

Radicalization of Religious History and Its Impact on Women

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Radicalization and Religion

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April 29th, 2020

## **Introduction**

Religion is radical. Whether religion is being used to secure economic or political power, wherever there is organized religion, there is radicalization. In the modern era, the radicalization of religion often takes the form of alt-right groups or terrorist groups who distort the word of God to weaponize the masses in violent ways. However, this is not a new phenomenon. From the Crusades to the burning of “witches” (or heretics) our history is littered with instances of using “God” to justify violent behavior. However, it is the Abrahamic God that is weaponized in all the above examples. This God has ruled over our modern history for thousands of years. Before Abraham was spoken to by the Angel Gabriel, and before his sons founded Christianity and Islam, there was another deity that reigned supreme. *She* was known by many names and worshipped for many reasons. It was the ultimate radicalization of society that led to her downfall and the almost complete acceptance of another deity. For something to be classified as “radical” it must shift the fundamental nature of something. Therefore, is the global shift from the Neolithic Creator Goddess to a patriarchal society supported by the ultimate Alpha-male not the most radical religious phenomena to date? This paper will illustrate this radical shift in belief systems and societal roles as the Goddess is violently replaced by the modern God and will link this to the often-violent impacts this has had on women today.

## **When He was She**

The evidence of an omnipotent Goddess has been found in numerous archaeological sites. However, in order to compare the prominence and permeation of this deity to that of the Abrahamic God, this paper will focus on the evidence found in the Near East and Northern Africa. The location of the Abrahamic God’s origin story as well. There are instances of Goddess worshipping societies in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Sumer, Elam, Libya, Ethiopia, Babylon, Ireland,

India, Crete, Canaan, and even Jerusalem. In Mesopotamia, she was Tiamat. In Sumer, she was Inanna. In Egypt, she was the cobra goddess Ua Zit, or Nekhbet. Isis is later represented with her wings in later dynasties. The Tuatha de Danaan in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales are also said to come from an omnipotent Goddess. Ashtoreth or Astarte is worshipped in Canaan and Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> These societies are often referred to by historians as “pagans” or “fertility cults” however, more recent evidence and interpretations have proven these terms too simplistic for these ancient belief systems. While early Neolithic and Chalcolithic civilizations such as those found at Çatalhöyük and Hacilar do have figurines of women, they were not kept simply because they hoped it would help those in their village conceive, but because women were worshipped for their ability to bring life into the world. This gift was from the Creator Goddess. The contribution of the men’s role in conception was not yet understood. Thus, women were thought to possess a sacred ability that allowed them to bring life into the world and sustain it.<sup>2</sup> This tradition of women holding superior positions to men is not specific to these two areas.

### **Social Structures**

What impact did a female deity have on the gender structure of a society? In all regions where the Goddess was worshipped, women benefitted from high positions. Many of these societies were matrilineal. Women owned the land, controlled the finances, produced the food, and bore the children. As late as forty-nine years before the birth of Christ, there are written records by Diodorus of Sicily relaying the contrasting roles of women in the Near East and Northern Africa to those in Greece. He illustrates a society in which women not only were independent but were warriors. Ethiopian women fought while their men stayed at home and raised the children communally. In Libya, accounts of the Amazon women were still highly influential in gender roles.<sup>3</sup> The Queen in Nigeria during this time only took a consort until she

became pregnant. He was then said to be strangled after having fulfilled his “earthly duty”.<sup>4</sup> Robert Briffault wrote of a female Egyptian clerk that later became the governor and commander in chief of the army.<sup>5</sup> Sociologist V. Klein solidifies the role of these women even further by saying that men were dependent on women in early societies.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Cyrus Gordon wrote that inheritance passed through the mother, not the father.<sup>7</sup> There are even some accounts of these societies being polyandrous.<sup>8</sup> As men relied on women, women taking more than one husband gave men access to women’s wealth and land. This gave them more secure positions in society. Furthermore, these Goddesses were tended to by mostly women. The temple of the Goddess Isis in Egypt originally averaged sixty-one priestesses and eighteen priests and the Goddess Neith was only served by priestesses.<sup>9</sup> Those who tended the temple gave sacraments to visitors from the *asherim*, what is thought to be a fig tree, and sometimes engaged in the sacred ritual of sex. Sexuality was not feared or stifled by these earlier religions. In Akkadian, these women were called *quadishtu* or “sacred women”. In Sumer at the temple of Erech, they were referred to as *nu-gig* meaning “pure or spotless”. This ritual took place at the temple of Aphrodite in Corinth during the festival of Adonis and even in the Canaanite temples in Judah in which Yahweh was supposed to reign by those who believed in the older religious practices. The children conceived in the temple were given the status and lineage of the mother. Patrilineage was unimportant as these priestesses held high positions in society a female kinship line was beneficial to the children.<sup>10</sup> According to a study by Rivkah Harris in 1962, in Sumer women known as, *naditu* were responsible for the temple finances, had real estate in their names, and were scribes.<sup>11</sup> At the temple of the Goddess Inanna at Erech in the city of Ur lived a high priestess by the name Enheduanna. She was not only a high priestess and trusted advisor of Sargon the Great, trusted with melding the Sumerian Gods with the Akkadian to secure his empire, but also a poet. Her

poems and prayers used by the Babylonians later inspired those used in the Hebrew Bible. This makes her not only the first-named author in the world but shows she had an influence on the hymns of early Christianity.<sup>12</sup>

### **Where were all the Gods?**

Where were the men? These societies were not devoid of Gods. The sun God Ra still existed in Egypt. However, it was Ua Zit, later Au Set, who put him in the sky.<sup>13</sup> Each of these Goddesses eventually developed a male counterpart. In some societies, he was the son, others the husband, or lover. Attis, Osiris, and Adonis were said to hold a lesser position in this relationship according to the book *The Golden Bough* by Sir Frazer. In all these societies he was second to the Goddess and in most died, after which a period of mourning was practiced. In some accounts, he is banished for disrespecting the Goddess to the Land of the Dead. This account is detailed in Sumer with the tale of Damuzi, Inanna's son. After proving himself, he was given the position of "Sheppard of the land" (holding the same position as the modern-day Jesus). He then places himself upon her throne in a period of her absence and was thought to have behaved arrogantly which displeased the Goddess. Therefore, he is punished by death and is placed upon the throne in the Land of the Dead.<sup>14</sup> A similar tale is told through the legends of Aphrodite and Adonis or Cybele and Attis.<sup>15</sup> As time went on, the place of this male character shifted from an accompanying role to that of the dominant. Early Jews did believe in Yahweh, however, they also worshipped Asherah, as proven by the research above and the fourteenth-century tablets unearthed at Ugarit.<sup>16</sup> This transition coincides with the invasion of the Indo-Europeans such as the Assyrians. This is illustrated best in Egypt through the transition of Ua Zit to Maat. Maat is said to be the "eye of" Horus, Ra, or Ptah depending on the legend and time. *Uazait*, when translated from Egyptian, is eye. Just as *mati* is in Indo-European Greek. It is fitting then that the

all-powerful Ua Zit is given to the male deities just as the Indo-Europeans begin to take over this area for they brought with them patriarchal societies. The lands they were colonizing which worshipped the Goddess did not recognize such a structure. Instead, the Goddess religion placed women higher on the social and political scale than men. There was a tradition of regicide and High Priestesses who tended to a female Goddess were the keys to power.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the legends began to shift women began to lose power and were instead veiled for their “protection” or “freedom”.<sup>18</sup> Thor-El once said to hide in his innermost chambers quaking in fear of the Canaanite Goddess Anath becomes the storm God Thor.<sup>19</sup> A powerful God of modern myth. Tales of Gods murdering the Goddess or a serpent/ dragon figure begin to dominate the narrative as men vied for power, proving that history and legends can be re-written to serve those in power. This transition was not absolute or all at once, however. There are clear references to those who worshipped the Goddess up until the Old Testament as well as the violent ways in which they were persecuted.

### **Weaponizing Symbols**

Claiming to be associated with a deity to establish control is something that has been practiced for thousands of years. What is interesting about the progression of the Abrahamic religion is how many attempts are made by those of the new faith to eradicate any evidence of the religion of the past. Just as Marduk murders the Creator Goddess Tiamat in Babylon to replace Sumer’s control of the area, priests of these new religions did all they could to degrade the Goddess.<sup>20</sup> Ashtoreth is continuously paired with Baal in southern Canaan. It is mispronounced as *boseth* or “shame” and when referring to the Goddess the masculine gender is used.<sup>21</sup> The Abrahamic religions derogated this female-dominated belief system in many ways.

The most interesting method is the way in which the symbols were repeatedly destroyed both in legend and reality.

Serpents and snakes were a large part of the Goddess religion perhaps because of the use of the venom in oracular divination. If a person is immunized to the venom, it is thought the effects of it entering the system are like that of hallucinogenic drugs. A similar ritual existed in the North American Indian religions by using peyote cactus or mushrooms.<sup>22</sup> The prophecies brought on by snake venom were thought to be words of the Goddess directing those who sought them out. Remnants of serpents were found across the Near East and Northern Africa. A bronze serpent was found in Gezer just eighteen miles northwest of Jerusalem in a cave that was used as a religious sanctuary. At Taanach, in modern-day Palestine, serpent heads, a figure holding a serpent and another of Ashtoreth with an inscription that the Goddess gave the oracles were unearthed. In Tell Beit Merism, an archaeological site in Israel, a stele was found that had a Goddess with a snake curling around her body carved into it. A serpent of bronze was also found in Jerusalem and was a sacred idol in the temple there until about 700 B.C.E. (even during the time of Moses). The Serpent or Cobra Goddess is found in Crete, Cyprus, and Canaan as well.<sup>23</sup> Another important symbol of this religion is the fruit tree, *asherah* or *asherim* (plural). In Egypt, this “idol” found in temples was most likely the sacred sycamore-fig tree that was representative of the “Body of the Goddess on Earth”.<sup>24</sup> Their fruit may have been taken as “communion” like the water and bread ingested by today’s Christians to represent Christ’s blood and body that were sacrificed.<sup>25</sup> Regardless of how it was used, it is accepted due to recent scholarship, evidence that the Asherah “pole” is a tree, representative of the “Tree of Life” used in many temples.<sup>26</sup> These symbols are seen in countless myths and passages meeting violent ends. The conquest over the “serpent” is referenced in Psalms 74 when it states, “By thy power, Thou didst cleave the sea

monster in two..." just as Marduk did. In Psalms 104, Yahweh (Jehovah) is also said to destroy the "primeval serpent". This chronicle appears again when Hercules defeats the serpent Ladon who is said to be defending the fruit tree of the Goddess.<sup>27</sup> The *asherim* are vanquished in a similar manner being referred to as "uprooted", or "burned" throughout the Bible.<sup>28</sup> In the book of Deuteronomy, it reads, "you shall tear down their pillars and burn their *asherim* with fire". In II Kings 23:4-15 it states, "He broke in pieces the pillars and cut down the *asherim* and filled their places with the bones of men."<sup>29</sup> After these symbols were destroyed both figuratively and literally they were commandeered into the Bible's own stories to further subjugate women and allow the immigrants from Indo-European areas to wield the power according to their social structures.

Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden is a story known worldwide. However, its association with the ancient Goddess religion is not. Now that the symbols of serpents and fruit trees have been expounded, their incorporation into the origin story as well as Adam's allusive first wife will be explored. The dissection of this tale will illustrate how the rituals and beliefs of the ancient religion have permeated those of today and were used by early Christians to internalize the "evil" associated with the Goddess religion. Lilith is many things depending on the source. According to the *Tales of Ben Sira* written by a Hellenistic Hebrew scribe, she is the first wife of Adam created from the same earth as he was by God.<sup>30</sup> In other accounts, she is his first wife made from the earth but mixed with "filth and sediment". In either case, she is unhappy with her submission to Adam when it comes to procreation and leaves the garden believing herself to be his equal. The name Lilith is thought to come from the Babylonian-Assyrian word *lilitu* meaning "female demon". She appears before the time of the Bible on a Sumerian tablet dated approximately 2000 B.C.E in the tale of *Gilgamesh and the*



*Willow Tree*. She is referred to as ‘Lillake’ and dwells in a willow tree where she is tended to by the Goddess Inanna. In all accounts, she is known for her seduction of men.<sup>31</sup> Eve, Adam’s second wife, has a creation that is also debated. In Gen 1.27 it states, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male *and female* he created them.” Gen. 2.23 tells a different story, in which Eve is created from Adam’s rib. “she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of man.” While it is Eve who is blamed for their banishment from the Garden of Eden, Adam received the edict that this is forbidden before Eve has been created. But when Adam is chastised for his actions, he faults Eve”.<sup>32</sup> When the tale of a sexually dominant first wife who is turned into the “mother of demons” is coupled with the tale of Eve eating the forbidden fruit from a tree after a serpent whispers in her ear causing her and Adam to become sexually aware, the parallels to the Goddess rituals in undeniable.<sup>33</sup> The patriarchal religion of the Indo-European immigrants to the Near East and Northern Africa wanted a story that could discredit the matrilineal line previously associated with control of their new land while also discounting the ability of women to hold power in the future. This new creation story puts them second to their male counterparts and holds the “lesser” of the sexes responsible for the exile of the entire human race from paradise. The *asherim*, serpents, and sexual acceptance of the ancient religion are discounted all at once alongside women’s descent from the social and political sphere. Thus, radically changing the course of history and leading to the struggle of women today to be treated equally. This has also contributed to violence against women by cloaking efforts to control them by asserting that they need to be “protected” because of their “nature”.

### **Bias is in the Eyes of the Beholder**

The radicalization of women’s place in the public sphere cannot be attributed solely to the creation of Abrahamic religions and the desire of Indo-Europeans to expand their control, but

to those left to interpret the past. While the eradication of the Goddess religion is a large part of the female's societal descent, the main inspiration of these religions is not responsible. Jesus and Mohammed displayed great admiration for the contribution of women and women had great freedom in Judaism until the creation of the Talmud. It is the scholars and religious clerics that came after them that lead to the extreme shift in the roles of women today. The interpretation of history and religious texts is espoused by those suffering from their prejudice and societal norms. Until recently, most of those educated and privileged enough to gain access to this information and given the societal prestige to be heard have been men. Men educated in societies where Abrahamic Religions were accepted by the majority. These men whose ideas are molded by the environment in which they have been educated and brought up are often those invading the lands in which this archaeological evidence is found. Through this colonization, they have claimed the history of foreign lands as theirs for the telling. For instance, most Egyptian excavations were done by British men, and their artifacts brought back to London to be interpreted and displayed in the British Museum. Establishing themselves and their religion as the Indo-Europeans did before them by giving meaning and purpose only by contrasting themselves to the *Other*.<sup>34</sup> Showing their "civilized" ways by showing how the "pagans" and "cults" behaved "primitively". It is, therefore, no surprise that even when researching this topic, mistranslations and bias interpretations flooded the available research. That is not to say that all the interpretations of archaeological evidence are incorrect. However, it has been proven time and again that initial interpretations are not always correct. For instance, a grave in Birka, a Viking settlement on Björkö the Swedish island, is redefining how gender-roles in Viking societies are viewed.<sup>35</sup>

This secular archaeological site provides another example of bias in scholarship. The grave initially excavated in the 1870s, was re-evaluated by Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson and

her colleagues using genomes and proved that the skeleton of the warrior was actually a female in 2017.<sup>36</sup> Although the status of this skeleton had never been questioned as a high ranking warrior, potentially a commander because of the high-quality weapons and gaming set, as well as the location of the grave; as soon as the gender was switched from male to female, all of the previously accepted notions of who this person was came into question. Showing once again that the cultural norms of the present bias the lenses through which the past is perceived. With this bias known, it is not surprising that *quadishtu* and *nu-gig* lose the “pure” and “sacred” and are instead referred to as “prostitutes”.<sup>37</sup> Goddesses are turned over to their male counterparts and warrior women are disguised as men. This shift in history is not surprising. For it is no secret he who holds the microphone is heard the loudest. However, unless the history of widespread religion, different from the modern one known today is given its place in history and interpreted by those with a different perspective the gender-specific interpretation of what is "civilized" will continue to permeate the hearts and minds of the masses. History was interpreted by men of privilege for centuries and archaeology is not a forgiving science. Once a site has been excavated, the rubble separated from what is thought to be important and interpreted, it is nearly impossible to revisit the site and successfully find what may have been missed. Therefore, we must do the best with what has been found and analyzed by those who were given the opportunity, money, and education to do so while making room for the re-interpretation of the religions of the past through the eyes of those with different perspectives in order to gain a better understanding of the world's history.

### **Mistranslations and Suppression in Abrahamic Religions**

Misinterpretations in the Abrahamic Religions further secured the secondary position of women. Neither, Mohammed nor Jesus could write, and stories of their lives were not put on

paper until years after their passing and it is not until the Talmud that women in Judaism are truly segregated from their male counterparts. Thus, like a game of telephone, what was said at the beginning is not what is being uttered today. Ancient documents found in the Egyptian desert in 1945 show that Christianity was initially made up of several different groups. These sects had various beliefs documents and rituals that were later burned or banned once the Roman faction gained control of the region. Proving yet again that religion for the masses is dictated by the political majority. Both the New and Old Testament and other religious documents have been translated and re-translated. From Aramaic, Greek, Coptic, and Latin in the early fifth century to the thousands it appears in today. There are re-interpretations, copying errors, and changes that were made deliberately that occurred during these centuries of translation. One well-known example is the mistranslation of the word “girl” to “virgin” from the Aramaic to the Greek translation.<sup>38</sup> This mistranslation in the Gospel of Matthew is the only reference to virginity in the New Testament. Furthermore, Mary’s Immaculate Conception was not formally accepted by the Roman Catholic Church until 1854. Virgin or not, this Mary and two others were important in the formation of Christianity.

According to the Gospel of Philip “A Mary is his sister and his mother and his lover”. These three were always in his company with Mary Magdalene revered as a disciple according to non-canonical texts. The Gospel of Mary Magdalene was found in Cairo in 1896. Written in the second century, this text shows her encouragement to the other disciples after Jesus’s death to continue his work. Despite several acknowledgements that he, “loved her more than us [disciples]” and the initial acceptance of her role in the religion, by the late second century, some Church leaders denounced her teachings as heresy and her place in Christianity was lost for a time. Simple jealousy could be the reason for this shift in dynamics. A passage from Pistis

Sophia, a Gnostic text given to the British Museum in 1785 shows Jesus both praising Mary Magdalene for asking a question and encouraging her to “speak openly and do not fear”. In this same text, Peter’s disdain for her preferential treatment is clear when he states, “Lord, we are not able to suffer this woman who takes the opportunity from us and does not allow any one of us to speak, but she speaks many times.”<sup>39</sup> The New Testament and non-canonical scriptures show that Jesus treated men and women equally and make clear Mary Magdalene’s close relationship to Jesus and her financial resources to his movement. Despite this, the church deemed her a whore. An assessment that was not corrected until 1969.<sup>40</sup> Jesus, the great equalizer, is renamed the “King” of heaven as Christianity progressed, illustrating the increasingly patriarchal interpretation of the faith.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the pattern of women holding high positions in society and in religion only to be categorized as “sexually promiscuous” and unimportant continues into the modern era.

These positions were eventually eradicated, and women were further suppressed. Women held onto their important positions in Christianity until about the fourth-century C.E when the Roman faction gained control of the church. Many of these women spread the gospel and because of this were killed under the emperor Diocletian along with the 100,000. Lydia, a businesswoman even founded a church in Philippi. Christianity proved a respite for wealthy women centuries later when convents provided an escape from marriage and one of the only chances at furthering female education at the time. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, women who were able to donate funding could come and go from the institutions that were often joined with Monasteries. Nuns and monks had equal rank and nuns could even hear confessions. These institutions produced many renowned scientific, musical, and theological achievers including Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). Unsurprisingly, in the eleventh-century women’s “sexual

prohowness” was used again to justify the removal of her freedoms. “The Bull” of Boniface VIII was issued in 1293. This declared abbesses were no longer able to hear confession. Women were decreed to be “perpetually enclosed” and covenants would be controlled by male clerics who were often appointed by a secular ruler and who had little education or religious knowledge. Women’s plight worsened between 1300 and 1500 CE and reached its peak in the sixteenth century when Innocent VII initiated Witch’s Bull. During this time uneducated lower-class women who could not read or write and instead told oral histories and folk tales and celebrated pre-Christian festivals were targeted in areas of religious conflict in Europe and America. This resulted in the drowning or burning of at least 100,000 and in some instances 8 million women. Both Calvin and Luther, prominent leaders of Christian sects supported these prosecutions in the name of religion against those who worshipped like “pagans” or who were “sexually promiscuous”. Keeping in mind, original sin is a concept created by men in the church some of whom, such as Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E) only came to this realization after he enjoyed of many prostitutes and a long-time mistress and whose focus on female sexuality has already been explained above.<sup>42</sup> This obsession with female sexuality and the attempts to control it can be seen in how the church focusses on stopping access to reproductive rights. Abortion has a long history in the Catholic church. It began when Pope Sixtus V declared abortion and contraception to be murder in 1588. This decree was annulled by Gregory XIV in 1591 until Innocent XI reiterates this sentiment in 1679 as did Pius IX in 1864 and Paul VI in 1965. When contraception becomes available to men, some sects approve its use including the Church of England in 1931. The Catholic Church remains adamant that sexual intercourse is to be for the transmission of life as Paul VI states in 1965. The Christian Church only took a stance on abortion after the first six centuries besides treating it as a petty crime as it concealed

“fornication”. Calvin and Luther opposed abortion because this was women’s way to salvation (or to atone for her original sin)<sup>43</sup> Even when it seems the church may side with the female cause through statements like that of Pope John III when addresses the Beijing Women’s conference in 1995 calling for the end of violence against women, he stresses the importance of the “family”.<sup>44</sup> These views impact women’s education as well. Less than 100 years ago in 1929, Pope Pius XI condemned co-education in Catholic countries because it was “founded upon naturalism and the denial of original sin”.<sup>45</sup> These opinions when compared with the Catholic Church’s action also raise questions. The scandals of priests abusing young children is well known and yet the abuse of its nuns is just coming to light.<sup>46</sup> Suggesting perhaps it is not the female whose sexuality needs to be controlled for the sake of sin. Yet women are still denied access to high positions in the Catholic Church and most Christian sects.<sup>47</sup>

Judaism’s trajectory for women’s radicalization follows closely to that of Christianity because of its common origins. This faith also stems from Abraham and Moses. The Torah includes the Pentateuch which is the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.<sup>48</sup> These are also the first five books of the Bible. The main differences for women in Judaism are the progression of their roles. Perhaps because Judaism respected ancient traditions or its attention to these ancient tales, women were not segregated from men in the temple and were able to hold administrative positions, were called up to read the Torah on the Sabbath, and participated in prayers and study groups up until their expulsion from Jerusalem. In the first 600 years of the Common Era, a group of men who viewed women as inferior to men created a set of rules observed until the nineteenth century by many Jews. These Talmudic rules stated that women were impure, should not touch the Torah or be allowed to read it. The Talmud also shares the story of Lilith portraying women as sexual beings needing to be controlled.

Women lost their abilities to participate in the religious rituals they were before and, in some sects, they were physically separated in the temple.<sup>49</sup> Today, many factions believe that the Torah can be interpreted if there is a group consensus. Due to the more common practice of female education, these voices now include that of women improving their circumstances. Some even becoming rabbis such as Regina Jonas in 1935 and Sally Priesand in 1972 with hundreds more following her suit.<sup>50</sup> However, the Orthodox Jews cling to these conservative beliefs of women's place beneath a man.

Islam follows a similar story. Muhammed did not have a religious experience until he was about forty. As mentioned, he could not read or write but his revelations would be eventually recorded somewhere between 2 and 12 years after his death by his followers to become the Quran. The Quran also includes scriptures from Judaism, and Christianity including the Gospel of Jesus, the Torah and the Psalms of David. The words of the prophet and his revelations presented by the Angel Gabriel are thought to be the most sacred.<sup>51</sup> Muhammad's many marriages served a similar purpose to the polyandry societies of the ancient world. But in this more patriarchal time, it was many women to one man. Some helped form alliances between the many tribes of Arabia, a war-torn region, others gave him access to resources and others were a means of protection to widowed women. According to the Quran, a man could only have four wives and had to treat them equitably.<sup>52</sup> Women were said to be equals of men spiritually and morally to men. Their punishment for sins and access into paradise or hell by the same criteria. It wasn't until around 100 years after the prophet's death that Sharia law, a set of Sacred Laws was established. These laws, much like the Talmudic laws are what removed much of the rights of women in this religion and the societies that embraced it. This is the product of the Sunni and Shiite schools of law. This gave the power to the imams (religious leaders) and fatwa (legal



opinion) to interpret the Quran and implement its meanings in daily life. All of whom are men. Despite the prominent roles of Muhammed's wives in the early days of Islam. This along with cultural practices is the reason behind issues like veiling, female genital mutilation, and various beliefs on abortion (which is not mentioned in the Quran).<sup>53</sup> Societies constant need to control female sexuality as a result of the centuries of internalizing the monologue about the "sins" associated with the ancient sexually active, communal, and matrilineal societies is clear. However, this cannot solely be attributed to the edicts of the Quran. It is the fault of cultural practices and patriarchal societal norms. Luckily, hints of change are developing due to the education of women and the recent allowance of their voices in the public space. A recent development for women is the first female interpretation of the Quran in which the word "beat" is translated as "to go away" instead.<sup>54</sup> Showing again, bias can have a profound impact on the treatment of women and has hindered their development by a radical overhaul of religion in the name of "civility" by those it most benefitted.

## **Conclusion**

Religion is being weaponized globally. The Hindu National Party is targeting Muslims and Evangelical Nationalists in the United States are focusing on anyone who doesn't share their interpretation of the Bible. There is also a constant misrepresentation of Islam by terrorist organizations.<sup>55</sup> However, instead of panic and reactionary countermeasures such as extreme secularistic laws, society must realize these actions are not new violations against humanity. Violence in the name of religion is as old as history itself. Yet, it is not the radicalization of these religions in terms of their crimes against other religions like those of the Crusades, or that against the "infidels" today that has caused the most harm. Women have been subjugated, stoned, burned, tortured, and purposefully uneducated for thousands of years, consistently and

systematically. This paper aims to show that modern society is built on these methodical biases and has victimized, controlled, and segregated women to the detriment of society. By showing this extreme radicalization of previous peoples and radical shifts in modern religious intents, the clear rewriting of history and reclaiming of religion for political and societal gains before is clear. It is my intention, by discussing these, that all is not lost if we can only remember to learn from our past mistakes. It is possible to redefine what is “civilized” and important for future generations if all viewpoints are given the space needed to form objective evaluations of both past, present, and future actions regarding how religion is interpreted and used for social and political gains. Faith can bring people comfort and allow people from different backgrounds to find common ground. However, it can also be used to initiate violence. With this complicated history and perpetually shifting focus of these religions, violence, “in the name” of any religion should be scrutinized by the interpretations and political agendas compounded through centuries past.

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