



Step Forward

May 2022 - Issue 2

Al-Azhar Observatory for Combating
Extremism

AT THE SERVICE OF HUMANITY AND ISLAM

Shedding Light on Muslim Women





Visit *Al-Azhar Observatory for combating Extremism*



AzharObserverEn
Observatoire anti-extrémiste d'Al-Azhar



@Azhar_observer



www.azhar.eg/observer-en
www.azhar.eg/observer-fr

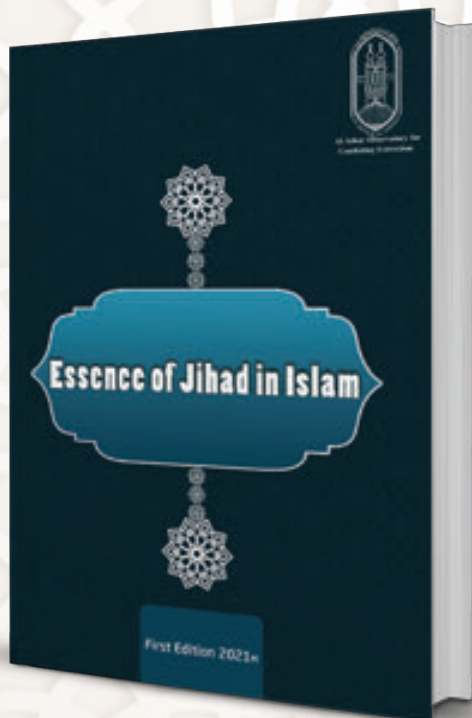


observatory@azhar.eg
observatoire.azhar@gmail.com





Know the Observatory



The Observatory conducted tens of studies in the field of combating extremism



Observer



www.azhar.eg/observer-en
www.azhar.eg/observer-fr



ALAZHAR OBSERVATORY
FOR COMBATING
EXTREMISM
(AOCE)

Editor's Note

At the Service of Humanity and Islam

Islam views humanity as of sacred position. With modernization and rapid progress in almost all walks of life, Islam is always coping with all ages, equipped with principles and values that help man to lead a peaceful and tranquil life and be a tolerant and productive being who cultivates land, builds civilization and spreads goodness everywhere.

Throughout ages, Muslim scholars devoted special attention to woman's issues and rights from Islamic perspective. Therefore, there have always been efforts for renewal of thought and discourse that address women's rights so as to cope with requirements of every age and enable women to fulfill their human mission, beginning with their families to the service of their religion and homelands.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was keen to honor women, calling for protecting them from any physical or moral harm. His life is rich with countless situations to that effect. He (PBUH) used to frequently advise his companions, saying: "Be good and kind to women". Even in his (PBUH) Farewell Sermon, he devoted a section thereof to talk about women and the necessity of being kind and fair towards them. He, moreover, said, "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should not hurt (trouble) his neighbor. And I advise you to take care of women ..." [Recorded by al-Bukhari].

Being in the last quarter of 2022, women now play significant roles in their communities, assuming the posts of state president, minister, ambassador, CEO of multinational companies. Efficiency, not gender, has become the sole criterion or requirement for selection. This opened the door very wide before women to have many opportunities. For their part, Muslim women have become outstanding role models in many countries for their knowledge, excellence and efforts, which enabled them to assume high-profile positions to serve their countries in particular and the whole humanity in general.

However, Muslim women have always been a main target for extremist and terrorist groups. They target all aspects of their lives to turn them into complete chaos. For them, women have no rights whatsoever, and they do not deserve even good treatment as human beings. They despise women and belittle their significant roles in family and society, in spite of Prophet Muhammad's advice of treating women kindly.

This issue of Step Forward is dedicated to celebrate Muslim women and their success stories in many countries around the world. It includes different topics and articles that narrate these stories and spotlight the Muslim role model women in the Muslim world. It also highlights the challenges they faced and overcame in their work and their societies in general.

Dr. Reham Abdullah Salamah
Director, Al-Azhar Observatory for Combating Extremism



General director of Alazhar observatory for combating extremism (AOCE)

Dr. Reham Abdullah salamah

English Unit Supervisor

Mahmoud Nagah Khalaf

Researcher at English Unit

Mahmoud Ahmed Kamel

Researcher at English Unit

Asmaa Mohammad Yusuf

Researcher at English Unit

Maryam Abd Al-Gawwad

Researcher at English Unit

Nihad Mohamed Ramadan

Researcher at English Unit

Mohamed Ali Al-Said

Art Director/ Graphic Designer

Heba Mekky

Step Forward

AzharObserverEn

Azhar_observer

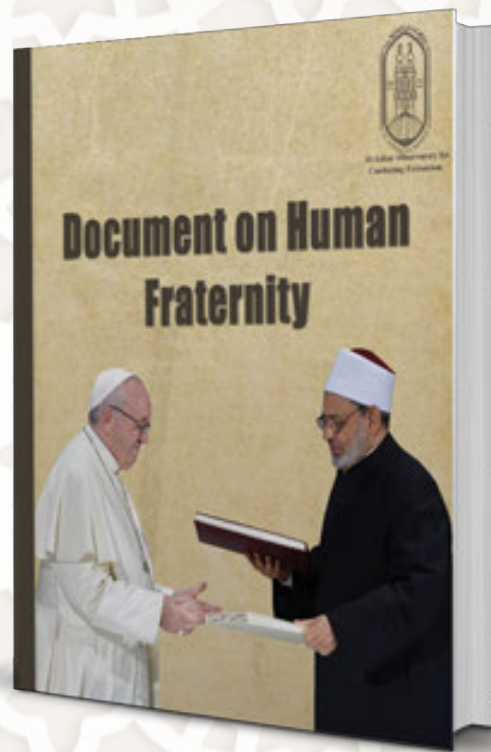
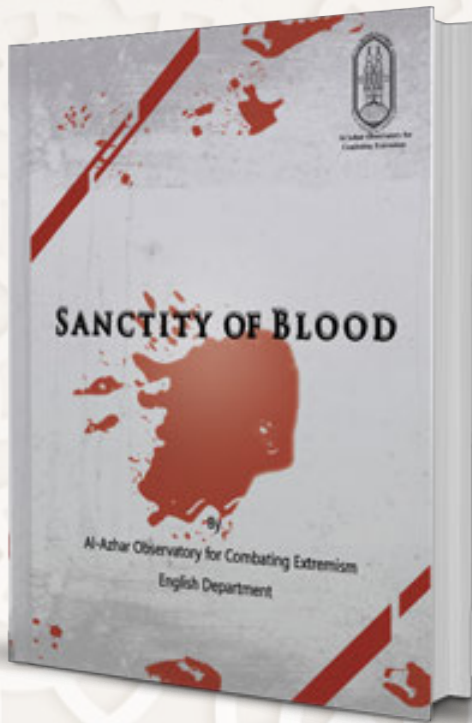
observatory@azhar.eg



May 2022

www.azhar.eg/observer-en

Know the Observatory



**The Observatory
conducted tens of studies
in the field of combating
extremism**



Observer



www.azhar.eg/observer-en
www.azhar.eg/observer-fr



ALAZHAR OBSERVATORY
FOR COMBATING
EXTREMISM
(AOCE)

Contents

Step Forward | Volume 01 | Issue 02 | May 2022



08

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Perceptions Regarding Women

14

Pioneers:
Influential Muslim Women: Halima
Yaqoob as an Example

18

An Interview with Dr. Azza Karam

22

Women's Social Life under ISIS

30

Why can't a Muslim woman marry
a non-Muslim man?

32

Does Islam Oppress Women



28

An Islamic View
on Marriage of
Underage Girls

34

Intellectual or Military Combating:
Which is Necessary for Countering
Extremism?

38

Diversity and its
Implications from
Islamic Perspective

40

Freedom of Expression in Islam:
Guarantees and Limitations

44

Ramaden .. Month of Great Victories



46

Inspiring Women

54
Colors



58
Last
Word

50

Said about Women

Contents



ALAZHAR OBSERVATORY
FOR COMBATING
EXTREMISM
(AOCE)

Analysis

From Islamic and Global perspectives..

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Perceptions Regarding Women



By/ Hassan Mohamed Wageih

Professor of Linguistics and Cross-cultural communication, Faculty of Language and Translation, Al-Azhar University

I have been teaching courses in the field of Cross-cultural Communication for several decades. In these courses, I would dedicate a section to address frequently asked questions regarding the role and status of women in our Arab-Islamic culture. In this preliminary article, I will provide a sample of questions frequently raised by non-Arabs and try to address them.



Step Forward



8

May 2022

www.azhar.eg/observer-en

Question #1:

On male dominance and the culture of masculinity:

There is a common perception in the minds of many non-Arabs that Islam is inherently oppressive to women and that the issue of the role and status of women is overlooked if not obliterated in certain contexts, so how could this situation be addressed?

It should be mentioned here that to address the issue of the status and role of women in the Arab-Islamic culture, I would say that the objective observer should admit that it is a complex-compound issue that needs to be addressed in detail from multidimensional perspectives that include dominant cultural practices, policies and religion. Since we witness unprecedented waves of Islamophobia, I would confine my response in this article mainly to an Islamic perspective.

The Holy Quran gave women prominent status. Contrary to dominant practices in the pre-Quranic jahiliyyah period, where female infanticide - the deliberate killing of female children among an array of harmful practices and norms- was prominent, Islam condemned and banned such practices. The Quran dedicated an entire surah for women (Surah An-Nisaa). The Quran also gave examples of great women in human history such as Maryam bint Imran, who is greatly revered by Muslims and there is an entire surah in the Holy Quran by her honored name. Her name was referred to seventy times to elaborate her as a great religious figure.

The Holy Quran also mentioned and honored

Asiya bint Muzahim, who was highly revered by Muslims. She was the wife of the pharaoh. She accepted monotheism after witnessing the miracle of Moses- peace be upon him. Asiya worshiped God in secret and prayed in secret fearing her husband. She adopted Moses and convinced her husband not to kill him. She died while being tortured by her husband, who had discovered her monotheism and retaliated to her rebellion against his tyranny.

So, both Maryam bint Imran and Asiya bint Muzahim were presented as role models of Islamic values such as integrity, perseverance, patience, charity, and standing against tyranny.

The practices of Prophet Muhammad- peace be upon him- when it comes to enhancing the role of women are very telling and informing. For example, he said, "treat women with decency and kindness." And when asked by one of his companions about who among people is most deserving of kind treatment, the Prophet- peace upon him- said, "Your mother", the man said, "Who is the next one?" The Prophet said, "Again, it is your mother". The man asked again, "Then who?" The holy Prophet said again, "It is your mother after that your father".

Question #2:

On the discourse of “inequality” and “injustice”

Another common question related to the wrongfully framed perceptions of “inequality” and “absence of justice” in Islam is the inequality of females’ portion of inheritance vis-a-vis males.. Unfortunately, often the reading of the texts on inheritance in the Holy Quran, deploys a decontextualization tactic consciously or unconsciously. I would not delve here into detailed juristic discourses to explain what went wrong in their perception, but I would say that a fair minded and honest reading caused non-Muslims to commend the great logic of the inheritance system in Islam. Dr. Robert Dickson Crane, a former U.S President Richard Nixon’s adviser who obtained his PHD in international law was asked by President Nixon to provide detailed reports on Islam. He did that assignment with care and diligence. The result is that he became strongly impacted by certain aspects of Islam. One thing

was the frequency and deep meanings of term JUSTICE in the Holy Quran. He said: “As a law student, I found that all the law that I have studied at Harvard Law school for three years exist in Islam. However, I have never found any similar concentration and focusing on the term justice as it is addressed in Islam”. The other piece of discourse that caused Dr. Crane to convert to Islam was about inheritance. Dr. Crane mentioned that “it is not possible for a human mind to cover all close relatives so wide that it leaves no one behind and then distribute the inheritance among them so justly that does not oppress any one...”.

In addition, it should be stated here that when it comes to inheritance, it is not always to give males the bigger portion, for in some particular contexts, females get the greater portion and in some other cases men receive none.



Question #3: On the foreign agenda, colonialism, and orientalism discourses:

Some analysts conclude that the issue of the status of Muslim women and the frequent calls for emancipating her is related to a strategic Western agenda for hegemony as a form of a new colonialism. For such purposes the West has been producing discourses in relation to Muslim women as oppressed, backward, slighted and silenced. Many concerned scholars quoted the former U.S First Lady Laura Bush, who calls to free Muslim women from the confines of Islam." (Washington post Nov.17 2001 - an article entitled "...Laura Bush on Taliban oppression of women"). She made such a statement directly after the invasion of Afghanistan by U.S forces.

In the context of dealing with this strategic question about the Western new colonial agenda, I would refer to a book written by Prof. Lila Abu-Lughod entitled "Do Muslim women need saving?" (Harvard University Press, September 2015). Prof. Abu-Lughod tried to uncover the embedded biases that characterize the Western discourses on the status and role of Muslim women.

She also demonstrated the close relationship between the discourse on Muslim women and the discourse on orientalism, colonialism, and practices of hegemony and control under the guise of glittering terms such as "Modernization," "Reform," "Women empowerment," "Emancipation" and "Saving". Another related book is by Karen Armstrong entitled "Islam: A Short History" (Modern library, 2002). On the part entitled women and Islam, she said: "The emancipation of women was a project dear to the Prophet's heart". The Quran gave women rights of inheritance and divorce centuries before western women were accorded such a status... the Quran makes man and woman partners before God, with identical duties and responsibilities. The women of the first Ummah in Medina took part in public life, and some, according to Arab custom, fought alongside men in battles. They did not seem to have experienced Islam as oppressive religion, though later, as happened in Christianity, men would hijack the faith and bring it into line with the prevailing patriarchy." (p. 14)



Mirror Question #4:

What about the perceptions and misperceptions of women from a cross-cultural perspective? Or in other words, how people from different cultures around the globe view the role and status of women cross-culturally?

To address such a question, I refer here to three books that I have used in my classes. Two of these books were written by Prof. D Tannen, an outstanding Sociolinguistics professor at George Town University. The first is entitled: “That Is Not What I Meant: How Conversational Style Makes or Breaks Relationships” The second book is entitled: “You Just Don’t Understand: Men and Women in Conversation”. In these two books, Prof. Tannen raises the issue of how to deal with communication barriers at large. She also relays special focus on the issue considering the communication between men and women everywhere as a special case of real cross-cultural communication. She says that men and women live in different worlds, made of different words.

The conclusion is that she brings the issue of language and gender to be included in the heart of the discussion when we try to uncover perceptions or misperceptions regarding the role and status of women if we consider the larger global context. That particular book by Tannen remained on the New York Times best seller list for nearly four years, and was subsequently translated into 30 other languages.

To provide a more holistic view and to provide a sort of systems-thinking-perspective, I add to the previous discourses the discourse of chapter 8 in the Prof. Philip Harris’s book *Managing Cultural Differences* which is entitled: “Women in Global Business” in which he addresses deep barriers, inequality and stereotypes regarding women in the global business context. He elaborates on the related problems to what came to be

known as the problem of the Glass Ceiling, which is a metaphor used to represent an invisible barrier that prevents persons of a given ethnic or demographic background from rising beyond a certain level in hierarchy. This concept was first coined by feminists in reference to barriers in the careers of high achieving women.

In conclusion, we can say that the issue of perceptions and misperceptions regarding the role and status of women is, in reality, an issue of a wide global concern. Away from the Islamophobic waves and tactics that need to be continuously uncovered, the Islamic perspective of the role and status of women should contribute positively to enhance and support the well-deserved role and status of women.





ALAZHAR OBSERVATORY
FOR COMBATING
EXTREMISM
(AOCE)

Analysis



Step Forward



ALAZHAR OBSERVATORY
FOR COMBATING
EXTREMISM
(AOCE)

Pioneers

Influential Muslim Women:

Halima Yaqoob as an Example



By Huda Mansour

“Women are allowed to take important public positions, including those in the domains of judiciary, fatwa-giving and presidency.” The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Prof. Ahmed El-Tayyeb

Many people all over the world have the misconception that Muslim women are oppressed by their religion and are denied their basic rights, including education. While Muslim women, like all women worldwide, have struggled against inequality and restrictive measures as to education, workforce involvement and family roles etc., these oppressive practices are mainly attributable to local culture and traditions, not to the Islamic teachings. As a matter of fact, Islam entitles women to their full share of rights. Some of these rights had not even been enjoyed by Western women until the 19th century.

We need now more than ever to highlight influential models of Muslim women from all over the world in an effort to challenge the stereotypes about Muslim women. In this article, we will shed light on an empowering Muslim female role model that could serve as a proof that Muslim women can be effective enablers and reach high status. Halima Yaqoob, a former advocate of women rights and the speaker of the Parliament of Singapore, was sworn in as the first female president of Singapore in 2017. Electing her to office is not seen as a milestone for Singaporean women only, but for all Muslim women in general as well.

Early life and Education

Halima Yaqoob was born on August 23rd, 1954 to an Indian father and a Malawian mother. Her father served as a guard and died when she was eight, so she had to strive to have good education before eventually becoming the first in her family to make it to university. She attended a girls' school, and later joined the National University of Singapore. Yaqoob has devoted decades of her life to public service. She received her Bachelor of Laws in 1978 and received a Master of Laws from the National University of Singapore, the university where she received an honorary doctorate.

Personal life

Yaqoob got married to Muhammad Abdullah Al-Habashi, a Yemeni businessman in 1980 and is a mother of five children. She is the first President live in a flat, affirming previously that she would not be moving out of her flat during her term in office. On 2 October 2nd 2017, she had to move out of the public housing apartment due to security threats identified by security agencies.

Life career

Yaqoob joined the National Congress of Trade Unions, as Director of the Secretariat for Women's Development and Legal Services and then became Secretary-General of Trade Unions. Her political debut was in 2001, when she was elected to the Singapore House of Representatives for the Gurung constituency of Singapore City. She received the title of Woman of the Year in 2001. In 2013, she was elected Speaker of Parliament. Yaqoob held several major positions, including Minister of Social and Fam-

Step Forward





ALAZHAR OBSERVATORY
FOR COMBATING
EXTREMISM
(AOCE)

Pioneers



Step Forward



ily Development and President of the House of Representatives before assuming the office of President. Halima played a prominent role in countering extremism, forming a strong opposition front against radicalism, issuing strong convictions against ISIS crimes in Syria and Iraq.

In her inauguration ceremony, she said, “I lost my father when I was young; my mom single-handedly brought up my four siblings and me. We experienced poverty and hardship firsthand, struggling to survive every single day.” She added, “I attended Singapore Chinese Girls’ School, and had classmates and friends from all races. In the unions, I served workers regardless of their race. As a Member of Parliament, I took care of the needs of Singaporeans from every race and religion. I am proud that I belong

to a country that does not just say it is diverse, but lives out this diversity every single day.” She also stressed the importance of dealing with divisive forces that are sweeping across the world, including the threats of extremist terrorism and Islamophobia.

Halima Yaqoob and Al-Azhar

In May 2018, she received the Grand Imam Prof. Ahmed Al-Tayyeb at the Presidential Palace in Singapore. The Grand Imam congratulated her on assuming the presidency. He invited her to participate in Al-Azhar Conference which discussed contemporary global challenges facing women. The Grand Imam described her success as a success for all Muslim women and a proof of the fact that women could contribute to society’s advancement.

Muslim women like Halima Yaqoob can serve as a model that negates all false claims that a Muslim woman must remain restrained and incapable of reaching high altitudes. As a matter of fact, the emergence of Islam and the spread of its lofty teachings marked a new era for women as they became more independent and entitled to full individual, social and human

rights. Islam places women on an equal footing with men in terms of free will and choice, declaring that they both are capable of following the path of Islam to attain moral and material well-being: “Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life” [Quran, 16:97].





ALAZHAR OBSERVATORY
FOR COMBATING
EXTREMISM
(AOCE)

Interview



An Interview with

Dr. Azza Karam

Secretary General of Religions for Peace
International and professor of religion and
development at the Vrije Universiteit in
Amsterdam.

Step Forward



Would you tell us more about Azza Karam the Egyptian woman and Secretary General of Religions for Peace?

Azza Karam is a very simple woman who has a sense of faith and is very fascinated by all religions. I was taught at an early age that the 'rouh' of Allah is breathed inside each of us. And this made me very interested in all religious peoples. Also in my early years, I learned how Egypt was going through many difficult political transitions, the Suez crisis was still very fresh in many minds especially among my father's generations; and with the aftereffects of the Palestinian naqba, it seems politics was so much part of our being. Shaped and compounded by the sense of humiliation of the 1967 war, the sense of jubilation after our soldiers crossed the Bar Lev line in October of 1973, and the sense of confusion – and some hope – in 1978. These historical moments defined my political interest not only in Egypt, but in the world. I was – and still am – a determined person. For my family this was understood as being 'stubborn'. It was my determination which made me a firm believer in the fact that if every human had God's rouh in them, then each deserved a sense of equality in dignity. In my university years this brought me to study and learn, and try to work with human rights.

Now as the Secretary General of Religions for Peace, how does it feel be one of the most influential women in the field of religion and Peace development?

I remember on the day I was elected, there was a hall full of over 900 delegates from all over the world, representing almost each and all the diverse faiths. The hall erupted in clapping and ululation and happy shouting and even whistling when I entered after being announced. I remember a sense of intense gratitude to these people, most of whom I do not know - nor did they know me.

I understood that their acclaim of me was a strong call of hope. Hope that after 50 years, a woman is now in this deeply male dominated space. Hope that after 50 years, a Muslim person now in this deeply non-Muslim dominated space. Hope that after 50 years, a person from the South is now in this traditionally Northern/Western space.

As I understood this hope, I also felt a strong sense of burden. This is above all, a responsibility. And a heavy one. How can I possibly honour all these expectations? This is all I think of. I understand deeply the privilege of service. As I feel the weight of its challenges. I am not saying that I am

unhappy. I am just saying that I pray for guidance each day because I am never sure that I am capable of this intense set of responsibilities.

In your opinion, how can religious leaders activate their role in building Peace around the world?

Actually, since I have the privilege of working with and about religions and politics from an international perspective, I have learned that religious leaders are already extraordinarily active in politics, society, finance, institution-building, and also human rights efforts, in every corner of the world. Religious institutions are the original institutions known to humankind – churches, mosques, citadels and empires. All of these long predated nation-states as we know them today.

What we are lacking is not activating religious leaders to build Peace, they do so. As some of them also advocate for war. What we need, is to encourage them to work together across their religious and institutional and political differences, to continue to facilitate for them to work together, to provide them with the necessary capabilities, skills and venues, to work together; and to celebrate their successes in doing so. The thing is, just because religious leaders are religiously qualified, does not immediately translate into them being able to do everything from providing food and health services to mediating conflict. Some of them are remarkably able to do many things. But many also need to be supported to do these services efficiently and accountably. And they need to be supported to serve together. All of this has to be done with media. The world hears all the news about how religiously motivated people commit acts of violence. But we rarely ever hear about how they keep the Peace and make Peace.

Serving previously as Senior Advisor on Culture, at the United Nations Population Fund, how can we engage culture and religion to serve the communities and build bridges of understanding?

Religions are part of cultures. and vice versa. I do not believe we should see them as separate. Our language is informed by our religion, so naturally much of what we write as poetry, design, paint, etc., will be influenced by religion. The linkages between religions and cultures are important for any work on bridge building. Part of the serious harm being done at the level of world politics is that governments engage with little or no understanding of the religious-cultural foundations of nations and peoples.

If governments were more culturally literate

about one another, we may be able to see more commonalities among and between us than we currently do. The entire idea of a European Union for instance, is built on the notion of a cultural and historical and religious commonality. This is partly why Turkey was not acceptable to many European Union politicians. If we were able to appreciate more that European cultures, as with Latin American, African and Asian cultures, are all connected through interreligious coexistences which have nurtured these nations and their peoples, we may feel less alienated from one another, and be less inclined towards bigotry and discrimination.

Being one of the most successful influential women in the world, what are your advice to women around the world, at a time where wars and conflicts are falling heavily on women, mothers, daughters and wives?

Thank you for having such a high opinion of me. I do not feel so successful nor influential, actually. I believe strongly that women, mothers, daughters and wives cannot change the world alone. We need to learn how to understand boys and men, brothers and fathers and husbands, etc.. And we can do so by working together instead of against each other.

It is problematic to assume that all men are alike and all women are alike. Women can be the worst enemies of one another, especially as they compete for more attention and power in male-dominated spaces, cultural settings, and institutions. We need to be better friends to one another as girls and women, and we need to understand that as we stand in closer alignment and solidarity with one another, we are also making men feel alienated, uncomfortable, angry, and even very aggressive. We need to learn how to communicate – together – how to be merciful. Our work will not stand on and with men alone. Nor will women alone keep it standing. We must be human beings together.

What can world religious institutions, like Al-Azhar and Religions for Peace, do more to help empower women and enlighten them about their rights?

This is also a very important question. Each of these institutions is already doing a great deal. The understanding of women's rights in Islam would not happen if it were not for centuries of knowledge which Al-Azhar has provided, and continues to provide, for the whole world. But this knowledge is not known to the whole world. For instance, who are Al-Azhar's foremost academics on women's rights? Are they part of inter-

national networks? Are they known to not only other academic institutions in Egypt and the Arab world, but to other international organisations working in the fields of human rights, of history, of art? Is their work translated into non-Arabic languages? Why is this important? It is important because Islam does not belong to Al-Azhar only. Just as it is important for the Grand Imam to be known as the great leader of Al-Azhar, its women scholars also need to be known as the great leaders of scholarship and engagement around social justice issues around the world.

Religions for Peace provides a global multi-religious platform for all the world's women of faith leaders/scholars. We bring the voices of the women together in international events, and support them to meet and dialogue with one another. Their voices and their experiences cannot and should not be limited to any one religious institution, whether secular or religious in nature. Rather, women of faith have to be at the forefront of global politics – as analysts, as strategic advisors, as story tellers of history. This is what Religions for Peace believes and is committed to ensuring.

What are the future plans of Prof. Azza Karam?

In the hands of God. If you had asked me two years ago, I would not have imagined where I am now. I am not good at planning ahead of time and strategizing my moves. Instead, I work hard at the task I have, and follow the calls from our Creator through his believers.

How do you see the role of religion and religious institutions in the time of COVID-19? Was it the expected or should they have exerted more efforts?

Religious institutions are the original social service providers (from education to health, from nutrition to sanitation, from mediation to providing humanitarian relief). The religious institutions are the originators of this work, and most of them – as you in Al-Azhar can attest to – remain critical service providers and humanitarian actors, around the world. They are already heavily mobilized to do a great deal. Some of the religious sites (mosques, churches) are even providing tests and vaccines, and all of them are trying to look after the needs of those impacted by the disease.

Again, I think the issue is not what can they each do more, but how can they work to serve more communities and peoples, together. Covid-19 taught us even more clearly, that no community can exist in isolation from the other. That the safety of one depends on the other. Covid

does not distinguish between Sunni and Shia, Copt or Muslim, or Baha'i and Muslim. Covid infects, and affects, all.

As the WHO says, no one is safe until everyone is safe. Our responses to the Covid pandemic, however, have not mirrored that basic reality. Religious institutions have responded on their own – each organization working more and harder and longer, alone. Very few religious organisations came together to address the same disease and the same impacts in the same communities, together. Those that did work together, are to be appreciated, but they are not enough. We need to ensure that the “normal” way of working is multi religiously and with other non-religious civil society actors and governments, together.

How can we respond to the unfounded claims that Islam is a religion that calls for violence?

Three concrete ways - focusing on ourselves, since we cannot change others until we change ourselves:

Be Humble: Stop believing that Arab Muslims are better than any other Muslims. We discriminate amongst one another, and that is haram. If we can stop our own internal discriminatory perceptions and practices, then we can exemplify to the rest of the world how they have no ground to stand on to discriminate against us. Work more to serve communities, together with non-Muslims. Our religious youth should serve as a role model for how they work together as Muslims and non-Muslims in service of their communities. These are times of great need and great distress among many in our populations: hunger, general poverty, homelessness, all are rampant, and are tearing apart peoples' sense of dignity. Initiatives to mobilise communities cross-religiously (including all religious minorities) should be actively planned and done.

Celebrate Religious Diversity - stop discriminating against non-Muslims. Work more together, learn more about other religions and learn how to show respect to other religions. Our youth need to be exemplars in how Muslims are able to celebrate diverse religions. This can be done in many ways, including through actual social service volunteer programmes at the grassroots levels; through cultural initiatives including poetry, painting, interreligious studies; and by insisting on holding their parents, friends and politicians accountable when they talk nonsense about other religions or religious beliefs.

Pursue Interreligious Education: we should witness and support academic/scholarly efforts to teach young students about each others' religious beliefs and practices. From an early age,

children should learn about each others' religions, in addition to their own. The argument that we need to educate about our own religions as purely as possible, is, in my opinion, an argument of arrogance and fear.

If we believe that God is one, then the multiple expressions of belief in him should not be taught exclusively. Muslims can learn about Islam for sure, but they must also learn about diverse faiths whether different Christianities/Christians, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Bahai'ism, and even those faiths who have no “book”. Our religious beliefs are the essence of who we are as individuals, communities and nations. We must learn about the other to learn about ourselves. That is what the Qur'an instructs. How do we learn about one another (ta3aruf) if we do not teach other's religions??

What do you expect from Al-Azhar Observatory in the field of combating extremism and creating religious and cultural harmony?

To contribute actively to the above recommendations.



Women's

Social Life under

ISIS



Social life is an important aspect as far as women's existence within a particular community is concerned. Comparing women's life conditions before and after joining ISIS, one can spot a vast difference. Perhaps we collide with the bitter reality when we know that there are some women who willingly joined this bloody organization, a thing that made us conduct a social analysis of the extremist publications to discover the different features of social life that ISIS tries to show to women through some online platforms in order to attract and entice them into joining the organization. In the following lines, we will explain some of the most important social life characteristics under ISIS, and how ISIS used some of them



Members of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) stand guard over families who have fled Isis's last stronghold in Baghuz. Many Yazidi women have managed to escape their captors.

01

Diverse Social Ties within ISIS

The showoff of the diverse social ties comes at the forefront of the false social features within the organization. It is based on putting together an image of women from various developing or developed countries who belong to different social classes, with differences related to color, race or ideology. This image in turn lures and deceives women in many parts of the world into joining them. And if travel to such an environment is not practically possible for some of these deceived women, they may connect with ISIS ideologically and emotionally, and could provide material support for the terrorist organization via the internet.

02

Strong Bonds among the Members of the Organization

Undoubtedly, ISIS' claim of strong bonds and cohesion among its members makes marginalized women in society view this terrorist milieu as a lifeline from the social injustice to which they are subjected. In addition, there is an allegation that any social differences vanish within the 'Islamic State', including linguistic and ethnic ones. Accordingly, there are special titles they give to each other and to those who they seek to recruit, such as "brother/sister in tawheed (monotheism)" and "brother/sister in Islam." This image crystallizes within women's intellects as cordiality and brotherly spirit within the organization.



03

Social Integration

Another social feature that ISIS shows to its victims is social integration. This is again a false presentation and is nothing but an illusion, through which it is attempted to integrate the newcomers or minorities within the social structure of the radical community. However, through this presentation, some women become deluded into quick integration with their peers in the terrorist milieu that, as mentioned earlier, comprises different social classes of women with multiple languages and nationalities and raises the slogan of eliminating borders between countries.



04

Social pressure

Social pressure is an evident characteristic of ISIS community and is experienced by men and women alike. An observer of ISIS affairs knows that death is the inevitable fate of any member who may go against the organization. This punishment is carried out in full view of all members of the organization, making the victim an example for others. This is one way of creating social pressure that affects one person's relationship with others in a society. This pressure in turn transmits to the women who happen to fall within the tight grip of the ISIS female Hisbah department.

05

Social fear

Social fear takes over the women who live under ISIS. This fear results from the consequences of interacting or talking with strangers, as they will have to face the brutality their criminal leaders. A case in point is the Yazidi teenager, Ashwaq Haj Hamid, who reported being raped multiple times by Abu Hammam al-Hayani, as punishment until she managed to escape the terrorist community.



ALAZHAR OBSERVATORY
FOR COMBATING
EXTREMISM
(AOCE)

In Focus

06

Suicide

Suicide committed by men, women and even children is relatively frequent in terrorist milieu. It usually takes the form of suicide attacks, which they call jihadi operations. It is worth noting that there are many suicide operations, killings and kidnappings that frontpage their various publications, boasting about the large number of the dead and wounded innocents. Al-Azhar Observatory for Combating Extremism could, for example, record as many as 4 suicide operations in Iraq and 4 others operations in Syria in the single month of September 2020, which led to the killing of about 50 people and the injury of 60 others.

07

Social exclusion

Social exclusion is a feature of life under ISIS. It applies to women and men alike within the organization. By reviewing the criminal history of ISIS, we found that such exclusion of women results from the organization's outlook of women as a commodity that can be bought and sold. It is noted that social exclusion is limited to members rather than the leaders (Umaraa) of ISIS. This is evidenced by a confession of an ISIS member who was arrested by the security authorities. When asked about how he would choose his captive female victim from among the kidnapped women, he replied: "The senior leaders are in charge of distributing the spoils and captives. We are not allowed to choose."



Step Forward

08

Social stigmas

Social rejection of ISIS by various societies is an undeniable fact, as evidenced by the large number of security pursuits of ISIS members. This social stigma afflicts women in particular when they join the organization. This became clear when many countries refused to receive female ex-ISIS members, with many of them arrested by the security authorities and placed in border camps, fearing that they would commit other crimes against innocent people within the community. In addition, many families refused to receive the women who could flee the grip of terrorism and return their original homeland out of fear for their children. A case in point the German girl Linda, whose return was rejected after she had left her home to marry an ISIS member.

In summary, ISIS presents an unreal image of women's social status within the organization in order to lure more women into becoming new members or at least to make them connect emotionally and ideologically with the radical organization. However, the narratives of female ISIS returnees and the observed facts expose the falsity of this image and reveal the various forms humiliation and social stigmas that a female ISIS member is put through.



An Islamic View on Marriage of Underage Girls

Marriage of Underage Girls: An
Investigation of Reasons and
Consequences.

Islam is very keen to regulate all human beings' relationships, either their relationships to Allah, or among themselves. As marriage institution occupies a high status and a special place in Islam, Islam underscores it as an indispensable basis and a corner stone of the Muslim community. In order to show how marriage is important in Islam, the Qur'an describes this relationship as 'mithaq ghaleez,' i.e. firm covenant and also as one of the great signs and favors of Allah to people, as He, Glory be to Him, says, "And among His Signs is this, that He created for you spouses from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy." (Qur'an, 30:21)



Islam sets regulations and conditions for marriage to be valid. Notwithstanding these elaborate shar'i conditions and regulations, Islam allows some space for cultural and social differences with regard to the celebration of marriage, etc. Yet, with the passage of time, and as people's norms and customs differ from time to time and as the world ceaselessly keeps evolving and advances, personal affairs codes have been edited and updated continuously in order to organize the relationships between people in this regard.

As the relationship between the two spouses requires rationality, tranquility and mutual understanding, Laws in most world countries require that the minimum age of marriage for girls be 18 years. But many of these same nations have some kind of exemption to this requirement. For instance, in Australia, if a person is at least 18, their spouse can (with judicial approval) be as young as 16. And in many other countries, such as Iraq, Jamaica and Uruguay, children can marry with parental permission. Only six countries worldwide do not specify a minimum age for marriage. They are Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen.

The aim of specifying a minimum age is that a young man or woman can fully understand the objectives of marriage and can shoulder the responsibility of forming a new family. This requires that there should not be any union between a child under this age and another child of the same age. According to the UNICEF, child marriage refers to any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child.

Despite this seemingly international unanimity on the prohibition of concluding marriages of underage persons, there are about 12 million girls who get married before the age of 18 each year. In other words, 23 underage girls get married every minute. This phenomenon has detrimental effects and consequences on girls, starting with dropping out from education, which greatly affects the society as a whole. It also includes greater health risks, such as dangerous complications during pregnancy and childbirth, greater probability of suffering from domestic violence.

There are different reasons for the spread of this phenomenon, which include, but not limited to, social norms and practices, poverty, in-

security, and religious opinions. We will focus on the last reason in order to present the sound Islamic perspective on this issue. Some may argue that Islam encourages early marriage and quote in support various Qur'anic verses, such as (Al-Rum: 21 and al-Nur: 32), and Prophetic hadiths that underscores the importance of marriage and necessity to marry whenever one is capable to. The other argument is that most classical Muslim scholars see that it is permissible to marry the underage girls.

In order to elaborate on the Islamic perspective in this regard, it is important in the very beginning to underline some general principles:

First, Muslim jurist (fuqahaa) agree that the original legal ruling is that marriage is permissible;

Second, in the classical books of Fiqh, there is a difference between concluding the marriage contract and consummation of marriage; and

Third, Muslim fuqahaa agree that it is permissible to restrict mubah (a term denoting an action as neither forbidden nor recommended) for a valid and preponderant interest.

In light of these principles, it is evident that the Qur'anic verses and Prophetic hadiths in this regard communicate that marriage is permissible, provided that its parties are well qualified and physically, financially and psychologically capable of having this experience. Therefore, Muslim scholars made it clear that marriage shall not be consummated unless the two spouses are qualified for marriage, even if the marriage contract is concluded beforehand. In fact, there is also a disagreement among Muslim fuqahaa whether a woman's guardian has the right to conclude her marriage contract while she is still underage or not. Muslim Fuqahaa disagree also on the point of specifying a minimum age for marriage. Yet, the preponderant opinion is that it is permissible for waliy al-Amr (the legislative bodies) to specify a minimum age as long as it serves a valid shar'i interest.

In conclusion, we see that as it has been proven that marriage of underage girls has detrimental effects on girls and, by necessity, on the community at large, there should be collective effort and activity towards the elimination of this phenomenon. This means that concerted efforts should be made by the international bodies, religious leaders, and world leaders as well as all educational, political and judicial institutions in order to put an end to this epidemic.



ALAZHAR OBSERVATORY
FOR COMBATING
EXTREMISM
(AOCE)

FAQS



Why can't a Muslim woman marry a non-Muslim man?



At first, it is important to note that a Muslim man seeking a non-Muslim woman for marriage is not the most preferable thing to do. It is instead recommended to marry a Muslim woman who can raise his children to observe the Islamic creed and traditions.

Let's review a more reasonable answer to this debatable question by His Eminence Prof. Ahmed Al-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar. He explained that marriage in Islam is not a civil contract as is the case in the West; it is a religious bond based on affection between the two partners involved. A Muslim man can marry a Christian or Jewish woman because he believes in Jesus and Moses, peace be upon them both, for this is a constituent part of a Muslim's

sound belief. Islam also commands a Muslim husband to grant his wife the freedom to observe her religious rituals because he believes in the divine origin of her faith.

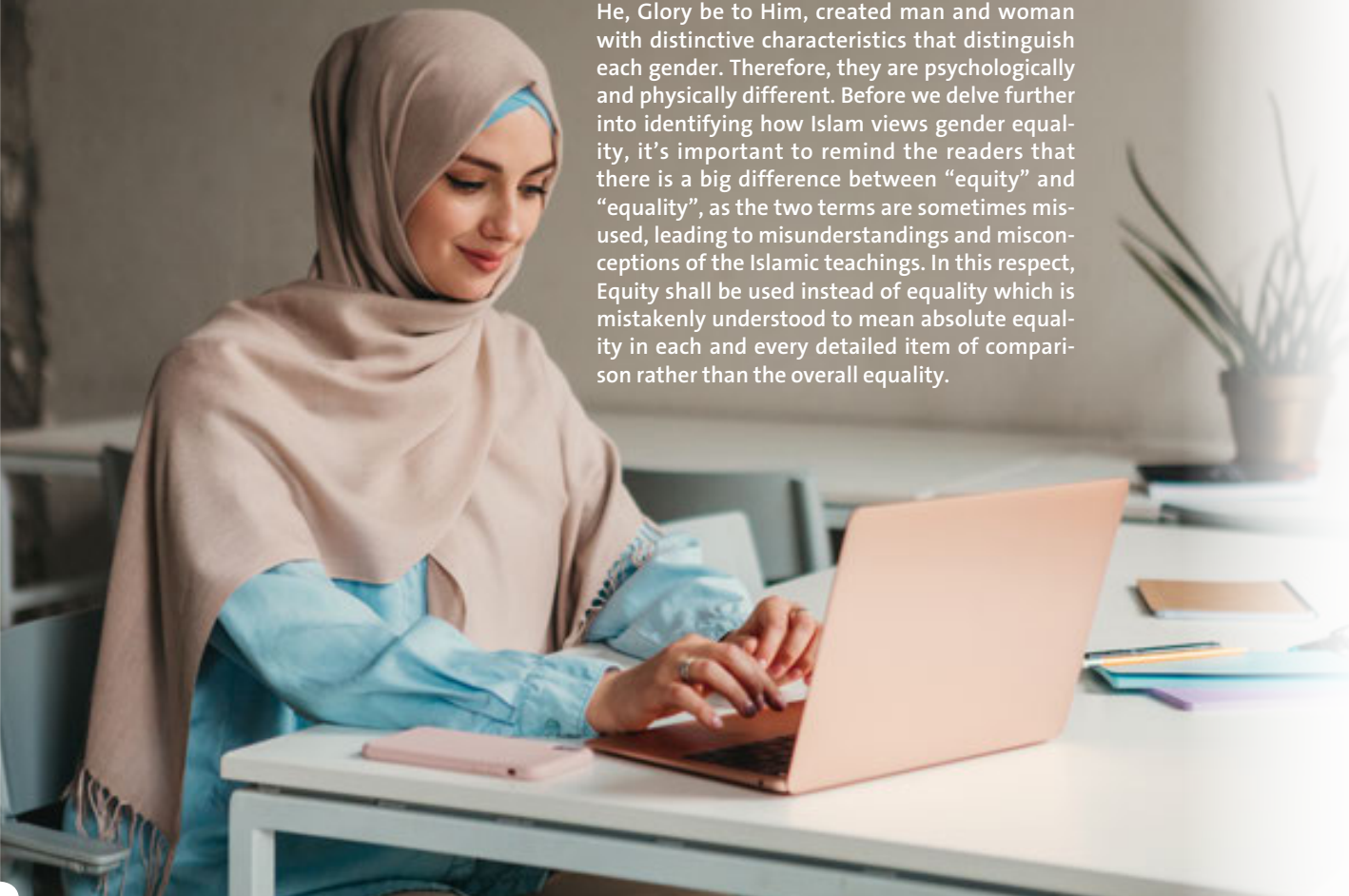
As for the marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man, it differs from the previous case, for a non-Muslim husband does not believe in our Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and his religion does not obligate him to grant his Muslim wife the right to observe her Islamic rituals or respect her sacred symbols because Islam came after Christianity. Thus, her husband would hurt her by being disrespectful towards her religion, Prophet (PBUH) and sacred symbols, which will ultimately cause love to vanish from marriage, and hence it can be seen why such marriage is prohibited in Islam.

Does Islam Oppress Women?



By Mahmoud Kamel

Allah, the Almighty, created all creatures and made them belong to different races and backgrounds that may sound similar or different from each other. He, Glory be to Him, created man and woman with distinctive characteristics that distinguish each gender. Therefore, they are psychologically and physically different. Before we delve further into identifying how Islam views gender equality, it's important to remind the readers that there is a big difference between "equity" and "equality", as the two terms are sometimes misused, leading to misunderstandings and misconceptions of the Islamic teachings. In this respect, Equity shall be used instead of equality which is mistakenly understood to mean absolute equality in each and every detailed item of comparison rather than the overall equality.



To make it clearer, let's differentiate between equality and equity. Equality is defined as "the state or quality of being equal with correspondence in quantity, degree, value, rank or ability." An illustrative example is that the Egyptian law stipulates that all Egyptians shall be treated equally, in the sense of having equal rights and duties. Equity, on the other hand, is defined as "the quality of being fair or impartial."

Based on the above, it is unfair to think that men and women are equal in all respects, since there are clear differences between a male and a female. Allah says: "And the male is not like the female" [The Quran 3:36]. So, we cannot ever call for the absolute equality between men and women, as it does women wrong to ignore their differences from men in terms of psychological and physical constitution.

Islam equates between men and women in some aspects, where equality is necessary, and differentiates between them in others as necessitated by their different natures. Below are some of the aspects that show that Islam views men and women as equals:

• Civil Rights

In pre-Islamic era, women had been deprived of a lot of their civil rights. For instance, men were used to prevent women from their right to inheritance, whether as mothers, wives, daughters or sisters. Islam, on the other hand, made no distinction between men and women in terms of civil rights, including sale, purchase, inheritance and marriage, etc. There are many Qur'anic verses that clearly admit women's right to inheritance. Allah, the Almighty, says, "And for you is half of what your wives leave if they have no child. But if they have a child, for you is one fourth of what they leave, after any bequest they [may have] made or debt. And for the wives is one fourth if you leave no child. But if you leave a child, then for them is an eighth of what you leave, after any bequest you [may have] made or debt. And if a man or woman leaves neither ascendants nor descendants but has a brother or a sister, then for each one of them is a sixth. But if they are more than two, they share a third, after any bequest which was made or debt, as long as there is no detriment [caused]. [This is] an ordinance from Allah, and Allah is Knowing and Forbearing." (Qur'an 4:12).

• Duties and Responsibilities

Islam assures that both males and females have specific duties and responsibilities, declaring in numerous verses that "Every person, for what he earned, is retained" (Qur'an 52:21). In another verse Allah, the Almighty, says, "And whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer – those will enter Paradise and will not be wronged, [even as much as] the speck on a date seed. (Qur'an 4:124) Therefore, women, like men, are required to fulfill duties and face the outcomes of their actions. The Qur'anic discourse does not make a distinction between men and women when calling for taking responsibilities and fulfilling rights: "Whoever does an evil deed will not be recompensed except by the like thereof; but whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - those will enter Paradise, being given provision therein without account" (Qur'an 40:40).

• Access to Education

It is undoubtedly known that Islam stands against ignorance and calls for seeking knowledge and education. It made no distinction between men and women in its discourse calling for education. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim". (The word "Muslim" is used here as a generic term to refer to both males and females). 'Aa'sha, may Allah be pleased with her, was one of the prominent female Muslim figures who represented a clear example of educated women in Islam, since she interpreted the Qur'an, narrated hadith (Prophetic sayings and actions), and even participated in the political process.

To conclude, Islam does not differentiate between men and women in terms of obligations, since they are both to receive the reward of their good conduct and the punishment of their bad one. Allah, the Almighty, says. "And for women are rights over men similar to those of men over women". (Qur'an 2: 228) However, given the mental, psychological and physiological differences between men and women, Islam recognizes that both genders have specific capacities. It would be unfair if general equality is applied. Instead, woman's distinctive nature shall be taken into consideration and orders and obligations are made orders accordingly, which reflects the real application of equality and justice.



Intellectual or Military Combating: Which is Necessary for Countering Extremism?

It goes without any shadow of doubt that the post 9/11 world differs from the pre-9/11 world. This event marks a beginning of a new history of humanity as the United States has then waged its long war on terrorism. Despite the high costs, the war on terrorism has not achieved much. That war, which was supposed to wipe out terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda and the extremist movements, failed spectacularly in achieving its ends. Rather, terrorism and extremism have become more rooted, dominating large areas throughout Africa and Asia, and turned to be more attractive to more people, especially the youth. The instability in Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks and their regional implications had very negative repercussions not only on Afghanistan but on the whole world as well. Therefore, the world's trust in war as a means for ending threats seems to be lost for generations to come, if not forever. Instead of military power, the world is turning to a new policy, that is, the intellectual combating and anti-extremism programs. It is worth nothing that since the September 11 attacks, the world has to some extent succeeded in supporting an alternative or parallel discourse. Admittedly, security confrontations alone are useless in countering extremism, because they often generate intransigence and increase extremism and terrorism.

Extremism, as defined, is the adoption of/adherence to extremist ideas, beliefs or ideologies. As thought can only be countered by thought and power breeds conflict, extremist ideologies should not be confronted with bullets only. That is why governments today need new strategies based on community participation and partnership to prevent extremist ideologies and hate speech. Many countries have now recognized that combating extremism is indispensable, and they have been active in countering extremism by promoting a culture of tolerance and coexistence between different cultures and civilizations. This is a very serious matter that requires immediate action towards enactment of international and national legislation that promotes

respect of human rights and shared values.

The world has witnessed a number of intellectual, cultural and behavioral transformations. Although these transformations have had positive effects on our life, they have, on the other side, a number of negative effects on thought and behavior, including weakening human and moral values of a few groups of people embracing radical thought. No stone shall not be left unturned to counter the extremist ideologies. All possible means should be employed to fulfill this sublime end. Activities and efforts shall be exerted at all levels and on all different fields. As media plays a pivotal and undeniable role in shaping the minds of many people in the present





time, all media platforms are of paramount importance in fighting and eliminating terrorism, extremism and hate speech and presenting the true and pure Islam as a religion of peace, compassion and tolerance.

Education is also an essential means for

countering extremism and terrorism. It should be employed to promote learners' awareness of rights, duties and responsibilities, to instill in their minds a sense of belonging to the global community, and to encourage them to participate in developing a peaceful and sustainable society. The necessity to support education



stems from the fact that it is an important, integral and, indeed, a central part of the battle against extremist thought and ideological distortions. Indeed, education plays a significant role in creating an environment that prevents extremists from spreading their ideologies and

recruiting supporters.

Al-Azhar institution was not far from that battle. Azhar has been under fierce attacks from the extremist groups, but it remains steadfast in defiance of all storms, spreading the true, moderate image of Islam. It shoulders the responsibility of spreading the moderate thought, confronting extremism and terrorism and consolidating the shared values of coexistence. It always emphasizes the importance of learning lessons from past experience on combating extremism and terrorism and moving forward towards the development of new and more effective policies, based on education and alternative discourse, to combat this scourge. As terrorist groups focus their efforts to brainwash and recruit the young people via cyberspace, Al-Azhar embarked on the mission of reviving religious discourse and recruiting technology to counter extremist ideas. It established Al-Azhar Observatory for combatting Extremism to address extremist ideas and refute misconceptions spread by extremist groups. Addressing thought by thought is a slogan adopted by Al-Azhar. It is put in effect through modern tools that help in building peace, combating extremism and terrorism, defending the causes of the nation and protecting young people from destructive and extremist ideas.

Finally, governments bear the responsibility of protecting all citizens and taking all needed measures to keep them safe. On the international level, many countries develop new strategies and programs for combatting extremism, such as PREVENT program in Britain as well as deradicalization programs in prisons. Deradicalization programs should not end with a person abandoning extremist views, but governments need to reintegrate those people into society. Those people have the right to live properly since they decide to be good citizens and disassociate themselves from extremist organizations. All programs and initiatives aiming to combat and prevent violent extremism must respect human rights, the rule of law and include specific protections against abuse in this regard. Moreover, they should be reviewed independently and regularly in order to identify their impact. The world must strive for peace and elimination of extremism and all forms of violence, taking into account the importance of peaceful means in achieving this goal, admitting that, at some cases, military power is needed, particularly in the face of those who choose to impose their extremist ideologies on the present and future generations.



Diversity and its Implications from Islamic Perspective

People are different in many aspects including color, race, sex, etc. This is an undeniable fact that can be easily noticed by naked eye and no one can argue otherwise. As Islam is a religion that goes in line with natural disposition, it admits this fact. It is clearly stated in the Qur'an (11:118) that Allah willed this diversity and had He, Glory be to Him, willed otherwise, He would have created all mankind one nation, i.e. identical in race, color, sex, etc.

Accordingly, difference among human beings is something that Islam admits. The very acknowledgement of this fact has some implications from an Islamic perspective. First, Allah, Glory be to Him, does not permit anyone to coerce another to follow Islam. He, Glory be to Him, says, "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (Quran, 2:256). The mission of Muslims is only to convey to others the pure and true teachings of Islam and its divine essence. Having being informed of the true message of Islam, people are free either to accept or refuse it, so long as they are well acquainted with the consequences of their choices.

The second implication of the Islamic acknowledgement of difference among human beings is that people's rights should be preserved. No one is allowed to violate the life or property of another for religious reasons. Followers of other religions should have the same rights Muslims enjoy, and holding them accountable for denying Allah or disbelieving in Him is a sole right to the Almighty Allah alone.

The third implication is that although we are

different from each other, which leads by necessity to the existence of different communities and nations, there should not be any kind of superiority of a community or a nation over another. Superiority in Islam is only for those who establish God's order and try their best to achieve prosperity on earth. This meaning is reinforced by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as he said, in his Last Sermon, "There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab and for a non-Arab over an Arab; or for white over the black or for the black over the white except in piety. Verily the noblest among you is he/she who is the most pious."

The purpose of being created different is to seek to know one another and cooperate with each other. Allah stated it clearly in the Qur'an, "O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another." (Qur'an 49:13) The Arabic term for "that you may know one another" is "li ta'arafū". In the broader sense, this term may be interpreted as 'you are created different and divergent so that you may coexist with each other and hold dialogue among yourselves about your different religions and cultures in order to promote prosperity and welfare on earth.

In essence, our diversity is meant to be a way for making matters easy for us, to let us complete each other, to cooperate with each other, and to lead prosperous lives. Therefore, we should make use of this privilege to the best of the whole humanity, and not to make it a pretext to destroy one another and spread chaos on earth.





Freedom of Expression in Islam: Guarantees and Limitations



By Mohamed Ali Al-Kazzaz

At the present time, freedom of expression represents a right that is cherished globally and an entitlement that is upheld by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. With a view, mainly upheld in the West, of the Sharia as a legal system that restrains freedom of expression, the main purpose of this article is to explore and introduce the true position of the Sharia on freedom of expression in such a way that shows whether or not it has principles that may set the basis for the exercise of this right, and, if proved to have these principles, define the extent to which the Sharia allows/qualifies the scope of freedom of expression.



There is no precise or inclusive definition of freedom of expression. Some have attempted to define it as individuals' right to express what they have in mind regardless of whether or not this expression brings about legal effects. This definition has an unqualified scope, for it does not take into account the legal limits that should regulate freedom of expression, including the content, time, place and manner. According to another opinion, which takes into consideration the legal effects, freedom of expression means one's liberty to express thoughts, principles and beliefs in the manner one deems appropriate within the confines of law. In line with the previous definition, other jurists are of the opinion that freedom of expression is a set of principles that must not contradict other social values, in the sense that any kind of freedom is bound by the principle of avoidance of harm or inconveniences to the others and non-violation of the public order and moralities.

Freedom of expression includes freedom of the press and the liberty to communicate ideas in all forms including books, pictures, signs and other means of communication, with the

purpose being to inform, to persuade, to convince others, to reveal the truth or to eliminate doubt. Freedom of expression is also correlated to social freedoms, which include, inter alia, the formation of parties and civil society institutions, the freedom of the press and the media, whether in audio, visual, or digital forms, and the freedom to access the information needed for expression of opinion.

Western commentators have generally held that there is no recognition in Islam of the concept of right or liberty, including the right to freedom of expression that is inherent to the human self. Thus, according to Schacht, the Islamic law is a system of duties, consisting of ritual, legal and moral obligations, all of which are sanctioned by the authority of the same divine command. "Hamilton Gibb also commented that the Islamic theory of Government gives the citizen as such no place or function except as a taxpayer and submissive subject."

The Sharia has principles that may be used as evidence in support of freedom of expression. These principles include *Ḥisbah* (commanding good and forbidding evil), *Naṣīḥah* (sincere ad-



AL-AZHAR OBSERVATORY
FOR COMBATING
EXTREMISM
(AOCE)

Opinion

vice), Shūrah (consultation), Ijtihad (personal reasoning) and Ḥurriyat Al-Mu'araḍah (freedom to criticize public officials), respectively. Based on these principles, it is found that the right to freedom of expression is well-established by the Sharia. However, these principles are not left loose or unregulated, but instead are bound by and dependent on certain regulations and limitations that guarantee non-departure from the intended objectives of freedom of expression under the Sharia.

The Sharia excludes certain forms of the scope of freedom expression due to their offensive nature and inappropriate content. It is found that violations of speech under the Sharia are subsumed under two categories: the first category of violations of freedom of expression includes forms of expression that are merely morally condemned, i.e., they are not penalized by any specific legal penalty, and thus are not justiciable. These include lying, backbiting, tale-bearing, etc. In addition to these, there are other varieties of speech that are penalized as





AL-AZHAR OBSERVATORY
FOR COMBATING
EXTREMISM
(AOCE)

Opinion

criminal offences. These include slanderous accusation (Qadhf), blasphemy, insult etc. It is concluded that the prohibition of the first category serves moral objectives represented in safeguarding the moral integrity of individuals, and is directed at the conscience of the believers who must abide by these enjoins. On the other hand, the prohibition of the second category serves the objective of the non-violation of people's rights as well as the preservation of social order.

All in all, it is concluded that the Sharia has principles that guarantee freedom of expression within a regulated scope. Nonetheless, this relatively restricted scope serves better moral and social objectives, with a view of the preservation of individuals' dignity, maintenance of public order and avoidance of harm. In addition, the Sharia imposes obliging restrictions of moral import, such as the prohibition of lying, backbiting, tale-bearing, etc. that any statutory law would fail to enforce.





Ramadan

Month of Great Victories

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. During this month, Muslims abstain not only from eating, drinking and intimate relationship from dawn to sunset, but also from anything that displeases Allah (Glory be to Him). The obligation of fasting in Islam came after the obligation of prayer, as the former became obligatory in the second year after Hijrah. While the month of Ramadan is regarded as the month of observing fasting, reciting the Glorious Qur'an, giving charity and many acts of performing worship, we must also keep in mind that it is a month of honor and pride for all Muslims as they managed to snatch great victories from the jaws of defeat.

The first battle that took place during the month of Ramadan was the battle of Badr, referred to as *Yaum al-Furqan* (day when the true was distinguished from the false) in the Qur'an as Allah says, "...if you truly believe In Allah and in what We sent down on Our servant on the day when the true was distinguished from the false, the day on which the two armies met in battle. Allah has power over

all things".[1] This battle took place on the 17th of Ramadan, 2 A.H. It is worth mentioning here that the number of Muslim fighters during this battle was about three hundred while the number of the unbelievers was about one thousand. However, Muslims were sure that Allah would support them with such great victory as Allah says,

"We will, without doubt, help our messengers and those who believe, (both) in this world's life and on the Day when the Witnesses will stand forth".[2]

Due to this great victory, Allah revealed a verse recited in the Glorious Quran till the day of judgment so that this battle remains deep engraved in the hearts of Muslims around the globe and throughout centuries, where Allah says, "Allah had helped you at Badr, when you were a contemptible little force; then fear Allah; thus may you show your gratitude".[3]

After the battle of Badr, the Muslim army was able to liberate Mecca on 20th of Ramadan 8 A.H.

This liberation, known also as (the greatest conquest), marked the end of the wars between the followers of the Prophet and the tribe of Quraysh. This battle was a turning point in Muslim history as Muslims started to control the Arabian Peninsula as a whole. When Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) went to Mecca, he performed circumambulation around the K'aba (tawaaaf) and started breaking down the pagans' idols rehearsing Allah's saying, "And say: "Truth has (now) arrived, and falsehood perished: for falsehood is (by its nature) bound to perish".[4]

On 28th of Ramadan 92 A.H., the Muslim army led by Tariq ibn Ziyad and Mussa Ibn Nusair was able to conquer al-Andalus (Parts of the Iberian Peninsula ruled by Muslims), in the west, and another Muslim army reached China, in the east. The Islam remained in al-Andalus for more than eight centuries and this land was one of the most important crossing points between Islamic and European civilizations. The Islamic civilization in al-Andalus came to an end with the fall of the Emirate of Granada.

Afterwards, on the 9th of Ramadan 212 A.H., Muslims, led by Asad ibn al-Furat, who was also a jurist and theologian, conquered the Island of Sicily, which is regarded as the biggest island in the Mediterranean Sea. Muslims became only five miles away from Italy. Muslims ceaselessly continued their journey of preaching and spreading the message of Islam across the globe.

On Ramadan 223 A.H., an Abbasid campaign was led personally by the Caliph al-Mu'tasim, when a Muslim woman appealed for help from him saying, "O Mu'tasim, [Save me!]" . Therefore, he targeted Amorium, a Byzantine city in western Asia Minor, because it was one of Byzantium's largest and most important cities. Amorium was strongly fortified but a traitor revealed a weak spot in the wall, where the Abbasids concentrated their attack, effecting a breach and soldiers surrendered.

As for modern era, we find that the greatest war that occurred in Ramadan was the 6th of October War, 1973, which corresponds to the 10th of Ramadan 1393 A.H., where the Egyptian army forces crossed the Bar Lev Line and destroyed the Israeli defense points east of the Canal. After long negotiations, Egypt restored not only its entire land from the Israeli occupation, but its military prestige that it had lost after the defeat on the 5th of June 1967 as well. Therefore, there is no wonder if we said that fasting and the month of Ramadan are a source of inspiration, enthusiasm, and motivation to the Muslim soldiers, as this month witnessed many decisive battles that contributed greatly to Muslim achievements. We can also surely say that it is a month for hard work, great effort and endurance, not a month for laziness and sleeping.

[1] The Qur'an: 8: 41

[2] The Qur'an: 40: 51

[3] The Qur'an: 3: 123

[4] The Qur'an: 17: 81





ALAZHAR OBSERVATORY
FOR COMBATING
EXTREMISM
(AOCE)

Faces

Inspiring women

*Hawa Abdi
Dhiblawe*

**A somali human rights activist and
physician**

• 17 May 1947 - 5 August 2020 •

Somalia's first female gynecologist, Hawa and her two daughters run a hospital and refugee camp that is now home to 90,000 people and have been hailed "The Saints of Somalia".

What makes her story truly remarkable is her fearless courage and boundless kindness.

When militants invaded her camp and took her hostage for a week, she said, "I may be a woman, but I'm a doctor. What have you done for society?"

She and her daughters run the camp and hospital from their own savings and donations.



Step Forward



46

May 2022

www.azhar.eg/observer-en

*Abla
El Kahlawi*

Dean of the faculty of Islamic and Arabic studies, women's college, Al-azhar University, port said, egypt.

• Dec 15, 1948 - Jan 24, 2021 •

In 1979, Dr Abla El Kahlaoui had been nominated as the head of the department of Islamic law at the university of Umm Al Qura in Mecca. This significant achievement pushed her to improve her educational curriculum in the religious field.

Between 1987 and 1989, Dr Abla worked in Makkah on providing Islamic courses for Muslim women who came from different parts of the world. After this rich experience, she moved to Cairo to join her father's Mosque where she exerted big influence upon women and managed to increase their religious awareness. She also supervised and guided actresses who decided to retire from acting due to religious purposes.

Dr Abla has founded a charity association to undertake the Orphans, patients and the elderly under the name of "Albaqiat Essalihah".



*Malala
Yousafzai*

A Pakistani Activist For Female Education And The Youngest Nobel Prize Laureate

• Born on 12 July 1997 •

Malala had already been nominated for an International Children's Peace Prize in 2011 in recognition of her bravery in speaking up for girls' rights to education. But in 2012, she was shot in the head by the Taliban, and went into critical condition before (thankfully!) recovering. Since then, she became fighting even more strongly for girls' rights to education. Despite being just 20 years old, Malala has countless awards (including the youngest recipient ever of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014) and established the Malala Fund, which "champions every girl's right to 12 years of free, safe, quality education.

"I don't mind if I have to sit on the floor at school. All I want is education. And I am afraid of no one." - Malala Yousafzai.





ALAZHAR OBSERVATORY
FOR COMBATING
EXTREMISM
(AOCE)

Faces

Zara Mohamed

Zara Mohamed the first female leader elected by Muslim council of Britain.

“ My vision is to continue to build a truly inclusive, diverse and representative body, one which is driven by the needs of British Muslims for the common good.



Dega Dhalac

Dega Dhalac, the first Muslim woman elected to the South Portland City Council, is now the first Somali-American mayor in the United States- a step that may inspire a new generation of American Muslims to engage more in building a better society.



Sameera Moussa

Atomic Scientist

The First Egyptian Woman to hold a PhD in atomic radiation and the first to hold a university post. She aspired to make the best use of atomic energy for peace and medical purposes; “I’ll make nuclear treatment as available and as cheap as Aspirin.



Step Forward

Rawya Attia

Mother of the Fighters and Martyrs

The first woman to be elected in the parliament in 1956, and was the first woman to be commissioned as an officer in the Liberation Army. She founded an association for the Care of Martyrs' Families. She obtained several military awards from the Egyptian state, notably the badge of the Third Army, the Medallion of 6 October and the medal of the armed forces.



Aisha Abdel Rahman

Literature and Islamic writer

Due to her accomplishments in the field of Literature and Islamic studies, she was the first woman to give a lecture in Al-Azhar University.

Dr. Aisha contributed much to the Arab library with valuable publications and researches, the best of which were her masterpieces in Ouranic and Islamic studies; The Prophet's Mother, The Prophet's Wives, The Prophet's Daughters. In addition to her master pieces The Islamic Concept for the liberation of Women, the Glorious Qur'an and Human Rights, the Qur'an and Geography, Woman in Islam.



ALAZHAR OBSERVATORY
FOR COMBATING
EXTREMISM
(AOCE)

Faces

Said About Women



Step Forward



50

May 2022

Yes She Is The Claimed Deficiency Reflects Her Power:

Yes, fundamentals and ignorant people take the hadith, which says: "I have not seen anyone more deficient in intelligence and religion than you. A cautious sensible man could be led astray by some of you", out of its context to devalue woman. However, this hadith is limited to two certain points: the testimony of two women equals that of one man in certain cases due to her highly emotional attitudes sometimes, and second, a woman can neither pray nor fast during her menses. Therefore, the hadith assures that, despite these limitations legislated for keeping her well-being, her charismatic power may exceed a wise man himself. Moreover, many prophetic sayings and quran verses call for treating women nicely.

Yes She Is Equal To Man:

Yes, Women And Men Are Equal In Regard To Duties, Rights, Virtues And Merits. Both Are Promised The Same Reward For Good Conduct And The Same Punishment For Evil Conduct.

Allah Says, "And For Women Are Rights Over Men Similar To Those Of Men Over Women".

(The Our'an, Al-Baqara 2:28)

Yes she is independent person:

yes, islam ensures woman an independent financial liability.

Allah says, "for men there is reward for what they have earned, (and likewise) for women there is reward for what they have earned". The our'an, al-nisaa' 4:32

In addition, islam ensures her full right to dower, maintenance and inheritance.



ALAZHAR OBSERVATORY
FOR COMBATING
EXTREMISM
(AOCE)

Faces

The emancipation of woman from the manacles of persecutions practiced against her at that period of time was “a project dear to the prophet’s heart.” In fact, islam gave woman “rights of inheritance and divorce centuries before western women were accorded such status.”

Karen Armstrong,
Islam: A Short History, 16



Step Forward



52

May 2022

www.azhar.eg/observer-en



All the dignity and honor shown to woman in the west is mainly credited to islam that has done everything possible to eradicate any enmity towards woman.

Sigrid Hunke, Shams Al 'Arab
Tasta'u Ala Al- Gharb, 468- 467

Muhammad (pbuh) was “sympathetic toward women and was concerned about their equal treatment, including full religious responsibility.”

Jeri Altneu Sechzer, “Islam and Women: Where Tradition Meets Modernity”: History and Interpretations of Islamic Women’s Status. Sex Roles, 51,, no. 5/6 (2004) 263





ALAZHAR OBSERVATORY
FOR COMBATING
EXTREMISM
(AOCE)

Last Word

Awareness Campaigns



Woman is A Queen in Islam

- The Qur'an contains an entire chapter named after Lady Mary (Surat Maryam). She is the only woman the Qur'an mentions by name, in what may be seen as a sign of recognition of all women in the person of Mary.
- «Live with them (your wives) in accordance with what is fair and kind» (Qur'an 4:19)
A general, longstanding, and strict Quranic injunction for men!

Step Forward



www.azhar.eg/observer-fr/



Observatoire anti-extrémiste d'Al-Azhar



observatoire.azhar@gmail.com

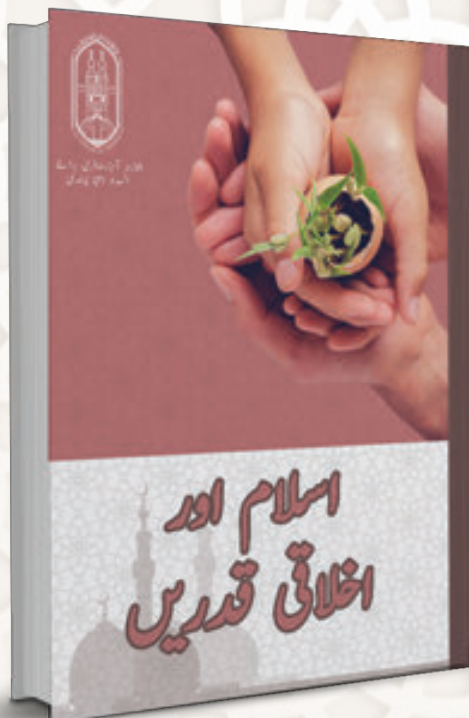
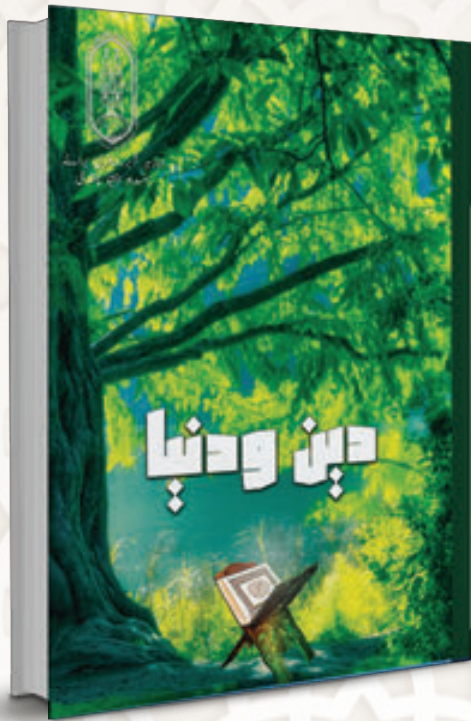


50

May 2022

www.azhar.eg/observer-en

Know the Observatory



The Observatory conducted tens of studies in the field of combating extremism



Observer



www.azhar.eg/observer-en
www.azhar.eg/observer-fr



مركز الأزهر العالمي للرصد والفتوى الإلكترونية

Al-Azhar Observatory for Combating Extremism

De L'observatoire D'Al-Azhar Pour La Lutte Contre Le Terrorisme



observatory@azhar.eg
observatoire.azhar@gmail.com



www.azhar.eg/observer-en
www.azhar.eg/observer-fr



Observer