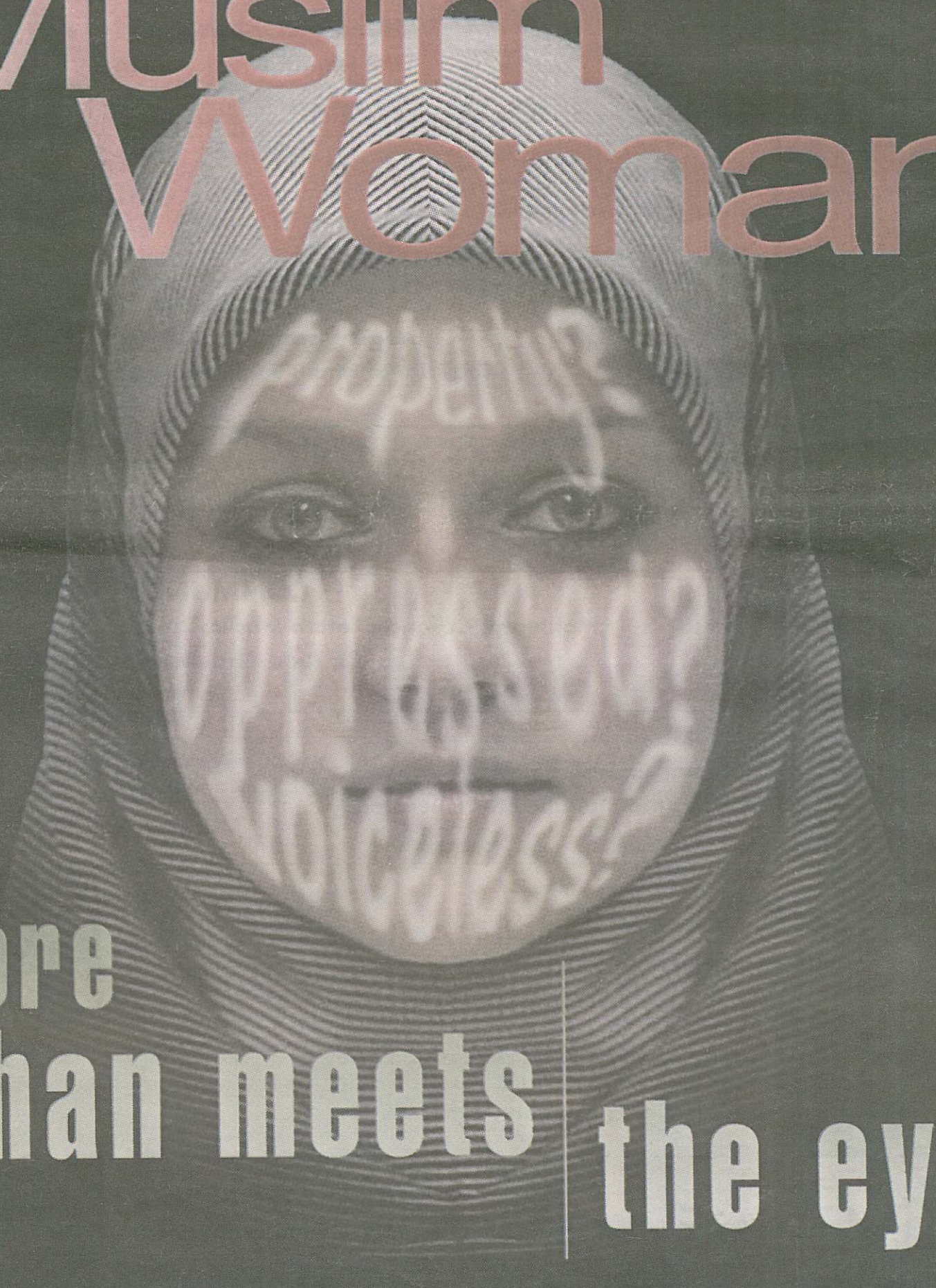


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# Muslim Woman

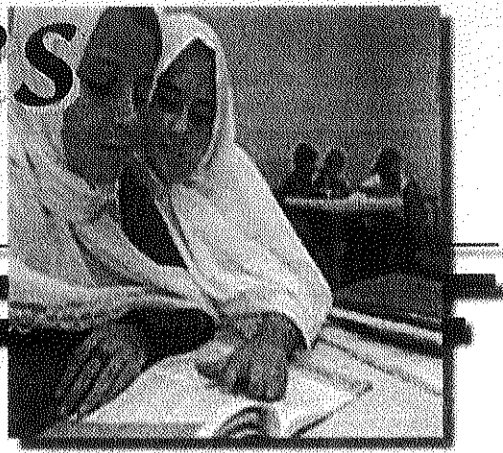


more  
than meets | the eye



# Gender Roles

## islamic perspectives on women in islam and the west



“Although I cover my hair in reverence to my Lord, I often feel it is my mouth that is covered...shut closed, super glued and permanently sealed. Others are speaking for me. Only my eyes are free to 'speak.' But if you knew me, you would know that there is more to me than meets the eye...”

In the 21st Century, the Crusades have been redefined. No longer is the goal the liberation of the Holy Lands from the “infidels,” but the liberation of women from the contemporary practice of Islam. “But it’s not Islam that is at fault, it’s our cultures.” So often this argument has resonated from our lips as we address the views that Muslim women are oppressed, that Muslim women are subjugated and persecuted, that Muslim women are physically abused, that Muslim women are imprisoned within their relationships, that Muslim women are...What went wrong?

With the inception of feminism, we have been taught that true liberation is defined by stripping down and throwing oneself into the rat race of consumerism. Bare foot and pregnant has become the antithesis of progression, where motherhood equates slavery and backwardness. And what about fatherhood – What fatherhood? – is a better question. Is feminism really a call for liberation, or a call for a gender-blind society, where both “hoods” become blended into one? No longer do Adam and Eve work to complement each other in creating that needed balance, but they’re now butting heads, each declaring the other as the original sinner.

Whether its manhood or womanhood, the measure of success today is determined by the size of our wallets and our ability to prove complete independence. And thus, in American society, we see some of the highest rates of divorce and single-parent homes. In a society that prides itself on social morals, why is it that one out of five women have been sexually assaulted. According to the national mean, 50-65 percent of husbands have engaged in extra-marital relations by the time they reach the age of 40. As for women, the national average is 45-55

percent (Focus on the Family). Despite these stats, the *hijab* (the headscarf; modest clothing) is seen as repressive. As we are constantly reminded by women’s rights organizations, true equality and liberation only comes by taking off the *burqah* and replacing it with a tight miniskirt. Ironically, those who are benefiting from women’s “liberation” are the men who are surrounded by “honeys” willing to give up their bodies and self-respect for the sake of “equality.” As for women’s rewards for so-called equality—what better than their commercialization on billboards, exploitation by the media and tokenization by men.

Yet in Islam, equality is neither defined by one’s body nor by who has the most money, but by the most pious, whether man or woman. True liberation is not only freedom from physical subjugation, but also freedom from mental subjugation that imposes upon us an insatiable desire to look this way, wear that brand, weigh so much and make six digits. Islamically, the goal is not to compete but to complement and work together to achieve the highest state of being, the pleasure of Allah Most High. In doing so, neither gender is deemed superior to the other, but equally necessary.

The role of both man and woman is measured and understood in the context of the other gender. So while Islam is true in its claim of gender equality where each gender respects and protects the other, why is this not exemplified in reality? Gender relations and the treatment of women has become merely the rhetoric that we espouse rather than the authenticity of our actions.

In order to save face, we use the past to forget the present. Take a glance at Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and the way he treated his wives and the way women were treated in general. True, women were some of the greatest scholars, highly respected for their knowledge. True, they were some of the bravest fighters, giving up their lives to preserve the message of Islam. True, they were some of the keenest minds, redefining humanity and spirituality. Yet why has our rich history been lost to ignorance and misguidance ... and to the

sands of time? Is it enough that we know that the Prophet, peace be upon him, stood up to greet women and children and declared “Verily you are of the most beloved of people to me?” Or how, historically, men believed the best of them were those who were best to their wives? Is it enough to just learn of the strength of women like Umm Salamah (may Allah be pleased with her) who advised the Prophet, peace be upon him, in one of his darkest hours? Or how Sumayya umm ‘Ammar was the first martyr in Islam? But as Imam al-Ghazali reminds us, “Action without knowledge is insanity and knowledge without action is vanity.”

While we can talk the talk, in reality very few of us can walk the walk. Islam has been lost to chauvinist cultures where men’s insecurity has justified domination, and women’s apathy has allowed them to accept subjugation as second class citizens. While we can claim day in and day out that it is not Islam that is at fault, but our cultures, the reality is that actions speak louder than words. Gender relations as taught and practiced in traditional Islam must be something we all consciously strive for. Yet as we are reminded by Imam al-Ghazali, knowledge needs to be supplemented by action in a conscious effort to change the way we Muslims treat and view each other. We must be critical of ourselves and question our perceptions first and foremost, and then work to change those perceptions in our everyday actions and interactions. This is a burden that both men and women must carry as we are both to blame for the present condition of Muslim women.

The *hijab* is meant to liberate Muslim women, not to muffle their voices into silence. Only when we recognize the beauty and complexity of Islam will we see that there is more to women (and men) than meets the eye ... May Allah grant us that knowledge and allow us to implement it in our lives and in our hearts. Amin. •

*Jazakum Allahu khayran,*  
(May Allah reward you well)

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Al-Talib is devoted to expressing the views, concerns and ideas of the American Muslim. It seeks to promote and achieve community empowerment and the worldwide success of Muslims by instilling the Ummah with the spirit of struggle, the love of the Qur'an and the example of Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. It also serves to correct the mainstream media's misinformation about Islam and Muslims, and seeks to provide non-Muslims with accurate information about Islam. Furthermore, Al-Talib is committed to remaining an independent forum for a diverse spectrum of views and concerns.

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**This magazine contains the name of Allah Most High. Please treat it with respect. Jazakum Allahu khayran.**