



Woman in Culture and Arts

Muslim Women's Political and Social Activism in the Conflict between Tradition and Modernity From the Perspective of Contemporary Egyptian Reformers (Case Study: Mohammad al-Ghazali al-Mesri and Yusuf al-Gharzavi)

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article Article history: Received: 27 December 2024 Received in revised form: 12 May 2026 Accepted: 14 August 2026 Published online: 2 October 2026 Keywords: <i>Mohammad Ghazali, Muslim Woman, Reform Movement, Tradition and Modernity, Yusuf Gharzavi.</i>	Introduction The influence of Western culture and civilization in Islamic societies resulted in two general reactions among Muslims: one group of Muslims ignored the Western confrontation and continued the same way of life that before they got acquainted with. Another group, the Westernizer, argued that female Muslims should be completely subordinate to Western customs and culture. This conflict in the Islamic world emerged between the two currents of tradition and modernity distinctly, which appeared in diverse aspects. Woman's lifestyle was a matter of conflict between these two currents. While followers of the theory of tradition limited women's duties to a pure maternal dimension religiously and worldly, the later emphasized women's boundless liberty. In contrary, there were thinkers from the Islamic world who, accepting the reality in contemporary Islamic societies, were interested in detecting novel solutions to women's issues. They resisted the growing influence of Western culture, which often promoted women's permissiveness, by taking refuge in the glorious past of Islamic civilization and trying to reconstruct the past ideal model for the present period. Among these contemporary Muslim thinkers, we can mention Mohammad Ghazali al-Mesri (1996-1917) and then his prentice, Gharzavi (1926-2022), both of them were Egyptian contemporary Sunni wizards. Methodology This study was conducted via a descriptive and analytical approach and a comparative methodology. First, Mohammad Ghazali's view on the social-political presence of female Muslims is discussed, and then it is illustrated from Yusuf Gharzavi's point of view. In the following, the study utilizes a comparative approach to comprehend their attitudes' resemblances and distinctions. Results In the confrontation between Islamic and Western civilizations, an issue that was of concern and challenge in the public sphere and from the point of view of thinkers in the Islamic world was the way these two civilizations viewed the status and issues of women. The revival of the Muslim woman's character, both in theory and in practice, took on another form following the revival and slogan of returning to the pure Islam of Mohammad in Arab countries, including Egypt. This was succeeded in Egypt in the 19th century as a reformist movement. This movement, which was shaped in reaction to the strenuous situation in the Islamic world, had a certain view on Muslim political and social issues and endeavored to correspond Islamic teachings to Western developments with an intellectual approach, according to the time and place. In accordance with its specific jurisprudential approach, the reformist movement had a particular view to women. Among them, one can mention two contemporary Egyptian reformist wizards—Mohammad Ghazali al-Mesri and Yusuf Gharzavi. According to their theory, women enjoyed a high status and dignity in early Islam, but were abandoned from their role and status gradually. Criticizing the current situation of Muslim women, they believed that women in the present period have become captives of two contradictory movements: The current of static inherited traditions left over from the

backward period of Islamic civilization, which blocked all of paths for women, and a modernist movement that has come to us from Western thought and heritage.

After illustrating the characteristics of both currents, these two thinkers condemned them and believed that Islam has adopted a middle ground regarding women, but so far we have not observed that balance in the views of these two prevailing currents in society. Both Egyptian thinkers argue that Muslims have deviated from the Islam teachings regarding the treatment toward women, that misleading hadiths and narrations are prevalent among them, and that they have reached absolute ignorance and profound neglect of religion and the world in this regard.

After stating these points, Ghazali and Gharzavi seek to portray the interval between the Islam teachings and the women status by addressing the existing realities in society. While Ghazali rises the question of why an Islamic alternative has not been offered for the periods of deviation since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, he gives important advice to all Muslims and states: Now it is better for Muslims, especially great leaders of the religion and thought, to consciously and immediately wake up from the sleep of negligence and by offering an appropriate Islamic alternative, confront the new civilization and prevent the invading sedition; a sedition that nothing but the Islam of the time of the Prophet can stop.

Gharzavi also tried to enlighten women in Islamic society, advising: "Now, Muslim women must be free from following the strict tendencies of predecessors and pure modernism." This is impossible unless women are placed in the light of the moderate movement, which seeks to exempt women from the oppression they suffer in different countries and ignore their rights. It also wants women to play a fundamental role, like men, in helping Islam and spreading and propagating it to the world. In fact, both Egyptian thinkers, while emphasize the importance of women's primary role in matters related to the home and family, emphasized the importance of women's role in social-political opportunities and believed that among women, there are individuals who are able to manage the affairs of Islamic society in various fields.

Conclusion

In this study, an attempt has been made to investigate and analyze the social-political presence of female Muslims in the conflict between tradition and modernity, considering the views of Mohammad Ghazali al-Mesri and Yusuf Gharzavi, two Egyptian contemporary reformist thinkers. For this purpose, Ghazali's position was first discussed. Then the thoughts of his prentice, Gharzavi, were examined in this context to clarify that Islamic scholars and thinkers were not passive and reacted to the issue of women's presence in society in the conflict between tradition and modernity. So that some of them, in addition to criticizing the thoughts of those who believe in tradition and the believers in modernity, also sought to revive the religious and Islamic teachings that were practically manifested in society during the time of the Prophet, in order to foster and consolidate the position of Islam in the modern era.

However, it should be said that Ghazali and Gharzavi, thinkers of the Islamic world, believed in the jurisprudence that was promoted in Egypt in the 19th and 20th centuries by the scholars and jurists of reform movement in that country. They also sought to revive Islamic teachings in accordance with the requirements of the time and considered Islam to be a religion that transcends space and time. Therefore, both of the aforementioned figures, while emphasizing the importance of women's primary role in matters related to the home and family, underlined the significance of their role in social opportunities and claimed that sometimes among women, there are individuals who are able to manage the affairs of Islamic society in various fields.

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