

# A Study of Miriam Cooke's Works in Outstanding Islamic Feminism

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## Dedication

We dedicate this work to those who seek the right path in life and believe that justice is the only way to live peacefully.

## Acknowledgement

We are thankful to Almighty Allah for guiding us the right path and helping us to complete this paper.

## Abstract

This study presents the writings of Islamic feminist writers and their strategies for self-empowerment and self-definition. It aims to show how societies draw corrupted principles in the name of judges and religions. These principles have devaluated woman and contorted the reputation of Islam. It is done with a reference to two works "Women claim Islam: Creating Islamic feminism through literature" and "Women of war story" by Miriam Cooke. The study also shows how women themselves denied their rights and how societies have confused oneness and equality with sameness. Societies also have confused God loving to protect woman with male domination.

**Keywords:** Islamic Feminism, Misinterpretations, Maintainers and Dictator, Islamic Paradigm. culture's epidemic, standard narrative.

**مفهوم الحركة النسوية الإسلامية بين النقد والدراسة  
قراءة تحليلية في كتابات مريم كوك أنموذجاً**

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تتناول الدراسة مفهوم الحركة النسوية الإسلامية الذي برز في المجتمعات العربية، والذي تمكن في فرض نفسه على الساحة الأكاديمية، ونجح في ان يصبح موضوعاً لعدد من الدراسات في مجالات عديدة منها سوسيولوجيا الجندر و الدراسات النسوية. ان جمهور النسويات الاسلاميات متنوع من داخل المجتمعات الإسلامية ومن خارجها أي الباحثات الغربيات المهتمات بالتيار النسوي وتطوره في ثقافات مختلفة. هؤلاء الناشطات يحاولن تقديم استراتيجيات في التمكين الذاتي واثبات الذات من خلال المشاركة في المجال المعرفي والتعريف بتفاسيرهن فيما يخص المساواة، والجندرية، وتعدد الزوجات، والضرب والعدالة الاجتماعية. وقد تمكنت هذه الحركة من تخطي سردية الضحية وتغييرها الى سردية المرأة الفاعلة، وان هدف هذه الدراسات معرفي أولاً وكذلك اجتماعي – ثقافي. وتبين الدراسة أيضاً الخلط الذي حصل بين الأعراف الاجتماعية الوضعية والتعاليم الدينية الأساسية فيما يتعلق بوضع المرأة داخل المجتمع.

## Introduction

One of the most controversial concepts is Islamic feminism. This concept started at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the present day. The activists called for rereading and reinterpretation of Qur'an and Hadith. It is also a form of feminism that concerns with the role of women within Islam. Islamic feminism, as a name, has appeared in the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today, to talk about Islam, it is hard to imagine that Islam has liberated the women and improved their position in the society. That is because there are many cases where women are being forced married, prevented to get property and are victims of domestic violence that is because of certain wrong interpretations of Islam. So on that perspective, this is the movement of women, Muslim women who struggle against the misinterpretation of the legislative sources of Qur'an and Hadith. Therefore, they come in the field of human rights. They come with a feminist process within Islamic paradigm.

Islamic feminism concept has been a broadly debated since the emersion of the term during the 1990s. It is repetitively a subject matter for raging debates. These debates are because of the manners by which it is inserted in the more extensive talks concerning the rights of women, women's status in societies where Muslims are the majority or the minority. Islamic feminism is also used to demonize Islam. You might have heard about the debates about the headscarf. There is a political instrumentalization of women, of the body of Muslim women. Muslim feminists come with their history and memory and they claim for justice. The big challenge that Muslim feminists face, within Muslim community, is that some Muslims do not agree with the concept. The misunderstanding of the concept, by both men and women, is the cause of this disagreement. Azza Karam sees feminist doctrine as understood out of a straiten diagram of stereotypes in post-colonialist Arabic-Muslim societies. Feminism being connected with the hostility between man and woman, with the promiscuity and depravity of women, with the colonialist planning to dismiss native social culture and religious teachings.

The second challenge is with feminists groups and movements. The Muslim feminists face a new colonial and dominated relationship with some feminists. They do not accept Islamic feminism. So there is a demand for decolonialization of the feminist practice. Muslim feminists want to be treated as equal, when they struggle for equality, with other feminist organizations. They want to be as women not as a headscarf. They want to be accepted as feminists not as victims. This is a new colonial approach, so they should decolonialize the feminist practice first. Also on the academic level, they want to give the Islamic feminism movement a room for debated and to be recognized at the academic discourses. Islamic feminism needs to stand by itself and express its identity away from dictations by other feminist practices.

Islamic feminisms originally established in the Islamic conviction following their development as a response to the major Qur'anic call to guarantee equity.

## *A Study of Miriam Cooke's Works in Outstanding Islamic..*

They found a basic investigation of both misogynist readings of Islam and their male-centric demonstrations inside some particular religious societies, just as of the neocolonialist women's activist talks in regards to the Islamic religion. So many Muslim and non-Muslim writers have been writing about Islamic feminism. Some of them went so far and called to create a new reading of Islam. Others say to read it with the Islamic paradigm because they believe that Islam has liberated the women. The non-Muslim write according to their own experience and concepts. Some want to draw attention to what is called Islamic feminism and are sympathetic to Arab women writers and their achievements. One of those non-Muslim writers is Miriam Cooke.

### **1-1 Cooke as Supporter for Islamic Feminism**

Miriam Cooke is a professor of Arabic and Literature in the Asian and African Languages. In her writings, she concentrates on gender in the Middle East. She writes about war extensively, with books that contain "War's Other Voices: Women Writers at the Lebanese Civil struggle, "Women and the war story" and "Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature". Cooke is also a supporter of "Islamic feminism.

One of Cooke's themes scholarship is the inheritance of sexism. She also mentions war and, how the upper and middle class women in Beirut find themselves progressively alone. They start to write their struggles as women. They recognize through expression their former marginalization and oppression. In writing about these marginal, Cooke challenges the idea that only men have writings about war, in spite of their differences in political and religious beliefs. Another theme of Mariam Cook is Islam as a female- companionable religion. She expresses that she wants to attract attention of what some Muslim women have called Islamic feminism. There are Muslim women who return to the Qur'an, sayings of the Prophet and Islamic law. They describe Islam as a religion, which has texts that can be read and interpreted in a woman-loving way. Men's interpretations and for a long time concentrate on making women out of public space. Nowadays, Muslim women themselves are interpreting these Islamic texts. They insist that they have the right of doing so because all Muslims have the right to interpret the essential texts, for a reason that there is no priesthood in Islam, so there is no mediator between the individual and God. Cook does a great effort to change behavior in some Middle Eastern societies, which most people there do not believe in gender-neutral and they are anti-feminist. She discusses "polygamy can be liberating and empowering". She observes that some women feel comfortable when their husbands marry a new wife. They will not have to serve him much.

Miriam Cooke is the writer of *Women and the War Story* (1997) and *Gendering War Talk* (1993), *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature*, a novel entitled *Hayati, My Life* and *War's other voices: Women writers on the Lebanese Civil War 1987 and 1996*. In her

## *A Study of Miriam Cooke's Works in Outstanding Islamic..*

writings, Cooke shows the protests of Arab woman Writers against claiming that just men can write of war, The Lebanese war shows many fictional works written by women more than by men. Cooke depicts the changes in consciousness that have happened among women who perceive and register the development of chaos in Lebanon. The Lebanese women writers like Ghada al-Samman, Hanan Claire Gebeyli al Sheikh, Etel Adnan Laila, Daisy al Amir, and many others, are female writers who begin to depict a society. They go beyond the normal masculinization in wars and accomplished unprecedented femininity. They share the war as their experiences. They wrote for themselves alone.

### **1-2 Uprising through literature**

Literature, today, is well argued and clearly written. This is important for academic collections and large public supporting in the Middle Eastern literature, religious studies, and women's studies. Cooke is sympathetic to Arab women writers and supporter of their achievements of self-expression. They are capable of creating and discussing new ideas. Nawal El Saadawi, the writer of *Woman at Point Zero* and *Daughter of Isis*. Sondra Hale, the author of "Gender Politics in Sudan: Islamism, Socialism and the State", deals with a very important aspect that is rising in the Muslim world. Some of Muslim women criticize the established Islamic knowledge as the only suitable interpretation and understanding of Islam. Those women writers seek their right to get their identity by claiming Islam. Cooke also brings to this subject a sensitivity rooted by highlighting a politics identity. In, *Women claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through literature*, Cooke tries to devastate hegemony stereotypes. She provides another choice for feminist knowledge, important political events like the Gulf War. She brings to the reader the voices that need to be heard. She presents women's Islamic literature, like Assia Djébar, Fatima Mernissi, Zaynab al-Ghazali and Nawal El Saadawi.

Women in Islam is the subject of vehement discussion among Muslims themselves as well as Muslims and others. The subject is written by men, which is meant that the subject is somewhat one-sided. Patriarchal explanations of Islamic law have to produce the truth of Islamic situation on women's position. A number of Muslim women write about Islam and themselves. They seek to interpret Islam for themselves. In this procedure new interpretation of Islam that still follow the essential sources of the religion and present the longing for empowerment of women are expressive in this new kind of writing. Miriam Cooke states that:

Many Arab women, such as Assia Djébar, the Algerian novelist historian and the Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi have placed themselves as Islamic feminists as so to examine the lives of women through the duration of formative time of Islamic history. They take ideas from their mothers language and experiences and their mother tongues, to develop our

## *A Study of Miriam Cooke's Works in Outstanding Islamic..*

understanding of the roles the mothers acted and the position they blessed with as individuals whom the Prophet respected loved, and protected. Many of people focus on the time directly after the Prophet's death in 632, since many consider that the ideals begin to fall apart later. (Cooke. P .64 , 2001).

She presents the writings, particularly autobiographies and novels of Arab Muslim women, mainly from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Kuwait, to show a general idea about what she terms 'Islamic feminism'. She makes a comparison of those women to a prior generation of Arab Muslim women. They influence by secular thought and socialist. She says that these women intentionally choose to describe themselves as Muslims. We find this in the context of Islamic movements in many Muslim societies since the 1970s. They look for roots and cultural and religious genuineness. Within Islamic paradigm, these women search to gain their rights. This means going directly to the Qur'an and to the Hadith, re-reading the rules of Islamic texts, rejected a patriarchal deviation that is observed with no legality in Islam. They insist that they also have a right to read the Qur'an and interpret it, as it comes for all believers. Cooke writes that this has definitive inclusions for the nature of religious supremacy in Muslim societies. The religious men are no longer considered to be the only dependable interpreters of the true religion. Indeed, it is argued, they have been complicit, whether consciously or not in deforming Islam to deny women rights that Islam provides them.

Her study considers the varied ways in which more gender-positive realization of the true religion are being searched to be expressed the Arab world by Muslim women. Some seek to highlight women's rights by working within Islamic paradigm. They realize that Muslims in deeply religious societies is self-defeating because they ignore religion. These include authors such as Assia Djebar the Maghrebi activist-scholars, Fatima Mernissi, and the Egyptian novelist Nawal el Saadwi. Cooke also presents an obvious role of Muslim women in the public domain established upon a new visibility of what it signify to be a Muslim woman today. A woman who is honest to her true religion. She is also able to be an active citizen at the same time. In this regard, the issue of the veil and women's necessarily take centric concern. Cooke indicates how these women reject concepts of total segregation of women, saying that this is a subsequent emergence and has no legality in the Qur'an.

In addition women writers in Islamic Arab world, Cooke also observes the role of a recent generation of Arab Muslim women who live and work in the United States. She investigates the rising persistence of these women associated with other marginalized women to combat for their rights and for gender justice. She also examines the raising of networking that link up these women with other Muslim women in other parts of the world over the internet. She shows that the internet has main possibilities for growing new recognition of women's rights and Islam. It leads to greater decentralization of religious influence in Muslim societies like in other societies, where all people get new entrance to the root of

faith and capable to interpret and think on their own.

### 1-3 Opposing Masculine War Legend

In a century shredded by civil rebellions, civilian bombings and massacre war has an experience for both civilians and soldiers, for both men and women. But has this fact convert our old idea of the roles men and women act in war, the emotions we concern to vehemence, and what we consider war can achieve? This work raises such issues in recognizing female and male experiences and roles of war.

Cooke in her book *Woman and The War Story* introduces an autobiographies and stories of Arab women authors who claim Islam. They write themselves into the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century because they are outside historical narratives of their nations. Cooke investigates the literary writings of Arab Muslim women who take part into political discourses, as active public intellectuals, instead of being just an invisible history subtext. Cooke states that Arab Muslim women are excluded from history, from the War Story, out of the emigration stories and exile. They are also left out of the interpretive and physical spaces of religion. Therefore, Muslim women writers and intellectuals challenge the elimination of their experiences in the discursive and public spaces of nation, religion and community. Cooke discusses that women in societies are governed and controlled by Islamic discourse become the “symbolic center”.

She explains that The War Story is a masculine genre, indicating sex, glory and valor, whereas women only act supporting roles. They are depicted also as victims of plunder and rape. They play as nurses or suffering mothers a virtual supporting of weeping roles. In the twentieth century, other roles appear for women in the Arab world and in the War Story, such as, the mothers of the Palestinian uprising, the woman writer and the female Algerian guerrilla. Cooke talks about gender and wars in the modern Arab literature. She also explores that Arab women write about their experiences through wars in a different role. She state that women now play the other roles that a war culture specified. They live the war as a survivor who may not carry weapons but not as a victim. These women have many writings of recent war-concerned fiction, most of it has not published in English yet, although Cooke observes, "Arab women's works are growingly translated into different languages over the world.

The title *Woman and the War Story* may refer to a global concerning to the subject. But, it's essential concentrate is the writings of Arab women regenerate from four wars in the zone, the wars of Palestinian-Israeli in 1948, the war of independence from the French by Algerian, the uprising of 1967, the Iraq-Iran War and the Gulf War. Cooke also writes vastly on this subject. She writes about women's works related struggles and wars outside the West in her work *War's Other Voices: Women Writers in the Lebanese Civil War, 1988*.

## *A Study of Miriam Cooke's Works in Outstanding Islamic..*

She explains that, Palestinian women mention the Algerian experience, arguing how they could combat both the feminist and the nationalist issues and how they could take part in opposition, seeking for social change without losing the opportunity. After the end of the Algerian uprising, Palestinian women were recalled its lessons by authors who declare that women are irreplaceable to the revolutions, emphasizing the need for substantial revolutionary changes in society which include feminism as an ideology. So that, the waking of women's dynamic role is make a move decades ago.

In a book that fundamentally and radically produce an updated or corrected images that way we depicted about war. Cooke depicts the come forth tradition of women's participating to what she presents as the "War Story" a genre already confined for men. Concentrating on the contemporary literature of the Arab world, Cooke examines how women writers can challenge by the substitutional of the master narrative the dominating of the permission to write and experience. She clarifies how women who write their experiences and write themselves into the War Story revoke the masculine deal with glory, violence and sexuality. Cooke concludes, "there is no single War Story the standard narrative—and with it the way we think about and conduct war—can be changed". According to Cooke:

Like peace war and, gender is regarded as a binary terms that are considered to be natural. Whereas gender, is not natural, is a cultural law that prescribed, described and thus forms social expectancy for sexed bodies. Women and men grow up in a different manner and they act in away compatible with their culture's epidemic values and i  
ages. (Cooke. p.14,1997)

### **2- Maintainers and Protectors are not Dictators**

Islam has held women as very respected and regarded identity. Before Islam people used to kill their daughters, but Islam prohibited female infanticide. It is also enough that a full part in the Holy Qur'an is on women. The woman in Islam is the mother, sister, daughter, scholar, and owner of business and manager. The first one whom the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) trusted and consulted was his wife Khadija. She was the first one who knew about the revelation and the inspiration. She was the supporter for the Prophet. There are a lot of evidences to affirm the way that Islam is the genuine liberator of the woman from her bondage. To make this progressively obvious, we will show how Islam shields the privileges of the woman since the time of her birth until she passes away.

Islam preserves the woman's humanity and makes her in the same rank of the man. Allah The Almighty Says: {O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous



## *A Study of Miriam Cooke's Works in Outstanding Islamic..*

of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.} (Quran 49:13). Allah says: "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has made one of them excel over the other, and because they spend out of their possessions (to support them)." (Quran 4: 34). To understand the meaning that men are "defenders and maintainers" of women. We need first to look at the Arabic meaning of the word that is interpreted as "protectors and maintainers". This word is "qawwâm" or "qayyim" which implies an individual who deals with the affairs of others. The qayyim of individuals is the person who oversees their affairs and provides for their needs. In a similar way, the qayyim of a woman is either the husband or her guard – the person who needs to take care of her and guarantee that her demands are fulfilled.

At the point when Allah says: "Men are the qawwâmûn of women..." it implies that men are considered in charge of taking care of the demands of women and are in charge of the women under their patronage. A spouse, in this way, has the obligation of dealing with his wife, ensuring her, shielding her, and fulfilling her demands. It doesn't mean, as very numerous individuals have expected that the man has the privilege to act unyieldingly towards her, compelling her, oppressing her, stifle her independence, and nullify her personality. Men's status as defenders and maintainers is an unadulterated obligation, unadulterated responsibility, and less a rank of power. It demands that he utilizes his great sense, considers what he does, and practices clemency. It implies that he can't be hurried in his choices. It does not imply that he can ignore his wife's feelings and disparage her identity.

An issue emerges when it is said that men have the priority. At that point we see every one of those activists, associations and foundations who call for women's parity emerging into movement, bouncing up prepared to battle about this point. In fact, they should delay sufficiently long to appropriately comprehend what it implies when Allah says: "... because Allah has made one of them excel with over the other...". The right comprehension must be in the light of the Qur'an and Hadith. The individuals who go over the edge in declaring the privileges of women and allege that the woman in Islam is persecuted and that Islam does not do her equity. They are headed to the point where they break the very message of the Qur'an and Hadith. For the sake of "fairness", what the verse is stating. Is it showing that there is some inalienable privileges of men over ladies, something that is incorporated within their natures? The researchers of Qur'anic discourse have adopted two methods to this issue.

The first method is to allude the matter back to the common structures of male and female, regarding their minds, their diverse habits of reasoning, and their inherent strengths. They discovered that men, naturally, are progressively hot-blooded, heading for intensity and hardness, meanwhile women by natures are cooler, heading for tenderness and atonality. The second method is to consider it from a legitimate side which Allah has forced upon men to give the



dowry to the women whom they want to get married with. Allah has made men in charge of spend on women and accommodate them. This is the only privilege which men have over women.

Allah has made both male and female to the destination that Allah wants for them and has given them the natural capacities expected to complete that destination. Allah has bestowed women the ability that they fall pregnant, give birth, and breast feeding. Hence, she is naturally loaded with the consideration of what the joining between a man and a lady realizes, and it is an enormous obligation. It is an overwhelming obligation, however, it is likewise a basic one, not something that can be drawn nearer softly, without the physical, mental, and enthusiastic readiness that Allah has presented solely to women.

On this premise, it is just barely that Allah would load the other portion of humankind – the men – with the duty of fulfilling the demands of women and ensuring them. Allah would present to men the intrinsic physical, psychological, and sentimental characteristics that would enable them to exceed expectations in doing what is expected of them. In addition, Allah would demand man to be financially responsible for the women under his consideration. These two components are, basically, what the verse is discussing.

The Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) was not a dictator who reigned over his family. His wives said that when he was at home, he was completely associated with housework. In a lot of situations, his wives contended with one another in his existence. He never got furious when they did. He constantly tackled their issues with intelligence and delicacy, never with cruelty. This demonstrates to us what a man's job as a defender and maintainer of ladies is about. Any individual who might take the man's role in Islam as the defender and maintainer of ladies and use it as an excuse to mistreat women is carrying out an offence against Islam. Islam has ensured the rights of woman as a human being, including her entitlement to have and express her very own views. The Sunnah is brimful with instances of this. We can take the case of Khansa' bint Khaddam, "that her father forced her to marry a man who she did not want to be her husband. When she told the Prophet (PBUH), he annulled her marriage."(islamweb.net)

Another example is the case of the husband of Burayrah was called Mughîth. "When she got her freedom she decided to leave him. He began to follow her and cried for her. The Prophet (PBUH) told her: 'If just you would return to him!'. She asked ' O messenger of Allah! Are you commanding me? He replied ' No, I am just pleading on his behalf.' She answered that she did not have any need for him." (dr-alawni.com)

There are lots of examples prove that women have the right to express their very own personalities and take the decisions. So the role of men as maintainers and protectors has to be in the accurate perspective and should not be miss interpreted. Human beings have been made from a male and female. The privilege, in the sight of God, is not given according to the gender but to the

## *A Study of Miriam Cooke's Works in Outstanding Islamic..*

right deeds. So man and woman both have the complementary part to the other. There is no superiority or inferiority because of the gender. The Divine speech and the prophetic hadith address both man and woman specially in the vital matters. This is to show that both of them have the same responsibility and duty.

### **Conclusion**

The important achievement of Muslim women's contention for their rights is that they deny the concept that they are unable to be sovereign and on a par with men and good Muslims at the same time. They urge that a woman becomes a true Muslim only when she can achieve equality and freedom as a citizen and individual. One can be supporter to women, liberal and Muslim at the same time. Islamic feminism, this declaration gives the impression of contradictory at first glance. It also gives a view that Islam is a patriarchal framework in essence, contrary with feminism. The idea of liberation, emancipation and equality should be clarified.

Muslims may have a paternalistic look, but that does not mean that Islam is patriarchal system. Several verses in Qur'an come to enhance equality between men and women. The central message of Qur'an is equality and justice for all human beings based upon their abilities and natures. Supporters of women authenticate that they find essentials in Qur'an that support women. Islam does not support any kind of discrimination. Islamic societies have to establish its rules upon Islamic law, in this way it will be no need for Islamic feminism.

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*A Study of Miriam Cooke's Works in Outstanding Islamic..*

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Yr. 2019  
Vol. : 44  
No . : 4C

Journal of Basra Research for Human Sciences