



The Idea of Women in Fundamentalist Islam

Lamia Rustum Shehadeh

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"Lamia Shehadeh gathers so many loose threads, provides definitive answers, and offers bold analysis . . . from her deconstruction of significant Islamic texts and intelligent critique of these works. So far studies on Muslim women have oscillated between the apologetic and the titillating. This is a very focused piece produced by an expert on Islamic thought and Western gender theory as well."--Ghada Talhami, Lake Forest College

Lamia Rustum Shehadeh analyzes the writings and political practices of the nine Islamic ideologues of the twentieth century who masterminded the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism to demonstrate that their consistent emphasis on the subordinate status of women constitutes a vehicle for attaining political power. As the only study that compiles and critiques the gender theory of the major Islamic fundamentalists, *The Idea of Women in Fundamentalist Islam* offers a unifying theory elucidating their stand on women's role in society and the centrality of women in their politically ideal Muslim society.

In an attempt to create a working prevalent theory about gender in Islam, this book deconstructs the religio-political writings and political practices of the nine Islamic ideologues of the twentieth century who masterminded the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism: Hasan al-Banna, Abu al-'A'la al-Mawdudi, Sayyid Qutb, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Ayatollah Mortaza Mutahhari, Zaynab al-Ghazali, Hasan al-Turabi, Rashid al-Ghannoushi, and Sheikh Hussein Fadlallah. It demonstrates that although these ideologues have individual peculiarities, their consistent emphasis on the subordinate status of women in society and in their relation to men constitutes a vehicle for attaining political power.

By examining the spectrum of 20th-century Islamic fundamentalist discourse on the subordinate role of women, Shehadeh builds a bridge between political ideology and gender theory. She determines how the diversity of political, social, and economic domains within the discourse of the nine ideologues--male or female, Sunni or Shi'ite, radical or moderate--applies to gender relations, and whether their discourse is distinctive or remains within the classical or traditional mold of Islam. She demonstrates that the importance given to gender issues by fundamentalist ideologues and the constraints imposed on women in society are not so much due to patriarchy as to the manipulation of such issues for purely political purposes--to assure overwhelming male support and to divert attention from the real problems of society.

Shehadeh's study, the only work that compiles and critiques the gender theory of the major Islamic fundamentalist ideologues, offers a unifying theory elucidating their stand on women's role in society and the centrality of women in their politically ideal Muslim society. This book provides new perspectives and insights into the 20th-century concept of political Islam.

Lamia Rustum Shehadeh is associate professor in the Civilization Sequence Program at the American University of Beirut.

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