslim women, nor to women as a sub-group of humanity, but is intended for all humans. That is, only when human society changes its conception of male-female relations will it become closer to being in tune with its propagation of democratic, egalitarian principles and human rights for all. That is, unless the present attitudes about male-female relations are changed, any democratic system or process will be short of addressing gender justice. The Qur'an, in a way, is a primary source to feminism in changing the conception of male-female relations from what was practiced before the inception of Islam (beginning with the rights to vote, the rights of inheritance, the protection against being infanticide, etc.). Yet to claim that the type of Islam taught in establishments controlled by male religious authorities and studied in the departments of Oriental and Near Eastern studies is the liberator of human dignity and the restorer of gender justice is a grave mistake. A critical examination of the discrepancy between these types of "Islam" brings us back to the reasons behind the opposition between the Enlightenment "reason" and religious "reason" that, in Arkoun's (1994a: 55) words, has spilled over into the twenteith century Muslim world. During the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, that opposition was projected in the form of opposition between Islam and modernismin, and in the twentieth century in the form of confrontation between Islam and the West. This opposition is at the heart of the "Muslim woman question." The second shortcoming in the CEDAW document lies in the emphasis on the role of the State in implementing the articles of the document. That is, to assign to the 'state' the role of the guardian in eliminating discrimination is problematic, given that the present Muslim states do not govern according to Islam and yet act as authorities protected by "Islamic law." Without having standards that are outside the human domain to reinforce the appropriate measures proposed to eliminate each form of discrimination [e.g, item (c.)"elimination of any stereotype concepts of the roles of men and women.."], how can we guarantee the elimination of these acts? We do not have a means to examine the change in actual policies and attitudes, nor can we bring the balance back into the social order, as intended in the Qur'anic conception of Islamic social justice, because the standards of the U.N. do not consider the Islamic conception of justice. In other words, we may be able to resolve the tension between the sexes or between nations on one level, but we often end up offsetting the balance on another level.

For example, the humanist and feminist perspectives that see the goal as empowerment, might succeed in taking away the authority from male patriarchs and giving it to females, but

they maight act in the same authoritarian way, once they become "empowered," because-- in the case of Muslim women--they were not trained in the Islamic higher knowledge that would enable them to counter accusations of blasphemy or preaching of the Shari`ah. Nor would these women be able to govern without getting the political backing of a military regime or a Western government. Using the concept of empowerment could be misleading if it is not joined by the questions of who is being empowered, in whose interest, and with what. Empowerment, excluding the power of persuasion (Papanek 1984:8), will not be different from the quest for eliminating independent personalities, a goal pursued both by the church since 1960 and among democratic states, but with a negative and sometimes scandalous results (Arkoun,1994a: 55).

Similarly, as long as those who wrote UIDHR use the rhetoric that God is the legislator while accepting human interpretation of God's legislation as part of the sacred law--the Shari`ah--there is no hope for a gender justice even if these leaders executed all the items under Article 10 of CEDAW and under Article XXI "Right to Education " of UIDHR (149).

As long as the attitude of human superiority over another human is not changed, it will be almost impossible to achieve gender justice. In this respect, gender justice becomes a prerequisite to achieving such a change in attitude because the purpose of human existence (males and females), according to Islam, is to be the trustees (Qur'an, 2:30) for approximating the natural, intrinsic justice on earth.9

In accordance with this perspective of gender justice, the above five Islamic principles could serve as a basis for a theory of Muslim women's education (secular and religious) and for Islamic higher learning. These principles, though being established by the Qur'an, are intended for the development of an autonomous individual human being who can fulfill the trust only by choice. The sophistication of the human ability to recognize her autonomous intellect and moral obligation to make a choice of a course of action is the only means by which education may result in social change and social justice. Through this course of action, education can be expected to, or at least hoped to, bring equality among humans, particularly between the sexes, because without education the individual human potential may not be realized. An essential part of this education is to understand and deploy the Islamic principles of human dignity that may not be attained without Islamic higher learning.

The Case in Point in Historical Analysis

The romantic views of popular culture and literature in America and the West in general are not the only sources that portray women in Islam as the "dependent, ignorant." Rana Kabbani states that the "Victorian imagination [of orientalists] could not conceive of female eroticism divorced from female servitude and dependency. " (1986: 80-81) With all the conflicts between the power of the colonial and the powerlessness of the colonized, Muslim women's emancipation was conditioned by their liberation from their culture.10

My research on Muslim women's education indicates that globally, the concerns for Muslim women's Islamic education and Islamic higher learning are particularly lost between the contemporary polarized Western negative image of a practicing Muslim woman and the Muslim propagation of differentiated function that calls for limited "religious" education.11 None of the Western scholarly and activist groups raise the issue of Muslim women's inclusion in the religious, juristic, and scholarly ranks of Muslim communities.12

Meanwhile, Muslim women in the USA and Canada, as generally is the case in other Western societies, are not as free to practice certain aspects of Islam as is the case among other

religious groups such as the Conservative Jews, the Mennonites, the Mormons, and so on. The often cited rationales are either that Muslim women are being oppressed by Islam and are coerced by their male guardians, or that there is no place in secular societies for asserting religious identity and symbolism of Muslim woman's modesty.13

While Muslim women are trying to build their own agenda for emancipation, they are being torn between "secular humanists" who discourage them from the development of their own reading of Islam, and the Muslim males and some females who think that a women's Islamicity is expressed through the wearing of a head-dress and seclusion, and that her Islamic education should be in all-female school and university and should focus on domestic subjects such as home economics.14 Ruth Roded rightly questions "the extent to which alleged seclusion of women actually prevented them from engaging in a variety of endeavors that were important by Islamic and external standards (Roded, 1994:12). What is being discussed here, however, is the contemporary Muslims' trend of measuring the Islamicity of a woman by her practice of the conservative form of dress, known as "hijab,"15 and by her returning to her home and assuming only domestic chores. Knowledge, particularly religious knowledge, means authority, and religious authority is power. Yet, this power may not be meaningful for the Muslim woman without her being knowledgable with the basic principles of Islam--other than what is generally taught as the belief in God, the Prophets, the Angels, the Scriptures and the Hereafter--in order to realize her self-identification with Islam as a trustee. My analysis the polarized position of Muslim women in the context of the educational history of Muslim women, beginning with the intensified interaction between the Western and Muslim societies, was undertaken for the following reasons:

First, Ruth Roded's work (1994:11) presented us with the impact that Western culture/colonialism had in actually reducing the number of women in biographical collections in Islamic history. I view this phenomenon as a contributing factor to the dichotomous views on Muslim women's education and emancipation. Second, since the concept of education in Islamic societies does not seem to fit the utilitarian Western theories of education (Barazangi, 1995a), Muslims' contributions to religious scholarship is considered marginal by Western educators. In addition, Western societies, being still largely influenced by the concept of limiting religious leadership to the male clergy, have minimized the importance of Muslim female religious scholarship. Third, the separation of "religious" and "secular" education among North American Muslim women, and among Muslims in general, seems to result from the dichotomy between the Western and Islamic world views on education, on Islamic education, and on women's role.

This dichotomy resulted, and results, in a tension between Muslims and Westerners in which Muslim women's education suffered and continues to suffer the brunt. Combining this dichotomy and the resulting historical and contemporary discrepant practices suggests not only that there was, and there is, "a constant tension in Islamic society between an egalitarian ideal and the realities of social, political and economic inequalities," as Roded (1994:8) suggests, but that there also exists a discrepancy within Western ideals for the self and for others.

As a case-in-point, two examples of a series of focus-group interviews are reported here from a sample of 25 Muslim immigrant mothers and their 25 youth daughters aged fourteen to twenty-two. These women and female youths represent a sub-sample of a larger group of Muslims who participated in the author's study of North American Muslim adults' transmission of the Islamic belief system to their offspring.16 The youth are first-generation children of immigrants who came to North America during the phase of immigration in the 1960s and 1970s.

The way in which mothers and daughters attempt to resolve cognitive conflicts suggested a number of related but different problems: (1) the Muslim mothers try to adjust an existing belief system and a particular attachment to the "Islamic" heritage to their living experience in the secular West; (2) the Muslim youth had to find ways to integrate the belief system (transmitted by their parents), the Islamic sentiment (enforced by the communities), and the "secular" system (enforced by society at large); and (3) the female Muslim youths in the West had to attempt to relate their experience to the experience of their mothers in the mothers' country of origin under Western colonization and during the post-colonial upheavals in Muslim societies. The mothers' and the daughters' experiences seem to reflect an identity at the crossroad between the ideals and practice of the East and the West.

Case #1

A Mother's Response: I asked an active and respected leader in her community whom I named 'Safia' (a Middle-age mother of Indo-Pakistani origin who teaches religious education to the community children some afternoons and on the weekends) the following question: "How do you expect your children to relate between the two forms of guidance; the school's and the home's. She responded that the three religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) are similar, and that she tells her children that Christian and Jews have changed what is in their books and put some human things in them. She added, "one time we were talking about dress and I told them [my daughters] look at the statue of Mary. Do you ever see her without covering her head and body? But look at the Christian and Jews; they are changing their dress. "

The use of such a parallel between Mary's garb and Muslim woman's modest dress might be used to bring a better understanding of common teachings among the three monotheistic religions. However, the response clearly disregards the difference between Western and Muslim attitudes toward religious symbols. S. H. Nasr (1993:ix) asserts that the first thing a Muslim is dazzled by in the West is the dissonance, the compartmentalization between religion and everything else. I would also add that North American Muslims tend not to recognize that a similar compartmentalization is happening among them and in the Muslim world, although not as explicitly expressed as in the West.

The Mother's comparison is a sign of how Muslim institutions can fail to integrate the two aspects of knowledge, the "religious" and the "secular". History tells us about the emphasis that Judeo-Christian religious institutions placed on compartmentalization and on the idealization of women in the person of Mary or Rachel. These institutions have, at the same time, neglected to provide just solutions to the social realities of women in their societies , which eventually resulted in women's revolt against religious institutions, and often, against religion in general. Furthermore, the mother's use of the figure of Mary, with its historical association in Christianity with the idea of celibacy and ambiguous attitudes toward sexuality, transmits ideas that do not communicate, and in fact contradict, the Islamic concepts of modesty and encouraged mutual sexual satisfaction in marriage.

These parallels are, knowingly and unknowingly, frequently reiterated among Muslim parents and educators. Some sources suggest that Muslims began emphasizing female strict dress and seclusion after their contacts with the missionaries. As I have no conclusive evidence yet, I am only drawing attention to the fact that not only the Orientalists may have shaped Islamic studies and philosophy for Muslims in the last three centuries, as Mahdi (1990:72) suggests, but also that the missionaries and colonial forces may have shaped the pedagogy and practice of Islam as well.

The Daughter' Response: When I interviewed "sana," the 19-year older daughter of this mother, I asked "Do you find any difference between the guidance you receive from your parents and the guidance you receive from school or non-Muslims?" She answered: "I think schools place more emphasis on your studies than they do on religious issues. May be they believe it is the responsibility of parents if they need to tell anything to their children; that they should be doing it and not the school." When I asked "but how do schools expect you to relate the morals of learning other subjects and of dealing with other people in the school environment to each other if they do not teach general concepts about religious and moral matters, leaving it for the home?" Sana answered: "Well, the thing , if they start teaching general concepts about religion, they will be teaching what they believe, and, you know, here the majority of people believe that Jesus is the son of god. We believe Jesus was a Prophet. Then there are other religions that don't believe in God. So you really can't teach general concepts of religion because there are so many different concepts of religion." When I probed further as to whether there was really a basic difference between religions, Sana retracted by saying "Not in the main religions; Jews, Christians and Muslims. But when you go into other religions, especially the orient, they are very different, they believe in idols. But if you set aside the belief in One God, most religions are similar because they teach you to love your neighbor and that you have a purpose in life. I guess schools can teach that, but it's very vague, and I don't know [how you would teach about a general concept of religion]." Such a response suggests that the young female was not only confusing the teaching of religion with the teaching about religion, but she was also not equipped spiritually and intellectually to relate the meaning of, and belief in, the One Supreme God to her practice of certain Islamic principles, such as understanding the purpose of life and loving one's neighbor. 17 This confusion seems to result from one of the very basic failures in Muslims' religious education that is often mistaken for Islamic education. It is also a failure in teaching the practice of a religion, in this case Islam, as something that is thought to be done without understanding and relating the meanings of each practice to the concept of God as the source of knowledge and value. Compounded with modern Western views of religious beliefs as superstitious and the practice of rituals as irrational and irrelevant to intellectual growth, Muslims as well as non-Muslims accepted the argument that religion has no place in the "objective, neutral, rational" educational process.

Discussion of Case #1: Confusion and uncertainty, it seems, often result from parents' well-intended attempt to shield the girls from the reality of their new culture instead of helping themselves and their children to understand and to practice Islam in the context of the new environment that they are part of now. These young peoples' statements of questioning and striving to know are indicative of deep belief and ability to realize that there is a difference between Islamic and non-Islamic life and education. But the ideals of parents and educators in and of themselves provide no means for these offspring to have a deeper understanding of the "why" that would enable them to negotiate their environment as autonomous individuals. Muslim parents and educators often miss the basic element of Islamic pedagogy: to prepare the next generation of women to realize themselves and to be agents of change while preserving "their" culture, rather than simply making women instruments for transmitting certain rituals. Such shielding does not differ much from what Muslim societies practiced with respect to women's education in the face of European colonial and missionary, military and cultural invasion, namely secluded, segregated education.

Case #2

By comparing the views of the above mother-daughter case to those of the following case, we may shed further light on the matter. I asked another group of mothers "what do we mean by practicing Islam," without pointing to any specific practice.

A Mother's Response: A mother of an European descent in her late thirty, whom I name 'Ella,' answered by explaining how she has dealt with the question of her children going out with friends. Contrary to another mother in the group who answered, "by following the Sunnah," Ella stated: " Usually the understanding among Muslim groups is that girls go out with girls and boys with boys. If we are in a group , Muslims in a study group, we sit in a circle, men and women, who are we to say that it is wrong when youth do the same?" She also alluded to the fact that the Prophet (PBUH) taught early Muslim males and females together.

By realizing that idealizing the Prophetic tradition would not enable her to translate his 14 centuries-old behavior into today's terms, Ella has decided to address the principles behind the Prophetic practice and to provide a somewhat detailed example. When I asked her about how she deals with other social activities, she answered: "[For] going to film, I would like to know what it is about; if it was suitable."

It seems that this Muslim woman of European origin has escaped the Orientalists' view of Islam and the missionaries' pedagogical practices of Islam that left a dent in Muslims' perception and practice throughout the Muslim world. The basic message of Islam has been transformed from a belief in One God into the rituals of prayers, fasting, etc. Muslims raised in Europe (not affected by missionary and orientalist work but nonetheless raised in a society where "secularized" Christian concepts are prevalent) and before their contacts with recent immigrants from the Muslim world may have developed simple and less confused views of Islam, and educators should investigate such views further. These findings have further implications for understanding the contemporary Muslim youth needs. My observation does not only concern the tension among Muslims' discrepant views of Islam and its pedagogy, but more importantly the tension between the West's view of religion and its practice in their own society vis-a-vis "other" societies.

The Daughter's Response: The 17 year-old daughter of Ella, I'll name'Ema,' answered to the question about the difference in guidance between home and school by saying: " The guidance you receive from parents, you usually assume it's like an Islamic kind of guidance. It's within the Islamic perspective. But the one at school is not. And to look deeper into that kind of thing, like you check it on your own. You can look it up in the Qur'an or the Hadith, or ask somebody [who knows] what is the right way to do it.

When I asked what the youth discuss in their youth dialogue group, she said: "Everything is actually discussed. It is not just about God. We usually start with some Ayah (Qur'anic verse) or Hadith (saying of Muhammad), and someone has a question about it, we try to resolve it. Also, we have general questions, or Dr. 'Y' brings-up some questions, and he relates some of the knowledge to us. He tries to explain." She also spelled out how best to plan for Muslims: "I don't think the planning should be massive, like for the community to change its way, like you go for the big thing first. You have to start from the basics, and then things grow gradually. Any kind of hope or change should be very minimal, and when you conquer them, then things on top come naturally."

Discussion of Case #2: The findings in this case suggest that, in addition to the mother's ability to differentiate the Islamic basic principles from their historical and social practice, she

was able to find for her offspring a well-rounded youth group. As an autonomous Muslim, this mother seems to have succeeded in guiding her daughter into realizing the place of God in her life. The young female's response that the dialogue group discussion was "not just about God" indicates a movment closer to Fazlur Rahman's description of the substantive teaching of the prophet and the Qur'an as "undoubtedly for action in this world, since it provides guidance for man concerning his behavior on earth in relation to other men. God exists in the mind of a believer to regulate his behavior if he is religiomorally experienced." Rahman adds that it was the bane of later medieval Islam that was regulative, namely, God was made the exlusive object of experience and hence was negatively related to social morality. (1982:14)

Conclusions and Recommendations

I attempted to shed light on the historical transformation of the Muslim woman's role in order to find solutions that may modify the process in the dynamics of Islamic pedagogy . The past and current transformation of the Muslim woman's role from what is intended by the Qur'an, is not the making of the West alone, but, knowingly or unknowingly, is also the making of the Muslims, in particular male elites and policy-makers. I argued therefore that recent and present attempts to transform the educational systems in Muslim societies, whether in the form of the "modern, secular universal" schooling or the recent "Islamization" of knowledge and education, are doomed to failure if Muslim educators do not examine the education of Muslim women from the perspective of gender justice and the Muslim woman's self-identification with Islam as trusteeship. Similarly, any attempts of intervention by any external agency claiming to "defend" the rights of Muslim women--whether inside or outside the Muslim world--will create more problems than solve the existing ones if the course of action remains within the scheme of viewing woman as an instrument for hegemony instead of recognizing her as an agent of change within her own culture, a trustee.

I propose a Muslim female perspective that relates and integrates Islam and education in service of social justice. This perspective is intended to replace the present idealistic, dichotomized, and polarized views of women and education with a view of woman as the perpetuator of social justice and not only as a passive preserver of Islamic culture. This perspective accepts the stability of the Islamic teachings in the Qur'an and takes into consideration, as suggested by Amina Wadud-Muhsin (1992), the social and cultural contexts in which the prophetic practice has extrapolated these teachings. It differs from the Revivalist males' perspective, however, by recognizing females as active partners in the interpretation process, and realizing, as did Muhammad Iqbal (1962), the relevance of space and time to learning and to the reconstruction of Islamic thought.

In this "Islamic" feminine perspective of education and development, education becomes Islamic only when it fulfills the premise of producing an autonomous individual who intellectually and spiritually makes the choice to be Al Khalifa and to follow the course of action toward achieving social justice as described in the Qur'an and objectified by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This perspective will benefit not only Muslim women but the Islamic social organization and gender justice in general. Self-identification with Islam and gender justice in Islam are the primary organizing principles of this feminine perspective. This perspective takes into account Western and some Muslim approaches, that tend to be linear, a-religious, and rational, and as well the Islamic approach, that is spiral, religious, and rational. These principles signal some of the different ways in which Islamic feminists working from within the Islamic educational perspective are struggling to reconstruct the interpretation of Islamic concepts, not simply in favor of girls, but ultimately also in favor of social justice for

all. I have explained this point elsewhere when I argued that multicultural democratic education does not benefit minorities only, but it is intended mainly to keep the majority in tune with their ideals of a democratic pluralistic education and social structure. (Barazangi, 1993)

In order to construct an action plan that will capture the momentum of the interest in human rights for Muslim women, we need to reinstate woman as educational agent, both at home and at the mosque in Muslim societies and communities, one who herself will outline her priorities as a trustee entrusted with changing history toward social justice.

ENDNOTES FOR BARAZANGI

1. This essay and the research that led to its conception would not have happened without the North American Muslim women and their daughters, among them my daughter, Nobl Barazangi. Her dialogue with me as well as the comments of Shirley Samuels and Gisela Webb were invaluable.

2. For example, in Al Zirkili, Khayr al Din. Al 'alam (Damascus, al Zirikli, nd), the reported number of notable women in Islamic history has dropped sharply after that era.

3. The United Nations. "The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women." 1994.

4. The Islamic Council. "Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights." in Concilium 1994/3. Hans Küng and Jürgen Moltmann, ed. Islam: A Challenge for Christianity (London: SCM Press, 1994), 141-150.

5. See Barazangi, Nimat Hafez. "Muslim Women's Islamic Higher Learning As a Human Right: The Action Plan," in Mahnaz Afkhami and Erika Friedl, eds., 1997 Muslim Women and the Politics of Participation: Implementing the Beijing Platform. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press), 43-57. It should be noted here that this 1997 work was conceived as a sequel to the original topic of the present essay. The topic was presented first under the title "Muslim Women's Islamic Higher Learning Is a Human Right " at The Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C., (December 6-10, 1995). The sub-title of this essay "Theory and Practice" was added when the sequel was developed. Certain concepts will overlap in the two pieces, no doubt.

6. The term "Islamization of knowledge" was first used by Isma'il R. Al Faruqi (1982) to indicate the need of Muslims to integrate contemporary knowledge within the Islamic framework. At later stages, it has taken several meanings and applications throughout the Muslim world.

7. Barazangi ("Educational Reform" in John L. Esposito, ed. The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995b: 420-25) argues that missionary and colonial education contributed to the dichotomy in women's education.

8. By citing the names of the Qu`anic Suras ' chapters,' in addition to their number--the customary practice in quoting from the Qur'an, wherein the first number is a referenceto the chapter while the second is a reference to the ayat ' verse'-- I am emphasizing the relevance of the name of the chapter to the content in addressing gender issues and its importance in the Qur'an.

9. In the Islamic worldview, natural, intrinsic justice includes animals and other beings as part of the balance of things, of naturally surrendering to the Divine Will. But humans are distinguished from animals by virtue of reason, a prerequisite for justice.

10. See "Bengali Women: Tongues untied" World Press Review, June 1995: 48.

11. For further distinction between "Islamic" and "religious" education, see Nimat Hafez Barazangi. "Religious Education" in John L. Esposito, ed. The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995a), 406-11.

12. See for example papers presented at the Sisterhood Is Global Institute's conference "Religion, Culture, and Women's Human Rights" (Washington, D.C., September, 1994).

13. See for example, Richard William Johnson. "Wars of religion." New Statesman & Society 2:13-14 December 15, 1989.; and "Behind the Yashmak." The Economist 313: 58 Oct 28, 1989; the New york Times report on the Algerian girl; The Atlanta Daily, etc. Also, reports on Tansima Ghazi (cf note 12 above) and others.

14. See Lucy Carroll's discussion of education (74-76) in "Nizam-I-Islam: Processes and Conflicts in Pakistan's Programme of Islamization, with special Reference to the Position of Women." Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politic, 20, 1, March 1982: 57-95.

15. Carla Power. "America's Young Muslims: New World Pioneers." Unpublished paper, Columbia University, 1995: 7.

16. See Barazangi, Nimat Hafez. Perceptions of the Islamic Belief System: The Muslims in North America. Ph.D. dissertation (Cornell. University, 1988). In the dissertation, Barazangi used genration as the unit of analysis. Later analysis of the same data used gender as the unit of analysis. This latter work, under preparation for publication, is partially reported in this essay.

17. Islam and Islamic here are understood in their broadest sense as explained by Isma`il Raji al Faruqi. The Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths . (Washington, D.C.: New Era,1986). They intend the overarching peace with the concept of One God.

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