

The Heritage of Islam: Women, Religion, and Politics in West Africa


By Barbara Callaway, Lucy Creevey

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The authors explore the impact of Islam on the lives of West African women, particularly those in Nigeria and Senegal. Focusing on whether or not Islam acts as a barrier to women in the process of social change and development, they address a series of important questions. Is the pattern of training and education different for Muslim and non-Muslim girls? What is the domestic life of a Muslim woman like? How do Muslim women fare in the economy, both in the labour force and in the informal sector? Do Muslim women act as a political group, and are they involved in politics in ways different from the political participation of other West African women? In short, how is a Muslim woman's life different from that of her animist or Christian counterpart? These questions are placed in the context of ongoing controversy over the role of Islam in the secular realm; and also in consideration of the history of West Africa; and of the position of women in pre-Islamic West African society, which has an important bearing on their present situation. The authors also examine the impact of modernisation and industrialisation, as well as nationalist reactions to colonialism and neocolonialism, on Islamic women in West Africa.

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