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## Islamic Feminism: A Discourse of Gender Justice and Equality

Breanna Ribeiro  
*Linfield College*

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Islamic Feminism:  
A Discourse of Gender Justice and Equality

Breanna Ribeiro

Senior Thesis for Religious Studies Major

Advisor Bill Millar

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Ribeiro, Breanna

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## Abstract

This paper examines Islamic feminism using structural methodology and the phenomenological approach to examine the component of Muslim feminist's activism that utilizes *ijtihad* and *tafsir* to reinterpret patriarchal rhetoric and highlight Islamic discourses that validate gender equality. These scholars and activists critically analyze Islamic theology by employing hermeneutics in order to produce Islamic exegeses that affirm social justice, gender equality, and liberation. Religion plays a critical role in building collective cultural identities therefore, examining sacred text's representation and prescription of gender roles and mores generates an understanding of the gender order in the community of believers, while simultaneously exposing contextual patriarchal inaccuracies that result in gender inequities. Muslim scholar-activists engage in this work to re-appropriate their cultural self-definition by emphasizing the socio-political environments that shaped the interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadiths in order to promote justice and affirm gender equality within an Islamic paradigm. A liberatory theology legitimized by Islamic sacred texts not only confronts systemic and systematic repressive practices against women but also mandates reflexive change in Islamic societies. Muslims collective identity is couched within an Islamic discourse; therefore, Muslim scholar activist's reinterpretation of sacred texts has the potential to enable a genuine cultural paradigm shift that can establish the necessary milieu for progressive women's rights to not only be proposed but also implemented successfully in Islamic societies.

This paper evaluates the growing academic literature on reform-oriented Muslim scholar-activists and specifically focuses on the ways in which Islamic feminist's reinterpret the Qur'an by employing *ijtihad* and *tafsir* to 1) contextualize verses revelation; 2) search for the best meaning as charged to by the Qur'an; 3) compare specific words or *ayats* with the syntactical composition elsewhere in the sacred text; 4) and to read *ayat* and *suras* in a holistic manner with the Qur'an's broader thematic message in mind. Their reinterpretations set the foundation for Islamic feminist's activism in broader society that seeks to eliminate social discrimination, promote social justice, and progress human equality and dignity. This examination of Muslim scholar activist's hermeneutics illustrates that Islamic feminism is a viable avenue to empower Muslim women and foster grass-roots cultural transformation in Muslim societies towards more gender egalitarian attitudes and practices. I argue that Islamic feminist scholars' hermeneutics unshackles Islam's liberatory theology and egalitarian message from patriarchal inaccuracies.

### Self-Reflection

During my study of Islamic feminism I utilized the phenomenological approach and standpoint theory to explore my “preconceived, culturally bound, explanatory paradigms and all prejudices incompatible with and foreign to the observed culture.”<sup>i</sup> This practice is crucial in order to name our biases and gain a deeper understanding of our created realities, subjective lens, and worldviews. A worldview is defined as “an interpretive framework through which or by which one makes sense out of the data of life and the world.”<sup>ii</sup> Therefore, worldviews are shaped by human-made institutions—like religion—which constitute and inform subjective realities, “objective” beliefs, and subsequent human actions.<sup>iii</sup>

The phenomenological approach attempts to “bridge the gap between the paradigm-laden outside observer lens in striving for objectivity and basic signifying meanings of religious

constructions maintained within a participant insider's worldview."<sup>iv</sup> Standpoint theory furthers this process by demanding the researcher to reflect explicitly upon and acknowledge one's "gender, ethnicity, class, religious beliefs, and so on, and their relationship to the object of study."<sup>v</sup> These two methods help researchers identify their paradigm from which they explore other concepts and perspectives.

In the process of self-critical examination it's vital to situate myself as a white woman in a liberal arts college in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. I come from a rural middle-class family and I identify as a vegan, feminist, and as an individual holding leftist political views. I was raised Catholic but I denounced my faith by the age of twelve years old due to the patriarchal hierarchy of the church ( at that age I articulated it by decrying that women can't be priests, bishops, cardinals, or the pope). Currently, I do not ascribe to any particular institutionalized faith but I am very spiritual and believe all life is deeply interconnected. I meditate everyday and find myself most existentially whole when I am in the midst of nature's beauty and truth. These foundational beliefs underpin my passion for social justice, human equality, and the eradication of oppressive structures.

Based on my identity as a feminist in the "West" it's crucial for me to clarify my distance from some prior Western feminists who have treated—or been perceived as to view—women in the Middle East and Africa in monolithic terms by labeling them as "oppressed victims"; this tends to render women in these region's agency as invisible while perpetuating the act of the hegemonic naming of "the other."<sup>vi</sup> Furthermore, this study of Islamic feminism does not seek to argue for a superior form of feminism, but rather demonstrate the complexities between and among feminisms that are critical for the amelioration of women's lives in different contexts. In addition, never in my study of Islamic feminism did I recognize MENA women's difference as a

way to validate that all women need feminism and therefore, to affirm my own identity as a feminist.<sup>vii</sup> In contrast, I see Islamic feminist's activism as a necessary and essential component of feminism's evolution where distinct feminisms develop indigenously within a specific historical, social, political, and cultural milieu. It is these feminisms that are imperative for women's position to progress within their own society and at their own rates. A "one-size fits all" feminism that has been hegemonically defined by Western feminists does not respond to the specific contextual circumstances that constitute the struggles women face in their communities.

As I've engaged in this study I've realized the construction of multiple binaries that are sites of contestation in the Islamic feminism discussion including secular feminism vs. religious feminism, socio-political issues vs. theology, and western feminism vs. Islamic feminism, all of which are misconstrued to paint their oppositional "other" in monolithic terms.<sup>viii</sup> Therefore, my very act in conducting this research and my positionality transgresses these constructed binaries, as do many other feminists in the West who support Islamic feminist's activism and vice versa. Ultimately, both students and scholars must do their best to escape these crippling dichotomies which obstruct dialogue, understanding, and solidarity. Audre Lorde clearly and inspirationally articulates the need to acknowledge the power within differences:

Advocating the mere tolerance of difference between women is the grossest form of reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives.

Difference must not merely be tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can sparkle like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity of interdependence become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the



world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters...In our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower.<sup>ix</sup>

My thesis on Islamic feminism seeks to promote a comprehensive understanding of the various facets of Islamic feminism but specifically I illustrate the importance of Islamic feminists' hermeneutics that rejects Qur'anic patriarchal inaccuracies and reveals the texts' message of gender justice and equality. In the first portion of this paper, I give a broad definition of feminism, especially in its theoretical use in academic circles and I elucidate the approach's usefulness when applied to religion and religious discourse. I then explore the development and meaning of Islamic feminism, as well as how Islamic feminists seek to reconcile feminism in an Islamic paradigm by explicating the ways in which Muslim scholars approach sacred text in order to provide the groundwork for other Muslim feminists to challenge the legitimacy of structural inequities and cultural discrimination.

In the next two sections, I review the historical events and subsequent issues that cause continual conflict around "feminism" in MENA countries, followed by a survey of the central oppositional arguments against Islamic feminism. This is a critical element of my paper because it helps provide an understanding of the complex issues that impede Muslim women's agency and empowerment in social, political, religious structures. This comprehensive understanding illuminates the obstacles Islamic feminists have to overcome, as well as reinforcing the necessity of religious discourse that validates Muslim women's equality within Islam. Furthermore, examining the oppositional viewpoints of Muslim feminist scholar's Qur'anic hermeneutics and Islamic feminism is imperative to contextualize the debate of Islamic feminism in Muslim communities, the West, and in academia.

After that I explored Islamic feminist's practice of hermeneutics including its purpose, justification, and step by step methodological approach. This is followed by an examination of the evidence for Islamic feminist's claim that patriarchy has been read into the Qur'an to produce gender inequities. Once this is established, I move into Muslim scholar's hermeneutics and arguments that 1) illustrate the Qur'an's liberatory theology; 2) reshape understandings of equality and difference in the Qur'an; and 3) lastly, deconstruct patriarchal readings that support wife beating and veiling. Exploring these central topics that Islamic feminists hermeneutically examine enables a better understanding of Muslim scholar's textual analysis that sheds light on patriarchal inaccuracies in order to promote an Islamic liberatory message that fosters gender justice and equality.

### Islamic Feminism

We, members of the Global Muslim Women's Shura Council, declare gender equality to be an intrinsic part of the Islamic faith. As Muslims, we affirm our conviction that the Muslim woman is worthy of respect and dignity, that as a legal individual, spiritual being, social person, responsible agent, free citizen, and servant of God, she holds fundamentally equal rights to exercise her abilities and talents in all areas of human activity. Furthermore, we insist that these rights are embedded within the Qur'an and six objectives of Shari'a—the protection and promotion of religion (al-din), life (al-nafs), mind (al-'aql), family (al-nasl), wealth (al-mal), and dignity (al-'ird). As the Shura Council, we embrace our collective and individual responsibility to work towards building a unified change movement of Muslim women – driven by compassion and justice – that will enable Muslim women to realize their full potential as individuals and in relationship to family, community, nation, and globe.<sup>x</sup>

Feminism is an analytical discourse that focuses on women's experiences and unequal treatment in patriarchal systems. The term itself was coined in the late nineteenth century in France by Hubertine Auclert who was critiquing man's political dominance while promoting the advancement of women's rights as a necessary byproduct of the French Revolution.<sup>xi</sup> Although the name itself came from the West, feminisms are unique and specific to the locales from which they derive. According to Margot Badran, feminism entails three dimensions, "one, awareness of constraints placed upon women because of gender; two, a refusal or rejection of such limitations upon women; and three, efforts to construct a more gender equitable system."<sup>xii</sup> Feminism in academia has offered a new perspective to the humanities and social sciences, and has illuminated the androcentric biases deeply entrenched in how these disciplines interpret, understand, and view the world. Furthermore, feminist theory highlights the marginalization of women and gender in the hegemonic theoretical discourse; therefore, feminist theory aims to transform "how we interpret the paradigms of social, economic, and ultimately power relations between men and women in both modern and pre-modern societies."<sup>xiii</sup> Consequently, extending this analytical framework to religion is imperative to understand the ways in which religion restricts and hinders women's freedom of movement, thought, and expression—both within religion and in broader society—based on gender.

Applying feminist theories and methods to religion is essential because religious institutions influence individual's temporal attitudes and practices while impacting the expression of transcendental beliefs, either individually or in a community. Ursula King notes that religion extends beyond the cultural dimension and influences the construction of "reality—all reality, including that of gender—and encompasses the deepest level of what it means to be human."<sup>xiv</sup> Therefore, Islamic<sup>xv</sup> feminists or Muslim scholar-activists engage feminism within

their Islamic identities and analytical framework to embark on the struggle of gender *jihad* in order to foster gender justice and equality within the community of believers.

Gender justice and the aim for equality is a fundamental component of Islamic feminism. Abusharaf explains how the idea of gender justice addresses the “analysis of gender relations across different political, socioeconomic, legal and institutional setting.”<sup>xvi</sup> Therefore, religion must be included in this process because it plays a pivotal role in the creation of the hegemonic discourse that is then engrained into gender roles and women’s status in Muslim communities. It is vital to note that gender inequality cannot solely be ascribed to religion because any given society’s history, political-economy, culture, and particular system of patriarchy all contribute to the disparities in power, privilege, and resources.<sup>xvii</sup> Furthermore, even religious attitudes and practices that contribute to gender discrimination are not inherent within a religion; rather these are the result of “religious knowledge” that has been constructed by individuals through “means of specific methodologies and in specific historical contexts.”<sup>xviii</sup> Consequently, Islamic feminists place an emphasis on reinterpreting Islamic sacred text to illuminate false “religious knowledge” that is a result of methodological errors and contextual influences.

Muslim women activists re-appropriate their “cultural self-definition” by utilizing *ijtihad* and *tafsir* to emphasize the socio-political environments that shaped sacred text’s interpretations in order to improve Muslim women’s overall well being. Muslim-scholar activist’s efforts “bridge religious and gender issues in order to create conditions in which justice and freedom may prevail.”<sup>xix</sup> This self-positioning by Muslim women affirms their pious Islamic identity and ultimately “informs the speech, actions, and writings, or the way of life adopted by women who are committed to questioning Islamic epistemology as an expansion of their faith position and not a rejection of it.”<sup>xx</sup>

Scholar Ronald Hendel in Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible describes the ways in which sacred text underpins communities remembered past and forms the basis for collective group identities. He notes that:

The past uninterpreted would be a mere collection of facts. The past as people remember it is the meaningful past, the past as perceived and colored by subjective concepts, hopes, and fears... The historically true and symbolically truth are interwoven in such a way that the past authorizes and encompasses the present.<sup>xxi</sup>

Therefore, Islamic feminists seek to reinterpret sacred text to reveal patriarchal influences and emphasize Muslim women's roles in the *Umma*, or the original Muslim community, in order to transform the collective remembered past, and consequently women's cultural self-definition within Islam. Religion plays a critical role in building collective cultural identities. Therefore, examining sacred text's representation and prescription of gender roles, norms, and expectations helps produce a comprehensive view of gender positions in the present, while exposing gendered assumptions and patriarchal inaccuracies that result in gender inequities. Muslim scholar-activists engage in this work to reveal Islamic discourses that validate gender equality within Islam in order to self-determine Muslim collective identity.<sup>xxii</sup>

Islamic feminism is a feminist discourse and practice that is framed within an Islamic paradigm and ultimately illustrates how patriarchal ideology has subverted the equality of all human beings; therefore Muslim scholar-activists' hermeneutics seeks to disentangle patriarchal influences from Islam's spirit of egalitarianism for the benefit of all believers, men or women. Therefore, Islamic feminism "seeks rights and justice for women, and for men, in the totality of their existence."<sup>xxiii</sup> Muslim scholar-activists hermeneutics and production of exegesis provides the foundation from which activists push for gender equality and justice in Muslim societies.

These acts include campaigns and community education that seeks to disseminate religious reinterpretations that highlight women's religious authority, autonomy, dignity, and which foster women's ability to participate in the Islamic tradition.

To address Islamic sacred text in a comprehensive manner, Islamic feminists take a couple of approaches. Some Muslim scholar-activists assess and challenge unjust interpretations through Qur'anic hermeneutics and exegeses (Wadud, Barlas, Bakhtiar, Hassan,). Some Islamic feminists scrutinize the legitimacy of interpretations that back Shari'a laws, while others contextualize and examine Hadiths (Mernissi).<sup>xxiv</sup> These acts seek to reform religion from within and build the groundwork to dispute the legitimacy of unequal power structures and social discrimination in Muslim communities.

Tariq Ramadan espouses Islamic feminist's work as a critical process to perceive Islam and Islamic texts in light of its central themes of social justice and equality, but also to shift whole Muslim societies and allow women's full participation and contribution. He notes that the "first liberation that should be worked out—and that can lead the whole community of believers the world over to evolve—consists of producing a discourse on womanhood that restores the link with meaning rather than single-mindedly focusing on norms."<sup>xxv</sup> As Islamic feminists embark on this multi-dimensional work they simultaneously illustrate that patriarchy is not divine and it encumbers the believer's ability to promote human equality and social justice as espoused by the Qur'an. Seedat explains how this "critical faith-centered feminism" expands the potential areas of critique "beyond gender and into a wide array of inequalities, race, environment, and economics among them."<sup>xxvi</sup> Therefore, Islamic feminism not only fosters Muslim women's spiritual empowerment but the movement also challenges unjust inequities within Muslim societies in accordance with the Qur'an—*And why should you not fight in the cause of Allah and*

*of those who, being weak, are oppressed?* (4:75)—in order to promote human dignity and justice for all.

Islamic feminism arose in the 1970s and 80s both within Islamist movements and as a response to the movement's dominant masculinist discourse. The Islamization<sup>xxvii</sup> of society affected gender roles and pious Muslim women who increasingly began donning the hijab and dressing modestly in accordance with Islamists form of Islam. These actions were considered to be women's free will or "personal choice" but were undoubtedly influenced by the broader Islamization, which extended into cultural, political, and social arenas.<sup>xxviii</sup> In addition, political Islam often attempted to eliminate prior feminist gains by limiting women's access to the public sphere through strict controls on women's appearance and movement.

The name "Islamic feminism" became discernible in scholarly articles and women's organization's rhetoric as a description and a self-label in the 1990s.<sup>xxix</sup> Islamic feminism, like all feminism, is one of many forms of identities that coincides and intersects with various other identity categories. The representation of oneself as a feminist is a political act that reflects the political climate of the time. As Badran describes "late twentieth-century Islamism—currently the patriarchal mainstream—is in contention with other identities, especially nationalism and feminism, aiming to subsume the former and to obliterate the latter."<sup>xxx</sup> Therefore, Islamic feminism is in part a byproduct of and fueled by Islamism's hegemonic patriarchal discourse that seeks to utilize masculinist interpretations of Islam to justify subverting women's status and roles in society.

Islamic feminism is a global phenomenon that fosters individual empowerment and promotes social, political, economic, and cultural change at the local, state, and international

levels. In addition, the movement aims to actualize the concept of an Islamic community or the *umma* by enfranchising women to enable both women and men to participate equally in their religion.<sup>xxx1</sup> In order to achieve this, Islamic feminists approach the issues holistically by making linkages between textual interpretations and social milieus to illustrate how they mutually affect one another, leading to false religious truisms.

Islamic feminism seeks to learn from past feminist movements and evade some of Western and secular feminisms drawbacks. Omaima Abou-Bakr describes how Islamic feminists must avoid essentializing Muslim women as oppressed and helpless victims while simultaneously blaming and degrading Islam and MENA cultures.<sup>xxxii</sup> Furthermore, Muslim scholar-activists must avoid subscribing to feminist perspectives that “completely exclude religious and cultural specificity from the picture when discussing improving women’s lives” or adopt a position that “unconsciously redefines the Orientalist view that the Muslim woman stands for, or is a symbol of, the success and failure of our progress and march toward the Western model of modernity.”<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Islamic feminism uses its new understandings of the Qur’anic text’s egalitarian message to evaluate *hadiths* and *fiqh*. *Hadiths*, which are the aphorisms and actions of Prophet Muhammad, are assessed by Islamic feminists using Islamic investigative mechanisms to reveal and reject sexist components that are a result of patriarchal manipulation or misinterpretations due to contextual circumstances.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Islamic feminism also examines *fiqh*, or Islamic jurisprudence which includes *Shari’a* and its influences on Muslim family laws. This is a vital component because contemporary political Islam derives much of its institutional, legal, and scriptural discourses from the Abbasid dynasty in ninth and tenth century Iraq. Therefore, historical Islamist discourse affects modern-day Muslim communities systems of meanings and



ideas of gender relations that originated in a particular patriarchal context where women were not only subordinate and marginalized, but were conceptualized as inferior beings.<sup>xxxv</sup> In addition, Islamic feminism brings to light how Western audiences and Muslims with their own sociopolitical motives have “read patriarchy, inequality, and even misogyny into the Qur’an.”<sup>xxxvi</sup> This contributes to why many practices and attitudes labeled as “Islamic” are not legitimized by Qur’anic text. Consequently, Islamic feminism applies “a combination of historical, linguistic, hermeneutic, literary critical, deconstructive, semiotic, historicist, and feminist methodologies,” to reinterpret sacred texts as required by the Qur’an to recuperate Islamic principles of equality and social justice.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

#### What’s in a Name? History, Identity, and the Power in Naming

The term Islamic feminism itself was not created by Muslim women engaging in feminist acts; rather the label was created by observers who noticed the development of a feminist paradigm in the Arab World.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Therefore, the term Islamic feminism/t refers to individuals who carry out activism aiming to progress women’s equality within an Islamic framework. Many women do consider and adopt the title Muslim feminist or Islamic feminist, but others do not, due to a complex set of factors, but the term can still be applied “descriptively and analytically... simply as a way of *identifying* what it appears particular actors think and do.”<sup>xxxix</sup> Historical legacies, issues regarding identity, and the power in the creation of hegemonic discourse each independently and in combination are three factors deterring Muslim women from self-labeling as Islamic feminists.

Women from the Middle East and North Africa—as well as other regions with a history of colonialism—are often cautious in accepting the feminist label because of the legacies from

Western influence and the subsequent opponents that have developed in these nations as a result of this history. Some attack the term “Islamic feminism” or Muslim feminists on the grounds that feminism represents “Western and colonial imposition.”<sup>xl</sup> This perspective is the result of colonial and post-colonial Western influences in parts of the Middle East and the Arab world. It is quite problematic because “it traps the issue of women with the struggle over culture,” which can have profound negative consequences by hindering women’s rights, their self-empowerment, and their ability to challenge unjust politics in the public arena.<sup>xli</sup> Therefore, when women seem to transgress what Islamists<sup>xlii</sup> believe is “‘original’ Islam and an ‘authentic’ indigenous culture” they are traitors to their culture, their religion (Islam), and their God (Allah).<sup>xliii</sup> Islamists contestation over women’s bodies as a site to affirm their “authentic” indigenous culture is a “response to the discourses of colonialism and the colonial attempt to undermine Islam and Arab culture and replace them with Western practices and beliefs.”<sup>xliv</sup> Therefore, resistance and unwillingness for some women to call themselves Muslim “feminists” is a legacy of colonialism where women’s bodies and identities are representative of the dominant discourse; and thus, naming oneself a feminist can be representative of “betraying” one’s culture in the name of Western ideas and practices. Ultimately, those that attack Muslim scholar-activists for “following a Western agenda” are unable to see the ways in which Islamic feminism defines its own context, paradigm, and agenda.<sup>xlv</sup>

In addition, Western colonialist and imperialist enterprises have instrumentally victimized Muslim women in order use the “save the women” trope to validate intervening in various MENA states. As Ahmed explicates:

Imperialist men who were the enemies of feminism in their own societies, abroad espoused a rhetoric of feminism attacking the practices of Other men and their

“degradation” of women, and they used the argument that the cultures of the colonized people degraded women in order to legitimize Western domination and justify colonial policies of actively trying to subvert the cultures and religions of the colonized peoples.<sup>xlvi</sup> Britain’s Lord Cromer provides an excellent example of this as he fought for women’s liberation in Egypt in 1877, yet opposed the feminist movement at home.<sup>xlvii</sup> George Bush and his administration also utilized this trope to invade Afghanistan in 2001; by “merging from a social imaginary dominated by a masculinized national state that cast itself in a paternal role, saving those who are abused by rival men and nations.”<sup>xlviii</sup> This imperialist tactic has further stigmatized feminism and the idea of progressing women’s rights because it is seen as a Western concept that degrades and demonizes local men.

The contemporary imperialistic voyages that utilize “feminism” further repel Muslim women from engaging in feminist discourse. Seedat sums this up when she explains Muslim scholar activist’s hesitancy to identify as feminists. She explicates that the:

historical use of feminism in the colonial enterprise and more recently with feminist entanglements in the so-called war on terror where liberal democratization policies premised upon the rhetoric of liberation for Muslim women have produced neocolonial outcomes and new modes of empire in Muslim-majority nation-states.<sup>xlix</sup>

Therefore, feminists must reappropriate their movement and discourse from militaristic utilization that uses feminism to further its own goals in the name of women, but with a complete disregard to the actual state of women’s wellbeing.

The debate of feminism in Muslim majority-societies highlights two oppositional discourses, Islamic and secular feminisms. This dichotomy is an extension of the contentious dispute between Islam and modernity, which is a component of the broader constructed East vs.

West debate. These labels are integrally related to issues of identity where multiple identities intersect to incline or hinder someone from self-labeling as a feminist. Badran points out how all individuals “have multiple identities and naming one seems, to many, to threaten their other identities.”<sup>l</sup> Therefore, how individuals describe or label themselves reveals the ways in which identity categories—gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality—have been constructed, socialized, and internalized into one’s sense of self. Islamic feminists’ perceptions are formed by history and social meanings which are then reflected on their conceptualization of self and how they self-identify.

The terms and meanings of secular and religious feminisms in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are also products of cultural values. Badran explains how “the term secular came to be associated with modernity, and often with the West, while “religious” came to be thought of by proponents of secularism as “traditional” and “backward;”<sup>li</sup> thus, creating an oppositional model for feminism in the region. Islamist movements in the 1970s and 1980s intensified the dichotomy between feminisms by emphasizing a reassertion of Islam back into social and public life while demonizing secularization and equating the term “secular” with “anti-Islamic.”<sup>lii</sup> During this period, tensions between these vying feminisms increased due to the politicization of women’s bodies. Veiling and Islamic dress became signifiers of one’s religious identity while modern or Western dress showed support to secular ideology therefore, women’s bodies and their identities became sites of contestation and representative of power in Muslim societies.<sup>liii</sup>

These debates extended beyond just secular vs. religion into conflicting notions of East vs. West, which further complicated the issue. Not only were Islamist women integral in maintaining this oppositional model but “secular feminists for their part displayed simplistic

notions of “religious women,” and sometimes conflated patriarchal practices imposed in the name of Islam with the religion itself – precisely the tangled skein Islamic feminism undertook to unravel.”<sup>liv</sup> Compromise has been difficult between these two discourses because individual’s sense of self are attached to these ideologies thus, causing debates to be wrapped up in one’s identity.

The polarization of secular and religious feminisms mask the ways in which Islamic feminism is an extension of secular feminism. Badran describes how Islamic feminism developed out of secular feminist movements in the Middle East that attempted to progress women’s status within the nation-state model. It was secular feminists who first began using “Islamic modernist discourse” in regards to reforming Islamic family laws and personal status codes because both significantly impact women’s economic, social, and legal position in society. Muslim feminists and scholar-activists utilized secular feminist’s discourse method and then took a step further than secular feminists had by calling for “unqualified equality of all human beings” using the Qur’an as justification.<sup>lv</sup>

Muslim women who are engaged in activities to promote women’s equality may not adopt the feminist title because “feminism” is often viewed as a Western construct that denotes an association with European political, theological, and intellectual traditions that value modernity. This becomes problematic because “associating modernity with European ways of being is the consequent devaluing of other, non-European ways of being.”<sup>lvi</sup> In addition, what has been labeled as “second-wave” feminism has been criticized for its colonial standpoint that perceives third-world women in simplified terms devoid of difference and diversity.<sup>lvii</sup> Some women also avoid the term “Islamic feminism” because it is a label that has been produced and defined by Western scholars, rather than an indigenously chosen label by Muslim activists

themselves. This viewpoint brings up issues of power in regards to hegemonic discourse and the prerogative to label and categorize another group. Therefore, some activists self-choose titles like “Believing women,”<sup>lviii</sup> Muslim scholar activists,<sup>lix</sup> or describe their activism as “woman-centered rereading of the Quran” as alternatives.<sup>lx</sup>

Feminism’s third-wave discourse has sought to learn from the faults of the past and therefore, incorporates a post-modern feminist analytical framework which helps highlight and value difference. However, many Muslim women activists maintain fears that Islamic feminism “is implicated in a project that seeks to produce sameness or equivalence between feminism and its Muslim other, even as the project is premised upon recognizing the otherness of Muslim women’s experiences.”<sup>lxi</sup> Ultimately, the term “feminism” itself is not inherently “Western” because feminisms grow indigenously out of specific milieus in response to certain contextual issues. Therefore, rejecting Islamic feminism because of feminism’s Western connotation or arguing that it is incompatible with Islam either illustrates one’s ignorance of feminism, Islam, or is an attempt “to delegitimize any kind of feminism” due to the real threat Islamic feminism poses to the contemporary power holders in both Islam and Muslim communities.<sup>lxii</sup>

Although a name holds importance and indicates authority, the critical significance and power is in the acts of Islamic feminists or Muslim scholar activists who raise their voices against the oppression of women in the name of Islam. These individuals highlight the patriarchal manipulation of Islamic texts, including the Qur’an, by engaging in hermeneutics to produce an authentic path to gender justice.<sup>lxiii</sup> Ultimately, the issues between the two paradigms are “not about vocabulary but about negotiating a place for Muslim women’s equality work in a predetermined landscape of discourses of women and Islam,” as well as feminism.<sup>lxiv</sup> Historical legacies of colonial oppression, issues surrounding identity, and the power in naming the

hegemonic discourse will continue to challenge and influence Muslim scholar-activists and Islamic feminists as they attempt to promote gender equality and justice in Muslim majority societies.

### Opposition to Islamic Feminism

At the onset of the 1990s, Muslim women were articulating a return to the true egalitarian spirit of Islam by advocating gender justice grounded in their interpretations of the Qur'an. This new innovated activism was most apparent first in post-Khomeini Iran.<sup>lxv</sup> Since Iran is considered one of the original sites of Islamic feminism as we define it today<sup>lxvi</sup>, many opponents assess Islamic feminism in the case of Iran and use it as grounds to delegitimize the entire area of scholarship and the subsequent activism.<sup>lxvii</sup> By examining gender specific legal reform attempts in the Republic of Iran, Mojab comes to the conclusion that feminists with “‘Muslim woman identities’ and ‘Islamic feminisms’ lag behind developments in the gender conflict in Iran. While Islamic theocracy in Iran is falling apart, they continue to essentialize the women of Islamic countries into religious being.”<sup>lxviii</sup> From this conclusion (from one case study) Mojab attempts to marginalize all Islamic feminism and then proceeds to challenge Western feminism too:

Feminism has seriously challenged androcentric (social sciences and humanities). Equally significant is the success of women's movements in many western countries to force male-centred state into granting *legal equality* between the two genders. We know, however, that legal equality does not lead to equality in the extra-legal world (for instance gender inequalities based on class, religion, race or nationality). In fact, the latter seriously constraints whatever may be gained from the former. Here lies, I believe, the crisis of feminist theory.<sup>lxix</sup>

To disregard all Islamic feminism without fully analyzing the diverse processes—including hermeneutic reinterpretation, the production of exegeses, grass-roots consciousness-raising, localized campaigns, and governmental lobbying—is trivializing a complex set of methods that each have varying effects individually, locally, nationally, and internationally, into a simplified term with a misconstrued meaning.

Moreover, Islamic feminism, like Western feminism, is as diverse as the communities and countries in which it is practiced in. A brief assessment of one country’s history of Islamic feminism is not grounds to delegitimize the entire enterprise. Each state must be critiqued individually to discern the ways in which Islamic feminism plays out in that society, including its theoretical underpinnings and the nature of its activism. Furthermore, in one country alone there may be multiple organizations working under an “Islamic feminist” agenda but they may differ greatly in their efforts; this can vary from engaging in localized consciousness-raising efforts—like the Sisters of Islam in Malaysia in the 1980s who passed out pamphlets that emphasized *suras* that espoused gender equality<sup>lxx</sup>—to working on the global level to collaborate with international feminist networks such as the Global Muslim Women’s Shura Council.<sup>lxxi</sup>

Lastly, in the previous excerpt, Mojab highlights some of Western feminism’s achievements but then points out the limitations of Western feminism’s focus on legal reforms.<sup>lxxii</sup> More specifically, that legal equality as the focal point for feminism’s activism does not ultimately produce widespread cultural change due to gender inequalities rooted in other systems of power like class, religion, race, and nationality. Here lies the irony of her paper; the critique she made of Western feminism is the very reason Islamic feminism, which aims to challenge the oppressive masculinist attitudes and practices from within Islam, is necessary to promote a genuine cultural transformation in Muslim majority-societies that will reverberate at



the political level with progress policies.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Furthermore, Islamic feminism is a crucial development in the feminist movement as a whole by increasing feminist literature, expanding arguments for gender equity, and constructing new consciousness-raising activities that extend beyond the confines of Western or secular feminisms.

Mojab is not alone in her opposition of Islamic feminism. The prominent arguments against Islamic feminism are articulated by Haideh Moghissi,<sup>lxxiv</sup> Nayereh, and Hammed Shahidian.<sup>lxxv</sup> They view “Islamic feminism” as an oxymoron because Islam and feminism are incompatible due to Islam’s inherent patriarchal nature.<sup>lxxvi</sup> Furthermore, they highlight Islam’s hierarchy of gender, which dictates women’s subordinate position. Opponents of Islamic feminism emphasize Islam’s role in creating inequities in Muslim majority societies therefore, they argue that utilizing an Islamic framework to attempt to progress women’s status is impossible. From this standpoint, they see Islamic feminism as legitimizing Islam and the subsequent patriarchal and hierarchical relationships that produce the gender inequalities. Secular feminists see Muslim scholar-activists preoccupation with the Qur’anic theology as a distraction from the socioeconomic and political obstacles that hinder women’s progress in Muslim societies.<sup>lxxvii</sup>

Opponents dismiss Muslim women’s ability to advance gender equality within a religious framework. This is highly problematic because the argument defines and limits the mechanisms to attain “gender equality” to a universalist strategy that mandates women to abandon their faith. Consequently, this perspective not only props up a secularist framework but it also falls into a patriarchal trap where some women articulate the exclusion of other women. Furthermore, this perspective reveals a clear bias for Western feminism by delegitimizing Islamic feminism on the basis of its religious standpoint. Badran refutes this by explicating how “there are multiple points

from which feminisms radiate outward. The West is not the patrimonial home of feminisms from which all feminisms derive and against which they must be measured.”<sup>lxxviii</sup>

Ultimately, Mojab and other opponents who attempt to alienate Islamic feminism from the mainstream feminist discourse root their arguments in orientalist and/or colonial positions that “overlook the interlocking character of various power relations such as race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexual orientation.”<sup>lxxix</sup> Furthermore, Muslim secular feminists who are situated in the West and denounce Islamic feminism—Mojab, Nayereh, Shahidian, and Moghissi—perpetuate the colonialist perspective that paints Muslim cultures and religious beliefs as detrimental to women in ways that Western cultures and religions are not. This type of feminist perspective promotes the “inferior” culture to abandon its beliefs and adopt Western practices, as if both aren’t androcentric in their own ways. Leila Ahmed therefore warns Western and secular feminists to understand and be aware of the varying historical legacies of colonialism and the use of feminism to justify Western imperialism before prescribing Muslim women to dispose of their religious and cultural beliefs. Furthermore, she explicates how such rhetoric from Western feminists will serve to perpetuate the “otherization” of Muslim cultures and peoples and put all Muslim women into the category of oppressed peoples:

In this context of the contemporary structure of global power, then, we need a feminism that is vigilantly self-critical and aware of its historical and political situatedness if we are to avoid becoming unwitting collaborators in racist ideologies whose costs to humanity have been no less brutal than those of sexism.<sup>lxxx</sup>

Concurrently, espousing cultural relativism and awareness of the historical influences that construct feminist paradigms does not mean allowing Islamists to “justify structural impairment

of women's freedom and formal enforcement of women's inequality" in the name of cultural differences.<sup>lxxxix</sup> Rather, post-structuralism and post-modernism have deconstructed the universal category of "women" and therefore, allow for more context specific historical analyses of the varying components that oppress women. This has the potential to create more effective feminist strategies that can promote women's rights in diverse locations while fostering necessary cultural shifts that will increase women's capacity to utilize their rights.

Mojab concludes her critique by specifically attacking "postmodern feminism" and her paper finishes by stating "Which side are you on?" is the question all feminists and feminist theories have to address.<sup>lxxxix</sup> Here Mojab reproduces the hegemonic discourse of oppositional binaries in order to disregard Islamic feminism and the broader postmodern feminism umbrella. As Fatima Seedat points out, third-wave feminism and the development of postmodern feminism with an emphasis on cultural relativism and the differences of identity, language, discourse, and the body is essential for the feminist movement's ongoing struggle against patriarchy's naturalization of gender differences as a justification for women's oppression.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> This recognition of difference has enabled a deeper understanding of the diverse experiences and struggles that are a result of sex and gender. Demonizing and alienating an entire scholarship of feminism, and the various feminist movements around the world which ground their activism in that scholarship is aiding the patriarchal enterprise of divide and conquer, which ultimately perpetuates the inequalities and disparities.

Opponents efforts to delegitimize Islamic feminism need to move beyond Universalist binaries and attempts to espouse the 'best' or 'right' feminism and begin to "view these struggles among various feminisms as necessary moves for dealing with the historical limits and appropriations of specific feminist theories, strategies and practices.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Muslim feminists seek

to transcend universalist prescriptions and eliminate old binaries between “secular” and “religious”, sociopolitical issues and theology, as well as “East” against the “West” in order to disentangle patriarchal manipulation to progress human equity.

Moreover, feminism as a movement of social change that seeks to eradicate patriarchy’s exploitative and oppressive practices should be viewed “as a dynamic ensemble of contesting rewritings not only of patriarchy but of different feminisms in order to develop more effective practices for transforming patriarchal social relations;”<sup>lxxxv</sup> in which case Islamic feminism is an essential component for challenging and changing patriarchal inequities. Islamic feminism is both a response to Islamization, which has reaffirmed women’s subjugation and subordinate position by instrumentally utilizing patriarchal Islamic interpretations, and to secular feminism, which has disregarded the liberatory theology of Islam.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Islamic feminism’s hermeneutical activism illustrate Qur’anic gender justice, which disrupts both oppositional positions: their agency challenges orientalist and secular discourses that essentialize Muslim women as victims and defines religion as inherently patriarchal, while their very interpretations expose Islam’s egalitarian discourse and thus, undermine patriarchal inaccuracies.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Therefore, Islamic feminism situates itself in the middle-ground between Muslim traditionalists and secular feminists, and seeks to:

redress the balance and fairness to include women’s perspective for holistic purposes, to analyze issues of unequal distribution of power, and finally, to promote women’s agency and negotiating stance in our culture and history...from within an indigenous and Islamic frame of reference.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

## Hermeneutics: Islamic Feminism's Foundation

To identify Islam inseparably with oppression is to ignore the reality of misreading of the sacred text... To accept the authority of any group and then to resign oneself to its misreading of Islam not only makes one complicit in the continued abuse of Islam and the abuse of women in the name of Islam, but it also means losing the battle over meaning without even fighting it...<sup>lxxxix</sup>

Hermeneutics is the act Islamic feminists employ in order to disentangle patriarchal influences from the Qur'an to reveal the sacred text's support for gender equality and social justice. Muslim scholar activists approach the Qur'an by 1) reinterpreting generally misconstrued verses regarding gender; 2) stressing *ayas* that articulate the equality of men and women; 3) and by analyzing verses that describe "difference" which are instrumentally utilized to validate male's supremacy.<sup>xc</sup> Qur'anic analyses are critical to shift Muslims understanding of the Qur'an's message and intention. Muslim scholar activists conduct textual analyses by first explaining the Qur'an's polysemic nature, followed by an assessment of specific *suras* based on the Qur'an's own hermeneutic model using *tafsir* (exegesis) and *ijtihad* (independent reasoning). Ultimately, Islamic feminists' hermeneutics sheds light on how institutions and worldviews are constructed and deconstructed on the basis of interrelating factors including individual comprehension, linguistics, and the intention of the author.<sup>xci</sup>

Muslim scholar activists like Barlas and Wadud argue that the historically particular elements of the Qur'an cannot be universally prescribed due to the Qur'an being polysemic. Polysemic refers to the text itself as having multiple meanings that can be interpreted in a variety of ways based on the context and individual's diverse worldviews.<sup>xcii</sup> Furthermore, the Qur'anic

text is dynamic rather than static and therefore, should be continually reinterpreted and reconceptualized to discern its’ “best meaning”. Ramadan supports this process because in his own words he notes that “texts do not speak by themselves, and teachings are both synchronic and diachronic: the relation to time is crucial, the relation to the context is imperative.”<sup>xciii</sup> Islamic feminists highlight 39:18—Who listen to speech and follow the best of it. Those are the ones Allah has guided, and those are people of understanding—to argue for the Qur’an’s polysemic nature. Barlas explains that the Qur’an’s description of its best meanings “confirms that we do not need to link it to just one historical context or to one reading alone since our understanding of what is best is itself changeable.”<sup>xciv</sup> Therefore, Islamic feminist’s reinterpretations enable the Qur’an to be a dynamic sacred text that takes into consideration the contemporary socio-political realities, while promoting an Islamic *ihya* (renewal or resurrection) more closely aligned with Muhammad’s egalitarian message.

Islamic feminists derive their hermeneutical methods from the Qur’an, which requires readers to use specific criteria to interpret its sacred text; this entails “textual holism,” “intrascriptural investigation,” and contextualization through *tafsir* and *ijtihad*.<sup>xcv</sup> Hermeneutic entirety is espoused in 15:89-93 which reads:

And say: “I am indeed he that warneth openly and without ambiguity,” – (Of just such wrath) As we sent down On those who divided Scripture into arbitrary parts, - (So also on such) As have made the Qur’an Into shreds (as they please). Therefore, by the [Rabb], We will, of a surety, Call them to account, For all their deeds.

Thus, the Qur’an itself requires a holistic reading and the production of interpretations that consider the Qur’an as a whole to genuinely discern its best meaning. Muslim scholar activists

also incorporate *tafsir al Qur'an bi al Qur'an*, which means “interpretation of the Qur'an based on the Qur'an itself.”<sup>xcvi</sup> This requires verses to be analyzed and compared to similar topics, language, terms, and syntactical structures that appear elsewhere in the Qur'an. The Qur'an also prescribes contextualization when reading verses; 5:14 states “They change the words from their (right) places and forget a good part of the Message that was sent them.” The Qur'an requires both of these methodological tools because of the immense power sacred text wields on the Community of Believers and the potential danger of human manipulation. As Wadud explicates, “when a Muslim thinker claims authority to render interpretations of the text, most Muslims who read these interpretations will assume that they are legitimate aids to understanding.”<sup>xcvii</sup> *Sura 2, aya 79*, criticizes those “who write The Book with their own hands, And then say: ‘This is from God.’” This same message is reiterated in 5:105, “Those who are bent on denying the truth attribute their own lying inventions to God.” Therefore, the Qur'an warns Believers not to equate human interpretations as Divinely revealed rhetoric.

Based on these Qur'anic prescriptions Islamic feminists reinterpret and examine each verse first, in the context it was revealed; second, in the context exegeses were produced; third, in comparison to similar Qur'anic subjects and linguistics; and lastly, through a holistic consideration of the Qur'anic message and worldview.<sup>xcviii</sup> Through *tafsir* and *ijtihad*, Islamic feminists highlight patriarchal influences in Qur'anic exegeses and then eradicate these influences from their own hermeneutics in an attempt to restore Islam's egalitarian spirit. Muslim scholar activists' work empowers not only individual Muslim women but the entire Islamic feminist movement by providing the theological basis for gender equality and social justice.<sup>xcix</sup> As Tariq Ramadan has noted, “the Qur'an's message and the Prophet's attitude were apt to free women from the cultural shackles of Arab tribes and clans and from the practices of the time.”<sup>c</sup>

Therefore, Islamic feminists' hermeneutics aim to free Muslims from their misguided gender concepts in order to return to the original revolutionary ideals of Prophet Muhammad.

### Reading Patriarchy into the Qur'an

Men increasingly take advantage of religion to justify their shortcomings and supposed privileges, while women are victims of the misuse of a religion whose essence was to liberate them.<sup>ci</sup>

I came to the realization that women and men are equal as a result not of reading feminist texts, but of reading the Qu'ran. In fact, it wasn't until much later in my life that I even encountered feminist texts...But I do owe an intellectual debt to feminist theorizing about patriarchy and for having given me the conceptual tools to recognize it and talk about it.<sup>cii</sup>

The Qur'an's exegetical texts have historically been problematic because interpretations have failed to use Qur'anic methodology that emphasizes holistic textual analyses and makes thematic connections.<sup>ciii</sup> These methodologically unsound exegeses have come to be regarded as the normative interpretive worldview, which has led to various social discrimination and injustices against women due to these interpretations being "products of the fragilities and fallibilities of human memory."<sup>civ</sup> Although most of these exegeses have been conducted by men, it is important to emphasize that women can also read patriarchy into the Qur'an. Patriarchal environments in which interpretations were performed tended to exacerbate false readings; Barlas elaborates that, "patriarchal readings of Islam collapse the Qur'an with its exegesis (Divine Discourse with 'its earthly realization'); God with the languages used to speak about God (the Signified with the signifier); and normative Islam with historical Islam."<sup>cv</sup>



Consequently, reading patriarchy into the Qur'an has been the result of intersecting factors that include methodological errors, conceptual mistakes, and contextual prejudices.

Islamic feminists emphasize how Muslim patriarchies have been grounded “on the confusion of sex (biology) with its social constructions (gender) and thus also of sexual differences with gender hierarchies and inequalities.”<sup>cv</sup> In other words, gender becomes exchanged with biological sex which then becomes a politicized entity where men are privileged based on ideas of sexual differentiation. From this standpoint, Muslim patriarchies have read both of these misconceived concepts into the Qur'anic text. Patriarchal readings of the Qur'an often occur regarding verses that treat women and men differently based on biological and unchangeable differences. These verses in conjunction with individual's ideas about gender—which have been shaped in a patriarchal milieu through socialization and power structures—prompts “difference” to mean a hierarchical relationship where men are ontologically superior.<sup>cvi</sup> Therefore, individuals' filters greatly impact their interpretations of the Qur'an. Due to the historical legacy of patriarchy in the temporal world, sexism and misogyny have come to warp the existential idea of God.<sup>cvi</sup>

The Qur'anic patriarchal inaccuracies derive from faulty methods and they produce conceptual errors. Instead of reading the Qur'an in a thematic or holistic manner, patriarchal interpretations have resulted from methodological approaches that interpret central conflicting verses independent of other verses, even within the same *sura*. Barlas explains that employing poor methods has facilitated readings from the Qur'an that “tend to decontextualize the Qur'an's teachings by rendering, words, phrases, and *ayat* in isolation from one another and without attention to language, grammar, and syntax, and/or by generalizing specific Qur'anic injunctions.”<sup>cix</sup> This “verse-by-verse approach” undermines *tafsir al Qur'an bi al Qur'an* or

intertextual analysis that uses other verses and *suras* in the Qur'an to discern the best meaning for words and phrases.<sup>cx</sup>

The conceptual flaws of these patriarchal readings reside in the assumption that when difference is specified in the text, it automatically means unequal; therefore, creating the perspective that God has endorsed unequal sex roles. Feminists contest this standpoint by referring to the Qur'an which “does not link sex with gender; i.e., it does not teach a theory of gender inequality based on the idea of sexual differences.”<sup>cxii</sup> Since the Qur'an does not associate biological sex with gender symbolism, the argument of Qur'anic sexual hierarchies is destabilized. Furthermore, the Qur'an does not describe humans in terms of gender—masculinity and femininity—rather, “each embodies so-called masculine and feminine attributes and *each* manifests the whole.”<sup>cxiii</sup> This perspective is strengthened by the fact that the Qur'an never engenders Allah.<sup>cxiii</sup>

Lastly, patriarchal readings are a result of the context in which it was read and by whom it was interpreted by (i.e. men). Many of the *fiqh*'s, or Islamic jurisprudences which affect *shari'a* and personal status laws, originate their institutional, legal, and scriptural discourses from the extremely patriarchal Abbasid dynasty in ninth and tenth century Iraq.<sup>cxiv</sup> Therefore, Qur'anic interpretations have been significantly impacted by misogynistic men's paradigms in a patriarchal context; this has resulted in biased readings that address and enfranchise men's experiences while marginalizing and suppressing the experiences of women.<sup>cxv</sup>

In some contemporary Muslim societies where conservative perspectives dominate, *ijtihad* is instrumentally employed to reject women's rights and therefore, ensure women's exclusion from public life. These nations reveal “how modern patriarchy is constituted, cultural

norms are defined, and the state moral economy is maintained.”<sup>cxvi</sup> Conservative Islamist views pervade not only public discourse but also private spaces and ultimately become internalized within women themselves. This means that even as societies progress and gain legal protections for women, they often do not exercise their formal rights because they are either uneducated on their rights or they perceive the secular state system as “un-Islamic” and therefore illegitimate.<sup>cxvii</sup> Consequently, women are not struggling against the religion as articulated by the Qur’an’s egalitarianism; rather they are fighting against patriarchal interpretations that are implemented in Muslim societies as traditions, customs, and social codes.

From this reflection and understanding of how patriarchy is read into the Qur’an, Islam needs a renewal (*ihya*) and a quest for meaning that espouses Qur’anic justice and equality. This religious and humanist discourse is necessary to reconcile the *Umma*—community of Believers—by promoting women as equal and responsible spiritual beings. Therefore, Islamic feminism, which works within an Islamic paradigm, is developing theoretical groundings to challenge rigid conservative representations of femininity to promote a gender perspective that encompasses dignity, conscience, balance, humility, contemplation, autonomy, and liberation.<sup>cxviii</sup>

### Theological Arguments Based on Islamic Feminist’s Hermeneutics

It is often said that Muslim women are one of the least empowered groups in society. While some blame the religious traditions, they ignore the importance placed on women in society in early Islamic history. Using misinterpretations of Islamic texts and cultural justifications, patriarchal systems have consistently pushed women to the fringes, creating environments where women are largely unable to make their own decisions

regarding career, family, and health. However, women today are reclaiming this space of authority and agency in order to protect and promote their dignity.<sup>cxix</sup>

Oppression is human-made, and therefore must be human-alleviated.<sup>cxx</sup>

Using Qur'anic hermeneutical methods, Muslim scholar activists reinterpret the Qur'an to free its liberatory theology by extricating patriarchal manipulation. Although Islamic feminists challenge patriarchal Qur'anic interpretations, they do not question the Qur'an as Allah's sacred speech. Islamic feminists sustain their beliefs that the Qur'an is the word of Allah and his final message to the world as it was delivered to the Prophet Muhammad over a span of years.<sup>cxxi</sup> Therefore, Muslim feminist's efforts to identify and reveal the Divine's true intentions undergird their epistemology, methodology, and ultimately inspires their activism. Consequently, Islamic feminists reject the widespread misunderstanding that the Qur'an's "meanings have been fixed once and for all as immutably patriarchal and that one cannot develop a new way of reading it that incorporates theories and insights that have matured twelve or so centuries after its own advent."<sup>cxixii</sup> Exploring some of the central topics Islamic feminists examine in the Qur'an can enable a better understanding of how Muslim scholar activists engage in hermeneutical analysis to bring to light patriarchal inaccuracies.

### Liberatory Message

Islamic feminists refer to three essential concepts to illustrate the Qur'an's liberatory theology. The first is *tawhid* or divine unity, incomparability or Allah's unrepresentability, and *zulm* or Divine justice.<sup>cxixiii</sup> *Tawhid* articulates the oneness of Allah and the idea that "there is no God but God," which underpins Islam's monotheism.<sup>cxixiv</sup> This concept means God is indivisible and therefore no other being can assert Divineness, not even representatively. Barlas explains

that “Believers cannot split obedience between God and others, nor can they claim for themselves any form of rule/sovereignty over others that displaces, conflicts with, or pretends to be a symbolic extension of God’s rule or sovereignty.”<sup>cxxv</sup> Therefore, patriarchy, or the supremacy and privileging of males in societal institutions, inherently violates *tawhid* by subordinating women as a group and enabling men’s overarching authority. Furthermore, Islamic monarchy’s that claim their legitimacy through Islam also breach this central Qur’anic concept. 3:64 states “we worship None but God;...we associate No partners with [God];...we erect not, From among ourselves, Lords and patrons Other than God;”<sup>cxxvi</sup> therefore, no human being—man or woman—can act as God’s representative on earth. Consequently, *tawhid* undermines any notions of patriarchy and sexual inequality as a Divinely sanctioned phenomenon in Islam.

The concept of Allah’s unrepresentability or incomparability also challenges androcentric ideas and representations of Allah that serve as masculinist justifications that affirm patriarchy. Islamic feminists emphasize that there is not one Qur’anic *ayat* that sexualizes or engenders God.<sup>cxxvii</sup> Therefore, if God is beyond gender, Allah cannot be considered a patriarchal deity that legitimizes patriarchy on earth. Allah in the Qur’an is Divine Unity (*Tawhid*), which underpins why Allah cannot be represented through images. Sura 112 clearly illustrates this “Say: [God] is God, The One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; [God] begetteth not, Nor is [God] begotten; And there is none Like unto [God].”<sup>cxxviii</sup> Thus, the Indivisibility of Allah prohibits misrepresenting Allah as a male in the roles of father, husband, or son. Barlas explicates this point further by stating “not only does God not stand in the literal relationship of son, father, husband, or partner to a divine pantheon, then, but god also does not stand in the symbolic relationship of a father to human beings either.”<sup>cxxix</sup> Therefore, the concept of Divine incomparability further delegitimizes patriarchy as Islamically ordained.

Lastly, *zulm* forbids Believers from hurting or limiting the rights and freedoms of other human beings and promotes justice as espoused by Allah.<sup>cxxx</sup> This central idea extends to Qur’anic text and meanings therefore, the Qur’an cannot infringe on the rights of others. This means that “Islamic patriarchies” cannot justifiably subordinate women through sexual hierarchies and discrimination due to *zulm* or the Qur’anic tenet of Divine justice. Wadud points to 9:70, 10:44, 29:40, and 30:9 in the Qur’an to illustrate that the term *zulm* reveals that God does not oppress, rather oppression is the result of human’s discrimination and domination of one another.<sup>cxxx</sup> Each of these verses reflects this idea; for example 10:44 states “Indeed, Allah does not wrong the people at all, but it is the people who are wronging themselves” (*Surat Yunus*, 2014).

Individuals—either Muslims, Islamists, or Westerners—that attribute Muslim women’s inequality and discrimination to the Qur’an, Allah, or Islam in general, must be confronted with the Qur’anic principles of *Tawhid*, incomparability, and *zulm* and then asked “why would a God who is above sex/gender and who promises not to transgress against the right of others... fall prey to shoddy sexual partisanship or hatred by privileging men over women or advocating the oppression of women?”<sup>cxxxii</sup> Rather, the Qur’an advocates for women’s equality—as is discussed in the next section—by describing man and women’s creation “from a single pair” (Qur’an 49:13), by requiring men and women to uphold equal Islamic standards (Qur’an 33:35), and by affirming women’s equal capability to exercise moral reasoning and fulfill their duty as *khalifah* (Qur’an 30:2).

## Equality and Difference

Islamic feminists espouse that the Qur'an ontologically affirms sexual equality. The Qur'anic creation story, which creates man and woman both from the same self, is often cited as grounds for this claim:

Oh humankind. We have created you from a single pair of a male and a female and made you into tribes and nations that you may know each other [not that you may despise one another]. The most honored of you in the sign of God is the most righteous of you [the one practicing the most *taqwa*]. (Qur'an 49:13)<sup>cxxxiii</sup>

Therefore, men and women derive from a single pair and possess equal capacity to exercise moral principles. Furthermore, this verse highlights the intention of men and women to “know each other” or to co-exist in a mutual partnership. In addition, this verse does not specify a ‘natural’ hierarchy between the sexes. Rather, honor is differentiated only on the basis of piety or the practice of *taqwa*.

Another example of men and women's equal ability of moral reasoning is described in 33:35, where the Qur'an explicitly holds men and women to the same standards:

For Muslim men and women, -For believing men and women, For devout men and women, For true men and women, For men and women who are Patient and constant, for men And women who humble themselves, For men and women who give In charity, for men and women Who fast (and deny themselves). For men and women who Guard their chastity, and For men and women who Engage much in God's praise, -For them has God prepared Forgiveness and great reward.<sup>cxxxiv</sup>

These two blatant examples of the Qur'an's articulation of men and women's equality illustrates that there are no inherent hierarchies for human beings according to the Qur'an; rather, humans are distinguished only by their observance of *taqwa* or "God-consciousness".<sup>cxxxv</sup> This point is reinforced in 48:5-6 which punishes men and women equally for their transgressions, "And that [God] may punish the Hypocrites, men and Women, and the Polytheists, Men and women, who image an evil opinion of God."<sup>cxxxvi</sup> Furthermore, gender equality and full personhood is required for believers to carry out *khalifah* or Allah's message; this duty is charged to all Muslims regardless of biological sex. As Wadud explains, the Qur'anic reason for creating human beings is stated in 30:2 "Verily, I am going to create a *khalifah* (caretaker, vicegerent, or trustee) on the earth."<sup>cxxxvii</sup> Human beings were chosen to implement Allah's rules on earth but the systematic discrimination that rejects women's equality, and therefore personhood, obstructs half the population's ability to execute *khilafah* thus defying Allah.

Sura 4 aya 34—"Men are responsible for women because god has given the one more than the other, and because they support them from their means"—is a particularly contentious Qur'anic verse regarding gender equality due to patriarchal readings that espouse the ontological superiority of men in Islam on the basis that men are prescribed responsibility over women and that female's biology constrains her activities to bearing and rearing children.<sup>cxxxviii</sup> From this standpoint, many conservative Muslims cite this verse to justify sexual divisions and male supremacy. Islamic feminists dispute this perspective and explain that "while fundamentally equal, humans have been created biologically different in order to perpetuate the species... Woman alone can give birth and nurse, and thus, in this particular circumstance, the husband is enjoined by the Qur'an to provide material support."<sup>cxxxix</sup> Furthermore, Wadud's exegesis explicates how *qawwanmuna 'ala* means providing for women in the specific context of



pregnancy and child-rearing.<sup>cxl</sup> Contrary to traditional interpretations—“Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth” (Surat An-Nisa)<sup>cxli</sup>—*qawwamuna ‘ala* does not give men universal supremacy over women, rather, men’s monetary and material support balances women’s act of childbearing.<sup>cxlii</sup>

Muslim scholar-activists emphasize that treating men and women differently does not intrinsically mean the treatment is unequal. They argue that it is the interpreter’s paradigms situated in a patriarchal context that causes one to read inequality and male authority into ‘difference’. Islamic feminists reiterate that “sexual equality is ontological in that the Qur’an teaches that God created humans from a single self (*nafs*).”<sup>cxliii</sup> They highlight how the creation from a single self disallows the hierarchization of gender differences that is often claimed based on interpretations for verses like 4:34. Moreover, Muslim scholar-activists cite *Sura Tawba, Aya* 71, which states “The Believers, men and women, are protectors [*awilya*], One of another,” as support for mutuality and equality between the sexes<sup>cxliv</sup>. Furthermore, the Qur’an does not use gender characteristics to differentiate the sexes; therefore it cannot privilege either gender. Rather, the Qur’an gives prescriptive orders based on the biological differences of the sexes in order to ensure harmonious relations.<sup>cxlv</sup> Barlas stresses that the Qur’an does not stipulate matching responsibilities to men and women due to the historical (and enduring) patriarchal context which systematically disadvantages women. Therefore, the Qur’an’s recognition of differences is necessary to “protect women’s rights within patriarchies by recognizing their sexual specificity as women”<sup>cxlvi</sup>. The emphasis here is that acknowledging difference was essential to ensure women’s rights. In addition, men and women remain equal in moral reasoning and choice in the Qur’an. Ultimately, Islamic feminism argues that the Qur’an distinguishes male

and females due to biological differences but that the Qur'an does not designate inferiority or superiority based on these differences.

### Wife Beating: A Patriarchal Reading

The second half of 4:34 is arguably even more problematic because patriarchal readings have interpreted this verse to allow husband's to beat their disobedient wives. Abdullah Yusuf Ali's interpretation of the Qur'an states 4:34 as:

Men are the protectors And maintainers [*qawwamuna 'ala*] of women, Because God has given The one more (strength) Than the other, and because They support them From their means. Therefore the righteous women Are devoutly obedient, and guard In (the husband's) absence What God would have them guard. As to those women On whose part ye fear [*nushuz*] Disloyalty and ill-conduct, Admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) [*daraba*] beat them (lightly) But if they return to obedience, Seek not against them Means (of annoyance).<sup>cxlvii</sup>

Consequently, Muslim scholar activists have critically analyzed this verse by applying Qur'anic hermeneutics in order to highlight patriarchal biases that have skewed the Qur'an's words and violated its intent to establish a morally just social order. Therefore, Islamic feminists conduct a holistic hermeneutical process which first examines the contextual circumstances of seventh-century Arabia, followed by an assessment of the words variant meanings using an intertextual analysis, and concludes by comparing patriarchal interpretations with the broader Qur'anic message of justice, equality, and harmony.

Seventh-century Arabia was characterized by "unrestricted concubinage, polygyny, and slavery," as well as sexual abuse and infanticide.<sup>cxlviii</sup> Marriages were fleeting due to men's

proclivity to divorce their wives arbitrarily. In this context, men were dominate in all aspects—economically, socially, and legally—and women were relegated to the status of men’s property. It was in this setting that the Qur’an was revealed to address and curb wife beating, which was widespread and normalized. Islamic feminists argue that “in the seventh century, men did not need permission to abuse their wives. Therefore, the Qur’an was not giving permission for abuse in verse 4:34 rather, it was restricting it.”<sup>cxlix</sup> In pre-Islamic Arabia men had full prerogative to treat women as they pleased because they were ultimately men’s property; thus, the Qur’an’s reference to spousal abuse was meant to limit men’s unfettered abuse, rather than to prescribe it.

Muslim scholar activists analyze the controversial terms in this verse to explicate patriarchal influences. First, *qawwamuna ‘ala*, which has been interpreted as ‘men are in charge,’ ‘men are the managers,’ or ‘men are protectors or maintainers’ depending on who is doing the reading and what form of methodology them employ.<sup>cl</sup> Al-Hibri interprets *qawwamun* to mean ‘caring for’, which abides by the concept *awliya* stated in 9:71.<sup>cli</sup> Wadud’s interpretation affirms al-Hibri’s position and explicates that *qawwamun ‘ala* requires men to provide “physical protection as well as material sustenance,” which enables mutuality by allowing men to balance the responsibilities since women are enabling “the continuation of the human race.”<sup>clii</sup> Though men are charged to protect women this does not signify male superiority because, as noted, men and women are reciprocal protectors of each other (*awliya*’).

The term *nushuz* has also been widely disputed. In this verse, patriarchal readings have interpreted *nushuz* to mean ‘disobedience,’ ‘disharmony,’ or ‘disloyalty’ when referencing women. However, the word *nushuz* is used in 58:11 and 2:259 and refers to ‘standing up’ or ‘leaving’ in both of these Qur’anic verses.<sup>cliii</sup> Furthermore, the Muslim Women’s Shura Council points out that “*nushuz* is never understood as “disobedience” on the part of the husband; instead

interpretations often change when applied to a man versus a woman.<sup>cliv</sup> In 4:128 it references *nushuz* on the husband's part and the term is read as to mean 'fear' while in 4:34 *nushuz* is interpreted as 'disobedience' when linked to women.<sup>clv</sup> Islamic feminists attribute this inconsistency to interpreters' paradigms couched in patriarchal contexts.

Finally, the word *daraba* has been interpreted in a way that allows men to beat their disobedient wives. Muslim scholar-activists have explicated how *daraba* has twenty-five different meanings in the Qur'an including "beat" but also "go away from," "leave," "set an example," and "to separate."<sup>clvi</sup> In addition, Barlas emphasizes that *daraba* is a different term than "*darraba*" which does mean "to strike repeatedly or intensely."<sup>clvii</sup> Using intertextual analysis—interpreting the Qur'an by use of the Qur'an—illuminates that reading *daraba* as "to beat" is not supported anywhere else in the Qur'an while "to go away from" is supported in 2:226-227.<sup>clviii</sup> Moreover, the Qur'anic verses that do reference "striking" or "beating"—28:15, 28:41, and 51:29—use a different Arabic term than *daraba*.<sup>clix</sup>

Returning to the key hermeneutical methods, Islamic feminists emphasize that the Qur'an must be read for its best meaning and interpreted in a holistic manner; this is in contrast to patriarchal readings which approach the Qur'an verse by verse reading words and phrases in isolation from other Qur'anic verses.<sup>clx</sup> Translating 4:34 to enable husbands to beat their "disobedient" wives discounts the broader Qur'anic message that promotes marital harmony. In addition, this reading contrasts 2:231 in the Qur'an, which explicitly mandates husbands who are experiencing a divorce to "not keep them [divorced wives], intending harm, to transgress (against them). And whoever does that has certainly wronged himself."<sup>clxi</sup> Therefore, interpreting 4:34 to mean "to beat" is not only a poor methodological reading of the verse but it also directly contradicts the spirit of marriage espoused in the Qur'an (4:128 & 30:21) which promotes

mutual, loving, and merciful marriages.<sup>clxii</sup> Moreover, the Qur'an states, "And among His signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves that you may live in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between you" (30:21).

*Sura 4 aya 34*, which limits spousal abuse and recognizes the importance of women's sustenance during the vulnerability of pregnancy, ultimately demonstrates the Qur'an's acknowledgement of men's dominance in patriarchal systems. As Barlas notes, "this does not mean that it [the Qur'an] either condones patriarchies, or that it is itself a patriarchal text;" rather, Qur'anic verses like 4:34 attempt to ensure women's wellbeing, especially in societies that institutionally discriminate against women and privilege men.<sup>clxiii</sup>

#### Veiling: A Contextual Response

Regarding the contested topic of veiling in Islam, Islamic feminists conduct a thorough hermeneutical analysis in order to illustrate the Qur'anic complexities and contextual circumstances surrounding the idea of "veiling". To achieve these ends, Muslim scholar feminists employ a critical examination to 1) the revelation directed to the Prophet's wives referencing privacy; 2) verses that have been interpreted to mandate Muslim women's "veiling"; 3) *suras* that discuss proper Islamic dress; and 4) the *ayas* that actually contain the term *hijab*.

*Sura al-Ahzab aya 32* clearly addresses only the wives of the Prophet, it explicitly states "O consorts of the Prophet! Ye are not like any of the (other) women" (33:32). *Aya 53* in this *sura* specifically refers to the Prophet's wives partition:

Ye who believe! Enter not the Prophet's houses, Until leave is given you, For a meal, (and then) Not so early as to wait For its preparation; but when Ye are invited, enter; And when ye have taken Your meal, disperse, Without seeking familiar talk. Such (behavior)

annoys The Prophet; he is ashamed To dismiss you, but God is not ashamed (To tell you) the truth. And when ye Ask (his ladies) For anything ye want, Ask them from before A screen [*hijab*]; that makes For greater purity for Your hearts and for theirs. Nor is it right for you That ye should annoy God's Apostle, or that Ye should marry his widows After him at any time. Truly such a thing is In God's sight an enormity. (33:53)

*Hijab* been interpreted to mean a “screen,” “partition,” or “curtain” which was meant to ensure the Prophet's wives privacy by requiring Muslim guests to speak to them behind some sort of divider in their home.<sup>clxiv</sup> Shaaban argues that because these verses were blatantly directed at Prophet Muhammad's wives “God did not want us [Muslim women] to measure ourselves against the wives of the Prophet and wear *hijab* like them and there is no ambiguity whatsoever regarding this *aya*.”<sup>clxv</sup> All Muslim women are referred to later in this *sura* (*al-ahzab*) in *aya* 59.

33:59 states “Prophet! Tell Thy wives and daughters, And the believing women, That they should cast Their outer garments [*jilbab*] over their persons (when outside): That is most convenient, That they should be known (As such) and not molested.” This verse is controversial because it has been used to validate forcing women to don various “coverings” in Muslim communities. The other *aya* that has been associated with the “veil” is 24: 31-32:

Say to the believing men That they should lower Their gaze and guard Their modesty: that will make For greater purity for them: And God is well acquainted with all that they do. And say to the believing women That they should lower Their gaze and guard Their modesty; that they Should not display their Beauty and ornaments [*zeenah*] except What (must ordinarily) appear Thereof; that they should Draw their veils [*khimar*] over Their bosoms and not display Their beauty except TO their husbands, their fathers...and that

they Should not strike their feet In order to draw attention To their hidden ornaments  
[*zeenah*].

Conservative Muslims reading patriarchy in the Qur'an have interpreted both 33:59 and 24:31-32 as requiring Muslim women to wear covering devices that vary from a *hijab* (head veil) to a *burqa*, which covers the entire body head to toe. Barlas explicates that these interpreters “justify such forms of veiling on the grounds that women’s bodies are pudendal hence sexually corrupting to those who see them; it thus is necessary to shield Muslim men from viewing women’s bodies by concealing them.”<sup>clxvi</sup> Moreover, these masculinist interpretations have been codified into law; for example, women in Iran are required by law to wear a *hijab*. Consequently, Muslim scholar activists comprehensively assess the Qur'an to illustrate that it does not religiously mandate “the veil”.

Islamic feminists explore the contextual circumstances that *sura al-ahzab* was revealed in. This verse espoused a “curtain” for the Prophet’s wives and a *jilbab* or outer garments for Muslim women. Stowasser points to two crucial environmental factors surrounding the revelation of these verses.<sup>clxvii</sup> First, Medina was at the height of its popularity and the mosque, where Muhammad and his wives lived, was specifically a location of public interest.<sup>clxviii</sup> In this setting, a “screen” enabled the wives privacy and seclusion from the continual visitors seeking the Prophet’s guidance. In addition, headscarves on women had historically been a symbol of status;<sup>clxix</sup> therefore this verse was emphasizing the differences in treatment and privilege between the Prophet’s wives and Believing women. Secondly, this verse was revealed during an intense political crisis with the hypocrites; for that reason, the screen was a protection devise in a time of turmoil.<sup>clxx</sup> The socio-political tension between the hypocrites and Muslims also illuminates the contextual forces that influenced *aya* 59. Prescribing all Muslim women to cover

themselves in public occurred during a time when women were being molested and targeted by the hypocrites in public; therefore, “cloaks” or “outer garments” (*jilbab*) were meant to distinguish Muslim women from slaves in order to protect them from harassment.

An intertextual analysis illustrates the complexities surrounding the notion of “veiling” in Islam. In 33:53, the term *hijab* refers to a curtain or screen in which other Muslims were supposed to remain behind when speaking to the Prophet’s wives; but there is no reference to women’s clothing in this verse whatsoever so how can a *hijab* possibly mean a head-covering? Furthermore, Islamic feminists highlight that this verse was solely addressed to the Prophet’s wives and therefore, this *aya* cannot be interpreted to confine all Muslim women to seclusion.<sup>clxxi</sup> Scholars also emphasize that after this verse was revealed, Muhammad’s wives continued to go into public thus, this verse does not enable sexual division nor prescribe all Muslim women to don a head covering of some sort.

When clothing is referred to in 33:59 and 24: 31, the Qur’an does not stipulate a precise definition of “modest dress”; rather women are informed to “veil their bosoms” (24:31) and wear their “cloak” or “outer garment” (33:59) in a modest manner that will deter harassment.<sup>clxxii</sup> The term *jilbab* in 33:59 has been widely interpreted to refer to loose clothing of some sort like a dress or overcoat but even here the Qur’an is emphasizing the protection of women, rather than specifying women’s inferiority and prescribing them to oppressive dress.<sup>clxxiii</sup> Viewing this verse as a Qur’anic response to the patriarchal realities of seventh century Arabia reinforces the notion that the Qur’an’s acknowledgement of difference is to protect women in contexts of patriarchal domination (just as in 4:34).



The next two contentious terms in relation to Muslim women's clothing are *khimar* and *zeenah* in 24:31-32. The term *khimar* or veil is used in reference to covering one's breasts, which is very different than one's head or face. The focus in this verse is on maintaining dignity rather than articulating a theory of women's "sexually corrupting" body. In addition, the term *zeenah* has been interpreted to mean "charms", "beauty", or "ornaments" but elsewhere in the Qur'an the term varies.<sup>clxxiv</sup> For example, in 7:31 it states "O Children of Adam! Wear your beautiful apparel [*zeenah*] at every time and place of prayer." One could speculate that 24:31 was advising women to not display their "beautiful apparel" in order to sustain one's modesty and humility.

Lastly, approaching the "veil" discussion by integrating the broader Qur'anic message and holistic spirit of egalitarianism and social justice is essential for a new understanding devoid of patriarchal influences. In 7:26 the Qur'an states:

O you Children of Adam! We have bestowed clothing or raiment [*libasan*] on you to cover your nakedness and as a thing of beauty. But the raiment of righteousness [*taqwa*], that is the best. Such are the signs of God, that they may receive admonition.

As discussed earlier, Believers are judged only by Allah and on the basis of their pious actions, modest attitudes, and fulfillment of *taqwa*. Therefore, the Qur'an "talks about our [Muslims] clothing as something both to cover our nakedness and serve as an adornment, reflecting the beauty of God's creation," rather than shaming women's bodies.<sup>clxxv</sup> It's also vital to note that the Qur'an does not prescribe any punishments for the transgression of some form of clothing standard (which also is not specified in the Qur'an). Ultimately, the verses on clothing reaffirm the Qur'anic message of modesty which is promoted to men and women alike (24:31) and meant to enable Muslims practice of *taqwa*.

Some Islamic scholar feminists, who have engaged in an antipatriarchal Qur'anic hermeneutics like Jasmine Zine, have come to the conclusion that the veil is not mandated in the Qur'an.<sup>clxxvi</sup> This has caused her to decide to wear the veil only in certain circumstances and upon her autonomous decision. She explains that “my use of the *hijab* is not based on coercion or “false consciousness”; rather, it is an informed and strategic move that does not fall neatly into the categorizations of veiled women that disapproving feminist scholars characteristically purvey.”<sup>clxxvii</sup> Furthermore, Islamic feminists emphasize the Qur'anic principle stating “there is no compulsion in religion” as the foundational reasoning that Islam does not universally prescribe women to veil (2:256). If the Qur'an prescribes that there can be no compulsion in religion how can Muslim communities force women to wear the *hijab*, *niqab*, or *burqa*? Therefore, Islamic feminist's hermeneutics strives to rid Qur'anic exegeses of patriarchal manipulations that hinder Muslims ability to actualize the Islamic principles of equality and justice.

### Conclusion

O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for God can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest ye swerve, and if ye distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily God is well-acquainted with all the yet do.  
(Qur'an, 4:135)

Who, I ask you, can take, dare take on himself the rights, the duties, the responsibilities of another human soul?<sup>clxxviii</sup>

Religions do not occupy an isolated space free of political, social, economic, or cultural influences. Therefore, Islam does not interpret itself; rather individuals who are impacted by history, cultural norms, and societal institutions establish the hegemonic religious discourse and ways of meaning that undoubtedly affect ideas about gender.<sup>clxxxix</sup> To combat patriarchal influences that have read patriarchy into the Qur'an and contributed to Muslim women's subordinate positions in Islamic communities, Islamic feminism expands its' activism to fostering grassroots cultural transformation and altering societal discourse through an Islamic framework instead of limiting the scope of their activism to state structures.

Muslim scholar activists attempt to reconcile modern civil society with Islamic traditions through the liberatory message of Islam which delegitimizes patriarchal interpretations that have historically marginalized Muslim women. Muslim scholar's hermeneutics illustrates that the Qur'an's epistemology undermines patriarchy and gender inequality.<sup>clxxx</sup> Furthermore, their reappropriation of religious discourse enables an Islamic *ihya* (renewal) which can reshape ideologies and therefore provide all Muslims greater access to civil society and politics. Islamic feminists provide an alternative conceptual understanding that differentiates "between the various strands of religion, custom, and culture" that has been "woven into an identity that is presented to women as an indivisible whole" in order to enable all Muslims to discern the Qur'an's liberatory and egalitarian message.<sup>clxxx</sup>

Muslim feminist scholar's Qur'anic hermeneutics ultimately constructs the groundwork for Islamic feminists' work which seeks to build a "more inclusive, pluralistic, civic, and voluntary civil society that rejects the false essentialism, defines an authentic identity, and maximizes women's participation and engagement."<sup>clxxxii</sup> Furthermore, Islamic feminist's Qur'anic reinterpretations present the opportunity to bridge women across differences of class,

nationality, and race due to the vast diversity of believing women in Islam. In addition, Islamic feminism is a critical development in the global movement to advance women's rights and status and reconfiguring feminism within an Islamic framework may enable more connections between women in a globalizing world. Lastly, Islamic feminism enhances feminist literature, expands arguments for gender equity and constructs new consciousness-raising activities that extend beyond the confines of Western or secular feminisms.

Islamic feminists fight for the privilege to reclaim and redefine their religious identity as Believing women in Islam through a feminist hermeneutics that highlights Qur'anic discourse that affirms gender equality and reinterprets patriarchal readings. By employing *ijtihad* and *tafsir*, Muslim scholar activists are able to: 1) contextualize both the Qur'anic verses and their mainstream exegesis, 2) employ Qur'anic hermeneutics by reading the Qur'an through use of the Qur'an or intertextual analysis, 3) search for the text's best meaning, 4) and holistically analyze each verse as a part of the whole. Their hermeneutics ultimately reveals how patriarchal influences have subverted the equality of human beings and therefore, Muslim scholars exegeses seek to disentangle patriarchal manipulation for the benefit of all Muslims. Islamic feminists' reformulation of gender justice and equality in the Qur'an requires reflexive change in Muslim societies that seeks to remove systematic discrimination and cultural oppression of Muslim women. Muslim feminist scholar's exegeses reconstruct religious meaning to incorporate Muslim women's experiences and to free the Qur'anic liberatory theology. Their reinterpretations of sacred text produce new meanings, or recover old meanings, to provide the foundation for Muslim feminist's activism which aims to promote a consciousness shift in Muslim's theological understanding and everyday practices. Ultimately, transforming mainstream rhetoric and understanding of women in Islam is a critical component for women's

dignity and full personhood to be acknowledged and respected. Islamic feminism illustrates women's full equality in the Qur'an in order to liberate Islam's spirit of egalitarianism from patriarchal constraints and enable the actualization of justice and equality within the *Umma*.

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Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Zevit, Z. *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallaxic Approaches*. London/New York: Continuum. ISBN 0-8264-4728-7, 2001.
- <sup>2</sup> Geisler, N. L., & Watkins, W. D. *Worlds Apart: A Handbook On World Views*. Baker Publishing Group, 1989, 10.
- <sup>3</sup> Berger, P. L., and Luckmann, T. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. United States: Anchor Books. ISBN 0-385-05898-5, 1966.
- <sup>4</sup> Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 24.
- <sup>5</sup> Spring, F. B. (1998, Spring). Trespassing on Sacred Domains: A Feminist Anthropological Approach to Theology and Religious Studies. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 1(14), pp. 40-62, 61.
- <sup>6</sup> Badran, M., *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*. England, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2009.
- <sup>7</sup> Seedat, F. "Islam, Feminism, and Islamic Feminism: Between Inadequacy and Inevitability." *The Muslim World*, 103(3), (2013): 404-420. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/muwo.12022/abstract>.
- <sup>8</sup> Badran, *Feminism in Islam*.
- <sup>9</sup> Lorde, A. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." *Sister*

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*Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*, 110-114. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007, 110 & 111.

<sup>10</sup> WISE. “The Global Muslim Women's Shura Council.” Last modified 2014. Retrieved February 2, 2014, from Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE) website: <http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/about/shuracouncil>

<sup>11</sup> Badran, *Feminism in Islam*.

<sup>12</sup> Badran, M., “Locating Feminisms: The Collapse of Secular and Religious Discourses in the Mashriq.” *Agenda*, 50, (2001): 41-57. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4066404>, 43.

<sup>13</sup> Afsaruddin, A., editor, *Hermeneutics and Honor: Negotiating Female Public Space in Islamic/ate Societies*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1999, 1.

<sup>14</sup> King, U. *Religion and Gender*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1995, 4.

<sup>xv</sup> It's important to clarify that Muslim and Islamic may be used to reference societies with majority Muslim population and who consider themselves a member of the Islamic faith. Therefore, when referencing a group of people after one of these terms—Islamic feminists—then I am referencing feminists who are a member of the Islamic religious faith and whose values, beliefs, and actions are informed by Islam.

<sup>15</sup> Abusharaf, A. “Women in Islamic Communities: The Quest for Gender Justice Research,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, 28(3), (2006): 714-728. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20072759>.

<sup>16</sup> Barlas, A. “Qur'anic Hermeneutics and Women's Liberation.” Paper presented at the International Congress on Islamic Feminism in Barcelona, Spain. October 29, 2005. Retrieved from <http://www.asmabarlas.com/TALKS/Barcelona.pdf>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>18</sup> Cooke, M. *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2001, 59.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>20</sup> Hendel, R. *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 0-19-517796-7, 2005, 71.

<sup>21</sup> Bahi, R., "Islamic and Secular Feminisms: Two Discourses Mobilized for Gender Justice." *European University Institute Working Papers: Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies*, (2011). Retrieved from [http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/17294/RSCAS\\_2011\\_25\\_rev.pdf?sequence=3](http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/17294/RSCAS_2011_25_rev.pdf?sequence=3)

<sup>22</sup> Badran, M. (2009). *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*. England, UK: Oneworld Publications, 242.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Here I have only listed a few of the most prominent Muslim scholar-activists that engage with Islamic sacred text.

<sup>23</sup> Ramadan, T. *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009, 217.

<sup>24</sup> Seedat, "Islam, Feminism and Islamic Feminism," 38.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Islamization is a phenomenon that varies between countries but has been described as the process in which one's Islamic religious identity becomes the central identity which guides all of an individual's activities and beliefs.

<sup>24</sup> Badran, M. (2001). Locating Feminisms: The Collapse of Secular and Religious Discourses in the Mashriq. *Agenda*, 50, 41-57. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4066404>



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<sup>25</sup>Badran, *Feminism in Islam*.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Abou-Bakr, O, "Gender Perspectives in Islam Tradition" (speech given at Second Annual Minaret of Freedom Institute Dinner. Retrieved from <http://www.minaret.org/gender.htm>, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Badran, *Feminism in Islam*.

<sup>31</sup> Ahmed, L., editor, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992.

<sup>32</sup> Barlas, A., "*Believing Women*" in *Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Badran, *Feminism in Islam*, 233.

<sup>34</sup> Badran, M., "Toward Islamic Feminisms: A Look at the Middle East," in *Hermeneutics and Honor: Negotiating Female "Public" Space in Islamic/ate Societies*, edited by A. Afsaruddin, 159-188, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

<sup>35</sup> Badran, M., "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s: Reflections on the Middle East and Beyond." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 1(1), (2005): 6-28. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40326847>, 15.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 236.

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<sup>xlii</sup> Islamist refers to individuals that are members of a political activist group that seeks to institute a political state that governs based on their interpretation of Islamic tenets. Political Islam also refers to the ideology these groups subscribe to.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 247.

<sup>40</sup> Abou-Bakr, "Gender Perspectives."

<sup>41</sup> Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 243.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Rosenberg, E. S. "Rescuing Women and Children." *Journal of American History*. 89(2), (2002): 456-465, 457.

<sup>44</sup>Seedat, "Islam, Feminism and Islamic Feminism," 33.

<sup>45</sup>Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic," 15.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>47</sup>Badran, *Feminism in Islam*, 328.

<sup>48</sup> Badran, M. "Gender Activism: Feminists and Islamists in Egypt," in *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective*, edited by V. Moghadam, 202-227, Denver, CO: Westview Press, 1993.

<sup>49</sup>Badran, *Feminism in Islam*, 329.

<sup>50</sup>Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic," 14.

<sup>51</sup>Seedat, "Islam, Feminism and Islamic Feminism."

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

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<sup>53</sup>Barlas, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics."

<sup>54</sup>Webb, G. *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar Activists in North America*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000.

<sup>55</sup>Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*, 245.

<sup>56</sup>Seedat, "Islam, Feminism and Islamic Feminism," 30.

<sup>57</sup>Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*, 326.

<sup>58</sup>Wadud, A. *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. USA: Oxford University Press. ISBN-10: 0195128362, 1999.

<sup>59</sup>Seedat, "Islam, Feminism and Islamic Feminism," 43.

<sup>60</sup>Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic," 2.

<sup>lxvi</sup> Note that a strong feminist movement developed in Egypt in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century but the dominant discourse espoused a secular feminist position rather than Islamic feminist.

<sup>61</sup> Mojab, S. "Theorizing the Politics of 'Islamic Feminism'." *Feminist Review*, (69), (2001): 124-146. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1395633>.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 142.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Badran, *Feminism in Islam*.

<sup>65</sup> WISE. "The Global Muslim Women's Shura Council."

<sup>66</sup> Mojab, "Theorizing the Politics".

<sup>67</sup>Barlas, "*Believing Women*" in *Islam*.

<sup>68</sup> Moghissi, H. *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism*. London, UK: Zed Books, 1999.

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<sup>69</sup> Shahidian, H. "Islamic Feminism Encounters Western Feminism: An Indigenous Alternative?" Paper presented at the Women's Studies 1998-99 Seminar on Globalization, Gender, and Pedagogy, Illinois State University, 1998.

<sup>70</sup> Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism*.

<sup>71</sup> Tohidi, N. "Women's Rights in the Muslim World: The Universal--Particular Interplay." *Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World*, 1(2), (2003):152-188.

<sup>72</sup> Badran, "Between Secular and Islamic," 12.

<sup>73</sup> Tomac, A. "Debating 'Islamic Feminism': Between Turkish Secular Feminist and North American Academic Critiques." (2011). Retrieved March 2, 2014, from Queen's University, Canada website:

[https://qspace.library.queensu.ca/bitstream/1974/6736/1/Tomac\\_Ayca\\_201109\\_MA.pdf](https://qspace.library.queensu.ca/bitstream/1974/6736/1/Tomac_Ayca_201109_MA.pdf)

<sup>74</sup> Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 247.

<sup>lxxxix</sup> Afkhami, M. Introduction to *Faith and Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World*, by M. Afkhami (Ed.), 1-17. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995, 3.

<sup>75</sup> Mojab, "Theorizing the Politics", 143.

<sup>76</sup> Seedat, "Islam, Feminism and Islamic Feminism."

<sup>77</sup> Ebert, T. "The "Difference" of Postmodern Feminism." *College English*, 53(8), (1991): 886-904. doi:10.2307/377692

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Badran, "Locating Feminisms".

<sup>80</sup> Cooke, *Women Claim Islam*.

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<sup>81</sup> Abou-Bakr, "Gender Perspectives."

<sup>82</sup> Barlas, "*Believing Women*" in *Islam*, xi.

<sup>83</sup> Badran, *Feminism in Islam*.

<sup>84</sup> Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*.

<sup>85</sup> Barlas, A., "The Qur'an and Hermeneutics: Reading the Qur'an's Opposition to Patriarchy." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 3(2), (2001):15-38. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25728036>

<sup>86</sup> Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 214.

<sup>87</sup> Barlas, A. "Uncrossed Bridges: Islam, Feminism and Secular Democracy." *SAGE*, 39(4-5), (2013): 417-425. doi:10.1177/0191453713477346.

<sup>88</sup> Barlas, "*Believing Women*" in *Islam*, 18.

<sup>89</sup> Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 5.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Tomac, "Debating 'Islamic Feminism'."

<sup>93</sup> Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 210.

<sup>94</sup> Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 228.

<sup>95</sup> Barlas, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics", 13.

<sup>96</sup> Barlas, "*Believing Women*" in *Islam*.

<sup>97</sup> Abugideiri, H. "Revisiting the Islamic Past, Deconstructing Male Authority: The Project of Islamic Feminism." *Religion and Literature*, 42(1/2), (2010):133-139. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23049473,136>.

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<sup>98</sup>Barlas, *“Believing Women” in Islam*, 4 & 5.

<sup>99</sup>Barlas, *“Believing Women” in Islam*, 16.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>Barlas, “The Qur’an and Hermeneutics”.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>103</sup>Barlas, *“Believing Women” in Islam*.

<sup>104</sup>Barlas, “The Qur’an and Hermeneutics”, 20.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>106</sup>Wadud, *Qur’an and Women*.

<sup>107</sup> Ahmed, *Women and Gender*.

<sup>108</sup> Barlas, “The Qur’an and Hermeneutics”.

<sup>109</sup> Abusharaf, “Women in Islamic Communities,” 719.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Ramadan, *Radical Reform*.

<sup>112</sup> WISE. “The Global Muslim Women's Shura Council.”

<sup>113</sup> Wadud, A. “Towards a Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Social Justice: Race, Class and Gender.” *Journal of Law and Religion*, 12(1), (1995): 37-50. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/1051608](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1051608), 46.

<sup>114</sup> Stowasser, B. F. *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994.

<sup>115</sup>Barlas, *“Believing Women” in Islam*, 25.

<sup>116</sup>Barlas, “The Qur’an and Hermeneutics.”

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<sup>117</sup> Aslan, R., *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam*. New York, NY: Random House, 2006.

<sup>118</sup> Barlas, "The Qur'an and Hermeneutics," 22.

<sup>119</sup> Quoted in Barlas, "*Believing Women*" in *Islam*, 109.

<sup>120</sup> Barlas, "The Qur'an and Hermeneutics."

<sup>121</sup> Quoted in Barlas, "*Believing Women*" in *Islam*, 95.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Wadud, *Qur'an and Women*.

<sup>125</sup> Barlas, "Uncrossed Bridges," 421.

<sup>126</sup> Badran, *Feminism in Islam*, 246.

<sup>127</sup> Quoted in Barlas, "*Believing Women*" in *Islam*, 143.

<sup>128</sup> Badran, *Feminism in Islam*, 248.

<sup>129</sup> Barlas, "*Believing Women*" in *Islam*, 144.

<sup>130</sup> Wadud, "Towards a Qur'anic Hermeneutics."

<sup>131</sup> Barlas, "*Believing Women*" in *Islam*.

<sup>132</sup> Badran, *Feminism in Islam*, 248.

<sup>133</sup> Wadud, *Qur'an and Women*.

<sup>134</sup> "Surat An-Nisa (The Women)." Last modified 2014. Retrieved from The Online Qur'an website: <http://quran.com/4/34>.

<sup>135</sup> Badran, *Feminism in Islam*.

<sup>136</sup> Barlas, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics", 5.

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<sup>137</sup>As quoted in Shabaan, B. "The Muted Voices of Women Interpreters." In *Faith and Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World*, edited by M. Afkhami. London, UK: I. B. Taurus & Co., 1995, 73 & 74.

<sup>138</sup>Barlas, A., "Reading the Qur'an: Challenges and Possibilities for Muslim Women." Symposium on Gender, Race, Islam, and the "War on Terror" at Simon Fraser University, Canada. May 11, 2006. Retrieved from [http://www.asmarbarlas.com/TALKS/Vancouver\\_Workshop.pdf](http://www.asmarbarlas.com/TALKS/Vancouver_Workshop.pdf)

<sup>139</sup>Barlas, "Believing Women" in *Islam*, 149.

<sup>140</sup>As quoted in Ali, A. Y., *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary* (2nd U.S. ed.). New York, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1988, 190.

<sup>141</sup>Barlas, "Believing Women" in *Islam*, 170.

<sup>142</sup>WISE. "Domestic Violence: A Violation of Islam." Last modified 2012. Retrieved from Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE) website: [http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/pdfs/shura\\_council\\_domestic\\_violence\\_digest.pdf](http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/pdfs/shura_council_domestic_violence_digest.pdf), 5.

<sup>143</sup>Wadud, *Qur'an and Women*.

<sup>144</sup>al-Hibri, A., "A Study of Islamic Herstory," in *Women and Islam*, edited by A. al-Hibri, 217-218. Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press, 1982.

<sup>145</sup>Wadud, *Qur'an and Women*, 73.

<sup>146</sup>WISE, "Domestic Violence."

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>148</sup>Wadud, *Qur'an and Women*.



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<sup>149</sup> WISE, “Domestic Violence.”

<sup>150</sup> Barlas, “Reading the Qur’an” 4.

<sup>151</sup> WISE, “Domestic Violence,” 3.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Barlas, “*Believing Women*” in *Islam*.

<sup>154</sup> “Surat Al-Baqarah (The Cow).” Last modified 2014. Retrieved from The Online

Qur'an website: <http://quran.com/2/231>

<sup>155</sup> Wadud, *Qur’an and Women*.

<sup>156</sup> Barlas, “*Believing Women*” in *Islam*, 198.

<sup>157</sup> Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an*.

<sup>158</sup> Shabaan, “The Muted Voices”, 72.

<sup>159</sup> Barlas, “*Believing Women*” in *Islam*, 55.

<sup>160</sup> Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an*.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ahmed, *Women and Gender*.

<sup>163</sup> Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an*.

<sup>164</sup> Barlas, “*Believing Women*” in *Islam*.

<sup>165</sup> “An Islamic Perspective on Women's Dress.” Last modified December, 1997.

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<http://www.mwlnusa.org/topics/dress/hijab.html>

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup>Zine, J. "Creating a Critical Faith-Centered Space for Antiracist Feminism: Reflections of a Muslim Scholar-Activist." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 20(2), (2004): 167-187.

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>171</sup> Stanton, E. C., "The Solitude of Self" Reprinted in *Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: Correspondence, Writings, and Speeches*, edited by Ellen Carol DuBois. New York, 1981, 9.

<sup>172</sup> Barlas, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics".

<sup>173</sup> Badran, *Feminism in Islam*.

<sup>174</sup> Afkhami, introduction, 95.

<sup>175</sup> Bahi, "Islamic and Secular Feminisms".