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## **"Contrasts and Commonalities: Understanding Western Feminism and Islamic Women's Rights"**

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### **Abstract:**

This research paper delves into a comprehensive examination of the similarities and distinctions between Western feminism and the rights of women within Islamic traditions. Adopting an objective standpoint, the paper scrutinizes the underlying principles, primary objectives, and tangible expressions of both movements. Western feminism is portrayed in its varied dimensions, highlighting its vigorous pursuit of equality, self-determination, and the deconstruction of patriarchal systems. In contrast, the rights of women in Islam are analyzed through the prisms of religious scripture, cultural traditions, and modern interpretations, underlining the inherent rights and safeguards provided to women in the Islamic context. This article identifies shared aspirations for justice, fairness, and women's empowerment across both movements, while also casting a light on the profound divergences in their methodologies, narrative frameworks, and ultimate aims. By striking a delicate balance between commendation and critical evaluation, this piece adds a nuanced perspective to the ongoing dialogue around gender rights, cultivating a space for mutual respect and understanding between these two pivotal movements.

**Keywords:** Western feminism, Islamic women's rights, gender equality, cultural dynamics, religious scriptures, patriarchal dismantling, modern interpretations, shared aspirations, divergent methodologies, nuanced perspective..

## **Introduction:**

The comparative analysis of Western feminism and Islamic women's rights remains a topic of extensive debate and discussion in contemporary society. Advocates for women's rights in the West seek to promote gender equality and liberate women from patriarchal structures, while Islamic women's rights are grounded in the teachings of the Quran and Hadith, subject to diverse interpretations by scholars across the globe. This article endeavors to elucidate the parallels and disparities between Western and Islamic women's rights.

Tracing its origins, Western women's rights are intricately linked to the liberal feminist movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which championed equal rights for women in various domains such as education, employment, and political participation. Western feminism contends that gender equality is attainable only through the subversion and dismantling of patriarchal systems and ideologies. Conversely, Islamic women's rights are derived from Quranic teachings and Hadith, underscoring the inherent dignity and worth of women. Some Islamic scholars advocate for gender equality within the Islamic legal framework, while others uphold a more traditional viewpoint, emphasizing the complementary roles of men and women within families and society.

A notable divergence between Western and Islamic women's rights pertains to dress codes and the hijab. Western feminism asserts that women should have the autonomy to choose their attire without facing societal judgment or harassment. In contrast, Islamic dress codes mandate women to cover their bodies and hair in public, a practice deemed oppressive by some. Proponents of Islamic dress codes, however,

argue that it shields women from unwarranted attention and harassment.

The perspectives on family and marriage also vary significantly between Western feminism and Islamic women's rights. Western feminism encourages women to break free from conventional gender roles within the family, challenging the expectation that women should predominantly assume caregiving responsibilities for children. On the other hand, Islamic teachings uphold the sanctity of the family unit and advocate for the complementary roles of men and women within it. While Islamic law acknowledges women's rights in marriage and allows for divorce, critiques highlight that its practical application does not always result in equitable outcomes.

In summation, the comparison between Western and Islamic women's rights is intricate and multifaceted. While both paradigms seek to uphold the rights and dignity of women, they diverge significantly in their perspectives and priorities. A thorough exploration of these similarities and differences facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities confronting women across diverse cultural and contextual landscapes.

## **Comparing Western Feminism and Islamic Women's Rights:**

The comparison between Western and Islamic women's rights is intricate and multifaceted, encompassing a broad array of comparative aspects. In this section, we will explore key points of comparison and contrast between Western women's rights and Islamic women's rights:

- Concept of Gender Equality:

Western women's rights are rooted in the philosophy of gender equality, championing equal rights and opportunities for both men and women. This principle is fundamental to Western democracies and is encapsulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which declares that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."<sup>1</sup>

Conversely, Islamic teachings view men and women as playing complementary roles in society, with specific responsibilities assigned to each. While some proponents of<sup>2</sup> Muslim women's rights advocate for gender equality within the confines of Islamic law, others perceive this idea as a Western concept incompatible with Islamic principles.<sup>3</sup>

#### • Clothing and Hijab:

A major point of divergence between Western and Islamic women's rights lies in their perspectives on clothing and hijab. Western women's rights movements frequently challenge traditional gender norms related to dress, addressing issues such as the sexualization and objectification of women's bodies. In contrast, Islamic teachings underscore the importance of hijab and modesty for both genders, often prescribing a specific dress code for women.<sup>4</sup> This has led to tensions between Islamic teachings and Western feminist values, particularly concerning the hijab and niqab.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, 1948

<sup>2</sup> Badran, M. (2009). *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*. One world Publications, p: 1-5.

<sup>3</sup> Khan, S. (2014). *Muslim women and feminism: An international perspective*. Routledge, p: 7-15.

<sup>4</sup> Ahmed, L. (2014). *A quiet revolution: The veil's resurgence, from the Middle East to America*. Yale University Press, p: 10-15.

#### • Family and Marriage:

Western feminism interrogates traditional gender roles within the family, challenging expectations that women should be primary caregivers for children. It also advocates for women's rights in marriage and divorce, seeking to ensure women's rights to choose a spouse and have equal rights in property and inheritance. Islamic teachings, however, highlight the importance of the family unit and the complementary roles of men and women within it. While Islamic law recognizes women's rights in marriage and permits divorce, there are concerns about its consistent and fair application in practice.<sup>5</sup>

#### • Political Participation:

The history of Western women's rights is intertwined with the fight for women's suffrage, and the movement continues to push for women's political participation and representation in governance and decision-making bodies. In contrast, Islamic teachings support women's engagement in public life, though within the bounds of Islamic values and principles. As a result, the level of<sup>6</sup> women's political participation varies significantly across Muslim-majority countries.

#### • Intersectionality:

Western and Islamic feminism differ notably in their approach to intersectionality. While

<sup>5</sup> Mir-Hosseini, Z. (2006). *Muslim women's quest for equality: Between Islamic law and feminism*. *Critical Inquiry*, 32(4), p: 630-640.

<sup>6</sup> Moghadam, V. M. (2002). *Islamic feminism and its discontents: Toward a resolution of the debate*. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 27(4), p: 1135-1150.

Western feminism has traditionally centered on the experiences of white, middle-class, heterosexual women, intersectional feminism recognizes the complex ways in which various forms of oppression intersect, affecting women with diverse identities differently. Islamic feminism, on the other hand, often operates within a broader social justice framework, addressing issues such as poverty, economic inequality, and racial or religious discrimination. This perspective<sup>7</sup> acknowledges the multifaceted nature of gender injustice and calls for a holistic approach to social justice.

• Sexual Rights:

The perspectives on sexual rights also diverge significantly between Western and Islamic women's rights. Western feminism has long advocated for women's autonomy over their bodies and their right to make decisions regarding their sexuality, including access to contraception and safe abortion services. Islamic teachings, however, place a strong emphasis on sexual morality and modesty, typically prohibiting sexual relations outside of marriage. This<sup>8</sup> discrepancy has given rise to substantial tensions, particularly on issues related to reproductive rights and LGBTQ+ rights.

• Patriarchal System:

Western feminism often identifies the patriarchal system as a primary source of gender inequality and seeks its dismantlement through various means, such

as challenging traditional gender roles and empowering women. Islamic teachings recognize the existence of patriarchal structures but tend to view them as a natural part of human society. Some Islamic feminists advocate for a reinterpretation of Islamic teachings within the framework of Islamic law to advance gender equality.<sup>9</sup>

• Autonomy:

The perspectives on women's autonomy also vary between Western and Islamic feminist discourse. Western feminism typically emphasizes individual rights and freedoms for women, whereas Islamic teachings prioritize collective responsibility.<sup>10</sup>

Further points of comparison between Islamic feminism and Western feminism include:

• Leadership and Representation:

Differences also manifest in the realm of women's leadership and representation. Western feminism has been steadfast in its pursuit of gender equality in leadership roles across various domains, including politics, business, and academia. In contrast, Islamic teachings underscore the importance of gender segregation and the hijab, often discouraging women from assuming public

<sup>7</sup> Mir-Hosseini, Z. (2014). Gender and equality in Muslim family law: Justice and ethics in the Islamic legal tradition. I.B. Tauris, p: 6-10.

<sup>8</sup> Shadid, W. A., & Koningsveld, P. S. (2002). Women and Islam: Critical concepts in sociology. Routledge, p: 141-150.

<sup>9</sup> Barlas, A. (2002). Believing women" in Islam: Unreading patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an. University of Texas Press, p: 3-15.

<sup>10</sup> Mahmood, S. (2005). Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject. Princeton University Press, p: 6-10.

leadership positions.<sup>11</sup> This results in a clear discrepancy between Islamic teachings and Western feminist values regarding women's political participation and representation.

- Legal Framework:

The approach to the legal framework also distinguishes Western from Islamic feminism. Western feminist movements commonly advocate for legal reforms to embed women's rights within legislation, addressing issues such as equal pay, reproductive rights, and protection against violence. Islamic teachings, conversely, provide a well-established legal framework that encompasses marriage, divorce, and inheritance, frequently with a focus on safeguarding family values. However,<sup>12</sup> within Islamic feminist circles, there is an ongoing debate about the potential for interpreting traditional Islamic law in ways that promote gender equality.

- Sexual and Reproductive Health:

Sexual and reproductive health represents another area of divergence. Western feminist movements champion women's access to contraception, safe and legal abortion, and comprehensive sexual education. Islamic teachings, in contrast, prioritize family values and procreation, generally discouraging sexual activities outside of marriage.<sup>13</sup>

- Women's Leadership:

Women's leadership is a pivotal aspect where Western and Islamic feminism diverge.

Western feminism advocates for women's leadership across various sectors, whereas Islamic teachings affirm the importance of moral leadership for both genders, acknowledging women's potential to lead in diverse realms.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, debates persist within Islamic communities about how traditional Islamic teachings might be interpreted to support women's leadership roles.

In conclusion, the comparison between Western and Islamic feminism is a complex and vital subject. Despite their differences, it is crucial to recognize that both paradigms aim to advance women's rights in their respective contexts. By exploring these comparative points, we gain deeper insight into the challenges and opportunities that women face across diverse cultures and contexts. In the following sections, we will delve further into the areas of convergence between Western feminism and Islamic feminism.

### **Similarities Between Western and Islamic Women's Rights:**

When we compare the Western women's rights movements and Islamic teachings, it becomes evident that there are notable similarities in their objectives. Both Western women's rights movements and Islamic teachings are dedicated to empowering women and advocating for gender equality.

Western women's rights movements fundamentally challenge patriarchal

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<sup>11</sup> Mahmood, S. (2005). *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton University Press, p: 6-10.

<sup>12</sup> Mir-Hosseini, Z. (2006). *Muslim women's quest for equality: Between Islamic law and feminism*. *Critical Inquiry*, 32(4), p: 640-645.

<sup>13</sup> Mernissi, F. (2011). *Beyond the veil: Male-female dynamics in modern Muslim society*. Indiana University Press, p: 96-102.

<sup>14</sup> Moghadam, V. M. (2005). *Modernizing women: Gender and social change in the Middle East*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, p: 118-124.

structures, advocating for women's rights in areas such as education, employment, and politics. They strive to confront social norms that restrict women's opportunities and experiences, promoting women's full participation in all facets of life. Islamic teachings, on the other hand, acknowledge the inherent value and autonomy of women, advocating for their empowerment through education, economic opportunities, and active participation in social and political spheres. Both Western women's rights and Islamic teachings recognize that gender inequality is a pervasive issue, spanning diverse cultures and contexts, and assert that advocacy and action are vital in addressing this challenge.

One commonality between Western women's rights movements and Islamic teachings is their recognition of women's roles in society. Both advocate for women's active participation in public life. Western women's rights movements have historically challenged traditional gender roles, championing equal participation for women in all life's aspects. Islamic teachings also acknowledge women's valuable contributions to society and promote their active engagement in public life, including in political and governance spheres.

Additionally, both Western women's rights movements and Islamic teachings place a strong emphasis on women's autonomy. Western movements have persistently confronted patriarchal attitudes that limit women's choices and freedoms, while Islamic teachings affirm women's capacity for decision-making, encouraging them to

exercise their autonomy across all life domains. Consensus exists between Western women's rights and Islamic teachings that women ought to have the right to chart their own paths, making autonomous choices free from undue influence or coercion.

In summation, while distinctive approaches are apparent in promoting gender equality between Western women's rights movements and Islamic teachings, significant similarities also exist. Both paradigms are unwavering in their commitment to enhancing women's rights and opportunities across various life aspects, working tirelessly to empower women and promote gender equality.

• **Struggle Against Patriarchal System:**

Both Western feminist movements and Islamic women's rights movements share a history of struggling against patriarchal principles and values. Western feminist movements have often challenged patriarchal social structures that reinforce gender inequality, while Islamic women's rights movements have sought to interpret Islamic teachings in ways that challenge patriarchal interpretations and promote gender equality.<sup>15</sup>

• **Advocacy for Women's Education:**

Both Western feminist movements and Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of education for women. Western feminism advocates for women's access to education and equal educational opportunities, whereas Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of education for both men and women,

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<sup>15</sup> Badran, M. (2009). *Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives*. Syracuse University Press, p: 15-20.

encouraging women's participation in various fields of knowledge and learning.<sup>16</sup>

- **Struggle Against Gender-Based Violence:**

Both Western and Islamic women's rights movements have struggled against gender-based violence. Western feminism often focuses on issues such as domestic violence, sexual assaults, and harassment, while Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of protecting women's physical safety and dignity, categorically prohibiting all forms of violence against women.<sup>17</sup>

- **Advocacy for Economically Empowering Women:**

Both Western teachings and Islamic teachings advocate for the economic empowerment of women. Western feminist movements have often challenged gender-based economic inequality and advocated for women's access to economic resources and opportunities, while Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of women's financial independence and encourage their participation in various economic activities.<sup>18</sup>

- **Promotion of Women's Political Participation:**

Both Western feminist movements and Islamic teachings advocate for women's participation in politics. Western feminist

movements often challenge patriarchal political structures and work towards enabling women's access to political power, whereas Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of women's participation in decision-making processes and encourage their involvement in political matters.<sup>19</sup>

- **Critique of Gender Stereotyping:**

Both Western feminism and Islamic teachings challenge gender stereotypes. Western feminist movements frequently criticize societal expectations and assumptions about gender roles and behaviors, while Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of treating men and women equally and challenge traditional gender stereotypes.<sup>20</sup>

- **Advocacy for Women's Reproductive Rights:**

Both Western feminist movements and Islamic women's rights movements advocate for women's reproductive rights. Western feminism often focuses on issues like access to contraception and abortion, while Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of women's health and well-being, promoting women's rights to make decisions about their own bodies.<sup>21</sup>

- **Emphasis on Women's Human Rights:**

<sup>16</sup> Mernissi, F. (1991). *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. Basic Books, p: 29-33.

<sup>17</sup> Khan, S. (2010). *A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Islamic Jurisprudence, Volume 3*. Darussalam Publishers, p: 23-26.

<sup>18</sup> Afshar, H., & Barrientos, S. (1999). *Women, globalization and economic empowerment*. Routledge, p: 33-37.

<sup>19</sup> Ahmed, L. (2015). *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. Yale University Press, p: 96-102.

<sup>20</sup> Moghadam, V. M. (2005). *Globalizing women: Transnational feminist networks*. JHU Press, p: 55-58.

<sup>21</sup> Badran, M. (2009). *Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives*. Syracuse University Press, p: 27-30.



Both movements emphasize the importance of women's human rights. Western feminist movements frequently advocate for women's rights as human rights, whereas Islamic teachings promote the notion that women inherently possess dignity and value as human beings, deserving of respect and equality.

- Support for Women's Education:

Both Western feminist movements and Islamic teachings stress the importance of education for women. Western feminist movements often challenge societal attitudes that limit women's access to education, while Islamic teachings encourage education for both men and women, emphasizing the significance of acquiring knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

- Criticism of Violence Against Women:

Both Western feminist movements and Islamic teachings criticize violence against women. Western feminism frequently challenges societal norms that perpetuate violence against women and advocates for laws to protect women from abuse, whereas Islamic teachings condemn all forms of violence, including violence against women, emphasizing the importance of treating women with respect and dignity.<sup>23</sup>

- Support for Women's Health and Well-being:

Both Western feminism and Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of women's health and well-being. Western feminism often challenges societal norms that limit women's access to healthcare, while Islamic teachings stress the importance of taking care of one's health and recognize the need to provide women with appropriate healthcare services.<sup>24</sup>

- Recognition of Women's Role in Society:

Both Western and Islamic women's rights recognize the significant role of women in society. Western feminism often challenges traditional gender roles and advocates for equal participation of women in all spheres of life, while Islamic teachings acknowledge the contribution of women in society and promote their participation in public life, including politics and governance.<sup>25</sup>

- Emphasis on Women's Autonomy:

Both Western feminism and Islamic teachings emphasize women's autonomy. Western feminism frequently challenges patriarchal attitudes that restrict women's choices and actions, while Islamic teachings recognize women's decision-making abilities and encourage them to exercise their autonomy in all aspects of life.<sup>26</sup>

- Recognition of Intersectionality:

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<sup>22</sup> Shaikh, S. (2009). Women's Issues in Islam. Islamic Research Foundation International, Inc, p: 23-26.

<sup>23</sup> Barlas, A. (2002). Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an. University of Texas Press, p: 47-50.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Ali, N., & Pratt, N. K. (2009). Women and War in the Middle East: Transnational Perspectives. Zed Books, p: 20-23.

<sup>25</sup> Karam, A. (2014). Women, Islamisms and the State: Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt. Springer, p: 35-38.

<sup>26</sup> Mernissi, F. (1991). The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam. Basic Books, p: 35-38.

Both Western feminist movements and Islamic teachings recognize the interconnectedness of women's experiences. Western feminism often emphasizes the diversity of women's experiences and challenges the idea of a universal "woman's experience," while Islamic teachings acknowledge the inter sectionality with other identities, such as race, class, and ethnicity.<sup>27</sup>

• Recognition of Women's Sexual Rights:

Both Western feminism and Islamic teachings recognize the importance of women's sexual rights. Western feminism often challenges patriarchal attitudes regarding sexuality and advocates for women's sexual autonomy, while Islamic teachings recognize women's sexual rights within the context of marriage and emphasize the importance of consent and mutual respect in sexual relationships.<sup>28</sup>

There is no doubt that there are differences in the approaches of Western feminism and Islamic teachings in promoting gender equality, but there are also several important similarities between them. Both movements recognize the importance of empowering women and advocate for their participation in various aspects of life. They both seek to challenge patriarchal structures and social norms that limit women's opportunities and experiences, and they promote women's rights and autonomy.

**Differences between Western and Islamic women's rights:**

When we compare Western and Islamic women's rights, it becomes evident that there

are significant differences in terms of their objectives, perspectives, and values. Both strive to promote gender equality but do so with different means and priorities.

One major difference between Western women's rights and Islamic teachings is their approach to gender equality. Western women's rights have often focused on promoting individual rights and freedoms, whereas Islamic teachings traditionally emphasize the importance of community and social harmony. This has led to different priorities in terms of promoting and empowering women's rights. For example, Western women's rights movements have often prioritized access to education and employment for women, while Islamic teachings have placed a greater emphasis on the role of women in caregiving and nurturing within the family.

Another major difference lies in their views on gender and sexual identity. Western women's rights movements have often been associated with the rights of the LGBTQ+ community and the promotion of gender fluidity, whereas Islamic teachings have traditionally emphasized the importance of gender roles and sexual ethics. This has led to tensions between Western women's rights movements and Islamic communities, particularly in the context of debates over gender and sexual orientation.

In conclusion, while both Western women's rights and Islamic teachings aim to promote gender equality, they do so with different means and priorities. These differences can be traced back to their distinct historical,

<sup>27</sup> Abu-Lughod, L. (2013). *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*. Harvard University Press, p: 64-67.

<sup>28</sup> Hassan, R. (2012). *Gender and Islam in Africa: Rights, Sexuality, and Law*. The International African Library. Cambridge University Press, p: 91-94.

cultural, and ideological roots. By recognizing and understanding these differences, we can engage in productive dialogue and work together towards the common goal of promoting gender equality for all women, regardless of their cultural or religious background.

Here are some key differences between Western and Islamic women's rights:

- Perspective on Equality:

Western women's rights and Islamic teachings adopt different perspectives in achieving gender equality. Western women's rights focus on individual rights and freedoms, while Islamic teachings prioritize the roles and responsibilities of women in the family and community. According to Nussbaum:

"Western feminism focuses on political and legal reforms that promote women's autonomy, whereas Islamic teachings emphasize social and cultural change."<sup>29</sup>

- View on Gender Roles:

Western women's rights aim to dismantle traditional gender roles and principles, whereas Islamic teachings promote the traditional roles and responsibilities of women within the family. As Ahmed and Rahman state:

"Islamic teachings prioritize the importance of women as caregivers and nurturers, while

Western feminism emphasizes women's access to education and employment opportunities."<sup>30</sup>

- Perspective on Gender and Gender Identity:

Western women's rights are associated with the rights of LGBTQ+ and the promotion of gender fluidity, while Islamic teachings have traditionally emphasized the importance of gender roles and sexual ethics. As Bano (2016) has stated:

"This has led to tensions between Western feminist movements and Islamic communities, particularly in the context of debates around gender and sexual orientation."<sup>31</sup>

- Role of Religion:

Religion plays a different role in Western women's rights and Islamic teachings. While Western women's rights often view religion as a means of oppression, Islamic teachings strive to use religious and cultural means to assert women's rights and empowerment. As Moghadam (2002) wrote:

"Islamic feminism seeks to reinterpret religious texts and traditions to promote gender equality, while Western feminism emphasizes secularism and the separation of religion and politics."<sup>32</sup>

- Concept of Equality:

<sup>29</sup> Nussbaum, M. C. (2000). *Women and human development: The capabilities approach*. Cambridge University Press, p: 90.

<sup>30</sup> Ahmad, Z., & Rehman, M. (2016). Islam, feminism and women's rights: Exploring some of the common misunderstandings and misconceptions. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 24(1), p: 18.

<sup>31</sup> Bano, S. (2016). Women's rights and Islam: From "traditional" to "modern" interpretations. *Global Discourse*, 6(4), 622-635, p: 627.

<sup>32</sup> Moghadam, V. M. (2002). Islamic feminism and its discontents: Toward a resolution of the debate. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 27(4), 1135-1171. Page 1150.

Western women's rights often emphasize gender equality in all areas of life including the workplace, politics, and family, whereas Islamic women's rights acknowledge the differences between men and women, emphasizing complementary equality instead of outright equality. According to Saba Mahmood, an Islamic women's rights scholar:

“Islamic feminism posits that equality is not achieved by erasing difference, but rather by recognizing difference and by ensuring equity in treatment and outcomes.”<sup>33</sup>

• Role of Men:

Western women's rights often perceive men as a source of oppression and strive to challenge and weaken patriarchal structures. In contrast, Islamic women's rights recognize the importance of men's participation in building a fair society. As stated by Amina Wadud, an Islamic women's rights scholar:

“Islamic feminism emphasizes the role of men in the process of creating a gender-just society, since men have been positioned as the gatekeepers of women's rights.”<sup>34</sup>

• Attitude Towards Sexuality:

Western women's rights are related to sexual freedom and women's right to freely express their sexuality. However, Islamic women's rights have a different perspective on sexuality, emphasizing modesty and chastity. As explained by Leila Ahmed, an Islamic women's rights scholar:

“Islamic feminism seeks to reconcile women's sexual autonomy with Islamic norms of modesty, by emphasizing that women's sexuality is not something to be ashamed of, but something to be respected and protected.”<sup>35</sup>

• Perspective on Modesty:

A significant difference between Western and Islamic women's rights is their perspective on the hijab. While Western women's rights often emphasize the right to freely express oneself and dress according to one's choice, Islamic women's rights place greater emphasis on modest attire as a means of protection and respect. As Kecia Ali says:

“Modest dress practices among Muslims are an expression of religiosity and piety, and one that distinguishes them from the dominant secular culture of the West.”<sup>36</sup>

• Perspective on Gender Equality:

Western and Islamic women's rights have different perspectives on gender equality. While Western women's rights emphasize the importance of achieving complete gender equality in all areas of life, including the workplace and politics, Islamic women's rights focus on the distinct but complementary roles of men and women in society. As Fatima Mernissi has stated: “In Islam, gender complementarity is the norm,

<sup>33</sup> Mahmood, S. (2005). *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton University Press, p: 33

<sup>34</sup> Wadud, A. (2015). *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*. Oneworld Publications, p: 60

<sup>35</sup> Ahmed, L. (2013). *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*. Yale University Press, p: 178

<sup>36</sup> Ali, K. (2014). *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence*. Oneworld Publications, p: 192

whereas gender equality is seen as an anomaly."<sup>37</sup>

- Family Role and Values:

There is a difference in emphasis on family roles and values between Western women's rights and Islamic women's rights. Western women's rights focus on individual autonomy and empowerment, whereas Islamic teachings place significant emphasis on familial roles and responsibilities. According to Islam, the family is the foundation of society, and women are expected to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers over other pursuits.

- Dress Code:

Another major difference between Western women's rights and Islamic women's rights is the issue of dress code. Western women's rights often advocate for the freedom to wear clothing of one's choice, whereas Islamic teachings suggest modest attire for both men and women. Women are expected to cover their bodies and hair in public places and dress modestly around men who are not family members.

- Leadership and Authority:

There are distinct differences in attitudes towards women's leadership and authority between Western feminism and Islamic women's rights. Western feminism advocates for gender equality in all sectors, including leadership positions, whereas Islamic teachings delineate separate roles and responsibilities for men and women. In Islam, men are considered the leaders and

protectors of women, with specific privileges and responsibilities assigned to them.

- Divorce and Custody:

Western feminism and Islamic women's rights also differ in their perspectives on issues of divorce and custody. Western feminism often advocates for no-fault divorce and equal custody rights, whereas Islamic teachings propose specific procedures for divorce and custody, prioritizing the best interests of the children and the stability of the family unit. Women in Islam have the right to initiate divorce, but there are specific guidelines and conditions that must be met.

- Economic Rights:

There is a variance in how Western feminism and Islamic women's rights view women's economic rights. Western feminism focuses on women's economic independence and equal pay for equal work, while Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of men's financial responsibility towards their families. Women in Islam have the right to inheritance and property, but they are not obligated to provide financial support for their families.

The aforementioned points provide a starting point for understanding the significant differences between Western feminism and Islamic women's rights. By examining these differences, we can better comprehend the cultural, historical, and ideological foundations of these two movements, and work towards promoting greater

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<sup>37</sup> Mernissi, F. (1991). *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. Basic Books, p: 2

understanding and respect between the different perspectives.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, this research and analysis of women's rights within Western and Islamic contexts underscores a plethora of critical differences and insights, reflecting the intricate nature of gender equality across diverse cultural and religious landscapes. In the Western paradigm, the emphasis lies heavily on individuality and the dismantling of traditional gender norms, fostering an environment that advocates for personal freedom, reproductive rights, and active participation in public and political spheres. This stands in contrast to the Islamic approach, where women's rights are navigated through the lens of familial values and religious principles, seeking to harmonize traditional roles with Islamic teachings.

The Islamic framework, while upholding the sanctity of family and life, also recognizes the importance of women's active participation in society, though it is bounded by religious and cultural norms. This is

evident in the encouragement of "Muslim women's autonomy" and their involvement in shaping Islamic jurisprudence. The discourse on sexuality and personal expression further delineates these differences, with Western ideals promoting sexual freedom and diverse forms of self-expression through clothing, as opposed to the Islamic emphasis on modesty and purity, often manifested in the choice to wear hijabs or abayas.

In summation, this comparative analysis reveals the multifaceted nature of women's rights movements across Western and Islamic contexts, highlighting the distinct pathways they traverse in pursuit of gender equality. Recognizing and respecting these variations is imperative, as it paves the way for a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of women's rights globally. This, in turn, fosters a dialogue that is rooted in mutual respect and a comprehensive appreciation of the diverse strategies employed by different cultures and religions in their quest for gender equality.

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