

# GLOBAL CONNECTIONS *the Middle East*

What factors determine the changing roles of women in the Middle East and Islamic societies?

## *Lesson 1: Who Wears a Veil?*

Which women are Muslim? Hindu? Christian? Jewish? Can you tell by looking at them? Check the key on the following pages to find out.



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What factors determine the changing roles of women in the Middle East and Islamic societies?

## *Lesson 1: Who Wears a Veil? (cont'd.)*

### **1. Mother Teresa – Christian**

#### *Catholic Nun and Humanitarian*

Mother Teresa was born Gonxhe Agnes Bojaxhiu in Skopje, in present-day Macedonia (then capital of the Ottoman province of Kosovo). At 18, she joined the Irish Catholic order of the Sisters of Loreto. After a brief period in Ireland, she was sent to teach just outside of Calcutta, India, at St. Mary's High School, of which she later became principal. She learned local languages, including Hindi and Bengali, and in 1946 dedicated herself to serving the poorest of the poor. She founded her own order, the Missionaries of Charity, in 1950. With a mission to provide "free service to the poor and the unwanted, irrespective of caste, creed, nationality, or race," the order operated clinics, homeless shelters, orphanages, and hospices for lepers and the dying. Mother Teresa won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. She died in 1997 at the age of 87. Covering the head has been important in the traditions of many religious orders, including Catholic nuns.

### **2. Queen Noor of Jordan – Muslim**

#### *Royal Activist*

Queen Noor of Jordan was born Lisa Najeeb Halaby in 1951. She attended schools in Los Angeles, New York City, Massachusetts, and Washington, D.C., before entering Princeton University. As a member of its first coed freshman class, she earned a Bachelor's degree in architecture and urban planning in 1974. Four years later, after converting to Islam and adopting the name Noor, she married King Hussein of Jordan. Still active in Jordanian and international organizations even after her husband's death, Queen Noor is an ardent support-

er of many causes, among them health care for women and children, education, environmental protection, preservation of culture, public architecture, and the banning of land mines. She is Muslim. Depending on the circumstances, Queen Noor may or may not cover her hair loosely.

### **3. Dr. Amina McCloud – Muslim**

#### *Scholar of Islam in America*

Amina Beverly McCloud converted to Islam in 1966. A professor of Islamic Studies at DePaul University in Chicago, she studies Islam and Muslim life in the United States. In Muslims, a recent documentary on PBS's Frontline, McCloud facilitated a debate between Muslims and non-Muslims in Palos Heights, Illinois, over the placement of a mosque in the community. Some African American Muslim women cover their heads; some do not.

### **4. Benazir Bhutto – Muslim**

#### *Prime Minister of Pakistan, 1988-90, 1993-96*

Benazir Bhutto attended school in Pakistan, later earning higher degrees from Radcliffe College at Harvard University in the U.S. and Oxford University in England. She took over leadership of the Pakistan People's Party from her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and spent years in prison and under house arrest for her controversial political involvement. Just two years after Bhutto's 1988 electoral victory, President Ghulam Ishaq dismissed her government for alleged corruption. She regained power in 1993 and served until 1996. Like many Muslim women in Pakistan, Bhutto covers her hair loosely.

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### **5. Laila Ali – Muslim**

*Professional Boxer*

Laila Ali, daughter of renowned boxer Muhammad Ali, made her professional boxing debut in 1999. Her father and mother, former model Veronica Porche, were divorced when she was 8 years old. Ali grew up in Malibu, California, with her mother and sister. She started a successful nail salon while still a senior in high school. Her most famous boxing bout to date was her 2001 victory over Jacqui Frazier-Lyde, daughter of her father's most famous opponent, Joe Frazier. Ali, a Muslim, is an actress and model in addition to being a boxer. Though Muslim, Ali rarely covers her head.

### **6. Rebiya Kadeer – Muslim**

*Uighur Activist and Businesswoman,  
Prisoner of Conscience*

A successful businesswoman, Rebiya Kadeer is among the most prominent members of China's Uighur ethnic group in the largely Muslim Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. As one of her many efforts to secure women's rights in China she founded the Thousand Mothers Movement to promote employment for Uighur women. In 1999, the Chinese government sentenced her to eight years in prison for spying. She is considered to be a prisoner of conscience, and human rights groups are pressing for her release.

Although they are Muslim, Uighur women may or may not cover their heads.

### **7. Tansu Ciller – Muslim**

*Prime Minister of Turkey, 1993-95*

After serving as Turkey's first female foreign minister, Tansu Ciller went on to make history when she became the country's first female prime minister in 1993, as leader of the True Path Party. Though she lost reelection in 1995, she remains active in Turkish politics, an advocate of a free-market economy. She earned degrees in economics from Bosphorus University in Istanbul, Turkey, and the University of Connecticut in the U.S. Like most women in Turkey, Ciller does not wear a head covering.

### **8. Hanan Ashrawi – Christian**

*Palestinian Spokesperson*

Hanan Ashrawi, a Christian Palestinian, has been a prominent spokesperson for Palestinian statehood since 1988. She holds a doctorate in medieval literature from the University of Virginia in the U.S. Ashrawi has served in several educational leadership roles in Palestine, including as Dean of the Faculty of Arts of Birzeit University and Palestinian Minister of Higher Education and Research. After serving in various capacities in the Palestinian leadership, she resigned from the government in 1998 in protest of its corruption.

As a Christian Palestinian, Ashrawi does not cover her head.

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### **9. Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis – Christian**

*First Lady of the United States, 1961-63*

Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis (1929-94) is here shown at the funeral of her husband, President John F. Kennedy, in 1963. Educated at Vassar College and George Washington University in the U.S., she spent her junior year of college in France. She was known to the American public as "Jackie," admired for her poise, beauty, and love of culture. Several years after the assassination of JFK, she married the Greek businessman Aristotle Onassis, who died in 1975. After his death, she worked as a successful editor in New York.

In American culture, the veil and other head coverings have a variety of meanings. As shown here, the veil can be a symbol of mourning. The veil is often used as part of a bridal outfit, traditionally to symbolize modesty and maidenhood. It can also be nothing more than a fashion accessory, as in netting attached to a hat or a bandanna worn on the head.

### **10. Indira Gandhi – Hindu**

*Prime Minister of India, 1966-74, 1980-84*

Herself a two-time prime minister of India, Indira Gandhi was at the center of an important political family: She was the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru (India's first prime minister after independence from Britain, from 1948-64), mother of Sanjay and Rajiv Gandhi (prime minister from 1984-89), and mother-in-law of politician Sonia Gandhi (current leader of the Congress Party). Even as a child she was politically active in the Indian nationalist movement against the British. She was educated at Badminton School and Somerville College, Oxford University, in England. Indira Gandhi served as prime minister from 1966-74 and again from 1980 until her assassination in 1984. Gandhi was Hindu.

In India, it is customary for women, both Muslim and Hindu, to loosely cover their hair.