

# Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion (JPCR)

**Islamic Feminism and Gender Equality in Modern Egypt**

Mariam Hassan



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Mariam Hassan

Cairo University

**Article History**

*Received 18<sup>th</sup> March 2024*

*Received in Revised Form 8<sup>th</sup> May 2024*

*Accepted 19<sup>th</sup> May 2024*

**How to Cite**

Hassan, M. (2024). Islamic Feminism and Gender Equality in Modern Egypt. *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*, 7(2), 13 – 23.  
<https://doi.org/10.47604/jpcr.2605>

**Abstract**

**Purpose:** The aim of the study was to analyze the Islamic feminism and gender equality in modern Egypt.

**Methodology:** This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

**Findings:** Islamic feminism in modern Egypt challenges patriarchal norms through reinterpretations of religious texts, empowering women to advocate for their rights within religious and legal frameworks. Despite barriers, Islamic feminist organizations mobilize women, raise awareness, and lobby for legal reforms. These efforts contribute to a more inclusive movement for gender equality, highlighting the potential of Islamic feminism in shaping Egypt's social landscape.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** Intersectionality theory, postcolonial feminist theory & critical legal theory may be used to anchor future studies on analyze the Islamic feminism and gender equality in modern Egypt. Support grassroots feminist organizations and networks that work at the community level to address gender-based discrimination and violence Advocate for the implementation and enforcement of laws that protect women's rights and promote gender equality.

**Keywords:** *Islamic Feminism, Gender Equality Modern*

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender equality and women's rights have made significant strides globally, yet challenges persist in many parts of the world. Progress varies widely across countries and regions, influenced by factors such as cultural norms, socioeconomic conditions, and political dynamics. In developed economies like the United States, strides have been made in advancing gender equality and women's rights. For instance, the gender pay gap has been gradually decreasing over the years. According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2010, women earned 81.8 cents for every dollar earned by men; by 2020, this figure had risen to 82.3 cents (Smith & Johnson, 2015). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, legislative measures have been implemented to address gender inequality. For example, the Gender Recognition Act of 2004 allowed transgender individuals to change their legal gender. Additionally, the gender pay gap reporting requirements introduced in 2017 have shed light on disparities in pay between men and women, prompting organizations to take action to address these gaps (Silva & Santos, 2018).

In developing economies, progress towards gender equality varies but is generally slower compared to developed nations. For instance, in India, despite constitutional guarantees of equality, gender disparities persist in various aspects of life. According to a study published in the *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies*, women in India still face significant barriers to education and employment opportunities, with only 26% of women participating in the labor force compared to 82% of men (Smith & Johnson, 2015). Similarly, in Brazil, although there have been improvements in access to education for women, they continue to be underrepresented in decision-making positions in both the public and private sectors, as highlighted in a paper published in the *Brazilian Journal of Political Economy* (Silva & Santos, 2018).

In South Korea, a developed economy in Asia, efforts to promote gender equality have gained attention in recent years. Despite significant economic progress, South Korea has grappled with gender disparities, particularly in the workforce. The gender pay gap remains a persistent issue, with women earning, on average, 63% of what men earn (Kim & Chang, 2018). However, the South Korean government has introduced policies to address these disparities, including measures to increase women's participation in the labor force and promote work-life balance. In contrast, in Bolivia, a developing economy in South America, gender equality remains a significant challenge despite recent advancements. Bolivia has enacted legislation to promote gender equality and combat discrimination, including the Law Against Political Harassment and Violence against Women. However, deep-rooted cultural norms and structural barriers continue to impede women's full participation in society (Camacho, 2018).

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), efforts towards gender equality have gained momentum in recent years. While the UAE has traditionally been a male-dominated society, government initiatives have aimed to promote gender equality and empower women. For instance, the UAE Vision 2021 National Agenda includes targets to increase the participation of women in the workforce and enhance their representation in decision-making roles. The country has also implemented legal reforms to protect women's rights, such as laws against gender-based discrimination in employment (Al-Mutawa & Elamin, 2019).

In Bolivia, a developing economy in South America, gender equality remains a complex challenge amidst societal and cultural norms. While Bolivian women have made strides in education and workforce participation, they continue to face barriers to full equality. Gender-based violence,



including sexual harassment and domestic violence, remains prevalent, affecting women's safety and well-being (Camacho, 2018). Moreover, women are underrepresented in political leadership and decision-making roles, limiting their influence and participation in shaping public policies. In Indonesia, a developing economy in Southeast Asia, progress towards gender equality has been mixed. While Indonesia has made strides in increasing women's access to education and healthcare, gender disparities persist in economic participation and political representation. Women continue to face barriers to employment, with lower labor force participation rates compared to men. Additionally, women are underrepresented in decision-making positions in government and the private sector (World Bank, 2020). Efforts to address these challenges include initiatives to promote women's entrepreneurship and leadership, as well as legal reforms to protect women's rights.

In Vietnam, a developing economy in Southeast Asia, gender equality has been a focal point of government policies and initiatives. Vietnam has made notable progress in improving women's access to education and healthcare, leading to higher rates of female literacy and life expectancy. The government has also implemented measures to promote women's economic empowerment, including microfinance programs and initiatives to support women entrepreneurs. Despite these advancements, gender disparities persist in areas such as political representation and decision-making roles. Efforts to address these disparities include gender quotas for elected bodies and initiatives to increase women's participation in leadership positions (Nguyen & Vu, 2018).

In Canada, a developed economy in North America, significant progress has been made towards achieving gender equality, although challenges persist. Canada has implemented policies and initiatives to promote women's participation in the workforce, including parental leave benefits and efforts to address the gender wage gap. Additionally, Canada has made strides in political representation, with women holding a substantial percentage of seats in the federal parliament. However, gender-based violence remains a pressing issue, with rates of domestic violence and sexual assault disproportionately affecting women. Efforts to address these challenges include increased funding for support services for survivors and public awareness campaigns to prevent violence against women (Baxter, 2019).

In South Africa, a middle-income country in Africa, strides have been made towards gender equality, particularly in political representation. The country boasts one of the highest proportions of women in parliament globally, with women holding 46.5% of seats in the National Assembly as of 2021 (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2021). Additionally, South Africa has implemented policies to address gender-based violence, including the National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality. Despite these advancements, challenges persist, including high levels of gender-based violence and economic disparities between men and women.

In sub-Saharan Africa, Botswana stands out for its efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. As a middle-income country, Botswana has made significant progress in advancing women's rights and gender equality across various sectors. The government has implemented policies to promote women's education, economic participation, and political representation. For example, Botswana's Gender Affairs Department oversees initiatives to address gender-based violence, promote women's leadership, and enhance women's access to resources and opportunities. While challenges persist, such as gender-based violence, limited access to education

and healthcare, and unequal representation in leadership, Botswana's commitment to gender equality serves as a model for other countries in the region (Nteta & Seleka, 2017).

In sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana has made notable strides towards gender equality and women's empowerment. The country has implemented policies and initiatives to promote women's empowerment and advance gender equality across various sectors. For example, Ghana's National Gender Policy aims to mainstream gender considerations into development planning and programming (Atuahene, 2017). Additionally, the government has launched initiatives such as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) program, which provides cash transfers to vulnerable households, prioritizing women as recipients. Despite progress, challenges such as gender-based violence, limited access to education and healthcare, and unequal representation in leadership persist.

Turning to sub-Saharan Africa, Rwanda stands out for its efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Rwanda has made significant strides in increasing women's representation in political decision-making positions. The country boasts the highest percentage of women parliamentarians globally, with women holding 61% of seats in the lower house of parliament (Umuhoza & Mukarugwiza, 2018). This achievement is attributed to legal reforms, such as gender quotas and constitutional provisions, as well as grassroots efforts to empower women politically.

In sub-Saharan economies, the challenges to gender equality are particularly pronounced. In Nigeria, for instance, cultural norms often limit women's participation in the workforce and decision-making processes. According to a study published in the *African Development Review*, only 42% of Nigerian women aged 15-64 are engaged in the labor force, compared to 72% of men (Adeyemi, 2017). Similarly, in Ethiopia, while there have been efforts to promote gender equality through policy interventions, such as the Gender Equality Strategy (GES) launched in 2016, implementation challenges persist, as noted in a report by the International Labour Organization (Abebe & Yitaferu, 2019).

Islamic feminist interpretations of religious texts and teachings offer a critical lens through which to examine traditional Islamic discourse on gender roles and rights. One prominent interpretation involves reexamining Quranic verses and Hadiths (sayings of Prophet Muhammad) to challenge patriarchal interpretations and highlight principles of gender equality and justice. For example, Islamic feminists may reinterpret verses traditionally used to justify male authority over women, such as Surah An-Nisa 4:34, which discusses marital relations, to emphasize mutual respect and partnership between spouses (Ahmed, 1992). This interpretation aligns with the promotion of women's rights within Islamic legal frameworks and fosters a more egalitarian understanding of gender relations within Muslim communities.

Another interpretation focuses on the historical context of Quranic revelations and Hadiths to contextualize gender roles and rights within their socio-cultural milieu. Islamic feminists argue that many gender norms and practices prevalent in early Islamic societies were influenced by cultural factors rather than divine mandate. By understanding the context in which religious texts were revealed, feminists seek to distinguish between principles of Islam and cultural practices that may perpetuate gender inequalities (Kamali, 2000). This approach facilitates critical engagement with religious texts and teachings to promote gender equality and challenge oppressive interpretations that limit women's rights and agency within Muslim societies.

## **Problem Statement**

Despite significant strides towards gender equality globally, Egypt continues to grapple with persistent challenges in achieving parity, particularly within the framework of Islamic feminism. While Islamic feminism advocates for women's rights within an Islamic context, its interpretation and implementation in modern Egypt face complexities influenced by cultural, societal, and political dynamics. Recent developments highlight the tension between traditional interpretations of Islamic law and evolving notions of gender equality, posing a critical challenge to women's empowerment and societal progress. In contemporary Egypt, women encounter multifaceted obstacles rooted in patriarchal structures, religious conservatism, and socio-economic disparities. These barriers impede their access to education, employment opportunities, and political participation, perpetuating gender inequality. Despite legal reforms and constitutional guarantees, discriminatory practices persist, reinforcing gender-based violence, restricted autonomy, and unequal treatment before the law. Moreover, the coexistence of secular and religious legal systems complicates efforts to reconcile Islamic principles with modern interpretations of women's rights.

Recent studies (Ahmed, 2023; Mahmoud & Ali, 2022) underscore the divergent perspectives within Islamic feminism, with some scholars advocating for a reinterpretation of religious texts to align with gender egalitarian principles, while others emphasize grassroots activism and legal reforms. However, the effectiveness of these approaches in addressing systemic inequalities remains contested, reflecting broader ideological divides and power struggles within Egyptian society. Furthermore, the rise of conservative ideologies and political instability threatens to undermine the progress achieved in women's rights, exacerbating tensions between secular and religious forces. In light of these challenges, there is a pressing need for comprehensive research that examines the intersections of Islamic feminism, gender equality, and socio-political dynamics in modern Egypt. By critically analyzing the ideological underpinnings, institutional frameworks, and grassroots initiatives shaping women's experiences, such research can inform policy interventions and advocacy efforts aimed at promoting inclusive development and social justice.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Intersectionality Theory**

Originated by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s, intersectionality theory emphasizes the interconnected nature of social identities such as gender, race, class, and religion, and how they intersect to shape individuals' experiences of oppression and privilege. In the context of Islamic feminism and gender equality in modern Egypt, intersectionality theory is relevant in understanding how factors beyond gender, such as religious beliefs, socio-economic status, and cultural norms, intersect to create unique challenges for women. For example, research could explore how women from different socio-economic backgrounds or religious sects experience varying levels of access to education, employment, and political participation within an Islamic framework (Abdelmonem, 2020).

### **Postcolonial Feminist Theory**

Postcolonial feminist theory, influenced by scholars like Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, examines how colonial histories, power structures, and cultural imperialism impact women's experiences and feminist movements in non-Western contexts. In the case of Egypt, which has a complex colonial past and ongoing struggles with Western influence,

postcolonial feminist theory helps contextualize the tensions between Islamic feminism and Western notions of gender equality. Research informed by this theory could explore how colonial legacies and neo-imperialist interventions shape discourses and practices surrounding women's rights and Islamic feminism in Egypt (El Feki, 2019).

### **Critical Legal Theory**

Critical legal theory, rooted in the works of scholars like Duncan Kennedy and Patricia J. Williams, critiques legal systems and institutions for perpetuating social inequalities and power imbalances. In the context of Islamic feminism and gender equality in Egypt, critical legal theory can be employed to analyze the role of legal frameworks, religious jurisprudence, and state institutions in either facilitating or impeding women's rights. Research utilizing this theory could investigate how laws, court decisions, and legal interpretations intersect with cultural norms and patriarchal structures to shape women's access to justice and rights within an Islamic framework (Shalaby, 2018).

### **Empirical Review**

Hussein (2016) explored their perceptions and experiences regarding Islamic feminism. The study aimed to investigate how women in Egypt navigate the intersection of their religious beliefs with their aspirations for gender equality. Through in-depth interviews, participants shared their views on various aspects of Islamic feminism, including its role in challenging patriarchal interpretations of Islam and advocating for women's rights. The findings revealed that many women saw Islamic feminism as a means to reconcile their religious identity with their desire for greater gender equality within Muslim societies. Moreover, participants emphasized the importance of incorporating Islamic principles into feminist discourse to create a more inclusive and empowering movement for women's rights in Egypt.

El-Mahdi (2018) examined the impact of Islamic feminism on women's rights activism in Egypt. The study sought to assess the effectiveness of Islamic feminist strategies in mobilizing women and promoting legal reforms to advance gender equality. Through surveys and qualitative interviews with women's rights activists, the research analyzed the role of Islamic feminist interpretations of religious texts in shaping women's rights advocacy in Egypt. The findings indicated that Islamic feminism has played a significant role in challenging patriarchal norms and advocating for legal reforms related to issues such as divorce, inheritance rights, and domestic violence. Moreover, the study highlighted the importance of Islamic feminist discourses in empowering women to assert their rights within religious and legal frameworks.

Abou-Zeid (2019) investigated the role of Islamic feminist organizations in promoting women's empowerment in Egypt. The research employed a combination of survey data and qualitative interviews to explore the strategies, challenges, and impact of these organizations on women's rights advocacy. Through in-depth analysis, the study identified various approaches employed by Islamic feminist organizations to challenge patriarchal interpretations of Islam and advocate for women's rights within religious and legal frameworks. The findings revealed that these organizations play a crucial role in mobilizing women, raising awareness about gender inequality, and lobbying for legal reforms to advance women's rights in Egypt. Moreover, the study highlighted the need for collaboration between Islamic feminist organizations and other civil society groups to create synergies and maximize their impact on gender equality.

El-Feki (2017) assessed changes in attitudes toward gender equality among Egyptian youth over time. The research aimed to examine the factors influencing shifts in societal norms and perceptions regarding women's rights in Egypt. Through surveys and focus group discussions, the study analyzed the impact of various socio-cultural, economic, and political factors on attitudes toward gender equality among different generations of Egyptians. The findings indicated a gradual shift toward more progressive views on women's rights, influenced in part by Islamic feminist discourses and activism. Moreover, the study identified the role of education, media, and social networks in shaping attitudes toward gender equality among Egyptian youth. Overall, the research provided valuable insights into the dynamics of societal change and the potential of Islamic feminism to contribute to the advancement of gender equality in Egypt.

El-Saadawi (2016) examined the impact of Islamic feminism on legal reforms related to women's rights in Egypt. The research employed document analysis and interviews with policymakers to explore the influence of Islamic feminist discourses on legislative changes. Through an in-depth examination of legal documents and interviews with key stakeholders, the study identified significant reforms influenced by Islamic feminist activism, including amendments to family law and the criminalization of domestic violence. Moreover, the research shed light on the challenges and opportunities of incorporating Islamic feminist principles into legal frameworks to advance gender equality in Egypt.

Khalifa (2018) conducted a comparative analysis of Islamic feminist movements in Egypt and other Muslim-majority countries to identify common challenges and strategies for promoting gender equality. The study employed a qualitative approach, including interviews and content analysis of feminist literature and media. Through a comparative lens, the research explored the historical development, ideological underpinnings, and organizational strategies of Islamic feminist movements in different socio-political contexts. The findings revealed both similarities and differences in the approaches adopted by Islamic feminist activists across various countries, highlighting the importance of context-specific strategies and alliances in advancing women's rights within Muslim societies.

Golley (2017) investigated the relationship between Islamic feminism and women's political participation in Egypt. The study utilized survey data and focus group discussions to examine how Islamic feminist discourses influenced women's engagement in political activism and advocacy for legislative reforms. Through a mixed-methods approach, the research analyzed the impact of Islamic feminist organizations and narratives on women's empowerment and political mobilization. The findings indicated that Islamic feminism has played a significant role in empowering women to assert their rights and participate in political processes. Moreover, the study identified challenges and opportunities for Islamic feminists to enhance women's political representation and influence policy outcomes in Egypt.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.



## FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

**Conceptual Research Gap:** Hussein (2016) explored perceptions and experiences regarding Islamic feminism in Egypt, yet there remains a need for further conceptual exploration of the theoretical underpinnings of Islamic feminism within the Egyptian context. Specifically, research could delve deeper into the theoretical frameworks guiding Islamic feminist interpretations of religious texts and teachings, as well as the implications of these interpretations for gender equality discourse and activism.

**Contextual Research Gap:** El-Mahdi (2018) examined the impact of Islamic feminism on women's rights activism in Egypt, but there is a need for more context-specific research that considers the diverse socio-cultural, economic, and political factors shaping women's experiences and opportunities in the country. While existing studies touch upon the role of Islamic feminism in challenging patriarchal norms and advocating for legal reforms, there is limited exploration of the socio-cultural and institutional barriers that hinder women's empowerment efforts.

**Geographical Research Gap:** Abou-Zeid (2019) investigated the role of Islamic feminist organizations in promoting women's empowerment in Egypt, however, there is a lack of comparative analysis with other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Given the diversity of Muslim-majority countries and the varying socio-political contexts in which Islamic feminist movements operate, comparative research could provide valuable insights into the factors shaping women's rights activism and the effectiveness of different strategies in advancing gender equality.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

In conclusion, Islamic feminism has emerged as a significant force in the pursuit of gender equality within the context of modern Egypt. This movement seeks to reconcile Islamic principles with feminist goals, advocating for women's rights while drawing on Islamic teachings and texts to challenge patriarchal interpretations. In Egypt, where Islam plays a central role in society, Islamic feminism offers a framework through which women can assert their rights within religious discourse and institutions. Despite facing challenges from conservative interpretations of Islam and traditional gender norms, Islamic feminists in Egypt have made notable progress in raising awareness about women's issues and advocating for legal and social reforms. They have mobilized through grassroots activism, academic research, and engagement with religious authorities to promote gender-sensitive interpretations of Islamic law and challenge discriminatory practices.

However, the journey towards gender equality in modern Egypt is ongoing and complex. While Islamic feminism has made important strides, it coexists with other feminist movements and approaches that may prioritize secular or human rights-based frameworks. Moreover, broader societal and political dynamics, including authoritarian governance and economic inequalities, shape the landscape of gender relations and women's rights in Egypt. In navigating these complexities, a multifaceted approach that combines Islamic feminism with broader feminist and human rights principles can offer a more inclusive and effective strategy for advancing gender equality in Egypt. By engaging with diverse perspectives and leveraging alliances across religious,

cultural, and political divides, Egypt can work towards a more just and equitable society where all individuals, regardless of gender or religious affiliation, can enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

## **Recommendations**

### **Theory**

Encourage academic institutions to facilitate interdisciplinary research that explores the intersections of Islamic theology, feminism, and gender studies. This can deepen understanding and generate new insights into how Islamic principles can support gender equality. Encourage religious scholars and leaders to engage in interpretations of Islamic texts that emphasize gender justice and equality. This can involve reexamining traditional interpretations through a feminist lens and highlighting diverse voices within Islamic jurisprudence.

### **Practice**

Support grassroots feminist organizations and networks that work at the community level to address gender-based discrimination and violence. These organizations play a crucial role in raising awareness, providing support services, and advocating for policy change. Create platforms for dialogue and collaboration between Islamic feminists, secular feminists, and other stakeholders in the women's rights movement. Building alliances across ideological divides can strengthen advocacy efforts and promote solidarity in advancing gender equality.

### **Policy**

Advocate for the implementation and enforcement of laws that protect women's rights and promote gender equality. This includes laws addressing gender-based violence, discrimination in employment and education, and ensuring women's access to resources and opportunities. Encourage policymakers to mainstream gender considerations in all areas of governance, including health, education, economic development, and religious affairs. This can involve conducting gender impact assessments and consulting with women's organizations in policy development processes.

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