

REREADING THE SHARIA TEXT IN ISLAMIC FEMINISM: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

RELEITURA DO TEXTO DA SHARIA NO FEMINISMO ISLÂMICO: UM ESTUDO DESCRITIVO

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Abstract: This study, titled "Rereading the Sharia Text in Islamic Feminism: A Descriptive Study," examines the attempts of Islamic feminism to reinterpret Sharia texts related to women in ways that align with their perspectives and goals, which are often distant from the objectives of Islamic law. The research aims to highlight the intellectual tools employed by feminists in rereading Sharia texts, such as fragmenting or interpreting texts in contradiction to their religious and historical contexts. The study indicates that such readings impact the correct understanding of women's rights in Islam and raise questions about the credibility of these interpretations and their alignment with Islamic law. The study reveals that one of the prominent issues promoted by feminists is absolute equality between men and women, relying on certain verses that appear to support this notion while neglecting texts that emphasize differences in roles and rights between genders. Furthermore, the research adds that feminists often use tools such as isolating texts from their broader

context and rejecting traditional interpretations.

Keywords: Islamic feminism. Rereading texts. Women's rights. Interpretation of Sharia texts. Gender equality.

Resumo: Este estudo, intitulado "Relendo o texto da Sharia no feminismo islâmico: um estudo descritivo", examina as tentativas do feminismo islâmico de reinterpretar os textos da Sharia relacionados às mulheres de maneiras que se alinhem com suas perspectivas e objetivos, que muitas vezes estão distantes dos objetivos da lei islâmica. A pesquisa visa destacar as ferramentas intelectuais empregadas pelas feministas na releitura dos textos da Sharia, como fragmentar ou interpretar textos em contradição com seus contextos religiosos e históricos. O estudo indica que tais leituras impactam a compreensão correta dos direitos das mulheres no islamismo e levantam questões sobre a credibilidade dessas interpretações e seu alinhamento com a lei islâmica. O estudo revela que uma das questões proeminentes promovidas pelas feministas é a igualdade absoluta entre homens e mulheres, confiando em certos versículos que parecem apoiar essa noção enquanto negligenciam textos que enfatizam diferenças em papéis e direitos entre os gêneros. Além disso, a pesquisa acrescenta que as feministas frequentemente usam ferramentas como isolar textos de seu contexto mais amplo e rejeitar interpretações tradicionais.

Palavras-chave: Feminismo islâmico. Releitura de textos. Direitos das mulheres. Interpretação dos textos da Sharia. Igualdade de gênero.

1. Introduction

Islamic feminism represents a contemporary intellectual trend aimed at rereading religious texts related to women's issues, intending to present a new understanding that promotes women's rights in line with their desires, often diverging from the principles of Islamic law. When Western feminist thought was imported by some Muslims into Islamic lands, it became evident that it could not fully align with Islamic thought. Consequently, efforts were made to present its themes in an "Islamic guise" more palatable to Muslim societies. Since Sharia texts are revered among the general Muslim population, some feminists attempted to exploit this reverence to frame feminist issues as Islamic ones that should be accepted as they presented them.

In this research, titled "Rereading the Sharia Text in Islamic Feminism: A Descriptive Study," I have chosen to examine some of these topics and extract the tools employed by feminists in rereading Sharia texts.

Research Problem

The research problem lies in the attempts of some Islamic feminists to reread Sharia texts concerning women in ways that align with their visions and objectives, which often deviate from the true purposes of Sharia and the correct understanding of texts. The problem is reflected in how certain intellectual tools of feminist thought, such as fragmenting texts or interpreting them in contradiction to their religious and historical contexts, are employed. This raises questions about the credibility of such interpretations and their compatibility with Islamic law. A critical question also arises about how these readings influence the understanding of women's Sharia-based rights and how to preserve the true meanings of texts without resorting to interpretations that may distort their intent.

Reasons for Choosing the Topic

1. The significance of feminist issues in the Islamic world: Women's issues are among the most prominent topics occupying contemporary Islamic thought. With the growing influence of the feminist movement on Islamic societies, it has become essential to study how this ideology affects the reading of Sharia texts concerning women.

2. The overlap of Western feminist thought with Islamic thought: Initially, feminist thought was rejected in Islamic thought, particularly as Islam already guarantees women's rights. However, feminist ideas have increasingly spread under the guise of Islamic thought.

3. Contributing to the correction of Islamic women's jurisprudence: Through studying this subject, the research aims to help build jurisprudence that relies on proper interpretation of Sharia texts, avoiding erroneous interpretations. This approach seeks to define the role of women in Islamic society based on Sharia principles rather than on imported ideologies or whims.

4. The topic's impact on societal thought: With the ongoing discussion about women's rights in Islamic societies, it is important to direct this discussion toward a proper reading of Sharia texts that ensures women's rights without compromising the purposes of religion.

Previous Studies:

1. "Contemporary Feminist Interpretation of Women's Religious Issues: A Critical Study," by Samia Mudhi Al-Anazi.

Difference from this research: This study does not extensively address the tools feminists use in rereading texts but focuses on Sharia topics and feminist interpretations.

2. "Feminism and the Qur'an: A Critical Perspective on the Writings of Amina Wadud," by Osama Abdulrahman Al-Marakebi, published in the Journal of Islamic and Arabic Studies for Girls, Al-Azhar University.

Difference from this research: This study focuses solely on a single Islamic feminist and her interpretations of Qur'anic texts, whereas this research is broader and includes the tools feminists employ in their rereading.

3. "The Methodology of Contemporary Feminist Thought in Interpreting Religious Texts," by Dr. Taj Al-Din Shoulian (Ph.D. dissertation).

Difference from this research: Interpretation is a part of rereading texts but not its entirety.

2. Methodology

The descriptive method was employed in this research to describe the state of interpretation and rereading of texts by feminists, extracting the tools they utilized. The study is structured into an introduction, a preamble, two main sections, and a conclusion.

Preamble

When discussing feminist movements, we find that their history includes several successive waves, beginning in the 19th century and continuing to the present day. The

emergence of the concept of Islamic feminism is an extension of this movement, influenced by various political, ideological, and cultural factors within Arab societies.

While I do not intend to provide a historical account of the feminist movement, it is worth noting that the Arab nation, due to its civilizational weakness on one hand and its admiration for Western civilization on the other, has adopted many Western movements and ideas. Recently, intellectual and social movements have emerged aiming to distort the fundamentals of Islamic religion and present these distortions in an Islamic guise to gain public acceptance. These attempts seek to bring about a radical change in fundamental Islamic principles and values. These modernist or secular ideas cloak themselves in Islam to appear as if they are renewing or modernizing it. In reality, however, this is nothing more than a clear extension of overarching secular thought.

This phenomenon does not merely involve introducing ideas that undermine Islamic principles while disguising them as Islamic; rather, the intellectual tools previously characterized by overt secularism—once positioned as an adversary to Islamic discourse—have shifted. Their proponents now delve into heritage texts, seeking a reference, a jurisprudential dispute, or even an interpretative approach taken by scholars to justify their secular ideas. Nasr Abu Zayd aptly remarks:

"Secular currents have turned to confronting the present and attempting to solve its problems using mechanisms of a predominantly contemporary nature. However, they realized the need to present these mechanisms in a way that legitimizes their acceptance by the public, and thus they found support for their orientations in certain aspects of the heritage. Accordingly, the disagreement between the two wings of the nation—contrary to what Islamic leftists might imagine—was not a fundamental disagreement concerning their relationship with heritage. Instead, the dispute centered on the manner in which each employed the heritage: for the Salafis, it became a referential framework, while for the secularists, it became a cover and support."⁽¹⁾

These calls, which resurface from time to time, are championed by some individuals, amplified by certain media outlets, and promoted through articles, represent a manifestation of the encroachment of secularism and its swallowing of all religious and moral values. These intellectual transformations resemble a snowball that grows larger over time, as these ideas gain more prevalence and influence, ultimately threatening to consume the fundamental

⁽¹⁾*Critique of Religious Discourse*, by Nasr Abu Zayd, p. 154.

Islamic values and morals. Over time, if left unchallenged, they may lead to the erosion of the entire Islamic identity.

Some of these are mere echoes of certain thoughts, while others are fully developed ideas crossing borders to settle within Islamic thought. This is especially true of ideas that a conservative Muslim society, protective of its religious identity, might otherwise reject. Hence, throughout history, we have seen concepts such as "Socialism from an Islamic Perspective," "Islamic Human Rights," and "Islamic Democracy," all presented as attempts to bridge these concepts with Islam and affirm their compatibility with its teachings. One such concept is "Islamic Feminism."

I do not wish to delve deeply here into the legitimization of ideas and their dangers, but it is useful to touch upon some matters concerning Islamic feminism and the reasons why we might need such a concept.

To start, Islamic feminism was defined by Omaima Abou-Bakr as⁽²⁾ by stating: *"The intellectual and academic effort that seeks to empower women based on Islamic references, utilizing concepts, standards, and intellectual methodologies derived from these references."*⁽³⁾

As for the need to legitimize feminism, Ahmed Zaki wrote a paper titled *"Why Do We Need Feminism from an Islamic Perspective,"* edited by Omaima Abou-Bakr, in which he stated:

"The primary motivation behind the current trends of Islamic feminist research is to activate the higher principles and objectives to produce feminist knowledge within the scope of Islam and through it. This knowledge seeks to dismantle authoritarian patriarchy and bias in the discourses and interpretations of heritage, then rebuild a new reformist vision that meets the needs of women within their societies and cultures."⁽⁴⁾ And how is this achieved? He answers:

"This is initially done by extracting specific, effective meanings from the principles of human rights embedded in the Qur'anic text to build a system of legal/jurisprudential reforms for implementation and to enhance the role of women as stewards on Earth as well. In other words, the foundation and logic of change come directly from the primary source of Islam, which is most relied upon and trusted—the Qur'an itself."⁽⁵⁾

And as we examine their methodology in rereading, we find that they often rely solely on the Qur'an, reading and rereading it in isolation from surrounding texts—whether

⁽²⁾feminism that claims to be Islamic feminism.

⁽³⁾From: *"Intellectual Tensions Between Feminism and Islam: A Study in Theory and Practice,"* by Dr. Ikram Talaat Al-Badawi. Published in the Takwin Center on August 13, 2024.

⁽⁴⁾*Why Do We Need Feminism from an Islamic Perspective?* by Ahmed Zaki, *Journal of Feminism and the Islamic Perspective*, 2013.

⁽⁵⁾Ibid.

Prophetic traditions or scholarly interpretations, ranging from the Companions to contemporary scholars. For them, the Sharia text is limited to the Qur'an alone, and the understanding of the Qur'an becomes the interpretation of every feminist in a manner that aligns with their ideas.

Here, I wish to pause and reflect on the rereading of texts by feminists. Feminist ideas rooted in Western feminism may be rejected by certain segments of society, whereas Sharia texts, when used as a façade for feminist concepts, may find acceptance among many, including a significant segment of the population⁽⁶⁾ I will discuss some of the topics whose texts they sought to reread in the first section and their tools in the second section.

3. Results and Discussion

Section One: Topics Legitimized by Feminism

First: Equality

One of the most prominent topics Islamic feminism sought to present through an Islamic lens and reread Islamic texts for is the notion of *absolute equality with men* and the elimination of all differences between men and women in every aspect.

This idea forms the foundation of all other feminist concepts for which they reinterpret texts, such as bodily autonomy, the abolition of guardianship or patriarchal (male-dominated) authority, and even equal rights with men in inheritance, testimony, and other areas.

Equality was the first issue championed by feminism, both in the East and the West. The authors of the book "*The Feminist Movement*" discussed the beginnings and roots of the feminist movement, noting that one of the earliest proponents was *Olympe de Gouges* in the 18th century. She published the *Declaration of the Rights of Women* as a response to the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* issued by the National Assembly, demanding equality between men and women in law, government, and education⁽⁷⁾.

And here, we observe that the initial demands focused on education, law, and voting rights. However, this was not always the case, as the evolution of feminism in its call for

⁽⁶⁾See: "*Intellectual Tensions Between Feminism and Islam: A Study in Theory and Practice*," by Dr. Ikram Talaat Al-Badawi, published by the Takwin Center on August 13, 2024.

This paper addressed the origins of Islamic feminism in the Islamic world at the beginning of the 21st century.

⁽⁷⁾*The Feminist Movement*, by Susan Alice Watkins, Marisa Rueda, and Marta Rodriguez. Translated by Jamal Al-Jaziri, (p. 36), National Translation Project, Supreme Council of Culture, Egypt, 1st Edition, 2005.

equality went beyond these early topics. The slogan of the new phase became: *the abolition of male authority (patriarchy)*.

Sarah Gamble states:

"Feminism, for women born after 1920, is nothing more than a bygone past. It ceased to exist as an active movement in America after women gained that last right—the right to vote. The relationship between this 'new feminism for women's liberation' and the 'old feminism advocating equal rights' is more complex than that. In most cases, many tend to draw a clear dividing line between the two directions... Women's liberation contains some threads that trace back to the old feminist movement for equal rights, but it is more than just a matter of equality.

The first wave, referred to as 'the most significant revolution in history,' represents the early feminist writings and advocacy for women's rights. After this movement was halted for fifty years due to a backlash, it re-emerged in the form of a 'feminist assault.' As Kate Millett suggests, this movement might finally achieve its ultimate goal: liberating half of the human race from the subjugation they have endured since ancient times under policies rooted in male bias."⁽⁸⁾

The rereading of Qur'anic texts related to equality is a necessity that feminists have resorted to. Feminism originally engaged in sharp criticism of religions, and attempts emerged to cancel all interpretations of the Bible. Sarah Gamble argues that the Qur'anic texts should be reread to eliminate bias or male superiority. For example, the creation story, as presented in the Bible and the Qur'an, grants superiority to men only in non-Qur'anic texts, as Sarah sees it. Qur'anic texts on creation can be understood as advocating equality, but no other texts should intervene.

She states:

"The creation story in the Qur'an is presented within the framework of non-Qur'anic materials in the hadith collections, which are believed to have been influenced by narratives involving misogyny, particularly Christian ones, based on chapters two and three of Genesis. They reveal the spirit of justice and equality in the Qur'an, which is overshadowed by the interpretations of those with vested interests in maintaining the current patriarchal status quo."⁽⁹⁾

⁽⁸⁾Feminism and Postfeminism, by Sarah Gamble (pp. 57-58), translated by Ahmed Al-Shami, National Translation Project, Supreme Council of Culture, Egypt, First Edition, 2002.

⁽⁹⁾Feminism and Postfeminism, by Sarah Gamble (p. 236).

Among the most prominent figures who attempted to reread Islamic texts to align with feminist ideas is Amina Wadud.⁽¹⁰⁾ She grounds her studies and arguments in the Qur'an, using it as justification and support for her modernist ideas, which she adopted while being raised in a context of modernity. At the same time, she strives not to depart from religion. In her most notable work, *"Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective,"* she asserts her belief that women's rights were guaranteed in Islam long before the concept of human rights became recognized in the Western world.

From this perspective, they argue that the absolute equality they seek is rooted in the Qur'an itself. Furthermore—and this still operates within their claim that equality is Islamic and legitimate—they contend that the Qur'an does not link sex to gender, nor to the division of labor, nor to masculine or feminine characteristics, nor to women with instinct and emotion. On the contrary, the Qur'an does not ascribe a fixed nature to humans but presents them as a collective whole.

For example, the Qur'an refers to (here they reference the verses they reread) the creation of humans from a single soul and affirms gender equality in moral behavior before God, where the only criterion for distinction in Islam is behavioral and moral, not gender-based⁽¹¹⁾ These verses referenced here include examples such as the verse: { وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَىٰ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ } (Adh-Dhariyat: 56), where "mankind" encompasses both male and female.

Asma Barlas argues: "If the Qur'an does not distinguish between the creation of men and women—something that is clearly evident—then why do Muslims believe that Eve was created from Adam's rib? While nearly all Muslims accept the story of the woman's creation as mentioned in Genesis, it is difficult to assert that this narrative entered Islamic tradition directly, as very few Muslims read the Bible.

The more likely explanation is that this belief became part of Islamic tradition through its incorporation into the corpus of hadith. Several hadith provide clear evidence of integrating the idea of the woman's creation from Adam's rib, as narrated in Genesis, into hadith tradition. Among these, six hadith stand out as particularly significant when we consider their active role in shaping Muslim views on the existence of women and their

⁽¹⁰⁾An American Muslim feminist activist, Amina Wadud, was the first woman to lead a Friday prayer with men and women standing in mixed rows behind her. This act was a practical application of the equality she advocates, which she believes the Qur'an endorses. Additionally, she was the first contemporary woman to perform the call to prayer (Adhan) in a church in the United States!

⁽¹¹⁾*The Qur'an, Gender, and Sexuality: Similarity, Difference, and Equality*, by Asma Barlas (p. 238), translated by Randa Abou-Bakr, Women and Memory Forum, 2012.

sexuality as inherently distinct from the existence and sexuality of men."⁽¹²⁾ Thus, the Qur'anic discourse is non-discriminatory; rather, it is a discourse that establishes equality between men and women. This preference or distinction between men and women, as argued, infiltrated Muslim thought through hadiths transmitted to Muslims via Jewish and Christian cultures.

She continues: "From a jurisprudential perspective, the subjugation of women in Islamic tradition (as in Jewish and Christian traditions) began with the story of Eve's creation. In my view, male-centered Islamic societies—controlled by men—will not acknowledge the clear equality expressed in the Qur'anic statements about human creation unless Muslim women return to that original point and challenge the validity of the hadiths that render their gender ontologically inferior, portraying them as inherently flawed with no hope for rectification."⁽¹³⁾

It has been noted that they use verses emphasizing equality in discourse or reward as evidence. For instance, Rifaat cited the following verses:

{ فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِنْكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ بَعْضُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْضٍ فَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَأُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ وَأُودُوا فِي سَبِيلِي وَقَاتَلُوا وَقُتِلُوا لَأُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلَأُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ } (Aal-E-Imran: 195).

{ وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظَلَّمُونَ فِيهَا شَيْئًا } (An-Nisa: 124).

{ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَٰئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ (71) وَعَدَّ اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسَاكِنَ طَيِّبَةً فِي جَنَّاتِ عَدْنٍ وَرِضْوَانٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ } (At-Tawbah: 71-72).

She comments: "The Qur'an not only affirms complete equality between men and women before God but also states that they are 'allies' of one another. Another perspective suggests that the Qur'an does not create a hierarchy placing men above women (as is the case with many foundational figures of Christianity). Furthermore, the Qur'an does not position men and women in antagonistic relationships as though they are adversaries. Instead, it portrays them as created together by a just, compassionate, and merciful God, equal in their humanity, who delights in their harmonious and righteous coexistence.

⁽¹²⁾Ibid.

⁽¹³⁾Ibid.

Despite the Qur'an's affirmation of equality between men and women, Islamic societies generally do not view men and women as equals, particularly in the context of marriage."⁽¹⁴⁾

Among the evidence cited by the feminist Amina Wadud in her book *"Qur'an and Woman"* is that Allah, the Exalted, revealed to the mother of Moses (peace be upon him). She reiterates what Rifaat and others have mentioned, claiming that Allah did not begin creation with Adam. She states:

"Allah did not begin human creation with the male, nor did He refer to the origins of humanity through Adam. The Qur'an does not even mention that Allah began human creation with Adam himself, who was a man."⁽¹⁵⁾

The issue does not stop at equality but extends to dissolving differences, which they also attempt to legitimize. Amina Wadud states:

"Although the Qur'an affirms the creation of humans as pairs, male and female, {ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا} (Fatir: 11), and distinguishes between them {وَلَيْسَ الذَّكَرُ كَالْأُنثَى} (Aal-E-Imran: 36), it does not attribute explicit characteristics to one or the other in particular... Moreover, femininity and masculinity are not innate traits imprinted in the essential nature of males and females."⁽¹⁶⁾

I will not elaborate further, but I point out that many other issues stem from this foundational argument in the writings of those seeking to legitimize feminism.

Second: Guardianship (Qiwamah):

The concept of a man's guardianship over a woman is mentioned in the Qur'an in the verse:

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَانِتَاتٌ { حَافِظَاتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ وَاللَّاتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ فَإِنِ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَالْوَالِدَاتُ وَالْأَقْرَبُونَ وَلَا تُبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا (An-Nisa: 34).

Many feminists and secularists argue that guardianship is either conditional—limited to those who can provide financial support, given that women today often support themselves and their households—or it is a historical construct that has become outdated,

⁽¹⁴⁾Ibid.

⁽¹⁵⁾*Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, by Amina Wadud (p. 55), translated by Samia Adnan, Cairo, Madbouli Bookstore, First Edition: 2006.

⁽¹⁶⁾*Qur'an and Woman*, by Amina Wadud (p. 78).

especially for those who interpret the Qur'an as contextual and historical, as previously discussed.

Rifaat Hassan states:

"Whenever some liberals raise the issue of equality between men and women, traditionalists immediately respond: 'But don't you know that Allah says in the Qur'an that men are guardians over women, that they have authority over them, and even the right to beat them?'

In reality, the mere statement 'men are guardians over women' buries any attempt to address the issue of equality between men and women in the Islamic community."⁽¹⁷⁾

According to traditional interpretations, guardianship (qiwamah) negates equality entirely. But how does Rifaat Hassan address this issue? She explains:

"Nearly everyone who reads verse 34 of Surah An-Nisa assumes that the discourse is directed at husbands. It is important to first note that the verse is addressed to both men and women, meaning it is directed to all men and women in the Islamic society. This is also evident in the use of plural forms rather than dual forms for all the actions prescribed by the verse. From this, it becomes clear that the commands contained in the verse are not directed specifically at the husband and wife but at the Islamic community as a whole.

Here, a logical point must be clarified: the first sentence is not a descriptive statement suggesting that all men inherently provide for women, as there are, of course, some men who do not support women. What the sentence states is that men *should* have the ability to provide for women (as the term *should* implies capability). In other words, this statement, which nearly all Muslim societies have regarded as a factual description of all men, is in reality a normative statement regarding the Islamic concept of the division of labor within the ideal family or societal structure.

This does not mean that women are incapable of providing for themselves, nor does it imply that they should not do so. It simply acknowledges that, given the significant burden placed upon women—such as pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing—they should not also bear additional responsibilities, such as providing for the household.

If we delve deeper into this paragraph, we arrive at the idea that Allah has endowed one group with greater capability than the other. Most translations make it seem as though men possess greater strength, virtues, or higher status. However, the Qur'anic text does not

⁽¹⁷⁾*Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam*, by Rifaat Hassan.

confer higher status upon men. The expression used in the verse is 'some of them over others,' which makes it possible to interpret the statement as meaning either that some men are superior to others (men, women, or both) or that some women are superior to others (men, women, or both). The interpretation most consistent with the context, in my view, is that some men are better providers than other men."⁽¹⁸⁾

Thus, according to this reading, a man has no inherent superiority over a woman in this verse. Rather, one man is superior to another.

However, another explicit verse challenges this interpretation, namely:

"And for the men is a degree over them" (Al-Baqarah: 228).

Hassan interprets this "degree" as referring to the fact that, if a woman is divorced, she must observe a waiting period of three months to ensure she is not pregnant, whereas men do not need such a measure. Hence, she argues that the "degree" does not imply any inherent superiority of men over women.

Third: Bodily Autonomy (Cohabitation):

Feminism advocates for complete bodily autonomy for women without any restrictions. One manifestation of this is the promotion of or advocacy for cohabitation. I have chosen to highlight this issue in particular because those attempting to legitimize certain practices do not limit themselves to the Qur'an but seek justification wherever they can find it—whether in a Qur'anic verse, a Prophetic hadith, or even a juristic opinion.

Cohabitation refers to a man and a woman living together in the same residence as a couple without being bound by a marital contract, supposedly to "test" marriage and shared responsibilities. If, after one year, two years, or even ten, they decide to marry, they may do so, and if not, they separate.

In reality, this constitutes complete seclusion and paves the way for fornication and its consequences. Regardless of the terminology used, this remains the essence of the matter.

Advocates of this practice cite a statement attributed to Abu Hanifa, as mentioned by Ibn Hazm (d. 456 AH):

"Abu Hanifa held that fornication is only what occurs without consent. If it involves compensation or hiring, it is not considered fornication, nor is there any prescribed punishment for it."⁽¹⁹⁾

Al-Shashi (d. 507 AH) also stated:

⁽¹⁸⁾Ibid.

⁽¹⁹⁾*Al-Muhalla bil Athar* by Ibn Hazm (11/250)

"If a man hires a woman to fornicate with her, and he does so, the punishment for fornication is due. Likewise, if he marries a woman who is a prohibited relative and has intercourse with her, believing it to be forbidden, the punishment is also due. However, Abu Hanifa said that in both cases, no punishment applies."⁽²⁰⁾

They cling to these statements, claiming that Abu Hanifa permitted fornication if it involved payment or compensation, equating it to the form of cohabitation under discussion. Based on this interpretation, they justify fornication and seek to normalize immorality among Muslims by citing what they perceive to be a supporting juristic opinion.

However, it is evident to all that their motives are not rooted in Islamic principles but rather in blind imitation of the West, importing their lowest and most degraded practices and morals.

Section Two: Tools Used by Feminism to Reread Texts on Women's Issues

Islamic feminism seeks to reread religious texts related to women's issues using methodological tools that reinterpret these texts in alignment with values of justice and equality. Feminists rely on several tools, which can be summarized as follows:

First: Fragmentation of Texts

Feminists engage in what can be termed as an "assault" on religious texts by selecting parts of texts that align with their desires while disregarding others. This fragmentation serves as a primary tool for rereading Sharia texts.

The term "fragmentation of texts" refers to the selective use of portions of religious texts while ignoring the broader contexts that could provide these texts with different dimensions or interpret their meanings in alternate ways. In this practice, feminist scholars use specific verses from the Qur'an or Prophetic hadiths that support their perspectives on women's issues, such as equality, rights, and social empowerment. They emphasize applying these texts to contemporary realities of women while neglecting the broader context of Sharia objectives. This method is not new; it has been historically employed by individuals inclined toward whims, innovation, and sectarianism.

Example:

The verse:

⁽²⁰⁾*Hilyat Al-Ulama fi Ma'rifat Madhabih Al-Fuqaha* by Al-Shashi (8/15).

وَالْمُطَلَّاتُ يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنْفُسِهِنَّ ثَلَاثَةَ قُرُوءٍ وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَهُنَّ أَنْ يَكْتُمْنَ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ فِي أَرْحَامِهِنَّ إِنْ كُنَّ يُؤْمِنُ
 بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَبِعَوْلَتِهِنَّ أَحَقُّ بِرَدِّهِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ إِنْ أَرَادُوا إِصْلَاحًا وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلِلرِّجَالِ
 {عَلَيْهِنَّ نِزَاجٌ وَرِجَالٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ} (Al-Baqarah: 228)

Feminists isolate the phrase:

{وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ} (Al-Baqarah: 228)

Using this fragment, feminists argue for complete equality between men and women in all domains, without considering differences in roles and responsibilities.

Omaima Abou-Bakr states:

"Everything for men must also apply to women based on this verse. However, the juristic institutions were not content with allowing equality between men and women. Instead, they introduced details and justifications to reinforce male dominance, emphasizing men's rights while neglecting women's rights."⁽²¹⁾

When the text is read in its full context, without fragmentation, it becomes evident that Allah, Exalted be He, has established equality between husband and wife within the family system in terms of rights and responsibilities. The wife has rights and obligations, and likewise, the husband has rights and obligations. These obligations vary according to the nature and characteristics of each gender, which constitutes true justice. For example, men are responsible for providing financial support, housing, and protection, while the wife is responsible for obedience in what is good.

Feminists, however, completely ignore the end of the verse, where Allah states:

{وَاللرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ نِزَاجٌ}. (Al-Baqarah: 228).

This selective reading mirrors the practice of innovators who isolate the statement:

{الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْكُمْ لَئِن لَّمْ يَأْتُواكُم مِّنْكُمْ بِبُرْهَانٍ كَافٍ لَّيَكُونَنَّ لَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِي الْأَعْيُنِ حَتَّىٰ تَقْتُلُوهُمْ أَوْ تُسَبِّحُوا عَلَيْهِمُ اللَّعْنَةَ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ} (Ash-Shura: 11).

from its full verse:

{الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْكُمْ لَئِن لَّمْ يَأْتُواكُم مِّنْكُمْ بِبُرْهَانٍ كَافٍ لَّيَكُونَنَّ لَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِي الْأَعْيُنِ حَتَّىٰ تَقْتُلُوهُمْ أَوْ تُسَبِّحُوا عَلَيْهِمُ اللَّعْنَةَ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ} (Ash-Shura: 11).

They take only what serves their whims and innovations while ignoring the portion that refutes their claims. The beauty of the Qur'an lies in its ability to close such gaps, addressing potential misinterpretations within the same context.

Another example is the verse:

{يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
 {عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ} (Al-Hujurat: 13).

Feminists fragment the verse, isolating:

⁽²¹⁾Feminism and the Islamic Perspective (p. 35).

{إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَى} (Al-Hujurat: 13).

They then infer that "the Qur'an refers to the sexual and psychological duality inherent in every human being... each person carries within themselves some masculine traits and some feminine traits."⁽²²⁾

The context of the verse highlights one of the clearest texts defining humanity as consisting of two distinct genders: "male and female." It serves as a definitive response to the gender chaos afflicting the Western world today. However, how can feminism, with its distorted interpretations, use this verse to support the idea of dual sexuality within every human being? How can the explicit meaning of the text be misinterpreted in a way that is illogical and incomprehensible?

This blatant fragmentation reveals an intent to distort religious texts to serve specific agendas, allowing misguided individuals to promote their deceptive ideas.

Another explicit example is the verse: {الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ} (An-Nisa: 34).

This verse is one of the most misinterpreted by feminists, who attempt to divert its clear meaning. They isolate the concept of guardianship (*qiwamah*) and restrict it to financial provision, arguing that whoever provides financially—be it a man or a woman—deserves guardianship. Thus, the one with money is deemed more deserving of authority.

However, the complete context of the verse indicates that *qiwamah* is not solely tied to financial provision. Rather, it encompasses protection, defense, providing shelter, and supporting the household. The man is the guardian of his household, responsible for the women and children, ensuring their needs are met. The Qur'an uses the emphatic form (*qawwam*) to emphasize the role of care and responsibility in managing affairs⁽²³⁾

Second: Rejection of Prophetic Hadiths

Feminist writings almost unanimously reject anything beyond the Qur'anic text, including Prophetic hadiths and the opinions of Muslim scholars. In their effort to legitimize feminist issues, they recognize that the greatest obstacle lies in the wealth of hadiths that differentiate between men and women, undermining the absolute equality they advocate. For

⁽²²⁾The Muslim's Lament on Inheritance, Marriage, and Homosexuality, by Olfa Youssef (p. 168).

⁽²³⁾See: *Women's Rights in Light of the Qur'an and Sunnah*, by Dr. Nawal Al-Eid (pp. 901–902).

them, the only solution is to reject all hadiths entirely, thereby reinterpreting Qur'anic verses in isolation from any explanation provided by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Rifaat Hassan states:

"Behind the rejection of the idea of equality between men and women in Islamic societies lies the entrenched belief that women—who are considered inferior in creation (as they are said to have been created from a crooked rib) and in uprightness (as they supposedly aided Satan in undermining what God prepared for Adam)—were created primarily for the benefit of men, who are deemed superior to them.

This idea of the alleged superiority of men over women, which prevails in Islamic tradition (as it does in Jewish and Christian traditions), draws its roots from the corpus of hadith as well as the prevalent interpretations of certain Qur'anic verses."⁽²⁴⁾

Third: Rejection of Scholars' Interpretations

As previously demonstrated, feminists reject hadiths entirely, making it even more evident that they will not rely on the interpretations of early scholars or those who followed them. Rifaat Hassan states:

"Having highlighted the importance of the Qur'an and hadith as sources of Islamic tradition, it must now be clarified that those who interpreted these sources throughout Islamic history were men who arrogated to themselves the task of defining the ontological, theological, social, and spiritual status of Muslim women.

The fact remains that the Islamic tradition has been and continues to be a patriarchal tradition at its core. It has impeded the flourishing of knowledge and inquiry among women, particularly in the field of religious thought. Consequently, it is no surprise that the vast majority of Muslim women remain entirely or partially unaware of the extent of the violations inflicted upon them by male-centered societies.

No matter how many socio-political rights are granted to women, as long as these women are conditioned to believe in the myths perpetuated by religious scholars or leaders to constrain their bodies, hearts, minds, and souls, they will neither achieve full development nor become complete human beings—free from fear or guilt and standing equal with men before God.

In my view, producing what the West refers to as feminist theology within the Islamic tradition is of paramount importance today. It aims to liberate Muslim women—and men—

⁽²⁴⁾*Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam*, by Rifaat Hassan.

from the unjust structures and laws that make equal partnerships between men and women nearly impossible."⁽²⁵⁾ Amina Wadud launched a fierce campaign against Islamic exegetical heritage, bypassing the interpretations of reputable scholars of tafsir. She even attributes their views as a reason for women's lack of progress in the modern era, stating:

"It is not the text that has hindered women's advancement, but the interpretations of that text."⁽²⁶⁾

Thus, we find that they begin by criticizing the honorable Companions, accusing them of altering what they refer to as "Prophetic feminism." They claim that the Qur'an supports their ideas as they are, and that it was the scholars, foremost among them the Companions, who altered its teachings.⁽²⁷⁾

Fourth: Exclusion of Language

When feminists encountered difficulties with the clear verses in the Qur'an, they could not escape some of its explicit teachings. To overcome this dilemma, Amina Wadud argued that gendered languages, such as Arabic, are insufficient to fully grasp the meanings and objectives of the Qur'an, especially those related to the equality between males and females. She states:

"How can one express ideas that transcend gender using a gendered language? The limitations of language complicate the process of guiding the reader toward an understanding of a reality that is not gendered."⁽²⁸⁾

Dr. Faraj Al-Zubaidi comments:

"Under the pretext of gendering the Arabic language, the author seeks to neutralize it from interpreting the Qur'anic words and verses related to gender, replacing it with non-gendered foreign languages. She strives to convince her readers that 'the Arabic language is an obstacle to understanding some Qur'anic terms.'" ⁽²⁹⁾

Fifth: The Claim of the Historicity of the Qur'anic Text

⁽²⁵⁾Ibid.

⁽²⁶⁾*Qur'an and Woman*, by Amina Wadud (p. 12).

⁽²⁷⁾See: *The Methodology of Contemporary Feminist Thought in Interpreting Religious Texts*, by Taj Al-Din Sholian (p. 485).

⁽²⁸⁾*Qur'an and Woman*, by Amina Wadud (p. 39).

⁽²⁹⁾*Intellectual Deviations in Amina Wadud's Work "Qur'an and Woman,"* by Dr. Faraj Al-Zubaidi, *The Jordanian Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 18, Issue 4, 1444 AH (p. 439).

The claim of the historicity of the Qur'anic text is well-known, suggesting that the Qur'an is tied to the time and history in which it was revealed, and its rulings are not applicable to the present. Amina Wadud states:

"I will reinterpret some concepts... based on the fact that they were expressed using terms specific to 7th-century Arabia."⁽³⁰⁾

She also says:

"The specificities of the 7th century found in the Qur'an should be confined to that particular environment."⁽³¹⁾

Furthermore, she asserts:
"The attitudes toward women in the time and place of revelation contributed to the formulation of specific expressions in the Qur'an, and the concerns addressed were particular to those circumstances."⁽³²⁾

4. Conclusion

Key Findings:

1. **Equality** and the call for it is one of the central issues advocated by feminism.
2. Feminists practice a selective interpretation, citing verses that appear to promote equality while ignoring those that highlight the differences between men and women.
3. While we do not deny that Allah, Exalted be He, has granted equality between men and women in the original address, the original duties, and in reward and punishment, this does not imply that they are equal in everything. Using this partial equality to argue for complete equality is incorrect.
4. One of the main tools used by feminists is isolating the Qur'anic text from its surrounding context, whether it be a Prophetic hadith or the interpretation of scholars and Muslim jurists.

Key Recommendations:

1. Encourage studies related to the rereading of religious texts by feminists.
2. Analyze the impact of Western feminist thought on the understanding of Sharia texts.

⁽³⁰⁾ *Qur'an and Woman*, by Amina Wadud (p. 20).

⁽³¹⁾ *Qur'an and Woman*, by Amina Wadud (p. 39).

⁽³²⁾ *Qur'an and Woman*, by Amina Wadud (p. 154).

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