

# INTRODUCTION TO ISLAMIC FEMINISM

## PART III

### FEMINIST HERMENEUTICS

A theory of interpreting texts, specifically religious texts, that centers the interests and rights of women as primary in its understanding of the content.

### WHY IT MATTERS

In modern times, women are excluded from the ulema, the interpreters of Islam's religious texts, contrary to the early days of Islam, when women, like the wives of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), were responsible for transmitting the Qur'an and the Hadith.

Rather than benefit women, this exclusion has only served to harm Muslim women, who are unable to cultivate their *ilm* (knowledge) as commanded in the Holy Qur'an.

Moreover, refusing a woman's authority over religious texts is a direct contradiction to the egalitarian lessons of the Qur'an which was revealed to subvert patriarchal misogynistic and oppressive practices

### ASPECTS OF FEMINIST HERMENEUTICS

#### 1 BASED ON PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN

Emphasizes the importance of the experiences of women as they interpret the Qur'an.

Rejects perceptions men have about women that influence how they interpret the Qur'an.

Considers the status and role of Muslim women in Islam to produce gender-just interpretations.

#### 2 FRAMED THROUGH FEMINIST THEORY

Centers on a framework of gender equality and gender justice.

Explores patriarchal interpretations that perpetuate inequality and injustices.

Departs from gender bias present in classical interpretations of the Qur'an.

#### 3 USES HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Focuses on the context of time and background of the verse and its revelation.

Defines verses that identify the conditions of 7th C. Arabian society and universal verses.

Identifies the importance of reading a text according to current historical & societal norms

#### 4 APPLIES THE INTRATEXTUALITY METHOD

Reads each verse according to the themes of the entire text rather than in isolation.

Compares verses of the Qur'an to one another to identify how the Qur'an advocates for justice.

Recognizes that no interpretation can contradict the Quranic ideal of gender equality.

#### 5 PRIORITIZES A MONOTHEISTIC FRAMEWORK

Recognizes the unity of God and the unique and indivisible nature of God's being.

Identifies sexism as idolatrous because it deems women, creations of God, to be imperfect.

Highlights the importance of **tauhid** because no human can be compared to God.

### A FEMINIST READING OF VERSE 4:34

As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty & ill-conduct (*nushūz*), admonish them first, (next), refuse to share their beds, & last beat (*daraba*) them (*idribū*) lightly.  
Surah al-Nisa 4:34

#### TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION

- **Nushūz** is interpreted as wife's disobedience, disloyalty or rebellious attitude towards her husband.
- **Daraba** has been interpreted in a number of different ways including: strike, scourge, beat, and discipline.

#### FEMINIST INTERPRETATION

- **Nushūz** is interpreted as a disruption of marital harmony as it is used in verse 4:128 to refer to men.
- Recognizes that a literal meaning cannot be applied to **daraba** because:
  - The Prophet (PBUH) was always kind towards his wives.
  - There are multiple meanings of the word **daraba**, including "to separate".
  - Other verses in the Qur'an (4:19) prohibit violence and harm in a relationship.
  - To condone domestic violence would violate the basic themes of the Qur'an including compassion, justice and human dignity.