

TOWARD A SCRIPTURAL HERMENEUTICS OF ISLAMIC FEMINISM

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In this article, the author outlines a number of mechanisms pertaining to Islamic scriptural hermeneutics that are affirmative of the very concept and goals of Islamic feminism. First, Duderija presents a brief outline of the concepts of scriptural hermeneutics and Islamic feminism. Next, he identifies and discusses the delineating features of Islamic feminist scriptural hermeneutics and how exactly they support the ideas underpinning Islamic feminist thought. Framing the discussion in this manner, the article aims to make a contribution to a wider acceptance and hence future viability of the very concept of Islamic feminism, especially among those who might be prejudiced against it on the basis of its employment of the word *feminist*.

Many worthy discussions on the possibility, meaning, and adequacy of the concept of Islamic feminism over the last decade or so have often generated diametrically opposing views.¹ On the one hand, a recent overview of the literature on theorizing about Islamic feminism suggests that “a carefully articulated and tentative convergence of the two (i.e., Islam and feminism) intellectual traditions” is both possible and potentially beneficial because such a convergence has “the potential to advance Muslim women’s struggles for equality.”² On the other hand, the latest scholarship by Ayesha Chaudhry and Aysha Hidayatullah has highlighted, if not reaffirmed, the difficulties and “feminist impasses” in espousing gender egalitarian or feminist interpretations of the Qur’an that are

¹ Fatima Seedat, “Islam, Feminism, and Islamic Feminism: Between Inadequacy and Inevitability,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 29, no. 2 (2013): 25–45.

² See Fatima Seedat, “When Islam and Feminism Converge,” *Muslim World* 103, no. 3 (2013): 404–20.

instrumental to the project of Islamic feminism.³ I am fully cognizant of these difficulties and shall address these concerns in various parts of the article. I hope this article will constructively contribute to these discussions and perhaps open up possibilities for new ideas that would be in general terms affirmative of the viability of the Islamic feminist scriptural hermeneutics project.

With the exception of Hidayatullah (and those whose scholarship she analyzes) who primarily focuses on Qur'anic hermeneutics, the question as to the kind of Islamic hermeneutics on which Islamic feminism proper is to be based has not been explored in depth. This is an important dimension of Islamic feminism since Islamic feminism, as a faith-based, global, intellectual, and activist-based movement, seeks to engage systematically and productively not only with the sacred texts of the Islamic *Weltanschauung*, namely the Qur'an and Sunna, but also the accumulated Islamic tradition as a whole, generally known as *turath*. This is especially the case with its theological, legal, and ethical dimensions, whose formation and continued mainstream interpretation is strongly tainted by androcentric and at times outright patriarchal elements. In this context, it is useful to define the concept of "the Islamic tradition" (*turath*). In classical Sunni Islamic thought, *turath* is usually linked to concepts such as continuity, stability, authenticity, and authority. It literally means "handing over" Islamic practices and beliefs.⁴ In its broader sense, *turath* can be characterized as a fluid, dynamic, and cumulative religiohistoric construct with a central intellectual core, primarily the Qur'an and Sunna, and a number of later developed doctrines pertaining to philosophy, theology, ethics, jurisprudence, legal theory, and mysticism as well as certain sociological and political attitudes and notions.⁵ Indeed, I argue that the very viability of the Islamic feminist project will rest heavily on how well it engages with not only the Qur'an and Sunna but also the *turath* as a whole. In light of this, the present article aims to identify and describe the major hermeneutical mechanisms that can support Islamic feminism and how these mechanisms can contribute to a systematic and productive engagement with the Qur'an, Sunna, and the *turath* by accounting for their dominant patriarchal interpretations and developing a hermeneutic that would provide alternative nonpatriarchal interpretations of the same based on, among others, scriptural reasoning principles.

³ Ayesha S. Chaudhry, *Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition: Ethics, Law, and the Muslim Discourse on Gender* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Aysa A. Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics in Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006).

⁴ Binyamin Abrahamov, *Islamic Theology: Traditionalism and Rationalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), vii.

⁵ I. Abu Rabi', *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Arab World* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 42.

Scriptural Hermeneutics and Islamic Feminism: A Brief Overview

Before I examine relevant existing literature, a few words about scriptural hermeneutics are in order. According to the leading Western theoretician of hermeneutics of the twentieth century, Hans-Georg Gadamer, hermeneutics is “the classical discipline concerned with the art of understanding texts.”⁶ As such, hermeneutical theories deal with “1) nature of a text; 2) what it means to understand a text; and 3) how understanding and interpretation are determined by the presuppositions and beliefs (the horizon) of the audience to which the text is being interpreted.”⁷ In the context of religion, hermeneutics refers to the study of the interpretation of sacred texts, especially texts in the areas of theology and law.⁸ Hermeneutics is therefore a process comprising “both the understanding of the rules of exegesis and the epistemology of understanding—the study of the construction of meaning in the past and their relationship to the construction of meanings in the present.”⁹

An important element of scriptural hermeneutics relates to the issue of determinacy of meaning and the factors that influence it. It aims to answer the question where meaning comes from and how it is derived. This element of scriptural hermeneutics intersects with literary theory, especially reception theory and its offshoot reader-response theory as it is known in the United States. These theories are associated with the works of Hans Robert Jauss (1921–1960), Wolfgang Iser (1926–2007), and Stanley Fish (1938–). Insights from literary theory tell us that since reading/interpretation is a process whereby a reader derives meaning from a piece of (sacred) text, the outcome of this process, termed “determinacy of meaning,” is governed by (1) the nature of the reader (previous bodies of knowledge—termed schemata—gender, lived experience and personality/character/moral sense/development of the reader, sociocultural norms governing the society in which s/he lives); (2) the (intent of) the author; and (3) the nature of the text (i.e., context and mechanics of language).¹⁰

Every time an interpreter is engaged in the process of interpretation, these factors contribute to the process of determinacy of meaning. In the context of the Islamic tradition, Islamic hermeneutics would relate to the study of theories of interpretation and understanding of the textual sources, namely the Qur’an and the hadith, especially in relation to how meaning is derived from these tex-

⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. rev. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 164.

⁷ Van A. Harvey, “Hermeneutics,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, vol. 6, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 3930–936, quotation on 3930.

⁸ H. A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981).

⁹ Duncan S. Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1986).

¹⁰ Scholars such as Gadamer would argue that these terms are the same since everything we do is an act of interpretation (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*).

tual sources and the role of the reader, author (or the author's intent to be more specific), and the text in this dynamic.¹¹

Muslim feminist scholar Aysha Hidayatullah has approached the question of Islamic feminism from a quasi-scriptural hermeneutics vantage point.¹² I employ the term *quasi-scriptural hermeneutics* since Hidayatullah's work is not consciously grounded in a scriptural hermeneutics framework per se and uses alternative terminology, namely "strategies of feminist theology." Nevertheless, Hidayatullah's work is a useful point of departure for this article as it comes closest to what I purport to achieve. Hidayatullah identified a number of common strategies of feminist theology in contemporary feminist interpretations of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, which have strong scriptural hermeneutics elements in them. These include (1) criticism of the assumption that men are the normative recipients of revelation; (2) criticism of the representation of God as male and the treatment of prophets as patriarchs; (3) historical contextualization of divine and prophetic texts; (4) close study of the language of revelation; (5) interpretation of sacred texts in light of women's life experiences; and (6) recovery of the stories of significant women figures in early religious history.¹³ Out of these six strategies, the first five have strong scriptural hermeneutics elements in them.

Delineating Features of Islamic Feminist Scriptural Hermeneutics

In what follows, I identify and discuss the following heuristic cum hermeneutical mechanisms as providing the basis for Islamic feminist scriptural hermeneutics:¹⁴

- an interpreter-centered hermeneutics;
- a comprehensive contextualization approach to textual sources;
- a thematico-holistic approach to textual sources and the dialogical nature of the Qur'anic discourse;

¹¹ By the phrase "Islamic hermeneutics," I mean post-Western Enlightenment developments in the theory of interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunna. This does not mean that "Islamic hermeneutics" did not exist in the classical Islamic tradition. Indeed, as argued elsewhere, classical Islamic hermeneutics does draw upon principles and interpretational mechanisms that can be considered real precedents for most of the post-Enlightenment hermeneutics associated with Schleimacher, Gadamer, Heidegger, and their contemporary interlocutors. See Adis Duderija, *Constructing a Religiously Ideal "Believer" and "Woman" in Islam: Neo-traditional Salafi and Progressive Muslims Methods of Interpretation (Manahij)* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).

¹² Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges*.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ I have excluded discussions of ontology since I deal with epistemology/hermeneutics. For an excellent discussion of nonpatriarchal Qur'anic ontology that is affirmative of Islamic feminist project as developed here, see A. Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

- a non-*salafi*-based *Weltanschauung*;
- an ethicoreligious values and purposive-based interpretation (i.e., teleological hermeneutics);
- a non-hadith dependent Sunna hermeneutics

The mechanisms should be seen as interrelated, working in unison, and existing in a symbiotic relationship with one another and have been separated in this discussion for the sake of conceptual clarity only.

Interpreter-Centered Hermeneutics

I explained above that “determinacy of meaning,” which aims to answer the question regarding how meaning is derived from a piece of text and what factors influence this process, is an important element in scriptural hermeneutics. I identified the reader/interpreter, the author (and author’s intent), and the text itself as factors that contribute to this process of meaning derivation. An *interpreter-centered* scriptural hermeneutics is based on the assumption that the meaning of a text is significantly influenced/determined by the prior self-positioning of the reader/interpreter herself/himself (in contrast to that of the text or the author) and that the interpreter does not simply retrieve the meaning of the text but plays an important part in *creating* meaning. This element of scriptural hermeneutics is useful for the Islamic feminist project because it provides us with a conceptual vista to understand the patriarchal nature of much of the formative, traditional, and neotraditional interpretations of the Qur’an and Sunna as embodied in Islamic law and ethics, since the vast majority of the interpreters of the Qur’an and Sunna—those who have constructed Islamic theology, law, and ethics—were men whose interpretations and *Sitz im Leben* (setting in life) were significantly influenced by the patriarchal context in which they functioned.

The prevalence of patriarchal values and systems in Muslim-majority societies and cultures (including in the foundational religious texts), both in the past and the present, has been identified and discussed from anthropological, sociological, cultural, political, legal, religious/theological, and historical perspectives by a number of scholars (apart from those already discussed above in the context of nonpatriarchal Qur’anic hermeneutics), including Suad Joseph, Denize Kandiyoti, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Leila Ahmed, Nikki Keddie, Barbara Stowasser, and Karen Bauer (see below) to name but the most prominent few.¹⁵

¹⁵ See, for example, Suad Joseph and Susan Slyomovics, *Women and Power in the Middle East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Denize Kandiyoti, “Bargaining with Patriarchy,” *Gender and Society* 2, no. 3 (1988): 274–90; Adis Duderija, “Islam and Gender in the Thought of a Critical Progressive Muslim Scholar-Activist: Ziba Mir-Hosseini,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* (2014), DOI:10.1080/09596410.2014.931043; Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); Nikkie Keddie,

For the purposes of this section, I am solely interested in the works that directly deal with the question of the importance of the nature of the interpreter in determining the outcome of “derivation of meaning.”

In “Room for Interpretation: Qur’anic Exegesis and Gender,” Karen Bauer examined important factors influencing the interpretation of over sixty of the most influential Qur’anic exegetes, primarily from the classical period. These factors have influenced the interpretations offered by these male exegetes of Qur’anic verses pertaining to gender relations including 4:1, 4:34, and 2:228. In this context, Bauer concludes that “the patriarchal lens through which the exegetes understood these verses has been apparent throughout this dissertation: almost every interpretation is colored by the exegetes’ assumptions about men’s and women’s natural roles and capabilities.”¹⁶

Elsewhere, she states that “common cultural understandings, societal mores, historical narrative, current scientific understandings, and their [exegetes] own opinions” have strongly influenced the kind of meanings and interpretations of these Qur’anic verses.¹⁷

Amina Wadud also shows acute awareness of the importance of the interpreter/reader in the process of “derivation of meaning” and incorporates it into her overall Qur’anic hermeneutical model by referring to it as “prior text.” In this context, Wadud argues that “every ‘reading’ reflects, in part, the intentions of the text, as well as the ‘prior text’ of the one who makes the ‘reading.’ This prior text in turn contributes significantly “to the perspective and conclusions of the interpretation” because it “exposes the individuality of the exegete.”¹⁸ Wadud defines the nature of “prior text” as functioning by means of a language (including its gendered nature in the case of Arabic) and cultural context in which the text is read but which is made up of individual interpreters.¹⁹

Chaudhry also expertly traces and analyzes the diverse and divergent interpretations of Q. 4:34, which highlights the pivotal roles of the interpreter and communities of interpretation in shaping the meaning and implications of scriptural texts.²⁰ By approaching the issue of Qur’anic interpretation from the vantage point of competing patriarchal and egalitarian communities of Qur’anic

Women in the Middle East: Past and Present (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Karen Bauer, “Room for Interpretation: Qur’anic Exegesis and Gender” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2008).

¹⁶ Bauer, “Room for Interpretation,” 182.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁸ Amina Wadud, *Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective*, 2nd ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4–10.

²⁰ Like Bauer, Chaudhry considers that all of the individual premodern/colonial Qur’anic exegetes can be considered as belonging to a single patriarchal community of interpretation when it comes to issues of gender in Islam.

interpretation and more specifically Qur'anic verse 4:34. Chaudhry's basic argument (echoing Ebrahim Moosa) is that the most decisive factor in the process of determinacy of meaning is ultimately the nature of the Qur'an's communities of interpretation whose interpretations at times can be mutually exclusive, as in the case of 4:34 (i.e., either patriarchal or egalitarian).²¹

In the context of Islamic law and Islamic legal edicts in particular, Khaled Abou El Fadl has convincingly demonstrated how the "authoritarian hermeneutics" (in distinction to authoritative) of contemporary Saudi Arabian male scholars has engendered authoritarian, woman-demeaning Islamic hermeneutics.²² In this context, Saudi Arabian male scholars are criticized for being oblivious to the intricate and subtle relationships existing between the author, text, and the reader, regulating "the determinacy of meaning" of God's indicators. Thus, such hermeneutics are guilty of equating the author's intent with that of the reader, thereby violating the principles inherent to the Qur'anic *Weltanschauung* and its ethicoreligious foundation. I have argued elsewhere that many of these interpretational tendencies that El Fadl detected apply equally to the broader traditional approaches to interpretation of the Islamic tradition.²³

Another important Muslim scholar's hermeneutics useful in understanding the patriarchal nature of (neo)traditional Qur'anic exegesis, Islamic law, and ethics is the work of South African Muslim liberation theologian Farid Esack. In his work (which is not directly related to Islamic feminism per se), he develops what he terms a "contextual hermeneutic of religious pluralism for liberation" that contains elements of an interpreter-centered hermeneutics. Esack subscribes to the view that (1) the act of reading is always tainted by personal experience and context; (2) that the process of meaning derivation is dynamic and significantly affected by the reader/interpreter or a community of readers/interpreters and her/their "prior text"; and (3) that meaning is always tentative and biased, produced not extracted, and thus no interpretation (of the Qur'anic text) is universal.²⁴

The patriarchal bias in exegetes' interpretation of the Qur'an is particularly evident in the following example taken from the classical Sunni *tafsir* of verse 4:34 by al-Zamakhsharī (1070–1143), who is representative of the majority view

²¹ Chaudhry employs the term *idealized cosmologies* and defines them as visions of the universe that "express normative religious constructions of gender, social relations, the human-divine relationship, and the descriptions of the divine [theology] through the language of law and Qur'anic exegesis" (*Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition*, 12). See also *ibid.*, 15, and Ebrahim Moosa, "The Debts and Burdens of Critical Islam," in *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, ed. Omid Safi (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 111–27, 123–25.

²² Khaled Abou El-Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003).

²³ Duderija, *Constructing*.

²⁴ Farid Esack, *Qur'ān, Liberation, and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997).

of the classical Qur'anic interpretations of this (and its sister verse 2:228). In relation to 4:34 he comments:

Men are the commanders [of right] and forbidders [of wrong], just as a governor guides the people. . . . The "some" in *some of them* refers to all men and all women. It means that men are only in control over women because God made some of them superior, and those are men, to others, and they are women. This is proof that governance is only merited by superiority (*tafdīl*), not by dominance, an overbearing attitude, or subjugation. Concerning the superiority of men over women, the exegetes mention rationality (*'aql*), good judgment (*hazm*), determination, strength, writing—for the majority of men—horsemanship, archery, that men are prophets, learned (*'ulamā'*), have the duties of the greater and lesser imamate, *jihād*, call to prayer, the Friday sermon, seclusion in the mosque (*i'tikāf*), saying the prayers during the holidays (*takbīrāt al-tashrīq*), according to Abū Hanīfa they witness in cases of injury or death (*hudūd* and *qisās*), they have more shares in inheritance, bloodwit (*himāla*), pronouncement of an oath 50 times which establishes guilt or innocence in cases of murder (*qasāma*), authority in marriage, divorce, and taking back the wife after a revocable divorce, a greater number of spouses, lineage passing through the male line, and they have beards and turban.²⁵

Based on the works discussed above, we can conclude that the patriarchal bias of the interpreter played an important part in the process of "meaning derivation" in much of the classical Islamic tradition, especially *tafsir*.²⁶ As particularly evident in the example of al-Zamakhsharī's exegesis of 4:34, it is obvious that the determinacy of meaning process in the context of much of the Islamic tradition has been significantly influenced by that of the nature of the interpreter, namely their patriarchal views and patriarchal *Sitz im Leben*. Important for the project of Islamic feminist hermeneutics, since "meaning" is conceptualized as always "tentative" and "biased," it is therefore possible to argue not only that these interpretations are not inevitable but also that alternative nonpatriarchal interpretations are possible.

Comprehensive Contextualization and Dialogical Nature of the Qur'anic Discourse

This hermeneutical mechanism is based on the hermeneutical recogni-

²⁵ Al-Zamakhsharī, Jār Allāh Mahmūd b. 'Umar, *Al-Kashshāf*, ed. Ahmad b. al-Munīr al-Iskandarī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1965), cited in and translated by Bauer, "Room for Interpretation," 137.

²⁶ Or "communities of interpretation" as is the case of classical Muslim scholars whose interpretational efforts were embedded in a cumulative exegetic tradition consisting of other Muslim scholars who shared similar patriarchal bias. See Bauer, "Room for Interpretation."

tion of the “intrinsic contextuality” of the sociolegal injunctions found in the Qur’an and Sunna. It means methodically investigating the role of context in the shaping of the content of the Qur’an and its worldview. For this to take place we need to recognize the Qur’an’s orientation toward the assumed operational discourse of its revelational context that manifests itself in the Qur’anic content and is reflected in the grammatical and syntactical structures employed and embedded in the very language of the Qur’an.²⁷ This Qur’anically assumed operational discourse must be seen as often reflecting the prevalent religious, cultural, social, political, and economic situation of its direct audience, its first community of listeners and participants upon which a dialogical nature of the Qur’an’s discourse is premised. This operational discourse was indeed characterized by patriarchy.²⁸ For the purposes of the Islamic feminist hermeneutics project, this dialogical nature of Qur’anic discourse translates itself into the argument that patriarchal practices evident at the time of revelation that were *reflected* in the sociolegal injunctions of the normative texts should not be considered as religiously binding as they do not belong to the universalist aspects of normative religious texts. Only those that the Qur’an *initiated* and repeatedly features—social justice and concern and protection for the weak and marginalized (in the context of the Qur’an this included women and their rights)—in actual fact can be considered to belong to the universalist aspects of the Qur’an-Sunna teachings.²⁹

In this context, the work of Nasr Abu Zayd is important. Abu Zayd argued that sociolegal injunctions mentioned in the Qur’an reflect the seventh-century civilizational reality the Qur’an confronted and ought not to be considered Qur’anic. The only purely or solely Qur’anic values, and therefore its teachings, are those that have been *initiated* by the Qur’an. Based on this criterion, none of the Qur’anic injunctions pertaining to punishments, inheritance, or divorce laws (i.e., those that differentiate on the basis of gender or social status) are a Qur’anic or divine imperative. Rather, they reflect the historical and cultural norms within which the Qur’an was revealed and initially operated. Thus, they are only procedural in nature and were not meant to institute absolute rules and regulations. The Qur’an’s sociolegal injunctions initially operated within and reflected this seventh-century patriarchal sociocultural and legal custom-based context, argued Abu Zayd further, in order that its immediate addressees would comprehend its ultimate message, which is theological and moral in nature. Hence, the dialogical nature of the Qur’anic discourses. Elevating this histori-

²⁷ Adis Duderija, “The Hermeneutical Importance of Qur’anic Assumptions in the Development of a Values Based and Purposive Oriented Qur’ān-Sunna Hermeneutic: Case Study of Patriarchy and Slavery,” *HAWWA—Journal of Women in the Middle East and the Muslim World* 11, no. 1 (2013): 58–87.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ As identified by what I below term a “thematic-holistic approach” to interpretation.

cal aspect of the Qur'an to divine status (as traditional Islamic jurists did when constructing Islamic law, at the expense of the divine and perennial Qur'anic values such as social justice, concern for the weak, and marginalized), argued Abu Zayd, would violate the actual Word of God. The same hermeneutical considerations principle can be applied to the concept of Sunna.³⁰

For example, Qur'an (65:1–2) instructs the Prophet that if men divorce women (*ṭalāqtumu nisā'*) they should allow their wife or wives to reside in their marital home during their *'idda* (waiting period) and then instructs *men* to keep or stay with their *wives* in dignity or divorce them in kindness and dignity. Most of the Qur'anic commentary on this verse reveals that the Qur'anic exegetes considered that the unilateral right of men to divorce their wives (*ṭalāq*) was a “pre-given” and “natural” order of things although it existed in the pre-Qur'anic period.³¹ The medieval male exegetes did not problematize such a unilateral right at all apart from emphasizing that although the verse addresses the Prophet it also speaks to all the male believers (*mu'minūn*). Instead, they either focused on discussions surrounding the *'idda* and/or proper treatment to be accorded the wife during this time and provided the circumstance for the revelation of the verse (e.g., the Prophet's divorcing of Hafsa or 'Abd Allah Ibn 'Umar divorcing his wife during her menses).³² For example, in the Qur'anic commentary attributed to Ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/687) the exegesis of the verses is as follows:

O Prophet, meaning [to address] his community, on account of what follows; or, [it means] say to them: when you [men] divorce women, when you intend to [effect a] divorce, divorce them by their prescribed period, at the beginning of it, such that the divorce is effected while she is pure and has not been touched [sexually], based on the Prophet's (s) explaining it in this way, [as] reported by the two Shaykhs [al-Bukhārī and Muslim]. And count the prescribed period, keep record of it, so that you may repeal [your decision] before it is concluded; and fear God your Lord, obey Him in His commands and prohibitions. Do not expel them from their houses, nor let them go forth, from them until their prescribed period is concluded, unless they commit a blatant [act of] indecency, [such as] adultery (read *mubayyana* or *mubayyina*,

³⁰ Hamid Nasr, Abu Zayd, “The Nexus of Theory and Practice,” in *The New Voices of Islam: Rethinking Politics and Modernity, A Reader*, ed. Mehran Kamrava (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press: 2006), 154–67.

³¹ Duderija, “Hermeneutical Importance.” See also J. Schacht and A. Layish, “Ṭalāk (a.),” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 2012). The authors write that “the right to a one-sided dissolution of a marriage belonged to the man exclusively, among the pre-Islamic Arabs. Long before Muḥammad, this ṭalāk was in general use among the Arabs and meant the immediate definite abandonment by the man of all rights over his wife, which he could insist upon as a result of his marriage.”

³² Duderija, “Hermeneutical Importance.”

corresponding [respectively] to *buyyināt*, “one that has been proven,” and *bayyina*, “blatant”), in which case they are brought out in order to carry out the [prescribed] legal punishment against them. And those, mentioned [stipulations], are God’s bounds; and whoever transgresses the bounds of God has verily wronged his soul. You never know: it may be that God will bring something new to pass afterwards, [after] the divorce, [such as] a retraction, in the event that it was the first or second [declaration of divorce].³³

As Chaudhry aptly notes, “Qur’anic exegesis and Islamic jurisprudence *assume* a husband’s right to discipline his wife and the ethical deliberations therein are concerned only with the procedure of hitting.”³⁴

Kecia Ali identifies and discusses other “problematic” Qur’anic verses, including 2:237 and 2:223, which “presuppose male agency and female passivity with regard to the initiation of sex,”³⁵ just as in the case of *ṭalāq* described above. Hidayatullah refers to these and similar verses in the Qur’an as “hierarchy verses” that “endorse male control over women and presume hierarchical male-female relations” which, for her, perhaps present an insurmountable obstacle for the project of Islamic feminism.³⁶ Hidayatullah also argues that we must accept the hierarchy verses as “real elements” of the Qur’an that enshrine gender inequalities at the level of ontology and come to terms with what this means for the Qur’anic feminist project.³⁷ She also concludes that Muslim feminist attempts to find support for gender equality in the Qur’an have been inadequate, resulting in kind of “text fundamentalism” that ascribes to a text meaning that the text itself does not support. This text fundamentalism, adds Hidayatullah, also contradicts the kind of hermeneutics to which Muslim feminist theologians subscribe in the first place. As a result, Hidayatullah opines that the manner in which Muslim feminists have interpreted the text has marginalized the importance of extratextual hermeneutical principles in their overall hermeneutical models, which in fact hold better promise for their ultimate

³³ The work is attributed variously to Prophet Muhammad’s Companion Abdullah Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687) and to Muhammad Ibn Ya’qub al-Firuzabadi (d. 817/1414). It is one of the most pivotal works for understanding the environment that influenced the development of Qur’anic exegesis. I use the translation of Mokrane Guezou, a British-Algerian translator of major Islamic works (<http://altafsir.com/Ibn-Abbas.asp>), which has been endorsed by Al-Azhar University and the Religious Ministry of Jordan (www.altafsir.com).

³⁴ Ayesha S. Chaudhry, “Wife-Beating in the Pre-Modern Islamic Tradition: An Inter-Disciplinary Study of *Ḥadīth*, Qur’anic Exegesis, and Islamic Jurisprudence” (PhD diss., New York University, 2009), viii.

³⁵ Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur’an, Hadīth, and Jurisprudence* (New York: Oneworld, 2005), 129.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

aim.³⁸ I contend that the hermeneutical principles of comprehensive contextualization discussed above and the hermeneutical distinction between what the Qur'an reflected and initiated à la Abu Zayd's discussion in the context of *ṭalāq* could apply equally well to the hierarchy verses Ali and Hidayatullah identify. Namely, when interpreted in light of these hermeneutical mechanisms, these verses are no longer prescriptive in the normative, ontological sense but merely reflect customary (*'urf*)-based practices that the Qur'an did not initiate.

The implications of this hermeneutical mechanism for Islamic feminist hermeneutics are clear. The traditional Islamic ethics and laws, among others, were clearly not informed by comprehensive contextualization of the Qur'an, Sunna, and hadith and did not recognize full hermeneutical implications of the dialogical nature of the Qur'anic discourse. Instead, they incorporated existing patriarchal custom (*'urf*)-based practices, into Islamic law and ethics.³⁹ Importantly, the *'urf*-based injunctions featured in the Qur'an and found in the texts of the hadith were considered reasonable and just by their contemporary community of listeners but are not to be considered as scripture bounded (*tawqīfī*), imitational (*ta'abbudī*), or sacred (*qudsī*). In the words of Muhsin Kadivar:

Islam signed off on the pre-Islamic customs' commandments as they existed, or with reforms in such a way that one might consider these commandments to have been revealed as marginalia to the common usage (*'urf*) of the Age of Revelation. Clearly the common usage (*'urf*) of that time was not scripture bounded (*tawqīfī*), imitational (*ta'abbudī*), and sacred (*qudsī*), otherwise they would not be used by the reasonable people (*uqalā*). These commandments were legislated to achieve justice and advocate human communities' worldly interests.⁴⁰

If recognized as such, there is no compelling reason to consider them normative for subsequent generations of Muslims.⁴¹

If we follow Abu Zayd's hermeneutical principle that a normative Qur'anic *value* or practice is to be restricted to only those practices that were *initiated* (rather than reflected) by the Qur'an (an interpretational technique that relies on the principle of comprehensive contextualization and "thematic-holistic" approach discussed below), and the idea that these *'urf*-based practices featuring in scriptural texts were normative *only* for those communities whose concrete realities, sensibilities, mentalities, and values were existing in a symbiotic rela-

³⁸ Ibid., 121–22.

³⁹ Custom or *'urf* has been recognized as a source of Islamic law. See Ayman Shabana, "Customary Implications in Islamic Law: The Development of the Concept of *'urf* in the Islamic Legal Tradition" (PhD diss., UCLA, 2008).

⁴⁰ Muhsin Kadivar, "From Traditional Islam to Islam as an End in Itself," *Die Welt des Islams* 51 (December 2011): 459–84, quotation on 479.

⁴¹ As any references to scripture are ipso facto based on scriptural reasoning and interpretation, they are also subject to critique.

tionship with them, we can interpret these difficult passages in this light. As a result, opportunities for alternative nonpatriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an and Sunna and constructions of Islamic law and ethics start appearing on the horizon.

Thematico-Holistic Approach to Textual Sources Based on an Inductive-Corroboration Approach to Textual Evidence

Traditional Islamic scriptural hermeneutics also often fell short of incorporating what I here term a "thematico-holistic approach" to textual sources even though the nature of the Qur'an and Sunna clearly warrants such an approach.⁴² This approach is based on the premise that a proper understanding of a Qur'an and/or Sunna-based concept is gained only if all the relevant verses dealing with that concept are analyzed and subsequently synthesized into a larger framework of interpretation by means of a corroborative induction. This is referred to as a thematic or systematic method of interpretation.⁴³ According to this view, the text is conceived as being web-like within which ideas are interwoven and the task of reading is to uncover what Ali Mabrook terms "the comprehensive constant" through thematic and corroborative inductive approaches to textual evidence. The eventual uncovering of "the comprehensive constant" would, in turn, be the aim or objective of the reading/interpreting process.⁴⁴

A thematico-holistic approach to textual evidence concerning the status, position, and rights of women in the Qur'an and Sunna reveals that sacred texts *mitigated* existing patriarchal practices and did not *initiate* them, which supports the idea that these practices are not integral to their message.⁴⁵ A thematic-holistic approach to interpretation suggests that the "comprehensive constant" to all textual evidence uncovered by such an approach amounts to an incremental, progressive improvement of the existing practices pertaining to women. In this context, the words of El Fadl are instructive:

The thorough and fair-minded researcher would observe that behind every single Qur'anic revelation regarding women was an effort to protect the women from exploitative situations and from situations in which they are treated inequitably. In studying the Qur'an, it becomes clear

⁴² Duderija, *Constructing*, 69–85, 139–69.

⁴³ Salwa Al-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qur'an: Relevance, Coherence, and Structure* (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁴⁴ Ali Mabrook, "A New Historical Discussion in Islam," in *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim Abu Rabi' (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 271–83, esp. 280; see also Barlas, *Believing Women*, 8, 23, 41, 60, 81.

⁴⁵ Verses such as 2:227, 2:230, and 4:35, which address both parties in marriage, suggest that there was "an incremental empowerment of women" scheme unfolding in the Qur'an. Khaled Abou El Fadl, "The Pearls of Beauty (On Re-Finding Our Lost Civilization)," in *Conference of the Books—The Search for Beauty in Islam* (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 2001), 275.

that the Qur'an is educating Muslims how to make incremental but lasting improvements in the condition of women that can only be described as progressive for their time and place.⁴⁶

Similarly, Ahmed Souaiaia's thematico-holistic approach argues that it is imperative, for example, to link the interpretation of Qur'an's inheritance verses with the polygamy verses and vice versa, since the latter have a direct and immediate effect on the former. In this context, he writes,

It is true that the wives equally share one-fourth or one-eighth (depending on whether or not the deceased is survived by a child). However, that is only relative justice. If we consider the rights of a wife in a monogamous marriage and compare her inheritance to that of a wife who is part of a polygamous arrangement, the difference is obvious. Specifically, and in the case where a childless husband dies and leaves behind a wife, she inherits one-fourth of what he leaves behind. According to Muslim jurists, however, if the deceased leaves behind more than one wife, then they are partners in one-fourth. Similarly, if he is survived by a child, one (or more) wife shall receive (or share) one-eighth respectively.⁴⁷

The recourse to the thematico-holistic hermeneutical mechanism is thus important to the project of Islamic feminist hermeneutics in that it not only exposes the hermeneutical weakness of traditional-based Islamic hermeneutics, and hence the Islamic laws based on it, but also provides alternative, women-"emancipatory" interpretations. In the case Souaiaia discusses above, we can argue that Qur'anic injunction on inheritance must not be adhered to in absolute terms and out of context. Instead, they must always be examined in the matrix of broader questions pertaining to what would be just and fair given a set of particular circumstances—just as these Qur'anic injunctions themselves were formulated in the context of the same. On the basis of this uncovered *mitigatory* element, the underlying moral, social, legal, and ethical trajectories, to use Wadud's terminology, could be extrapolated, which could be argued to be indicative of the actual purposes and values that the normative texts seek to embody.⁴⁸ I return to this point below.

⁴⁶ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from Extremists* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 250–75, quotation on 262.

⁴⁷ Ahmed Souaiaia, *Contesting Justice—Women, Islam, Law, and Society* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 87.

⁴⁸ Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*. In this regard, I disagree with Hidayatullah's observation that the idea of "moral trajectories" is not inherent to the text but an interpreter's projection onto the text. I justify my position by the fact that the moral trajectory is deduced directly from the text based on the "thematic-holistic approach" as argued above. It is also in accordance with Gadamer's ideas on teleological hermeneutics discussed below (see Hidayatullah, "Feminist Interpretation," 121).

A Non-Salafi-Based Worldview

It is a commonly held view, even among some academics working in the field of Islam, that Salafism is a phenomenon associated with the emergence of puritan “Wahhabism” and later in its modernist version in the works of Muhammad Abduh (1848–1905) and Rashid Rida (1865–1935). However, as demonstrated elsewhere, Salafism is a philosophical cum political cum religious worldview with significant legal and ethical implications that emerged in the second century of the Islamic calendar and has been present ever since in the Sunni branch of Islam.⁴⁹ Salafism is based on the idea of “emulation worthiness” of the so-called *salaf ul salih* generations of Muslims, including the manner in which they supposedly interpreted/understood the normative religious texts, after which a period of irreversible abeyance and moral decline among Muslims took place.⁵⁰ For the purposes of this article, I highlight one aspect of this Salafi worldview, namely its regressive view of the nature of history and time that a priori privileges the interpretive efforts of the early Muslim communities (especially the distinguished Companions and the Successors) over all others. Thus, Salafism implies a subscription to an epistemologically premodern episteme that lacks internal hermeneutical mechanisms to incorporate ethical values and system of ethics that were not prevalent at the time of the formative and classical periods of Islamic thought into its ethical and legal canon.⁵¹

The entire edifice of this traditional/classical/premodern Islamic law, legal theory and ethics was based on an Aristotelian, ethical voluntarist-based system of ethics.⁵² This system of ethics awarded women an ontologically, ethically, legally, religiously, socially, and politically inferior status vis-à-vis men. In part because of its *salafi Weltanschauung*, it considers this ethical system to be reflective of Divine Will and as such the most just system there could ever be.⁵³ Hence, no evolution of thinking with respect to possible evolution of theories of ethics occurred in classical Islamic thought and its contemporary manifestations.

However, a rejection of this *salafi* worldview on the basis of an ethically objectivist, post-Aristotelian system of ethics and progressive (in the sense of possibility of change) worldview, informed by contemporary discussions on gender justice and equality considered to be embodying the spirit and values of the

⁴⁹ In Duderija, *Constructing*, 36–39.

⁵⁰ There is no actual agreement among classical Muslims scholars as to the precise “cut-off point” in Islamic history to which this would apply. See Duderija, *Constructing*.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² That is, that ethical value terms mean only what is approved or disapproved, commanded or forbidden by God. In terms of Islamic legal theory this would translate into a view that all ethical-moral and legal rules must ultimately be derived from prescriptions enunciated by God.

⁵³ Other hermeneutical mechanisms are discussed in Duderija, *Constructing*, 69–85.

Qur'an and Sunna is possible.⁵⁴ The adoption of such a worldview and system of ethics as a theoretical lens through which the Qur'an and Sunna are interpreted would enable the Islamic feminist hermeneutics project to account for the patriarchal nature of the traditional Islamic hermeneutics as well as develop nonpatriarchal interpretations of the same.⁵⁵

Purposive and Ethicoreligious Values-Based Approaches to the Interpretation of Textual Sources (Teleological Hermeneutics)

The purposive and ethicoreligious-values-based element of the scriptural hermeneutic, which can be taken recourse to in the case of Islamic feminist hermeneutics, is premised on the idea that the actual nature and character of the discourse in the Qur'an and Sunna seek to realize and reach an underlying objective in the form of certain ethicoreligious values understood in an ethically objective manner and which are nonpatriarchal in nature. This hermeneutical mechanism is akin to Gadamer's concept of teleological hermeneutics in which the text is interpreted in terms of the world it projects to the interpreter.⁵⁶ In other words, this hermeneutic stipulates that the intended meaning of the text embodies or approximates the spirit or the purpose of the text better than the literal meaning itself. In many ways, this hermeneutical principle is the logical outcome of a thematic-holistic approach (assuming that the text in question is coherent and noncontradictory in nature) discussed above, which could be seen as its catalyst. I believe it is useful to distinguish between the two at least for heuristic and conceptual purposes.

By the purposive nature of the ethicolegal teachings of the Qur'an and Sunna (as systematized in Islamic law, Islamic ethics, and Islamic ethicolegal philosophy) I mean that the primary function of Islamic law and the most fundamental element in its methodological philosophy is based upon a realization and fulfillment of its purposes (*maqāṣid*) which, in turn, are identified on the basis of a legal theoretical methodology that hermeneutically privileges an ethicoreligious values-based approach to the interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunna.

Wadud has discussed this hermeneutical element in the context of what she terms the principles of "textual development" and "moral trajectories," by which she alerts readers/interpreters to how the Qur'anic text establishes new moral, social, and political trajectories whose significance override its literal meanings and point to the underlying rationales instead.⁵⁷ However, the entire

⁵⁴ Ibid., 117–39.

⁵⁵ Hassan Eskevari, "Rethinking Men's Authority over Women: Qiwwa, Wilaya and Their Underlying Assumptions," in *Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law*, ed. Ziba Mir-Hosseini (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 191–213; Mohsen Kadivar, "Revisiting Women's Rights in Islam: 'Egalitarian Justice' in Lieu of 'Deserts-Based Justice,'" in *Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law*, ed. Ziba Mir-Hosseini (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 213–37. See also Duderija, *Constructing*.

⁵⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, chap. 3, esp. 267–98.

⁵⁷ Wadud, *Quran and Woman*, ix–7.

edifice of Islamic law and its legal theories have overlooked the hermeneutical importance of such trajectories.⁵⁸ For example, a lack of incorporation of teleological hermeneutics in traditional exegesis of the Qur'an is evident in the interpretation of the inheritance verses 4:11–12, according to which female kin receive smaller inheritance shares than male kin.⁵⁹ However, Souaiaia convincingly argues that when examined from a teleological hermeneutic vantage point, the Qur'an's concern, much like in the case of divorce explained above, was primarily procedural, namely to protect the very concept of women's right to inheritance from being compromised by their other male and female kin and should not be interpreted as stipulating absolute and once and for all fixed commands.⁶⁰ An Islamic feminist hermeneutics project would benefit from teleological hermeneutics as it would provide arguments based on scriptural reasoning for a purposive (*maqāṣid*) and ethicoreligious-values-based hermeneutic whose values are based on contemporary ethically objectivist derived values such as gender justice and equality and not the *salafi*-worldview-embedded, premodern ones.⁶¹

A Non-Hadith-Dependent Sunna Hermeneutics

The final hermeneutical mechanism identified in this essay is what I call the non-hadith-dependent Sunna hermeneutic. The vast majority of Muslims consider Sunna in all its different concepts and interpretations a source of normative Islamic teachings, including those pertaining to Islamic ethics and law. For a number of reasons examined elsewhere, the concept of a “sound” hadith that consists of a chain of transmitters and a text tracing back to the prophet's saying or action or tacit approval of the same, became epistemologically and methodologically conflated with the concept of Sunna.⁶² Hadith, over time, became an important tool through which the Qur'an was interpreted and provided a large bulk of textual material for the subsequent discourse of Islamic law, theology, and ethics. Much of the hadith literature is patriarchal if not outright misogynist in nature.⁶³

Examples of accepted but misogynist hadith considered are found in such

⁵⁸ Duderija, “Hermeneutical Importance.”

⁵⁹ Souaiaia, *Contesting Justice*, 60–79.

⁶⁰ Ibid. Compare with Kh. Abu El Fadl, *Reasoning with God: Reclaiming Shari'ah in the Modern Age* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 380–89.

⁶¹ In *Constructing*, I have demonstrated that the Qur'an and Sunna employ ethical values in an ethically objectivist manner.

⁶² Adis Duderija, “The Evolution in the Concept of Sunnah during the First Four Generations of Muslims in Relation to the Development of the Concept of an Authentic Hadith as Based on Recent Western Scholarship,” *Arab Law Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2012): 393–47.

⁶³ El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*; compare with Hidayet Tuksal, “Misogynistic Reports in the Hadith Literature,” in *Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians*, ed. Ednan Aslan, Elif Medeni, and Marcia Hermansen (New York: Peter Lang, 2013).

books as *The Righteous Wife* by Muhammad Shooman, *Marital Discord: Causes and Cures* by Majdi Ash-Shahawi, and *The Choice of Every Woman* by Sayyid Abu Saif.⁶⁴ Examples from Shooman's book are Abu Hurrayra reports that Allah's Messenger said that "the rights of the husband over the wife is such that if he had a wound, or his nostrils were pouring forth pus or blood, then she were to swallow that down—then she would (still) not have fulfilled his right."⁶⁵ The Messenger of Allah said, "Allah will not look at a woman who does not give thanks to her husband and she cannot do without him."⁶⁶ In Abu Saif's book we find the following hadith with similar themes. "The Prophet said: If a woman knew what right her husband has (over her) she would not sit down while his lunch and dinner are served to him until he finishes (his meal). . . . As for two (people), their prayers do not go beyond their heads: a slave who runs away from his owners, until he returns to them, and a woman who disobeys her husband, until she returns."⁶⁷

El Fadl's hermeneutical concepts of "authorial enterprise" and "a conscientious pause" support the Islamic feminist project by arguing that these reports cannot be considered as emanating from the Prophet and do not come under the purview of the teachings of Sunna. El Fadl argues that due to the very nature of hadith, in each report the "personality of the transmitter is indelibly imprinted upon the report" (which he terms "authorial enterprise"); hence, each hadith is the result of nonobjective multiple "authorship mediums," since each hadith is a product of what a number of Companions have seen, heard, recollected, selected, transmitted, and authenticated.⁶⁸ When there is a conflict between a faith-based ethical conviction and textual determination, El Fadl argues that an interpreter must employ "a conscientious pause" and filter the text through it, and if necessary, reject it.⁶⁹

One can also argue that Sunna is a dynamic ethicoreligious behavioral concept that is organically linked to the Qur'an's *Weltanschauung* and is conceptually, hermeneutically, and methodologically independent of the concept of a sound hadith.⁷⁰

Conceptual, hermeneutical, and methodological separation of Sunna and

⁶⁴ Muhammad Shooman, *The Righteous Wife*, trans. Abu Talhah Dawood (Riyadh: Al-Hidaayah Publishing and Distribution, 1996); Majdi Ash-Shahawi, *Marital Discord: Causes and Cures* (Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, 2004); and Sayyid Abu Saif, *The Choice of Every Woman* (Riyadh: Dar As-Salam, 2004).

⁶⁵ Shooman, *Righteous Wife*, 12; and Abu Saif, *Choice of Every Woman*, 115.

⁶⁶ Shooman, *Righteous Wife*, 12, 25, 15.

⁶⁷ Abu Saif, *Choice of Every Woman*, 112.

⁶⁸ El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, 88.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁷⁰ Adis Duderija, "A Paradigm Shift in Assessing/Evaluating the Value and Significance of Hadith in Islamic Thought—From *Ulm-ul-hadith* to *Usul-ul-fiqh*," *Arab Law Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (2009): 195–206.

hadith bodies of knowledge has important and, as shown above, self-evident implications for the Islamic feminist hermeneutics project, which enables its proponents to embrace Sunna while also rejecting the normative character of a patriarchal/misogynist hadith deemed “sound,” especially given the rich tradition of hadith criticism in classical Islamic thought.⁷¹

The task of this essay was to outline and discuss some scriptural hermeneutical mechanisms that the project of Islamic feminism could employ in order to systematically, authentically, and productively engage with much of the patriarchal residue that remains in Islamic traditions, Islamic laws, and ethics as well as to engender nonpatriarchal interpretations of the same. In this context, I have argued that an interpreter-centered hermeneutics based on a comprehensive contextualization approach to interpretation of normative texts, which recognizes their dialogical nature, a thematico-holistic approach to textual sources based on the principle of inductive-corroboration, a non-*salafi* based *Weltanschauung*, an ethicoreligious and purpose-based interpretation, and a non-hadith-dependent Sunna hermeneutics—all provide important hermeneutical tools that can form a solid basis for such conceptualized and applied Islamic feminist hermeneutics.

As noted at the beginning of the article these hermeneutical mechanisms are best employed in unison rather than in isolation. The importance of this becomes evident when seen in the context of the question of subjectivity versus objectivity in interpretation.⁷² So, while the interpreter-centered hermeneutics mechanism provides space for recognition of inevitable (and at times, arguably significant) encroachment of subjectivity in interpretation, hermeneutical principles, such as comprehensive contextualization and a thematico-holistic approach, infuse the overall hermeneutical process with elements of objectivity that delimit the range of what could be termed reasonable interpretations and that could thus be deemed as authoritative or, better still, *more* authoritative than others.

When framed in this manner, the above-outlined hermeneutics of Islamic feminism could ensure the future viability and perhaps even increased acceptance of Islamic feminism, especially among those who might be prejudiced against it on the basis of its employment of the word *feminist*.

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⁷¹ In other words, according to the classical hadith criticism sciences.

⁷² On this generally, see A. Emon, “To Most Likely Know the Law: Objectivity, Authority, and Interpretation in Islamic Law,” *Hebraic Political Studies* 4 (2009): 415–40.

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