EWIC3_1-469 11/15/05 4:45 PM Page 353

Science: Medicalization and the Female Body

Overview

This entry explores the emergence of scientific discourses on women and gender in Islamic cultures in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through the transformation of the notion of science from "useful arts" to modern forms of scientific knowledge and practices.

Biological reproduction and female illnesses

The medicalization of childbearing in Islamic cultures throughout the nineteenth century illustrates the centrality of reproduction to the emergence of scientific discourses on gender. Historically, this entailed the replacement of local midwives with individuals trained in the modern science of medicine, as well as the supervision of that process by state authorities. Thus, in Ottoman Egypt, under the reign of Muḥammad ʿAlī, a school of midwives was established in 1832, among the first of its kind in the Middle East. Training for female doctors, *ḥakīmāt*, was for a period of six years and included obstetrics, pre- and postnatal care, hygiene, vaccination, and the preparation of medicines (Kuhnke 1990, 125). The newly trained *ḥakīmāt* were instrumental in administering vaccinations, supervising and certifying midwives, collecting vital statistics, treating syphilis, ascertaining the virginity of maidens, and performing post-mortem autopsies on female victims of epidemics and murder (Fahmy 1998, 49–50). Through the services they rendered *ḥakīmāt* were part of a larger state project of disseminating medical knowledge to the broader public, of undermining "old wives' medicine," and, less innocuously, supervising and monitoring larger segments of the population, particularly women. Similarly, in Ottoman Turkey, medical schools began training local midwives in 1842. Often, the medicalization of childbearing embodied the need for larger populations to sustain increased agricultural productivity and military strength.

Childbearing continued, throughout the twentieth century, to be subject to medicalization, in particular through private women's initiatives and state-sponsored maternal and child welfare clinics, which were aimed at reducing high infant mortality rates. In turn-of-the-century colonial India, for example, traditional midwives (*dāyāt*) were blamed for high infant mortality rates, and in 1934 the All India Women's Conference called for the registration of all *dāyāt* and midwives (Gupta 2002, 177–85). High infant mortality rates had plagued the Muslim world since the turn of the century, with epidemics such as cholera and smallpox claiming the lives of children under the age of five. Indigenous women's associations and organizations emerged in the Muslim world from a tradition of religious charitable organizations and learned societies. Centered on social welfare and uplift, local welfare societies began to emerge in the first quarter of the twentieth century, concerned principally with the protection of motherhood and childhood, and the lowering of maternal and infant mortality rates.

Partly in response to European colonial allegations that the indigenous population was unable to care properly for its offspring, children's dispensaries and maternal and child health clinics sought to instruct mothers in the methods of cleanliness and the proper feeding and bringing up of their children. Local women's associations and schools emerged in, for example, Egypt (the Mubarrāt Muḥammad ʿAlī, 1909); Lahore, India (the Muslim Woman's Organization, 1908); Zanzibar (Arab Girls' School of Zanzibar, 1927); and Mombasa (the Government Arab Girls' School, 1938), and were often responsible for the diffusion of health propaganda to mothers and children. Other examples in the Muslim world were in Lebanon where the Sisters of Love was founded in 1847, containing a school, sanatorium, and home for wayward girls, and the Orthodox Aid Society for the Poor founded in Acre, Palestine in 1903 (Fleischmann 1999, 102). Between 1919 and 1921 the Red Cross founded mothers' societies in Beirut, Aleppo, and Damascus (Thompson 2000, 84–5). In Turkey during the second constitutional period (1908–19), several women's societies were formed, such as the Red Crescent Women's Center (1912) and the Society for the Defense of Women (1914) whose goal was "to render mothers capable of bringing up their children according to the principles of modern pedagogy" (Fleischmann 1999, 103). An interest in the scientific organization of the protection of

EWIC3_1-469 11/15/05 4:45 PM Page 354

childhood began to develop, and, for example, Egyptian delegates were sent to attend international conferences in 1925. Islamists, too, concerned themselves with the protection of motherhood and Muslim Brother Ḥasan al-Banna founded an Institute for the Mothers of the Believers in Egypt in 1933, while Zaynab al-Ghazālī founded the Muslim Women's Association in 1936, encouraging Muslim women to be modern, scientific, and educated in order to be proper mothers.

While childbearing was one component of the scientification of gender discourses, reproductive diseases and other female illnesses also began to be linked to the eradication of folk medicine (*ṭibb al-rukka*). By the turn of the century folk medicine was relegated to a realm of predominantly female superstition and irrational non-modern practices to be replaced by the new medical sciences. Thus, conditions such as infertility, once the purview of local healers, became subject to the new discourses of health and science. An example of the denigration of traditional or folk medicine is ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ismāʿīl's 1892–4 study entitled *Ṭibb al-rukka*, which critiqued the practices of old wives' medicine in modern Egypt. In India Mawlana ʿAlī Thanawī's *Bihishti Zewar* (Heavenly ornaments) – a "guide for respectable women" – critiqued customary practices, especially related to childbearing, but, interestingly, encouraged women to learn the traditional *yūnānī ṭibb* ("the scientific medicine of the Greco-Arabic humoral system") alongside modern medical practices (Metcalf 1990, 10). In central and North Africa emergent scientific discourses especially targeted the female practice of *zar-bori* (or the exorcism associated with spirit possession) for religious and medical reform, often viewing the illness as a form of female hysteria or a heterodox "un-Islamic" practice (Morsy 1993, 18, Hale 1996, 6).

Another arena where state intervention sanctioned scientific gender discourses was in the regulation of prostitution and the transmission of venereal diseases. The regulation of sexual diseases and, in particular, syphilis, had long been one of the exigencies of the large-scale military campaigns and encampments of the nineteenth century. So much so that in 1835 Dr. Clot Bey, the Frenchman who helped establish the modern medical profession in Egypt, wrote a treatise on syphilis, which had reached near epidemic proportions in the Ottoman viceroy Muḥammad ʿAlī's large naval and military bases (Fahmy 1998, 43). Prostitution had been legal in Egypt throughout most of the nineteenth century, although criminalized in Cairo. By the 1860s and 1870s the ban had been lifted in Cairo and prostitution became subject to state regulation with required medical examinations and health certificates. After the 1882 occupation prostitution came under British regulation, taking place in registered houses and with "compulsory weekly examinations" (Badran 1995, 192–206).

Colonial armies, too, regulated prostitution and in Algeria the French army mandated monthly medical visits for prostitutes (Lazreg 1994, 55). Similarly, in French mandatory Syria and Lebanon, the French colonial army was keen to regulate prostitution, passing laws in 1921 (Syria) and 1931 (Lebanon) that required prostitutes to register with the police, carry identification cards, and be medically examined twice weekly (Thompson 2000, 86–7). In colonial India, British officials became increasingly concerned with the regulation and registration of prostitutes, and the containment of venereal diseases, particularly after the 1857 revolt (Gupta 2002, 109–10). By contrast, in colonial Mombasa, a port city where prostitution flourished, official attempts to regulate the trade (such as a 1929 regulation requiring travel passes certifying that women were married) were largely unsuccessful and the government settled on the regulation of venereal diseases (Strobel 1979, 141–50).

Prostitution was often posed as a religious and public health issue, with Muslim reformers expressing concern for the moral and physical health of the people. Thus, Islamist discourse dovetailed with public health prescriptions. For example, Egyptian feminist Hudā al-Shaʿrāwī wrote to Shaykh al-Azhār Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl to enlist his support in banning prostitution, which he did by commending the Egyptian Feminist Union for "commanding good and forbidding evil" (Badran 1995, 198). In the Netherlands Indies, where mixed unions between Europeans and natives had become increasingly common by the turn of the century, the Sarekat Islam "campaigned against concubinage on religious grounds," while colonial authorities expressed concern over the eugenic fitness of children born of mixed unions (Stoler 1997, 221).

Interestingly, the prevention of sexual diseases and prostitution led to proposals for the encouragement and medicalization of marriage. In April 1941 Muslim Brother Sayyid Quṭb proposed the reconsideration of a law in Egypt that called for the medical testing and certification of individuals before marriage by government physicians to ensure the sexual and reproductive health of the

EWIC3_1-469 11/15/05 4:45 PM Page 355

couple (S.Q. 1941, 90). This failed attempt to medicalize marriage was one component of state efforts to assert control over the reproductive process.

Social reproduction

Female education and the Woman Question

The turn of the century witnessed a proliferation of writings throughout the Muslim world surrounding what came to be known as the Woman Question. Throughout the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century Muslim reformers began to agitate for female education, linking the reform of women inextricably to the progress of the nation as Qāsim Amīn's widely read and controversial 1899 *Taḥrīr al-marʾa* had done.

Yet Amīn's ideas did not arise in a vacuum and debates in Turkey and India, for example, both foreshadowed and followed many of his arguments. Critical of the Tanzimat reforms as superficial and imitative of the West, the Young Ottomans have traditionally been viewed as the first proponents of women's emancipation in Turkey, posing the reform of women as essential to civilizational progress. Tanzimat (1839–76) and Hamidian (1876–1908) era writers such as Namık Kemal (1840–88) used dualisms like *alafranga* (*alla franca*) and *alaturka* to highlight the Westernized versus indigenous elements within Turkish society (Göle 1996, 33–4). As Partha Chatterjee has noted in the Indian context, anti-colonial nationalist discourse situated the Woman Question within an inner domain of spirituality, localized within the home and embodied by the feminine; nationalist discourse was thus enabled to construct a cultural essence distinct from the West (Chatterjee 1993, 134).

Another example is produced by Turkish writer Mahmud Esad (1865–1918) who asserted the division of the world into a material and spiritual realm. The Western (representing material scientific progress) could be adopted so long as the Eastern spiritual realm remained intact. Women functioned as either the "touchstone of Westernization" (Göle 1996, 27) or the "touchstone" of Western "contamination" (Kandiyoti 1991, 32) depending on one's ideological position. For Westernists, the superiority of the West in science and technology related to its positivist world-view and critique of religion, while for Islamists the abandonment of Sharīʿa was the cause of Ottoman decline. Two Turkish texts related these issues to the status of women: Şemseddin Sāmī (1850–1914) published *Kadınlar* (Women, 1880), stating "the condition of any society is always symmetrical to the condition of women," whence the necessity to educate women in science and proper child-rearing; and Fatma Aliye Hanım (1864–1924) published *Nisvan-ı İslam* (Women of Islam, 1891), arguing that Islam was not a barrier to the "progress of civilization" (Göle 1996, 32–3).

Scientific child-rearing

Articles in the turn-of-the-century women's press in the Muslim world began to consolidate new scientific gendered discourses on wifehood, domesticity, and proper child-rearing. Among the first women's journals in the Islamic world were *al-Fatāʾ* (Egypt 1892), *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* (Turkey 1895), *Khatoon* (in Urdu, India 1904), *Dānish* (Iran 1910), *al-ʿArūs* (Syria 1910), and *Fatāʾ Lubnān* (Lebanon 1914). Common throughout the literature of the turn of the century was a concern for the proper upbringing or education of the future generations. Proper child-rearing came to condense a complex set of debates about the nature of mothering, child-rearing, the progress of nations, and the backwardness of Muslim nations.

A fundamental shift occurred at this time as mothers became responsible for the physical, moral, and intellectual development of children. Nationalist discourses began to problematize child-rearing, calling for its reorganization on scientific lines according to modern, hygienic, and rational principles. Within many Muslim colonial settings, "ignorant" mothers were problematized by both colonial administrators and indigenous modernizing reformers as particularly unsuited for the preparation of a new generation. Such assertions held up the example of an advanced and scientific European pedagogy to corroborate their argument, pointing to the relationship between proper mothering and the progress of the nation.

The importance of mothering and child-rearing thus played a critical role in the emergence of scientific gender discourses. The creation of a national family in Turkey emphasized the importance of women's role in socializing the sons of the nation (Duben and Behar 1991, 212–14, 216). Beginning in the Hamidian era, and particularly from the late 1880s, Turkish writers began to focus on the relationship between proper child-rearing, social reform, and the health of society. Drawing on the French sociological and psychological tradition, treatises on child health and child-rearing manuals began to flourish, and pediatrics itself emerged as a specialization (ibid., 226–38). Abdullah Cevdet (1869–1932), a positivist and

EWIC3_1-469 11/15/05 4:45 PM Page 356

biological materialist, argued for the "rehabilitation of the mothers of the nation . . . on scientific grounds" (Kandiyoti 1991, 33). In 1909 medical doctor Nusret Fuad published his enormously popular (three editions) *İzdivaç Şerait-i Sıhhiye ve İçtimaiyesi* (The hygienic and social conditions of marriage) in which he covered the hygienic preconditions for healthy family life (marriage, housekeeping, and child-rearing) (Duben and Behar 1991, 138, 182–3, 205). Ahmet Midhat Efendi (1844–1912) began publishing influential texts in the late 1890s (such as *Istidâd-i Itfâl* or Children's aptitude and *Çocuk Melakât-i Uzviye ve Ruhiyesi* or The physical and mental faculties of children) instructing parents and children alike and connecting the progress of Europe to proper child-rearing. Such ideas on mothering were disseminated widely through organizations such as the Society for the Protection of Children and its journal *Gürbüz Türk Çocuğu* (The robust Turkish child) and the premier women's journal of the prerepublican era *Kadınlar Dünyasi* (Women's world) in which women were exalted as mothers and child-rearers.

Turn-of-the-century Persian texts reconfigured the premodern concept of woman from house (*manzil*) to manager of house (*mudabbir i-manzil*) (Najmabadi 1998, 91). The centrality of motherhood and wifehood in Iran during the modern period is illustrated by child-rearing and domestic science textbooks, which began to address the mother (rather than father). The "modern educational regimes" of the turn of the century created an image of the modern woman as manager of the household and educator of children, requiring the cultivation of scientific sensibilities. Writers such as Mīrẕa Āqā Khān Kirmānī (1853–96) in his *Sad khatābah* imagined the womb as both a vessel and a school (*maktab*), and linked the advancement of women to national civility (Najmabadi 1998, 92–5). Iranian discourses were hybridized with European discourses as, for example, in the late nineteenth-century *Kitāb-i Aḥmad*, a modified version of Rousseau's *Emile* (Najmabadi 1998, 99–100). An 1891 text entitled *Tarbiyat-i aṭfāl*, which covered hygiene, proper child-rearing, and housekeeping, embodies the transformation of the largely female and oral domain of woman's wisdom into male authored texts aimed at the inculcation of scientific sensibilities (Najmabadi 1998, 104–7).

Iran's Constitutional Revolution (1906–11) initiated a consciously secular modernity in contradistinction to the Qājār monarchy. During the constitutional era (1906–20) family life, now envisaged as part of a national family, transformed mothering into a central task for the creation of national citizens. The acquisition of modern science through education, in particular, was viewed as a means to overcome national backwardness and the backwardness of women. Journals such as *Dānish* (1910) and *Shukūfa* (1914–18) promoted the science of housekeeping, child-rearing, and husband management (*ʿilm i-shawhardārī*). The new Iranian woman was to be a scientific mother and the house a space of citizenship. In a 1910 article a female principal exhorted: "you respected women must seriously and with great effort seek sciences and spread knowledge" (Najmabadi 1998, 108). The Pahlavī era (1925–79) in Iran consolidated a secular nationalist vision of modernity, in emulation of the Kemalist secular state, while inaugurating an aggressive project of state-building. Under Reza Shah's reign (1925–41) women became symbols of modernity appropriated by the state, symbolized by the 1936 ban on veiling. A state-sponsored "ladies' center," with organized lectures and activities providing women with a scientific basis for child-rearing and housekeeping, was formed in 1935 by Reza Shah, and independent women's organizations and journals were shut down (Paidar 1995, 105–6).

In Egypt and Greater Syria the writings of the journal *al-Laṭāʾif* (1885–95), edited by Shāhīn Makāriyūs (with anonymous entries presumably written by his wife, Maryam Nimr Makāriyūs), began to include articles in the late 1880s on domestic obligations, the education of women for proper wifehood and motherhood, and in particular the importance of modern scientific principles of child-rearing (physiology, nutrition, pedagogy). For example, one article cited Linnaeus's upbringing as an example of how "added education could enhance a mother's ability to provide stimuli based on scientific knowledge" (Cannon 1985, 474–5). Writing in *al-Laṭāʾif* in 1890, a Syrian female writer hailed education and the "basic principles of science" as the means for women in the Middle East to realize domestic and social roles (Cannon 1985, 476–7). In the early twentieth century the scientific-literary journals *al-Hilāl* and *al-Muqtaṭaf* covered the European kindergarten movements as examples of how the science of play contributed to the exercise of children's bodies and minds and the advancement of the European nations (Shakry 1998, 139–41).

At the Egyptian University in 1908 a special Friday "lecture for ladies" was launched by Hudā al-Shaʿrāwī. In 1911 Labība Hāshim, a Syrian émigré and editor, began a lecture series on child-

EWIC3_1-469 11/15/05 4:45 PM Page 357

rearing in which she instructed mothers in the science of *tarbiyya*. In her collection of articles, *al-Nisāʾiyyāt*, Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif also addressed the reform of *tarbiyya*, exhorting reformers to address female education and condemning young marriages as a cause of female hysteria (Baron 1994, 163). In fact, throughout the first third of the twentieth century the women's press in Egypt was replete with articles on childbearing and child-rearing. Between 1928 and 1936 the Lebanese journal *al-Marʾa al-jadīda* and the Syrian journal *al-ʿArūs* regularly featured columns on motherhood, with medical and pedagogical advice (Thompson 2000, 143). Household management, too, became subject to scientification and rationalization, as for example in the school of practical housewifery established in Cairo in 1909 to teach "the laws of household economy and hygiene" (Tucker 1985, 128) and Malaka Saʿd's 1915 practical text on household management *Rabbat al-dār* (Baron 1994, 156–7).

Similarly, in India mothering and child-rearing were to become modernized and rationalized and women's journals began to carry advice columns on child-rearing as early as 1874 (Gupta 2002, 185–90), while *Bihishti Zewar* devoted an entire book to proper child-rearing and household management (Metcalf 1990, 315–82). In colonial Mombasa, Muslim reformer Shaykh Amīn bin ʿAlī Mazrūʿī, writing in the 1930s in his journal *al-Iṣlaḥ*, suggested that Muslims imitate Europeans in female education, pedagogy, and child-rearing, but within a framework of Muslim religious science (Strobel 1979, 103–6).

However, anti-colonial nationalist Islamic discourses on motherhood were not merely parasitic upon colonial or European discourses. Crucial to the discourse of upbringing was the concept of *adab*, entailing a complex of valued dispositions (intellectual, moral, and social), appropriate norms of behavior, comportment, and bodily habitus (Messick 1993, 77–9). Islamist reformers were able to draw upon resources indigenous to the Islamic tradition that emphasized the proper pedagogy for children, the cultivation of the body, and the moral education of the self as essential for the constitution of a rightly guided Islamic community. Such norms of pedagogy were complementary, and not antithetical, to the modernist disciplinization of the body and rationalization of the household (Shakry 1998, 127–8). Further, the formation of new private spheres within Muslim colonial settings was often fashioned within non-secular parameters. As Dipesh Chakrabarty (1992) has shown in the creation of a domestic sphere in colonial Bengal, such attempts encountered resistances which refused to align along bourgeois public-private axes. Pointing to other configurations of self and community, he elucidates the construction of bourgeois domesticity in Bengal as hinged upon two fundamental strategies of exclusion: the rejection of companionate marriage (denial of the bourgeois private) and of the secular historical construction of time by an invocation of collective memory (denial of historical time).

Contemporary discourses: family planning and population control

The principal manner in which gender has figured in contemporary scientific discourses in the Muslim world has been in the debates on family planning, population control, and new reproductive technologies. Early in the twentieth century Muslim scholars began discussing the permissibility of modern contraceptive methods, arguing by analogy from medieval jurists' discussion of coitus interruptus, often arriving at conflicting opinions. Thus, for example, Indian Deobandi reformers, such as Mufti Azizur-Rahman, allowed contraception, while Mawlana Mawdudi wrote an entire treatise in 1943 declaring modern birth control to be harmful to Islamic values (Omran 1992, 201–8).

As early as 1937 the Egyptian medical association organized a conference on birth control covering topics such as eugenics and the use of modern contraception to prevent unwanted pregnancies. In fact, the first official fatwa in Arabic addressing, and sanctioning, birth control in the twentieth century was issued in Cairo in 1937 by Shaykh ʿAbd al-Majīd Salīm, and reprinted in the conference proceedings.

As healthy childbearing became a "national duty" within the Muslim world, nationalist discourse increasingly took up the Woman Question, encouraging the mothers of the future to "reproduce less in order to reproduce better" (Anagnost 1995). Yet it would not be until the 1950s and 1960s that Muslim nations would begin to embark on official family planning programs. Among the first countries to formulate official population policies in the Muslim world were India in 1951, Egypt in 1964, Morocco in 1966, Iran in 1967, and Indonesia in 1970. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, as in Egypt, the state made great efforts to achieve a broad consensus on family planning through a focus on disseminating information on population issues rather than simply distributing contraception (Hoodfar 1994, 12).

EWIC3_1-469 11/15/05 4:45 PM Page 358

Through Friday sermons and government sponsored population programs for disseminating family planning knowledge among workers and in rural areas, the state defined family planning as the prevention of pregnancy for the health of the family and society. Nevertheless, individual religious pronouncements often found themselves at odds with state sponsored population programs. Throughout the Muslim world abortion is generally prohibited unless the mother's health is at risk, and absolutely prohibited after 120 days.

Several fatwa committees and councils have convened on the issue of family planning, notably the Academy of Islamic Research at al-Azhar in 1965 and the Councils of Islamic Fiqh in Mecca in 1987 (Omran 1992, 215–6). Several major pan-Muslim conferences on family planning also took place throughout the Muslim world: Rabat, Morocco 1971; Banjul, the Gambia 1979; Dakar, Senegal 1982; Aceh, Indonesia 1990; and Mogadishu, Somalia 1990 (Omran 1992, 216–24).

At the December 1991 First International Conference on Bioethics in Human Reproduction Research in the Muslim World at al-Azhar University, Muslim scholars reached a consensus on reproductive health and new reproductive technologies, the gendered dimensions of which are clear. Scholars emphasized the following: that Islam is fully compatible with modern scientific research; that Islam promotes strong progeny through the selection of healthy spouses rather than through biogenetic engineering; that any reproductive research that poses a threat to mother, child, or future offspring is clearly unethical; that infertility is a problem in the Muslim world and thus that in vitro fertilization is acceptable, insofar as the sanctity of marriage is maintained (sperm and egg used belongs to the spouses and surrogacy is prohibited) and the protection of patrimony guaranteed; that overpopulation is also a grave problem in the Muslim world and that family planning is permissible in Islam, so long as no harm accrues to the mother; and that Islam promotes chastity outside of marriage and thus prevents sexually transmitted diseases.

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EWIC3_1-469 11/15/05 4:45 PM Page 359

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