

# Speaking from Behind the Veil

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*Islam degrades women and this degradation, most evident in the practices of veiling and segregation, explains the inferiority of Muslim men. To achieve liberation, it is essential to change the position of women in Islam, for it is Islam's degradation of women, expressed in the practices of veiling and seclusion that is the fatal obstacle to the attainment and elevation of thought and character.*

# The Qur'ān as Scripture

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- revealed to Muhammad (610-32)
- Muhammad = Adam, David, Solomon, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, & Jesus
- no divine nature; only a mouthpiece

# Beliefs in the Qur'ān

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- 3 fundamental beliefs:
  - verbatim word of God (miracle)
  - eternal (timeless in its relevance)
  - universal (contextually adaptable)
- therefore, it is the 1<sup>st</sup> source of Islamic law (*Shariah*), thus gender laws

# The Qur'ān as Text

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- 114 chapters (*surahs*)
- not a narrative or a law book
- “Book of Guidance” = ambiguous
  - imparts values & principles, not details
  - challenge: particulars vs. universals

# Qur'ānic Rights: Particular to 7<sup>th</sup>-c Arabia

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- prohibition of infanticide
- limited polygamy to 4 wives
- prohibited men from expelling menstruating wives from their homes or eating from the same pot (Jewish trad.)
- prohibited men from inheriting the wives of their dead fathers

# Qur'ānic Rights: Eternal & Universal

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- consent to marriage
- dowry
- marriage contract stipulations
- right to use maiden name
- divorce
- inheritance
- education
- killing of a woman = killing of a man

# Qur'ānic Vision of Gender

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- **Religious vision => EQUALITY**
  - unequivocal; no debate
  - religious beliefs & tenants = equal
  - rewards/punishments = equal
  - 4 examples: 3:195; 4:124; 9:71;  
33:35

# Qur'ānic Verses: Equality

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## ■ 3:195

And their Lord has accepted of them, and answered them: 'Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female; you are from one another...'

# Qur'ānic Verses: Equality

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## ■ 4:124

If any do deeds of righteousness – be they male or female – and have faith, they will enter heaven, and not the least injustice will be done to them.

# Qur'ānic Verses: Equality

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## ■ 9:71

The believers – men and women – are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil. They observe regular prayers, practice regular charity, and obey God and His Messenger. On them will God pour His mercy for God is exalted in Power, Wise.

# Qur'ānic Verse: Equality

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## ■ 33:35

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.

# Qur'ānic Vision of Gender

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- **Social vision => INEQUALITY**
  - debated
  - based on ambiguous or seemingly misogynist verses
  - 3 examples: male supremacy-  
inheritance & polygamy

# Inequality: 4:34

## Male supremacy

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Men [husbands] are the protectors and maintainers of their wives because God has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means...

# Inequality: 4:34

## Male Supremacy Redressed

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Men are [*qawwamuna ala*] women **[on the basis]** of what God has [preferred] some of them over others, and **[on the basis]** of what they spend of their property (for the support of women)...

# Male Supremacy Redressed: Inheritance

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- 4:11

God (thus) directs you as regards your children's (inheritance): to the male, a portion equal to that of two females...

# Inequality: 4:3

## Polygamy

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If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two, three or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hand possesses. That will be more suitable to prevent you from doing injustice.

# Inequality: 4:3

## Polygamy as Conditional

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- the subject of the verse = female orphans (not all women)
- the problem = mismanagement of female wealth by male guardians
- condition = fair treatment
- goal = justice

# Inequality: 4:129

## Polygamy Redressed

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You are never able to be fair and just between women, even if it is your ardent desire: but turn not away (from a woman) altogether, so as to leave her (as it were) hanging (in the air). If you mend your ways and practice self-restraint, God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

# Islamic Feminism Complicated

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“If only people, including those in Britain, were aware of the sheer number of girls living in terror...Just going outside without your father or your brother’s permission can lead to your being taken to the home country of your parents and being shot dead. You can be forced into marriage with someone who’s going to rape you every night. You will conceive children year after year when you don’t want to be pregnant.”

Ayan Hirsi Ali

