

islam & women (ii)

re-interpreting the qur'ān

overview

- **terms: feminism & patriarchy**
- **contextualist qur'ānic hermeneutics: Fazlur Rahman (d.1988)**
- **hermeneutic reformulations: Amina Wadud**
 - veiling, polygamy & marital discord
- **theological reformulations: Riffat Hassan**
 - man as god's primary creation, women as source of sin, & women created for men

terms:

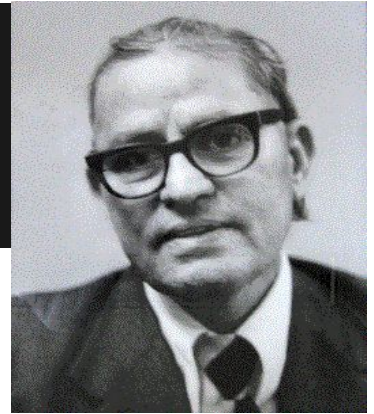
- **feminism**: theory & movements concerning the political, economic & social **equality** of the sexes.
- **feminism** is “aiming to increase women’s rights, opportunities and choices within any ideology or context.”

Parvin Paidar, quoted in Franks, *Women and Revivalism in the West*. p. 187

- **patriarchy**: “A system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.”

S. Walby, ‘Structuring Patriarchal Societies’ in Giddens and Sutton (ed.s) *Sociology: Introductory Readings* (3rd ed.). p. 30

contextualist hermeneutics



the basic questions of method and hermeneutics were not squarely addressed by Muslims and there was a lack of an adequate method for understanding the Qur'an.

- failure to understand the underlying unity of the Qur'an
- practical insistence upon fixing on the words of various verses in isolation (atomistic approach to Qur'anic interpretation)
- the result of this “atomistic approach” was that laws were often derived from verses that were not at all legal in intent.

In Islam “there exists a sharp distinction, even cleavage, between law and ethics, among the users of the law if not among its producers and dispensers.”

Rahman, *Law and Ethics*, p.4

“whenever there are specific Qur’anic commands and prohibitions, lawyers take them very seriously, but whenever the lawyers are faced with general Qur’anic requirements with an ethical import, they do not know how to deal with them, and in many cases do not even try.”

ibid. p. 6

“The Qur'an is a divine response, through the Prophet's mind, to the moral-social situation of the Prophet's Arabia, particularly to the problems of the commercial Meccan society of his day...”

Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 5

“The Qur'an is considered to be primarily “an ethical teaching (with a theological base), and not a book of law.”

Rahman, *Islam* p. 257

qur'anic values:

Justice ('*adl*), fairness (*qiṣṭ*), kindness (*iḥsān*), forgiveness (*maghfirah*), and God-consciousness (*taqwā*), brotherhood, cooperation and self-sacrifice for the sake of the common good.

the ideal & the contingent

the **ethico-legal** qur'ānic instructions functioned at two levels:

- the 'ideal': the **ethical goal** that believers were to aim for, equated with divine will (which was not always achieved at the time of the revelation)
- the 'contingent': what was possible at the time of revelation, given the structural / situational constraints within the community

qur'ān (re)interpretation



objective “was to make a reading of the Quran that would meaningful to women living in the modern era. By reading I mean the process of reviewing the words and their context in order to derive an understanding of the text. Every reading reflects, in part, the intentions of the text as well as the prior text of the one who makes the reading. Although each reading is unique, the understanding of various readers of a single text will converge on many points.” *Quran and Woman* p.1

a “reading of the Qur'an from within the female experience and without the stereotypes which have been the framework for many of the male interpretation.” *ibid.* p.2

- context in which the qur'ān was revealed
- grammatical composition of the qur'ān
- worldview of the qur'ān



“the imamate of a woman over men and women is absolutely permissible.”

ibn al-'Arabi, *Futuhāt*, vol. 1:447



the veil (*ḥijāb*)

[Prophet], tell believing men to lower their glances and guard their private parts: that is purer for them. God is well aware of everything they do. And tell believing women that they should lower their glances, guard their private parts, and not display their charms beyond what [it is acceptable] to reveal; they should let their head scarves fall to cover their necklines and not reveal their charms except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers..."

Q. 24.30-31 (trans. Abdel Haleem)

Prophet, tell your wives, your daughters, and women believers to make their outer garments hang low over them so as to be recognized and not insulted: God is most forgiving, most merciful.

Q. 33.59 (trans. Abdel Haleem)

Mernissi & Wadud

Mernissi: “The *hijab*...was the incarnation of the absence of internal control; it was the veiling of the sovereign will, which is the source of good judgment and order in society...In the logic of the *hijab*, the law of tribal violence replaces the intellect of the believer, which the Muslim God affirms is indispensable for distinguishing between good from evil...The *hijab* reintroduced the idea that the street was under the control of the *sufha*, those who did not restrain their desires and who needed a tribal chieftain to keep them under control.”

Mernissi, *Women and Islam*, pp. 185 & 187

Wadud: “If the overall thrust of Islam with regard to social decorum is one of modesty, the idea that you can associate modesty with any singular item of dress is ludicrous...So the idea of struggling with modesty is in fact the element that is Islamic. And that the *hijab* might be one of the ways in which this modesty has manifest itself does not mean that modesty is equal to the *hijab*. The *hijab* has no hierarchy over the concept of modesty. So it is at one and the same time a mixed symbol that people will identify for the sake of religion, but also for the sake of personal identity with that religion, even though in and of itself, has no religious meaning.”

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/muslims/interviews/wadud.html>

polygamy (q. 4:3)

If you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two, three or four. But if you fear that you will not be able to do justly (with them), then only one, ...to prevent you from doing justice. (q. 4:3)

trans. Wadud, *Quran and Woman*, p. 83

“It is especially clear that this verse is concerned with justice: dealing justly, managing funds justly, justice to the orphans, and justice to the wives, etc. Justice is the focus of most modern commentaries concerned with polygamy. In the light of verse 4:129- 'You are never able to be just and fair as between women ...' -many commentators assert that monogamy is the preferred marital arrangement of the Qur'an.”

ibid.

Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905)



- polygamy allowed in the Qur’ān with the strict requirement of upholding justice, which he states could only be upheld and realised in a monogamous marriage.

Abduh, ‘*Ta’dud al-Zawjāt*’, in ‘Imarah, ‘*Abduh, al-‘Amāl al-Kāmila*, Vol. II, pp. 82-87

- elsewhere, ‘Abduh expresses his jurisprudential view (*fatwa*) concerning polygamy in an article published in the Egyptian gazette *Al-Waqā’i’ al-Maṣriyyah* in which he states that polygamy should be ‘prohibited’: “there is no doubt concerning the permissibility of the prohibition [*ibṭāl*] of the custom of polygamous marriages.”

Abduh, ‘*Fatwa Fi Ta’adud al-Zawjāt*’ in ‘Imarah (ed.), ‘*Abduh, al-‘Amāl al-Kāmila*, Vol. II, p. 92 (he presents three reasons for his view: justice cannot be realised, wives will be mistreated, and enmity and hostility will develop in the relationship of the children within polygamous marriages).

marital discord (q. 4:34)

Men are [*qawwamuna 'ala*] women, [on the basis] of what Allah has [preferred] (*faddala*) some of them over others, and [on the basis] of what they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are [*qanitat*], guarding in secret that which Allah has guarded. As for those from whom you fear [*nushuz*], admonish them, banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then, if they obey you, seek not a way against them.

trans. Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, p.70

Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High, Exalted, Great.

trans. <https://quran.com/4?startingVerse=34>

‘Personally, I have come to places where how the text says what it says is just plain inadequate or unacceptable, however much interpretation is enacted upon it.’

Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, p. 192

on q. 4:34: “There is no getting around this one, even though I have tried through different methods for two decades. I simply do not and cannot condone permission for a man to “scourge” or apply *any kind* of blow to a woman. Because of the extensive time I have examined this verse, it is the best place for me to demonstrate the diverse interpretive and implementive possibilities as they have been applied through some historical examples and conditions, including my own attempts at interpretative manipulations. This leads me to clarify how I have finally come to say “no” outright to the literal implementation of this passage. This also has implications in implementing the hudud (penal code) ordinances. This verse, and the literal implementation of hudud, both imply an ethical standard of human actions that are archaic and barbaric at this time in history. They are unjust in the ways that human beings have come to experience and understand justice, and hence unacceptable to universal notions of human dignity....Any kind of a blow, or any intention to apply the verse in that manner, violates other principles of the text itself – most notably “justice” and human dignity, as Allah has led humankind to understand today.”

ibid. p. 203

‘Allah is, has always been, and will always be, present. Allah has endeavored to inform free-willed moral agents of Her presence through many ayat – in the text and everywhere in the universe.’

Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*. p. 207

theological reformulations



assumption 1: god's primary creation is man (& that woman's is ontologically secondary and derivative). Considers how was woman created. ('Treat women nicely, for a woman is created from a rib, and the most curved portion of the rib is its upper portion, so, if you should try to straighten it, it will break, but if you leave it as it is, it will remain crooked. So treat women nicely.')

Bukhari: <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3331>

assumption 2: women are a (the) source of evil & sin. Considers 'the fall of man' - Satan as 'seducer' of Eve? ('After me I have not left any trial (*fitna*) more severe to men than women.')

Bukhari: <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:5096>

assumption 3: woman was created for man. Considers why was woman created (men are superior to women)?

See: <http://riffathassan.info/>