



# 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

# Intersectionality: How Cultural Wombs Shape Muslim American Women

- 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



## The Prayer Heard Around the World

- 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



## What Some Women Want: Space, Leadership, and Voice

- 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

# The Quran: New Interpretations and Personal Understandings

- 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





# Ethnicity and Race: How They Affect Opinions and Ideals

- 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

# Islam: A Motive for Activism



- 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

# Conclusion

- Islamic scholars, activists, and feminists are going to continue to learn, expand, and question the norms within their communities

# Questions & answers



# References

- Grewal, Zareena. 2014. *Islam is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority*. New York: NYU Press.
- Hammer, Juliane. 2008. "Identity, Authority, and Activism: American Muslim Women Approach the Qur`an". *The Muslim World*. 98(4):443-464).
- Hammer, Juliane. 2012. *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Activism: More than a Prayer*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Hartford Institute. 2011. "The American Mosque 2011: Report Number 3 from the US Mosque Study 2011: Women and the American Mosque." Retrieved April 23, 2018 (<http://www.hartfordinstitute.org/The-American-Mosque-Report-3.pdf>).
- Karim, Jamiillah. 2008. *American Muslim Women: Negotiating Race, Class, and Gender Within the Ummah* New York: NYU Press.
- Lamrabet, Asma. 2016. *Women in the Qur'an: An Emancipatory Reading*. Leicestershire: Square View.
- McGinty, Anna M. 2012. "'Faith Drives Me to Be an Activist:' Two American Muslim Women on Faith, Outreach, and Gender". *The Muslim World*. 102(2):371-389.
- Naeem, Zarinah El- Amin. 2009. *Jihad of the Soul: Singlehood and the Search for Love in Muslim America*. Kalamazoo: Niyah Press.
- Nawaz, Zarqa. *Me and the Mosque*. Documentary. Directed by Nawaz, Zarqa. Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 2005.
- Root, Kristen. 2015. "Women-Only Mosque in Los Angeles in the First of its Kind in the U.S.," *Women in the World*, July 17.
- Seager, J., Lewis, 2003. *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World*. New York: Penguin Books
- Schmidt, Garbi. 2004. *Islam in Urban America: Sunni Muslims in Chicago*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- The Women's Mosque of America. 2018. Retrieved April 5, 2018 (<http://womensmosque.com/faq/>).
- Wadud, Amina. 2006. *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*. Bloomsbury: Oneworld Publications.
- Wadud, Amina. 1992. *Quran and Woman*. Selangor: Penerbut Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd.