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***The 21<sup>st</sup> Century family:  
(A Religious Perspective)***

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# ***RELIGIONS***

**Published by the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue**

***RELIGIONS*** is an annual and bi-lingual (English and Arabic) publication in interfaith studies published by the Doha International Center for interfaith Dialogue with an emphasis on interreligious dialogue and the relation between Islam and the other faiths.

In a world of the religious misunderstandings, violence and hijacking of religious faith by political ideologies the ***RELIGIONS*** intends to provide a welcome space of encounters and reflections upon the commonalities and shared goals of the great religions of the world. The title of the Journal suggests religious diversity, while suggesting the need to explore this diversity to develop keys to both a deepening of one's faiths and a meaningful opening to other creeds. The Quran suggests a commonality of faiths and a striving for the Truth within the context of religious diversity:

***“To reach among you, we have prescribed a law and an open way. If God had willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His Plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so, strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.”*** (The Table Spread: 48, version of Yusuf Ali).

As a refereed international publication published by the Doha International Center for interfaith Dialogue, ***RELIGIONS*** finds its inspiration in the universal message of the monotheistic broadly understood, while engaging the various religious faiths that share common principles and values within this broad defined context.

***RELIGIONS*** encourages comparative studies and interreligious exchanges in a spirit of dialogue and mutual enrichment. Its aim is to promote understanding between religious faithful of various traditions by exploring and studying the rich field of their theological and spiritual common grounds, their mutual and constructive relationships, past, present, and potential future, a better understanding of the causes of their conflicts, and the current challenges of their encounter with atheism, agnosticism and secular societies.

In addition, ***RELIGIONS*** wishes to highlight and revive the universal horizon of Islam by fostering studies in the relationship between Islam and other religions and civilizations in history, the arts, and religious studies. This is also away to revitalize intellectual discourse in Islam, within the context of an interactive and cross-fertilizing engagement with other faiths.

The essays published in ***RELIGIONS*** exclusively engage the intellectual responsibility of the authors, and necessarily reflect the views of the **DICID**. They are published as part of an ongoing dialogue on religions, and should not be construed as the expression of the positions of any sponsoring organizations.



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# Editorial

The journal “*RELIGIONS*” has taken on the duty of raising awareness and keeping up with current happenings and latest developments by selecting, emphasizing, and debating important and developing subjects from a religious standpoint to promote interfaith dialogue. The modern family institution is changing significantly in terms of concepts, beliefs, traits, rights and obligations, and the dynamics of relationships among its members. One could add the obvious challenges facing the family institution today such as violence, poverty, racial and cultural inequality, and intolerance for differences, to name a few. Some think that there are unprecedented challenges and attempts to weaken the family institution’s position in society.

Most people believe in shared religious ideals inside their family. The established principles of compassion, solidarity, and collaboration among family members are critical in nurturing the sacred bond between family members. Thus, the peer-reviewed journal “*RELIGIONS*,” published by **Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue**, is glad to present its 18th issue entitled **The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Family: Religious Perspective**

To strengthen family values and enhance the role of the family in creating a healthy family, strong, resilient, and sustainable society, the journal “*RELIGIONS*” has dedicated this issue as an opportunity and a significant step for **DICID** to present in-depth studies on the modern family from a religious perspective. In addition to stressing the rights and responsibilities of



family members and promoting harmony and justice in these interactions.

These papers explore religions' perspectives on family issues based on divine revelation, legislation, and commandments. They aim to provide spiritual, intellectual, and moral foundations for achieving cohesion and success, and for addressing social, educational, and psychological challenges. The English section has nine (9) outstanding research papers, two (2) book reviews, and an interview at the outset. Notable Arabic papers are also included. These works were carefully selected, academically evaluated, and intellectually examined.

It is my aim that this issue will provide the reader with thoughtful discussions and analysis of one of the most serious challenges our world is currently facing. It is my goal that every researcher will discover in this issue papers that are intelligent and interesting and will expand their perspectives, enhance their culture, and increase their knowledge.

In conclusion, I am delighted to present to our esteemed authors, readers, researchers, and all followers the 18th issue of our peer-reviewed journal "*RELIGIONS*," published by the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, which contains a variety of intellectual contributions and discussions in Arabic and English on the topic: **The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Family: Religious Perspective**, in a thoughtful attempt to conduct serious academic studies on this topic. I believe this issue will provide value to the libraries.

**Prof. Ibrahim bin Saleh AlNaimi,**

Editor-in-Chief,

Chairman of the Board of Directors, of DICID



The interview of «Religions» with

# Prof. Aawatif HAYAR

Minister of Solidarity, Social Inclusion and Family - Morocco

The 21st Century Family: Religious Perspective

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\* Interview conducted in Arabic by Dr. Ahmed Abdelreehim

\* Translated into English by Dr. Sekou Marafa Toure

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**Religions:** First and foremost, we appreciate you for agreeing to this interview and for being the guest in the 18th issue of the Journal of Religion. Our journal focuses on religion and humanitarian topics, and we believe your contribution to the discussion of family issues would enhance it. Our focus is on recent family changes, challenges, and solutions.

What if we start with the underlying idea of solidarity-an ethical value that is recognized by all major world faiths, as you are aware?

Many people may believe cooperation and understanding among family members are the only ways to achieve family solidarity. **How can we attain family solidarity given your expertise as the head of a ministry that upholds social cohesion and the family unit?**

**Prof. Aawatif HAYAR**

Firstly, I would like to express

my gratitude to you and your entire team for inviting me to collaborate with you on this issue of the Journal of Religions, which is primarily focused on subjects related to religion, as you have mentioned. I will therefore respond to the questions from political, strategic, and managerial aspects due to my background.

The modern State, in the form of its institutions and government, is still primarily responsible for taking into account all aspects of its society within a broad institutional solidarity framework, despite the fact that solidarity has a profound social dimension and helps to maintain societies in a sound and sustainable manner. This ensures that people who are vulnerable due to their economic, social, or cognitive circumstances have the rights necessary to integrate into society as citizens. It also upholds their dignity and inevitably creates a long-lasting protective

structure for the family and all of its members.

I would like to bring to mind, in this specific context, the following passage from the foreword of the Kingdom of Morocco's Constitution: **"The Kingdom of Morocco, faithful to its irreversible choice to build a democratic State in which right and law prevail, continues with determination the process of consolidating and strengthening the institutions of a modern State, based on participation, pluralism, and good governance, and laying the foundations of a solidarity society in which all enjoy security, freedom, dignity, equality, equal opportunities, social justice, and the elements of a decent life, within the framework of the correlation between the rights and duties of citizenship."**

The Kingdom's constitution recognises the family as the fundamental social unit and, in

article 32, it is recommended that the state endeavour to ensure the family's legal, social, and economic protection as well as its unity and stability. This adds a protective dimension to the logic of solidarity. In accordance with Article 31 of the Kingdom's Constitution, this emphasizes the State's duty to defend citizens' social and health interests, as well as to provide safety nets for social assistance, incubation, and integration to all people equally.

**Religions:** With the real changes that take place in the world around us on all fronts, and the openly visible consequences they have whether positive or negative. **Is the family's existence and moral and religious principles truly in danger?**

**Prof. Aawatif HAYAR**

Social changes and shifts are an inevitable by-product of society's evolution and living systems. In this perspective, the continuity

of certain societal conceptions is contingent upon their level of “natural” involvement in the course of societal alterations that affect every aspect of society. As such, certain notions cannot remain unchanging.

As I mentioned earlier, development and transformation are natural processes that may result in significant changes to the structure of the family and its values. As such, they shouldn't be seen as inherently dangerous to any institution whose essence is change. This has to be viewed positively because of how its surrounds are changing and developing, as well as for its sustainability. However, in order to maintain its stability and be able to adapt to changes in its surroundings, it must also strengthen its constancy based on its religious system and values. Additionally, it must live each context with its facts, which plays a significant role in its crystallization and enriches it to

some extent.

As a result, its relationship is constructive and guarantees its adherence to its core values while enhancing its value system in a way that keeps up with the global system while maintaining its uniqueness and individuality. I believe that while smooth transformations may encourage the continuation and growth of the family, violent transformations at their speed are impossible for communities to adapt to. Stability is threatened by the capacity to maintain continuity rather than by change. The best evidence of this is the transition of our societies from the extended family to the nuclear family, without this meaning that society has lost its compass.

**Religions:** Some people think that the family's challenges are a direct result of the quick changes that are occurring right now, particularly with the rise of social media and digital technology.

**Are these issues truly new challenges, or are they old? What distinguishes the family's current challenges, particularly in the moral and social spheres, from those of the past?**

**Prof. Aawatif HAYAR**

As I mentioned before, the family is not so much under danger as it is undergoing a number of changes associated with advancements in humankind. I remember that the Industrial Revolution altered the standing of the individual and the family without undermining the latter through its people and methods. Above all, we have to think of the family as an institution in the widest meaning of the word, prepared to adapt its structure to meet the ongoing, often rapidly changing difficulties.

Since people are the engine of change, institutions and the state must act in a forward-thinking manner to support people from

an early age and provide them with a social upbringing that develops their talents, fortifies their abilities, and fosters their creativity and innovations. This will enable them to adopt a set of values that upholds the principle of solidarity within the family and in society as a whole and frames development that is both legitimate and constructive. The modern family is more open than it was in the past because it depends on social media and digitization mechanisms, which cannot be disregarded. This is because any system that is isolated from its surroundings and engages in itself runs the risk of becoming ill or dying, so the family must keep up with its development while actively strengthening it with public policies, citizenship education and values drawn from our true religion in order to increase its resilience and meet future challenges.

Since families are not created

today, their history may be intertwined with the history of society. As such, their development is solely determined by how they have interacted with the challenges they have faced, which may have led to their formation thousands of years ago and their concentration in society to maintain stability.

**Religions:** As a Minister of Solidarity, Social Inclusion and Family; **what connects the family to all these essential and crucial pillars that make up the foundation of man and society?**

**Prof. Aawatif HAYAR**

The objective of public policies, which prioritize effectiveness, promptness, and good governance, is sustainable development. Since the family is the primary unit of social organization, every effort must be made to expedite the accurate and comprehensive implementation of sectoral and

public policy substance on the ground. Its members are also members of its organs, since they are the link between all the parts of society. On one hand, it can be seen as a place of convergence and the original incubator for the evolution of man and society; on the other hand, it can be seen as a tool for social integration, solidarity, and the national economy. Based on the aforementioned, the family space accelerates convergence mechanisms related to social protection and growth.

**Religions:** Family concerns cover a wide range of sophisticated topics and are crucial to the lives of children, mothers, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities.

**How might the interests in the growth and renaissance of societies and countries be increased by combining these many fields?**

**Prof. Aawatif HAYAR**

Making investments in the family



to support it through family policies that offer protection, education, and awareness about (for instance) positive parenting, family mediation, and family counseling, strengthens the family bond between generations and improves the convergence of policies and programs aimed at all aspects of the family.

This convergence allows us to look beyond family welfare, which is the defense of the family. When it comes to advancing women's rights and empowering them, strengthening the family's

role as a space that supports rights and sustainable development, and improving the economic, social, and special needs circumstances of vulnerable groups, new mechanisms like the development of the care economy and the provision of infrastructure and social workers to care for young children, elderly people who are not self-sufficient, and people with disabilities as much as possible within the family.

The Royal Social Protection Workshop is regarded as a



social revolution par excellence, and the Kingdom of Morocco depends on its processes and system, particularly the unified social register, to achieve convergence and offer social services and protection. It's a digital tool that assesses a family's socioeconomic standing and enhances identification of vulnerable and underprivileged populations, particularly those with young children, disabled children, or elderly individuals in need of assistance so they can obtain solidarity health coverage and receive social services and direct support based on their makeup and the status of their constituent parts.

**Religions:** Integration is among the key ideas and principles that underpin all success. Addressing legislation, studies, welfare and social development, **do you think that interaction, interdependence, and integration among people working on family matters**

**have been achieved, or is there still a gap that has to be filled?**

**Prof. Aawatif HAYAR**

As was already mentioned, the basis is continual development and evolution, and like all systems—regardless of kind—the complementarity and balance principle is still essential and necessary. The society of yesterday is not the society we live in now. It underwent several transformations, encompassing social, political, and economic alterations.

Families more than any other institution need the integration and convergence of governmental policies because they bring together all facets of society and all of its social, economic, and ethical challenges. It is clear that governmental policies frequently have a narrow, sector-specific focus and disregard the family as the main recipient of the development process. Consequently, a

family policy that guarantees convergence and integration of all sectoral policies is required, and it must be utilized to attain resilience and the well-being of families by offering universal health coverage, high-quality education, jobs, and access to all services in a way that promotes equitable opportunities and sustainable development.

**Religions:** We understand how important it is to incorporate the roles played by public, private, and religious institutions into every aspect of societal development and renewal. **How far along is this with the actors in family issues?**

**Prof. Aawatif HAYAR**

The fundamental requirements for any social renaissance are, in fact, the availability of mechanisms of convergence and the complementarity between the responsibilities played by public and private organizations. The family,

which is the foundation of society and a fundamental lever for inclusive and sustainable social development, is, as previously mentioned, the first area to be used as a basis for achieving convergence between development policies and the first area to achieve a balance between the various references to human rights, religion, and the constitution. His Majesty King Mohammed VI, may God assist him, emphasized this point in his speech on October 13, 2023, on the occasion of the opening of the autumn session of Parliament “**According to our Constitution, the family is the pillar of society. Therefore, I have always sought to make sure the conditions conducive to family cohesion are in place.**

**Society will not function properly if the family is not cohesive or is imbalanced. Family disintegration makes societies lose their moral compass.”**

**Religions:** As a professor and the previous president of Casablanca's Hassan II University. **What roles may educational institutions play in assisting and resolving the family's problems while simultaneously fostering the family's growth and sustainability?**

**Prof. Aawatif HAYAR**

First, learning and training are mechanisms that support the efforts a family makes for its young children. It enables kids to improve their critical thinking abilities, engage in socialization, and advance their cognitive, life, and self-awareness. The two aforementioned processes serve to develop the principles of equal opportunities and entrepreneurship spirit training. The objective of all of this is to increase their level of information empowerment, expand their capacity to support their social and economic integration, and accomplish sustainable

development.

**Religions:** Without question, women are the primary pillar of the family because they are responsible for the majority of the raising kids duties. **What, in your opinion, are the necessities for women to fulfill their desired position as family members? How can society, including all of its individual and institutional sections, empower them to do so?** This is especially true for women who confront unique challenges like poverty and other issues.

**Prof. Aawatif HAYAR**

There is no denying the crucial role that women play in society. It is the cornerstone of the family and, when one considers its crucial role in raising children and socialization, the cornerstone of society. Mothers in particular have a significant impact on how an individual is structured, as do women in general. In order to help create a society capable

of engaging in meaningful and sustainable development, it is therefore even more imperative to invest in the empowerment and well-being of women.

From this perspective, and in my opinion, the most effective way to contribute to the development of society is to empower women economically, politically, and culturally by facilitating their access to knowledge. This is true whether they are directly involved in the development process as half of society or through their work to prepare future generations to meet challenges in the areas of the economy, society, and values.

**Religions:** Lastly. We might not be able to ignore your extensive background and area of expertise in the areas of technology, communications, digitization, and smart cities. **How much can be gained from these obviously scientific professions that are focused on community development and family services in particular?**

## Prof. Aawatif HAYAR

The modern human needs are incredibly varied and diverse, which adds complexity to the processes of awareness, tracking, teaching, and learning. Remember that rapid population increase is occurring alongside the introduction of new restrictions like those related to food and spiritual security.

Drawing from this concise diagnosis and considering the remarkable advancements in contemporary technology, particularly in the area of artificial intelligence, digitization is imperative in enhancing the quality of life for citizens and promoting the welfare of the individual, family, and community. It seems unfathomable that any form of intelligence, whether created artificially or naturally, cannot prioritize the needs of humans and advance societal wellbeing.

When a city uses all of its resources



and energies to support human development and strengthen its citizens' capacity for crisis management and resilience, it is truly referred to as a smart city, or smart village. Through the available infrastructure, which is primarily based on phones and smart tablets, digitization opens up several horizons. For instance, it makes it possible for women and girls living in rural and mountainous areas as well

as people with special needs who are not able to attend school to access learning, knowledge, and socioeconomic integration at a low cost. In addition, digitization makes family services widely accessible in both urban and rural areas, upholding the notion of equal opportunity, advancing social and territorial justice, and fostering sustainable development.



## The Changing Face of American Families: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Perspective

**Ms. Alena Demirovic \***

### **Abstract**

As we approach the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, our rapidly evolving global society raises significant questions regarding the future of the American family. While family structures have changed throughout history, each family's growth is unique and varies according to its life cycle. This article examines the transformations in family dynamics that have taken place in American society in the 21st century. The article also seeks to contribute to the ongoing academic discourse by comprehensively analyzing the traditional nuclear family structure, its evolution, and the impact of individualism and independence on family dynamics. Moreover, the article explores the changing roles and expectations of both men and women in American families and the evolving nature of relationships and marriages in an American diverse society, offering a nuanced understanding of the topic.

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## Introduction

For centuries, the quintessential American family has been a nuclear family, comprising a husband, wife, and children, with extended family members residing in separate households. However, the emergence of divorce, remarriage, civil unions, common-law marriages, and births outside of wedlock has led to a shift in the traditional nuclear family structure, rendering it less of a social expectation among American families in the 21st century.

The dynamics of American families are influenced predominantly by individualism, which encourages each family member to be self-assured and accountable for their choices. Even with the differences in expectations, parents and schools encourage children to pursue their aspirations and independence. Upon attaining legal adulthood (18 years old), children ordinarily leave the household and become financially independent. The emphasis on independence has even permeated the older generation, who strive to live autonomously and avoid

burdening their younger family members.

Historically, American men have been viewed as the breadwinners,<sup>1</sup> while women were children's primary caretakers and homemakers. However, since the mid-20th century, these roles have significantly changed, with women becoming increasingly involved in the labor force and political affairs and attaining higher educational levels than their male counterparts. Nevertheless, traditional views persist despite women's equal rights and opportunities to choose their contributions to household dynamics.<sup>2</sup>

Dating, marriage, and relationships in American society resemble those in many Western nations. Couples meet, date, and marry or decide to live in common-law marriages. Marriages are usually a couple's commitment to their love rather than economic, social, or family arrangements. However, marriages, as an institution, have lost their essential features in American families, with common-law marriages becoming increasingly prevalent. The 2015

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1-(Sear 2021)

2-(Evason 2021)

same-sex marriage legislation marked a significant exception to this trend, leading to an increase in same-sex marriages. Marriages are still highly valued in American society, particularly among families that maintain religious or conservative values.

This article offers a comprehensive view of how family dynamics in American society have transformed in the 21st century. The traditional nuclear family structure will be examined, along with its evolution, due to factors like divorce, remarriage, and births outside of marriage. Furthermore, it will delve into the cultural emphasis on individualism and independence in America and how this has affected family dynamics. Additionally, the article will touch on the changing roles and expectations of both men and women in American families and the evolving nature of relationships and marriages in American society.

### **The traditional American nuclear family structure**

The traditional American nuclear family structure has evolved due

to changing historical contexts and social norms. In the early 20th century, the ideal family structure consisted of a husband working outside the home and a wife raising the children and their biological offspring at home. This model's affirmation had support through cultural messages in media and education systems.

However, the traditional nuclear family structure has changed significantly over the past century. Women's societal roles have expanded beyond the home, and more families have become dual-income households. Additionally, the definition of family has expanded to include single-parent households, blended families, and families with same-sex parents.<sup>3</sup>

In recent years, American families have experienced notable changes that have significantly impacted the traditional nuclear family model. These changes include a rise in divorce rates, an increase in remarriages, a growing number of interracial marriages, an uptick in fostering and adoption, and a rise in births outside of marriage. These factors reflect modern American society's changing social, economic, and

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3- ("Family Dynamics Changing in 21st Century" 2017)

cultural landscape. This shift from the traditional nuclear family model has resulted in more diverse and dynamic family structures, reflecting contemporary society's evolving values and norms. These trends have important implications for family dynamics, the economy, and public policy and require careful consideration and analysis.

Noticeable changes such as the effect of divorce, remarriage, interracial marriages, multi-generational households, fostering and adoption and births outside of marriage have resulted in significant changes in traditional nuclear American families. The rise in divorce rates has caused an increase in single-parent households and blended families. Remarriages have become more common, leading to the emergence of stepfamilies and half-siblings. Additionally, societal acceptance of births outside of marriage has led to the rise of non-traditional family structures and single-parent households. These factors have contributed significantly to the diversification of family structures in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

The rise in divorce rates has

caused an increase in single-parent households and blended families. Remarriages have become more common, leading to the emergence of stepfamilies and half-siblings. The trend toward an increasing number of interracial marriages in American families is a significant development that scholars and researchers have noted. This shift has been attributed to various factors, including more significant social and cultural acceptance of diversity, changing attitudes towards race and ethnicity, and the increasing prevalence of multiculturalism in modern society. The emergence of multi-generational households in American families is becoming more common. Studies have shown that this trend is driven not only by economic factors such as rising costs of living and healthcare expenses but also by cultural and social norms prioritizing family cohesion and support. Moreover, research has revealed that multi-generational households can positively affect family relationships, intergenerational transfer of knowledge and skills, and the overall well-being of family members.

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4- (Center 2015)

There has been an observable increase in American families fostering and adopting children in recent years. Encouraged by various factors, this trend includes heightened awareness of the need for loving homes for children in foster care, advancements in the adoption process, and a shift in societal attitudes toward adoption. There is anticipation that this trend will continue in the coming years. Additionally, societal acceptance of births outside of marriage has led to the rise of non-traditional family structures and single-parent households. These factors have contributed significantly to the diversification of family structures in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these changes, the traditional nuclear family structure remains a common ideal for many Americans. Popular media often portrays it as a symbol of stability and security. However, it is essential to recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to family structure, and families should be free to define themselves in a way that best suits their individual needs and circumstances.

## **Individualism and independence in American family dynamics**

America's social and cultural landscape has evolved over the past few decades, significantly impacting family structures. Among these changes are the acceptance of non-traditional family structures, the rise of dual-income households, the shift towards individualism, and the increase in divorce rates. As a result, families have become more diverse, ranging from single parents to blended families, same-sex couples, and live-in partners. While these changes have brought greater freedom and flexibility, they have created new challenges, such as navigating complex legal and social frameworks. As we move forward, it is vital to recognize the ongoing complexities of these changes and their effects on American families.

Economic factors and globalization have also shaped family dynamics, with new challenges emerging as families strive to balance work and family responsibilities. As these changes continue to shape family life, it is essential to understand and address their positive and negative

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5- (Mayer 2020)

impacts on American families.

### **Family Dynamics in American Christianity**

In American Christian families, individualism and independence are often highly prized. While some prioritize communal living and interdependence, others highlight the importance of everyone's unique traits and independence. These can take various forms, such as nurturing children's passions and aspirations or valuing personal space and privacy at home. However, it is crucial to remember that while individualism and independence are positive qualities, they should never compromise solid familial ties and a shared sense of purpose.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Importance of Individualism and Community in American Muslim Family Dynamics**

In American Muslim family dynamics, individualism and independence are essential and balanced with a strong sense of community and interdependence. Many families prioritize personal autonomy and collective responsibility, striving

to encourage their children to pursue their interests and goals while maintaining connections to their cultural and religious heritage, regarded through the importance placed on shared rituals and traditions within the family, which are considered essential to the health and well-being of the community. Overall, American Muslim families view individualism and independence as complementary to the larger community rather than conflicting.<sup>7</sup>

### **The American Jewish Family**

In American Jewish family dynamics, individualism and independence are highly valuable yet balanced with a deep sense of community and tradition. Many Jewish families encourage their children to pursue their passions and aspirations while emphasizing the importance of maintaining a strong connection to their cultural and religious heritage. These can take many forms, such as participating in community events, cherishing family traditions, or valuing education and intellectual pursuits

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6- ("What Does Family Mean to the Christian? — John Jay Institute" 2015)

7- (Dhami 2000)

to enhance personal success and contribute to society. It is important to note that while individualism and independence are prized, they do not conflict with the larger community or cultural traditions. Instead, it is distinguished as vital to maintaining a thriving Jewish identity in the modern world.<sup>8</sup>

### **Changing roles and expectations of men and women in American families**

The dynamics of gender roles and expectations within American families have undergone significant changes over time, with traditional expectations being challenged by evolving societal attitudes toward gender equality. The purpose here is to examine the changing roles and expectations of men and women in American Christian, Muslim, and Jewish families.

In Christian families, the traditional gender roles of men as breadwinners and leaders and women as home and children caretakers entailed a growing emphasis on equality and mutual respect. Modern Christian

families are more flexible in dividing responsibilities, with both partners working to support the family. These changes reflect a broader shift in societal attitudes toward gender roles and the recognition of the value of diversity in family structures.

Muslim families in America have also experienced a shift in traditional gender roles, with an emphasis on equality, mutual respect, and shared responsibilities. Islamic teachings play a crucial role in shaping the roles and expectations within Muslim families, with men considered the guardians of women and children and responsible for providing financial support for the family. In contrast, women are responsible to manage the household and raise children. However, there is also a growing movement among American Muslim families towards more gender-inclusive interpretations of Islamic teachings and a recognition of the importance of women's education and empowerment.<sup>9</sup>

In Jewish families, traditionally, men were the

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8- (Center 2021)

9- ("Challenges Facing Muslim Families in North America | Crescent International | Monthly News Magazine from ICIT" n.d.)



primary breadwinners, while women were responsible for managing the household and raising children. However, these roles have become more flexible nowadays, with many Jewish families sharing household and childcare responsibilities. Jewish tradition places a high value on education and intellectual growth, leading to many women pursuing higher education and professional careers. Additionally, there has been a movement towards more egalitarianism in Jewish marriages, with both partners sharing leadership roles and decision-making responsibilities.<sup>10</sup>

Overall, the changing roles and expectations of men and women in American families reflect a broader trend toward equality and inclusivity in diverse cultural and religious communities. Recognizing the value of diversity in family structures and emphasizing mutual respect and shared responsibilities are vital steps toward creating a more equitable and just society.

## **The evolving nature of relationships and marriages in American society**

The changing nature of relationships and marriages in American society is a topic of growing interest in social sciences. As the country becomes increasingly diverse, the traditional view of marriage as a union between a man and a woman becomes challenging, and different forms of relationships and marriages have emerged. In recent years, same-sex marriage has become legalized, and people of all genders and sexual orientations have gained the right to marry. Additionally, many couples choose to live together without getting married, and some opt for non-traditional forms of partnership, such as open relationships, polyamory, and, in some cases, polygamous relationships.

These changes, like relationships and marriages, have been driven by various factors, including social norms, religious upbringing, technological advances that have made it easier to connect with others<sup>11</sup>, and a

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10- (Hartman 2020)

11- (“How Technology Is Re-Shaping Our Families” 2021)

greater emphasis on individual fulfillment and happiness. As researchers continue to explore the evolving nature of relationships and marriages in American society, it is clear that these changes have far-reaching implications for individuals, families, and communities.<sup>12</sup>

The evolving nature of relationships and marriages in American Christian families is also undergoing a metamorphosis. With the current cultural landscape transforming, the dynamics between partners in Christian unions are also subject to change. Such is particularly evident as societal attitudes and beliefs continue to shift. Traditionally defined roles and responsibilities are being settled upon and redefined to align with contemporary sensibilities and expectations. Observing how these changes will shape the fabric of Christian families in the future will be intriguing.

In recent years, the academic study of relationships and marriages within American Muslim families has revealed a changing landscape. Scholars have noted a shift in attitudes

towards traditional gender roles and expectations within marriages as Muslim communities become more diverse and integrated into American society. This shift's characteristics move towards more egalitarian and progressive ideas, such as shared decision-making - equal rights, roles, and responsibilities for men and women. These changes reflect broader trends of inclusivity and diversity in American society and highlight the complex interplay between cultural traditions and evolving social norms.

In contemporary American Jewish society, relationships and marriages are experiencing a significant transformation. The shift towards modern societal norms and values is leading couples to approach building meaningful connections within the community in new ways. As a result, a re-examination of traditional partnerships and unconventional relationships is emerging. This evolution creates opportunities to explore new cultural norms and traditions and incorporate Jewish customs into relationships in diverse ways. These changes are shaping

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12- (Cox 2022)

the future of the Jewish family structure, and it is appealing to observe how these new dynamics influence the community. The emerging culture is increasingly inclusive and accepting of all types of partnerships. Witnessing how all three Abrahamic religions and these transformations in North America create a welcoming and supportive space for diversity is intriguing.

## **Conclusion**

The transformations in family dynamics in American society have raised significant questions regarding the future of the American family. While family structures have changed throughout history, each family's growth is unique and varies according to its life cycle. The cultural emphasis on individualism and independence in America has significantly affected family dynamics, with parents and schools encouraging children to pursue their aspirations and independence. The changing roles and expectations of both men and women in American families and the evolving nature of relationships and marriages in American society have contributed to the evolution of the American

family structure. It is essential to recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to family structure, and families should be free to define themselves in a way that best suits their individual needs and circumstances. This article seeks to contribute to the ongoing academic discourse by comprehensively analyzing the traditional nuclear family structure, its evolution, and the impact of individualism and independence on family dynamics.

American society's cultural cohesion (aka socio-cultural fabric) has witnessed significant changes in recent decades that have profoundly impacted family structures. These changes include accepting non-traditional family arrangements, increased divorce rates, the rise of dual-income households, and a shift towards individualism. Consequently, families have become more diverse, ranging from single-parent households to blended families, same-sex couples, and live-in partners. While these changes have brought greater freedom and flexibility, they have also presented unique challenges, such as navigating complex legal and social frameworks. It is, therefore,

essential to recognize the ongoing complexities of these changes and their impacts on American families.

Economic factors and globalization have also played a critical role in shaping the dynamics of American families, leading to new challenges as families strive to balance work and family responsibilities. As a result, it is vital to understand and address the unique challenges families face in different cultural and religious communities in America.

In American Christian families, individualism and independence are highly prized, with a focus on nurturing children's passions and aspirations. However, communal living and interdependence are also crucial to some families, emphasizing the significance of shared values and goals.

In American Muslim family dynamics, individualism and independence are essential but balanced with a strong sense of community and interdependence. Families encourage personal autonomy while maintaining connections to their cultural and religious heritage through shared rituals and traditions vital to the community's well-being.

In American Jewish family dynamics, individualism and independence are highly valued but balanced with a deep sense of community and tradition. Families prioritize personal success and intellectual pursuits while cherishing family traditions and participating in community events to maintain a thriving Jewish identity in the modern world.

Succinctly, American families are continually evolving, and it is crucial to recognize and address the unique challenges different cultural and religious communities face. Balancing individualism and independence with a strong sense of community and tradition is integral to maintaining healthy family relationships and a shared sense of purpose.

The changing roles and expectations of men and women in American families is a complex and multifaceted topic that requires a thorough analysis of historical, cultural, and religious factors. The examination of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish families in this context illustrates the diversity of experiences and perspectives within different cultural and religious communities. The evolution of

gender roles and expectations within these families reflects broader societal changes towards inclusivity and gender equality. It is essential to recognize the value of diversity in family structures and emphasize mutual respect and shared responsibilities to create a more equitable and just society.

The evolving nature of relationships and marriages in American society is a complex and dynamic topic. As society becomes increasingly diverse, challenges arise towards traditional views on marriage and partnerships, leading to the emergence of new types of relationships and

marriages. While these changes can be unsettling for some, they also present exciting opportunities to explore new cultural norms and traditions and create more inclusive and accepting communities. As we continue to navigate these changes, it is crucial to approach the topic with sensitivity and an open mind, recognizing that everyone's experiences and perspectives are unique and valuable. By fostering open and honest dialogue, we are working towards creating a society that celebrates diversity and inclusivity in all relationships and partnerships.



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## Religion as a Refuge of Family in Contemporary World

**Mr. Amir B. Ahmeti \***

### Abstract

This article delves into the intricate relationship between family, religion, and education in the contemporary global landscape. Despite the challenges posed by the digital age, the family, particularly in the Islamic context, is portrayed as a fundamental institution supported by enduring Islamic teachings on marriage and extended family structures. The article emphasizes the crucial role of religious education in sustaining wholesome families and shaping the next generation, providing a refuge amidst the diverse influences of the digital era. The integration of religious education in school curricula is advocated not only for its academic significance but to comprehend personal identity, understand global roles, and foster critical thinking. Ultimately, the family, rooted in religious values and reinforced by education, is depicted as an indispensable pillar for societal development and resilience in navigating the complexities of the modern world.

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## Introduction

The world today is perceived as a closely-knit global community, a perspective facilitated not only by increased accessibility in travel but also by the advancements in communication technologies that afford us the opportunity to gain deeper insights into diverse cultures. However, amid these modern conveniences, contemporary lifestyles and technological choices have cast a detrimental impact on the accurate comprehension of the concept and role of the family. This is further exacerbated by prevailing social challenges, marked by a shift in the prevailing ethos of today's society, characterized predominantly by materialistic inclinations and individual pursuits, in stark contrast to the conservative past, where societal frameworks were grounded in collective aspirations and spiritual needs.

Famous sociologist Anthony Giddens defines the family as a group of people directly linked by kin connection, adult members of which assume responsibility of caring for children (Giddens, 1993). While these values, like kin connection and responsibility and many more are a missing

value these days. Families in the 21st century face more challenges than ever before in the history of mankind. There are several major challenges facing families: frequently divorce cases, lack of communication, abuse and violence within the family, poverty, among others. These challenges and others, we find them in all countries and nations. For instance, increasing divorce between couples is present in the west and east, without exception. But surely modestly more less in religious communities. Glenn Stanton, author of many books and research papers on family matters, came to conclusion that the risk of divorce and separation among couples who marry in religious services is lower than that among couples who marry in non-religious ceremonies (Stanton, 2018). Therefore, these modern challenges do not relate to the social level of the people or to the governing structure of a nation, since these problems have affected all nations and there is no social system or political structure that can solve these challenges, unless we return to religious values.

Family and society are disparate notions, with mutual opposition. Sympathy or feeling is the

unifying principle in the family, while interest or intellect, or both, is the unifying principle in society (Izetbegovic, 1976). Thus, the family is the only pillar by which mankind can be saved in contemporary times, and we should never associate the fate of the family with social development, as they can lead mankind to reject the family or to completely remove its influence from society and its life, whereas the family remains the only pivot that all developments in society must revolve around. As an institution, the family remains crucially important to social processes and to the patterns of change that will determine the future of human society despite its changing forms and functions (Cherlin, 1996). And when we add religion, as a natural component in family formation, the capacities offered by this connection are the only conditions that allow the family to function properly. It is important to understand the unique characteristics of religion and family and their interrelationships in all aspects of life.

### **Family in Islam**

As previously stated, it is essential for a successful society to

maintain strong connections with the family. The significance of the family cannot be replaced by society. Religion serves as the best safeguard for this concept. It is noteworthy to mention that some atheist authors have expressed their views on the liberation of modern men and women from religion, particularly in relation to women's independence. This kind of perspectives is exemplified in the books and interviews of the renowned French writer Simone de Beauvoir. In her interview with Betty Friedan of "Saturday Review" magazine, in New York, she advocates for the dismantling of the family structure, motherhood, and the instinct of motherhood. According to her, this liberation will grant women true freedom (Friedan, 1975). While all these decades after that interview showed the opposite, as we pointed out earlier.

Whereas the Islamic perspective on the family elucidates it as a cohesive unit arising from the union of a man and a woman bound by a sacred marriage contract, encompassing not only the spouses but also the progeny emanating from this sacred alliance. In the Islamic ethos, the family is conceived as a harmonious amalgamation,

transcending mere biological ties to encompass shared values, responsibilities, and a profound sense of interconnectedness. This sacred bond extends beyond the mere biological realm, emphasizing the spiritual, emotional, and ethical dimensions that contribute to the intricate fabric of the Islamic family structure.

The conventional Muslim family adheres to an extended structure, frequently encompassing three or more generations. This extended familial framework presents numerous advantages, such as enhanced stability, coherence, and both physical and psychological support, especially during periods of exigency. In alignment with other traditional cultures, the Islamic cultural milieu places a premium on reverence and esteem that grow in tandem with advancing age. Elderly parents command respect owing to their accumulated life experiences and their hierarchical role within the familial structure. The act of attending to the needs of one's parents in their later years is perceived as a divine gift bestowed by Allah (Dhami and Sheikh, 2000). The concept of family in Islam is that paramount

importance attributed to the family emanates from its pivotal role, specifically in the cultivation and shaping of an individual, thereby contributing to the overall well-being of said individual, as well as fostering positive impacts that extend beyond the self to encompass others in the broader societal context.

The family constitutes an integral component of the Islamic social framework. The societal paradigm advocated by Islam transcends mere sensual indulgence and a preoccupation with sexuality. Instead, it aspires to establish an ideological society characterized by a heightened moral consciousness and a purposeful alignment of all human conduct. The discipline inherent in this societal construct is not coercively imposed but rather emanates organically from everyone's unwavering dedication to the values and ideals inherent in Islam. This society upholds a profound sense of social responsibility, whereby the entire system operates cohesively to bolster and fortify the institution of the family, ensuring its robust and integral role within the broader social fabric (Ahmad, 1974).

## Marriage, children, and family life

The institution of marriage is essentially a civil contract, as mentioned earlier. While the Muslim scholar Hamude Abdulati states that regardless of what meanings people describe marriage, the Islamic religion sees it as a strong bond (meethakun galeedh), something that is quite attractive for the full meaning of the word (Abdulati, 2000).

This is explained very well in the Qur'an:

*"...Your spouses are a garment for you as you are for them..."*  
(Qur'an, 2:187)

Islam views marriage as an ongoing relationship and does not view it as a temporary union. However, a marriage may be dissolved if it fails to meet its intended objectives and has irretrievably broken down (Ahmad, 1974).

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) has said:

*[The most hated of permissible things to Allah is divorce.]*  
(Narrated by Ibn Majah)

In a marriage relationship, both parties assume new roles, and

each role includes rights and responsibilities that are equal and proportionate (Abdulati, 2000).

The literal meaning of a family on all these bases creates the unity of the whole human being based on our first parents Adam and Hawa. Allah, the Almighty, Who commands the principles guiding the formation of familial structures is the same Creator of our primeval ancestors. Consequently, these divine directives have profound implications not only for our interpersonal relationships within our immediate familial context but also hold significance in shaping our connections with other families in our vicinity and, more broadly, influence our engagements with diverse societies worldwide.

In this context, we recall the Qur'anic verse:

*"O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may 'get to' know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware."*  
(Qur'an, 49:13)

An emerging challenge

confronting Muslim family in contemporary times pertains to their adapting into non-Muslim societies and the requisite adjustment to contemporary lifestyles. It is imperative to scrutinize the manner and rationale by which Muslims residing in modern contexts can conscientiously preserve and perpetuate the significance of familial values delineated in the Quran and the Hadith of our beloved Prophet (peace be upon him). This commitment is pivotal for the realization of Islam's overarching objective, namely the attainment of peace and exemplary behavior. As well as assuming heightened significance as a model for others, particularly those who may not fully grasp the import of religious principles in fostering the vitality of a wholesome family unit.

A pious spouse, both husband, and wife, coupled with virtuous offspring, constitutes among the most benevolent blessings attainable for an individual. Consequently, it is noteworthy that Allah the Almighty, has judiciously imparted teachings regarding the inherent value of such blessings and has enjoined upon humanity the imperative of supplication for their submission.

Allah states in Qur'an in this regard:

"They are" those who pray, "*Our Lord! Bless us with 'pious' spouses and offspring who will be the joy of our hearts, and make us models for the righteous.*" (Qur'an, 25:74)

The principles governing Islamic family values are all-encompassing, addressing the regulations, and methodologies deemed appropriate for each phase of family life. These encompass the entire spectrum, ranging from the initial stages of marriage to the subsequent aspects of childbirth, child-rearing, and extending through the later stages of life involving the care and respect accorded to parents and other elder people around us. Since human behavior, among other influencing factors, is shaped by the family, the school, and the community in which children live. Therefore, raising and educating children is also considered to be one of the predominant challenges.

Even though parents place great emphasis on their children's education, school remains one of the most important aspects of a child's development, and

of shaping their personalities. Thus, religious education is one of the most important aspects of supporting our new generations, once the carriers of the families of future societies.

### **Religious education for children as a refuge for wholesome family**

Contemporary children enjoy a plethora of advantages. With entertainment readily accessible at their hands, swift social interaction, and seamless entry into a global playground for learning and growth, the digital age presents an expansive array of benefits for today's children, or in other words, for the next generation. Simultaneously, however, these sources also give rise to distinctive challenges. The dynamic nature of the world is self-evident, and it is intrinsic to acknowledge that each generation confronts distinct challenges during its formative years, contingent upon the societal milieu in which they are nurtured. It is equitable to assert that the challenges confronting today's children markedly differ from those encountered by preceding generations. These challenges encompass alterations in socialization patterns,

complexities surrounding gender, cyberbullying, and the ubiquity of information, among various others. In the given context, Education is a key element and highly important to reach out the basic knowledge of understanding family values and religious approaches in that sense. In this regard, personal experiences describe it exemplary.

In November 2012, during my visit to Austria, as the chairman of Commission for Religious Freedom in Kosova, in a meeting, the officials of the Catholic Church in Vienna expressed their concern that 10% of parents do not register their children to teach religious subjects in schools. Just the same, Director for Education at the Malines-Brussels Diocese in Belgium, pointed to the challenges that religious education in schools faces with people in politics who deny faith and demand that religious education be removed from the school curriculum. However, these demands were avoided through cooperation of Malines-Brussels Diocese with the families of the pupils. These examples show the important of religious education as a refuge for sustainable and wholesome families, while the religious institutions and families



acknowledge the importance of religious education of children as it will help them to have confidence in themselves. A well-known sociologist and political scientist Robert MacIver excellently described this relationship. Both the familial and religious institutions are recognized as integral components of culture, rather than being relegated to secondary or ancillary roles (MacIver, 1970).

In this context, Dr. Simone Whitehouse-James lists numerous values and behaviors of children if they have religious education in school curriculum, like: Broadening their knowledge and understanding of views and beliefs, that results in respecting others; enhancing a stronger sense of wellbeing, ethical standards, and personal fulfillment; as well as avoiding extremism and religious discrimination within community (Whitehouse-James, 2022). While the author Matthew Lynch, gives his approach for religious education in schools arguing that the incorporation of religious education into the school curriculum holds paramount significance as it facilitates students in comprehending both their personal identity and their role within the global

context. The inclusion of religion in educational curricula is imperative due to its substantive importance as a subject matter and its profound relevance to human lives and historical narratives. Consequently, advocating for the teaching of religion in schools is grounded not only in its academic significance but also in its intrinsic connection to the fabric of our existence and cultural heritage (Lynch, 2023), and the author extends the discourse by listing various rationales supporting the inclusion of religious education in schools. These include fostering empathy and comprehension toward diverse cultures and religions beyond one's own; imparting the skills necessary for children to actively contribute to society; and cultivating a sense of community, among other benefits.

To achieve these values, pupils are expected to think for themselves. These children will develop their ability to discern as they learn to critically interpret and evaluate the content that is presented (Whitehouse-James, 2022). Thus, the role of Religion in the society is undeniable, and we should not deny this to our children, or our future generations of society.

## Conclusion

Despite the challenges posed by the digital age, the family, particularly in the Islamic context, remains a fundamental institution. Islamic teachings underscore the enduring nature of marriage and the extended family structure, providing stability and support. Religious education emerges as a crucial tool in sustaining wholesome families and shaping the next generation, fostering empathy and community values. It serves as a refuge in a world where digital advancements expose children to diverse influences.

The integration of religious education in school curricula is not merely academic but a means to comprehend personal identity and global roles. It contributes to critical thinking and understanding diverse cultures, fostering the well-being of individuals and communities. In essence, the family, anchored

in religious values and reinforced by education, remains an indispensable pillar for societal development and resilience. As we navigate the complexities of the modern world, acknowledging the profound interrelationships between family, religion, and education becomes imperative for ensuring the well-being and sustainability of future generations.

Consistently emphasizing the pivotal role of the family as the central axis shaping the future, regardless of the myriad circumstances and dynamic developments unfolding within societies across the globe.

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[The official visit to Austria as Chairman of Commission for Religious Freedoms in Kosova, in November 2012.](#)

[The official visit to Belgium as Chairman of Commission for Religious Freedoms in Kosova, in April 2013.](#)



## Spouses and Families: Exploring the Protection and the Promotion against Spiritual *Ḍarar* in the Brunei Islamic Family Law

Dr. Asna Isa \*

### Abstract

The study explores the spiritual core within humans, emphasising the heart's significance in acquiring knowledge and performing righteous actions, as per al-Ghazālī's principles. Adapting al-Ghazālī's Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah framework, focusing on the protection and promotion of Faith, the study introduces the concept of "spiritual *Ḍarar*" in the context of Islamic family law, focusing on spouses and families. Spiritual *Ḍarar* encompasses intentional and unintentional behaviour acts causing harm to a person's Faith, including manipulative behaviour and restrictions on religious practices. Three problems are identified: 1) Islamic Family Law Act (Chapter 217) offers ambiguous provisions, creating challenges in dealing with non-physical spiritual *Ḍarar* cases, This study employs conceptual and textual analyses, exploring interpretations and gaps in current legal provisions. Finding reveal interpretational challenges and a lack of specificity in addressing spiritual *Ḍarar*, particularly in protecting children. The study is not only providing valuable insights for enhancing the protection and the promotion of Faith within the legal context, but also charts a course toward fulfilling the Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah.

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## Introduction

The term “spirituality” is a relatively new addition to European languages, appearing in the past century or two, initially within the Catholic circle. It is often used interchangeably with “religion” due to its broad and sometimes unclear definition. In Arabic, the commonly used term for spirituality is *ruḥāniyyah*, deriving from the root of *rūh*. It refers to an inner spiritual dimension linked to religion, surpassing mental concepts and shaping one’s worldview. Allah ﷻ revealed in the Qur’ān that He imbued the first human being, Prophet Ādam (AS), with *rūh* after his biological and physical creation was completed. This Divine aspect is shared with all humankind, and its nature remains beyond our comprehension. Allah ﷻ created humankind for the sole purpose of worship, making spirituality involve religious rituals, practices, and beliefs. Spirituality also goes beyond just devotional acts, encompassing daily activities and lawful habits.

The spiritual essence resides within the human heart, a creation of Allah ﷻ. Al-Ghazālī introduced two main principles for good deeds: 1) acquiring the

right knowledge as a theoretical principle, and 2) performing the right action as a practical principle. With four dimensions proposed by al-Ghazālī—*qalb* (heart), *rūh* (soul), *nafs* (self), and *‘aql* (mind)—the concept of spirituality towards worshipping Allah ﷻ can be fulfilled. While a universal definition of spirituality remains elusive, this study is adapting al-Ghazālī’s Maqāṣid al-Sharī’ah framework, focusing entirely on the protection and promotion of Faith, introducing the term “spiritual *ḍarar*”. For this study, the term spiritual *ḍarar* covers an intentional or unintentional act of causing *ḍarar* to a person’s Faith, encompassing manipulative behaviours and restrictions hindering religious practices.

With reference to the existing legal Acts, a problem had been identified. Islamic Family Law Act (Chapter 217) offered vague provisions that might complicate addressing spiritual *ḍarar* cases, lacking clear criteria for identification. Proving such non-physical harm is challenging. The absence of reported cases might stem from such issue, despite the general provision in IFLA (CAP217). This raises the question: to what extent does

Brunei Islamic family law protect and promote spouses and families against spiritual *ḍarar*?

This study is anchored in al-Ghazālī's Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah framework, encompassing five themes: Faith, life, intellect, progeny, and wealth. Due to limitation, I will only focus on one theme, i.e., Faith. Notably, al-Ghazālī exclusively coined the term “حفظ” (protection) for these themes. However, Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah had evolved over the years, incorporating additional theories for various contexts. By drawing on the Qur'ānic directive of “enjoining what is right” and “forbidding what is wrong”, this verse is respectively aligned with the constructs of promotion and preservation. Contemporary scholars, including Hashim Kamali and Amin Abdul Aziz, also used the term promotion in their works. Applying to a law language, the term preservation is synonymous to protecting rights. Hence, for this study, the term protection will be applied throughout. The constructs of protection and promotion are considered the Frame of Reference (FoR), or as an assessing tool for evaluating Brunei Islamic family law. Given the paper's focus on the protection and promotion of

Faith only, it addresses spiritual-related issues, encompassing a belief system, including *fiqh* rulings and rituals commanded by Allahﷻ.

Due to Brunei following the Shāfi'ī *mazhab* as written in the constitution, it is necessary to use Shāfi'ī Mazhab's Islamic classical literature as the primary reference, i.e., *Kifāyah al-Akhyār fī Hilli Ghāyah al-Ikhtisār* by Imām Taqīyyuddin Abī Bakr ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-Ḥiṣnī. Choosing this book as the main reference is due to the author already compiled the opinions from several *imāms* from Shāfi'ī Mazhab, such as al-Juwaynī, al-Qaffāl, an-Nawawī, and ar-Rāfi'ī. Meanwhile, the main act used for this study is IFLA (CAP217). This act is mainly providing provisions for spouses and families, including children. Although IFLA (CAP217) is the main act used in this study, there are some other relevant existing legal acts that work in tandem with IFLA (CAP217). And to some extent will be referred to in this study.

### Literature Review

In today's society, spiritual *ḍarar* is increasingly recognised as a form of abuse, prompting researchers

to define it in various contexts. Within Muslim communities, spiritual abuse involves religious leaders misusing authority to manipulate members for personal gain, including sexual misconduct, financial exploitation, bullying, or harassment. In family settings, spiritual abuse entails misusing of Qur'ānic teachings to manipulate a spouse for personal gain, such as threatening with hellfire to control actions. This manipulation can be a form of oppression, involving the misuse of power to control and make others feel powerless. Islam is often attacked by its adversaries through various means, such as speeches, writings, protests, and practical movements. This can lead Muslims to refrain from openly practicing their faith due to restrictions and negative attitudes. For instance, wearing a headscarf in public, especially in Western European societies, can be controversial. Studies indicated that Muslims often face more negative feelings than other minority groups, impacting their ability to practice their faith freely. Hence, all these restrictions and negative attitudes towards Islam can be a form of spiritual abuse. Limited data mentioned issues of intimate partners in spiritual abuse, where religion is misused

for control, causing significant negative impacts on victims.

In the context of Brunei, the study on spiritual abuse is limited. Rogayah categorised abuse into four main types: sexual, physical, emotional, and neglect. This paper intends to explore spiritual *ḍarar*. Similarly, Nurul Nazurah also mentioned that the most common types of abuse are physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. Meanwhile, Saadiah and Johar did not explicitly explain the types of abuse, rather their discussion exhibits a gender bias, framing abuse as actions committed by husbands against wives. Despite initially presenting *dharar* Syar'ie as a husband's exclusive act, Saadiah later proposed a more gender-neutral definition, categorising abuse as acts by both spouses. She identified two types: physical and emotional. None of the researchers touched issues on spiritual abuse specifically and evaluated Brunei Islamic family law in terms of its protection and promotion of spouses and families against spiritual *ḍarar*.

It is evident that the conceptualisation of spiritual *ḍarar* is lacking. The existing studies lack a standardised framework for spiritual *ḍarar*. IFLA (CAP217) is considered

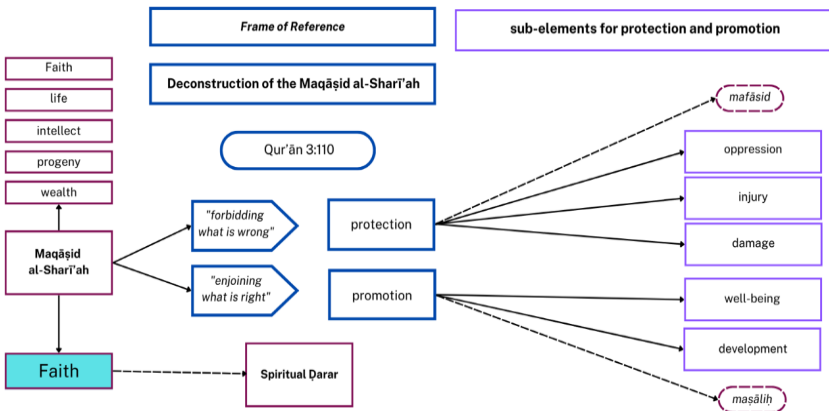


ambiguous, necessitating a clear framework aligned with the Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah for effective implementation. Thus, there is also a need to define criteria to evaluate the extent of spiritual *ḍarar* in the Brunei Islamic family law as this paper intends to study. In order to be able to analyse the study, there is a need to understand the underlying Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah, which majority scholars agreed that it is to ensure benefits (*maṣāliḥ*) and to avoid detriments (*maḥāsīd*). In line with Based on the existing literature there are certain criteria of *ḍarar*, identified as sub-constructs in order for this paper to evaluate the protection against spiritual *ḍarar*,

which are: oppression, hurt, and damage, in line with the purpose of the Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah; avoiding detriments. Meanwhile, in terms of promotion, it should be aligned with ensuring benefits. Hence, for the promotion, this study chooses two sub-constructs, which are well-being and development. These two sub-constructs can also be seen in the works of Taha Jabir al-Alwani and Hashim Kamali. The following figure is the framework that will be applied throughout this study.

### The Protection of Spouses and Families against Spiritual *ḍarar*

Marriage, viewed as the commencement of a spiritual



journey between spouses, plays a crucial role in getting closer to Allahﷻ and preparing for the *ākhirah*. This spiritual journey, prioritised over worldly life, involves the heart as a core created by Allahﷻ, enabling understanding of Him and guiding actions for His sake. Considering spiritual *ḍarar* in Islamic family law, al-Ḥiṣnī's work in *Kifāyah al-Akhyār*, as the main reference for this study, lacked specifics on this issue. However, the broader understanding of spiritual *ḍarar* as harm affecting Faith or religious beliefs aligned with al-Ghazālī's perspective on the benefits of marriage, emphasising the potential harm caused by diverting family members from worshipping Allahﷻ. The question here appears to be the following: in what way does keeping away family members and children, as al-Ghazālī stated, may harm a person? While spiritual *ḍarar* in the context of family law has yet been widely discussed, this study seeks to assess the concept, guided by the FoR of this study. Allahﷻ revealed in the Qur'ān, allowing the oppressor to seek help and defend themselves in equal measures.

Seeking help is viewed as a means of prevention and self-protection,

aligned with the concept of “forbidding what is wrong”. The dynamics involved an oppressor and an oppressed, with oppression being considered one of the forms of spiritual *ḍarar*. Oppression can manifest in various ways, and authorities are urged to incorporate legal measures against it. Oppression can be detrimental to a person. The act of oppressing a person may injure and damage the spiritual status of a person such as feeling anxious, or any adverse conditions. If a person cannot protect himself or herself in own personal space—i.e., home—the government should fulfill this role for they have the power and the authority to impose protection in favour of the victims by establishing proper interpretation to carry out the smooth procedure. The extent to which the law protects victims from spiritual *ḍarar* remains a question.

Defining spiritual *ḍarar* becomes crucial for legal clarity and effectiveness investigation. Assessing Brunei Islamic family law, the lack clarity in IFLA (CAP217) poses challenges in determining spiritual *ḍarar*. Many aspects need to be considered for the victims not to be blamed, leading to the alleged perpetrators

being not held accountable of guilt. Lacking clarity could turn the case into unsubstantiated matters, knowing that spiritual *ḍarar* is intangible. The concept of spiritual *ḍarar* in this study is also contextualised harming another person whether it is intentional or unintentional. Hence, this context of spiritual *ḍarar* also reflects the prohibition of harm in the *ḥadīth*, “there should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm”.

While IFLA (CAP217) did not explicitly mention spiritual *ḍarar*, it is observed that IFLA did address issues related to it. For example, one aspect of *dharar Syar’ie* involved “harm affecting a person in respect of religion”, which is considered spiritual *ḍarar*. However, this component lacks detailed context, only stating that harm should align with what is recognised by *Hukum Syara’*. At this point, the *Syar’ie* judge is presumed to determined “reasonable” grounds for spiritual *ḍarar*, leading to potential inconsistencies in judgments among Syariah court judgments. To ensure consistency, it would be beneficial to establish specific and well-defined provisions for spiritual *ḍarar*, regardless of which *mazhab’s* opinions, as allowed by

IFLA (CAP217). This approach is aimed to prevent the portrayal of the court as an inconsistent legal institution and maintain a unified standard regardless of the *mazhab’s* opinion as long as it deems fit to the society.

In the Qur’ān, *Sūrah al-‘Imrān*: 221, a Muslim should only marry another Muslim. The verse emphasised the protection of spiritual well-being by prohibiting marriage to non-Muslims, highlighting the obligation for Muslim men to marry within their religion. Another verse, *Sūrah at-Tahrīm*: 6, instructed believers to protect themselves and their families from the Fire, encouraging teaching good behaviour and religious values. This verse is aligned with the subsequent verse stating that prayer prevents shameful and unjust deeds, emphasising its role in the protection and prevention of spiritual *ḍarar*.

The classical scholars, al-Ḥiṣnī, including an-Nawawī and ar-Ramlī, did not provide specific criteria for spiritual *ḍarar*, focusing more on prayer-related discussions. They agreed on five conditions for prayers. To understand these conditions in the context of

spiritual *ḍarar*; the criteria need to be identified, involving an oppressor and the oppressed, whether the act is intentional or otherwise. Since Faith is situated in the heart, emotions play a role, with oppression leading to feelings of confusion, anxiety, and depression. Anxiety here does not necessarily mean a clinical condition, but emotional responses to life challenges. These emotions often manifest physically. As prayer is tied to religion, preventing someone from practicing induces negative emotions.

The interpretation of *dharar Syar'ie* in Section 2 (1) of IFLA (CAP217) does cover spiritual *ḍarar*. However, it is still lacking clarity in conceptualising harm to a person's religion. Section 60A under the "Protection of Family" is also providing general contexts without specific terms such as "religion" or "Faith", or "belief". Section 60A (a) and Section 60A (b) only mentioned actions causing "fear of hurt" or "known would result in hurt" respectively, without specifying types of *ḍarar*. Furthermore, Section 60A (c) on compelling family members also lacked clarity on the types of *ḍarar* for "any conduct of act".

Despite ambiguities, Sections 60A (a), (b), and (c) seem to cover two sub-constructs – oppression and injury. However, there are slim chances to apply for a protection order for spiritual *ḍarar* under the "Protection of Family", as no specific section specifies victims to seek protection against spiritual *ḍarar*.

In another part, Section 44 has subsections that possibly relate to spiritual *ḍarar*. This section permits a wife to seek divorce under *dharar Syar'ie*. For instance, Section 44 (e) mentioned hindering the wife from fulfilling religious duties, which qualifies as *ḍarar* and allows her to apply for a divorce under *dharar Syar'ie*. Similarly, Section 44 (b) appeared to pertain to spiritual *ḍarar* by addressing a spouse's association with individuals of ill repute, which is considered a common ground for divorce under *dharar Syar'ie*. Although section 44 (b) is unclear about the gender involved in committing *ḍarar*, as far as the practice in Brunei Darussalam is concerned, it applies for a wife. Since "*Hukum Syara*" is mentioned, such actions may impact a person whose Faith are affected, as it contradicts the Shari'ah.

This would fall under the sub-construct of damage. Obstruction, generally, may cause harm, but legally, damage typically involves monetary compensation for loss and injury. Evaluating a person's spiritual damage is challenging due to its intangible nature. Thus, in the context of IFLA (CAP217), the sub-element of damage is not addressed in the protection against spiritual *ḍarar*.

Section 60A applies to spouses and families, including children. Despite covering the two sub-constructs – oppression and injury – Section 60A (a), Section 60A (b), and Section 60A (c) remain ambiguous. Meanwhile, Section 44 (b) and Section 44 (e), both sections are only applicable to spouses. It is noticed that only one sub-construct is covered – oppression. However, it may lead to causing injury. The sub-constructs of injury and damage for spiritual *ḍarar* are not contextualised in Section 44 (b) and Section 44 (e). Although the term oppression is not mentioned, the provisions are perceived to contextualise oppression. Yet, it is insufficient to say that the Brunei Islamic family law has achieved the protection of Faith through the protection against spiritual *ḍarar* for spouses and families.

## **The Promotion of Spouses and Families against Spiritual *ḍarar***

In Islam, the key to a harmonious family and marital relationship lies in love, mercy, and peace. These values are fundamental to Faith, and Allahﷻ emphasised the importance of worship, particularly daily prayers, in the Qur'ān. The recitation of the Qur'ān and establishment of prayers are also considered a promotion against spiritual *ḍarar*, as it underscores the obligation for every Muslim to achieve the Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah.

Prophet Muḥammadﷺ, asserted in a *ḥadīth* that marriage fulfils half of one's *dīn*. Al-Ḥiṣnī, in his Book of Marriage, drew on Qur'ānic verses to discuss the permissibility of choosing a spouse based on personal preference, supported by a *ḥadīth*, emphasising marrying a woman. The *ḥadīth* shows the importance of faith in sustaining relationships. The connection between Faith and harmonious relationships is evident; couples who love for the sake of Allahﷻ strengthen their Faith. A pious spouse become a facilitator for enhancing spirituality. Despite al-Ḥiṣnī not explicitly emphasised religious activities in marital and familial relationships, he

indirectly promoted against spiritual *ḍarar* through the *ḥadīth*.

The promotion against spiritual *ḍarar* encompasses well-being and development. Hence, it is essential to look at two facets: 1) spiritual well-being, focusing on religious practices and commitments, and 2) spiritual development, denoting character growth towards a desired religious personality. Spiritual well-being revolves around religious obligations and education, encompassing acts like charity, seeking Islamic knowledge, and mosque activities. The Qur'ānic emphasis on piety underscores the importance of aligning one's life with the Sharī'ah, ensuring spiritual harmony. Daily prayers, fasting, *zakāh*, and *ḥajj* constitute the individual-level protection of Faith. Spiritual well-being involves maintaining a strong connection with Allahﷻ and following the Prophetic Sunnah.

Spiritual development pertains to character enhancement toward a religiously desired personality. Through prayers and Islamic teachings, negative traits diminish, replaced by humility, kindness, and non-violence. Marriage, deemed half of one's *dīn*, serves as a means to spiritual

development by nurturing positive traits and fostering an environment conducive to worship.

Turning to the IFLA (CAP217), there is a notable absence of explicit provisions on promoting against spiritual *ḍarar*. The application of spiritual well-being and development in the legal framework, particularly IFLA (CAP217), presents challenges. IFLA (CAP217) primarily focused on protection, lacking explicit provisions for promotion. Yet, it indirectly promoted against committing spiritual *ḍarar* by preventing harm affecting religion. IFLA (CAP217) took an approach by not only protecting victims but also encouraging people to achieve goals of peaceful marital and familial relationships.

The provisions of *dharar Syar'ie* in IFLA (CAP217) in Section 2 (1) further regulate actions, in terms of promoting Faith, towards spouses and families. Thus, this is where the promotion against spiritual *ḍarar* is also observed. However, the relational dynamics between protection and promotion suggest their interdependence. For instance, Section 128 (1) addresses ill-treatment, emphasising protection but indirectly promoting good

behavior. While this may indirectly promote certain rights, including spiritual rights, certainty is hindered by the absence of explicit mentions of spiritual well-being or development in the provision.

Reviewing other legal acts such as Penal Code (CAP22) and SPCO 2013, it is clear they did not explicitly address spiritual well-being and development. These laws primarily focused on physical offences, making prosecuting spiritual *darar* challenging due to inadequate proof. SPCO 2013's Section 229 (2) (b), permitting teaching Islam at home without government approval, aligns conceptually with promoting spiritual development, though it did not expressly mention "development". Conversely, the Penal Code (CAP22) lacks provisions for promoting spiritual rights due to religious matters are typically governed by the Syariah law. Although Syariah law holds authority over such issues, the available provisions for promoting spiritual well-being and development remain extremely limited.

Despite IFLA (CAP217)'s limitation, alternative initiatives, such as family counseling

programs and webinars, contribute to the promotion against spiritual *darar*. However, the extent to which these programs and webinars addressed spiritual well-being and development remains uncertain. The dearth of public programs specifically addressing spiritual rights in the family domain hampers definitive claims about the achievement of this goal. For example, a "Post-Marriage Course Webinar" conducted by the Family Counseling Services Division is noteworthy, even though not law-related. Family counselling, promoting domestic harmony, inherently involves spiritual well-being and development. However, specific details about promoting both spiritual well-being and development in the webinar remain unclear.

Promoting Faith through spiritual well-being and development for spouses and families can also be done through programs. However, there is a scarcity of such programs available to the public, especially those focused on family units. Seminars on family-related topics, such as the International Seminar on *Fiqh al-Usrah* by the Religious Teachers University College Seri Begawan (KUPU SB), were typically



designed for academics and commonly not accessible to the general public. Consequently, the limited availability of programs and public seminars makes it challenging to assert that the promotion of Faith, particularly in the context of spiritual well-being and development for spouses and families, has been successfully achieved.

The missing interpretation of well-being and development in IFLA (CAP217) underscores the need for legal provisions that explicitly promote against spiritual *ḍarar*. While IFLA (CAP217) provides leeway for judges or administrator justice, further elaboration on spiritual dimensions is crucial. The marriage course webinar, albeit not law-related, aligned with the broader objectives of promoting domestic harmony and could potentially include spiritual elements. Alternative programs and other initiatives must be expanded to bridge the gap and ensure the holistic promotion of spiritual well-being and development within marital and familial relationships. Collaborative efforts from various ministries and agencies, involving legal frameworks, counselling services, and educational programs are pivotal for fostering

harmonious marital and familial relationships embedded in the tenets of Faith.

### **Analysis and Conclusion**

Exploring spiritual *ḍarar* poses challenges as its intangibility makes it seemingly immeasurable by legal standards. This study, however, aims to “measure” both the protection and promotion against spiritual *ḍarar* through established sub-constructs.

In terms of protection, the focus is not on evaluating whether spiritual *ḍarar* is punitive, but on ascertaining the protection against spiritual *ḍarar*. The Sharī’ah unequivocally prohibits any form of *ḍarar*; emphasising the need to recognise spiritual *ḍarar*. While al-Ghazālī and IFLA (CAP217) addressed harm affecting religion, al-Ḥiṣnī’s silence left a gap in understanding spiritual *ḍarar*. IFLA (CAP217) is lacking emphasis on micro-level protection, necessitating refinement to contextualise spiritual *ḍarar*; with a dedicated section and criteria. Currently, looking at the sub-constructs of protection, only oppression and injury are covered, offering partial protection against spiritual *ḍarar* for spouses and families.

Moving to the promotion

against spiritual *ḍarar*; al-Ḥiṣnī and al-Ghazālī did touch on these issues conceptually but lack detailed insights into how marriage contributes to spiritual well-being and development. This gap prompts a call for new study to establish suitable criteria. Evaluating IFLA (CAP217) reveals uncertainty in promoting against spiritual *ḍarar*. Most provisions fall under protection, indirectly assessing promotion. Section 229 (2) (b) is seen to promote spiritual development, but limited programs raise concerns adequate promotion. Due to IFLA (CAP217)'s limitation, the examination extends to other legal Act, such as SPCO 2013, which predominantly falls under protection, and while Section 229 (2)(b) seemingly promotes spiritual development, the restricted arguments question the sufficiency of promoting against spiritual *ḍarar* between spouses and families.

Considering the five sub-constructs under the established FoR, the protection and promotion against spiritual *ḍarar* for spouses and families fall short of achieving the broader objectives of protecting and promoting Faith. The intangibility of spiritual *ḍarar* presents challenges, often leading to oversight. Legal systems, designed to prove matters beyond reasonable doubt, require tangible proof, contributing to this oversight. The law, aimed at protecting people's rights, tends to sideline peace and harmony. Relevant authorities should enhance legal system, providing more efficient provisions and legal procedures. By doing so, in shā Allah, the protection and promotion of Faith can be achieved.

## Endnotes

1. For further reading, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Spirituality and Science Convergence or Divergence?”, in *The Essential Sophia: Love and Wisdom*, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Katherine O’Brien (eds), (Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 2006), 207-218.
2. Ibid.
3. Qur’ān 15:29, “So, when I have fashioned him completely and breathed into him (Adam) the soul which I created for him”, trans. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan.
4. Qur’ān 17:85, “Say, “The Rūh (the Spirit) is one of the things, the knowledge of which is only with Lord””, trans. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan.
5. Qur’ān 17:85, “And of knowledge, you (mankind) have been given only a little”, trans. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan.
6. Qur’ān 51:56, “And I (Allahﷻ) created not the jinn and mankind except that they should worship Me (Alone)”, trans. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan.
7. For further reading, see Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn*, Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm. 2005, Vol. 3, 7-9.
8. For further reading, see al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn*.
9. Ibid.
10. Hereinafter referred to as IFLA (CAP217).
11. Faith is capitalised as it specifically refers to the religion of Islam.
12. For further reading see, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mustaṣfā min ‘Ilm al-‘Uṣūl*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah. 2008).
13. See Qur’ānic verse 3:110.
14. Hashim Kamali, *Maqāṣid al-Sharī’ah Made Simple*, (Herndon, VA: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), 4.
15. Amin Abdul Aziz, “Governance in a Contemporary Islam Negara”, in *The Journal of Islamic Governance*, 1 (1) (2015), 6, <https://doi.org/10.53105/jig.1-1>.
16. Article 2, Interpretation of “Islamic religion”, Constitution of Brunei Darussalam, 1959.
17. Hereinafter referred to as Imām al-Ḥiṣnī. He was born in 1369AD and died in 1446AD. Taqiyyu ad-Dīn Abī Bakr ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-Ḥiṣnī, *Kifāyah al-Akhyār fi Ḥillī Ghāyah al-Ikhtisār*, (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā’ir, 2001).
18. ‘Abū al-Ma’ālī ‘Abd al-Malik al-Juwaynī (1028AD-1085AD), also known as Imām al-Ḥaramayn. He was born in a village called Bushtanikan, near the Iranian city of Nishapur. He was a well-known Shāfi’ī scholar for his juridical and theological works. Among his famous books were *Nihāyah al-Maṭlab fi Dirāyah al-Maḏhab*, *al-Burhān fi Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, and few others. (For further reading, see Oliver Leaman, “Juwayni, Imam al-Haramayn”, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Islamic Philosophy*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015, 269).
19. ‘Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Ismā’īl ibn Aḥnad Qaffāl as-Shāshī, also known as as-Shāshī. He was born in 904 c.e and died in 976 c.e. He was a leading early Shāfi’ī jurist. (For further reading, see Stanley N. Katz, *The Oxford International Encyclopedia of Legal History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
20. Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf, Muḥyi ad-Dīn Abū Zakariyyā an-Nawawī, also known as an-Nawawī. He was born in 631H (1233) and died in 676H (1277). He was a well-known Shāfi’ī jurisprudent and a ḥadīth master. He studied al-Bukhārī and Muslim’s aḥādīth with Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Isā al-Murādī, he studied jurisprudence with al-Taḥfīsi, and he studied grammar with al-Miṣrī, and other well-known scholars as his teachers.

21. ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn al-Faḍl Ibn al-Ḥusayn Ibn al-Ḥasan Imām ad-Dīn Abū al-Qāsim ar-Rāfi‘ī al-Qazwinī, also known as ar-Rāfi‘ī. He was born in 555H (1160) and died in 623H (1226). Among his famous books were *as-Sharḥ al-Kabīr*, *as-Sharḥ as-Ṣaḡhīr al-Muḥarrar*, and few others.
22. Danish Qasim, “Introduction to Spiritual Abuse”, in *Shaykhs Clothing*, (2017), accessed March 9, 2022, <https://inshaykhsclotthing.com/home/intro/>; Untensati Ande Apyewen, “The Use and Abuse of Religion: Implications in Nigerian Society”, in *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies (IJOURS)*, (2020), Vol. 10, No. 1, 69.
23. Chelby Daigle, “Understanding Spiritual Abuse: An Interview with Salma Abugideiri”, *Muslim Link*, accessed December 4, 2021, <https://muslimlink.ca/stories/muslim-spiritual-abuse-salma-abugideiri>; Sharifa Alkhateeb, “The Muslim Wheel of Domestic Violence”, *Project Sakinah*, accessed September 1, 2021, [http://www.ncdsv.org/images/PFP\\_MuslimPowerAndControlWheel.pdf](http://www.ncdsv.org/images/PFP_MuslimPowerAndControlWheel.pdf).
24. See Daigle, “Understanding spiritual abuse”.
25. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, (New York-London: Continuum, 2005), 126.
26. For further reading, see Muhammad Adil Khan Afridi, “Maqāsid al-Sharī‘ah and Preservation of Basic Rights”, *Islam and Its Perspectives in Global & Local Contemporary Challenges*, *Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, Vol. 4 (June, 2016), ISSN 2289-9855.
27. This term commonly used in the West for a couple who lived together and have involved in intimate relationship, regardless they are married or not.
28. For further reading see, Rogayah Abdullah, *Penderaan Wanita di Negara Brunei Darussalam: Kes Kajian di Daerah Brunei Muara*, (Brunei: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2008).
29. Saadiyah Tamit, *Institusi Keluarga dan Undang-Undang*, (Bandar Seri Begawan: Pusat Da’wah Islamiah, 2012) 94; Johar Muhammad, *Pembubaran Perkahwinan dalam Perintah Darurat (Undang-Undang Keluarga Islam)*, 1999, (Brunei: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2010), 144.
30. In the context of Brunei, *dharar Syar’ie* is described as “harm affecting a person in respect of religion, life, body, morals, mind and property, according to what is normally recognized by *Hukum Syara’*” (Section 2 of IFLA (CAP217)). All the officials used the term ‘*dharar Syar’ie*’ to address ‘domestic violence’ as they understood the concept is referring to harm specifically abuse or violence against spouses or any of the family members.
31. For further reading see, Taha Jabir al-Alwani, *Towards A Fiqh for Minorities: Some Basic Reflections*, trans. Ashur A. Shamis, (London.Washington: IIIT), 2003, xv; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *I‘lām al-Muwaqqi‘īn ‘an Rabb al-‘Ālamīn*, ed. Ṭaha ‘Abd al-Ra‘ūf Sa‘d (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1973), Vol 3, 3; ‘Izz al-Dīn ‘Abd as-Salām, *Qawā‘id al-Aḥkām fī Masāliḥ al-Anām*, ed. ‘Abd al-Laṭīf ‘Abd al-Raḥmān (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1999), Vol. 1, 3 - 8; ‘Abd al-Majīd an-Najjār, *Maqāsid al-Sharī‘ah bi ab’ād jadīdah*, (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2006), Jasser Auda, *Maqāsid al-Sharī‘ah: A Beginner Guide*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvkc67c6>, 4; Amin Abdul Aziz, “Governance in a Contemporary Islam Negara”.
32. For these sub-constructs—oppression, injury, and damage—there are levels. First level is oppression, which is identified in this research as the act of causing harm intentionally or unintentional. Second level is injury, which indicates a person’s action being restricted, affecting his rights. Third level, damage. It is either related to a situation where body, mind, and property are experiencing impairment, or loss.
33. For further reading see, Alwani, *Towards a Fiqh for Minorities*; Kamali, *Maqāsid al-Sharī‘ah Made Simple*.
34. For further reading, see Taqiyyu ad-Dīn Abī Bakr ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-Ḥiṣnī, *Kifāyah al-Akhyār fī Ḥilli Ghāyah al-Ikhtisār*, (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā‘ir, 2001).
35. For further reading, see al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn*,
36. Equal measure here is referring to Qur’ān 5:45, “We ordained therein for them: Life for life, eye

for eye, nose or nose, ear for ear, tooth for tooth, and wounds equal for equal”, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

37. Qur’ān 42:39, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali. See also, Qur’ān 4:98-99, “Except those who are (really) weak and oppressed – men, women, and children – who have no means in their power, nor (a guide-post) to the way. For these, there is hope that Allahﷻ will forgive: For Allahﷻ doth blot out (sins) and forgive again and again”.
38. Qur’ān 3:110
39. See Section 2 (1), “dharar Syar’ie”, IFLA (CAP217).
40. Ibid.
41. Section 2, “Syar’ie Judge”, Syariah Courts Act (CAP184); Section 9, 10, 11, Syariah Courts Act (CAP184).
42. Section 2 (1), “Hukum Syara” of IFLA (CAP217).means “the laws of any sects which the Court considers valid”.
43. “Do not marry unbelieving women (idolaters), until they believe: A slave woman who believes is better than an unbelieving woman, even though she allures you. Nor marry (your girls) to unbelievers until they believe: A man slave who believes is better than an unbeliever, even though he allures you. Unbelievers do (but) beckon you to the Fire. But Allahﷻ beckons by His Grace to the Garden (of bliss) and forgiveness, and makes His Signs clear to mankind: That they may celebrate His praise”, Qur’ān 2: 221, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali.
44. Ibn Kathīr, “Sūrah at-Taḥrīm”, Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr, 68.
45. “for Prayer restrains from shameful and unjust deeds”, Qur’ān 29: 45.
46. For further reading, see al-Ḥiṣnī, Kifāyah al-Akhyār, 106-206.
47. For further reading, Muḥyī ad-Dīn Abī Zakariyya Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf an-Nawawī, Minhāj at-Ṭālibīn wa ‘Umdah al-Muḥtāj, (Lubnān: Dār al-Minhāj, 2005), 90-147.
48. For further reading, Shams ad-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Abī al-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn Ḥamzah ibn Shihāb ad-Dīn ar-Ramlī, Nihāyah al-Muḥtāj ilā Sharḥ al-Minhāj (fi al-Fiqh ‘alā Maḥab al-Imām as-Shāfi’ī), (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2003), Vol. 2-Vol. 3.
49. The five conditions are: 1) to be free from impurity, to cover ‘aurah and the clothing must be clean, the place of prayer must also free from impurity, to be certain about the time for prayer has come, and to face the qiblah. (For further reading see al-Ḥiṣnī, Kifāyah al-Akhyār, 198-216).
50. The Qur’ān also recognised anxiety, in which verse 17:67 indicates the extreme fear, or great distress. (See Qur’ān 17:67, “when harm touches you upon the sea, those that you call upon vanish from you except Him (Allahﷻ alone)”, trans. Muhammad Taqī-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan.
51. For further reading, see Ali Ali Gobaili Saged, et al., “The Effect of an Islamic-based Intervention on Depression and Anxiety in Malaysia”, Journal of Religion and Health, 61 (2022), 79-92, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01484-3>.
52. Ibid; Gunvor Gard & Amanda Lundvik Gyllensten, “The Importance of Emotions in Physiotherapeutic Practice”, Physical Therapy Reviews, 5 (3) (2000), 155-160, <https://doi.org/10.1179/ptr.2000.5.3.155>.
53. For further reading, see Robert J. Nordstorm, “Toward a Law of Damage”, Case Western Reserve Law Review, 18 (1)(1966): 86-102, <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4448&context=caselrev>
54. See Qur’ā 30:21.
55. See Qur’ān 29:45
56. Qur’ān 29:45
57. Grade ḥadīth ḥasan. Mishkāh al-Maṣābīḥ, Book 13 Ḥadīth 17.
58. Qur’ān 4:3
59. Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Vol. 7, Book 62, Ḥadīth 27.

60. Qur'ān 49:13
61. See Qur'ān 25:74, 31:17, Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said, "In the body, there is a piece of flesh; if it sound, the whole body is sound, and if its corrupt the whole body is corrupt, and hearken it is the heart", (See Saḥīḥ Muslim, Book 10, Ḥadīth no. 3882, trans. 'Abd al-Hamid Siddiqui).
62. See Section 128 (1), IFLA (CAP217)
63. Azlan Othman, "Post-marriage course webinar to open for couples", Borneo Bulletin, Brunei Darussalam, December 17, 2021, <https://borneobulletin.com.bn/post-marriage-course-webinar-to-open-for-couples/>, accessed July 9, 2022.
64. Rokiah Mahmud, "Seminar spotlights Islamic education in families", Borneo Bulletin, Brunei Darussalam, June 9, 2022, <https://borneobulletin.com.bn/seminar-spotlights-islamic-education-in-families/>, accessed July 7, 2022.

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## The Fante Family Bonds, Mutual Obligations and the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana

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### Abstract

The Fante people of Ghana are organized along a family (kin) system based on marriage and blood relation. This family structure offers its members a relationship grounded in peaceful co-existence, co-operation, and mutual support. The paper examines the dynamics of the Fante family which ensures its togetherness and continual survival. Using information derived from field research instruments such as focus group interviews of Christian-Muslim family members (kins) and observation from eight towns in the Central Region, the paper argues that despite the enormous impact of both Christianity and Islam on the Fante people today, their customary family practices are critical in the promotion of Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana. The main instruments, employed on the fieldwork were in eight towns in the Central Region of Ghana. These were Elmina, Abora, Kotokoraba Zongo (Cape Coast), Agona Nyakrom, Gomoa Assin, Ekumfi Essarkyir, Gomoa Kokofu, and Ekumfi Ekrawfo. In this paper, I will evaluate the importance of the Fante customary values and practices, associated with family relationship, and contend that they positively contribute to the promotion of Christian-Muslim encounters.

**Keywords:** Africa, Fante, Family, Christianity, Islam and Dialogue

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## Introduction

The Fante people are part of Akan ethnic and social groupings which occupy a large portion of Ghana, from the coast to the middle belt, as their land or territory. Other Akan groups are Ashanti, Akim, Akwapim, Brong, Kwahu, Assin, Wasa, Agona, Nzima and Ahanta, Afema, Sehwi and Chakosi (Manoukian 1964, 9-10). The Akan people and so the Fante are organized along family (kin) systems according to marriage and blood relation, which often generate family relationships of Christians and Muslims at the personal level. The dynamics of family relations are critical for the appreciation of Christian-Muslim encounters among the Fante people and Ghana in general. Despite the great influence of Christianity and Islam following mass conversions, the Fante socio-religious organizations based on customary family practices continue to be strong. As family, Christians and Muslims are also obligated by indigenous customs and traditions to offer each other respect and support. In this paper, I will evaluate the importance of the Fante customary values and practices, associated with family relationship, and contend that

they positively contribute to the promotion of Christian-Muslim encounters.

I used a mix-approach in gathering information for this paper. Information about the Fante indigenous values were obtained from available literature, which included books and articles in libraries, archives, and local newspapers on the Fante (Akan) customary laws and traditions. Official documents such as constitutions, handbooks, working papers, and profiles of Christian and Muslim groups, organizations, and denominations were also used. The main instruments, employed on the fieldwork were observation and focus group interviews of Christian-Muslim family members (kins) in eight towns in the Central Region of Ghana. These were Elmina, Abora, Kotokoraba Zongo (Cape Coast), Agona Nyakrom, Gomoa Assin, Ekumfi Essarkyir, Gomoa Kokofu, and Ekumfi Ekrawfo. These towns were selected because of their significant number of Christian and Muslim families. The focus group interviews of family members were designed to require information on the beliefs and attitudes, behaviours, and characteristics of family

Christians and Muslims as they relate with their kins who belong to other religions. The respondents were randomly selected from Christian and Muslim groups in all the selected villages and towns (Bell 1992, 72). One-on-one interviews were conducted with four selected individuals with immense knowledge on indigenous families and Christian-Muslim relationships. Participant observation of interactions, actions, reactions, and behaviours of Christian and Muslim families were done. As a native and with sufficient knowledge of the social context under study I was able to give meaningful, insider-based, and informed interpretations of the behaviours observed. Diligent efforts are taken to ensure that my native status does not adversely influence my perspective.

### **The Fante Indigenous Conception of the Family**

To the Fante people of Ghana, the family is an extended one, and often involves a group of close relatives which expands largely to the third or fourth generations of descendants. The nuclear family which results from the traditional marriage always lays the foundation of and operates

within the context of an extended family, either horizontally in terms of families of many brothers or sisters, or generationally, in terms of grandfather/grandmothers', fathers' and mothers', a man and his family, and his children's families (Arthur, 2001:82). Thus, the basic family is the extended family which may comprise grandparents, blood relatives, in-laws, constituting a dynamic unity, or togetherness, with parents and children, according to prevalent mores (Pobee, 1979:49).

The extended family system is, usually, made up of individuals of varying religious traditions which may or may not be a residential group (Nukunya, 1992:47). The religious backgrounds of the membership of the extended family play a very limited role, if any at all, with regards to familial relationships even in a residential setting. The family relationships are built on indigenous customs and traditions which encourage togetherness, peaceful co-existence, and communal survival. These values of brotherhood, co-operation and mutual support are also essential values of both Christianity (Acts 2:40-47) and Islam (Sura 3:103). The Fante family is brought about in two main ways: 1. Family by Marriage

## 2. Family by Blood relations

### A. *Family By Marriage*

A Family marriage is a social system meant also to bring families together. It is more or less an alliance between two families of which the spouses are only representatives. Among the Fante people, an individual marries not just their spouses but also their family (Daniels 1964:355; Ghana Law Reports 573, 1961: 597; Rattray 1929:126). The family members of your spouse automatically become your kin relatives in a highly recognised and reputable religio-social linkage, often referred to as affinal relation. By this relationship of affinity, the families of the spouses and the children from the marriage become “real kin of the two families” (Nukunya 1992: 39). It is real in the sense that the members of the families are not just imagined or considered to be kin relations, but they are truly. It is appropriate or convenient to say that the Fante marriage brings four family groups into affinal communion. These four groups are the mother’s and father’s families of both the man and the woman. In fact, among the Fante a person’s in-laws are not just the

parents of his or her spouse but include the entire membership of their families. Marriage is intended primarily to bring people together into families and ultimately to ensure that various communities live together in peace. This explains the reason why marriage goes further than merely uniting the couples to uniting families (Hagan, 1967:61).

### B. *Family By Blood Relations*

The Fante people has developed extended family structure of clans which is also divided into families or lineages (*ebusua*): *Nsona, Anona, Twidan, Aburadze, Ntwaa, Kwona* and *Adwenadze* (Hagan 1967, 59). Each of these seven families (lineages) has narratives which associate them with a putative ancestor/ ancestress, which some scholars on Fante people replace with the image of the Patriarch Abraham. Desmond Ayim-Aboagye, in his work: “Akan Language and its Relationship to Ancient Biblical Writings”, points out evidence of this Akan (Fante) linkage with Abraham as seen in their languages, the names and proverbs, and in general cultural traits (Ayim-Aboagye 2022, 34). Thus, a Fante family (*ebusua*)

is a basic social group whose members are believed to have descended through one line from a common ancestor or ancestress. It is an organized group which owns common property (usually land) who could reside in any village or town of Fanteland (Sarbah 1968, 77). The Fante people claim that all members of family (lineage) are “...the matrilineal descendants of a single remote ancestor/ancestress” (Manoukian 1964, 17; Sarbah 1968, 78) who is believed to have founded the family many years ago.

### **Rights and Obligations of Family Membership**

The family is associated with noble features of reciprocal or mutual obligations which is expressed in helpfulness and cooperation. The individual gives generously to and receives support and cooperation from his family folks (Arthur, 2001:94). Arthur identifies largely two forms of reciprocity which is highly recommended among the Fante families: compensatory and obligatory reciprocity. The compensatory type of reciprocity is epitomised by the indigenous *adinkra* symbol such as ‘raise your head and accept thanks’

(*pagya wo ti na gye aseda*). Other symbol like ‘when you do good, you do it unto yourself’ (*woye papa a, woye ma wo ho*) also expresses the view that a good deed returns to those who do it. The obligatory reciprocity is based on the demands of justice. It is conveyed by the *adinkra* symbols: ‘do unto others’ (*nea wope se* and *onipa ye yie a*) and ‘a good deed deserves praise’ (*ɔye gye ayeyie*). Also, when a Fante offers a gift, they ‘accept thanks’ (*okanni kye adee a ɔgye aseda*). These expressions convey the view that one must offer thanks in anticipation of a favour or service that will be rendered. The ungrateful person is likened to a stranger who returns a good favour with ingratitude (*woye ɔhohoɔ papa a ɔde wo ti bɔ dua mu*). Of the ungrateful person it may be said: ‘remember the past’ (*kae da bi ’yede se boniaye*) is said to the ungrateful person. Also, to the ungrateful person may be said: ‘if you will not praise me, do not tarnish my good name’ (*annyi me ayɛ a, ennsei me din*), (Arthur, 2001:94). This ‘give and take’ obligation and thankfulness lead to deep personal interaction and relationship on daily bases. Busia writes of the significance of the family to members thus:

“There is always the overriding importance of one’s membership in the kingroup. There can be no satisfactory or meaningful life for man except as a member of this group, of his family. Cooperation and mutual helpfulness are virtues enjoined as essential; without them, the kingroup cannot endure. Its survival depends on its solidarity. Such a concept of group life makes for warm personal relationships in which every individual has a maximum involvement in the life of the group.” (Busia, 1962:34)

Here, Busia points out the strong feeling of corporate responsibilities among the family membership in the spirit of “cooperation” and “helpfulness” which infuses a powerful sentiment of brotherhood or fraternity irrespective of religious affiliation. Every debt, for instance, which comes in the name of the family (*ebusua*) as it lends support to individuals in the event of personal predicaments is shared by its members and though people may escape payment of council rates, *ebusuatow* (the *ebusua* levy) is always paid and even those who have travelled outside have theirs paid on their behalf

by their close relatives (Buaben, 1985:67; Buah, 1998:8; Pobe, 1979:49, 50; Assimeng, 1981:62). This ever strong and unyielding mutual obligation toward one another binds the family further together in group solidarity. This solidarity, in turn, promotes warm inter-personal relationships in which every individual has a maximum involvement in the life of the group. The moral deviation of a member of the family could adversely affect the welfare of the whole lineage. A morally good act is conformity to family customs (Assimeng 1981:63).

### **Christian-Muslim Relations Among Family Members**

#### *The Family, Putative Ancestor and Christian-Muslim Encounters*

Responses of the eight focus groups, concluded that the relationships between Christians and Muslims of the same family are largely based on cultural prescriptions and their religious tenets (Douglas 2005, 76). When asked to indicate how they view their Muslim or Christian family-cognates about 80 percent of the respondents have a favorable view of their family-cognates (relatives) irrespective of religious

backgrounds. Kofi Mensah (a Christian), for instance, noted: “Inhabitants of this village are classified into families. Family members are kins, they are brothers and sisters...non-family are visitors or outsiders”. As a Muslim, Hajia Mamuna also agreed with Kofi stating: “family members are true siblings, from the same mother, ancestress.” These responses of Kofi and Mamuna indicate acceptance of family members (kins) even if they belong to religious tradition other than their own. Thus, one can deduct from the responses that among the Fante people, Christians and Muslims often belong to the same extended family. This assertion is reinforced by participant Mary (Christian) who stated that rejecting a Muslim relative is tantamount to rejecting herself: “How can I reject my family member, it does not matter if he or she is a Muslim or even a Hindu, we are one people.” I also observed that Christians and Muslims of the same family get along quite easily and have created shared social spaces for themselves for the promotion of their relationships. In view of this Haruna, an Imam, observed that: “...the good relations between us [members] can largely

be attributed to the common family ties based on common ancestry.” It is this notion of common ancestry which enables individuals to rate themselves highly as blood relatives and place their relations over and above their religious linkages. Family relationships among Fante people are so strong that they are organized and formalized into corporate groups in every town and village which owns property, managed for the optimum benefit of all its members (Arthur 2001, 82; Jennings 2009, 64). Apart from owning land, Muslims and Christians own and share houses inherited from their common ancestors or grandfathers. John (Christian) opines that: “Our grandfather who built our house was a Muslim. But I am a Christian. I have other Muslim brothers, cousins and nephews who live in this house with us.” Thus, the common ancestry of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar offers Christians and Muslims opportunity to share common inheritance and to .respect one another

### *The Family Bonds, Mutual Support and Christian–Muslim Relations*

In the focus group discussions, participants were asked to indicate



how the mutual support among of family members help improve their relationship with their Muslim or Christian relatives. Among the responses the following were identified as critical for Christian-Muslim encounters and dialogue. Most family members expressed the need for active engagement with one another in reciprocal obligations to members in accordance with a prescribed customary status as well as their belief in God as Christians and Muslims. Anthony (Christian) noted that: "...all members are obligated by customs and tradition to lend support (material and emotional) to each other, as a family, irrespective of religious backgrounds." I observed that the Fante indigenous notion of hospitality is the engine for the brotherhood or sisterhood between the members of the same family group and/or of the same family irrespective of religious affiliations. Professor F.K. Buah, Department of History, University of Ghana, underscores some benefits of family affiliations to its members with regard to mutual helpfulness and cooperation, stating that wherever the Fante finds themselves, he or she "...is received as a member of the local *ebusua* or the extended family,

enjoying all privileges and rights, and sharing in the customary obligations with his 'brothers' and 'sisters' there" (Buah 1998, 8).

Thus, the family territorial space, apart from giving its Christian and Muslim members a claim to common ancestral property such as land, also offers mutual assistance in relation to funeral, health and education expenses (Jennings 2001, 64). Funerals are occasions during which the unity, solidarity, and generosity of the family members receive public expression. For example, adult Christians and Muslims share funeral expenses to lessen the burden on the bereaved cognates who be Christian or Muslim. In relation to this Rev Thomas of the Christ Mission Church (Abora), in a focus group discussion, acknowledged the significant role of his family head (*ebusua panyin*), Alhaji Hasan Buntua, in his family who was chosen by consensus by the Christian majority family members. Alhaji's exemplary character and kind-heartedness, which is admired by many in the family, was all that he needed to be the family head: "When my mother died in 2018 his name appeared on her obituary as the chief mourner as custom prescribes. He also saw

to the organization and raising of funds for the funeral as customary norms stipulate.” Christians and Muslims buried their religious differences, came together as a family to offer a befitting funeral for their deceased Christian-kin. This public display of family hospitality, unity, and solidarity by Christians and Muslims in such difficult family times is depicted by the famous *adinkra* symbol *ebusua dɔ fun* which literally means ‘the family loves .the corpse’ (Arthur 2001, 35)

The mutual support is also expressed in the formal education of family members or cognates. It is not the sole responsibility of parents to foot the educational bill of members; family members contribute their quota in cash or kind. In line with this demonstration of co-operation, in his memoir, the former Methodist minister and a director of the Methodist Museum of Ghanaian Indigenous Life at Ampia-Ajumako in the Central Region, Rev. Yedu Bannerman, in his biography, acknowledges the contribution of his maternal uncle to his education in accordance with Fante customs: “As the practice was among Akan matrilineal ethnic groups ... it was

not a child’s biological father who usually educated him. Rather, matrilineal uncles or brothers were responsible for their niece or nephew’s education... My maternal grandfather (mother’s uncle) readily agreed to bear his grandson’s school expenses” (Bannerman 2003, 10). Rev. Bannerman later admitted in an interview on June 14, 2009, that his maternal uncle was a Muslim. The maternal granduncle footed his bills, supporting his pursuits in theological formation. In a similar vein, John A. Azumah, Executive Director of the Sanneh Institute, recounts his priestly ordination service at which his uncle, a devout Muslim, generously provided a ram to be slaughtered for the ceremony, which included relatives from both religions (Azumah 1995, 69). In all these occasions, I notice the efforts of Christians and Muslims in agreeable bid to support one another for progress of the family and community. Professor Lamin Sanneh of the Yale Divinity School acknowledges this unique family and lineage bond in African context and the opportunity it offers for reciprocal helpfulness, irrespective of religious connectivity noting: “...African family is saying something to

the West about inter-religious encounters based on the virtues of hospitality which might help to relate Christians and Muslims to each other in society at large” (Sanneh 1982, 65).

### *Family Bonds, Disagreements and Christian-Muslim Relations*

Typical of all human organizations, the family system is also marked by disagreements and disunity among members (cognates) which are often expressed in Christian-Muslim exchanges. However, Professor Nukunya observes that the segmentation and disagreements found among family members (cognates) is not according to religious differences but is “relative to their genealogical positions” and “... the closer they are on the chart, the closer and more intimate the relationship” (Nukunya 1992, 16). Consequently, it must not be assumed that Christian-Muslim tension and acrimony do not take place in the family. However, family relationships are strong enough to accommodate or neutralize disagreements, even religiously extremist attitudes, which in most cases seek to demonize other religious adherents. The family tie has

also been a unique model for minimizing, if not eliminating, inter-religious animosity, violence, and conflicts. Kwame Atta (Christian) noted in relation to family bonds: “People united by family, however putative, are more likely to stand together... they can resist any force, religious or otherwise, that might attempt to disintegrate and tear them apart.” Yunus (Muslim) admitted also in case of misunderstanding or tension that: “family head (*ebusua panyin*) helps to instill discipline and to ensure that peace and harmony prevail.” He sees to it that among the family enmity and strife, quarrels and dissensions are minimized or resolved completely.

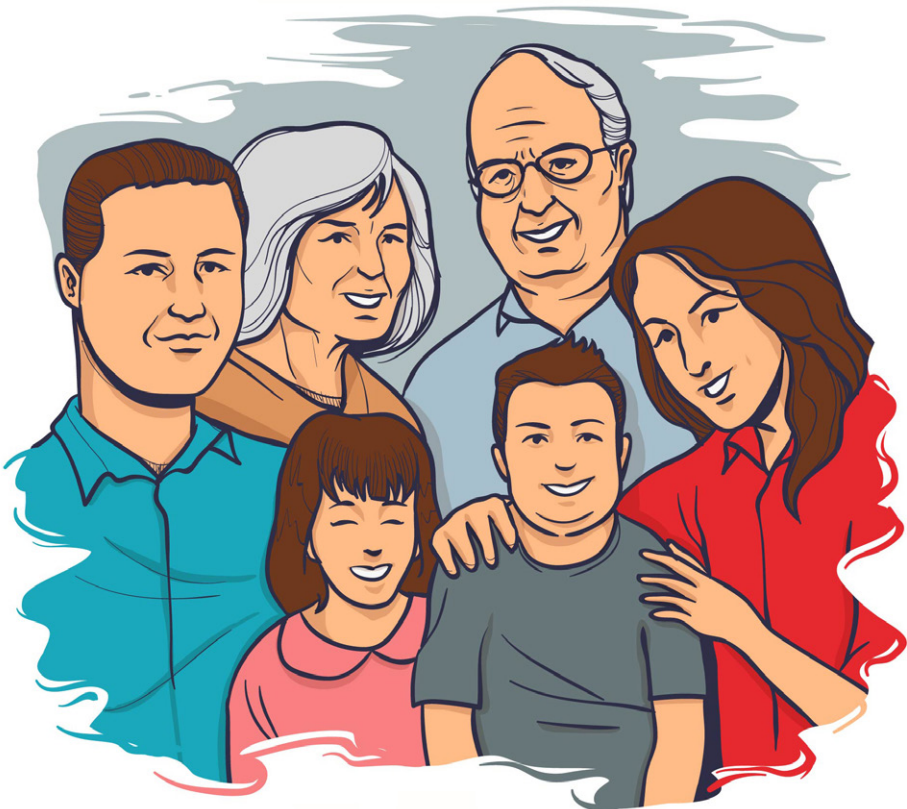
### **Conclusion**

We have examined, in this paper, the dynamics of the family structures of the Fante people and contended that they help promote Christian-Muslim relations. The fante people are organized along family (kin) systems based on the principles of marriage and blood relations. The extended family is the basic family. It is a group of close relatives including the third or fourth generations of descendants. The nuclear family always lays the foundation of and

operates in the extended family of brothers or sisters, grandfather/grandmothers', fathers' and mothers', a man and his family, and his children's families (Arthur, 2001:82), constituting a dynamic unity, or togetherness (Pobee, 1979:49).

The family structure generates positive family connectivity of Christians and Muslims at the personal level. We have also discussed the dynamics of family relations which are critical not only

for effective family relationship but also Christian-Muslim encounters among the Fante people. Despite the enormous impact of both Christianity and Islam on the Fante people the customary family practices continue to be strong. As a family, Christians and Muslims are also obligated by indigenous customs and traditions to offer each other respect and support which go a long way to promote Christian-Muslim encounters



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# Modernity's Influence on Muslim Families in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## Abstract

The 21st century has witnessed a rapid increase in globalization and interrelation, which has had a profound impact on Muslim families around the world. Modernity has introduced new challenges and opportunities for Muslim families, as they strive to maintain their traditional values while adapting to the ever-changing world around them.

**Keywords:** Muslim families, modernity, globalization, Islam, family values

## Modernity's Influence on Muslim Families in the 21st Century

The concept of modernity has been defined in various ways, but it generally refers to the social, political, and economic changes that have occurred since the Enlightenment. These changes have had a significant impact on all aspects of life, including family structure, gender roles, and religious beliefs. Muslim families have not been immune to the effects of modernity. In fact, they have been at the forefront of many of the challenges and opportunities that modernity has presented. One of the most significant challenges has been the erosion of traditional family structures. Extended families, which were once the norm in many Muslim societies, are now

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becoming increasingly rare. This is due in part to urbanization and migration, which have led to families being geographically dispersed.

### **Role of Women in Muslim Families**

In Islam, women have always played a significant role within the family and society. Contrary to common misconceptions, Islam values women as integral pillars of the community and affords them a position of respect and honor. The role of women in Islam is multi-faceted, encompassing their responsibilities as wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters. It is crucial to understand that Islam considers women to be equal to men in their spiritual and intellectual capacities. Allah says in the Holy Quran: Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and

the women who do so - for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward. (Quran 33:35)

Muslim women have traditionally been the primary caregivers in the family, nurturing their children and maintaining a harmonious household. Their roles extend beyond domestic responsibilities, as they are encouraged to seek knowledge, develop skills, and actively participate in their communities. Women are viewed as guardians of morality and are expected to uphold high ethical standards in their interactions with others. Contrary to stereotypes, Islam encourages women to pursue education and contribute to society while maintaining their modesty and dignity.

Islamic teachings also emphasize the importance of justice, fairness, and respect towards women. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) taught his followers to treat women with kindness, honor, and compassion. Islam strictly prohibits any form of physical or emotional abuse towards women. It is essential to understand that any cultural practices that oppress or marginalize women are not rooted in Islamic principles but result from misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

## **Changing role of Muslim women in the 21st century**

In the 21st century, Muslim women are gradually experiencing a shift in their roles and aspirations. While their dedication to their families and communities remains steadfast, they are increasingly seeking opportunities for personal growth, education, and professional development. More and more Muslim women are pursuing higher education, obtaining influential positions in various careers, and making significant contributions to society.

The increased access to education and advancements in technology have empowered Muslim women to expand their horizons. They are actively participating in the workforce, starting their businesses, and breaking stereotypes. This shift is not a departure from the teachings of Islam but a manifestation of the religion's inherent emphasis on knowledge, justice, and progress. Additionally, Muslim women are also engaging in dialogues within their communities and advocating for positive changes. They are taking leadership roles in promoting gender equality, addressing social issues, and challenging harmful cultural

practices. This evolution in the role of Muslim women in society is redefining perceptions and breaking down barriers, allowing them to thrive in both traditional and non-traditional roles.

## **Technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

In this fast-paced digital age, technology has undoubtedly brought about significant changes in various aspects of our lives, including how Muslim families navigate their daily routines and maintain their religious practices. While it is easy to focus on the potential negative impacts of technology, it is equally important to acknowledge the positive ways in which it has enriched the lives of Muslim families. Let's delve into some of these positive impacts:

### *Connecting with the Global Muslim Community*

One of the most remarkable benefits of technology for Muslim families is the ability to connect with the global Muslim community, regardless of physical distance. Through various social media platforms, online forums, and Islamic websites, families can now engage in discussions, seek advice, and share their experiences with Muslims from

all over the world. This newfound digital connectivity fosters a sense of unity and solidarity among Muslim families, providing them with a support network beyond their immediate surroundings.

#### *Access to Religious Knowledge and Resources*

Traditionally, seeking religious knowledge required extensive efforts, such as visiting libraries, attending physical classes, or consulting scholars in person. However, technology has revolutionized this process, making religious information and resources readily accessible. Online platforms offer a plethora of Islamic books, scholarly lectures, and interactive courses, enabling Muslim families to strengthen their knowledge and deepen their understanding of their faith. This accessibility empowers parents to educate their children about Islam with ease, fostering a rich religious upbringing within the convenience of their own homes.

#### *Facilitating Prayer and Worship*

Technology has simplified the incorporation of prayer and worship into the busy lives of Muslim families. Mobile applications and smart devices now offer prayer time reminders,

Qibla locators, and digital copies of the Quran, allowing individuals to adhere to their religious obligations even when on-the-go. These technological tools not only serve as practical companions but also provide a sense of reassurance and convenience, ensuring that families can conveniently perform their daily prayers and engage in spiritual practices without any setbacks.

There are few negative impacts of technology. These includes:

While technology has undoubtedly brought numerous benefits, it is important to acknowledge the potential negative impacts it can have on Muslim families. Despite its convenience and connectivity, excessive reliance on technology can inadvertently lead to adverse consequences. Let's explore a few challenges that Muslim families face in the digital era:

#### *Distraction from Religious Duties*

One of the primary concerns associated with technology is the potential for distraction from religious duties. With the ever-increasing array of entertainment options and social media platforms, it is easy for individuals, including Muslim families, to become engrossed in

the virtual world at the expense of fulfilling their religious obligations. This excessive reliance on technology can lead to a decline in attending mosques, engaging in community activities, and dedicating time for personal reflection and spirituality.

### *Shifting Family Dynamics*

The pervasive presence of technology in our lives has shifted family dynamics, sometimes leading to reduced face-to-face interactions and quality time spent together. Muslim families, like any other, face the risk of getting trapped in the virtual realm, sacrificing valuable opportunities to strengthen family bonds through meaningful conversations and shared experiences. Moreover, the constant use of technology within households can disrupt the establishment of an atmosphere conducive to fostering Islamic values and teachings.

### *Exposure to Inappropriate Content*

With the vast expanse of the internet, Muslim families face the challenge of navigating through an ocean of information that may not align with their religious beliefs and values. Children are highly vulnerable to stumbling

upon inappropriate content while using digital devices. Protecting them from harmful influences and monitoring their online activities becomes a crucial responsibility for parents to preserve the Islamic principles and teachings within their households.

## **Generational Gap and Intergenerational Communication**

### *Generational Gap*

The generational gap refers to the differences in values, beliefs, and behaviors between different generations. It is a phenomenon that has existed throughout history, but it has become increasingly pronounced in the 21st century due to the rapid pace of technological and social change. The generational gap can lead to misunderstandings, conflict, and even alienation between generations. However, it can also be a source of creativity, innovation, and progress.

### *Impact of Generational gap on Muslim Society*

The generational gap manifests in various aspects of Muslim family life and social dynamics. Parents and children may hold differing views on religious practices, education, and career choices,



creating tension and hindering open communication. Similarly, younger generations' embrace of technology and social media can clash with older generations' preferences for traditional communication methods and community engagement.

The generational gap, while posing challenges, also presents opportunities for Muslim society to embrace diversity, foster unity, and navigate the complexities of the modern world. By acknowledging the gap, promoting open communication, and embracing intergenerational initiatives, Muslim communities can harness the strengths of each generation and build a more cohesive and resilient society. The generational gap is a challenge, but it is also an opportunity. By understanding the different generations and communicating effectively with each other, we can build stronger relationships and create a more inclusive and collaborative society.

*Intergenerational communication*  
Intergenerational communication refers to the exchange of information and ideas between individuals of different generations. In the 21st century, characterized by rapid

technological advancements and a diverse global population, effective intergenerational communication is essential for fostering understanding, collaboration, and progress across generations. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is home to a remarkable range of generations, each shaped by distinct historical events, technological developments, and societal shifts. The Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z represent unique perspectives and approaches to life, necessitating effective intergenerational communication to bridge the generational gap.

### *Significance of Intergenerational Communication*

Effective intergenerational communication serves as a bridge between generations, fostering understanding, collaboration, and progress. It allows for the transmission of knowledge, values, and traditions from older generations to younger generations, ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage and social continuity. It also facilitates the exchange of fresh perspectives and innovative ideas from younger generations to older generations, promoting adaptation

and growth in a dynamic world.

### **Strategies for Effective Intergenerational Communication**

To promote effective intergenerational communication, several strategies can be implemented:

**Open and respectful communication:** Fostering an environment of open and respectful dialogue is essential for understanding and appreciating diverse perspectives. **Active listening:** Active listening involves paying close attention to the speaker's message, both verbal and nonverbal, without judgment or interruption.

#### *Empathy*

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. It is crucial for building rapport and fostering trust across generations.

#### *Willingness to learn*

Both younger and older generations should be open to learning from each other. This involves being open to new ideas, perspectives, and technological advancements.

#### *Shared experiences and activities*

Creating opportunities for shared experiences and activities can strengthen bonds, promote understanding, and foster a sense of community across generations.

### **Influence of Media and Popular Culture**

The portrayal of Muslims in media has had significant implications for Muslim families in the 21st century. The misrepresentation and negative stereotyping of Muslims perpetuated by media outlets have contributed to the challenges faced by these families. The exposure to diverse cultural influences, within the context of globalization, further adds complexity to the balancing act between cultural preservation and integration into wider society. Muslim families navigate these challenges by fostering a strong sense of their Islamic identity while actively seeking to dispel stereotypes, promoting intercultural understanding, and fostering meaningful participation in the larger community.

#### *Raising Children in Modern Muslim Families*

Raising children in a modern Muslim family is a rewarding yet challenging endeavor. It requires patience, dedication,

and a deep understanding of Islamic teachings. By emulating the guidance provided in the Qur'an, Muslim parents can instill in their children a strong sense of faith, equip them with Islamic values, and nurture them into well-rounded individuals who can gracefully navigate the complexities of the modern world.

### *Fostering a Loving and Nurturing Environment*

The Qur'an repeatedly stresses the importance of love and kindness between parents and children. In Surah Bani Israel, Allah (SWT) reminds parents to treat their children with gentleness and affection, stating, "You shall not kill your offspring for fear of want. It is We who provide for them, and for you. Indeed, killing them is a great sin." (Quran 17:31). Creating a loving and nurturing home environment is essential for fostering a child's emotional well-being and spiritual development. Parents should prioritize spending quality time with their children, engaging in meaningful conversations, and providing them with a sense of security and support.

### *Instilling Islamic Values and Principles*

Education plays a vital role in shaping a child's understanding of Islam and its values. The Qur'an encourages parents to educate their children in the knowledge of Allah, the Highest, stating, "And enjoin prayer upon your family [and people] and be steadfast therein." (Quran 20:132). Parents should actively involve their children in Islamic activities, such as attending the mosque, participating in community events, and engaging in discussions about Islamic teachings. By providing a strong foundation in Islamic knowledge, parents can help their children develop a strong moral compass and make informed decisions aligned with Islamic principles.

### *Balancing Love, Discipline, and Respect*

The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of discipline in raising children, while also advocating for respect and fairness. In Surah At-Tahreem, Allah (SWT) states, "O you who believe, protect yourselves and your families from the Fire of Hell. Its fuel is people and stones" (Quran 66:6). Discipline should be administered with love and compassion, aiming to guide children towards positive behavior rather than inflicting

punishment. Parents should clearly establish boundaries and expectations, while also providing opportunities for open communication and understanding.

### **Navigating the Modern World with Islamic Principles**

In today's interconnected world, Muslim children are exposed to a wide range of information and influences. While embracing the benefits of technology and globalization, parents must also guide their children to navigate these influences with Islamic principles as their foundation.

#### *Economic Challenges Faced by Muslim Families*

Muslim families are a diverse and growing population, with an estimated 1.9 billion members worldwide. They are also one of the poorest groups in the world. According to the World Bank, 26% of Muslims live in extreme poverty, and 36% live on less than \$2 per day.

Muslim families face several economic challenges, including:

#### *Discrimination:*

Muslim families are often discriminated against in the workplace and in the housing

market. This discrimination can make it difficult for them to find jobs and homes and can lead to lower wages and higher housing costs.

#### *Lack of access to education and employment opportunities:*

Many Muslim families live in areas with poor access to education and employment opportunities. This can make it difficult for them to get ahead in life.

#### *Poverty*

Poverty is a major challenge for many Muslim families. This can make it difficult for them to afford basic necessities such as food, shelter, and healthcare.

### **Coping Strategies**

Despite these challenges, Muslim families have developed a few strategies for coping with them, including:

#### *Relying on strong family networks*

Family networks are a vital source of support for Muslim families. They provide financial assistance, childcare, and emotional support.

#### *Engaging in entrepreneurship*

Many Muslim families turn to entrepreneurship to make ends meet. This can be a risky

proposition, but it can also be a rewarding one.

### *Adhering to Islamic principles*

Islamic principles, such as zakat (charity) and sadaqa (voluntary giving), can help Muslim families cope with economic hardship.

### **Maintaining Islamic Identity in the Face of Modernity**

Maintaining Islamic identity in the face of modernity is a complex and multifaceted challenge. Muslims must grapple with how to reconcile their traditional beliefs and practices with the ever-changing world around them. This can be a difficult task, as modernity often brings with it values and norms that are at odds with Islamic teachings. There are several factors that have contributed to the challenges of maintaining Islamic identity in the modern world. One factor is the globalization of Western culture. Western culture, with its emphasis on individualism, materialism, and secularism, has had a profound impact on Muslim societies. This has led to a decline in traditional Islamic values and practices and has made it difficult for Muslims to maintain their sense of identity.

Another factor that has

contributed to the challenges of maintaining Islamic identity is the rise of Islamic extremism. Islamic extremism is a small but vocal minority of Muslims who believe that violence is justified in the name of Islam. This has led to a great deal of fear and suspicion of Muslims in the West and has made it even more difficult for Muslims to maintain their sense of identity. Despite these challenges, there are a few things that Muslims can do to maintain their Islamic identity in the modern world. One important thing is to find a community of like-minded Muslims who can provide support and guidance. Another important thing is to be knowledgeable about Islam and to be able to articulate your beliefs concisely. Finally, it is important to be active in your community and to work to promote Islamic values and understanding.

### **Conclusion**

Modernity has had a profound impact on Muslim families in the 21st century. While there have been some challenges, there have also been some opportunities. Muslim families are now more diverse and adaptable than ever before, and they are well-positioned to thrive in the 21st century.

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## Navigating Islamic Sexuality Education for Muslim Family from Sex and Gender-related Rulings in the Islamic Legal System

Mr. Bilal Abu Samah \*

### Abstract

This article delves into the intersection of the Islamic legal system (*fiqh*), particularly within the Shāfiʿī school of thought and sexuality education, aiming to address the challenges Muslim parents face in imparting such education while adhering to Islamic principles. Utilising qualitative research and document analysis of Shāfiʿī *fiqh* texts, the study advocates for the incorporation of sexuality education within the broader framework of Islamic education. The definition of sexuality education underscores its role in guiding children to distinguish between permissible and forbidden actions in alignment with Islamic ethics. Analysing Islamic legal sources, including the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth, the study emphasises the modest treatment of sexuality and underscores parental responsibility in educating children. Exploration of *fiqh* literature, with a focus on puberty, ablution, menstruation, and nakedness, supports the argument for the continued relevance of classical *fiqh* in addressing contemporary sexuality issues and emphasises the need for an Islamic framework for sexuality education. The study contributes to future research by bridging the gap between sexuality studies and the Islamic legal system, facilitating a nuanced understanding of this crucial aspect of human development within an Islamic context.

**Keywords:** Classical *fiqh*, Islamic Legal System, Islamic framework, Muslim parents, Sexuality Education.

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## Introduction

Fiqh is a body of knowledge that discusses the legal status of individual actions based on their specific evidence (Hītū, 2021). According to the definition, the subject of this science will be the actions of individuals who are legally responsible - also known as *mukallaf* - whether the action is obligatory, unlawful, offensive, recommended, or permissible. The role of parents is critical in providing a good education for their children. In Muslim society, parents are obligated to teach their children about purification, prayer, and other topics. Sexuality education is also important for children to learn. However, due to cultural and traditional sensitivity, most Muslims find it difficult to teach sexuality, even in a positive manner (Khan, 2006). As a result, there are few Muslim intellectuals, parents, or teachers who are comfortable discussing sexuality from an Islamic perspective.

In contemporary times, the Islamic world has been impacted by the sexual and mental liberation observed in the Western world. While some individuals have attempted to present the Western model as a substitute for religious sex education, this has prompted numerous Muslims residing in

Western nations to contemplate strategies for safeguarding the Islamic identity of children who have been assimilated into Western society. However, this has prompted some parents to criticise the Western model of sexuality education on the grounds that it exposes young children to sensitive topics such as safe sexual practices and the LGBT community (Fahs & Kalso, 2022). Therefore, the objective of this paper is to propose a framework for Islamic Sexuality Education based on the *fiqh* texts or the Islamic legal system.

## Definition of Sexuality Education

Sexual orientation, sex, gender, sexual and gender identity, eroticism, emotional attachment, and reproduction are all embodied within the core dimension of humanity that is referred to as sexuality. (Khan, Sex and Sexuality in Islam, 2006).

Education, according to al-Baydhāwī, is the process of presenting something until it is perfect in stages (al-Baydhāwī, 1997). According to al-Aṣfahānī, education is a process of forming or shaping something step by step until it reaches the level of perfection (al-Aṣfahānī a.-H. i.,

n.d.). From these two definitions, al-Hāzimī suggests that education is a process of forming a person in stages, from all aspects, to achieve happiness in the world and the hereafter by following the Islamic teachings (al-Hāzimī, 2000).

According to Abdullah Nāsih ‘Ulwān, sexuality education is the process of teaching, explaining, and reinforcing information pertaining to lust, sex, instinct, and matrimony to children as awareness and guidance. Additionally, to live in accordance with Islamic ethics and conduct, one must be capable of distinguishing between actions that are permissible and those that must be abstained from. When children can comprehend it -by reaching the age of sense (*mumayyiz*)-, he recommended that sexuality education be imparted in a systematic and thorough manner (‘Ulwān, 1992). Sexuality education is a broad term and has different meanings for different people and organisations. Sexuality education globally comes under various labels, such as Sex Education, Sexuality and Reproductive Health, Relationships and Sex Education and many more (Khan et al., 2020).

Hence, sexuality education should

be taught to children as it fulfils the demands of human life based on Islamic law. Providing and obtaining a clear understanding of sexuality education and a solid religious belief can prevent individuals from doing things that are prohibited by religion, such as adultery, fornication, abortion, child abandonment and many others.

Therefore, sexuality education is ought to be taught to children because, according to Islamic law, it satisfies the requirements of human life. Not only can individuals be prevented from engaging in behaviours that are prohibited by their religious beliefs, but they can also be prevented from engaging in those behaviours if they are provided with and obtain a clear understanding of sexuality education, in addition to having a strong religious belief. Some of the behaviours that fall under this category are adultery, fornication, abortion, abandonment of children, and a wide range of other deviant behaviours.

## **Methods**

Qualitative research methodology was utilised for this study. Document analysis of the pertinent literature was utilised

to collect the data. The sources of information utilised in this research are *fiqh* texts, with particular attention given to rulings concerning gender and sex. Furthermore, the data for this study is collected solely from *fiqh* texts that are affiliated with the Shāfiʿī school of thought. To establish a theoretical foundation, the sources of literature utilised in this investigation have been published. A conclusion is reached after a comprehensive synthesis of varied information sourced from a subset of the literature.

### **Sexuality Education in Islamic Legal Sources**

In the Qurʾān, numerous verses show and mention about sexuality. There are also several themes pertaining to sexuality, such as the creation of man, family, marriage, relations between the spouses, menstruation, pregnancy, developmental stages of the human fetus, fornication, sexual perversions and deviations. This remark that the discussion of sexuality has been dealt with decency and due respect in these verses shows that Muslims are encouraged to study knowledge related to sexuality.

Parents, as guardians, hold a responsibility to educate their

children. In the Qurʾān, Allah Taʾāla commands:

“Allah has instructed you regarding your children...”  
(Surah al-Nisā’: 11)

Although there is no specific verse in the al-Qurʾān that mentions sexuality education per se, the verse under the mentioned themes is deemed to be sufficient evidence to support the existence of sexuality education in Islam. As a second authoritative source after the al-Qurʾān, a more specific explanation of sexuality education can be found in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad. It was narrated in the Sunan of Ibn Mājah, narrated by ‘Ā’ishah that Asma asked the Messenger of Allah about bathing after one’s period. He said: “One of you should take her water and lote leaves and purify herself well or thoroughly. Then, she should pour water over her head and rub it vigorously so that the water reaches the roots of her hair. Then she should take a piece of cotton perfumed with musk and purify herself with it.” Asma said: “How should I purify myself with it?” He said: “Subhān Allah! Purify yourself with it!” ‘Ā’ishah said, as if whispering to her: “Wipe

away the traces of blood with it.” Then she (Asma) asked him about bathing to cleanse oneself from sexual impurity. He said: “One of you should take her water, and purify herself, and purify herself well, or thoroughly. She should pour water over her head and rub it so that the water reaches the roots of her hair, then she should pour water over her body.” ‘Ā’ishah said: “How good were the women of the Anṣār! For they did not let shyness keep them from understanding their religion properly.”

The Ḥadīth shows that the Prophet -peace be upon him- teaches Asma how to perform the purificatory bath when one experiences menstruation. Asma’s efforts to understand the rulings precisely also represents a blessing and benefit not only for herself but for all Muslim women until the Afterlife.

### **Sexuality Education in Islamic Legal Rulings**

This paper will dive into the chapter on purification in the books of *fiqh* of the Shāfi’ī school of thought to measure its relation to sexuality. Any sex and gender-related rulings suitable for adolescents will be collected to serve the purpose of this paper,

which is to show that there are legal rulings related to sexuality in the books of the Islamic Legal System (*fiqh*). Hence, it is significant to be a model for Islamic Sexuality Education for children.

This paper will examine the chapter on purification in the Shāfi’ī school of thought’s books of *fiqh* to determine its relevance to sexuality. A compilation of sex and gender-related rulings applicable to adolescents will be undertaken for the purpose of this study, which is to demonstrate the existence of sexuality-related legal principles in the books of the Islamic Legal System. The fact that it serves as an example of Islamic sexuality education among children thus demonstrates its significance.

### **Rulings related to bulūḡ (puberty)**

Generally, individual Muslims are required to learn the rules for anything they do in their daily lives. Knowing the rulings allows one to carry out what one has been ordered to do while avoiding what one has been instructed to avoid, resulting in happiness now and in the Afterlife.

It is known by necessity that when a person has reached puberty, he

or she will be categorised as a *mukallaf*; thus, performing rituals (*‘ibāda*) following its specific legal rulings is now required. For example, they must perform and learn about obligatory fasting and what necessitates and diminishes it.

The attainment of puberty serves as a prerequisite for a Muslim to attain the rank of *mukallaf*. There are indicators that can be employed to ascertain the commencement of puberty. In *fiqh* literature, these indicators are usually discussed in the section on signs of puberty under the purification chapter. Generally, there are three signs of puberty: 1- Reaching the age of fifteen lunar years old for males and females, 2- Experiencing nocturnal emission by a nine lunar-year-old male and female, 3- Menstruation for a nine lunar-year-old female. Al-Jāwī added that a person will also reach puberty even if the secretion of sperm is through masturbation or intercourse (al-Jāwī, 2011). Additionally, as a person has become a *mukallaf* through reaching and experiencing the signs of puberty, they are now subjected to the Islamic legal rulings of obligatory (*wājib*), recommended (*mandūb*), unlawful (*harām*), offensive

(*makrūh*), and merely permissible (*mubāh*). Parents should also teach their newly *mukallaf* children to perform purificatory baths to cleanse them from the filth that can obstruct their rituals. The discussion of how to perform a purificatory bath has been mentioned in numerous books of *fiqh* literature.

### **Rulings related to ablution (*wuḍū’*)**

Another ruling that is sex and gender-related is ablution. Performing ablution is obligatory to perform rituals such as praying, handling the Qur’ān, and many more. In the ablution section, scholars of *fiqh* have discussed the essential elements and prerequisites for the validity of the ablution. They also stated the causes that will make the ablution invalid.

One of the invalidators of ablution is having direct skin contact with others who are not of the same gender and an unrelated woman. According to al-Bayjūrī, this invalidator only applies among twos with different genders, which excludes the skin contact between male and male, female and female, *khunthā* and *khunthā*, male and *khunthā*, female and *khunthā* (al-Bayjūrī & Shāhīn,

2012). In addition, having direct skin contact purposefully is prohibited in Islam, as narrated by the scholars of Shāfiʿī where it is mentioned in their legal formula: “When it is unlawful to see, it is also unlawful to touch” (al-Shirbīnī, 1994).

Another invalidator of ablution is touching a human’s genitals and anus with the palm, whether it is of their own or others. The scholars of Shāfiʿī also came to the extent that looking at one’s own genitalia without any needs is considered offensive (al-Haytamī, 2020; al-Ramlī, 1984).

### **Rulings related to menstruation**

As mentioned before, experiencing menstruation is one of the signs of reaching the age of puberty. This subject has also been discussed explicitly by the scholars of *fiqh*. Generally, it was mentioned in a number of *fiqh* books that there are three types of blood exit from the vagina: 1- menstrual, 2- postnatal, and 3-irregular.

Firstly, menstrual blood, which is a blood that normally exits from a woman’s vagina and without being caused by delivery. It is black in colour, hot, and pungent. The average duration for menstruation is 6 or 7 days;

its minimum duration is 24 hours, and 15 days is maximum. Secondly, postnatal bleeding, which is the blood that exits after childbirth. The minimum duration for postnatal bleeding is a single instant, and its maximum is 60 days. The average duration is 40 days. Thirdly, irregular bleeding, known as *istiḥāḍa*, is the blood that exits outside the days of menstrual and postnatal bleeding. In addition, the minimum duration of purity between two menstrual cycles is 15 days, with no maximum limit (al-Aṣḥānī A. S., 2012). Knowing these types of blood can help identify which actions are permissible and which are not, such as performing prayer, fasting, reciting the Qurʾān and many more.

### **Rulings related to nakedness (*ʿAwwrah*)**

In the school of Shāfiʿī, Muslims must cover their *ʿawrah*. This obligation generally includes men, women and *khunthā*. It was mentioned in the books of *fiqh*, especially in the prayer section -because covering nakedness is one of the prerequisites- that there are four types of nakedness. First, the nakedness of a man generally and that of a slave girl is the area between the navel



and the knees. It applies to all men, whether he is a Muslim or not, slaves, and children, though they have not reached the age of *mumayyiz*. Second, the nakedness of a free woman includes the whole body except the face and the two palms. Third, the nakedness of a free woman and that of a slave girl is the entire body, which applies when in the presence of an unrelated person (*ajnabī*). It is also unlawful for an unrelated person to look at any parts of the body of a free woman and that of a slave girl. Lastly, fourth, in the presence of a *mahram* (unmarriageable kin) or other women, the nakedness of a free woman and a slave girl is the area between the navel and the knees. In addition, although the discussion on nakedness is placed in the section of prayer, the mentioned rulings above also apply outside of prayer (al-Suyūfī, 1983; al-Jāwī, 2011).

### **Conclusion**

It is germane to mention that sexuality has long been a subject of discourse in the Islamic world. Conversely, it has been a subject of discourse since the time of the Prophet -peace be upon him- and continues to be so in the present day. This study concludes that the classical *fiqh* literature

is applicable to contemporary sexuality issues, particularly in the context of sexuality education for children. This study concludes that sexuality has been addressed in the first chapter of *fiqh* tradition, a section on purification. This study suggests that individuals, particularly children, would be required to study *fiqh* concerning sexuality-related matters, including menstruation, puberty, and numerous others. In addition, sexuality-related rulings are also associated with daily acts of devotion.

A selection of the sex and gender-related decrees from the section on purification are compiled in this article. This paper demonstrates that the classical, traditional scholars of the Islamic legal system have recognised and deliberated upon the topic of sexuality, albeit exclusively pertaining to the Shāfi'ī school of thought's primary literature on the Islamic legal system. Therefore, it aids forthcoming investigations in delineating the connection between sexuality studies and the Islamic legal system, thereby enabling more fruitful future research, particularly in formulating an Islamic framework for sexuality education.

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## Spiritual Dimensions of a Marital Union in Islam

Dr. Senad Mrahorović \*

### Abstract

The concept of marriage (*zawāj, nikāḥ*) is one of those Qur'anic narratives that requires a meticulous examination of various terms that are directly or indirectly related to the subject in question. Since the marriage in Islam is impregnated with spiritual connotations, apart from its legal status and understanding, Muslim scholars have expanded its strict juristic domain to that of spiritual psychology, cosmology, and metaphysics. Thus, when approaching the subject of marriage from the spiritual point of view one has to deal not only with the juristic terminology of marriage such as *nikāḥ* and *zawāj* and its derivatives, but also with a range of other terms such as the notions of *azwāj* (the creation in pair), *rūḥ* (spirit), *nafs* (soul), *qalb* (heart), *fiṭrah* (primordial nature) *al-samāwāt wa al-`ard* (heaven and earth) and others, all of which philosophers and spiritualists among Muslim scholars and exegetes used to provide a holistic interpretation of the concept of marriage in Islam. In this article our focus is mainly to explore the meaning of spiritual aspect of marriage known in the traditional Islamic sciences as mystical or microcosmic marriage.

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**Keywords:** Marriage, Islam, Spirituality, Macrocosm, Microcosm.

## Introduction

Islam is based on the immutable principles that manifest themselves through a variety of aspects, from metaphysical realm to physical and psychic worlds or through the intellectual, spiritual, and practical means usually regulated by the religious sacred law or the Sharī'ah. The exoteric manifestation of the said principles is situated at the bottom of the hierarchy of existence above which stand the higher existential dimensions such as subtle, imaginal, and angelic domains. To explain these categories of Being as the creation of God, Muslim scholars over the centuries have employed numerous terms and phrases mostly derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah, as the primary sources of Islamic thought. The phraseology in questions is often impregnated with spiritual and symbolic implications contained in Arabic language and as such it requires sound interpretation to be

properly understood. This way of communicating a desired message by means of language is found in the semantics and morphology of the divine revelation itself, since the latter deals not only with worldly affairs, but also with spiritual content attached to them, conveying therefore the proper meaning and significance of the divine word.

The concept of marriage is one of those Qur'anic narratives that requires a meticulous examination as it involves a range of specific terms and their appropriate interpretation. Among the terms involved in the context of marriage besides *nikāh* and *zawāj* are *azwāj* (the creation in pair), *rūh* (spirit), *nafs* (soul), *qalb* (heart), *fiṭrah* (primordial nature) *al-samāwāt wa al-`ard* (heaven and earth) and others that philosophers and spiritualists among Muslim scholars and exegetes used to provide a holistic interpretation of the concept of marriage in Islam. In this article our focus is mainly to explore the meaning of spiritual aspect of marriage known in the traditional Islamic sciences as mystical or microcosmic marriage.

## The Concept of Marriage in Islam

The two main terms that stand for marriage in Islam are *zawāj* and *nikāḥ*. Both notions are mentioned in the Qur'an numerous times. In its derivative forms issued from the root z-w-j, the term '*zawāj*' is used in more general sense, indicating marriage, union, pair, a member of the pair (a mate, husband, or wife), category, kind, or type of something. The word '*nikāḥ*' deriving from the root n-k-ḥ is used specifically for the concept of marriage, its contract and condition. According to the Qur'anic usage of these terms, we can assert that the concept of marriage in Islam applies not only to human beings, in which case it is understood as a societal institution sanctioned by cultural or religious principles, but also to all kinds of entities within the created order of reality as the Qur'an proclaims: "Glory be to the One Who created all things in pairs be it what the earth produces, their genders, or what they do not know!" (Qur'an, 36:36). The word 'pairs' in the verse used as plural of '*zawj*', rendered as a partner or mate, may as well be understood in terms of various kinds or categories of creation, as suggested by some exegetes.

If everything is created with the aim of realization of Divine reality and ultimate submission to it, as the Qur'an suggests, "I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me" (Qur'an, 51:56), the purpose therefore of the natural process of procreation as an organic force that supports and upholds the physical facet of universe on the one hand, and as one of the essential aims of marriage on the other hand, must have been an outward reflection of the inner or spiritual processes designed to fulfill the aim of realization and submission mentioned above. The perfect example of such a process that plainly demonstrates the Qur'anic idea of duality inherent in every domain of creation is the act of marriage and its interpretation within Islamic tradition. As the state of marriage in a social sense signifies a contractual union between the couple consisting of opposite gender, that is, man and woman whose relationship is commonly legalized either by religious or secular laws, or both, it demonstrates that the said duality is permeated by complementarity not only for the existence of itself, but also and more importantly for the expansion or prolongation of such an existence through the

act or union fruits of which is the procreation as the essential feature of all forms of worldly life. In Islam, the concept of marriage is defined as “a relation between a man and a woman which is recognized by custom or law and involves certain rights and duties.” Marriage as such is regarded as a societal norm going back to the earliest times of human history. Depending on time and space, religion and culture, it is usually associated with numerous customs and rituals with celebrational and joyful accent to mark the marital union between man and woman.

In Islam, the crucial factor that needs to be considered in the process of realizing the matrimonial union is a spiritual state of the couple involved. This condition on individual or social level is closely related to the essential principle of creation, that is, knowing and obeying God, as the Creator of the universe. However, the condition in question can be outwardly realized only if the inward fulfilment of acknowledging God and submitting to Him is taking place. That is why the Qur’an stresses the importance of spiritual quality of the groom or bride to be the main criteria in choosing one’s marriage partner: “Wicked

women are for wicked men, and wicked men are for wicked women. Women of purity are for men of purity, and men of purity are for women of purity” (Qur’an, 24:26). In his interpretation of this verse, Ahmad bin ‘Umar said that the wickedness in the verse refers to the negative aspects of this world that usually attract the human soul which seeks pleasure and fulfils its desire in worldly, vanishing affairs. As for the purity or virtue, it relates to positive aspects of the world to which human spirit is drawn to by virtue of its divine nature and constant exaltation in its obedience of God. The wickedness and the purity in the verse are represented here as the two completely opposite dimensions of human character, both of which are associated with the concepts of evil and virtue, respectively. Hence, duality not only in physical feature of human being, dividing it into male and female, but also in its spiritual domain that resemble both, divine and demonic tendencies in eschatological terms.

The Prophet of Islam has also advised the believers regarding their marital partners to choose those endowed with spiritual character: “A woman may be married for four reasons: for her



property, for her rank, for her beauty, and for her religion (and character), so marry the one who is best in the religion and character and prosper.” The positive spiritual dimension of marital couple as the most significant condition for healthy and wealthy union established in accordance with the divine law, ensures the welfare of the couple and their progeny not only in its societal settings but also in its spiritual environment that helps navigating the journey towards the ultimate salvation of their souls.

### **Spiritual Aspects of Marriage in Islam**

Islamic philosophical and spiritual doctrines about microcosm (*al-‘ālam al-ṣaghīr*) and macrocosm (*al-‘ālam al-kabīr*) that have primarily developed based on the Qur’an and Hadith, indicate the polarity of the creation, similar to that of pairs, comprising of inward and outward, spiritual and corporeal, or hidden and visible domains. The idea of the connection between them is depicted by virtue of manifestation or reflection of the first upon the latter. The Qur’an stresses this point by stating: “We will show them Our signs in the

horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that He is the truth” (Qur’an, 41:53). A number of classical exegetes identified the concepts of ‘horizons’ and ‘themselves’ with the notions of macrocosm and microcosm, respectively. Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī believes that the ‘horizons’ refers to the part of creation outside of human being, known as the ‘great world’ stretching from the lowest point (the bed) to the highest point (Divine throne), while ‘themselves’ denote the souls within human being, known as the ‘minor world’ that is, every human being individually. The idea of micro and macrocosms has been further developed into a systematic doctrine relating to Islamic cosmology and hierarchy of being within the traditional Islamic perspective. In line with that it is believed that everything contained in the outer cosmos is reflected or internalized within every human being. On that note, al-Ghazālī said that “The wonders of the world are composed and created by God. (Since) the parts of the soul correspond with the parts of the world, and these parts of the world are bulging with marvels, the one who examines (these parts) will benefit by having more firm belief and confirmed

faith. Thus, God has urged (us) to reflect upon the universe and commanded (us) to contemplate upon the souls, horizons, heavens and the earth.”

Having in mind the purpose of the creation of human being, and the fact that everything is created in pair, in addition to the inward and the outward aspects of creation, the classical scholars in Islamic philosophy and spirituality identified a close relationship between the macrocosm and microcosm, reveling their striking similarity through the notion of union or marriage accruing within them in almost the same manner as the marriage in an ordinary sense, that is between a man and a woman. Strictly following the Qur’anic narrative concerning the creation and different functions attached to its various elements, Muslim scholars have divided the external world into two basic parts, namely, the heaven and the earth, the two opposites, but providently coupled to form a whole assembled by two contrasting and at the same time complementary parts to generate the continuum of itself and various forms of existents within itself as the Qur’an proclaims: “Indeed, Allah is the Knower of the unseen of the heavens and the

earth. He surely knows best what is ‘hidden’ in the heart” (Qur’an, 35:38).

The verse informs us that besides heaven and earth as the two main parts of the cosmos, lies the world of the unseen reality, without mentioning the seen or visible reality like in other Qur’anic verses where the phrase ‘*‘Ālim al-ghayb wa al-shahādah*’ (Knower of the hidden and manifest) is mentioned. The verse also links the cosmos and its visible and invisible substances with that contained within every human being. The notion of ‘unseen of the heavens’ is interpreted as heavens of hearts (*samāwāt al-qulūb*), while ‘unseen of the earth’ is referred to earth of souls (*‘ard al-nufūs*). In other words, “God knows the sincerity of the sincere ones and the honesty of the truthful ones, which are from the unseen heavens of hearts, and He knows the hypocrisy of the hypocrites and the ungratefulness of the ungrateful, which are from the unseen land of souls and the gathering of all breasts.” Thus, we are notified of two opposing realities (Divine creation in pair) that comprise the entire cosmos (heaven and earth) and existing realities between or within them, again divided in two, hidden

and apparent all of which are compared with human being and what he or she holds within from higher or lower qualities.

These spiritual interpretations of the above and similar verses in the Qur'an are intended to highlight the essential purpose of creation situated in acknowledging Divine and submission to it. In order to accomplish such a task, human being ought to unite all of his/her internal faculties of which the spirit occupies the summit of the creational order and is regarded as the most noble of creation due to its Divine origin, compared to the soul which stands at the bottom of the spiritual hierarchy due to its inclination to carnal or worldly desires. In vocabulary of spiritual scholars, the spirit is identified with various concepts such as intellect (*'aql*), heart (*qalb*), secret (*sirr*) and even soul (*nafs*), whereas the soul is seen to resemble lower self or ego (*nafs* or *anāniyyah*), passion or lust (*shahwah*) and body (*jism*). The spirit is thus associated with heaven and all positive things that descend from it such as knowledge, illumination, revelation, but also rain, sunlight, starlight. The soul for its part is compared with the earth and things of lesser or negative qualities such

as ignorance, darkness, illusion etc. Furthermore, the spirit in the context of the said union is given a male character, like that of the husband in an ordinary form of marriage. As the husband in a legal marriage enjoys the role of the leader, provider, and protector of the family, so is the spirit in terms of the mystical or microscopic union, the guardian of the soul on their spiritual journey towards God. The soul on the other hand, represents a female character, identical to the role of wife in an ordinary sense, that needs support and providence from her husband/guardian spirit for the welfare of the entire family. Having obtained the function of a caregiver in this union, the spirit symbolizes the guide within the microcosm and needs no further development in terms of spiritual knowledge, whereas the soul must go through several stages or stations to gradually gain its enlightenment on her spiritual path. In this way, writes Sachiko Murata, "spirit is the divine light within the human being, while soul is the inward reality that experiences the actualization of the divine light through becoming more and more illuminated."

This union between the spirit and the soul is symbolically called the

marriage within human being that may be regarded as the inward form of an outward or legitimate marriage between man and woman on the one hand, and of the macroscopic or simply cosmic wedding between the heaven and the earth, on the other hand. That is why all qur'anic verses related to the concept of marriage are interpreted not only within the Sharī'ah domain, but also in their mystical or metaphysical context that directly relates to the inner structure of human being that is, psychological and spiritual consciousness. The correlation in question up to this stage, apart from resembling dual dimensions of the created reality, namely, physical and metaphysical, or material and celestial, in addition to the gender duality within the creation, may be equally matched with the first two main aspects of Islam, faith (*īmān*) and submission (*islām*) whereby the faith is related to the inner aspect of religion that involves spiritual faculties of knowledge and their proper relationship as a unified entity (marriage) as the spiritual requirement for a true and pure faith, while submission is the outward aspect of religion, involving physical or formal expression of faith through a

variety of rituals performed in accordance with the religious law such as prayer, fasting, but also marital union, the main goal of which is to spiritually protect the couple and keep them safe within realm of their religiously refined space.

Since a successful marriage in its societal form demands certain conditions to be realized by the couple in their respectful ways, complementing and supporting each other along the way, so does the spiritual union of spirit and soul. From the Islamic perspective, both marriages are seen as a form of divinely imposed act on believers to bring them closer to their spiritual realization and ultimate salvation. The similar setup is observed in the union between heaven and earth, a cosmic couple from which everything else in creation emerges only to participate in the glorification of their Lord: "Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth 'constantly' glorifies Allah—the King, the Most Holy, the Almighty, the All-Wise" (Qur'an, 62:1). In this context the triumph of the social form of marriage highly depends on its mystical counterpart for it provides the believer with all necessary

knowledge and skills to overcome the internal challenges ensuing from indecorous and more often illicit behavior by some psychic and spiritual powers within an individual that usually serve as the main reason for all sorts of corrupt relationships. The roles of each member of the couple must be clear and endorsed as such, like the rules of each other that need to be respected if the union is to be successful and beneficial to the entire family.

In comparing the macroscopic to the microscopic unions, Murata cites al-Kāshānī's viewpoint: "When heaven's rain falls on the earth, the earth gives birth to the Ten Thousand Things: When the spirit effuses its light upon the body, the body gives birth to the soul. The soul, as conjunction of spirit and body, is the locus within which all the perfections of heaven and earth become outwardly manifest. In other words, the body is the womb wherein the child - the heart - is born." As the heaven in the cosmic union provides the earth with all necessary provisions and nourishments, the earth prospers and produces their children in abundance of natural phenomena. In the same way when the spirit supplies the soul with all sacred

food and sustenance it needs, the healthy spiritual child will be born out of such a carrying wedlock. The child in question is the heart as the only place wherein the faith or ignorance resides, as the Qur'an states: "Those who believe and whose hearts are at peace in the remembrance of God. Are not hearts at peace in the remembrance of God?" (Qur'an, 13:28) or "...And do not obey those whose hearts We have made heedless of Our remembrance, who follow 'only' their desires and whose state is 'total' loss (Qur'an, 18:28). The verses are indicating two completely different spiritual states, the first being serene due to the consciousness of God, a state that reflects one's true faith and spiritual enlightenment; the second being spiritual failure due to the ignorance and illusion caused by egoistic or self-centered nature of human being.

Being a child of the spiritual marriage, the heart comes under the influence of its parents, the spirit, and the soul, and whoever dominates in that union will have more impact on the heart. Thus, the constant internal struggle of dominance is waged within oneself, most often, without one's realization. This struggle is between the spirit as a positive





power which may be identified with the primordial nature of human beings (*fiṭrah*), and the soul as a negative power (*hawā`*). It is interesting to note that in other Qur'anic verse (6:79), the notion of *fiṭrah* is also attributed to heaven and earth in the same way as it is ascribed to human being. This only supports the idea of interrelatedness between human beings and the cosmos, or micro and macrocosm. As for the soul being inclined to evil, it needs to undergo gradual transformation to achieve the state of peace by virtue of divine mercy, as stated in the verse. The process of purification or revitalization through which the soul in this microcosmic level is going is comparable with the regeneration of earth by water and sunshine in the macrocosmic domain. The result of these parallel renewals is "like the plants of the earth, thriving when sustained by the

rain We send down from the sky" (Qur'an, 18:45), in other words, the new form of life is given to the offspring produced by either cosmic or spiritual union. In the case of the latter, the offspring is the heart that is under continual influence by its parents, the spirit, and the soul. In that respect the heart is like a mirror that reflects the internal structure of a human being, or the spiritual states of his parents. That is why the Prophet of Islam has said: "Everything has a polish, and the polish for hearts is remembrance of God." With this, we are reminded once more of the Qur'anic statement regarding the creation: "I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me" (Qur'an, 51:56). The purpose of the internal or spiritual marriage as well as the outward or juristic marriage is ultimately designed for no other reason but to help believers on their spiritual journey towards God.



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# Suicide Teenagers and Religious Interactions within the Family

**Ms. Neven Melek \***

## **Abstract**

In addressing teen suicide, some difficult questions need to be answered. Although I do not believe it's uncommon for teenagers to experience suicidal thoughts, I feel that there is something wrong with the way we respond to being thought about, and we should try our best to prevent it. Many people, both adults and children, consider ending their lives when circumstances get too challenging. While most of them never try, some of them do. One of the main institutions for religious development is the family, and parents are extremely important in forming the religious practices and beliefs of their offspring. Family relations can be significantly influenced by religion. Parenting techniques, family dynamics, and family formation decisions can all be influenced by religious beliefs and practices. For example, families that practice religion tend to have closer bonds and fewer marital disputes. Furthermore, parents who identify as religious might use their faith to inform their parenting choices and methods. However, depending on the religious practices and ideas being taught, the influence of religion on family dynamics might change. Isn't it time we just start accepting that suicidal thoughts are something that happened and instead start talking openly and responsibly about it.

**Keywords:** Suicide, teenagers, health, teens, Adolescents, Religious beliefs.

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## Introduction

Parental religiosity may have mixed effects on children, improving social and psychological development significantly but also possibly degrading intellectual achievement. It is crucial to remember, yet, that the influence of religion on a child's development may differ based on specific religious principles and concepts that are being taught. The good thing is that the process of acquiring religious practices and beliefs, or religious interactions within the family or/and with others, can have a big influence on how well families' function.

On the other hand, the influence of religion on children's development can also be inconsistent in some circumstances. Furthermore, decisions about family formation, including attitudes towards cohabitation and advanced family formation practices, might be determined by religious social development. However, the effects of religious interaction on how well families operate can differ based on their specific religious practices and beliefs the fact that are being taught. Remarkably, parenting practices can be strongly affected by religion. Parents who identify as religious can leverage

their faith in determining their parenting choices and methods. For instance, traditional parental approaches, which are defined by high degrees of warmth, support, and communication as well as precise expectations and boundaries, maybe more predominant among religious parents. Authoritarian parenting methods, which promote strict discipline and control above warmth and support, are also more common among religious parents. It's difficult to have a conversation about suicide, this silent killer, especially when it comes to young suicide.

However, considering what specific beliefs and practices are being taught, the influence of religion on parenting techniques can differ. For example, while some religious traditions place a high value on emotional support and nurturing, others may place a greater emphasis on rigid obedience and discipline. Cross-sectional research provides most of the evidence that families with religious backgrounds may protect against many issues such as teen suicide. Comprehending the correlation between religious faith, spirituality, and suicide is crucial for evaluating and tending to individuals who may be at

danger. The most important thing we can do to support a loved one who is struggling is to learn to recognize suicidal thoughts from the beginning, understand what it looks like in teenagers, how to tackle that issue, and then how to cope with it. In my humble opinion, it needs to be widely acknowledged that suicide is not a shame or guilt issue.

Isn't it time we just start accepting that suicidal thought is something that happened and instead start talking openly and responsibly about it.

### **Definitions/measurement and phenomenology**

Suicide is death caused by injuring oneself with the intent to die. A suicide attempt is when someone harms themselves with any intent to end their life, but they do not die as a result of their actions.

Many factors can increase the risk for suicide or protect against it. Suicide is connected to other forms of injury and violence. For example, people who have experienced violence, including child abuse, bullying, or sexual violence have a higher suicide risk. Being connected to family

and community support and having easy access to health care can decrease suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

As Cynthia Pfeffer, one of the leading researchers in prepubertal suicidal behavior, has stated, “Suicidal behavior is a developmental process that begins at an earlier phase of the life cycle than when this behavior manifests.”

### **Why Do Teens Consider Suicide?**

Suicide is complex and rarely attributed to any one factor. Young people with mental health problems — such as anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, or insomnia — are at higher risk for suicidal thoughts. Teens going through major life changes (parents' divorce, moving, a parent leaving home due to military service or parental separation, financial changes) and those who are bullied are at greater risk of suicidal thoughts. Many teens that attempt or die by suicide have a mental health condition. As a result, they have trouble coping with the stress of being a teen, such as dealing with rejection, failure,

breakups, school difficulties and family turmoil. They might also be unable to see that they can turn their lives around, and that suicide is a permanent response, not a solution, to a temporary problem. Among younger children, suicide attempts are often impulsive. They may be associated with feelings of sadness, confusion, anger, or problems with attention and hyperactivity. Among teenagers, suicide attempts may be associated with feelings of stress, self-doubt, pressure to succeed, financial uncertainty, disappointment, and loss. For some teens, suicide may appear to be a solution to their problems.

There's very little research into the reasons why teenagers suicide but the recent research that does exist speaks about how teenagers' high suicide rates are linked to things that increase the risk of suicide among teens include:

- A psychological disorder, especially depression, bipolar disorder, and alcohol and drug use (in fact, about 95% of people who die by suicide have a psychological disorder at the time of death).
- Feelings of distress, irritability, or agitation.
- Feelings of hopelessness and

worthlessness that often come with depression.

- A previous suicide attempt.
- A family history of depression or suicide.
- Emotional, physical, or sexual abuse.
- Lack of a support network, poor relationships with parents or peers, and feelings of social isolation.
- Exposure to violence.
- Impulsivity.
- Aggressive or disruptive behavior.
- Access to firearms.
- Bullying.
- Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness.
- Acute loss or rejection.

### **Prevalence**

Although suicide is relatively rare among children, the rate of suicides and suicide attempts increases greatly during adolescence, it is estimated that suicide is one of the top causes of death among adolescents around the world, and that its prevalence in this age group has quadrupled in recent decades. The prevalence

of suicidal thoughts and behaviors among youth varies across countries and sociodemographic populations, it is consequently being acknowledged in the scientific community as one of the major public health issues in the world. As an orientation, in 2002 there were 877,000 suicides in the world, of which approximately 200,000 were adolescents and young adults.

According to the WHO (World Health Organization)

- More than 700 000 people die due to suicide every year.
- For every suicide there are many more people who attempt suicide. A prior suicide attempt is the single most important risk factor for suicide in the general population.
- Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death in 15-19-year-olds.
- 77% of global suicides occur in low- and middle-income countries.
- Ingestion of pesticide, hanging and firearms are among the most common methods of suicide globally.

According to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) Suicide is the second leading cause of death for people ages 10-34, the fourth leading cause among people ages 35-44, and the fifth leading cause among people ages 45-54.

### **Latest Suicide Rates for Adolescents**

The pandemic has had a measurable impact on teen suicide statistics. Rates of suicidal ideation and attempts among teens were nearly twice as high during the first half of 2020 as compared to 2019—illustrating the significant negative effect of the pandemic on adolescent well-being. Studies examining depression and suicide among teens reveal the following troubling statistics. In the past 10 years, suicide rates among young people ages 10–17 have increased by more than 70 percent.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death in the United States among the ages 15–24. Current teen suicidal stats show that 17 percent of high school students have seriously considered suicide, and 8 percent have made failed suicide attempts. More than half of the teens who try to commit suicide have never been given a

mental health diagnosis. The rate of suicide is four times greater for lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth, and two times greater for questioning youth compared to straight youth. The number of teens admitted to children's hospitals as a result of suicidal thoughts or self-harm has more than doubled during the last decade.

Whereas suicide is a leading cause of death across all age groups, suicidal thoughts and behaviors among youth warrant particular concern for several reasons:

- First, the sharpest increase in the number of suicide deaths throughout the life span occurs between early adolescence and young adulthood (Nock, Borges, Bromet, Alonso et al., 2008; WHO, 2017).
- Second, suicide ranks higher as a cause of death during youth compared with other age groups. It is the second leading cause of death during childhood and adolescence, whereas it is the tenth leading cause of death among all age groups (CDC, 2017).
- Third, many people who have ever considered or attempted suicide in their life first did

so during their youth, as the lifetime age of onset for suicidal ideation and suicide attempt typically occurs before the mid-20s (Kessler, Borges, & Walters, 1999).

- Finally, suicide death is preventable, with adolescence presenting a key prevention opportunity resulting in many more years of life potentially saved. By gaining a better understanding of how and why suicide risk emerges during youth, we can offer opportunities to intervene on this trajectory earlier in life.

### **Gender suicide rates**

Sex presents a now well-established paradox in which adolescent girls are more likely to have experienced suicidal ideation and suicide attempt than boys, but adolescent boys are more likely to die by suicide. The sex difference in suicide death rates among youth tend to mimic those found among adults, such that boys and young men die by suicide at a rate of more than two times, and sometimes more than three times that of girls and young women.

Rates of suicide in most countries



are higher in males than in females. In recent years, several countries have experienced an increase in suicide rates in males, particularly in the younger age groups. In contrast, suicide rates of females have declined, especially in older women, or remained fairly stable, particularly in the young. With an overall rise in male rates and a decrease in female rates. It suggests that causal factors and, possibly, protective factors have changed in different directions in the two genders. Social factors, especially linked to changes in gender roles, seem the most likely explanation.

### **Suicidal thoughts and behaviors in teenagers**

- **Cognitive Development and Maturity**

The variability of teenagers' cognitive maturity through prepuberty has implications for their understanding of the seriousness and finality of suicide. Most of the research agrees that depression is the risk factor most commonly involved in suicidal behavior among young people. However, many authors also insist on hopelessness as a more accurate predictor. According to Beck, the state of hopelessness is defined

as a system of cognitive patterns with the common denominator of negative future prospects. Under these circumstances, suicidal thoughts may be understood as an extreme expression of the desire to escape from what seem to be unsolvable problems or an intolerable situation. Indeed, adolescence is a critical period during which stressful changes take.

- **The relationship between psychiatric disorders and adolescent suicide**

Much of the decrease in suicide ideation and suicide attempts seem to be attributable to nonspecific elements in treatment. For high-risk youth, cognitive behavioral therapy would offer better possibilities to prevent suicides. Mood disorders, substance abuse, and prior suicide attempts are strongly related to youth suicides. Factors related to family adversity, social alienation, and precipitating problems also contribute to the risk of suicide.

The main target of effective prevention of youth suicide is to reduce suicide risk factors recognition and effective treatment of psychiatric disorders.

- **Warning signs of suicidal thoughts**

Knowing the signs and symptoms associated with suicide is a start to preventing teen suicide, by studying and understanding the developmental processes of suicidal behavior and thinking, important information and Warning signs can be gleaned which will inform suicide prevention and intervention efforts.

Warning signs associated with suicide can include:

- Ups and downs more than anybody else.
- Acting differently than usual.
- Crying or getting angry for no good reason.
- Distraction focus.
- Not able to sleep or sleep too much.
- Shutting her friends out.
- Giving the stuff away.
- Acting recklessly.
- Drinking drugs.
- Staying out late.
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits.
- Frequent or pervasive sadness.
- Withdrawal from friends, family, and regular activities.

- Frequent complaints about physical symptoms often related to emotions, such as stomachaches, headaches, fatigue, etc.
- Decline in the quality of schoolwork.
- Preoccupation with death and dying.
- Stop planning for or talking about the future. They may begin to give away important possessions.

### **Treatment and prevention**

We lived in a time where suicide wasn't considered something that you spoke about it was swept under the carpet, and a cause shame amongst families, nothing's really changed we still struggle to talk about it we label it as abnormal or unusual and we make them wrong for having suicidal thoughts, and because we think of it this way it stops us from being able to talk about it, and we stay silent instead and suicide remain shrouded in this stigma. We can take steps to help protect your teen. For example:

- If you suspect that your teen might be thinking about suicide, talk to him or her

immediately. Don't be afraid to use the word "suicide" Talking about suicide won't plant ideas in your teen's head. If you think your kid acting different, if he seems like a different person, in fact the best way to keep a teenager from killing herself is to ask straight-out: are you thinking about killing yourself?

- Talk about mental health and suicide. Don't wait for your teen to come to you. If your teen is sad, anxious, depressed or appears to be struggling, ask what's wrong and offer your support.
- Discourage isolation, encourage your teen to spend time with supportive friends and family.
- Teenagers can't always ask for help; because they feel that asking for help will make them a burden. If they are struggling with anything they haven't told us, and can we think about how we respond to that, how we choose to empathize with their pain, and make space for them and listen to them.
- Share with your teen your feelings, let him know he or she is not alone and

that everyone feels sad or depressed or anxious now and then, including moms and dads. Without minimizing his anguish, be reassuring that these bad times won't last forever. Things truly will get better and you will help get your child through counseling and other treatment to help make things better for him or her.

- Ask your teen to talk about his or her feelings and listen. Don't dismiss his or her problems. Instead, reassure your teen of your love. Remind your teen that he or she can work through whatever is going on — and that you're willing to help.
- Also, seek medical help for your teen. Ask your teen's doctor to guide you. Teens who are feeling suicidal usually need to see a psychiatrist or psychologist experienced in diagnosing and treating children with mental health problems.
- Find someone can talk to about it someone who knows how to help; talk to a counselor at school. Make sure that your kid always has someone to turn to someone he trusts.

- Keep an eye on your teen's social media accounts; it can expose them to bullying, rumor spreading, unrealistic views of other people's lives, and peer pressure. If your teen is hurt or upset by social media posts or messages, encourage him or her to talk to you or a trusted teacher.
- Encourage a healthy lifestyle. Help your teen eat well, exercise, and get regular sleep.

## Conclusion

- Suicide among children and adolescents is claimed to be a morbid process of neurobiological etiopathology, rather than the desires of the individuals themselves.
- There is an overall tendency to try to find and classify the psychopathological aspects involved in suicide.
- Gender differences in suicidal behavior clearly merit more research attention to induce information that can guide clinical practice and prevention strategies in ways during which will prove the handiest for preventing

suicidal behavior in both genders.

- Teenage suicide is often reduced or prevented through education.
- Parents should be educated and encouraged to talk to their children about suicide, and ensure their children understand that their parents are there for them. Teachers, doctors, and clergymen mustn't be afraid to talk to children about suicide.
- Children should be taught about suicide and encouraged to act if they believe one altogether their friends is potentially suicidal. If there are more ways to induce out a message about suicide; like, television commercials, magazine articles, or even radio talk shows, then one would have more knowledge on the subject of suicide. If that happened, then more people would be ready to recognize wondering suicide or was on the purpose of the kill.
- Suicide is an occurrence that's preventable. By recognizing the signs and symptoms of suicide and knowing the available resources.

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# Contemporary Western Family Structure in the Thought of Abdel Wahab Al-Messiri



**Dr. Sekou Marafa Toure \***

## **Abstract**

The family system is one of the most important themes in religious thought because it symbolizes a part of human reality, and religions have long sought to explain the nature of man in terms of identifying the relationship between human existence and the Creator. Abdel Wahab al-Messiri (1938 - 2008) is a modern Egyptian thinker who understands both Arab Islamic Eastern and Western culture. Although his thoughts on secularism, Palestine, English, Zionism, literature, and Judaism piqued researchers' interest, his contributions to the family were often overlooked. This study attempts to examine the most important issues of the Western family in al-Messiri's writings. By explaining al-Messiri's readings of the Western family concept and its relationship with the society, deducing the factors that led to the emergence of contemporary family challenges according to his view, studying the most important manifestations of contemporary family challenges, and extracting al-Messiri's solutions to reactivate family moral values. The researcher uses inductive and analytical methods, focusing on four works by al-Messiri: *Encyclopedia of Jews and Judaism*, *Milestones of Contemporary Islamic Discourse*, *Zionism and Violence*, and *Partial Secularism and Comprehensive Secularism*. The research

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findings include a comparison of the East and West's conceptions of the family, highlighting the differences between traditional family structures and modern families. It also reveals that modern civilization, with all of its features, is the root cause of today's family problems, and that the way to overcome them is to invoke the universal human values that the West still adheres to, whether as a holdover from religious doctrine or as absolute human values.

**Keywords:** Family values, family challenges, Abdel Wahab al-Messiri, Contemporary Islamic thought, Modern Civilization, Secularism, Women

## **Preface**

In the name of Allah, the most merciful and the most gracious. Praise be to Allah, and peace be upon the Messenger, all his family members, companions, and those who followed them until the Day of Judgment. Only in its observable social, economic, cultural, and other forms does life have meaning. Family is not an exception to this rule. The family is a social entity that is governed by culture, religion, and the dominant civilization. The

family faced several challenges yesterday, and it continues to face some challenges today. These difficulties caused the family's structure to change in some ways; some of these changes touched on the fixed side of some religions and cultures, while others related to the evolving flexible aspect of religion and culture, and still others fall somewhere in between.

Upon observing religious thoughts, the modern Islamic religious thought in particular, one finds that experts in the area have taken an interest in current situations and have endeavored to discover fresh problems associated with them, such as family and general societal issues. Al-Messiri is without a doubt one of the most well-known academics of modern Arabic/ Islamic thinking who contributed to his issues. Furthermore, the goal of this study is to look at the most pressing modern family concerns and to comprehend the challenges that arise because of the new changes, using al-Messiri's concept. The family is regarded as the most important institution for bringing peace to the human heart and shaping individuals into complex social beings. Family relationships are characterized by love and affection.

The research limitation hindered the analysis of the study considering Muslim academics' writings and opinions in modern Islamic thought, who have made efforts and stated viewpoints that are obviously comparable or different from al-Messiri's. The research will respond to the following questions:

1. What is al-Messiri's definition of family, and how does it relate to society in his writings?
2. According to al-Messiri, what circumstances have led to today's family challenges?
3. How do al-Messiri's thoughts reflect contemporary family challenges?
4. What remedies has al-Messiri recommended to revitalize family values?

### **Part 1: Al-Messiri's definition of family and its relationship to society in the west**

#### ***First: Definition of the family and its patterns***

Al-Messiri defines family as man's fundamental and final shelter, as well as the space within which society achieves continuity of identity and value system. Thus, the family is the primary

unit of society through which values are taught to individuals and turned into citizens and social beings. (Al-Messiri, 1999). He has also underlined this concept by explaining that the family is the key social structure responsible for conveying the community's legacy and experiences to young people. (Al-Messiri, 1999). However, this meaning of the family for al-Messiri has collapsed in the West, and the world was influenced by the Western control of technology and media.

Al-Messiri demonstrates that the family in the west therefore can take various forms (much like sexual orientation); in the past, there was an extended family of three generations, which eventually decreased to the nuclear family with a man, his wife, and their two offspring (ideally male and female so that society can reproduce itself). In the United States, they now term the nuclear family the "core family" and refer to other forms of families. Furthermore, al-Messiri observes that even this core family has become a minority, as there are various varieties, such as a father with his children, and a mother alone with her children. Father and mistress with their children, mother and

lover with their children Mother and friend with her or their children; father and friend with his or their children. The father's lover can join the family with the mother's permission. The family structure becomes as follows: a mother, a father, his friend, and their offspring. Thus, dualism, centralization, and authority as references fell and crumbled. (Al-Messiri, 1999).

In addition, illegitimate children were called illegitimate children. However, via adaption, they became known as "unwed mothers," then "sons of a single-parent family," and finally the deterministic label "natural babies," which indicates that the incident was registered against an unknown individual or that it was the result of nature/matter. Finally, they were referred to as "love babies," an ambiguous English word. The English word "love" signifies both "love" and "sex"; "to make love," which some people read as "sex" whereas these actions have nothing to do with love or hate), hence the notion of "children of love/sex". Then he concluded that, whatever the original meaning, the new phrase covers the origins and makes the phenomenon of illegitimate offspring a perfectly normal

phenomenon, i.e. the transfer occurred from *haram* -unlawful- and *halal* -lawful- to neutrality, just as the prostitute became a "sex worker". Throughout this process, the unaccepted value of the connection is completely resolved and becomes normal. (Al-Messiri, 1999)

### ***Second: The family's relationship with society***

Just as the concept of family has evolved in the West and its patterns have multiplied, so has current Western society's perspective on society and the nature of the interaction between members of society, as well as the family. In the West, social bonds are voluntary and contractual, and the family serves as the foundation of society. The contract may be rejected at any time, and anything can be debated and discussed. As a result, the family is not the symbiotic and symbiotic organic group, as it is with people in the Middle East, rather, society functions as an automatic contractual process. According to al-Messiri, social relations in the West are not primary direct relations between individuals without mediation, as it is understood in the Middle East before contemporary civilization

and secularism, nor are they warm relations of compassion in a spirit of solidarity, participation, and spontaneous cooperation, and they are founded on faith in a common religious system and social norms. As a result, the family is not a symbiotic organic group, as we it is in the Middle East. (Al-Messiri, 1999)

### **Part 2: Factors of Family Challenges According to al-Messiri**

According to al-Messiri, various factors contribute to family challenges in the West, including the following:

#### ***First: The materialist vision and focus on production in Western society are at the heart of current family transformations***

Materialist philosophy and contemporary civilization threatened family values because the steady increase of production is the ultimate goal of existence in the universe, so the secular nation-state emerged at home and European colonialism abroad to ensure this productive increase, and the philosophy of contemporary civilization was based on a philosophical vision that absolutely believes in materialism and adopts science and technology separate

from value. Intermediary social institutions such as the family are weakened, replaced by new definitions of the family: two men and children, a woman and a child, two women and children, all based on the background of the absence of constants governing the ethics of society and technological development that provides alternatives that did not exist previously in the field of genetic engineering. (Al-Messiri, Partial Secularism and Comprehensive Secularism, 2002)

#### **Second: Intentions trying to destroy the family system**

The eradication of the family is not an accident, a natural result, or a natural reaction of modern civilization only; rather, some institutions purposefully strive to destroy the family. Al-Messiri warned that the kibbutz movement, for example (kibbutz means “grouping” or “gathering” in Hebrew. It’s a community where people voluntarily live and work together on a noncompetitive basis) seeks to eliminate some human social institutions such as marriage and the family, under the pretext that they are old bourgeois institutions that are outdated, and that “progress” requires setting them aside. To al-Messiri, many

kibbutzim attempted to eliminate gender disparities so that women might be entirely liberated, so work was dispersed among members regardless of sexual orientation, and any work or employment may be assigned to women. This trend has been encouraged by the collective rearing of children, away from parental influence, which has (exempted) women from the function of motherhood, a function that in all other civilizations prevents them from carrying out men's jobs and work. (Al-Messiri, 2002)

The goal of this movement according to al-Messiri is to restore the family as an institution, so undermining the kibbutz's general military attitude, which seeks to separate people from their families to become full warriors. (Al-Messiri, 2002). However, to be objective and fair, al-Messiri presented the exact opposite of these endeavors and plans. He observed that perhaps one of the most significant other developments in this direction (a negative development in the eyes of the kibbutz's founders and leaders) is the resurgence of the family, as evidenced by the return of independent housing and the fact that many children join their parents and spend all

or most of their free time in their homes or independent housing units, away from school and the various kibbutz institutions. Some kibbutzim have begun to build middle-class flats in any modern Western country. (Al-Messiri, 2002)

***Third: Is the root cause of these changes in the West a difference in the source of values, or a clash of civilizations?***

Concerning the aforementioned contemporary family changes in the West, whether influenced by the contemporary Western civilizational vision or the goal of various Western institutions to abolish family features, do they fit into the circle of human constants, which Arabs, Muslims, and everyone else should reject, or the circle of variables, which they should accept?

We discover that al-Messiri approached the subject from the perspective of Huntington's theory. Who believes that every civilization has a vision of the universe centered on the relationship between man and God (the individual and society, part and whole), and that this vision is based on cognitive and moral systems that determine the hierarchy of responsibilities

and rights (equality and power, the individual, the family, the citizen, the state, conflict, and consistency). This image of the universe is established in humans over generations and cannot be erased in a few years, and what people of a certain civilization see as fundamental, others may see as marginal. According to Huntington, various civilizations are built on the foundations of history, language, culture, and traditions, with religion being the most important. According to al-Messiri, thus, the West emphasizes that the reference (or any reference) has disappeared, and a world has developed with no specificity or center. In this centerless world, in which people walk without a center or a goal, they cannot communicate or belong to a homeland or family, each individual is an isolated island or a small story, so a one-dimensional consumer person appears, who sets his goals every day, and changes his values after a short notice that comes to him from advertisements and the media, the human being of the world of global consumerism, who produces efficiently, consumes efficiently, and maximizes! (Al-Messiri, 1999)

### **Part 3: The manifestations of family challenges according to al-Messiri**

Family challenges in the west can be obviously seen in the following phenomena:

#### ***First: The Phenomenon of Women empowerment***

Paying attention to the women's liberation movement, this asks that women be granted their rights as members of society, including their roles as mothers and workers. Commodity profiling normalizes and rationalizes life, whereas driving speeds it. The expansion of public life, the atrophy of private life, the beginning of the internationalization of the way of life, and the decrease of local color are observed. (Al-Messiri, 2002)

#### ***Second: The phenomenon of family erosion, disintegration, and disappearance***

The extended family almost disappears, to be replaced by the nuclear family, which also begins to disintegrate, and desires are upheld in the name of the ideal within the family. The erosion of the family to al-Messiri accelerates until it disappears completely, and alternative forms of the family appear (a family of

one man, children of one woman, children of two men, children of two women, children of two men, women, and children... etc.). The feminine-centric movement emerges, which views women as objects in conflict with men, and therefore does not demand women's rights, but rather demands better conflict competencies, language change, and a modification of the course of history. (Al-Messiri, 2002)

### ***Third: Separating sex from moral and social values***

With the decline of utopia and the disappearance of the family as a mechanism for transmitting elevating desires, individuals are experiencing sexual frenzy, which is exacerbated by the pleasure sector, which works to destroy moral values and spread consumerist values that become the standard for judging man (and thus good taste replaces good morals and aesthetic values replace moral values). Another explanation for the growth in sexual frenzy is the dissociation of sex from moral and societal worth, resulting in sexuality becoming the reference itself. (Al-Messiri, 1999)

### ***Fourth: Self-centeredness and interest in work at the expense of the family***

Al-Messiri argues that secular societies prioritize self-centeredness and work over family values, causing the family to become a source of conflict and rivalry rather than a place for rest. Everyone in the modern family is involved in the market; the father works, the mother works, and in industrialized nations, sons work as well. The family has become a transient arrangement: when children reach the age of sixteen, they leave the home, and when parents reach retirement age, they move into the shelter of the elderly. This family is highly likely to collapse by divorce (60%) as seen by al-Messiri.

And the prospect of starting a family with individuals who are not directly related (husband and children from a prior marriage with a wife, children from a previous marriage... According to the most recent alterations we indicated in the "transfer" entrance), it has risen dramatically. In fact, all of this implies greater self-centeredness, more sense of isolation, and more immersion in the mundane everyday mechanisms that undermine



warmth, love, sympathy, and compassion. (Al-Messiri, 1999)

***Fifth: Al-Messiri identifies suicide and isolationism as expressions of family challenges***

Al-Messiri believed in Durkheim's study, which concluded that the phenomenon of suicide within the framework of sociology, demonstrating that suicide is not an individual psychological deviation as it was imagined, but a social fact, so he tried to link suicide rates as determined by him and the differences in social solidarity between different groups, and discovered that the more societal controls and family ties erode, the weaker the solidarity, the greater the individual's Suicide is negatively correlated with the extent of solidarity in society. (Al-Messiri, 1999)

***Sixth: A set of manifestations specified by al-Messiri: (Al-Messiri, 1999)***

Contemporary family difficulties include:

1- The prevalence of the values of utility, pleasure, individualism, and selfishness in Western societies, which are called "advanced", values that contradict the idea of family, marriage,

having children, and raising them, with all that includes restrictions on freedom and abandonment of direct sensory pleasure.

2. Late marriage. It is a widespread phenomenon in "advanced" Western nations caused by the breakdown of the family institution, the long time it takes to educate, and the delay in children's economic independence.

3 The percentage of homosexuals in so-called "advanced" Western countries (up to 30 percent in some places), including a sizable Jewish population. Most homosexuals are sexually active, implying that many males and females retreat from the reproduction process.

4- The retreat of many women from the process of childbirth in Western nations that are considered "advanced" due to the impact of the female-centric movement, which views any private female activity (such as procreation) as undesirable or impedes women's participation in public life. Most of the leaders of this organization are Jewish, and the proportion of Jewish women active in it exceeds the national norm (national average).

5- Strong bureaucratic institutions (governmental and non-

governmental) have emerged that have assumed many of the functions that the family previously held and carry out the selection process on behalf of the individual person, which means the increasing atrophy of the moral sense and the shrinkage of the so-called “private life”.

#### **Part 4: Restoring family values in the West according to al-Messiri**

It is important to note that al-Messiri believes in the possibility of restoring family values through what is known in the thought of al-Messiri as “partial secularism,” as to him Christianity did not stop functioning in the public arena as a result of secularization immediately with the advent of secular philosophy (he called that comprehensive secularism), but persisted with its religious, moral, and human absoluteness in people’s consciences, and thoughts, and even in some intermediary institutions such as the family.

Not only may we drive family ethics out of the surviving secularization in the West (partial secularism), but also out of Humanism. Humanism, according to al-Messiri, had a similar role

in importing and seemingly secularizing some Christian absolute doctrines, changing them into absolute humanistic doctrines (in the form of human rights for example) and preserving them within their physical framework (with no genuine philosophical tie to this system). Whether it be a faith system or humanism, it maintains transcendental authority, resulting in dualism. This resulted in the formation of knowledge and ethical systems founded on absolute human thought (human rights for example). (Al-Messiri, 1999)

Al-Messiri goes further to explain that it’s as if the Western man lived his public existence in a secular society with a hidden materialistic authority (universal secularism), but dreamed, loved, hated, married, and died inside a framework of transcendental Christian or semi-Christian humanism (partial secularism). So, it is easy to find a professor of philosophy who teaches nihilistic pornography at the university (his public life), but he does not allow his daughter to live with someone without marriage and goes to church every Sunday. It was possible to find a capitalist who fully believed in the utilitarian values of the market while fiercely

defending the family institution, so the process of external social control was carried out through the underlying material reference or authority, while the internal social control process was carried out through the Christian or humanistic systems. Perhaps this is the basis of the secular claim of the independence of public life that rules the principles of the secular state from the private life that the secular state allows the person to exercise his religious freedom and ethnic identity. (Al-Messiri, 1999)

Thus, according to al-Messiri, although contemporary Western society had emerged as a furious imperialist civilization, it still included a great degree of dedication and confidence in absolute ideals at the level of vision, if not practice. This civilization likewise claimed to be a human, human-centered human civilization; Western civilizations were still socially and familiarly bonded, and many of the pathological phenomena that characterize Western society today had not yet evolved. (Al-Mesiri, 1998). As a result, al-Messiri believes that Western civilization was not entirely

secular material civilization, because values (religious and human) played an obvious and positive role in it, giving it a sense of cohesiveness and teleology.

In this regard al-Messiri stated that when the earliest Islamic reformers came into touch with this civilization, they did not come into contact with a secular civilization in the full sense, but with a partially secular society in which only some parts of public life were secularized. (Al-Mesiri, 1998). The scenario for the new Islamic discourse thinkers is considerably different, as most of them were intellectually formed in the 1950s and encountered Western civilization in the 1960s. We contend that Western civilization entered the crisis phase at that time, and many of its thinkers recognized the extent of the problem and the impasse entered by the Western modernity system. (Al-Mesiri, 1998). According to al-Messiri, the ideal means and mechanism for restoring family values in the West is to preserve the values that have survived because of the absolute human intellect, or as a result of “partial secularism”.

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## Tim Winter and John A. Williams, *Understanding Islam and the Muslims:*

The Muslim Family, Islam and World Peace (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2002). 96 pp. ISBN-13: 9781887752473

**Dr. Senad Mrahorović \***

The unfortunate events that occurred at the very beginning of the present millennium initiated a perpetual discussion concerning the nature of Islam and its peoples. Countless studies and research with a varying degree of academic quality has been carried out since then. While some responsible scholars and academicians were trying to identify the real cause of the crisis, without hastening towards any conclusions, let alone unfounded accusations, others were quick to place the full blame on Islam and Muslims as the main reason for the calamity that shocked the entire world. As a result of that, centuries-old and almost forgotten orientalist prejudices about Islam and Muslims resurfaced once again all-over western media and academia with all sorts of negative images and messages ascribed to it mostly in hasty and nasty ways. The similar and mixed reactions were coming from the Muslim world as well. While some authors tried to offer apologetic explanations of the events, others condemned the extremist and fundamentalist representation of their religion. In midst of that a few studies about Islam and Muslims were composed by those scholars whose primary goal is to

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simply underline the immutable principles of Islam based on which most Muslims lived in peace and prosperity in their often multi-religious and multi-cultural societies across the Islamic world for the past fourteen centuries and so. “Understanding Islam and the Muslims: The Muslim Family, Islam and World Peace” is one of those studies that offers authentic insights of the nature of Islam and Muslims in European languages.

The entire book was written in a question/answer form, whereby the authors dealt with the essential questions related to Islam and its followers. The book is divided into three main sections. In the first sections, numerous questions were concisely discussed from the meaning of the concept of Islam, its pillars, the Prophet Muhammad, and the Qur’anic revelation to subjects related to the Islamic perspective on other religions, its stance towards Christianity and Jesus in particular. Interestingly, in answering the question why does Islam often seem strange? the authors stated the following: “Islam may seem exotic or even extreme in the modern world. Perhaps this is because religion

does not dominate everyday life in the West today, whereas Muslims have religion always uppermost in their minds, and make no division between secular and sacred. They believe that the Divine Law, the Shari’a, should be taken very seriously, which is why issues related to religion are still so important.”<sup>1</sup>

The second part of the book is fully devoted to the concept of family in Islam, including the questions of love, relationship, marriage, Muslim attitude towards children and elderly, the culture of food and issues related to cultural diversity, art and architecture. After introducing the notion of family in Islam, relating it not only to the societal affairs, but also to the spiritual growth of Muslim community, the authors discussed several other important questions concerning Muslim attitude towards women, polygamy, and issues of human rights. In relation to the latter, the authors emphasized the fact that according to the traditional Islamic perspective the life and property of all citizens within an Islamic state are considered sacred, regardless of one’s

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1- Tim Winter and John A. Williams, *Understanding Islam and the Muslims: The Muslim Family, Islam and World Peace* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2002), pp. 5.

religious background. The similar Muslim attitude is expressed regarding the issue of racism and other national differences, in addition to the Islamic perspective towards war. These were followed by questions concerning male and female roles in society and some perhaps less known insights in relation to marriage and sexuality. As for the importance of love in Muslim relationships, the authors stated that the divine gift of love and its presence in human soul is the basis for love between human beings. They supported their argument with some qur'anic verses on love and the sayings of the Prophet of Islam. In addition to that, they noted an interesting fact that Taj Mahal, one of the most famous monuments in the world was build by a Muslim husband in honor of his beloved wife.

The third and the final section of the book is devoted to the Islamic perspective concerning peace. It seems like the authors in this concise book on Islam and Muslims were offering their unique interpretation of three main dimensions of Islam, namely, faith (*īmān*), submission (*islām*) and serenity (*iḥsān*). After offering the

readers what Muslims believe and the way they interact with each other as well as with others within or without their communities which may be taken as a practical reflection of their beliefs, the authors dedicated the last part of their work to the concept of peace in Islam, which may be rightly compared to the notion of *iḥsān* as the third dimension of Islamic religion. *Iḥsān* to certain extent comes as the final manifestation of *imān* and *islām*, intellectually and spiritually acquired and practiced by Muslims, which overtime evolve into a beautiful and perfect manifestation of a believer's peaceful life and attitude towards God and the entire creation. The Prophet defined *iḥsān* by the following words: "Iḥsān is to worship God as if you see Him, for even if you do not see Him, He sees you."<sup>2</sup> It is in line with these words that a Muslim envisages the world around him or her.

Salam, or peace, write the authors, "is the gift of God. In the Qur'an, one of God's divine attributes is the *al-Salām*, 'The Peace', or 'The Source of Peace'. The supreme form of peace is therefore the serenity, which is achieved in the

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2- Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2005), pp. xxv.



soul, as the Qur'an says: It is by remembering God that hearts find peace (13:28)."<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the authors etymologically linked the concept of peace with the meaning of Islam, or submission to God, an act that required one's internal peace and free will. Then a timeless and most important question, especially in our times was asked: "How can peace on earth be made a reality? To this the authors replied by stating that it is not enough to achieve peace by simply renouncing the war altogether, as some pacifists believe for such an action can defeat its own purpose if not all individuals and states are ready for such a stance. The authors believe that according to most religions and cultures peace is difficult to achieve without some forms of deterrence. That is why in cases when injustice and aggression are waged against innocent people or states, it is religiously permissible to resist such an evil and tyranny. In similar context the term *jihād* in all its various meanings and the rules of war in Islam were discussed.

In addition to this quite short but inspiring presentation of

Islam and Muslim to the Western audience, the content of the book is enriched and decorated with numerous pictures depicting beautiful images of Islamic world. The photos of Islamic calligraphy, famous architectural monuments across the Muslims world, in addition to countless images of Muslim peoples, men and women, young and old, are scattered along the questions and answers as though the authors were trying to provide certain answers by images that for the most part, "speak a thousand words". The book is therefore highly recommended, especially for those who are not very familiar with Islam and Muslims.

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3- Tim Winter and John A. Williams, *Ibid*, pp. 68.



## Akram Ridha, *The Muslim Family in Contemporary Society*

(Doha: Research and Studies Center at Awqaf and Islamic affairs). 383 pp.

**Dr. Sekou Marafa Toure \***

The goal of this study's reviewer is to evaluate the book **The Muslim Family in Contemporary Society**. The author is Dr. *Akram Ridha*. The reviewer intends to highlight the content of the book, the methodology of the study, and an overview of the topics of the book using the descriptive and analytical approaches, and then analyze the text by evaluating it, shedding light on the reason for authoring it, and relating it to the relevant studies and existing literature.

The book is published by the Research and Studies Center of Qatar's Ministry of *Awqaf* and Islamic Affairs, and it was originally authored in Arabic before being translated into English due to its importance. The book received the Sheikh Ali bin Abdullah Al Thani International Endowment Library Award from Qatar's Ministry of *Awqaf*. The documented ISBN for the book is 4-14-48-99921.

The book is one of the few family-related books issued by Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. The book is consistent with the Doha International Centre

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of Interfaith Dialogue’s goal of focusing on family issues in its upcoming major activities in 2024. The 18<sup>th</sup> edition of the “Religions” reviewed journal addresses the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Family: (A Religious Perspective), and the upcoming 15<sup>th</sup> Doha Conference on Interfaith Dialogue will address: Family Structure in Light of Changing World: Religious Perspective. “Integration of families, faith, values, and education”; I realized that it is crucial to review this book and present it to the audience, readers, and researchers.

Dr. *Akram Ridha* works as a faculty member at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals’ College of Applied and Support Studies.

**Talking about the purpose of authoring the book, it is clear that** the author began by pointing a finger at the challenges of modernity and Western civilization. To him, the family appears to be one of these fields where modern and materialistic values failed to achieve balance and happiness; human theories about the relationship between men and women or about the new unity of families, are but proving to be catastrophic, causing many irremediable damages in advanced societies where people want to be guided only by their

human reason, which is limited by human capacities.

This background information offers context for the author’s desire to publish the book. However, the primary reasons for publishing the book include:

1. To present a Muslim family model
2. To present experiences of Muslim families from the Prophet’s (PBUH) age
3. To advocate the Muslim family model as a means of achieving our community’s ultimate goal
4. To reconstruct Islamic civilization by constructing and educating the future generation about the flaws of contemporary Muslim families

Perhaps one of the most crucial aspects to recognize and examine is the **author’s approach to his work**. Those who have read the book will identify the author’s approach as the following:

**First: descriptive and historical methods:** the author’s main methods, as indicated throughout the book, are descriptive and historical methods. The author tends to elucidate Islamic themes in the same way as Muslim jurists do in *Fiqh* texts from Islamic tradition, but in a more modern

manner.

The author's methodology is not well stated in his work. However, this is understandable in light of the book's preface. This is also reflected by the book's various titles and discussions.

**Second: General assertions** (Critical approach): The author occasionally generalizes conclusions without attempting to prove them; to him, they are clear. This is true generally, but especially when it comes to critiquing Western and modern civilization.

**Third: comprehensiveness:** this is true when the author integrates family concerns with contemporary Islamic topics and discusses human rights, women in Islam, Islamic society, education, and Islamic civilization.

**Fourth, the book uses an indirect comparative methodology:** comparing and contrasting the traditional Muslim family with the modern/Western model. Examples include the concept of family, same-sex marriage, child education, nuclear and extended families, and so on.

Moreover, among the most important reasons for choosing this book for a review are the following:

1. The book is relevant to the upcoming issue of the Journal of Religion. The book is on **family in modern society**, and the Journal's issue is titled **Family Structure in Light of Changing World: Religious Perspective**.

2. I have also selected this book for its significance, as outlined below:

A- The book targeted two groups of Muslims.

- The first category includes men and women who are interested in learning about Islamic family traditions and comparing them to Western family models.
- The second category includes the majority of Muslims, leaders, and grassroots men and women. Those who aspire to live an Islamic lifestyle.

B- The book supports the idea of the majority of Muslims in the Middle East by demonstrating the author's interpretation of the Islamic family and addressing issues in modern family institutions.

It is apparent that the *Da'wah* spirit is deeply embedded in the work, rather than only the academic aim of providing knowledge. That is good to satisfy DICID's purpose of providing religious

perspectives in the journal and the upcoming conference.

Furthermore, the book comprises 383 pages divided into five (5) main chapters, each of which highlights a specific theme to address thoroughly. The book presents the model of role models for the Muslim family, as a curriculum through studying the foundations on which the family was founded in Islam, as a practical application by presenting an actual practice that took place during the era of the Prophet and his companions, and finally as a means to achieve the highest goals of the Muslim nation, which is the advancement of civilization.

The author organized the book's content into five chapters and an introduction. The **introduction** discusses the historical development of the concept of family. In the **first chapter**, he discussed the Islamic foundation of the Muslim family. The **second chapter** introduces the ideal type of family, by evaluating the family structure and interactions during the Prophet's (PBUH) and Caliphs' eras. The **third chapter** discusses the family's function in human education and civilization-building. The **fourth chapter** covers the obstacles faced by the Muslim family. In the **fifth chapter**, he attempted to address

the following question: How can the Muslim family accomplish its duty and become an ideal example for others?

**Among the positive points** that the reviewer of the book sees in the book are the following:

1. The book's contribution to spreading awareness of the importance of family from a religious perspective, Islam in particular.
2. The book's contribution to the improvement of people's mentality towards family in Islam.
3. Unified and logical coherence between the themes of the book
4. A good study (employment) of the biography of the prophet. The author has included important information from the prophet's biography and his companion in the book.
5. Perhaps the message of the book is the following: Islamic civilization knows aspects of sports competition, and the event of sports competition represented by hosting the 2022 World Cup in Qatar should not be strange in Islamic society, nor is it new in Islamic civilization.
6. Comprehensiveness of the

book: this is true when the author integrates family concerns with contemporary Islamic topics and discusses human rights, women in Islam, Islamic society, education, and Islamic civilization

**Nevertheless, for the analytical evaluation of the book; I would like to list some:**

**1- Lack of explanation when defining family in Islam:**

The definition's basis was unclear. Is it the author's own opinion or a consensus among Muslim scholars? This is because some Islamic points of view are directly derived from the revelation (*Qur'an or Hadith*), while others are based on Muslim scholars' attempts to comprehend the revelation.

**2- Lack of Identifying permanent and transitory characteristics of Islam in the book:**

This is because some Islamic laws are cultural, historical, and location-based, while others are permanent. For example, the author contends that in Islam, the family is founded on the adoption of the extended family, rather than the nuclear family. Is this

relevant to Islam's social and cultural evolution? Should time and cultural influences be considered, or is it constantly independent of time and location? Another example of this is a topic the author titled: **Attempts to distort the concept of "family"**, and he said: "Family according to the Islamic conception is the legal union between a man and a woman, from which children are born **to live in the context of a large family (grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins...)**. Some attempts are being done, nowadays, to distort this concept and this image. One of them is initiated by the international conferences about women and demography, where alternative terms are being developed to replace that of family.

3- The author occasionally generalizes conclusions and general assertions without attempting to prove them; to him, they are clear. This is true generally, but especially when it comes to critiquing Western and modern civilization.

4- The book could have benefited from a dedicated chapter on the challenges

of modern society for traditional Muslim families. It was expected that he would address contemporary issues right away, but he rarely does. Women's education, work, the complexity of materialism, and other financial factors might be adequately addressed as part of the most recent family challenges.

- 5- The book's worth may be derived from its methodology. Otherwise, the author simply confirmed and described what can be found in the book of *nikah* in traditional Muslim *fiqh* books.
- 6- Certain sections of the book, such as chapter 3's Part 4

on civilization, may not be relevant to the book title. I might even go so far as to argue that the entire third chapter is redundant. To be fair, we can look at it from the other side as the adoption of a comprehensive approach, to integrating family and civilization.

- 7- Some of the author's list of family problems may not be exclusively attributed to modernity. Many of the challenges raised are neither confined nor exclusive to the modern era. They existed as family problems before modern civilization.

Now, I invite you to read the book.





## Biographies



### Pr. Aawatif HAYAR

Minister of Solidarity, Social Inclusion and Family since October 2021. She received, with honors, as the First Moroccan, the degree of “Agrégation” in Electrical Engineering from Ecole Normale Supérieure de Cachan in 1992. She received the “Diplôme d’Etudes Approfondies” in Signal processing Image and Communications and the degree of Engineer in Telecommunications Systems and Networks from ENSEEIHT de Toulouse in 1997. She received with honors the Ph.D. degree in Signal Processing and Telecommunications from Institut National Polytechnique in Toulouse in 2001. She was research and teaching associate at EURECOM’s Mobile Communication Department from 2001 to 2010 in Sophia Antipolis-France. AawatifHayar has an HDR (Habilitation à Diriger la Recherche) from University Sud Toulon Var from France on Cognitive Wideband Wireless Systems on 2010 and an HDR on Green Télécommunication from University Hassan II Casablanca on 2013. From 2011 till June 2019, AawatifHayar had Professor position at the engineering school ENSEM of University Hassan II Casablanca. From June 2019 till October 2021, Pr. Aawatif Hayar was appointed President of the University Hassan II of Casablanca-Morocco and is the second female in the history of Morocco to occupy this position. She is also member of Casablanca “Avant-garde” City think-tank. She is co-initiator since 2013 of E-madina Smart City Cluster. Her research interests includes fields such as cognitive green communications systems, UWB systems, smart grids, smart sustainable social building, e-governance, open data for citizens, smart cities, ICT for social eco-friendly smart socio-economic development. Pr. AawatifHayaris also IEEE DLT Chair for EMEA region on 2014 and the designer of Frugal Social Sustainable Smart City concept for Casablanca and emerging countries which was selected by IEEE Smart City initiative as one of the most innovative projects in the world in 2015.

Pr. AawatifHayar is currently Chair of Casablanca IEEE Core Smart City project. She was also selected by the prestigious African Innovation Foundation as one of the top ten innovative African women in 2015. AawatifHayar has developed “Frugal Social Collaborative Sustainable Smart City Casablanca“, a new concept for smart city transformation which was distinguished by IEEE Smart city initiative in 2015 as an innovative cost effective inclusive smart city concept. She is the Scientific Advisor, at the City level, of Smart City Expo Casablanca and General Co-Chair of IEEE international Conference on Smart Cities (IEEE ISC2 -2019). Pr Hayar was elected in September 2021 member of the AUF (Agence Universitiare de la Francophonie) Council at the international level. Pr. AawatifHayar is currently leading or involved in a couple of R&D/Innovation projects with the City of Casablanca, the region Casablanca Settat, CNRST, INDH, GIZ and Heinrich Böll Stiftung such as End to End Energy Efficiency Living Lab, Virtual Museum of Casablanca, e-douar “Smart Inclusive Ecological village”and Solar Decathlon Africa E-Co Dar and Benguerir Smart City ASToN AFD projects.



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## Ms. Alena Demirovic

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Alena Lena Demirović is a General Secretary at the Institute for the Research of Genocide, Canada as well as a member of Sandžak Council of America and a Project Manager for North America region of the Bosniak Cultural Community Preporod, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Alena has extensive experience in advocacy and training on the protection of civil liberties and political rights, the promotion of economic and social justice, and international human rights law. She is in a process of receiving her AMP degree in Public Administration.



## Mr. Amir B. Ahmeti

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Amir is currently pursuing a PhD in International Peace Studies, with a focus on Human Rights and Human Security, at the University for Peace established by the UN in Skopje, North Macedonia. He has held various key positions in diplomatic service and government. Notably, from 2019 to 2021, served as the Ambassador of Kosova in Doha, Qatar. Having also served as a Member of Parliament, Deputy Minister and as the Director of the Kosova Institute for Middle East Studies, Ahmeti has demonstrated leadership and commitment to public service. As Chairman of the Governmental Religious Freedoms Committee actively contributed to the promotion of religious freedoms in Kosova.

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## Dr. Asna Isa

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Asna Isa obtained her PhD in Islamic Civilisation and Contemporary Issues from Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD). She also holds a Master's degree in Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (Fiqh) from International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Her educational journey also includes a Bachelor's degree in Syariah from Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA), Brunei Darussalam, along with participation in a study abroad program at Cairo University in Egypt. Previously, she actively served as a teaching assistant, both within and outside UBD. Her research interests revolve around Islamic law, specialising in family law, criminal law, and the application of the Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah, as well as dedicated inquiries into women and children's legal protection. Her work contributes to the broader understanding of these crucial areas within the field of Islamic studies.



## Dr. Cosmas Ebo Sarbah

Cosmas Ebo Sarbah is a senior lecturer at the department for the study of Religions, University of Ghana. He earned his PhD in Islamic Studies from The Center for Christian-Muslim Relations, University of Birmingham, UK. His research interests include Intra-Muslim Dialogue in Sub-Saharan Africa, Intra-Christian Dialogue in Sub-Saharan Africa, Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Sub-Saharan Africa. He has published several papers in the field of interfaith dialogue.

## Mr. Mohammad Aamir



Mohammad Aamir is a freelance translator and a teacher of Islamic studies. He is graduated from an Islamic university, Jamiatul Falah (جامعة الفلاح), Azamgarh, U.P. India. He translates books, booklets and articles from Arabic, English, and Urdu languages to Nepali Language. He is working as a procurement manager, and food and beverage manager in Meridian International School, Baluwatar, Kathmandu. He is playing a joint secretary role in Nepali Jame Masjid, Ghanta Ghar, Katmandu and is serving the Muslim community of Kathmandu. Interfaith dialogue, comparative studies of religions and different school of thoughts in Islam are his fields of interest.



## Mr. Muhammad Bilal

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Che' Mat bin Haji Abu Samah Shukri  
Muhammad Bilal Che' Mat bin Haji Abu Samah Shukri graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Shari'ah Fiqh and Uşul from Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) in 2019. He is currently a graduate researcher in Islamic Jurisprudence (al-Fiqh al-Islāmī) and Gender Issues from the Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Centre for Islamic Studies, UBD. Having been trained in traditional Islamic Knowledge, he is presently teaching the Classical Islamic Books (Turāth) in Brunei Darussalam, especially in Fiqh.

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## Dr. Senad Mrahorović

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Senad Mrahorović is a lecturer and tutor at Sultan Omar 'Ali Saifuddien Centre for Islamic Studies (SOASCIS), Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD). He also works as a researcher and editor for Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue DICID. Mrahorović received a PhD in Philosophy, Ethics and Contemporary Issues from International Center of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), Malaysia. His research interests include Religious Studies, Sufism, Orientalism, Philosophy and Religious Art. He has edited four volumes of Conference Proceedings for DICD and published several academic articles in various publications.



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## Ms. Neven Melek

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Neven Melek is an Egyptian lawyer and a Human Rights activist. She worked as a monitoring and advocacy manager and Head of International Relations at Doha Center for Media Freedom. Prior to her social work, she was a humanitarian and community worker with organizations including the Association of Coptic Love and Peace in Egypt. She was an active human rights activist, a lawyer and she was a member of the Lawyers Association in Egypt.

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## Dr. Sekou Marafa Toure

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Dr. Sekou worked as an Assistant Professor at University of Sharjah, Department of Theology, Faculty of Shariah and Islamic Studies from 2017 to 2020. He also worked as an Assistant Professor and then Associate Professor at Al-Medina International University, in Malaysia from 2013 to 2017. His area of expertise is theology and comparative religion (Islamic studies). He received his Bachelor's degree from Qatar University Doha - Qatar in 2007; in SHARIA and Islamic Studies, specializing in Theology (USUL DIN). He received his Master's and PhD degrees from the International Islamic University Malaysia, specializing in Usūl al-Dīn and comparative religion. He is now a senior researcher at Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue. He was Assoc. Prof. Dr. in the Department of Islamic Studies, College of Education Sciences, Multi-Specialization Center, Ouagadougou - Burkina Faso. He served as the Dean of Scientific Research from February 2014 to September 2016. He is the founder and president of TOURE Educational Center.

