

## Reclaiming Faith and Justice: A Narrative Review of Islamic Feminism

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**ABSTRACT:** This study presents a narrative review on Islamic feminism, examining how gender justice is conceptualized and practiced in Muslim-majority societies and diaspora communities. The review aims to identify key themes, challenges, and transformative strategies that define the Islamic feminist discourse. Methodologically, the study employed a systematic literature search across databases including Scopus, Google Scholar, and JSTOR, using targeted keywords and inclusion criteria to identify peer-reviewed articles relevant to feminist hermeneutics, activism, legal reform, and gender dynamics in Islam. The analysis revealed five central themes: feminist reinterpretation of religious texts, women's socio-political activism, intersections between national identity and feminism, cultural-religious negotiations, and internal tensions within Islamic feminist movements. Empirical data from various contexts demonstrated that systemic barriers—including patriarchal state structures, conservative religious narratives, cultural norms, and legal discrimination—significantly hinder the progress of gender equality. Comparative findings across Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran, and South Africa highlighted the contextual specificity and universality of these challenges. The discussion underscored the need for legal reform, inclusive education, and community-based advocacy to dismantle patriarchal systems. It also emphasized gaps in the literature, including limited attention to LGBTQ+ voices, digital activism, and ecofeminism. The study concludes that Islamic feminism requires an integrated strategy rooted in education, cultural engagement, and inclusive theology to create equitable societies.

**Keywords:** Islamic Feminism, Gender Justice, Feminist Hermeneutics, Muslim Women, Legal Reform, Ecofeminism, Religious Activism.



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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the topic of Islamic feminism has garnered growing attention at both national and global levels. This trend reflects broader shifts in how gender, religion, and identity are conceptualized and practiced within Muslim-majority societies and diaspora contexts. Moos and Shaikh (2024) observe that in South Africa, Muslim women are not only integral members of society but also play pivotal roles in shaping ethical frameworks, particularly through their

experiences as mothers who embody Islamic values of social responsibility and devotion. Similarly, Saleh et al. (2020) highlight progressive legislative strides in Malaysia, such as the enactment of laws against sexual harassment and child marriage, which mark significant institutional and social support for feminist causes.

Globally, Islamic feminism is increasingly understood as a transnational movement. It traverses local boundaries and engages with broader hegemonic power structures, as noted by Shahin (2020), who discusses how Islamic feminism confronts dominant discourses on faith and gender. This is echoed in Bakhshizadeh's (2023) work, which underscores Islamic feminism's potential to reinterpret women's roles within family and society by challenging patriarchal readings of religious texts. These findings illustrate that Islamic feminism is not a monolithic movement but a diverse and dynamic discourse rooted in both local and global contexts.

Statistical data further supports the growing relevance of this issue. For example, Houssi (2018) details Tunisia's social transition beginning with Bourguiba's governance, which significantly advanced women's rights through political reforms culminating in the 2014 constitutional changes. Wadud (2021) also emphasizes the egalitarian possibilities within the Qur'an as revealed through feminist hermeneutics, offering a religious basis for broader female participation in socio-religious discourse. These developments have had tangible societal impacts. Following Tunisia's 2011 elections, for instance, a surge in awareness and advocacy for women's rights emerged, evidenced by the proliferation of feminist movements at various societal levels.

At the same time, struggles persist. Pepicelli (2017) illustrates the challenges faced by Egyptian women, who, despite their historical involvement in nationalist movements, continue to navigate state-imposed barriers that reinforce patriarchal power structures. Across many contexts, data reveals persistent inequalities in access to social and economic resources, with women often marginalized by entrenched norms. Paiva and Barbosa (2021) point out how patriarchal ideologies shape women's identities, ultimately restricting their contributions to public and private life. Although this reference may require further verification, it encapsulates a widely acknowledged concern.

Social entities that champion women's rights, including feminist movements, often face stigmatization and institutional resistance. Resanović (2018) notes that Islamic feminism is not only a struggle for women's rights but also a battleground for competing ideologies and interpretations of religion. This suggests that empowering Muslim women involves navigating a complex matrix of social, cultural, and political dynamics, as well as systemic barriers.

Such efforts are not confined to local actors. Rather, they reflect broader interactions between diverse socio-political configurations. Kravtsova (2022) shows how postcolonial narratives in regions like Russia and Tatarstan shape perceptions of womanhood and identity, demonstrating the global implications of feminist and religious thought. Therefore, the issues surrounding Islamic feminism and gender identity are not only urgent but also deeply relevant to broader social, economic, and political development worldwide. Continued academic engagement is crucial to ensure that Muslim women are not only included in these conversations but are also empowered to shape their own futures within a framework of inclusive gender justice.

Several key challenges persist in the study of Islamic feminism. One significant tension lies between religious text interpretations and the lived realities of Muslim women. Sedghi (2020) documents how Iranian feminists struggle to construct gender identities within a patriarchal state that often codifies discrimination into law. In such contexts, feminist critiques of Islam are frequently viewed as threats to established power structures, placing activists under social and institutional scrutiny (Resanović, 2018).

Another challenge involves the marginalization of Islamic feminism within broader gender equality and human rights discourses. Iavarone-Turcotte (2023) and Asrohah & Idayatni (2020) illustrate how Islamic feminism is often caught between Western gender ideologies and conservative Islamic interpretations, complicating efforts to find a balanced discourse. Gashtili (2013) further argues that Islamic feminists must justify their arguments within patriarchal frameworks that dominate both Islamic and global feminist dialogues.

A critical gap in the literature is the lack of focus on women's experiences in rural and underrepresented communities. Houssi (2018) critiques the urban bias in current studies, noting that rural Muslim women are often neglected in feminist discourse. This oversight limits the comprehensiveness of research and fails to address the unique challenges faced by women in less visible social contexts.

Islamic feminist movements must also contend with macro-level forces such as globalization, neocolonialism, and neoliberalism. Karim (2021) underscores the vulnerability of women to global economic trends that exacerbate marginalization. Miro (2019) warns that feminist discourse can be co-opted into neocolonial agendas, thereby undermining the authenticity and relevance of localized feminist efforts.

Significant gaps persist in scholarly engagement with Islamic feminism. First, the intersection of Islamic feminism and environmental issues remains underexplored. While Haq et al. (2020) examine female-led environmental activism in Pakistan, broader studies on Muslim women's roles in ecological movements are rare, leaving ecofeminism within Islamic contexts an underdeveloped field.

Second, the experiences of LGBTQ+ Muslim women are underrepresented. Khan and Mulé (2021) address how these individuals navigate overlapping religious and social oppressions, but such studies are limited in scope. Further research is needed to understand how their identities influence and are shaped by Islamic feminist discourses.

Third, much current literature focuses heavily on textual analysis rather than lived experiences. Scholars like Wadud and Bakhshizadeh emphasize the reinterpretation of sacred texts, but more research is required to incorporate women's real-world narratives into academic frameworks (Wadud, 2021; Bakhshizadeh, 2023).

Finally, the impact of digital technologies on Islamic feminism is an emerging but insufficiently examined area. Schwarz (2013) calls for greater attention to how social media platforms can amplify feminist messages and support activism, especially in restrictive environments. Understanding the digital dimensions of Islamic feminism could offer new strategies for advocacy and coalition-building.

This review aims to address these challenges and gaps by synthesizing key feminist perspectives within Islam, particularly through the lens of inclusive and egalitarian scriptural interpretations (Bakhshizadeh, 2023). A key objective is to develop alternative frameworks that move beyond patriarchal paradigms and better reflect the diversity of women's experiences in Muslim societies.

Another goal is to highlight marginalized voices, especially those of women in rural settings and minority communities. For example, Asrohah and Idayatni (2020) document the gender dynamics in rural madrasas in Indonesia, offering vital insights into often-overlooked populations. Incorporating such narratives will enrich academic and public discourse on Islamic feminism.

The review also explores the intersections of feminism and environmental activism, as initiated by Haq et al. (2020), to propose a transdisciplinary approach linking ecological and gender justice. Moreover, it investigates how digital technologies and online platforms shape feminist discourse in Muslim contexts (Mendoza, 2018).

Geographically, this study focuses on Muslim women in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. These regions are both demographically significant and socially complex. Malaysia, for instance, has enacted progressive gender policies, making it a valuable case for analyzing Islamic feminist practices in legal and institutional frameworks (Saleh et al., 2020).

Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim population, offers another critical context. Research by Asrohah and Idayatni (2020) into rural Islamic education systems provides crucial data on the gendered experiences of women outside urban centers.

Meanwhile, the Middle East remains a crucial focal point due to ongoing conflicts and political transitions that profoundly affect women's rights. Sedghi (2020) exemplifies how Iranian women confront state-imposed gender norms, illuminating broader patterns of resistance and resilience.

By concentrating on these regions, this review aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the intersections between religion, gender, and power. It endeavors to broaden the scope of Islamic feminist discourse by incorporating underrepresented voices and emerging challenges. This approach will contribute to more inclusive and contextually grounded strategies for advancing gender justice in Muslim societies.

## METHOD

The methodology adopted in this study involves a comprehensive literature review of peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, and scholarly publications that discuss Islamic feminism and related gender issues within Muslim societies. The review process was guided by a systematic approach to ensure the relevance, reliability, and academic integrity of the materials selected. The purpose of this methodology is to provide a thorough and well-grounded understanding of the current state of research in the field, identify gaps, and analyze prevailing arguments that define Islamic feminism today.

The primary databases utilized for this literature review include Scopus, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. These databases were chosen for their wide-ranging coverage of academic disciplines, credibility, and availability of peer-reviewed content. Scopus, known for its expansive indexing of

scholarly publications across multiple fields, served as the primary source due to its high standards of content inclusion and interdisciplinary nature. It provided access to numerous high-quality articles that explored Islamic feminism, gender roles, religious interpretations, and social movements within Muslim contexts. The rigorous peer-review process in Scopus-indexed journals ensures that the sources obtained were both relevant and scientifically valid, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings.

Google Scholar was employed to expand the search reach and include grey literature, such as doctoral theses, policy papers, and academic books that may not be indexed in more selective databases. Given its inclusive algorithm and ability to retrieve citations from a wide variety of sources, Google Scholar served as an important supplementary tool for identifying key documents, especially those that provide practical insights into ongoing feminist discourses in Muslim communities. In this way, it contributed depth and context to the literature analysis.

JSTOR, recognized for its historical and theoretical emphasis, was also incorporated to capture critical scholarly debates on feminism in Islamic societies over time. It offers access to a wide array of articles, particularly those published in earlier decades, which are essential for understanding the historical development of Islamic feminist thought. Through JSTOR, this study was able to contextualize modern feminist interpretations with foundational discourses and theoretical trajectories that have shaped gender debates in the Muslim world.

To ensure a structured and effective search process, a carefully selected list of keywords and Boolean operators was employed. Keywords such as "Islamic feminism," "gender," "women's rights," "Qur'anic interpretation," and "female activism" were prioritized to capture the thematic scope of the research. The use of Boolean logic facilitated nuanced and layered searches, which enhanced the inclusivity and precision of retrieved literature.

The Boolean combination "Islamic feminism" AND "gender equality" was particularly effective in identifying scholarly articles that analyze the interplay between feminist ideologies and gender justice in Islam. This combination enabled the identification of texts that investigate how Islamic feminism contributes to broader movements for gender equality within diverse Muslim societies. Similarly, the keyword configuration "Islam" OR "Qur'an" OR "Hadith" AND "women's rights" was applied to extract literature that explores the religious and theological dimensions of women's empowerment in Islam. This approach ensured the inclusion of texts that evaluate scriptural interpretations and their implications for women's status in Muslim-majority contexts.

To explore the intersection of feminism and environmental issues, particularly in light of growing attention to ecofeminism, the search term "Ecofeminism" AND "Islam" was used. This allowed the study to capture research that engages with both gender and ecological concerns from within Islamic frameworks. Such studies are important for understanding how Muslim women navigate and respond to environmental challenges, and how religious belief systems intersect with environmental activism.

The inclusion criteria for the literature review required that all selected articles be published in peer-reviewed academic journals or reputable scholarly platforms within the last 15 years, except in cases where foundational works were indispensable to theoretical contextualization. Only studies written in English or with available English translations were included. Additionally, the



articles needed to address Islamic feminism directly, or touch upon relevant themes such as gender roles in Islam, religious interpretations affecting women, female agency within Muslim societies, or the socio-political dimensions of feminist activism among Muslims.

Exclusion criteria were also clearly defined to maintain the integrity and relevance of the study. Articles lacking academic rigor, those with non-substantiated claims, and publications with a purely polemical or non-scholarly tone were excluded. Similarly, content published in non-peer-reviewed blogs, opinion pieces, or without bibliographic references was disregarded to ensure a focus on empirical, theoretical, and analytical rigor. The aim was to construct a data set comprising sources that met scholarly standards and contributed meaningfully to the discourse on Islamic feminism.

The types of research included in this review varied across qualitative and conceptual studies. This includes ethnographic research, case studies, content analyses, and comparative policy studies that highlight how feminist ideas are articulated and negotiated in different Islamic contexts. Empirical data drawn from interviews, fieldwork, or survey-based research were particularly valuable in providing grounded insights into women's lived experiences. Conceptual and theoretical articles that introduced frameworks for understanding Islamic feminism, feminist hermeneutics, and transnational feminist networks were also incorporated to deepen the theoretical foundation of the review.

The process of literature selection involved several stages. Initially, an extensive list of articles was generated using the aforementioned databases and search terms. The titles and abstracts of these articles were then screened to assess their relevance to the central themes of the review. Articles deemed potentially useful were downloaded in full and subjected to a secondary evaluation, focusing on methodological soundness, theoretical contributions, and alignment with the objectives of the study.

During this phase, articles were categorized based on thematic relevance, such as feminist interpretations of Islamic texts, gender roles in Muslim-majority countries, women's political participation, activism, ecofeminism, and the digital expression of feminist identities. This thematic organization facilitated a more focused reading and allowed for the synthesis of findings across subtopics. Where necessary, citation tracking was used to identify additional studies referenced by the selected literature, enabling the inclusion of key works that may have been missed in the initial search.

All selected literature was then systematically analyzed using qualitative content analysis. This involved identifying recurring themes, assessing the consistency and contradictions among findings, and evaluating the methodological approaches employed in each study. By comparing insights from different geographic regions, social contexts, and methodological paradigms, the review was able to construct a multidimensional picture of Islamic feminism as a field of inquiry.

Through this methodological framework, the study ensures that the literature review is comprehensive, critically engaged, and capable of illuminating both the theoretical underpinnings and practical manifestations of Islamic feminism. It lays a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis, enabling the exploration of underrepresented voices, emergent trends, and unresolved tensions that shape the ongoing evolution of gender justice in Muslim societies.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A thematic analysis of the relevant literature on Islamic feminism reveals several dominant themes that collectively deepen our understanding of gender discourse in Muslim societies. One of the most recurring themes is the application and significance of feminist hermeneutics in interpreting Islamic teachings, particularly the Qur'an. Wadud (2021) emphasizes that traditional interpretations of sacred texts have often been patriarchal, marginalizing women's voices. Through feminist hermeneutics, these texts are reinterpreted in ways that center on gender equality and justice. This alternative interpretation challenges entrenched norms and provides new frameworks for understanding women's roles in Islam, allowing for greater inclusion and engagement of women in religious discourse.

Another theme that emerges prominently is the role of Muslim women's activism in advocating for their rights. Haq et al. (2020) highlight the involvement of women in Pakistan's ecofeminist movements, demonstrating that Islamic feminism is not only a religious or cultural discourse but also a socio-political force responsive to global issues such as environmental degradation. These women engage with environmental activism as a form of resistance, suggesting a broader scope of Islamic feminism that aligns with global justice movements. This illustrates that gender activism within Islamic contexts cannot be isolated from other intersecting global concerns.

The interplay between feminism and national identity also surfaces as a key area of investigation. Pepicelli (2017) describes how women in postcolonial Arab societies must navigate a complex space where feminist ideologies often conflict with nationalistic narratives. These narratives frequently demand conformity to a homogenized identity, marginalizing feminist discourse and reinforcing patriarchal control. The literature suggests that Islamic feminism in such contexts must reconcile gender-based struggles with broader questions of citizenship, belonging, and postcolonial statehood.

Further, the intersection of religion and culture becomes evident in contexts where Muslim women inhabit pluralistic societies. Moos and Shaikh (2024) examine how South African Muslim women negotiate their identities within a multicultural landscape. Their findings show that women's religious roles often intersect with cultural expectations, making it necessary to consider the sociocultural matrix in which Islamic feminism operates. This intersectional approach reveals the multifaceted nature of Muslim women's identities and the importance of situating gender discourse within localized frameworks.

The literature also sheds light on internal tensions within Islamic feminist movements. Sedghi (2020) discusses the Iranian context, where feminist movements often face state-imposed restrictions rooted in patriarchal interpretations of Islam. These movements are not only expressions of resistance but also symbolic of broader political struggles. The challenge for these women is to articulate feminist positions without invoking state retaliation or social ostracism. These findings underscore the complex dynamics between political structures and feminist activism in Islamic contexts.

Empirical evidence from the reviewed studies strengthens the thematic assertions. Wadud (2021) demonstrates that feminist reinterpretations of the Qur'an lead to increased participation of women in Islamic study circles and religious forums. This inclusion is a tangible outcome of

intellectual activism that seeks to democratize religious knowledge. Similarly, Maimun (2022) provides empirical data on divorce proceedings in Madura, Indonesia, where women often face systemic injustice. The rising divorce rates and disproportionate legal outcomes for women reflect the urgent need for gender-sensitive legal reforms.

In Pakistan, Haq et al. (2020) conducted a survey among women involved in environmental activism. The study found that 63% of respondents believed their involvement had a positive impact on their communities. This statistic illustrates how activism rooted in faith and environmental ethics can be a potent tool for empowerment. Likewise, Pepicelli (2017) notes that 57% of Egyptian women reported marginalization in feminist movements post-revolution, indicating a disconnect between nationalistic agendas and genuine gender equity.

Sedghi (2020) documents that 70% of Iranian feminist respondents experienced direct gender-based discrimination, which severely limited their ability to advocate for their rights. These findings reveal that Islamic feminist movements operate in highly constrained environments, requiring resilience and strategic negotiation. The data validates the themes identified in the literature and highlights the structural barriers that inhibit gender equity.

The influence of specific socio-political factors further contextualizes Islamic feminist discourse. Saleh et al. (2020) discuss Malaysia's institutional progress in enacting gender-equity laws, such as bans on child marriage and anti-harassment legislation. These legislative efforts reflect how institutional support can significantly enhance women's rights in Muslim societies. By contrast, Sedghi (2020) illustrates how political repression in Iran curtails feminist expression and mobilization. The stark divergence between these two countries demonstrates that the viability of Islamic feminism is heavily dependent on political will and state openness.

Cultural norms also play a vital role. Moos and Shaikh (2024) show that in South Africa's pluralistic setting, Muslim women gain moral and social recognition through religiously-informed social responsibility. Their activism is often embedded in cultural and familial expectations, indicating a hybrid identity that blends religious devotion with civic engagement. Meanwhile, Bakhshizadeh (2023) explores how globalization and modern education influence the evolution of Islamic feminism. The access to global discourses enables Muslim women to question traditional norms and assert their rights, even in conservative societies.

Educational access, as noted by Asrohah and Idayatni (2020), emerges as a critical factor. Their study of rural madrasas in Indonesia reveals that increased educational opportunities empower women to engage in rights-based advocacy. The contrast with less-educated populations highlights education's transformative potential in reshaping gender roles.

Comparative analysis across countries reveals significant variation in how Islamic feminism is experienced and expressed. Asrohah and Idayatni (2020) observe that Indonesian Muslim women, particularly those in educational settings, demonstrate higher awareness of gender rights than their counterparts in Middle Eastern countries such as Iran. While Malaysia exhibits progressive gender legislation, challenges persist in translating these reforms into lived realities (Saleh et al., 2020). In more conservative settings like Yemen, hyper-patriarchal systems continue to restrict women's agency.



In secular contexts like parts of Europe, Islamic feminism encounters less societal stigma, allowing Muslim women greater freedom to explore and express their identities. Liyana and Alagesan (2024) analyze how Muslim women's narratives in diaspora literature challenge stereotypes and present nuanced understandings of identity. These comparative insights affirm that Islamic feminism is context-dependent, shaped by local political structures, cultural norms, and legal frameworks.

Several observable trends and patterns emerge from the literature. One notable pattern is the correlation between political transitions and feminist advancement. Houssi (2018) notes that Tunisia's post-revolution political climate created opportunities for women to advocate for rights previously denied to them. Similarly, Saleh et al. (2020) identify Malaysia's legislative reforms as milestones enabled by political shifts. These examples underscore that political liberalization can provide fertile ground for Islamic feminist mobilization.

A second trend is the evolving perception of women in modern Muslim societies. Moos and Shaikh (2024) reveal that South African Muslim women are increasingly viewed as community leaders, not just as domestic caretakers. This redefinition of roles suggests a growing societal acceptance of gender equality rooted in religious ethics. Haq et al. (2020) highlight a parallel trend in environmental activism, where Muslim women adopt leadership roles in sustainability movements, further broadening the scope of Islamic feminism.

A persistent pattern is the resistance to patriarchal religious interpretations. Wadud (2021) and others advocate for a re-reading of sacred texts through feminist lenses, revealing egalitarian principles often obscured by traditional exegesis. These intellectual efforts contribute to the academic legitimization of Islamic feminism and challenge the monopolization of religious authority by patriarchal institutions.

Differences in findings also depend on the population studied, geographic location, and methodological approach. Research focusing on youth and educated women tends to reveal more progressive attitudes toward gender roles. For example, Asrohah and Idayatni (2020) document that young women in educational settings express greater agency compared to older or rural populations.

Geographically, the Middle East, particularly countries with authoritarian regimes like Iran, presents harsher conditions for feminist activism than Southeast Asian nations such as Malaysia and Indonesia. The contrast highlights the role of political culture in either enabling or suppressing feminist efforts. Methodologically, qualitative research often uncovers richer, more nuanced perspectives. For instance, Yusuf et al. (2023) use in-depth interviews to explore how gender biases influence court decisions in Indonesia. Such approaches provide insights that quantitative studies may overlook.

In summary, the findings from this review underscore the multifaceted nature of Islamic feminism. The themes, empirical evidence, and comparative perspectives illustrate that while common goals unite Muslim feminists globally, their experiences are profoundly shaped by local contexts. These insights are crucial for developing nuanced, culturally sensitive strategies to advance gender equity within Islamic frameworks.

The results of this narrative review highlight both consonances and dissonances with existing literature on Islamic feminism, reaffirming some established theoretical positions while also

revealing nuances that challenge prevailing assumptions. Central to this analysis is the role of feminist hermeneutics in reinterpreting religious texts, a theme that aligns closely with the work of Wadud (2021) and Bakhshizadeh (2023). These scholars emphasize the necessity of reexamining Qur'anic verses through a gender-equitable lens to counter patriarchal interpretations that have historically dominated Islamic scholarship. The current findings support this perspective by showing that reinterpretation can empower women to articulate and reclaim their roles within religious and social contexts.

However, this optimistic view contrasts with the stance taken by Gashtili (2013), who argues that Islamic theology inherently resists pluralistic interpretations, rendering it incompatible with feminist values. Yet, as evidenced by the progressive policy changes in Malaysia (Saleh et al., 2020), there are contexts where feminist interpretations of Islam have gained institutional traction. These examples demonstrate that Islamic theology is not monolithic and can be molded through contextual reinterpretation to support gender justice.

The role of activism, particularly ecofeminist engagement in Pakistan, further underscores the dynamic nature of Islamic feminism. Haq et al. (2020) document meaningful community engagement by Muslim women in environmental advocacy, signaling their broader influence on policy and society. While such activism is promising, its impact varies significantly by region. Sedghi (2020) reveals that in Iran, state-imposed restrictions curtail feminist expression, illustrating how political contexts shape the feasibility and visibility of women's activism. Thus, the divergence between Pakistan and Iran exemplifies how national political climates either facilitate or hinder feminist mobilization.

Similarly, studies by Moos and Shaikh (2024) illustrate how cultural pluralism in South Africa allows Muslim women to craft unique identities that synthesize Islamic values with civic responsibilities. This stands in contrast to more conservative societies where patriarchal cultural norms dominate. These findings challenge the notion that Islamic feminism operates uniformly across contexts, suggesting instead that its articulation is deeply influenced by local sociocultural landscapes.

Methodological variation also influences the kinds of insights available. For instance, qualitative work such as that of Yusuf et al. (2023) provides granular understanding of gender dynamics in Islamic legal proceedings in Indonesia. In contrast, quantitative approaches may overlook nuanced cultural and emotional dimensions, emphasizing the need for mixed methods to fully capture the lived experiences of Muslim women. Together, these comparative studies reveal the heterogeneity of Islamic feminist practices and underscore the importance of methodological pluralism in feminist inquiry.

Systemic factors emerged as critical barriers to the advancement of Islamic feminism, notably political structures, patriarchal religious interpretations, sociocultural norms, and discriminatory legal systems. Sedghi (2020) describes how the Iranian state systematically marginalizes women through policies that limit their participation in public life. Institutionalized patriarchy not only hinders legal reform but also shapes societal attitudes that normalize gender inequality. In such environments, even the most resilient feminist efforts face significant resistance.

Religious interpretations also serve as both enablers and inhibitors of feminist discourse. Bakhshizadeh (2023) and Wadud (2021) argue that dominant interpretations often reinforce gender hierarchy, making it difficult for women to challenge their status within religious communities. The review finds that inclusive theological frameworks are urgently needed to combat deeply entrenched patriarchal ideologies. The success of such efforts, however, is contingent upon broader educational and cultural reforms that can cultivate an openness to alternative interpretations.

Cultural norms continue to exert strong influence over gender roles, particularly in settings where tradition is invoked to resist change. Moos and Shaikh (2024) demonstrate how cultural expectations in some Muslim communities restrict women to domestic spheres, reinforcing their marginalization in public and political domains. These restrictions often present themselves not as overt oppression, but as cultural values that discourage female leadership and activism. Overcoming these barriers requires strategic engagement with community values to foster more inclusive norms.

Legal systems, as noted by Saleh et al. (2020), often institutionalize gender disparities, particularly in areas such as divorce and family law. The review highlights how reforms in countries like Malaysia offer hopeful models for other Muslim-majority societies. However, the uneven implementation of these laws reveals a gap between policy and practice, exacerbated by inadequate legal literacy and enforcement mechanisms. In parallel, limited access to education, particularly for rural women, restricts their ability to engage with feminist discourse. Asrohah and Idayatni (2020) document that educational programs tailored to female students in rural Indonesia can enhance agency and participation, yet such initiatives remain insufficiently scaled.

To address these systemic barriers, the literature suggests a range of policy and community-based interventions. Legal reform is frequently identified as foundational. Saleh et al. (2020) note that the Malaysian government's enactment of laws to combat sexual harassment and child marriage has fostered greater public awareness and institutional accountability. Nonetheless, enforcement challenges remain, especially in rural or conservative regions where resistance from traditionalist actors undermines progressive efforts. These observations underscore the necessity of coupling legal reforms with community outreach and education to shift social norms.

Educational empowerment emerges as a potent tool for transformation. Asrohah and Idayatni (2020) advocate for expanding access to gender-sensitive education in Islamic schools, particularly madrasas. This approach not only equips women with critical thinking skills but also cultivates future leaders who can advocate for reform from within religious frameworks. Education that is contextually relevant and culturally resonant has proven effective in increasing female participation in civic and religious life. The development of such curricula requires collaboration among educators, religious scholars, and feminist activists to ensure both authenticity and efficacy.

Social advocacy and public awareness campaigns also play a vital role in shifting societal perceptions. Liyana and Alagesan (2024) emphasize the need for initiatives that challenge gender stereotypes and normalize women's participation in public discourse. Campaigns that incorporate storytelling, media engagement, and grassroots mobilization have shown promise in generating dialogue and reducing stigma. For instance, public discourse on women's rights in Tunisia expanded significantly after the 2011 revolution, allowing feminist issues to gain visibility and

traction (Houssi, 2018). These efforts suggest that public sentiment can evolve with sustained exposure to inclusive narratives.

Community-based strategies further enhance feminist engagement by grounding activism in local realities. Haq et al. (2020) show that involving women directly in environmental projects not only empowers them but also enhances community resilience. Such projects build localized knowledge and foster networks of solidarity that extend beyond gender advocacy to broader social justice concerns. However, the sustainability of these initiatives depends on access to resources and the willingness of local authorities to support grassroots mobilization.

Despite these promising directions, the literature acknowledges persistent limitations. One major gap is the underrepresentation of LGBTQ+ voices within Islamic feminist discourse. Khan and Mulé (2021) highlight the need to broaden the scope of Islamic feminism to include sexual and gender minorities, whose experiences are often excluded from mainstream narratives. Additionally, ecofeminist perspectives remain peripheral in Islamic contexts despite their potential to bridge environmental and gender justice (Haq et al., 2020). Addressing these gaps requires interdisciplinary approaches and greater inclusivity in research agendas.

Moreover, the digital dimension of Islamic feminism, while emerging, is insufficiently explored. As Schwarz (2013) notes, online platforms can serve as powerful tools for disseminating feminist thought and building transnational alliances. Yet, little is known about how these platforms are utilized by Muslim women in different socio-political contexts. Future research should investigate how digital spaces facilitate or constrain feminist activism, particularly in countries with restricted media freedom.

In summary, this discussion situates the findings of this review within broader theoretical and empirical contexts, highlighting the multifaceted and deeply contextual nature of Islamic feminism. By identifying both systemic barriers and potential interventions, the study contributes to a nuanced understanding of how gender justice can be pursued within Islamic frameworks. The discussion emphasizes the need for sustained engagement, institutional support, and inclusive scholarship to overcome the enduring challenges facing Muslim women worldwide.

## CONCLUSION

This narrative review has explored the complexities of Islamic feminism across diverse socio-cultural and political landscapes. The findings reveal that feminist hermeneutics plays a pivotal role in challenging patriarchal interpretations of Islamic texts and opening space for gender justice within religious frameworks. Women's activism, particularly in ecofeminist and legal reform movements, illustrates the potential of Islamic feminism to address broader social and environmental issues. However, systemic barriers, such as political repression, patriarchal religious narratives, restrictive cultural norms, and inadequate legal protections, continue to hinder progress. Comparative insights from countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran, and South Africa show that while contextual factors vary, the core challenges facing Muslim women remain interconnected.

The urgency of these issues demands targeted interventions. Legal reforms that uphold gender equality, gender-sensitive educational programs, and grassroots advocacy efforts are essential to

dismantle entrenched inequalities. Inclusive interpretations of Islamic texts must be mainstreamed to support women's rights within faith-based contexts. Moreover, future research should address the underrepresentation of LGBTQ+ Muslim voices, explore the role of digital platforms in feminist discourse, and investigate ecofeminism within Islamic societies. These areas remain underexplored but are critical to broadening the scope and impact of Islamic feminism.

Ultimately, the advancement of Islamic feminism depends on a multidimensional strategy that includes education, legal reform, and cultural transformation. These components are not only essential for achieving gender justice but also for fostering inclusive, resilient communities across the Muslim world.

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