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Abstract

This book, explores the historical adventure of the ideal woman identity in the early Islamic thought. However, it gives information about the nature of the ideal life (Islamic life) in line with the examples of women in question. In this way, it is emphasized how the ideal life differs from the period of Jāhiliyya. Here, while the period of Jāhiliyya is evaluated as disorder, lawlessness and aberration, the Islamic life is shown as order and justice image. In this respect, Islam has been conceptualized as an alternative to the corrupt life of the Jāhiliyya as well as being the reference to the religion.

Keywords: *History, Islam, Abbasid İdentity, Woman, el-Cheikh.*

Öz

Bu çalışma, erken İslam düşüncesindeki ideal kadın kimliğinin tarihsel serüvenini incelemektedir. Bununla birlikte çalışma, söz konusu kadın örnekleri doğrultusunda ideal hayatın (İslami hayat) mahiyeti hakkında malumat vermektedir. Bu şekilde ideal hayatın Cahiliye döneminden nasıl farklılaştığı vurgulanmıştır. Cahiliye dönemi düzensizlik, hukuksuzluk ve sapkınlık olarak değerlendirilirken, İslami hayat ise düzen ve adalet timsali olarak gösterilmiştir. Bu bakımdan İslam bir dine matuf olmasının yanı sıra Cahiliye döneminin bozuk yaşamına alternatif olarak kavramsallaştırılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Tarih, İslam, Abbâsî Kimliği, Kadın, el-Cheikh.*

Nadia Maria el-Cheikh explores the development of the ideal woman identity which is a crucial matter in the early Islamic thought. The author also investigates what the ideal life is through the early Islamic women exemplars in this work. It has been widely analyzed which exemplars of the women are respected for Islam and the Islamic society. In this respect, the author examines the ways in which Islam and Jāhiliyya are separated from each other, what the orthodoxy in Islam is in terms of ideal identity and how it changes within this process. The author then focuses on her work by giving information about the system that Islam is trying to establish. In this context, the Islamic system is considered in terms of justice and order (nizam). The system, which is gradually established by Muslims means the destruction of the Jāhiliyya. Although the Jāhiliyya period was conceptualized as lawlessness, sexual immorality, the killing of girls and idolatry, Islam is seen as a systematic structure that offer to change all these negativity.

Chapter 1, entitled *Hind bint 'Utbah: Prototype of the Jāhiliyya and Umayyad Woman*, explains how the characters of Jāhiliyya and Umayyad women formed. Jāhiliyya was one of the negative or unfavorable characteristics of a society viewed as an opposition to Islam. It was portrayed as a sign of all kinds of immorality and corruption. Such a historiography was developed that there was no way for Jāhiliyya to identify itself outside of negative meanings. In this respect, in the exemplar of Hind bint 'Utbah, it was tried to explain what kind of social and moral life was in the Jāhiliyya period. According to the author's statement, the differences between Islamic values and cultural systems in the Jāhiliyya period will be better understood through her identity. Actually, Hind narration is adapted to all

Umayyad caliphs and all dynasties are described as defeatist and deviant (18). In this way, all kinds of actions to break Muʿāwiya's authority were planned by al-Maʾmūn and al-Muʿtaḍid himself during the Abbasids period. As a matter of fact, for the Kharijites and the Shiites, he was someone who was deliberately trying to bring the lawlessness and brutality of Jāhiliyya and to destroy the new order brought by the Prophet Muhammad. However, with the establishment of the Sunni resurrection towards the end of the ninth century, especially as a result of the increased hostility towards the Shiites, it was started to comply with Muʿāwiya and Umayyads by the people of ahl-Hadith, such as Ahmad Ibn Hanbal. In addition, a Sunni reconciliation was tried to be created by spreading the knowledge that Muʿāwiya had been heralded with heaven by the Prophet Muhammad (31).

Chapter 2, entitled *Women's Lamentation and Death Rituals in Early Islam*, tries to improve the theory that the wives of the Prophet Muhammad would not be like other women. "They veil and cannot be unveiled like any other. They pray and give alms". This distinctive feature is the most important aspect that distinguishes Islamic women from the their of Jāhiliyya. On the other hand, with the arrival of Islam, dead rituals, lament after the dead, and plucking the hair of women were extremely seen as problematic and un-Islamic. The lamenting the dead was opposed since it was seen as a sign of "loyalty to the world" (48). It was also emphasized that Islam had a serious difference from these modes. First of all, the Muslims rejected ritual lamenting since it was incompatible with the Islam's emphasis on salvation in the afterlife. Moreover, the mourning of women was not tolerated since it represented an act of complaint against God's judgment, will and wisdom. Thus, the death in Islamic thought is not the end, but the transition to eternal life.

Chapter 3, entitled *The Heretical Within: The Qaramita and the Intimate Realm*, discusses the issue of heretics in Qarmatian groups in the line with orthodox-heterodox concepts. Staying outside the consensus established in the tenth century was extremely risky and ungrateful. According to Hamid Dabashi, orthodox and heterodox concepts were more about political debates than religious. The politically successful formation always deserved to be called as an "orthodox" (60). As a matter of fact, according to Sherman Jackson, the orthodox sect could only be established with state support. In this respect, orthodoxy meant acceptance of the existing order, while heterodox meant criticizing or opposing it (61). In the anti-Qarmatian texts produced during these periods, it was emphasized that it would be more appropriate to fight Qarmatians rather than fighting Byzantine since they were described as "heathen people". According to the author, wearing away the Qarmatians and showing them as non-Islamic was caused by the Qarmatian's giving more rights to women in social life. This meant challenging the ideal identity of the Sunnis. The social order that Sunnis have established by isolating women was

almost destroyed by Qarmatian women working and actively participating in social life. In other words, this threatened the idea of a uniformized society that Sunnis are trying to create through ideal woman examples.

Chapter 4, entitled *Beyond Borders: Gender and the Byzantines*, emphasizes the ideal type of Islamic women by addressing the role of Byzantine women in social, political and economic life. The Byzantine woman figure were used in painting arts and coins. In contrast, the caliphs' mothers or daughters were not shown to anyone isolated in the imperial palace. They had neither titles nor representations shown in coins or pictures. Their power in rulership revealed only when their husbands or sons were successful, which was behind the scenes or indirectly. In terms of Islam, revealing women's charms and taking an active role in the social life was seen as unrest (fitna). Nevertheless, the women in the social life were not tolerated to be given too much freedom. As a matter of fact, Byzantine women were seen as immoral in the Abbasid texts. For instance, al-Jahiz (d. 868) stated that Byzantine women could not be cleaned from their sins because they were immoral and shameless people (83-84). In this regard, Angeliki Laiou said that what is expected of Byzantine women is to sit in their homes, get involved in less politics and talk less with men. Therefore, it appears that Muslims have been wary of the Byzantine women in order not to exceed the moral/ethical limit and to protect their ideal identities (85).

Chapter 5, entitled *Fashioning a New Identity: Women Exemplars and the Search for Meaning*, examines religious-ethical boundaries (ḥadd, pl. ḥudūd) by giving information about the understandings produced in the context of new female exemplars tried to be created during the Abbasid period. Legitimacy and authority are based on experience and examples grounded on the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Inclusion and distinguishing in the ummah was only accomplished by practicing the roles or attitudes of men and women in the time of the Prophet Muhammad. The most reliable women exemplars in this period were Mariam, Khadijah, Aisha and Fatima (98). In line with these prototypes, it has been tried to create a uniformed identity in the ummah.

The author analyzed the nature of Islam in accordance with the ideal prototypes of women in Islam throughout the work. However, while discussing what Islam is, suddenly discussing what kind of political system Islam has had, it sometimes disrupted the subject integrity. She discussed what criteria Sunnis and Shiites considered when choosing the caliph. In doing so, she never mentioned the political system or the Arab experiences of that time. This may cause an incomplete understanding or misunderstanding of the caliphate. Although the subject is extended from time to time in this work, it is seen that historical data are not excluded.

Overall, el-Cheikh's book has made an important contribution to the Islam and Medieval History. This work has made important findings about how women actively determine ideal Islamic life, social memory and identity. However, in this work, the main characters of Islam and its lifestyle as a world view were revealed by clearly showing the differences of the Islamic period from the Jāhiliyya period through the female exemplars. It is also seen that there is no identity anxiety and sense of belonging in dealing the work. Therefore, the absence of dogma or partisanship has impartially enabled to be handled of this work. Readers will easily be able to grasp through this work how the norm and values in the early period of Islam changed in line with the prototypes or exemplars of women. It will also be understood in terms of social history how Sunni paradigm was formed through this work.