

Islamic Opposition To Socialism

Socialism calls for the destruction of tradition and its replacement by a radically egalitarian system.

The socialist distributive system is unIslamic because it ignores differentiation arising as a result of contract and trade, but considers only the pattern of distribution.

Socialist materialism is incompatible with the ant materialism of Islamic ideology.

The idea that the means of production must be in the hands of the masses, or the party that represents them, is contrary to the idea of hierarchical rule found in Islam, which, though it may be for the benefit of the people, does not give the people any right to the means of production.

More specifically, with regard to feminism, where socialism opposes the family as an expression of exploitative class relations, Islam seeks to support and encourage the building and maintenance of families. Family ties are exceedingly important in Islam. So Islam and socialism are diametrically opposed on this point.

All forms of feminism with socialist leanings are in agreement with the aim of ultimate destruction of the family. All reject any sort of gender differentiation and complementarity. As such, they are fundamentally opposed to Islam.

Many of the forms of feminism that reject socialism, nevertheless retain the absolute egalitarian and anti-family principles of the socialists, and so Islam will oppose them no less than it does more orthodox forms of socialism.

[Islamic Opposition To The Philosophical Attitude Of Feminism](#)

The moral values espoused by feminists, whether equality feminism or gynocentric feminism, are not values supported by Islam. In feminism the goal is absolute freedom to choose to live as one pleases without interference of social customs or regulations assigning specified roles to men and women. Justice in Islam means everything being in its proper place, not absolute equality, let alone feminine superiority in all areas.

The determination of justice in Islam requires the wisdom and insight that result from study of and living according to the patterns set by the Prophet (s) and Imams (as) .

Philosophical thought in Islam, like all the aspects of Islamic culture, is a reflection of tawhid. All things are seen as having an underlying unity as effects of God as ultimate cause, or as modes of His self-disclosure.

Reason is championed as a vehicle for understanding tawhid. Feminist philosophical thought, on the other hand, moves in the opposite direction. Instead of searching for some underlying unity in being or causation or appearance and reality, feminism is occupied with the discovery of conflict; feminism sees hidden forms of subjugation lurking beneath virtually every text, every theory, every social or cultural phenomenon.

It displaces the idea of a harmony between the masculine and feminine with outrage against the oppression of the female through gender differentiation. Reason itself is considered a tool of oppression, and reliance on reason is disparagingly called 'logo-centrism.'

The ideal of the philosopher in Islamic culture is of one who has gained victory over the wiles of his base soul through the employment of the intellect. The intellect dominates over the soul of the philosopher, who thereby loses interest in what is considered desirable by worldly standards.

The ideal of the feminist thinker one finds in feminist writing is of a woman who is preoccupied with her own experiences and who uses those experiences to uncover the roots of women's oppression in gender differences which she overcomes through an effort of desire unconstrained by patriarchy.

The ideal of Islam is nearness to God, and social relations are governed by a spirit of obedience to God, in which justice is conceived as a proper balance that satisfies the demands of moral conscience, social custom, and the explicit commands of God.

In feminism, by contrast, all of theology is subordinated to its program of liberation, in which the ideal is a social freedom that makes its own absolute moral claims on behalf of equality and the abolition of gender based differences in social role, that demands a revolution in social customs, and that rejects the explicit commands of God.

Islamic Opposition To Feminist Political Theory

Islamic political theory sees injustice in terms of rebellion against God. It is because rulers usurp authority for the satisfaction of their own desires instead of submitting to the divine will that they perpetrate injustices on other people, their own subjects and their neighbors. The sin against God is primary, and this is expressed in injustice to others.

This political view is magnified in Shi'i theology. The dispute over the caliphate arises because some

were unwilling to submit to the choice of God for leadership. All accept that 'Ali was designated for some sort of leadership role, but the supporters of other choices for caliph refused to accept this designation or its extension to the realm of politics.

With this refusal, for whatever reason, a spirit of something quite foreign to the complete submission required by Islam is displayed. The primary sin is that of disobedience to God. The injustices done in the violent attempts to hold power are the natural consequence of this sin.

Feminist political theory, on the other hand, sees the primary sin in the subjection of women to male authority. All other social injustice is interpreted on the basis of this, and the elimination of any subordination of women to men is seen as the key to the elimination of all other forms of injustice.

Islam aims at bringing the human ever nearer to the divine. Thus, the aim of the political order, in Islam, is the creation of an environment conducive to the worship of and obedience to God through which proximity to Him is gained.

This requires the establishment of a condition of social harmony and balance in which each component of society, its institutions, practices, cultural forms, discourse and individual members, each find their fitting place to approach divinity in complete submission.

The aim of the political order in feminism, by contrast, never gets beyond freedom to violate the constraints of traditional gender roles, forming relationships and even communities without any form of hierarchy, subordination, or gender differentiation such as is found in the families of virtually all cultures.

Islamic Opposition To Feminist Theology

Since there is no holy trinity in Islam, no God the Father nor God the Son, the concept of God in Islam is not as gender specific as it is in Christianity. In the Arabic of the Qur'an, masculine pronouns are used to refer to God, but this provides little leverage for the development of the sort of critique feminists have leveled against the Christian concept of God.

Goddess feminism, on the other hand, is clearly incompatible with the teachings of Islam. The God of Islam is not a woman, and He has no daughters.

Theological discussions of the attributes of God indicate very clearly, however, that there are feminine and masculine aspects of divinity and even that the feminine has priority.^{[1](#)}

Now, as Wolfson has argued in his study of Islamic theology,^{[2](#)} discussions of the names and attributes of God play a role in Islamic theology comparable to discussions of the Trinity among Christian theologians.

So, not only is the Islamic concept of the divinity free of the male bias present in the concept of the

Trinity, but the closest thing we can find in Islam to the idea of relations internal to divinity discussed in Christianity in terms of the Trinity is the idea of the divine names and attributes in which not only is there an absence of bias against the feminine, but the feminine is dignified as paramount. God's mercy precedes His wrath.³

Feminism As Cultural Imperialism

Feminism has long been a favorite weapon in the arsenal of the colonialist powers. The colonialists used feminism in order to berate the cultures of the lands they governed, to win local support for Europeanization, and to provide moral justification for imperialism.⁴

Europeans understood Islam very poorly prior to the twentieth century. The misunderstandings had been entrenched since the crusades when a disinformation campaign was employed to bolster the war effort. One of the aspects of this campaign concerned gender in Islam.

Islam was condemned because of polygamy, sensuality, and the imprisonment of women behind the veil. Even in the eighteenth century many Europeans believed that Islam teaches that women have no souls.

During the nineteenth century, the European colonialist powers, particularly the English, built upon these common misunderstandings to justify a program for the eradication of Muslim culture. Victorian anthropology contributed to the idea that the culmination of human evolution was to be found in England, and that it was therefore natural and fitting for the British to rule over other peoples.

At the same time, a vocal feminist movement was emerging in England itself. The colonialists made use of the arguments of English feminists in their own rhetoric to claim that because Muslims oppressed their women, their mores had to be replaced by 'civilized' European mores.

Colonial feminism was thus used against other cultures in the service of colonial rule, particularly against Muslim cultures, but in different variations it was also used against local cultures in India and Africa.

The colonialists argued that the fundamental reason for the comprehensive backwardness of Muslim societies was the prevalence of Islamic customs pertaining to women. The veil became the symbol for the degradation of women and chief target of colonialist propaganda.

In order for Muslim societies to progress toward civilization, the women in these societies would have to learn to dress and behave like European women.

Evelyn Baring, the 1st Earl of Cromer, was the British consul-general of Egypt from 1882 to 1907, and he made frequent use of feminist arguments in his attacks against Islam, claiming that Islam degraded women while Christianity elevated them, yet in England Cromer was a founding member and a president of the Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage! Prominent in his statements about Egypt

was that only by abandoning the veil could Egypt reap the benefits of the introduction of Western civilization brought by the colonialists.[5](#)

Christian missionaries also focused on the role of women in Islamic societies to justify claims of the superiority of the Christian religion and the need for missionary activities in Muslim lands under the protection, of course, of colonialist military prowess.

In addition to colonialist rulers and missionaries, Western feminists also propagated the idea that Islamic precepts pertaining to women should be abandoned. Leila Ahmed states:

Others besides officials and missionaries similarly promoted these ideas, individuals resident in Egypt, for example. Well-meaning European feminists, such as Eugenie Le Brun (who took the young Huda Sha'rawi under her wing), earnestly inducted young Muslim women into the European understanding of the meaning of the veil and the need to cast it off as the essential first step in the struggle for female liberation.[6](#)

The legacy of colonialist feminism persisted through the neo-colonialist period to the present. Western feminists continue to criticize Muslim societies with special attention given to the veil, which is still seen by feminists as the symbol of the suppression of women by Islamic patriarchy.

Members of the upper classes in Muslim societies who adopted Western modes of dress, manners, home decor, and intellectual fashions also accepted colonialist feminism. The first feminists from the indigenous populations of colonized countries were those of the upper classes who were educated in Europe or European schools.

Nationalist leaders in Muslim countries, such as Ataturk and Reza Shah, were the next to adopt the rhetoric of colonialist feminism as part of their programs of modernization. They were in basic agreement with the sort of values and worldview held by the colonialists.

They also agreed with the colonialists that their own cultures had to be reformed to come up to the standards of European civilization. Their only difference with the colonialists was that they wanted to direct the program of modernization themselves. They would not allow Europeans to govern their countries, but they themselves would govern their countries as the Europeans would, or perhaps even more ruthlessly.

The values and fashions learned from the colonialists by the upper classes were to be imposed on the society as a whole. The most striking symbol of this was the attempt to outlaw traditional Islamic modes of dress.

In 1936, Reza Shah declared the emancipation of women and made women's Islamic covering illegal. In 1963, women were granted the right to vote, and in the Family Protection Act, polygamy was made illegal and women were given custody of their children in case of divorce.

The Family Protection Act was revoked after the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, when this law and many of the other measures introduced by feminists were denounced along with the rest of the colonialist legacy as contrary to the aims of Islam.

The connection between feminism and cultural imperialism is clearly indicated by Sachiko Murata:

It seems to me that feminists who have criticized various aspects of Islam or Islamic society base their positions upon a worldview radically alien to the Islamic worldview. Their critique typically takes a moral stance. They ask for reform, whether explicitly or implicitly. The reform they have in view is of the standard modern Western type. Among other things, this means that there is an abstract ideal, thought up by us or by our leader, which has to be imposed by overthrowing the old order. This reform is of the same lineage as the Western imperialism that originally appeared in the East as Christian missionary activity. The white man's burden gradually expanded its horizons—or reduced them, depending on how you look at it. Salvation was no longer touted as present in Christianity, but in science and progress.⁷

Prof. Murata goes on to observe that the feminist critique takes a decidedly moral stance for granted, and on the assumption that any sort of subordination of women to men is wrong and oppressive, goes on to denounce Islam, as well as most other traditional systems that contain rules governing gender relationships.

It is here that Muslims have to stop and ask whether the moral assumptions being used to condemn their religion are really acceptable. Islam has its own morals and jurisprudence grounded in a metaphysics that has been delineated through the course of centuries by Muslim philosophers, Gnostics and theologians.

The point is not that there can be no injustice in Islamic societies, but that Muslims will not be able to solve their social problems as Muslim by acquiescence to the social and cultural hegemony of the West.

Both feminine and masculine are double-edged swords. Each has a negative and a positive evaluation. If the rigidly "patriarchal" stress of some contemporary Muslims is to be softened, this can happen only when they place renewed stress on femininity as a positive quality and masculinity as a negative quality.

And Muslims will be able to do things as Muslims—not as imitation Westerners—only if they look once again at the spiritual and intellectual dimensions of their own tradition.⁸

¹. See Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), especially part 2.

². H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1976).

³. Murata (1992), 55, 203–222.

⁴. This is explained in detail by Leila Ahmed in *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 150ff. Most of what follows in this section is a summary of information presented in Ahmed's work.

⁵. See Cromer's *Modern Egypt*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1908), cited in Ahmed (1992), 152–153.

⁶. Ahmed (1992), 154.

⁷. Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 4.

⁸. Murata (1992), 323.

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