

Islamic Feminism



overview

- background: textual foundations of patriarchy
- methodology 1: theology
- methodology 2: hadith criticism
- methodology 3: qur'anic (re)interpretation
- evaluation

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

qur'an

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...(Q. 4.34) trans. Pickthal

...Wives have [rights] similar to their [obligations], according to what is recognized to be fair, and husbands have a **degree** [of right] over them: [both should remember that] God is almighty and wise. (Q. 2:228) trans. Abdel Haleem

You who believe, when you contract a debt for a stated term, put it down in writing: have a scribe write it down justly between you. No scribe should refuse to write: let him write as God has taught him, let the debtor dictate, and let him fear God, his Lord, and not diminish [the debt] at all. If the debtor is feeble-minded, weak, or unable to dictate, then let his guardian dictate justly. **Call in two men as witnesses.** **If two men are not there, then call one man and two women out of those you approve as witnesses, so that if one of the two women should forget the other can remind her.** (Q. 2.282) trans. Abdel Haleem

ḥadīth

Once Allah's Apostle went out to the Musalla (to offer the prayer) of 'Id-al-Adha or Al-Fitr prayer. Then he passed by the women and said, "O women! Give alms, as I have seen that the majority of the dwellers of Hell-fire were you (women)." They asked, "Why is it so, O Allah's Apostle ?" He replied, "You curse frequently and are ungrateful to your husbands. I have not seen anyone more deficient in intelligence and religion than you. A cautious sensible man could be led astray by some of you." The women asked, "O Allah's Apostle! What is deficient in our intelligence and religion?" He said, "Is not the evidence of two women equal to the witness of one man?" They replied in the affirmative. He said, "This is the deficiency in her intelligence. Isn't it true that a woman can neither pray nor fast during her menses?" The women replied in the affirmative. He said, "This is the deficiency in her religion." Bukhari: <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/6/9>

Imam Ali: O' ye peoples! Women are deficient in Faith, deficient in shares and deficient in intelligence. As regards the deficiency in their Faith, it is their abstention from prayers and fasting during their menstrual period. As regards deficiency in their intelligence it is because the evidence of two women is equal to that of one man. As for the deficiency of their shares that is because of their share in inheritance being half of men. So beware of the evils of women. Be on your guard even from those of them who are (reportedly) good. Do not obey them even in good things so that they may not attract you to evils. *Nahj al-Balagha*, sermon 80 (<http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul-balagha-part-1-sermons/sermon-80-o-people-women-are>)

'strategy' 1: theological reassessment



assumption 1: God's primary creation is man (and that woman's is ontologically secondary and derivative). Considers how was woman created (the woman is like a rib, if you try to straighten her, she will break. So if you want to get benefit from her, do so while she still has some crookedness.)

assumption 2: Women are a (the) source of evil and sin. Considers 'the fall of man' (Satan 'seduced' Eve?): 'After me I have not left any affliction (*fitna*) more harmful to men than women. Bukhari

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

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

'strategy' 2: ḥadīth criticism



narrated Abu Bakra: During the battle of Al-Jamal, Allah benefited me with a Word (I heard from the Prophet). When the Prophet heard the news that the people of the Persia had made the daughter of Khosrau their Queen (ruler), he said, "Never will succeed such a nation as makes a woman their ruler." Bukhari: <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/92/50>

Abu Huraira reported: The Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) said: A woman, an ass and a dog disrupt the prayer, but something like the back of a saddle guards against that. Muslim: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/4/301>

narrated 'Aisha: The things which annul the prayers were mentioned before me. They said, "Prayer is annulled by a dog, a donkey and a woman (if they pass in front of the praying people)." I said, "You have made us (i.e. women) dogs. I saw the Prophet praying while I used to lie in my bed between him and the Qibla. Whenever I was in need of something, I would slip away, for I disliked to face him." Bukhari: <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/8/158>

'strategy' 3: qur'an (re)interpretation



objective “was to make a reading of the Quran that would be 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'an was revealed
- grammatical composition of the text
- worldview of the text

polygamy

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



‘the imamate of a woman over men and women is absolutely permissible.’ ibn al-'Arabi, *Futuhat*, vol. I:447



‘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.’

Inside the Gender Jihad. p. 207

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

...The first claim of ours on blood-revenge which I abolish is that of the son of Rabi'a b. al-Harith, who was nursed among the tribe of Sa'd and killed by Hudhail. And the usury of the pre-Islamic period is abolished, and the first of our usury I abolish is that of 'Abbas b. 'Abd al-Muttalib, for it is all abolished. Fear Allah concerning women! Verily you have taken them on the security of Allah, and intercourse with them has been made lawful unto you by words of Allah. You too have right over them, and that **they should not allow anyone to sit on your bed whom you do not like**. But if they do that, you can **chastise** [فَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ] them but not severely. Their rights upon you are that you should provide them with food and clothing in a fitting manner. I have left among you the Book of Allah, and if you hold fast to it, you would never go astray. And you would be asked about me (on the Day of Resurrection), (now tell me) what would you say? They (the audience) said: We will bear witness that you have conveyed (the message), discharged (the ministry of Prophethood) and given wise (sincere) counsel. He (the narrator) said: He (the Holy Prophet) then raised his forefinger towards the sky and pointing it at the people (said): "O Allah, be witness. O Allah, be witness," saying it thrice. Muslim: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/15/159>