American Muslim Women: Feminism, Equality and Difference

Amber Coniglio | Western Michigan University
Introduction

- Why American Muslim Women?
- How did this project get started?
- Initial theories/biases
Overview

- American Muslim Women

- This project examines the intersectionality, gender roles, and Islamic feminism found with America
Zarinah Al-Amin Naeem and “cultural wombs”
  – Womb of Islam, Womb of America

What identities do these women hold:
  – Mothers, Daughters, Americans, Muslims, Teachers, Activists, Leaders

What influences these identities outside of Islam:
  – Race, Ethnicity, Place of Origin, Education, Class, Age, Sexuality
On Friday March 18, 2005 Dr. Amina Wadud gave the Friday khutba and prayer
  – This was not the first time a woman lead these religious practices, but it was highly publicized

American Muslim women could see themselves in a leadership role
Space: Physical and metaphorical space within the Muslim community
- Including mosques, prayer spaces, and other shared spaces
- Many mosques are separated by gender
- This separation makes some American Muslim women feel segregated and discriminated against
- This separation is seen as a positive for some American Muslim women
Finding Strength in the ‘Mother of Islam”

- Hagar “Mother of Islam”
  - Her story, who was she, why was she significant
  - Ibrahim, Ishmael, and Mecca

- Woman of faith, perseverance, and sustainability
Many interpretations of the Quran have been done by men, lacking a woman’s perspective.

Different ways to read the Quran: traditional, reactive, holistic.

- Wadud’s hermeneutic model:
  - context in which the Quran was written
  - grammatical composition
  - the text as a whole

- Story of creation in Islam

- Story of banishment from the Garden of Eden in Islam
Race and culture (country) of origin do shape ideologies of gender roles.

Two major cities for case study:
- African Americans in Chicago
- South Asians in Atlanta

Me and the Mosque
- More accounts of race and culture (country) of origin shaping gender roles
Creating Novel Spaces: Opportunities for Space and Leadership

- The Women’s Mosque of America
  - Founded in 2015
  - Women Only
  - Prayers and Sermons lead by women
  - Physical space for women
  - Mental and spiritual space for women to grow in their faith
Muslim Women Organization (MWO)
- Founded in 1993
- “serve the community broadly, but also to present a positive image of Muslim women”
Conquering the Stereotype

- Community outreach with organizations like MWO
- American women are converting to Islam now more than ever
  - One of the greatest victories in modern day Islam
Islamic scholars, activists, and feminists are going to continue to learn, expand, and question the norms within their communities.
References