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INTRODUCTION TO ISLAMIC FEMINISM

PART III - HERMENEUTICS OF ISLAMIC FEMINISM

WOMEN IN ISLAM SERIES



FEMINIST HERMENEUTICS

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

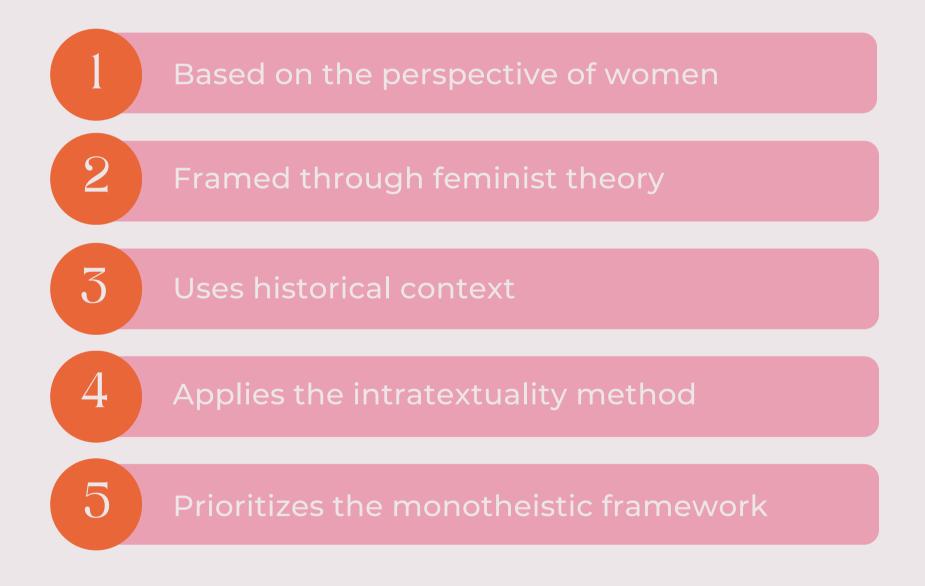
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

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 and the cultural patriarchal practices that prevent women from exercising this authority are inherently unIslamic practices.



WHAT ARE THE ASPECTS OF FEMINIST HERMENEUTICS



Based on the

perspective of women

EMPHASIZES

the importance of the experiences of women as they interpret the Our'an.

REJECTS

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

CONSIDERS

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

Framed Through Feminist Theory

CENTERS

on a framework of gender equality and gender justice.

EXPOSES

the patriarchal interpretations that perpetuate inequality and injustices.

DEPARTS

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

Uses Historical Context

FOCUSES

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

DEFINES

verses that identify the situation and condition of 7th Century Arabian society and universal verses.

IDENTIFIES

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

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 of a verse can contradict the Quranic principle of gender equality.

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Prioritizes the Monotheistic Framework

RECOGNIZES

the unity of God and the uniqueness and indivisibility of God.

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 and ill-conduct (nushūz), admonish them (first, (next), refuse to share their beds, (and 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 Surah al-Nisa 4:128 to refer to men.
- Recognizes that a literal meaning cannot be applied to daraba because
 - Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was never violent 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.

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