WOMEN AND ISLAM

WEEK#3

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Is there an Islamic Feminism?
Is it an oxymoron?
Is Islam really compatible with Women’s rights?
What is Islamic Feminism?
ISLAM + FEMINISM?
"We need to start by asking some basic questions: Whose Islam? Whose feminism? Who is speaking for Islam? Who is speaking for feminism? These questions remain unaddressed in most debates, whether in academia, media, or activist forums."

Ziba Mir Hosseini, a founder of Musawah, an Islamic Feminist and the editor of “Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law”
Muhammad Abdu (1849-1905) first one to make the argument, used today by Islamic Feminist “that it was Islam and not the West, that first recognized the full and equal humanity of women”

- He claimed that regulations concerning polygamy and divorce are “backward” and “degraded”
- Call for “Ijtihad” or legal reasoning to reinterpret the religious texts.
THE REFORMISTS

- 1892, first magazine, Al-fatat, for women edited by a woman, Hind Nufal, an Arab Christian

- However, some reformists were so close to the British administration. When they proposed ideas to reform Islam, their message was rejected by the rest of the population. In Egypt Qasim Amin was one of them.
Malak Hifni Nassef (1866-1918): one of the very first voice of feminism in Egypt without affiliating herself with westernization.

“we cannot assume that all men who write about women are wise reformers. Their words must be carefully scrutinized, and we must be wary of man... being as despotic about liberating us as he has been about our enslavement”
Huda Shawrawi founder of Egyptian Feminist Union (1879-1945), greatly influenced by Eugenie Lebrun (French Feminist)

Zeinab Al-Ghazali (1917-2005)

Nawaal Sawdawi (1931-)
Haddad was a feminist. In the 1930 book “Our Women in the Shari 'a and Society” he advocated for expanded rights for women and said that the interpretations of Islam at the time inhibited women.

“a society in which women are not liberated is not truly free.”
FATIMA MERNISSI

- Born in Morocco 1940, passed away in 2015.
- Sociologist
- One of the very early Islamist feminist
- In 1975: she publishes “Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Muslim Society”
- “The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Islam”
- She casts doubts on some hadiths attributed to the Prophet to justify misogynistic interpretations of the texts.
A global movement emerged around 2009. **Sisters in Islam** civil society organization committed to promoting the rights of women within the frameworks of Islam and universal human rights, Zeinah Anwar is one of the founder.

**Musawah:** Equality in Arabic

Fight for justice and equality within the Islamic tradition
The notion of Qiwamah, usually interpreted as equivalent to man superiority over woman.

The rights of the woman in a marriage. In the Quran, the marriage contract is “heavy of consequences”. In most of the interpretations, woman lacks many rights. Man has all rights.

Inheritance

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

Chapter 4, verse 34
Divorce is twice. Then, either keep [her] in an acceptable manner or release [her] with good treatment. And it is not lawful for you to take anything of what you have given them unless both fear that they will not be able to keep [within] the limits of Allah. But if you fear that they will not keep [within] the limits of Allah, then there is no blame upon either of them concerning that by which she ransoms herself. These are the limits of Allah, so do not transgress them. And whoever transgresses the limits of Allah - it is those who are the wrongdoers. 

*Chapter 2, verse 229*
For men is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, and for women is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, be it little or much - an obligatory share.

*From Chapter 4, verse 7*
- Officially launch in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- 250, activists, scholars, legal practitioners, policy makers from 47 countries: Turkey, Gambia, Egypt, Pakistan
MUSAWAH, 2009, KUALA LAMPUR
Musawah operates on the belief that Islam is not inherently biased toward men: patriarchy within Muslim countries is a result of the way male interpreters have read Islamic texts.

Musawah empowers women to shape the interpretations, norms and laws that affect their lives, then push for legal reform in their respective countries.
According to progressive scholars, the concept of *iddribuhunna*, which has traditionally been interpreted as “to beat,” also means “to go separate ways” and can serve as confirmation that it is sometimes permissible for a woman to end her marriage.
Women are claiming the authority to speak on Islamic law and to participate in the construction of meaning. Musawah’s ambition is to multiply and amplify this voice at an international level.
"The Quran has more than 6,000 verses, and only four of them can be explained in a patriarchal way," explains Mir-Hosseini. "The rest are clear-cut on the issue of gender equality. The question is why these four verses became the basis for so many laws." These are the kinds of questions Musawah wants to see discussed openly.
Secular feminists say that pursuing justice within Islam is a losing battle because the process of interpreting Islamic sources is inherently subjective.
Islam = patriarchy, old

Feminism = Western civilization, modern

How to reconcile both?
Western feminism did not reject the entire Western heritage

Leila Ahmed said

“Adopting another culture as a general remedy for a heritage of misogyny within a particular culture is not only absurd, it is impossible”
AND WHAT ABOUT THE MAIN STREAM SCHOLARS AND MUSLIMS IN GENERAL?

- Suspicion
- Marginalized
- Feminism is imported from the west then necessarily not genuine
- Bring back memories of colonialism, imperialism
In 2004, Moroccan Parliament passed a bill that defines marriage as an equal partnership between spouses, with equal responsibility for the family. It gave women the right to divorce and also protected them from *talaq*, an Islamic practice that gives husbands the right to dissolve a marriage at will.
In June 2012, Jordanian women demonstrated to protest a law that allows rape charges to be dropped if the perpetrator marries his victim.

In May 2013, the King Khalid Foundation in Saudi Arabia ran a highly visible campaign demanding legislation against domestic abuse, and in September 2013, in an unprecedented move, the kingdom passed the law.
In October 2013, after Sudanese women were detained in anti-government protests, women formed a silent wall to demand their freedom, which resulted in President Omar al-Bashir releasing them.

On October 26, 2013, more than sixty Saudi women collectively took to the streets in their cars to challenge the law that bans them from driving.
### SOME MAIN DIFFERENCES IN INTERPRETATIONS OF THE TEXTS

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<th>Islamic Feminists</th>
<th>Traditional Interpretation</th>
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<td>Shared responsibilities</td>
<td>Quiwama: Men are responsible of women</td>
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<td>Consensual, initiated by man, initiated by woman</td>
<td>Only a man can divorce woman</td>
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<td>Inheritance: equal shares</td>
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Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so - for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward.

*From Chapter 33, verse 35*
And their Lord responded to them, "Never will I allow to be lost the work of [any] worker among you, whether male or female; you are of one another.

*From Chapter 3, verse 195*
“We have given dignity to the children of Adam.”

*From Chapter 17, verse 70*
AMINA WADUD

- American scholar of Islam
- She is interested in gender and Quranic Studies.
- She delivered the Friday Khutba and led the Friday prayer in 2005.
She is one of the pioneer of the Islamic Feminist current

Many of her ideas are based on the notion of “Tawhid” in Islam. The unicity of God. Woman is an agent on Earth to do the “work” of God as well as the man.
Yussuf al-Qaradawi criticized her actions:

“The currently extant juristic schools agree that it is not permissible for women to lead men in the obligatory Prayer, though some scholars voice the opinion that, under certain circumstances, a woman who is well-versed in the Quran may lead the members of her family, including men, in prayer on the basis that there is no room for stirring instincts in this case”
She is a Moroccan doctor
She is part of “The League of Oulema of Morocco”
Islam does not have an inherently unequal message.
The problem starts with the distorted interpretations of the sacred texts specially during the Golden Age of Islam
Colonialism made the problem worse
AZIZAH AL HIBRI

- Professor at Richmond School of Law, in the US.
- She founded Karamah. (Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights)
- Its primary mission is to educate both Muslims and non-Muslims about the just, gender equitable foundation of Islam.
- Al-Hibri work is centered on developing an Islamic jurisprudence and body of Islamic law that are gender equitable and promote human rights and democratic governance.
• All the authors insist that there are many forms of Islamic Feminism.
• They all believe in the sacredness of the Holy Text and don’t want a Feminism with a sexual liberation (copied on the Western feminism)
• Trying to bring change in the religious and political institutions across the countries
ZITA BOURBON PARMA WIFE OF CHARLES, EMPEROR OF AUSTRIA, 1916
VEILED WOMEN ALSO KNOWN AS LES PLEUREUSES OR MOURNING WOMEN, WHOSE HEAD IS COVERED WITH BLACK CLOTH TO COMMEMORATE THE PASSION AND CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS TAKE PART IN A PROCESSION IN ROMONT, SWITZERLAND, FRIDAY, 18 APRIL 2014.
EASTER CELEBRATION IN ITALY, 2012
YOUR THOUGHTS...