

Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal

*Misogynistic
Reports in the Hadith
Literature*

The phenomenon of Muslim women questioning the position of “being a woman” within the framework of the Islamic religion and tradition is more often than not explained as arising due to new influences in the wake of Westernization, modernization, and feminism. These associations are not wholly erroneous. However, the objections that ‘Ā’isha, the Prophet’s wife, raised against some hadith reports about women which were becoming widespread in her own lifetime—a time when feminism, modernism, and Westernization were not yet forces to be reckoned with—are true precursors to the concerns raised by Muslim women today.

When ‘Ā’isha heard certain statements that attributed inauspiciousness to women, statements, for instance, that expressed a ruling that a person’s ritual prayer becomes void if a woman passes in front of him, and that these statements were being disseminated with the claim that these were “the words/hadith of the Prophet”, she was incensed. In response she drew attention to the fact that these reports were fabricated as an expression of negative impressions about women, stemming from the mentality of the Jāhiliya.¹ ‘Ā’isha’s objections

1 As reported by Urwa b. Zubayr, ‘Ā’isha asked: “What makes one’s ritual prayer void?” We said: “The woman and the donkey.” (Upon that) she said: “What a bad creature the woman is! (according to you the fact is that) When I lay down in front of the Messenger of Allah, like a corpse on the bier, I knew that he would pray his ritual prayer ...” Muslim, (4) Şalāh 51, h. 269 (v. 512), I. 366. English translation [Book of Prayer #1037].

were based upon the revelation process that she herself witnessed, and upon the worldview she developed through being the partner of the Prophet. Unfortunately, however, despite her strong opposition, this and similar reports took their place in hadith collections that are much respected by Muslims, with the justification that their *isnād* (chain of reporters) is sound.² The reports that are present in the hadith collections concerning women have influenced the Muslim world's mindset to a great extent. Issues concerning women in the literature of the Islamic disciplines have always been treated either within the framework created by these reports, or according to a general approach that is determined by these reports. In the discussions of earlier periods as to whether women could be rulers or prophets, scholars would use the hadith reports that spoke of women lacking reason and religion.³ Over the last century during which women's traditional role in the family was being reinterpreted, various reports of the kind were used in the effort to refute the adoption of Western ways.⁴ Consequently, the hadith reports that have to do with women, in many respects, determine the relationship between women and religion. In my doctoral thesis at the Ankara University Theology Faculty, Hadith Department, my research revealed that the common characteristic of the hadith reports concerning women could be best described—I am sorry to say—as misogynistic. That is why I termed the reports that attributed negative meaning to women's very existence as human beings and women, which conceived of women as being somehow different from the prototype of the “real human being”, and as having negative valence, or the reports that could lead to such a mindset, “misogynistic reports” in that study.⁵ As part of the thesis these reports were categorized into five main groups. They were examined, taking into account other related reports and were discussed from different angles in order to reveal their “misogynistic and patriarchal” character. The five categories are the following:

2 Ibn Hajar al-'Asqilāni, *Fath al-bārī* VI eds. Muḥammād Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb, (Cairo: Dār al-Rayyān li'l-Turāth, 1987), 73.

3 Münire Mutlutürk, “Kelam Kaynaklarında Kadın” (Marmara University Social Sciences Institute, Theology Faculty, Kelam Department, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation: Istanbul, 2006), 34–43.

4 Many books that speak about the wife's duties towards their husbands and many Islamic sites on the web that contain ‘defenses’ of traditional views base their explanations on the hadith reports to be found in hadith collections.

5 Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal, *Kadın Karşıtı Söylemin İslam Gelenegindeki İzdüşümleri* (Ankara: Kitabiyat Yayınları, 2006), 23.

1. The hadith reports that speak about the view that woman was created “from Adam’s rib”
2. The reports that claim that the majority of the inhabitants of Hell are women
3. The reports that claim that women are lacking both in reason and religion, and that they at the same time lead men astray
4. Reports that claim that women are inauspicious
5. Reports in which women are mentioned in the same breath as donkeys and dogs; such as the report which says that if a woman, donkey or dog passes in front of a person who is performing the ritual prayer, his ritual prayer will be invalid.

When we consider that fact that the reports mentioned above can be found in all of the respected collections of hadith, including those of Bukhārī and Muslim, and that these words that are attributed to Prophet Muhammad are considered *ṣaḥīḥ* (sound), we see that the transformation of mentality that had occurred during the time of the Prophet, directed for the most part for the betterment of women’s lot, had already started to regress at a very early period. These hadith reports had started to circulate when ‘Ā’isha was still alive, and this suggests that this regression started before the first two centuries had been completed, and that it gained momentum with political upheaval and rapid geographical expansion.

The different political camps that were formed at an early period of Islamic history eventually led to the fabrication of hadith reports, and this resulted in many made-up and one-sided accounts becoming known and disseminated as “hadith”. It is also known that during this period, reports of the *targhīb-tarḥīb* register spread wide and fast among the populace.⁶ The fact that the scholars of *jarḥ* (impugning reputation) and *ta’dīl* (deeming of good repute) showed a rather lax attitude towards the dissemination of hadith that did not contain any *shar’ī* (legally binding) implications—such as hadith concerning the benefit of good deeds, *targhīb-tarḥīb* (exhortation and intermediation), asceticism and good morals—led the hadith fabricated in these areas to be included in the collections of *ṣaḥīḥ* hadith.⁷ Thus, these reports

6 Mücteba Uğur, “Hadis Vaz’ı Kısacılık ve Hadiste Kussās,” *Ankara University Theology Faculty Journal* 28 (1986): 291–326.

7 Mahmut Demir, “Tergib ve Terhib Hadisleri” (Ankara University Social Sciences Institute, Theology Faculty, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Ankara: 2001), 101.

gained a credibility they did not deserve and this caused many problems for the Muslim community. All the hadith that I have categorized above concerning women carry many of the characteristics of the fabricated hadith of *targhīb-tarhīb*, and yet they have gained the authority of being *ṣaḥīḥ* hadith. This indicates the dimensions of the misfortune and misunderstanding this ultimately caused in the area of women's issues.

I will now treat the categories of misogynistic reports one by one and illustrate my point with concrete examples:

1. Hadith reports that speak about the view that woman was created "from Adam's rib"

We can quote the following report as an example of how the creation of women is connected to the rib. This is a hadith that is transmitted by almost all great hadith authorities:

As reported by Abū Hurayra, the Prophet said the following: Whoever believes in Allah and the day of judgment should not be mean to their neighbours! And encourage the doing of good when it comes to women; for they have been created from the rib. The most bent part of the rib is its upper part. If you try to straighten it, it will break, if you leave it as is, it will remain bent forever. That is why you should encourage the doing of good among you concerning women!"⁸

As can clearly be seen in this text, woman being created from a rib is interpreted as women having a "bent" or "crooked" nature, like the shape of the rib bone, as a straightforward case of cause and effect. All similar reports address men who are implicitly believed to be stronger, and suggest that in their relations with the women who are under their guardianship, good (*khayr*) should be the effective principle. Although the report has a positive approach, as in the *targhīb* (incitement/encouragement) type hadith, it is still problematic because the encouragement of good behavior is based not on principles of respect and love, but rather on the "bent", or crooked, nature of women. This

⁸ al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi' al-musnad al-ṣaḥīḥ* VI (Istanbul: Çağın Yayınları, 1992) (67) Nikāḥ, 80, 145.

crookedness that is claimed to exist in women's nature implies the existence of problems in the area of morals as well.

The comment of the famous hadith exegete al-Nawawī concerning the report, which should in fact be understood as an example of *targhīb* (encouragement), presents a very interesting example of how this report is carried to the platform of *fiqh*:

This hadith contains proof for the view of some *fuqahā'* and others that 'Eve was created from Adam's rib bone'. Allah declares "We created you from a single soul (*nafs*), and from it its partner" and the Prophet says that the partner was created from the rib. This hadith, (apart from) encouraging men to be kind to women, to treat them well, to be patient in the face of their crooked morals, points to their possible lack of reason, the unseemliness of divorcing them without good reason and that (men) should not be insistent on trying to straighten out women.⁹

Adding to these views, Ibn Ḥajar says that the duty of "forbearance" that is given to men has a limit, that tolerance can extend only to the areas that are *mubāh* (permitted), that in cases that may lead to sin or the abandonment of *wājib* (required behaviors), one can infer the ruling that intervention in the crookedness is necessary, and thus he assesses the role of this report within the field of *fiqh*.¹⁰

When viewed from another perspective, we see in these reports and exegeses, what meaning this problem of "crookedness" can have for a woman's life. What it means to herself, and what kind of difficulties it poses for her, are completely ignored, and the issue is treated only with regard to the problems that her condition may cause to the man who is her husband. In these reports, crookedness is treated as a state of being for women only; and this creates the perception that men are above such faults, and only serves the purpose of reducing women to a sub-category of human that is more flawed than that of the male.

⁹ al-Nawawī, *al-Minhāj XX*, ed. Al-Shaykh Khalīl Ma'mūn Shīḥā (3rd ed.) (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1996), 229.

¹⁰ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-bārī IX*, 162–163.

2. *The reports that claim that the majority of the inhabitants of Hell are women*

The reports in this category are reports that have the aim of instilling fear (*tarhib*) by cautioning women against Hell while encouraging them to avoid sin. However, the hyperbole in these reports is so strong that the aim is overshadowed by the power of the images that speak of women's terrible fate. Given that such reports are various and disparate, here I will discuss a report in the *Muwatṭā*. During the time of the Prophet there was a solar eclipse, a phenomenon that was believed to be an extraordinary and almost supernatural event. According to some reports, the Prophet believed this to be the end of the world and so he ran to the mosque to pray. The same reports relate that he saw a vision of Heaven and Hell, and the section of these reports related to women is as follows:

[...] I also saw the fire, but I had not seen a scene so ugly and terrible as I saw that day. I also saw that the majority of the inhabitants of Hell were women." "Why, O Messenger of Allah?" they asked. (In response) he said "Because of their denial!" "Do they deny Allah?" they asked again. "They are ungrateful to their husbands, they are ungrateful in the face of goodness. If you should show goodness to one of them as long as the world lasts, and then if you should do something that displeases them they (at once) say, "I have never seen any goodness from you!"¹¹

The first association generated with the expression "because of their denial" in the minds of the listeners is the hermeneutic key for our discussion. The views that Ibn Ḥajar quotes from Qādī Abū Bakr b. al-'Arabī (d. 543/1148) are rather interesting in exposing the context that this report was placed in:

[...] But the denial that is attributed to women here is not denial that leads to apostasy. The fact that ingratitude towards the husband is chosen specially among many types of sins refers, in a refined way, to the following words of the Messenger of Allah: "Were I to order someone to prostrate in front of another, then I would have ordered women to prostrate in front of their husbands."

11 Mālik ibn Anas, *Muwatṭā* I, ed. Muhammed Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, (Istanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1992) *Ṣalāt al-kusūf* 1. 186.

According to this, the rights of the husband are considered to be equal to the rights of Allah. If a woman is ungrateful to her husband, given that the rights of men over their wives are at such a level, this becomes proof that she belittles Allah's rights over her. That is why denial is attributed to her, but this is a denial that is not equal to apostasy.¹²

Al-Nawawī, in the commentary that he provides for this report, concludes that because it is punished with fire, ingratitude to the husband for his goodness is among the great sins.¹³

Apart from ingratitude, there are reports that accuse women of characteristics such as fondness for ornament, miserliness, tendency to reveal secrets, ill temper and jealousy concerning their husband's other wives; such reports threaten women with Hell due to these failings. The way these characteristics are described as pertaining only to female character, to give the impression that men are above such emotions, reveals a gender discriminatory approach. The feeling of jealousy that is idealized and legitimized with reference to the jealousy of Allah in the case of men is categorized as a crime that can lead to Hell when exercised by women, since jealousy exercised by women concerning their husbands will only serve to make the lives of men more difficult. It is also made clear that these reports, which are in the mode of *tarhīb* (instilling fear) and which reduce women to the status of criminal underlings vis-à-vis their husbands, exploit divine and Prophetic authority as a tool when sanctifying male authority.

The fact that these reports which, in many respects, carry the characteristics of fabricated hadith, contain elements that are against many verses of the Qur'an, seems neither to have bothered the great hadith authorities who included them in collections of hadith that are called "*ṣaḥīḥ*", nor the Qur'anic exegetes who explained and commented on them in later periods.

¹² *Fath al-bārī* I, 105.

3. The reports that claim that women are lacking both in reason and religion, and that they at the same time lead men astray

The hadith reports that describe women in general as being “lacking in reason and religion” without making any distinctions between them can be found in all known hadith collections with some variations, and they are usually given the status of being sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*). The aim of these reports against women to manipulate the legitimizing power of the Prophet’s word is evident, and they have served their purpose throughout history, as they have been accepted and used to construct the most basic ontological knowledge about women. Even today, these reports, with all their determining power, are in popular use. The reports that discuss women’s lack of reason and religion are merged with the expression that deals with women comprising the majority of inhabitants in Hell. I will now quote a passage reported from Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī, ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Umar, Abū Hurayra, and Jābir b. ‘Abd Allāh, all of them in almost identical terms:

“Oh the congregation of women! Give alms and ask for more forgiveness! For I have seen you to be the majority among Hell’s inhabitants.”

One woman (of the congregation) said: “What is it with us that we comprise the majority of the inhabitants of Hell, oh Messenger of Allah?”

The Prophet answered: “You curse too much and you are ungrateful to your husbands. I have not seen anyone to be so lacking in reason and religion and yet so able to defeat a person of deliberation!”

The woman (asked): “Oh Messenger of Allah! What is “lacking in reason and religion”?”

The Prophet answered in the following way: “Lack of reason is that two women’s testimony is equal to one man’s; this is the lack in reason. You do not perform the ritual prayer for days, you do not fast in Ramadan, and this is the lack in religion.”¹⁴

According to reports, this conversation took place after an Eid prayer. Having finished the Eid prayer and said what he meant to say to the men in the front, the Prophet approached the women’s section be-

hind the men's and addressed them. Shorter versions of the report of this address relate how the women gave away their jewelry as alms, or *ṣadaqa*, when they were required to contribute materially to the common economic needs of society.

However, in reports similar to the longer one I have quoted above, the *ṣadaqa* (charity) required from women is not to contribute to the society economically but as repentance for the sin they have committed by showing ingratitude to their husbands, so that they may avert being destined for Hell. The difference between these two kinds of reports, in which the same request is said to be based on different causes, is rather meaningful.

When we consider the reports that link the *ṣadaqa* that is asked of them to economic necessities, along with other reports that point to women's contribution to social life, we see that women played an important role as founding elements in the early Muslim community. The fact that women participated in congregational prayer (which could be said to be a social function at the time), that they participated in Eid prayer, that in the hijra (migration) to Medina they swore their allegiance to the Prophet upon certain principles, are all phenomena that support this view. It will, then, not be an exaggeration to suggest that some people have manipulated and reshaped the historical facts concerning women's founding role in the new Muslim society.

*a. The discourse of female
"lack of reason and religion"
and its source*

In the report that we have quoted above, women's lack of reason is explained through the practices of bearing witness mentioned in the 282nd verse of *Sūra Baqara* (Qur'an 2:282). In this verse, it is stated that in situations where two male witnesses cannot be found, one male and two female witnesses (on whom the two parties agree) can be used, and the need for "two women" is explained in the verse as being "so that one will remind the other if she should be mistaken". The way this explanatory sentence has been understood and interpreted in conjunction with the reports about "women's lack of reason" have been used as mutually supportive evidence. This rationale has played

13 Al-Nawawī, *al-Minhāj* II, 254.

14 Muslim, (1) *Imān* 34, hadith 132 (79), I. 86–87.

a great role in having the perception that women, by nature, are “lacking in reason” acquire religious legitimacy. In the interpretations of the exegetes concerning the verse, the emphasis on women’s forgetful “nature” becomes more important. The focus is very much on justification on the basis of “women’s nature”, particularly in the classical interpretations.

Because phlegm and cold take up a lot of space in women’s bodily make-up, forgetfulness is dominant in women’s nature. That two women should coalesce in forgetfulness is not probable, almost impossible, compared to the forgetfulness stemming from one woman. For that reason, two women’s testimonies have been seen as appropriate (replacement) for the testimony of one man.¹⁵

This justification based on “women’s nature” has sometimes become an excuse for even more narrow interpretations. In other verses concerning testimony, the plural of the nouns used for witnesses are expressed in masculine form, according both to the structure of the Arabic language and the practices of social life at the time. This has led to a consensus among legal scholars that women’s testimony can in under no circumstances be accepted in cases that are under the scope of the *ḥudūd*.¹⁶ We quote an interesting interpretation concerning the issue:

In *ḥadd* and retaliation (*qisās*) crimes, the witnesses need to be male. In these cases women’s testimony cannot be accepted. For it was reported from al-Zuhrī that: “There is a sunna from the Prophet and the first two Caliphs that women’s testimony cannot be accepted in cases of *ḥadd* and retaliation.”

Another reason why women’s testimony in these cases is not accepted is that in crimes of *ḥadd* and retaliation, if there is any doubt, the crime is voided. And women’s testimony can never be entirely free from doubt, since females are subject to confusion and heedlessness, and lack reason and religion from the time of their birth. This will always raise doubts.¹⁷

While the subject of women’s testimony is being discussed in these terms in the literature, the subject of men’s testimony has been rigorously debated in juristic circles as well. For instance, one topic of discussion is whether the testimony of a person who accuses an innocent

15 al-Rāzī, Muhammed Fakhrud-dīn, *al-Taḥfīr al-kabīr (Mafātiḥ al-ghayb)* II (Istanbul, n.d.), 552.

16 *Ḥadd, ḥudūd*—refers to a limit set of crimes and punishments stipulated in the Qur’an.

Muslim woman of adultery and yet fails to prove it by bringing forth four witnesses can be accepted after his *ḥadd* punishment has been executed and he has repented.¹⁸ The testimony of male and female slaves is an issue that is discussed within the context of social status.¹⁹ The testimony of a man who cannot see is also an issue that is discussed from different angles.²⁰

It is important that in these discussions, in the cases of men who are not faced with the stipulation of numbers because of their sex, as women are, but whose testimonies are disputed by some scholars because of certain other social or physical obstructions, concern about their “lack of reason” never comes up.

The fact that the testimony of a man who has the requisite experience in commercial transactions, that is a man who had become Muslim and had gained trust in the society, is not enough on its own, and that he has to be accompanied by the testimony of another man or two women, has not led to discussions about that man’s reason or an undermining of his testimony. However, unfortunately these reports have been accepted as the proper justification of a discourse of “female deficiency” that has left its stamp on Muslim tradition for centuries, and they have also been used to buttress an understanding that subjects women to male domination.

*b. The basis for the
discourse of female deficiency
in the sources*

It is known that from the very first days in which Islam was being institutionalized and systematized in Medina that the ritual prayer had a unifying role in gathering people together.²¹ Passages from the Quran being read during the ritual prayer ensured that the teaching was internalized both at emotional and intellectual levels. It can be observed that the ritual prayer retained its permanence but that it also gained new functions in parallel with developments in society. That is why, al-

17 al-Kāshānī, *Bidā’i*, VI. 279; quoted by Salih Akdemir in “Tarih Boyunca ve Kur’an-ı Kerim’de Kadın?” *İslam Araştırmalar Dergisi* V no. 4 (1989), 255.

18 *Fatḥ al-bārī* V, 301–302.

19 *Ibid.*, V. 301–316.

20 *Ibid.*, V. 312, 315.

21 It is reported that during the Incident of Kusūf (the Eclipse) the Prophet called the companions to this meeting with the words, “The ritual prayer gathers people together.” See *Muslim*, (10) Kusūf 5 (The Chapter of the Call of “The Ritual Prayer Gathers People Together”), hadith 20 (910), 1, 627.

though women were, in *shar‘ī* terms (and according to general consensus) told to stay away from certain forms of worship, such as the ritual prayer and fasting when they were menstruating, this staying away from worship was at the same time described as being a “lack of religion”. The contradiction inherent in this reasoning is probably due to another perception. This is that the reports that suggest “deficiency in religion” present themselves as perfect source material for those who consider deeds to be an essential component of ultimate personal judgment.

As we can clearly see from al-Nawawī’s comments²² that treat the worship’s *thawāb* (reward for deed) relationship, for those who regard menstruation as the cause of deficiency in religion, this state of women was not a natural condition in which they were excused from worship due to matters of hygiene and health, but rather a negative state that detracted from their religiosity. Women who suffered from this negative ailment, then, must necessarily be lacking in religion. This report, which is against the central tenets of the school of theology that argues that religion (and faith) cannot be increased or decreased according to deeds/worship and which therefore should be rejected is, on the contrary, accepted by them, as well as being considered a *ṣaḥīḥ* hadith. This reveals that the discourses concerning women being “secondary”, “deficient”, and “crooked” are dominant enough to even annul the principles of consistency and mercy associated with the school of *ra’y* (opinion).²³

22 “There is no “problem” here, on the contrary it is *zāhir* (apparent); for the words religion, faith and Islam share their meaning—as we have explained in relevant places. As we have mentioned before obedience is also called faith or religion. These being so fixed, we learn that the person who engages more in *‘ibāda* will have his faith increased, and the person whose *‘ibāda* decreases, his religion decreases. Abandoning *wājib ‘ibāda* (obligatory acts of worship) such as the ritual prayer, fasting and others without a legitimate excuse constitutes a sin; in the same vein, abandoning aspects that are not *wājib* such as the Friday prayer and others constitute an act that is not a sin. Also, it has an aspect that obliges the menstruating woman to abandon the ritual prayer and fasting. Since the menstruating woman is considered to have an ‘ailment’, if one should ask whether they will be given *thawāb* (reward for good deed) for the time that they have not performed the ritual prayer—just as the sick or the traveler not praying or shortening their prayers will be given *thawāb* equal to the supererogatory ritual prayer they pray when they are at home and in good health—the following will be the answer: “As can be understood from the *zāhir* of this hadith, she will not be given *thawāb*; (for between the two circumstances) there is the following difference: the sick and the traveler perform the (supererogatory) *‘ibāda* with their license to perform them and with the intention of continuing. However, such is not the case with menstruating women. Her intention is to abandon the ritual prayer during menstruation. In any case the intention to perform the ritual prayer is prohibited to her. In that case, the case of the menstruating woman is like the case of the person who performs supererogatory prayers sometimes and abandons them at others; that is to say like the case of the sick or the traveler who do not have the intention of continuing, and no *thawāb* (reward) is given to the sick or the traveler during the time of his sickness or travel,” al-Nawawī, II. 255.

23 This refers to Ḥanafi positions on these issues.

‘Aynī, a member of the Hanafi school, and an exegete of al-Bukhārī’s works who argues that deeds do not decrease faith, says the following about the matter: “The statement, ‘The ruling of being deficient in reason and religion is a general ruling’ contradicts the report, ‘The Prophet said: “Among all the women in the world the following four are enough: Maryam, the daughter of Imrān, ‘Āsiya, the wife of the Pharaoh, Khadija, the daughter of Khuwaylid, and Fāṭima, the daughter of Muhammad”.’” Against this claim he says, “If a ruling concerns the whole, this does not require that that ruling should be valid for all individuals in that whole”,²⁴ and with this argumentation, he excludes the four women mentioned in the hadith from the ruling, yet accepts the idea of the deficiency of reason and religion for all other women, without any exception. Thus consensus is achieved among the schools.

At this point we have to stop and ask the question, “What is this menstruation that decreases a woman’s religion?”

Almost all our hadith sources contain information, rulings, practices and perceptions concerning menstruation, sometimes in the Chapter on *Ṭahāra* (Chapter on Ritual Purity) and sometimes as a section on its own. The general tone of this information reflects the way the perceived truths and traditions of the time of the Companions were being questioned in the light of the new religious teaching. Interestingly, we also find a discussion about when it was that women first started to menstruate. Among the reports that are mentioned as an answer to this question is the view, “The beginning of menstruation occurred when Eve descended from Heaven”,²⁵ and also the view, “Menstruation was first sent to the Children of Israel.”²⁶ While the first view reflects the perception that menstruation is a natural phenomenon for women, the second view refers to another understanding. This report, related by ‘Aynī, expands the context of the second view:

This is a statement that ‘Abd al-Razzāq has derived from ‘Ā’isha and Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd. The statement is as the following: “In the society of the sons of Israel, women and men used to pray together. The women started to orna-

24 al-‘Aynī al-Ḥanafī, Badr al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad Maḥmūd b. Aḥmad (855/1451), *‘Umdat al-qārī* XXV, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabi, 1975), 271.

25 *‘Umdat al-qārī* III. 256.

26 Bukhārī, (6) Ḥayḍ 1, I. 76–77.

ment themselves for the men, and so Allah plagued them with menstruation and barred them from the mosques.”²⁷

Such reports concerning menstruation that are found in our sources making reference to the children of Israel can be seen as a manifestation of the importance of Jewish beliefs and traditions as a people respected by the Arabs for having a religion of the Book, in the estimation of the Companions. Abandoning the understanding of menstruation as decreasing religion, the other menstrual taboos of the Jews were rejected by the Prophet and no activity, apart from sexual intercourse—as declared in the Qur’anic verse—was prohibited during menstruation. However, some reports found in hadith sources reveal that the wives of the Companions and even the Prophet could not easily reject received lore about the menstrual period being an unnatural and debilitating state.²⁸

The state of menstruation which is asked about by the Companions of the Prophet in relation to everyday human action and interaction is seen to be placed within a more tolerant framework through the answers that the Prophet gave, through reasoning and setting an example, including matters concerning sexuality that can be said to be more delicate. The tolerance in some reports goes so far as to decree an easy form of punishment for engaging in sexual intercourse with a woman while she is menstruating: “This has been reported from Ibn ‘Abbās: ‘About the man who had approached (had sexual intercourse with) his wife, the Messenger of Allah said: “He can give alms of half a dinar.”’”²⁹

It is interesting that in the very same literature where “women’s crimes” such as ingratitude, miserliness, moodiness and jealousy warrant the punishment of Hell, this act, a “man’s crime” defined as “en-

27 *‘Umdat al-qārī* III, 255.

28 In his *Kitāb al-aṣnām* Ibn al-Kalbī reports certain practices that show that the pre-Islamic Arabs had the tradition of limiting menstruating women’s worship like the Jews: “They also had idols named Isāf and Nā’ila [...]” Bishr b. Abū Ḥazm (al-Asadī) spoke about Isāf in the following terms: “As immovable as if birds were sitting on its head, you cannot approach it! The stature of the menstruating women in front of Isāf” (See Ibn al-Kalbī, *ibid.*, 37). “[...] He said: ‘They also had their Manāf. The Quraysh would name it ‘Abd Manāf. But I do not know where it was or who was it that had erected it. The menstruating women could not approach their idols, but would stay at a distance [...] I left the enemies, the birds were waiting a little way away. Like the menstruating women waiting around Manāf.’” (See Ibn al-Kalbī, *Kitāb al-aṣnām*, ed. Aḥmad Zakī, 2nd ed., trans. Beyza Düşüngen (Cairo: 1343/1924), 38–39.

29 Muhammad b. ‘Isā al-Tirmidhī (279/892), *Sunan al-Tirmidhī (Al-Jāmi’ al-ṣaḥīḥ)* I (Istanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1992), (1) Tahāra 103, hadith 136, 244–245. For similar reports see Abū Dāwud Sulaymān b. al-Ash’ath b. Ishāq al-Azdi es-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwud* I (Istanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1992), (1) Tahāra 105, hadith 264, 181–182.

gaging in something forbidden (*ḥarām*)” can be atoned for with a simple punishment; in fact most scholars say that even this simple “act of recompense” is not necessary. According to common tradition, the religious worship and rituals that women can perform in “normal” times and yet cannot perform when they are having their period include: ritual prayer, fasting, entering mosques, touching the Qur’an, reading the Qur’an while looking at the page, and circumambulating the Ka’ba during the Hajj. The reports concerning ritual prayer, fasting, and the circumambulation reveal that there is an actual acceptance of this in practice, and yet when it comes to entering mosques, touching the Qur’an, and reading the Qur’an while looking at the page, there are different views among hadith scholars. Despite the existence of these debates and differences, the practice has been to prohibit menstruating women from all religious practices. It is a remarkable manifestation of pragmatist sexism that the state of menstruation has been interpreted with a very tolerant approach when men’s comfort is in question, allowing men a wider space in which to move, and yet when it comes to a woman’s relationship with Allah, it has been interpreted in an obstructive, prohibitive, and alienating manner. These limitations that in the Jewish tradition stem from the concept of impurity are not explained in these terms in the Islamic tradition; the interpreters try to base these prohibitions on concepts such as “essential nature” or “entailed by the *naṣṣ* (text)”.³⁰ However, even in these efforts, there is no attempt to assess the reason or wisdom behind these limitations.

This state of affairs creates a vacuum in mentality and, unfortunately, when this vacuum is not openly addressed, it becomes filled with understandings of impurity carried over from Judaism. As such, in the Islamic tradition, the function of the reports that lead to the discourse of women being deficient in religion can be viewed as the continuation of the mentality of the Jāhiliya, supplemented by Judaic traditions, rather than based on information gathered from the Prophet’s practices, that menstruation is a negative characteristic pertaining to women.

30 Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥh al-bārī* 1, 483.

c. The seductiveness of believing women who are deficient in reason and religion, according to the reports

The hadith reports that contain the claim of female deficiency in religion also contain the accusation that women “lead men astray”. This accusation, according to exegete ‘Aynī, is more an expression of “wonder” rather than “slander”.³¹ Ibn Hajar, however, is of the view that with this expression “leading astray” is authenticated as being a sin that leads to Hell.³² When we consider these reports, along with the reports that contain elements concerning women as *fitna* (trial/strife), we can regard the discourse of “leading astray” as being of the same register as women’s association with *fitna*. The fact that the report, “I have not left to you any *fitna* (trial) greater than women”³³ can be found in almost all respected books of hadith shows us that this understanding of women as a trial or calamity is widely accepted.

4. Reports that claim women are inauspicious

Some of the hadith reports in the sources that attribute inauspiciousness to women in fact deal with efforts to eradicate such an understanding, due to the fact that it is unfounded. However, due to the incredible richness of Islamic literature, there is also another group of hadith reports that contain an approach that is the complete opposite. What concerns us in these reports is that women are portrayed as being inauspicious: As ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar reports, “the Messenger of Allah said: ‘Inauspiciousness lies in the house, the woman, and the horse.’”³⁴

Al-Bukhārī treats this subject in a section entitled, “Protecting One’s Self from Women’s Inauspiciousness”, and supports his chapter title with the verse, “Among your wives and children there are those who are against you”³⁵ All hadith scholars agree on the conclusion

31 *‘Umdat al-qārī* III, 272.

32 *Faṭḥ al-bārī* I, 484.

33 Bukhārī, (67) Nikāḥ 17, VI 124. For similar reports see *Muslim*, (48) Dhikr 26, hadiths 97–98 (2740, 2741 and variations), III. 2096–2097; *Tirmidhī*, (41) Adab 31, h. 2780, V, 103.

34 *Muslim*, (39) Salām 34, h. 115 (2225), II. 1746–1747; *Abū Dāwūd*, (27) Ṭibb 24, 3922, IV. 237.

35 Bukhārī (67) Nikāḥ 17, VI. 124.

that the two groups of hadith, ones that state this inauspiciousness overtly or covertly, are both sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*); however, there are some differences in the interpretations of these reports. Those who accept the existence of the inauspiciousness are of the view that the inauspiciousness does not stem from the things themselves, rather Allah's will is enacted according to the natural laws that He has put in place—on these things—and thus they are made vehicles for evil or inauspiciousness. The scholars who reject inauspiciousness as a concept altogether say that these reports only inform us of the beliefs of the Jāhiliya period and that these beliefs are deemed wholly superstitious.³⁶

The issue of women's inauspiciousness is treated within the framework of *fitna* and enmity in many reports; since these two activities parallel the mission of the Devil, woman is identified with the Devil himself. In these reports there is such an air of generalization that even the most auspicious of women are subjected to the same claims. The picture that results under these circumstances is that of believing and pious men being under the influence of women who are deficient in reason and religion and who are also the snares of the Devil: of men being led astray by women into the business and pleasures of the world, which is the cause of their downfall.³⁷

The fact that things designated as being inauspicious include women, houses, horses, and, in some reports, even swords³⁸ and virgins,³⁹—all entities that a free adult male would need in everyday life, reveals the male-centered discourse contained in these reports.

36 Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Bāqī b. Yūsuf al-Zurkānī, *Sharḥ al-Zurkānī 'alā Muwaṭṭā' al-Imām Mālik* IV (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1990), 485.

37 *'Umdat al-qārī* XX, 89–90.

38 Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Yazīd el-Qazwīnī Ibn Mājāh (273/886), *Sunan Ibn Mājāh* I–II, ed. Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī (Istanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1992), (9) Nikāḥ 55, h. Addendum to 1995, I. 642.

39 Muslim, (39) Salām 34, h. 120 (2225), II. 1748.

5. Reports in which women are mentioned in the same breath as donkeys and dogs; such as the report which says that if a woman, donkey, or dog passes in front of a person who is performing the ritual prayer, his ritual prayer will be invalidated

The ritual prayer is a very important form of worship in the Islamic tradition, and great emphasis has been placed on the way this is performed. Consequently, many statements of the Prophet have been reported on this issue and there has naturally been some difference of opinion on some points. Passing in front of the person who is performing the ritual prayer is a subject that is discussed within this framework.

From the content of many reports that have been passed down on this subject, we see that there were two prevailing views. The first is that passing in front of the person who is praying, or lying in front of the person who is praying, does no harm to the validity of the ritual prayer of the praying person.⁴⁰ The second is the opposite and this view is based on the Prophet putting a *satra*, an object approximately the height of a saddle, in front of him when he prayed in open space. However, some reports that support the second view speak not only of the *satra* but also of some creatures that in themselves voided the ritual prayer:

Reported from Abū Dharr: “The Messenger of Allah said: ‘If a person performs the prayer without having put something as big as the back belt of the saddle or the middle hump, then a black dog, woman, and donkey will make his ritual prayer void’. ‘Abdullāh b. as-Sāmit said, ‘I asked Abū Dharr, ‘What is the difference between the black dog and the red dog?’ and he said, ‘My brother! You asked me what I asked the Messenger of Allah.’ (He) said, ‘The black dog is the devil.’”⁴¹

‘Aynī states that the person who passes in front of a person who is praying being characterized as the “Devil” is a hyperbolic metaphor.⁴²

40 Ibn Mājah, (5) Iqāma 40, h. 958, I. 308; Bukhārī, (8) Şalāh 107, I. 131; Muslim, (4) Şalāh 51, h. 273 (513), I. 367.
41 *Tirmidhī*, (2) Şalāh 136, II. 161. For other reports see *Abū Dawūd*, (2) Şalāh 109, h. 702, I. 450–451; *Muslim*, (4) Şalāh 50, h. 265 (510), I. 365.

Ibn Ḥajar says that the word, “Devil” is used in the literal sense for the jinn and in a metaphorical sense for people, quoting Ibn Baṭṭāl’s comment that the word “devil” can be attributed to people who cause *fitna* in religion.⁴³

Ibn Ḥajar says that there is no negative context in the mentioning of living beings such as donkeys, dogs, or women, and that they refer to the species, and that here woman represents the human species.⁴⁴ But the fact that these creatures are usually to be found with a negative connotation in other reports, and the fact that they are identified with or linked to the Devil in various other ways demonstrates that this categorization is the product of negative associations. Many of the hadith reports that speak about how the ritual prayer becomes void use the word, “woman” and yet in one *musnad* report the term “menstruating woman” is used⁴⁵ which goes further in highlighting the negative contextualization that I am talking about. It can be said that such reports have facilitated “woman” becoming associated with negative connotations in the hadith literature.

In conclusion, the difficulties in searching for a resolution of issues raised by negative hadith reports against women within the classical tradition are the following:

In the hadith heritage, which is considered to be the second primary religious source of the Islamic religion, one can observe an attitude that is anti-woman in both the reports and the commentaries on them, except for a few instances in which women are given an advantageous position. Among these exceptional cases are reports that condemn the pre-Islamic tradition of killing female children or considering them inauspicious, saying that rearing female children is a means of attaining salvation (Heaven). However, the five categories of reports that I have treated in this the article present an evident misogynistic attitude.

In this same hadith literature, there are many reports that contain anecdotes that are not in keeping with this misogynistic approach: reports that contain instances of how women during the period of the Prophet worked for Islam just like their male counterparts, how they assumed responsibilities, how they performed the Hijra, how they par-

42 *Umdat al-qārī* IV, 291.

43 *Fath al-bārī*, I, 295.

44 *Ibid.*, I, 686.

anticipated in war when the need arose, and how they made their political will known through swearing allegiance to the Prophet. These anecdotes described how the female Companions of the Prophet during the early period overcame the views extant during the Jāhiliya that relegated women to a secondary status and how they viewed themselves as being equal members of the Islamic society.

Reports that contradict each other in strange ways are not limited to the subject of women in this literature. In the hadith literature that tries to classify the hadith reports as systematically as possible, the fragmentary approach that divides a single hadith into its different components makes it possible to understand how this literature can come to contain such contradictions.

It is a known fact that when they lead to different rulings, the discrepancies between hadith reports are taken seriously by hadith experts, and they try to resolve these by the means of *ta'līf* (reconciliation). However, in the reports concerning women in the mode of *targhīb/tarhīb*, this seems to have resulted in the authorities not deeming these discrepancies worth the effort of reconciliation. The most evident example are the above-mentioned reports that negate each other concerning women being inauspicious or being one of the elements that can invalidate the ritual prayer. These reports have been left as they are without being reconciled, due to the preexisting negative mentality and perceptions concerning this issue, which construe women as being suspect. Looking for a resolution of these reports, whose criticism is partial and prejudiced within classical hadith methodology means, most of the time, being resigned to failure.

We already know the attitudes and comments of past scholars about this issue. However, we also know the failure of contemporary scholars, who are in a better position to use all the available resources, and who have a greater responsibility towards the public in trying to resolve the issues surrounding misogynistic hadith reports through using classical methodology. Egyptian scholar 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Abū Shuqqa's work, entitled *Tahrīr al-mar'a*,⁴⁶ is a case in point. In his extended work, the author tries, with the best intentions and courage,

45 Aḥmed Muḥammad Ibn Ḥanbal (241/855), *Musnad Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal* I–VI (Istanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1992), I, 347. For other reports see Abū Dawūd, (2) Şalāh 109, h. 703, I. 453; Ebū 'Abdurrahmān Ahmed b. Shu'aib an-Nisā'i (303/915), *Sunan al-Nisā'i* II (Istanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1992), (9) Qibla 7, h. 749, 64.

46 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Abū Shuqqa, *Tahrīr al-mar'a fi 'aṣr al-risāla* I–V (Kuwait: Dār al-Qalam li'l-Naṣr wa'l-Tawḍī', 1410/1990).

and to the best of his ability, to mitigate the classical discourse about women being deficient in reason and religion, ideas of them leading men astray, and the claim that they are the majority among the inhabitants of Hell. However, he is crushed by the authority of the *ṣaḥīḥ* hadith. His contribution to the literature has been to provide some answers for traditional circles concerning women's social status, based on the reports of al-Bukhārī and Muslim.⁴⁷

Another example is Yūṣuf al-Qaraḏāwī's approach in his *Method in Understanding the Sunnah*, which has also been translated into Turkish. When explaining his methodology in the introduction, he states, "I have tried to stay away from the approach of people who freeze the hadith as they appear, and who are unaware of the purpose behind the words, the approach of those who hold on to the outer structure of the Sunna and yet neglect its soul, only following the letter."⁴⁸ Yet he has not been able to refrain from contradicting himself in his work.

Qaraḏāwī, who at times adopts a lenient approach that can even go against the general tendency among the public, such as his positions on women visiting graveyards, use of birth control, women traveling on their own, and males shaking hands with women, is seen to be rather undecided concerning certain crucial issues. In his comment on the report, "The woman who buries the girl alive, and the buried girl, are both in Hell", Qaraḏāwī takes an approach which prioritizes the literal meaning, and says that he cannot find any criticism in the accounts of the scholars who say that the report is "*ṣaḥīḥ*". Although he states that this report contradicts the verses in Sūra Takwīr, he concludes: "Fearing that they may contain a meaning that has not been disclosed to us as yet, I prefer not to reject such reports and to concur with the *ṣaḥīḥ* hadith."⁴⁹

Lastly, I want to make a reference to a graduate thesis submitted to the Marmara University Social Sciences Institute, Theology Faculty, Hadith Department in 2005 by Hatice Eriş. The title of the thesis is "The Limits of Respect Between the Spouses and the Hadith of 'Prostration': Investigation-Derivation-Assessment."⁵⁰ This 246-page thesis

47 Ibid., 286–287.

48 Yūṣuf al-Qaraḏāwī, *Sünneti Anlamada Yöntem*, trans. Bünyamin Erul (Kayseri: Rey Yayınlan, 1991), 17.

49 Ibid., 109–111.

50 Hatice Eriş, "The Limits of Respect Between the Spouses and the Hadith of 'Prostration': Investigation-Derivation-Assessment" (Marmara University Social Sciences Institute, Theology Faculty, Hadith Department, Ph.D. dissertation, İstanbul, 2005).

discusses a report which is not commented on in the respected hadith collections and yet which has come to be quite famous, namely, "Were I to order someone to prostrate in front of another, then I would order women to prostrate in front of their husbands." This report is treated in various forms of its *isnād* (chain of reporters). The thesis thus tries to suggest that, because it has been reported through so many channels, it must be genuine. This is a known method in hadith literature, often employed to save weak or fabricated hadith. However, to see such methods being used by a female theologian to rescue such a hadith report is both surprising and disappointing.

All the reports that place woman at a lower position lower than man, and that relegate her to an inauspicious context, with their misogynistic character, can be called marginal when we consider the value that the Qur'an attaches to human dignity and freedom. Unfortunately, however, we see how cultural reflections of misogyny are easily attributed to Allah by way of exegesis of the verses, and to the Prophet, by way of the reports of various hadith, as our classical literature contains hundreds of examples that claim that this misogynistic approach is divine and Prophetic. In that sense, saying that the embedded prejudices against women are not Islamic is more difficult, daring, and risky, than saying that they are Islamic.

It is difficult, for it requires a review and assessment of the hadith literature with a new point of view and new methods. It is daring, in the face of the vastness of the classical literature, and the deficiencies of an enthusiastic researcher that he/she cannot compensate for despite the best of efforts, may lead him/her to certain errors. It is risky, addressing a Muslim populace who have preferred a Muslim way of life transmitted through imitation, a populace who have not been encouraged to think and to take on intellectual responsibility, an *umma* whose sensitivity for looking for the truth has become rusty. Addressing such an audience with information that will disturb their peace of mind, their conformity of thought, that will disquiet them to a certain extent, might lead to the researcher being faced with rejection, alienation, and totally unwarranted accusations. However, despite all these difficulties, those who are in search of truth will get the reward of their search, sooner or later.