



**THE CONCEPT OF GENDER EQUALITY IN
FEMINISM: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS FROM THE
QUR'ANIC PERSPECTIVE**

BY

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**A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for
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ABSTRACT

The emergence of feminism in the West plays a major role in the rapid progressing of women's right campaigns around the world. Their explosive voices and relentless efforts manage to bring many women, including academia and the masses, into their perspectives. The general idea of their gender equality is the liberation of women from backwardness with comparison to men. Their campaigns have become very successful that many feminists have also started to emerge from the Islamic community. Nonetheless, feminism and Islam have different sources and concept of gender equality which may and may not be reconciled depending on the in-depth study of Islamic texts: the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. This study aims to examine and analyse the concept of gender equality in feminism and Islam and compares both concepts through a rational approach guided by a critical understanding of the Qur'ān. This study also attempts to look into feminist claims of gender equality and analyse these concepts from the Qur'ānic perspective. The study involves a qualitative study of related feminist sources and literatures which take into account the methods of critical analysis by extracting the concepts and issues of gender equality in feminist campaigns and writings, whilst critically analysing and evaluating it through a holistic understanding of the Qur'ānic verses related to the issue. The study also utilized a comparative analysis; by comparing between concepts of equality in feminism with selected Qur'ānic verses, the tradition of the Prophet SAW, and views of prominent Muslim scholars. The outcomes of this study show the existence of several concepts of gender equality in feminism and Islam that can be reconciled despite the disparity of the sources. The best platform for gender equality comes from the Islamic vicegerency and cooperative concepts rather than competitive approach promoted by feminists. Nonetheless, several feminist arguments on women's issues, worth to be examined, are relooked in a fair and academic manner so the positive aspect of their idea can be incorporated in Islamic platform of gender equality. Several issues have been raised up by feminist regarding the Muslim's conduct on women that deserved to be seriously taken up for change for the sake of Muslim's community as a whole. The results demonstrate the desperate need for Muslim think tank that can devise and present the Islamic concept of gender equality to the world in a more effective way.

خلاصة البحث

ظهرت النسوية في الغرب لتؤدّي دورًا رئيسًا في حملات حقوق المرأة في جميع أنحاء العالم. والتعريف العام للمساواة بين الجنسين عندهم هو تحرير المرأة من التخلف، حتى لتصبح مثل الرجل. وقد أصبحت حملاتهم ناجحة جدًا، حتى تأثر بأفكارهم كثير من المسلمين. ومع ذلك فإن النسوية والإسلام متضادان لاختلافهما في مفهوم المساواة بينهما اعتمادًا على الدراسة المتعمقة لنصوص القرآن والسنة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحقيق مفهوم المساواة في المنظور النسوي، والإسلامي، ثم المقارنة بين المفهومين من خلال مقارنة عقلانية يسترشد بها الفهم النقدي للقرآن الكريم. ومن ضمن هذه الدراسة أيضًا تحقيق الادعاءات النسوية المتعلقة بالمساواة بين الجنسين، ثم تحليل هذه الادعاءات حسب المنظور القرآني. وتعتمد هذه الدراسة على منهج الاستقراء اعتمادًا على التحليل النقدي والمقارن للمساعدة في توضيح قضايا المساواة من خلال الفهم الكلي للآيات القرآنية المتعلقة بهذه المسألة، ثم المقارنة بين مفاهيم المساواة في النسوية مع المفاهيم الإسلامية. وقد نجحت هذه الدراسة في جمع بعض مفاهيم المساواة النسوية، وكذلك الإسلامية للتوفيق بينهما علي الرغم من اختلاف مصادرها. وأثبتت هذه الدراسة أيضًا أن مفهوم المساواة الإسلامية أفضل من مفهوم المساواة النسوية؛ لأن الإسلام يقدم مفهوم التعاون بدلاً من المفهوم التنافسي الذي تقدمه النسويات. ومع ذلك، فقد ثار جدل حول قضايا المرأة والتي تحتاج إلى مراجعة مطالب النسوية المناسبة لإصلاح نساء الأمة. وتشير هذه النتائج أيضًا إلى أن المجتمع الإسلامي يحتاج إلى مجموعة من المفكرين الذين يعملون معًا لتوضيح مفهوم المساواة الإسلامية بنشرها في المجتمع العالمي بطريقة أكثر فعالية.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (Qur'ān and Sunnah Studies).

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful,

All praise be to Allah SWT, and peace and blessings be upon the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad SAW, his family and companions RA. I am grateful to Allah SWT for giving me the strength and determination, as well as guidance along the way of completing this humble dissertation.

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TABLE OF TRANSLITERATION

ء	'	ز	z	ق	Q
ب	B	س	s	ك	K
ت	T	ش	Sh	ل	L
ث	Th	ص	ṣ	م	M
ج	J	ض	ḍ	ن	N
ح	ḥ	ط	ṭ	هـ	H
خ	kh	ظ	ẓ	و	W
د	D	ع	‘	ي	Y
ذ	dh	غ	Gh		
ر	r	ف	F		

Short Vowels		Long Vowels	
َ	a	َ + ا	ā
ِ	i	ِ + ي	ī
ُ	u	ُ + و	ū

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Cambridge Dictionary defines feminism as “the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state”.¹ This ideology originated from the political ideas of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and the French Revolution and regards all human beings as rational creatures who enjoy the same fundamental rights.² Feminism comprises a range of political movements, theories and social movements that share a common objective, which is to define, establish, and achieve economic, political, personal, and social rights for women including the effort to establish equal opportunities for women in employment and education.³

The feminist movement champions gender equality rights in many countries. It pursues equality in women’s rights, including voting rights, educational rights, the right to hold public office, to work, to procure fair wages or equal pay, to own property, to enter contracts, to have equal rights within marriage, and to have maternity leave. Feminists are actively involved in promoting bodily autonomy and integrity, protecting women and girls from rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence.⁴

¹“Feminism,” *Cambridge Online Dictionary*, accessed February 3, 2017, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/feminism>.

² Martin Pugh, “The Women’s Movement,” *History Review*, 1997, <http://www.historytoday.com/martin-pugh/womens-movement>.

³ Chris Beasley, *What Is Feminism?* (New York: Sage, 1999), 3–11.

⁴ Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–75* (University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

Due to these, they can be considered as the largest contributor to the pivotal change of the women's right movement, particular in the West, where they have successfully managed to gain rights for women's suffrage, gender neutrality, reproductive rights for women (including access to contraceptives and abortion), and the right to enter into contracts and own property.⁵ Although the feminist campaign focuses on women's rights, some feminists, including Bell Hooks, insist that feminist advocacy should include the liberation of men because traditional gender sceptics also harm men.⁶ Feminist theory, which emerged from feminist movements, is the theoretical, philosophical and intellectual approach aiming to understand the nature of gender inequality through an analytic lens, assumptions, and topical focus away from the male viewpoint and experience.⁷ Feminist theory has been developed into a variety of disciplines to respond to issues concerning gender.

Today, the feminists are actively associating themselves with women's studies centres in various universities around the world and are establishing research and publication foundations. They form international non-government organisations, and strongly demand their rights before the international community. Their consistency, explosive voice, in propagating their ideas and performing political networking, which can be deemed as one of their noteworthy points, have won them over a large majority of female students, young research scholars and female intellectuals to their feminist perspective.⁸

⁵ Ellen Messer-Davidow, *Disciplining Feminism: From Social Activism to Academic Discourse* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002).

⁶ Bell Hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (Mass: South End Press, 2000).

⁷ Nicki Lisa Cole, "Feminist Theory in Sociology," *About Education*, December 10, 2016, <http://sociology.about.com/od/Disciplines/a/Sociology-Of-Gender.htm>.

⁸ Zeenath Kausar, "Zeenath Kausar's Critique of Feminism and Her Reflections on Co-Vicegerency," in *Modern Western Political Ideologies: An Islamic Critique*, ed. Zulaikha Nurain Mudzar (Kuala Lumpur: Pearson Malaysia, 2014).

In Malaysia, feminist campaigns were joined by numerous coalitions of women's organisations that share the same objective to end all sorts of discrimination, harassment and violence against women.⁹ These organisations such as Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) and Women's Crisis Centre (WCC) mostly focus on the protection of victimised women; women who experienced domestic violence, sexual harassment and discrimination at their working place. The most controversial feminist movement in Malaysia is perhaps Sisters in Islam, actively pursuing women's liberation from Islamic *fatwās* (rulings) and Islamic family law that they consider patriarchal.¹⁰ Issues such as limiting the religion to private matters and sharing divorcing power between genders incur fierce debates among Muslim scholars and women activists in Malaysia.

The feminist understanding of gender equality eventually gave rise to a question of applicability of this concept in the Islamic community. This is because Islamic view of gender equality is directly guided by Islam's sources (the Qur'an and Sunnah) that look at gender equality from a more comprehensive perspective. Islam defines men and women as equal, and the only thing that differentiates them is their level of obedience to Allah SWT in which the Qur'an states:

﴿مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوةً طَيِّبَةً ۚ
وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾

Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do.¹¹

⁹ Cecilia Ng, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Malaysia: An Unsung (R)evolution* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁰ Sisters in Islam, "The Malaysian Insider - Muslim Women Fight for Equal Rights," accessed February 15, 2017, <http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/news.php?item.198.27>.

¹¹ *Qur'an* (Al-Nisā'), 16:97, (Translations throughout the thesis by Sahih International).

This verse, according to Ibn Kathīr, is a promise from Allah SWT to children of Adam, male or female, who do righteous deeds in accordance with the Qur’ān and the Sunnah, while believing that these deeds are commanded and enjoined by Allah. Allah promises that He will give them a good life in this world and that He will reward them according to the best of their deeds in the Hereafter.¹² This verse indicates that men and women clearly have an equal position in front of Allah SWT regardless of their gender and shall be rewarded only according to their efforts and deeds.

History has proven that Islam was the first religion to speak up on women’s rights. Muslim women have been noted as contributors in the development of the Islamic civilisation. They have engaged in administrative positions, opened madrasahs and even participated in battle.¹³

Another verse that shows how men and women have equal responsibilities is:

﴿وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ ۚ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ
عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ ۚ أُولَئِكَ
سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ﴾

The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those - Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.¹⁴

Sayd Quṭub believes that this verse presupposes the need of true co-operation and close ties within the community in fulfilling the roles of what Allah SWT have obliged them, indirectly illustrates how men and women share the same

¹² Ismā‘īl Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Ibnu Katsir*, trans. M. Abdul Ghaffar E.M, vol. 5 (Bogor: Pustaka Imam Asy-Syafi’i, 2004), 103.

¹³ Jamal Badawi, *Gender Equity in Islam* (Durban: IDM Publications, n.d.).

¹⁴ *Qur’ān* (Al-Tawbah), 9:71.

responsibilities and accountability as co-vicegerency and was encouraged to use political and social measures for the objective of doing good and forbids evil.¹⁵

Regrettably, due to ignorance and malpractice of law in some Muslim countries, the Islamic concept of equality has become unconvincing.¹⁶ The media has labelled Islam as a religion that oppresses women. Due to ignorance, some Muslims became obsessed with the ideologies of the West in their quest for justice and equality. As a result, some lead movements to fight for gender equality contrasting against Islamic teachings without realising how profound Islam advocates gender equality.

This study is expected to examine and analyse the concept of gender equality in feminism and Islam and compares both concepts through a rational approach guided by a critical understanding of the Qur'ān. This study also attempts to look into feminist claims of gender equality and analyse these concepts from the Qur'ānic perspective.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Feminist activists and organisations are committed to using all available channels to propagate their theory. The United Nations has been organising international conferences on women since the 1970s and has successfully passed important documents for women's empowerment and development under the influence of feminist and women activists. Striking examples in this connection can be seen through the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

¹⁵ Syed Qutb, *In The Shade of the Qur'an*, trans. Adil Salahi, vol. 8 (Leicestershire: Islamic Foundation, 2009), 167.

¹⁶ Lisa Beyer, "The Women in Islam," *TIME Magazine*, November 25, 2001, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,185647-1,00.html>.

Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)¹⁷ by the UN General Assembly in 1979 which entered into force in 1981 and also the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action,¹⁸ which was passed in 1995. Muslim countries will be affected by the implementation of such resolutions. Being backed by international law, feminist activists and organisations brazenly promote their ideas openly. Without a profound understanding of feminist theory and Islam's gender equality, Muslims could easily be deceived into disregarding Islam in exchange for a claimed justice and freedom. Should this be the case, sooner or later they will accept the secularisation of life, and Islamic jurisprudence will thus be abandoned.

In light of this issue, this study examines and compares the concept of gender equality brought up by Western feminism and the concept of gender equality as promoted in Islam. This is done by critically analysing the contradictions and evaluating feminist concepts of gender equality from the Qur'ānic perspective. It also examines the feminist claims on gender equality and analyses its claims from the Qur'ānic perspective.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- 1- To study the aims of feminism when pursuing gender equality.
- 2- To examine the concept of gender equality in Islam and feminism.
- 3- To evaluate feminist claims for gender equality from their perspective.

¹⁷ CEDAW, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women is considered as an International Bill of the Rights of Women, prepared by the United Nation Commission on the Status of Women, CSW. Entered into force in 1981.

¹⁸ UN Department of Public Information, *Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration, United Nations* (New York: United Nations, 1996), 58.

- 4- To analyse feminist claims for gender equality from the Qur'ānic perspective.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The questions that this study intends to answer are:

1. What are the aims of feminism when pursuing gender equality?
2. What is the feminist and Islamic concept of gender equality?
3. What are the feminist claims for gender equality?
4. What is the Qur'ānic view on feminist claims for gender equality?

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study involves a qualitative methodology and a study of related internet sources which take into consideration the following methods:

1. Critical Analysis – by extracting the concept and the issue of gender equality in the feminist campaigns and writings, and critically analysing and evaluating it through a holistic understanding of the Qur'ānic verses related to the issue.
2. Comparative Analysis – by comparing between concepts of equality in feminism with selected Qur'ānic verses, tradition of the Prophet SAW, and views of prominent Muslim scholars.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The concept of gender equality promoted by feminists contradicts a certain aspect of the Islamic understanding of gender equality. Islam observes equality in all aspects of life for both genders in its appropriate manner, respectable to its identity and Islamic

sources (the Qur'ān and Sunnah). The comparative analysis of this issue will help the Muslim society, NGOs and Muslim women, in particular, to reflect and perceive perspectives held by both feminism and Islam. The research offers a more detailed understanding of gender equality for Muslim men and women.

1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research focuses on the feminist concept of gender equality in comparison with the Islamic perspective. It examines several books and articles written by feminist advocates and critically analysing them under the light of the Qur'ān and the Prophetic tradition while unveiling the Islamic injunctions regarding gender equality. The Qur'ānic understanding of gender equality is compared with those held by feminism and is supported by the views of Western and Muslim scholars. This research will not include an explicit explanation of the various schools of feminism but focuses on the general concept of gender equality of feminism with comparison to Islamic perspective. It does not include all feminist arguments regarding gender equality but will choose several issues and claims relevant to Qur'ānic studies such as the issue of women's rights in marriage, women freedom for bodily autonomy, and victimisation of women in culture and law.

1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have discussed equality as a human right. This research examines the literature directly related to feminism, the characteristics and the concept of gender equality, and the Islamic perspective on gender equality.

An important study relevant to this topic issue is by Zeenath Kausar in a chapter entitled "Zeenath Kausar's Critique of Feminism and Her Reflections on Co-

Vicegerency” in her book “Modern Western Political Ideologies: An Islamic Critique”.¹⁹ In this chapter, she explains the Islamic understanding of men and women while proposing the concept of co-vicegerency on the issue of feminism. She critically examines several points of feminism such as the epistemological foundation of feminism and its background, Islamic position on some epistemological issues, feminist and Islamic position on some fundamental issues, and critically analyses major arguments of feminism. The author briefly compares many feminist issues with Islamic perspective, criticising feminist general idea and characteristics. This current study will focus specifically on the concept of gender equality in feminism and its implementation around the world in comparison with Islamic viewpoint.

Zeenath Kausar also wrote “*Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi on the Empowerment of Women in the Family, Society, State and Islamic Movement*”²⁰ in which she presented the Islamic stance and counterclaim to feminism. The author supports her work by analysing Sayd Abū al ’alā al-Mawdūdī’s perspective on this issue. She analysed al-Mawdūdī’s perspective due to his recognition as an Islamic contemporary and revivalist scholar. Additionally, she compared some of al-Mawdūdī’s arguments and opinions with feminist observations and arguments and asserted her concern on the importance of the Islamic movements and the need for the effective participation of men and women in this movement.

The book “*Inside the Gender Jihad: Women’s Reform in Islam*”²¹ by Amina Wadud will be used to understand the concept of gender equality from a feminist perspective. The author who in the past has been criticised for her controversial acts of

¹⁹ Zeenath Kausar, “Zeenath Kausar’s Critique of Feminism and Her Reflections on Co-Vicegerency.”

²⁰ Zeenath Kausar, *Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi on the Empowerment of Women in the Family, Society, State and Islamic Movement* (Selangor: Thinker’s Library Sdn. Bhd, 2008).

²¹ Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women’s Reform in Islam* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2008).

leading prayer for men, explained her opinion on many Islamic juridical issues concerning the rights of gender. The author begins by stating that her vision of Islam is not the only or the true Islam. There are many 'Islam' as there are many interpretations, and that is how Allah wants it. She offers a method of feminist analysis of Qur'ānic text which she regards as the real concept of equality in Islam. This book will be used to compare the feminist activist understanding of the Qur'ānic text in the pursuit of gender equality and the authentic interpretation of the text from mainstream Muslim scholars. This book differs with the current study as the book views the concept of gender equality from a religious feminist point of view while this current study will include the evaluation of the concept of gender equality from mainstream Islamic teachings that Wadud regard as patriarchal.

Nadiah Ridzuan conducted a significant study on the arguments of feminist theory from the University of Singapore in her thesis "Woman, Islam and Feminism in Postcolonial Malaysia and Singapore".²² The study focused on the ability of postcolonial feminism, Islamic feminism in particular, in capturing the diversity of Muslim women's voices. The author argues that postcolonial feminism narrowly defines women's empowerment as 'emancipation' and 'equality' despite being critical of the Eurocentric understandings of these terms as used by Western feminists. The author thus takes Malaysia and Singapore as her case study. She believed that feminists have a tendency to assume that women would be predisposed to see these ideals as favourable in comparison to those which uphold a patriarchal structure. However, as women's assertiveness in Islamic movements that espouse gender-differentiated roles demonstrates, reality is more complex. Islamic feminists are at a loss in terms of fully appreciating Muslim women's identifications with conservative

²² Nadiah Ridzuan, "Women, Islam And Feminism In Postcolonial Malaysia and Singapore" (National University of Singapore, 2011).

principles espoused from a more conservative Islamic framework and their involvement in such movements. As a result, women's voices are framed out of the hegemonic framework that pits universal feminist values against state cultural essentialism in the discourse of Islam and gender. The author focused more on general feminist theories rather than the concept of equality in feminism in which this current study aims to compare from Islamic perspectives.

Another thesis that engaged this issue is "The Impact of Islam as a Religion and Muslim" by Sonia D. Galloway.²³ Her phenomenological research aimed at discovering meanings, structures, and essence of the lived experiences of Muslim women while seeking to advance knowledge of how Islam, as a religion, can promote gender equality via an Islamic theological and logic (*al-kalām*) framework. In her meticulous research, she discovers that Islamic theoretical framework is egalitarianism and the misunderstanding of Islam mostly was caused by ignorance Muslim and integrity-lack media. She brought up examples from many Islamic countries and conducted surveys to prove her hypotheses on this issue. The author also explains the reason behind the establishment of Islamic feminism and its differences with other feminist schools of thought. This thesis differs from the current study as the objective of the latter is to specifically determine the concept of gender equality in Islam and feminism.

"The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam"²⁴ by Fatema Mernissi is another book that discusses the issue of gender equality in Islam. The author examines sociological condition of the Muslim from the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW and interprets the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* using

²³ Sonia D. Galloway, "The Impact of Islam as a Religion and Muslim Women on Gender Equality: A Phenomenological Research Study" (Nova Southeastern University, 2014).

²⁴ Fatema Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1991).

traditional Islamic science as well as modern sociological methodology. She applies this methodology from her standing as an Islamic feminist. She argues that Islamic jurisdictions on women such as hijab, run against the egalitarian ideals of Muhammad SAW and believes this jurisdiction was actually influenced by the Arabic culture and traditions. She argues that the Muslims were in military defensive that time and the fighting strength of the conservative tribal forces were needed if Islam were to survive, thus Muhammad SAW allowed the diminution of women's rights and the reassertion of male dominance as a means of ensuring the survival of Islam. The author's approach in understanding Qur'ānic text and the *ḥadīth* from a feminist point of view will be valuable for this recent study in understanding the concept of gender equality from their perspectives. This book differs from the current study as the latter will also include mainstream Islamic scholars' understanding of gender equality for comparison.

Another book that is beneficial to this study is "Allah, Liberty and Love" by Irshad Manji.²⁵ This book emphasizes author experience in life and her views on the current Muslims situation. The author, a lesbian feminist argues that Muslim should be more vocal in expressing their stand and belief as she does. She believes that she is a reformer of Islam, and advocates that every Muslim has to do independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) to understand the Qur'ān and Sunnah. She refuses to be confined under traditional Islamic belief and urges people to rely on their own faculty in determining what is right or wrong. She presented her discussions on liberty and gender equality with various Muslims around the world and compiled it in this book. Her views would be beneficial to understand current Muslim feminist issues and examine it from their

²⁵ Irshad Manji, *Allah, Liberty and Love* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

perspective. This book differs from the current study as the objective of the latter is to specifically determine the concept of gender equality in Islam and feminism.

The article “Gender Equality, Islam and Law”,²⁶ elaborates gender equality provided in Malaysia’s Islamic Family Law in light of polygamy. This article discusses international demands for women’s rights and its opposition from Islamic fundamentalists. The authors criticised the rigidity of international practice that acts without giving due consideration to the choices of women themselves. As such, international standards of gender equality cannot be adopted by all nations since women who view gender equality from the perspective of a differing value system, is not codified in contemporary international legislation. The article focused on the equality in Islamic marriage law, while this current study will include a more holistic perspective of equality from the Islamic perspective.

The American Political Science Review presented a journal entitled “Feminisms, Women’s Rights, and the UN: Would Achieving Gender Equality Empower Women?” by Zehra F. Kabasakal Arat.²⁷ This article discusses the efficacy of liberal feminist theory in the United Nations (UN) platform. The author provides a timeline of feminist theoretical developments informing the UN Work from the year 1945 to the new millennium and how feminist theory and schools have changed in influence. She also criticised liberal feminist handling of woman’s issue, particularly after the UN indicators of empowerment reveal a tacit subscription to the narrow framework of liberal feminism, which recognises gender oppression only and seeks gender equality through the integration of women into the present institutions and structures. The author doubly believes that liberal feminist theoretical framework in

²⁶ Raihanah Abdullah, Asadullah Ali, and Siti Aminah Hamid, “Gender Equality, Islam and Law,” *Journal of Oriental Studies* 25 (2015): 20–36.

²⁷ Zehra F. Kabasakal Arat, “Feminisms, Women’s Rights, and the UN: Would Achieving Gender, Equality Empower Women,” *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 4 (2015): 674–89.

the United Nations would be successful in bringing equality that benefits women. She believes that this integration of women equality into equality, as defined by men, might become harmful to them. This article focused on the impact of liberal feminist theory in the UN, while this current study will cover the other schools of feminist thought and the Islamic stand on gender equality.

Another working paper worth mentioning is the “United Nations Convention Documents in Light of Feminist Theory” presented in the Michigan Journal of Gender and Law.²⁸ This paper discusses prominent feminist theories and their implication to the international community and international law while at the same time observing their method to the understanding and interpreting of UN documents. The author explains the impacts of UN documents and policies and elaborates each from the perspective of liberal feminism, cultural feminism and dominance feminism. This journal will help the readers understand UN’s progress in their agenda for gender equality, with the understanding of legal aspect through their theoretical framework. However, this journal differs with the current study as it limits its research to the United Nations without taking Islamic perspective into consideration.

In conclusion, the current study attempts to analyse the feminist and Islamic concept of gender equality, examines the feminist claims and demands for gender rights, and evaluates their arguments from Qur’ānic perspective.

²⁸ R. Christopher Preston; and Ronald Z. Ahrens, “United Nations Convention Documents in Light of Feminist Theory,” *Michigan Journal of Gender and Law* 8, no. 1 (2001).