Welcome to the first issue of BARAZA!, Sisters in Islam’s biannual issues bulletin. This bulletin brings together articles on contemporary matters affecting Muslims today, with a focus of women’s rights in Islam and an update of SIS activities.

Why BARAZA!? According to Hans Wehr’s Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, baraza means “to step out, to come out, to stand out, to be prominent, to expose, to show, to excel, to surpass, to compete, to publish, to present.” In the early centuries of Islam, a baraza woman is a woman who does not hide her face and does not lower her head; a woman of sound judgment, known for her ‘aql (reasoning). A baraza woman is one who is seen by people and who receives visitors at home.

For us in Sisters in Islam, the quintessential baraza woman is Sukayna bint Hussein, the great-granddaughter of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and granddaughter of the Prophet’s beloved daughter Fatimah and fourth Caliph of Islam Ali Abu Talib. Biographies of early women in Islam celebrated Sukayna’s independence, intelligence, beauty and wit. She debated with powerful men about political and social issues of the day, and spurned their offers of marriage. She pursued her literary interests, and hosted poets and literary figures in her home. She was married several times and was famed for her marriage contracts, which stated among other things that she would not obey her husband, she had total control of her life and that her husband shall not commit polygamy. If her husband were to renege on any of the conditions, she stipulated that he would be compelled to divorce her at her wish.

Sukayna is a figure forgotten in the Muslim tradition. The Muslim woman today is seen by the world as oppressed, discriminated against, backward and destined to suffer in silence. In the name of her religion and shariah law, she is viewed as inferior to men. And God forbid if she is strong, independent, outspoken and stands up for her rights, for this would condemn her as Westernised and unIslamic.

In the course of our work, Sisters in Islam has found that the realities of women’s lives today conflict with society’s image of what the ideal Muslim women should be. In the 21st century, women’s groups in the Muslim world are at the forefront of challenges to traditional religious authorities and Islamist political movements; their use of Islam to justify women’s subordination; and most perniciously, using the fear of God to silence dissenting voices.

In this inaugural issue of BARAZA!, SIS has chosen to focus on the reformation of Islamic Family Law to reflect the justice of Islam. If justice is the indisputable objective of shariah, shouldn’t this principle be reflected in laws that regulate the relationship between, and the rights of, a husband and a wife?

The classical juristic framework of marriage in Islam was influenced by the logic of a contract of sale. In exchange for a dower, a woman comes under her husband’s authority. At the core of this marriage contract is the wife’s submission (tamkin), defined as unhampered sexual availability, which is regarded as a man’s right and a woman’s duty, in exchange for maintenance (nafaqa), defined as shelter, food and clothing, which is a woman’s right and a man’s duty.

Given the realities and complexities of our lives today, such a conception of marriage is no longer sustainable. The 20th century saw the slow reform of personal status laws in many parts of the Muslim world to deal with the complaints of injustice and suffering of women. Common approaches have focused on adding conditions to the marriage contract to protect women’s rights, and to reform substantive provisions in areas such as polygamy and divorce to minimise the discrimination and hardships women face.
In a modern world dominated by an ethical paradigm of justice, equality, freedom and dignity, the Qur’an provides a wealth of guiding principles to develop a new jurisprudence on marriage based on the principles of equality and justice. Morocco recently reformed its family law to achieve this.

But this approach to law reform has not been satisfactory. It remains a patchwork or band-aid approach to redress a flawed contract based on an assumption that has little bearing on today’s realities. In this age of globalisation and wide access to education, the traditional male provider and subservient female homemaker are no longer models of Muslim marriage. The dynamics of marital relations in the modern world have changed as more women outperform men academically, as more women work and become financially independent and contribute to the family expenses.

Given these changing realities, the legal logic that produced the law governing the personal status of Muslims will need to change. This is not to say that the traditional Islamic family law and its assumptions are wrong. The classical jurists were guided by the circumstances of their times. In a different time and a different reality governing the lives of men and women today, the legal framework for marital relations must necessarily change.

In a modern world dominated by an ethical paradigm of justice, equality, freedom and dignity, the Qur’an provides a wealth of guiding principles to develop a new jurisprudence on marriage based on the principles of equality and justice. Morocco recently reformed its family law to achieve this.

So have Tunisia and Turkey. Indonesia has just drafted a new model law – a new Islamic Family Law grounded on the several Qur’anic verses of equality before the eyes of God; a relationship of mutual protection between men and women (at-Taubah 9:71), of men and women being each other’s garment (al-Baqarah 2:187) – providing a strong Islamic framework for this reform effort.

This imperative, in no way heretical, will allow Muslims to lead their lives according to the teachings of their faith, within the context of their changing realities.

Zainah Anwar
Executive Director
Sisters in Islam

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Sisters in Islam (SIS) would like to thank The Body Shop International for funding the first year’s publication of BARAZA!
Jana Rumminger for her writing and research, Rose Imaill for her editing, the SIS Islamic Family Law research team for its assistance in developing the lead article in this inaugural issue, and SIS members for their comments and suggestions.

BARAZA! is a resource primarily for activists; policy makers; academics and students of law, Islamic and gender studies; and SIS funders and supporters.

It provides:
* a focus on contemporary matters affecting Muslims today, especially women’s rights in Islam.
* resources for reference
* an update on SIS activities.

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Reforming Family Law in the Muslim World

In early April, a Universiti of Malaya professor commented that a Muslim father can force his daughter to marry a person of the family’s choice against her will, and that this marriage would be legal and binding in Islam. Similarly, the Kelantan Islamic Family Law Enactment (IFL) 1985 states that under certain conditions a virgin whose wali is mujibir (her father or paternal grandfather) may be married without her consent.

That same week, however, Saudi Arabia’s top religious authorities banned the practice of forcing women to marry against their will (ijbar), stating that the practice contravenes the objectives of shariah. The clerics said that whoever forces a woman to marry against her will is disobeying God and His Prophet, and that coercing women into marriage is “a major injustice” and “un-Islamic.” Laws in Algeria, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Morocco, the Philippines and most Malaysian states also prohibit ijbar.

If the laws of so many countries ban forced marriages, why have the UM professor and the Kelantan IFL Enactment allowed the practice to continue?

Such is the debate around the Muslim world, where, after centuries in which the fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) articulated in the major Sunni schools of law was considered the only definitive legal doctrine, recent law reform efforts are attempting to re-embrace the spirit and teachings of the Qur’an and the Sunnah.

History and development of Islamic Law

The development of Islamic law can be divided into several periods. Initially, shariah law revealed to the Prophet reformulated the cultural practices of pre-Islamic Arabia relating to women and the family (see Table 1). In the Caliphate period, the ummah conformed to the Qur’an and the Sunnah, the practices of the Prophet, and added two new sources of law – ijma’ (consensus) and qiyas (analogical reasoning).

Over the next 400 years, the Hadith were compiled and a science of Traditions was developed. Schools of law arose that codified fiqh, the jurists’ independent interpretations (ijtihad) of the Qur’an and Sunnah. After this period, the door of ijtihad was considered closed, such that future jurists could not independently interpret shariah, but rather followed the doctrine of taqlid, or adherence to the fiqh codified by one of the schools of law. For this reason, the interpretations of four major schools of law – Hanafi, Malik, Syafi’i, and Hanbali – formed the basis of most of the laws in the Sunni world today.

After independence from European colonialism, countries revived ijtihad as they codified and reformed their laws, though mostly through the talqiq (patchwork) or takhyir (selection) methods of replacing individual provisions with less discriminatory ones from other schools of law. In recent decades, scholars have advocated creating entirely new sets of laws based on an egalitarian approach, even if it requires shifting from interpretations of the major schools of law. This

Table 1: History and Development of Islamic Law

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<tr>
<td>Shariah revealed to the Prophet</td>
<td>Adherence to the Qur’an and the Sunnah. Two additional sources of law - consensus of the community (ijma’) and analogical reasoning (qiyas) - used for resolving matters not specifically addressed in the Qur’an and Sunnah.</td>
<td>Sectarians narrated Traditions that were not accepted generally in order to further their particular viewpoints. Muhaddithin began to collect and organise hadith in order to separate authentic from false Traditions.</td>
<td>Development of science of Traditions and systematic compilation of the Hadith. Rise of major schools of law that codified fiqh as fixed, permanent standards that have been followed to this day. Conceptions of women’s roles from the culture of pre-Islamic Arabia and other patriarchal civilisations, not the Qur’an, concretised in the fiqh. Period in which door of ijtihad was closed.</td>
<td>Adherence to the schools of law (taqlid) rather than independent interpretations of the Qur’an and Sunnah (ijtihad). Jurists polished principles and produced commentaries, glossaries and compendiums.</td>
<td>Continuing prevalence of taqlid, sporadic legal activities, collection of fatwa.</td>
<td>Decline of the use of fiqh under European colonialism, followed by the codification of Islamic family law. Codification included law reform, mostly based on the process of talqiq (patchwork) or takhyir (selection), where individual provisions are combined with, or replaced by, less discriminatory provisions from minority opinions or different schools of law.</td>
<td>Continued revitalisation of Islamic law reform, with renewed debate between taqlid and ijtihad. Scholars begin to advocate replacing entire sets of laws based on an egalitarian approach, even if it requires shifting from interpretations of the four major schools of law.</td>
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is based on the premise that scholars were responsible for strengthening and promoting Qur’anic teachings (the shariah), not to merely uphold the teachings of early jurists (fiqh).

The history of Islamic law teaches that there is a difference between shariah (the infallible and unchangeable law revealed to the Prophet) and fiqh (interpretations of the shariah derived by man through the process of religious and legal science). Fiqh, the Islamic law applied in Muslim nations, has constantly evolved over the centuries and has never been fixed.

While shariah law is sacred and immutable, fiqh is human science. The fact that each Muslim nation has a different law demonstrates that these laws cannot be the revealed shariah, but rather are fiqh as interpreted and codified by humans. As such, the laws can be reformed to better reflect the Qur’an and better serve Muslim communities today.

Islamic Family Law reform around the world

Because Qur’anic provisions on marriage and divorce are often broad proclamations, they provide a wide scope for interpretation. Classical jurisprudence is restrictive in their interpretations of women’s rights within the family due to the socio-cultural milieu of their times. Because the subordination of women was a universal feature in various societies, among both Muslims and people of other faiths, jurists of those times embedded such patriarchal and cultural assumptions into the standard marriage contract (see Table 2).

Scholars of recent times, however, argue that this man-made fiqh contains flaws, especially since it reflects the social context and norms of the past, and that people today should take current experiences and circumstances into account when endeavouring to implement the objectives of shariah (maqasid al-shariah). Thus, women and men should have equal rights and responsibilities.

Since the mid-20th century, the trend in law reform has been to uphold the spirit of equality and justice in the Qur’an rather than to conform blindly to interpretations of the past.

Examples include:

- **Reform of entire law based on framework of equality**

In October 2004, a Task Force set up by Indonesia’s Ministry of Religious Affairs produced an alternative draft to the country’s Kompilasi Hukum Islam (Compilation of Islamic Law) that embraces gender equality.

In February 2004, Morocco announced a major reform of its family law (Mudawwana) which, “consistent with the spirit of our tolerant religion... is meant to reconcile lifting the iniquity imposed on women, protecting children’s rights and safeguarding men’s dignity.” The new law upholds the principle of equality between men and women; allows polygamy only under stringent legal conditions and judicial supervision, making the practice nearly impossible; provides for divorce by mutual consent and divorce because of irreconcilable differences; demonstrates concern for fairness and justice in the law; and provides additional rights and safeguards for children.

In 2001, Turkey promulgated a new Civil Code that defines the family as a union based on equal partnership, with spouses jointly running the matrimonial union with equal decision-making powers. A 2001 constitutional amendment redefines the family as an entity “based on equality between spouses.” The new government, under the leadership of the Islamist Justice and Development Party, has accepted these reforms, and in 2004 it reformed the Penal Code to strengthen gender equality and protection of women’s rights, particularly sexual and bodily rights.

- **Divorce**

In January 2000, Egypt enacted a law that allows women to obtain a divorce (khul’) on the grounds of incompatibility. Instead of the wife having to wait for judges to decide her application based on conclusive proof and independent corroboration of her husband’s ill-treatment or physical abuse, the divorce is granted upon the wife’s return of her mahr (dower).


The Supreme Court of Pakistan in 1967 used the same passages to expand women’s rights of divorce, ruling that a court could enforce khul’ against a husband’s will whenever a judge determined that a harmonious marriage was not possible.

- **Polygamy**

A number of countries limited polygamy based on the interpretation of an-Nisa’, 4:3 and 4:129, that the fear of injustice between co-wives is inevitably present in almost all cases of polygamy, thus polygamy should be banned or heavily restricted to a limited number of exceptional circumstances.
Table 2: Islamic Law Reforms and Pre-Islamic Arabian Customs

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<tr>
<th>Pre-Islamic Arabian Customs</th>
<th>Islamic Reforms</th>
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<tr>
<td>A girl baby was considered an ‘ar (shame). She was buried alive by certain Arab tribes.</td>
<td>Islam condemned and forbade this practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women were given no share in inheritance.</td>
<td>The Qu’ran introduced the shares of female relatives in inheritance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A girl’s guardian had the authority to marry her without her consent.</td>
<td>Islam made it compulsory to seek girl’s consent, a marriage forced by the guardian without her consent was not allowed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahr (dower) is paid to bride’s father or male guardian.</td>
<td>Mahr paid to bride herself</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walima (wedding dinner)</td>
<td>Approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categories forbidden to marry eg mother, daughter, sister, niece, aunt.</td>
<td>Generally approved, except that one was forbidden to marry father’s widow but allowed to marry father’s ex-wife if one is an adopted son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shighar form of marriage (giving away a woman in marriage in exchange for another woman as mahr)</td>
<td>Forbidden</td>
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<tr>
<td>Za’tina form of marriage (to make a man’s wife captive after killing him)</td>
<td>Forbidden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mawq form of marriage (marrying a widow without her consent, especially according to the custom by which the eldest son had the right to marry the widow of the father, other than his natural mother)</td>
<td>Forbidden</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taking two sisters in marriage at the same time (sisters as co-wives in polygamous marriage)</td>
<td>Forbidden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Istibda’ (custom of sending one’s wife to a person of noble family for a noble seed)</td>
<td>Forbidden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikah al-Zina, Baghaya were the harlots who had flags on their houses to invite males (form of marriage considered customary)</td>
<td>Forbidden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Mut’a (temporary marriage, with no right of inheritance given to the wife)</td>
<td>Only recognised by the Fiqh Ja’fariyya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikah al-Khaadn (secret marriage without formalities)</td>
<td>Forbidden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikah al-Badl (wife-swapping)</td>
<td>Forbidden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ta’addud azwaj polygamy (several husbands)</td>
<td>Forbidden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ta’addud azwaj polyandry (several wives, no limit on numbers)</td>
<td>Limited to four wives with the condition of justice among them, otherwise only one</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talaq (dissolution of marriage by husband); unlimited right of return, right of husband not to allow wife to marry others even after iddah (waiting period for divorce wife)</td>
<td>Talaq limited to two revocable pronouncements with prescribed procedures; payment of mut’aah compensation to wife, freedom of wife to marry anyone after the iddah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khil’ (dissolution of marriage at wife’s instance by returning mahr to husband)</td>
<td>Allowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ila’ (form of divorce by vowing to have no relations with the wife for up to two years)</td>
<td>Period was limited to four months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zihar (form of divorce by declaring wife to be comparable with husband’s mother or forbidden relative)</td>
<td>Not allowed as a form of divorce, expiation attached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women not recognised as witnesses</td>
<td>Allowed as witnesses; in commercial transactions two required</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Tunisian Personal Status Code 1956 states, "polygamy is prohibited".

The Jordanian Law allows a wife to state in the marriage contract that the husband cannot take another wife and that the wife is entitled to divorce if he does.

Many countries, including Malaysia, require the court's approval of polygamous marriages based on restrictions that may be strictly enforced.

### Conditions in Marriage Contracts (ta'liq)

Countries in the Middle East (including Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and Saudi Arabia), the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent and Southeast Asia allow the parties to agree upon conditions in marriage contracts such that breach of a condition can be grounds for a ta'liq divorce. Examples include: a husband shall not take another wife during the marriage; a husband shall provide maintenance; a husband shall not ill-treat or assault his wife. Ta'liq has been used throughout the centuries, the most famous being that of Sukayna bint Hussein, the great-granddaughter of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), but the inclusion of additional conditions that protect women's rights have not been promoted in Southeast Asia.

### Financial provisions

1992 amendments to the Iranian Divorce Law allow “domestic wages” (calculated by placing monetary value on housework) for the work a wife has done during the marriage if the divorce is not initiated by her or caused by any fault of hers.

Malaysia provides for the division of matrimonial assets (harta sepencarian). The wife, whose housework might be said to have indirectly contributed to the husband’s acquisition of property, is entitled to claim one-third of the property acquired during the marriage. She is entitled to claim half if it is shown that she contributed directly towards its acquisition. The claim can be made upon divorce or before the husband contracts a polygamous marriage.

### Why reform Islamic Family Laws in Malaysia?

Islamic family laws in Malaysia should be reformed because they discriminate against women (see Table 3). While the message of the Qur'an is that men and women are equal, the message of the laws is that men have more rights than women. Amendments to various states’ Islamic Family Laws since the 1990s have actually been regressive in terms of women’s rights, harming women more than helping them, which also points to the need for reform.

Discrimination and inequality can be found in provisions on:

- **Age of marriage**: Women may be married at younger ages than men; there is no minimum age for marriage in Perak.
- **Ijbar (forced marriage)**: In Kelantan and Kedah, if a woman is an unmarried virgin, her wali mujbir (father or paternal grandfather) can marry her to a man of equal status against her will.
- **Registration of marriages**: A marriage may be registered even if it contravenes the law.
- **Witnesses**: Only males may act as witnesses to a marriage.
- **Polygamy**: A man may marry up to four women, with few restrictions in some states.

### Nusyuz

A wife but not a husband can be punished for nusyuz even though the Qur'an also uses nusyuz to describe conduct by the husband; laws in some states do not define what constitutes nusyuz.

### Divorce

Husbands can divorce through a unilateral talaq outside of court; wives may only get a divorce with the husband’s consent or through lengthy arbitration and/or court proceedings.

### Mut'ah (monetary gift from husband to wife, paid on divorce through talaq or where the fault lies with him): Awards are usually insubstantial, even when husbands have financial resources; amounts are decided at the discretion of individual courts.

### Guardianship

Guardianship is always male, never female or shared by both parents.

National and international laws also necessitate reform. The Federal Constitution forbids discrimination on the basis of gender. International law, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which Malaysia has ratified, demands that nations act to eliminate discrimination against women and establish equality between men and women.

### Continuity of reform

Whenever reforms of Islamic laws are proposed, the proposals are met with opposition and fear that Islam itself is to be reformed. While it is understandable that many think of “Islamic law” as sacred and immutable, deeper reflection into the history and development of the law reveals that reforming present-day Islamic laws will not threaten Islam because these laws are man-made fiqh, not divinely revealed shariah. The basic principles of shariah are absolute, but the non-basic principles of fiqh, which are non-divine interpretations of the shariah, are not absolute. Because of this, fiqh can be and has, over the years, been changed to conform better to the teachings in the Qur'an and the Sunnah and better reflect current Muslim societies.

This is not extraordinary among the ummah: the trend in Muslim countries around the world is law reform. Religious and legal authorities in other Muslim nations are recognising the problematic aspects of their current family laws and reforming them to be more egalitarian and just. It is only right that Malaysia begins to do the same.
Table 3: Best Practices on Family Law Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Law Issue</th>
<th>Current Practice in Malaysia</th>
<th>Best Practices in the Muslim World</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of marriage</td>
<td>The minimum age of marriage is 16 for females and 18 for males. The Shariah court judge can use discretion to give written permission for the marriage of minors.</td>
<td>Morocco: Under the Personal Status Code (2004 revision), the legal age of marriage is 18 for boys and girls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent for marriage</td>
<td>Consent of both parties is mandatory except in the states of Kelantan and Kedah, where if the woman is an unmarried virgin, her wali mujbir (father or paternal grandfather) can marry her to a man of equal status as she is, without her consent.</td>
<td>Tunisia: No marriage shall be contracted except with the consent, freely and voluntarily given, by each party.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wali for marriage</td>
<td>Consent of wali is necessary for the bride although she may apply for a judge to consent as wali hakim if her wali nasab (father or male relative) unreasonably refuses consent.</td>
<td>Tunisia: Both husband and wife have the right to contract their marriage themselves or appoint proxies.                                                                                           Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan (under Hanafi jurisprudence): A wali is not required for Hanafi women who have attained puberty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnesses for marriage</td>
<td>The Kelantan Enactment requires male witnesses. The practice in other states also calls for male witnesses, even though it is not explicit in the law.</td>
<td>Senegal: Two adult witnesses required, one for each spouse. The sex of witnesses is not specified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polygamy</td>
<td>Contracting polygamous marriages requires permission from the Shariah Court. Conditions vary slightly among the 13 states. Penalties exist for failure to follow procedures.</td>
<td>Tunisia: Any man who contracts a polygamous marriage can be jailed for a year or fined 240,000 Tunisian francs, or both. A wife who knowingly enters a polygamous marriage is also liable to the same punishments. The marriage can be nullified by either spouse, guardians, mothers, or the legal department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nusyuz</td>
<td>Nusyuz is defined as disobedience of wife. Any woman who wilfully disobeys any order from her husband that is lawful under hukum syara' commits an offence and shall be punished with a fine. Wife is not entitled to maintenance if she is disobedient.</td>
<td>Turkey: The family is based on equality between spouses and both have joint decision-making powers regarding the family. Indonesia: The rights and responsibilities of the wife are equivalent to the husband's in the life of the household and in social intercourse in society. The spouses are to treat each other with kindness, make their conjugal life pleasant, and refrain from causing each other harm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>Husbands’ pronouncement of divorce outside court – even through SMS – is recognised, subject to his paying a fine. A wife who initiates divorce often faces numerous delays and will be ordered to undergo reconciliation and mediation proceedings with no time limit imposed.</td>
<td>Indonesia: A husband married under Muslim law must provide the religious court with a written notification of his intention to divorce. The six grounds for divorce are available to both husbands and wives, before reconciliation meetings are called separately, failing which the court calls the parties to witness the divorce. Revocable divorce is not recognised. Tunisia: Divorce shall only take place in court. There is equal grounds for divorce for husband and wife, including ‘at the will of the husband or at the request of the wife’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mut’ah (compensatory payment by the husband to the wife, paid on divorce through talaq or where the ‘fault’ lies with the husband)</td>
<td>A woman divorced without just cause may apply mut’ah but the amount of mut’ah is left to the discretion of individual courts.</td>
<td>Tunisia: If a woman is ‘wrongfully’ divorced, she may be awarded the mut’ah in the form of a lump sum, a property transfer or monthly instalments. The amount paid to a woman may be determined by the standard of living the wife was accustomed to. Turkey: The party least at fault and who has suffered injury to their actual or potential interests due to the divorce can claim reasonable compensation, paid monthly or in lump sum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Custody and Guardianship</td>
<td>The best interest of the child is the paramount consideration but for young children, it is presumed that their best interest will be served by being in the custody of the mother, if she had not remarried. Guardianship is always vested in the father.</td>
<td>Cameroon &amp; Central Asia Republics: Custody and guardianship can be given to either parent, with the best interest of the child as the paramount consideration. Tunisia: Both parents have equal rights in custody and guardianship during marriage and the court decides custody in the best interest of the child in the event of divorce. If custody goes to the mother, she exercises the authority of guardianship in relation to the child’s travel, education and financial affairs.</td>
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**MOROCCO**
- The Code of Personal Status (al-Mudawwanah) was issued following independence in 1956. The small Jewish minority is governed by separate personal status laws.
- Major improvements to the Mudawwanah were made in 1993 following campaigns by activists.
- In February 2004, a major reform took place to make it consistent with the spirit of Islam as a tolerant religion.
- The new law upholds the principle of equality between men and women. It allows polygamy only under stringent legal conditions and judicial supervision, provides for divorce by mutual consent and divorce because of irreconcilable differences, demonstrates concern for fairness and justice in the law, and provides additional rights and safeguards for children.
- Women can apply for *talaq* divorce if the husband breaches the additional *talaq* which states that he shall not commit polygamy.

**TUNISIA**
- The Tunisian Civil Code, largely inspired by the French law, applies to all citizens. Personal status matters are governed by separate laws for each community, including the Jewish minority.
- The 1936 Personal Status Code (the Majalla), which applies to Muslims, outlawed polygamy, gives women the right to initiate divorce and prohibits unilateral repudiation by the husband.
- Spouses are to treat each other with kindness, make their conjugal life pleasant, and refrain from causing each other harm.
- Both parents have equal rights in custody and guardianship during marriage.

**TURKEY**
- The Turkish Civil Code, based on the Swiss Civil Code and inspired by the Napoleonic Code, governs family matters and applies to all citizens, regardless of religious or ethnic identity.
- Amendments to the Civil Code, pushed by a coalition of women’s groups, were enforced in 2001, substantially changing many patriarchal provisions.
- It defines the family as a union based on equal partnership, with spouses jointly running the matrimonial union with equal decision-making powers.
- A constitutional amendment in 2001 redefines the family as an entity “based on equality between spouses”.

**SENEGAL**
- The Code de la Famille applies to all communities. Largely based on the Napoleonic Code, it is also influenced by Wolof customary laws and recognizes aspects of Muslim law such as dower and the husband’s duty of maintenance.
- The formal judicial system is entirely secular.
- Marriages have to be registered under the Code to be recognized. There must be consent of both spouses and two adult witnesses (not specified), one for each spouse.
- Divorce can be by mutual consent and agreement must cover custody of children and the division of marital property.
- There are nine grounds for divorce equally available to men and women and a 10th ground available to women only (non maintenance by the husband).

**EGYPT**
- The legal system is based on Islamic law and civil law. Egypt has some of the longest-standing personal laws based on Muslim law – which were codified in the 1920s. There is a separate personal status law for the Coptic Christian minority.
- Judges trained in shariah preside over family law cases within the National Courts, with separate family chambers for Copts.
- Largely based on the Hanafi school, the personal status laws have been amended repeatedly, most recently in 2000.
- Under this new law, women can apply for *khul’* divorce on the grounds of incompatibility, granted upon her returning the dower. Guardianship is governed by the Civil Code.
- Based on Hanafi school, breach of additional *talaq* which states that the husband shall not commit polygamy can be grounds for a *talaq* divorce.

**SAUDI ARABIA**
- The main sources of Saudi law are Hanbali fiqh as set out in a number of specified classical scholarly treatises and other Hanbali sources, other schools of law, state regulations, royal decrees, custom and practice. There is also a Shi’a minority adhering to the Ja’fari school.
- Saudi women have the right of access to a shariah court in matters concerning her own property. Saudi women inherit exactly according to Quranic rules, but only a few women actually manage their own property.
- Women can apply for *talaq* divorce if the husband breaches the additional *talaq* which states that he shall not commit polygamy while married to her.
- More recently, top religious authorities banned the practice of forcing women to marry against their will (qiba'), stating that coercing women into marriage is “a major injustice” and “unIslamic.”
SYRIA
- The Ottoman Law of Family Rights governed matters of personal status from independence in 1946. In 1953, the Syrian Law of Personal Status was produced, based on principles derived from a variety of sources, including a code drafted by the Qadi of Damascus, Ottoman Law, and various Egyptian laws.
- In 1975, the Syrian Law of Personal Status was amended in matters relating to polygamy, dower, maintenance, custody of children and guardianship.
- Marriages must be registered. Marriages contracted out of court are not certified. Permission for polygamy is usually refused unless the man can demonstrate financial capacity and lawful cause.
- Women can apply for *talâq* divorce if the husband breaches the additional *talîq* which states that he shall not commit polygamy.

IRAN
- The Civil Code deals with family matters as well as general procedural law. Although *Jawari* is the official school, laws may be interpreted according to other Muslim schools in some conditions. Personal status matters are governed by separate laws for Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians.
- The family law underwent major amendments via the Family Protection Law 1967 (amended in 1973), which abolished extra-judicial divorce, made judicial permission a requirement for polygamy, and established special Family Courts.
- Many provisions were repealed after the 1979 revolution. The sources of law now include Islamic law, constitutional law, legislation, customs and principles of the Islamic revolution.
- The government has made a model marriage contract available that gives the divorced wife a right to half the property acquired during the marriage, provided she did not initiate the divorce and is not at fault. It also includes a power of attorney from the husband to the wife (talak tafauid), permitting her to divorce herself on 12 different grounds.
- In 1992, the divorce law was amended to allow for "domestic wages" (calculated by placing monetary value on housework) for the work a wife does during the marriage if she does not initiate or cause the divorce.
- In 1997, a law was passed requiring courts to calculate the *mahr* payments husbands must pay divorced wives according to an index updated for inflation.

PAKISTAN
- The legal system is based on English common law with provisions to accommodate "Islamic state" status, most notably in the area of personal status, also to some extent in criminal law and commercial law.
- Each religious community has a separate personal law, although all cases are heard by Family Courts established in 1964; judges do not have to be Muslim.
- The Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961 gives substantial protection to women's rights within the family.
- Divorce by mutual agreement is recognised and delegated right of divorce (*talak tafauid*) to the wife is an optional clause in the standard marriage contract.
- The Family Court power to grant a *khul* divorce and the husband's consent is not relevant.

MALAYSIA
- The legal system combines Roman-Dutch law, Muslim laws and customary laws. Following independence in 1945, the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration law of 1946 was enacted.
- In the 1980s, the state issued *Kompilasi Hukum Islam* (Compilation of Islamic Law) to clarify the application of Muslim laws, which is dominated by Shafi'i interpretations.
- The rights and responsibilities of the wife are equivalent to the husband's in the life of the household and in social intercourse in society.
- A husband married under Muslim law must provide the religious court with a written notification of his intention to divorce. The six grounds for divorce are available to both husbands and wives.
- In October 2004, a Task Force set up by Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs produced an alternative draft to the country's *Kompilasi Hukum Islam* that embraces gender equality.

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Sources:

09
The Construction of Gender in Islamic Legal Theory

The major schools of law codified *fiqh*, or interpretations of the divine *shariah* law, in the 8th to 11th centuries CE, between 120 and 400 years after the death of the Prophet (pbuh). The rules on the formation and termination of the marriage contract that were devised by the classical jurists during this period largely govern marriage and divorce law today, 1,000 years later.

The conceptions of gender that were codified by the major schools of law, however, were neither unified nor coherent, but competing and contradictory. The various schools of law each had different substantive rules governing marriage and divorce, with no single ‘authentic’ or unanimous idea of the rights and obligations of spouses within marriage. Over the past 1,000 years, these substantive rules have altered, though the inequality between spouses has remained constant. This helps to demonstrate that while *shariah* is universal, unitary, and unchanging, *fiqh* is local, multiple and subject to change.

While the substantive rules were different between the schools, the concept of marriage was similar. Jurists regarded marriage as a transaction that gave husbands ownership or control over their wives, and especially over their sexual organs (*fatiha*). Thus, marriage was conceived in terms of commerce and ownership, with jurists even making frequent analogies between marriage and the institution of slavery, husbands and masters, wives and slaves. In exchange for the dower, the husband gained a type of ownership – in the form of sexual access – over his wife. The wife had to be sexually available to him at all times, such that he had total control over even her movement to and from the house. In return, he was required to provide maintenance and support, to the extent that Maliki, Hanafi and Shafi’i even made frequent analogies between marriage and the woman as housewife replacing the ideas of maintenance in exchange for sexual access. A 1972 ‘manual’ on marriage in Islam cites the man’s responsibilities as protection, happiness and maintenance of his wife; and the woman’s responsibilities as cooking, cleaning, laundry and other household management tasks. This is a far cry from the three major schools’ stance that women were not responsible for any housework. It demonstrates, however, that conceptions of gender roles and the system of male marital privilege that were created by the classical jurists and reshaped in the last century did not simply emerge from the Qur’an, but were the results of numerous acts of interpretation by particular men living and thinking at a specific time.

In fact, these conceptualisations of marriage and the social roles of women contravene the notions of justice and fairness toward women that are articulated in the Qur’an and practised by the Prophet, as well as ideas of social roles we understand today. Gender rights as constructed in historical *fiqh* are unable to attain the objectives of justice, equality and fairness by the Prophet, as well as ideas of social roles we understand today. Gender rights as constructed in historical *fiqh* are unable to attain the objectives of justice, equality and fairness in today’s societies. And yet justice is central to the objectives of the *shariah* (*maqasid al-shariah*). While the gender discriminatory rules may have been acceptable in the context of the hierarchical societies within which they were formulated, they are unacceptable from a modern perspective. Muslims today need to formulate a new jurisprudence based on conceptions of marriage that are promoted by the Qur’an and relevant to the changing roles and responsibilities of men and women in today’s society.


2 Such as “the Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another” (at-Tawbah 9:71) and spouses are garments for one another (al-Baqarah 2:187).
Public Education
A core programme area for SIS is public education. Activities include:

• **Study Session**

  Every month, SIS organises a study session on contemporary issues affecting Muslims, led by Malaysian and international scholars, activists and public figures. Here is a list of SIS study sessions conducted in the first half of 2005:

  **Jan 2**: Prof Clive Kessler on ‘Religion, Traditional Interpretation and Critical Hermeneutics’. Prof Kessler is Emeritus Professor, School of Sociology & Anthropology, University of New South Wales, Australia.

  **Feb 23**: Dr Farish Noor on his latest book *Islam Embedded: The Historical Development of PAS (1951-2003)*. A political scientist and human rights activist, Dr Farish is currently an academic researcher at the Centre for Modern Orient Studies, Berlin.

  **Mar 30**: Yasmin Alibhai-Brown on ‘Religion, Culture and Women’s Identity’. The prominent British journalist, author and broadcaster shared her insights on the challenges of being Muslim and the issues confronting Muslims and Muslim women today.

  **Apr 9**: Prof Muhammad Khalid Masud on ‘The Current Discourse on Hudud’. Prof Khalid, chair of the Pakistan Council of Islamic Ideology, is one of Pakistan’s most universally-acclaimed Islamic scholars.

  **June 21**: Eddin Khoo on ‘To’ Kenali and the Culture of Religion’. The poet, writer and translator is founder and director of Pusaka, Centre for the Study and Documentation of Traditional Performance.

  **Short Course**

  In April, Prof Muhammad Khalid Masud conducted a three-day course on Islamic Legal Theory for 27 participants comprising government officials, law lecturers, women activists, SIS members and staff. The lectures covered key areas of the construction of shariah in the formative period of Islam, gender construction in shariah and the social construction of shariah. Participants also learned about the principles of *fiqh* and examined their application in Malaysia through discussions on *Hudud*, Islamic Family Law, Morality and Human Rights. The final session was a vibrant discussion among the participants and Prof Khalid on the place of shariah in the modern world.
Legal Services & Advocacy
The success of our weekly legal literacy column in Utusan Malaysia spurred SIS to open a Legal Clinic in 2003 in cooperation with the Kuala Lumpur Bar Committee. The SIS Legal Clinic has served more than 1,600 clients through face-to-face appointments, telephone and email on Islamic Family Law matters. From January to June this year, we have served over 270 clients with the help of six chambering students, courtesy of the KL and Selangor Legal Aid Centre. Our legal advice column appears in the Keluarga (Family) section in Utusan Malaysia every Friday. The questions and answers are reproduced on our website www.sistersinislam.org.my, and used by clients as a source of information and legal education.

The Joint Action Group Against Violence Against Women (JAG), of which SIS is a member, has presented two memoranda to the Parliamentary Select Committee for Amendments to the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code. JAG presented the proposed amendments, including those on rape provisions (definition and scope, marital rape, burden of proof, aggravated rape, penalty), Evidence Act (corroboration, past sexual history) and domestic violence. JAG argued that since the Domestic Violence Act (DVA) is to be read with the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code, it thus necessitates amendments to the DVA. The proposed amendments were part of the memoranda submitted by JAG to the Prime Minister on law reform matters last year.

Campaigns
Moral Policing
If we had to choose one issue that dominated the media in the first half of this year, it would have to be Moral Policing. The topic attracted much debate following the raid and subsequent detention and humiliation of some 100 Muslim youths at Zouk nightclub in Kuala Lumpur by the Federal Territory Religious Department (JAWI) enforcement officers in late January. SIS’ responses to the media – including a letter to the editor on the issue – appeared in a few newspapers. The Malay Mail provided good coverage on the issue while the Sun took a brave stand asking for issues pertaining to morality to be dealt with by individuals and their families. To encourage informed coverage on the issue, SIS hosted a media briefing on the Shariah Criminal Offences Act (SCOA) on Feb 2.

On Mar 22, a group of NGOs and individuals held a press conference and issued a joint statement endorsed by 53 organisations, 3 political parties/wings, a business entity, 22 elected representatives and more than 250 individuals. The Joint Statement called for the repeal of provisions in religious and municipal laws that deny citizens their fundamental rights, and the appointment of a committee to monitor the process of repealing these laws, including representation from a broad spectrum of groups. It also urged more groups to be included in dialogues on the issue.
ACTIVITIES

The press conference started a wave of national and international media coverage of the campaign.

After the press conference, the groups and individuals set up a coalition – Malaysians Against Moral Policing – represented by a Working Committee.

Since then, the coalition has handed over the joint statement to the Human Rights Caucus in Parliament (Mar 24) – an event which received wide media coverage – and briefed the Backbenchers Club on the issue at Parliament House (Mar 28).

Those opposed to the joint statement went public with their views. Some groups even held public rallies during which supporters of the joint statement were painted as promoting permissiveness, hedonism and ‘Liberal Islam’. Most of the criticisms were levelled at SIS, which was seen as the organisation leading the initiative. PAS Youth (Selangor and Federal Territory) even urged the Government to ban SIS.

Despite the negative publicity, SIS was seen as an important voice in discussions about the issue.

SIS was represented at these events:

Mar 8 – Panel discussion on the Zouk raid organised by the National Council of Women’s Organisations (NCWO).

Mar 28 – Meeting between Puteri UMNO and JAWI.

April 27 – Panel discussion on ‘Enforcing Public Morality’ organised by Liberal Forum Malaysia.

May 15 – Panel discussion on ‘Liberal Islam’ organised by PAS in Johor Baru.


May 21 – ‘Wacana Islam Liberal’ forum, co-organised by the Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka and Majalah i, Nur and Dewan Agama & Falsafah.


There have been some important outcomes to the growing discussion on the issue in the public realm:

• review of the SCOA. The Cabinet has ordered the Attorney-General’s Chambers to conduct the review. SIS has submitted relevant documents to the review committee.

• ongoing public discussion on moral policing. There is increasing debate on the jurisdiction of Federal and state authorities to punish offences against the precepts of Islam. The issue will be discussed at the Bar Council’s 13th Malaysian Law Conference.

RESEARCH

Since its formation in 1988, SIS has embarked on various research activities, the outcome of which provides the content for our advocacy and public education work. The areas of research are the rights of Muslim women and diverse concerns relevant to the contemporary ummah.

SIS research activities this year are:

• Impact of Polygamy on the Family Institution

In 2004, SIS kicked off its pilot survey on the Impact of Polygamy on the Family Institution in the Klang Valley. The survey looked at the financial, social and emotional impact of polygamy on the family. SIS staff, members, academics and women activists formed the Polygamy research team, which carried out interviews with husbands, first wives, subsequent wives and children from the marriages. The team is now preparing the questionnaire for the next stage of the project – the national survey.

• Model Islamic Family Law

SIS is in the process of drafting a Model Islamic Family Law (IFL) for Malaysia based on the framework of equality and justice. The IFL team, made up of SIS staff, academics and activists, is collecting arguments for reform at four levels – Islamic framework; constitutional and national laws; international human rights principles; and the lived realities of Muslim women. To find out more about the areas of concern covered by the IFL research, read this inaugural issue of BARAZA! from cover to cover...

Source: Modul Analisis Gender, Jakarta: Fatayat Nahdlatul Ulama.
Recommended Reading on Reform of Family Law


Weblinks on Islamic Family Law


BBC, Paternity Scandal Divides Egypt, by Heba Saleh http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4295911.stm

Brandeis University, Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies, Feminist Sexual Ethics Project, Muslim Sexual Ethics http://www.brandeis.edu/projects/lse/muslim/sex-index.html


Emory University Law Faculty, Islamic Family Law: Possibilities of Reform Through Internal Initiatives http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/index2.html


Human Rights Watch, Women’s Status in the Family http://www.hrw.org/wr2k2/women.html#status

Karamah, Women’s Rights within Islamic Family Law in Southeast Asia http://www.karamah.org/docs/Womens_rights_%20SEA.pdf


About us
Sisters In Islam (SIS) is an independent non-governmental organisation which believes in an Islam that upholds the principles of equality, justice, freedom and dignity. SIS comprises a group of Muslim women and men, including staff and volunteers, who work on the rights of women within the Islamic framework and who advance the development of a progressive Islam in Malaysia.

Calling all friends
Throughout the years, many have voiced their support for SIS and to them, we have good news. SIS is setting up Friends of Sisters in Islam, a special membership category open to people from all walks of life who echo the voice of Sisters in Islam – loudly or silently, women or men, Muslim or those of other faiths.

You can be a Friend of Sisters in Islam by contributing RM50 or more. As a Friend of Sisters in Islam, you will receive:
- BARAZA! (SIS biannual bulletin) * SIS publications and/or merchandise * use of SIS resource centre * tax-deductible receipt.

Above all, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are part of a growing group of people who support the important role SIS plays in ensuring that Malaysians can continue to celebrate our heritage of moderation, openness and diversity that has been the hallmark of our multi-ethnic and multi-religious country.
Glossary

fiqh
jurisprudence; generally used to refer to Muslim laws as developed by jurists

hadith
written traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)

harta sepencarian
jointly acquired matrimonial assets

ijbar
the power to compel an unmarried virgin to marry someone of equal status, as recognised by certain schools; the power usually resides in the father or paternal grandfather

ijma
consensus of scholars on an issue

ijtihad
independent reasoning to arrive at a legal principle

khul
form of divorce available to a Muslim woman, generally by compensating the husband

mahr
dower; goods and/or cash to be given by the groom to the bride as a requisite of a valid Muslim marriage. It may be given at the time of the marriage ceremony, or promised at a later date or to be paid upon divorce or the death of the husband, or divided into prompt and deferred portions.

maqasid al-shariah
five basic values or objects that the shariah is supposed to protect: religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property

muhaddithun
scholars of the science of Hadith

mut'ah
compensatory payment by the husband to the wife, paid on divorce through talaq or where the ‘fault’ lies with the husband

qiyas
analogical reasoning

shariah
the path by which human beings search God’s Will. Commonly misinterpreted as “Islamic law”, shariah is not restricted to positive law per se but includes moral and ethical values, and the jurisprudential process itself.

sunnah
the example of the Prophet embodied in his statements, actions, and those matters that he silently approved or disapproved as reported in hadith literature

ta’liq
stipulations in a marriage agreement to which the groom has agreed; delegated divorce to wife for breach of conditions by husband

talaq
husband’s oral repudiation of marriage

taqlid
adherence to the schools of law

ummah
community

wali
guardian (for marriage); recognised by some schools as the father or paternal grandfather who has authority to contract the marriage on behalf of the bride

Source: WLUML Dossier 21