

The Family and Marriage¹
Muslims in the 21st Century
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Earlier today I argued that if we want to understand why most Muslims read the Qur'an as privileging men (that is, as a patriarchal text), we must examine the structure of religious authority and knowledge, specifically, who has read the Qur'an historically, how, and in what contexts.

In this talk, I will focus on the Qur'an's teachings as a way to dispel the idea that it privileges men and discriminates against women and I will focus on six issues:

- the idea that men are ontologically superior to women
- the view of the wife as her husband's sexual property,
- polygamy,
- the young age of marriage for girls,
- gender preferences, and
- women's testimony.

Each one of these issues impinges on female-male relationships and therefore on the family and marriage and my intent in speaking about them is not to pit men against women but to contest Muslim women's oppression in the name of Islam.

1. Ontological superiority

Let us begin with the idea that men are ontologically superior to women even if by a single degree, or darajah, which is derived from verse 2:228. I am going to share four translations of this verse.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation runs as follows:

Divorced women
Shall wait concerning themselves
For three monthly periods.
Nor is it lawful for them
To hide what God
Hath created in their wombs,
If they have faith

¹ This is a slightly amended and edited version of the talk I gave on April 16th.

In God and the Last Day.
And their husbands
Have the better right
To take them back
In that period, if
They wish for reconciliation.
And women shall have rights
Similar to the rights
Against them, according
To what is equitable;
But men have a degree [darajah]
(Of advantage) over them.
And God is Exalted in Power, Wise
(2:228; in Yusuf Ali, The Holy Qur'an, 1988: 89-90; my emphases).

Muhammad Asad translates it as follows:

And the divorced women shall undergo, without remarrying, a waiting-period of three monthly courses; for it is not lawful for them to conceal what God may have created in their wombs, if they believe in God and the Last Day. And during this period their husbands are fully entitled to take them back, if they desire reconciliation; but, in accordance with justice, the rights of the wives [with regard to their husbands] are equal to the [husbands'] rights with regard to them, although men have precedence over them [in this respect]. And God is almighty, wise (M. Asad, The Qur'an, 1980: 50; my emphasis).

M.M. Pickthall is even clearer in his translation:

Women who are divorced shall wait, keeping themselves apart, three (monthly) courses. And it is not lawful for them that they should conceal that which Allah hath created in their wombs if they are believers in Allah and the Last Day. And their husbands would do better to take them back in that case if they desire a reconciliation. And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them in kindness, and men are a degree above them. Allah is Mighty, Wise (M.M. Pickthall, The Koran, 1955: 30; my emphasis).

Amina Wadud's translation approximates those of others:

Women who are divorced shall wait, keeping themselves apart, three (monthly) courses. And it is not lawful for them that they conceal that which Allah has created in their wombs if they believe in Allah and the Last Day. And their husbands would do better to take them back in that case if they desire a reconciliation. And [(the rights) due to the women are similar to (the rights) against them, (or responsibilities they owe) with regard to] the ma'ruf, and men have a degree [darajah] above them (feminine plural). Allah is Mighty, Wise (A. Wadud, Qur'an and Woman, 1999: 68).

Although ma'ruf is translated as kindness, it has much wider implications as Wadud points out.

In spite of the fact that each translation is somewhat different, it should be possible for us to recognize that this ayah is dealing with three themes:

- the waiting period for a woman who going through a divorce;
- the possibility of reconciliation between an estranged couple,
- the equality of spousal rights except that the husband has a degree or advantage over the wife on whose nature Muslims can't seem to agree.

For instance, Wadud reads the advantage to lie in the fact that a husband can divorce his wife "without arbitration" whereas a wife cannot. But, as she points out, the Qur'an doesn't say that women shouldn't have powers of repudiation; it is just that they didn't have such powers at the time of its revelation.

Riffat Hassan² (1999), on the other hand, believes that the husband has an advantage in being able to remarry without having to wait for three months. Asad, however, reads the husband's advantage to lie in his being able to rescind a divorce, and since the Qur'an mentions the possibility of a reconciliation and kindness, this may be the most appropriate reading of all.

Even if we don't accept his reading, the point is that the degree the Qur'an speaks of is only with respect to a husband going through a divorce and not an ontological claim about all men! It is thus a specific and not a universal claim. It is important to keep this distinction in mind because universalizing what is specific in the Qur'an can lead to great distortion and harm as will also become apparent from some of the other verses I am going to consider.

Another verse that lends itself to patriarchal interpretations is 4:34:

² Riffat Hassan, "An Islamic Perspective," in Karen Lebacqz (ed.), *Sexuality: A Reader* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1999), p. 357.

Men are qawwamun ala [the protectors
 And maintainers of] women,
 Because God has given
 The one more (strength)
 Than the other, and because
 They support them
 From their means.
 Therefore the righteous women
 Are qanitat [devoutly obedient] and guard
 In (the husband's) absence
 What God would have them guard.
 As to those women
 On whose part ye fear
 Nushuz [Disloyalty and ill-conduct],
 Admonish them (first),
 (Next), refuse to share their beds,
 (And last) daraba [beat them (lightly)];
 But if they return to obedience,
 Seek not against them
 Means (of annoyance). . .
 (4:34, in Ali, 190).

At the outset, let me point out that the Qur'an does not in fact say that men have more strength than women; this is purely Yusuf Ali's extrapolation.

Qawwamun, as Azizah al-Hibri argues, "is a difficult word to translate. Some writers translate it as 'protectors' and 'maintainers.' However, this is not quite accurate. The basic notion involved here is one of moral guidance and caring."

Other scholars, however, argue that qawwamun refers to being a breadwinner since, in a Muslim family, the man is charged with providing for the household.

Significantly, however, as al-Hibri points out, nowhere in the ayah "is there a reference to the male's physical or intellectual superiority." Moreover,

since men are 'qawwamun' over women in matters where God gave some of the men more than some of the women, and in what the men spend of their money, then clearly men as a class are not 'qawwamun' over women as a class. . . . It is worth noting that the passage does not even assert that some men are inherently superior

to some women. It only states that in certain matters some man may have more than some woman (al-Hibri, 217-218).³

As such, not only is it inappropriate to read *qawwamun* as guardians, much less as jailors (as a noted cleric at Al-Azhar did), but rather simply as charging the husband with the financial upkeep of his household. Such a reading would also accord with the Qur'an's teaching that believing women and men "are 'awliya' of one another" (9:71). According to al-Hibri *awliya* means "'protectors,' 'in charge,' 'guides' [and] . . . is quite similar to 'qawwamun.'" But how can "women be 'awliya' of men [she asks] if men are superior to women . . . How could women be in charge of men who have absolute authority over their lives?"⁴

Here I should also mention that the Qur'anic injunction to enjoin the right and forbid the wrong is equally incumbent on women and men and that both men and women are equally God's *khalifa* on earth.

Of course, there remains the issue of three other words in this ayah: *qanitat*, *nushuz*, and *daraba* all of which generate antiwomen readings of this verse. Here again, there are differences in how scholars interpret these words.

For instance, Wadud argues that *nushuz* refers to a state of marital discord,⁵ not to a wife's rebellion and *qanitat* to an attitude of obedience on the part of all believers to God and not to a wife's obedience to her husband. As she says, the Qur'an "never orders a woman to obey her husband. It never states that obedience to their husbands is a characteristic of the 'better women' (66:5)" or make it "a prerequisite for women to enter the community of Islam."

Daraba, on the other hand, can mean "to strike," "set an example," and "separate" and is not the same as *darraba* which means "to strike repeatedly or intensely." As such, Wadud reads the verse "as prohibiting unchecked violence" against women and therefore as "a severe restriction of existing practices" (Wadud, 77; 76).

If this sounds strange today, we need to realize that no society in those times was egalitarian or respected women. For instance, Assyrian laws allowed a husband to pull out his wife's hair and mutilate her ears; a wife who contradicted her husband could have her "teeth smashed with burnt bricks."⁶ In light of such practices, we can certainly read *daraba* as a restraint on abuse. But we can also read *daraba* as "to separate" and I have always wondered why we don't given

3 Azizah al-Hibri, "A Study of Islamic herstory," *Women's Studies International Forum*, Special Issue: Women and Islam, 5, no. 2 (1982): 217-218.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 218

5 This is also borne out by the fact that in 4: 128 the Qur'an refers to a wife who fears *nushuz* on her husband's part; see Yusuf Ali.

6 See Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, Yale University Press, 1992.

that it would be more in accord with the Qur'an's teachings which emphasize love and mercy between spouses. I will return to this point in a moment.

2. Women as sexual property

The idea that the Qur'an discriminates against women arises from how many Muslims read other ayat as well, such as 2:222 which is read as designating a wife as her husband's sexual property to treat as he wills. This view gained much notoriety last year with the release of the Dutch film *Submission*, whose director, Theo Van Gogh, was later killed by a Muslim. The *New York Times* published a still from the film which shows a Muslim bride's back with a line from the Qur'an written on it saying that "a man may take his woman in any manner, time or place ordained by God."⁷

I don't think there's a more powerful or troubling way to suggest that Muslim women's oppression is codified in the scripture itself. However, as in other cases, it is important to put this one line in context by reading the whole ayah, or actually, two ayat:

They question thee (O Muhammad) concerning menstruation. Say: it is an *adan* so let women alone at such times and go not in unto them till they are cleansed. And when they have purified themselves, then go in unto them as Allah hath enjoined upon you. Truly Allah loveth those who turn unto Him and loveth those who have a care for cleanness. Your women are a *harth* for you (to cultivate) so go to your *harth* as ye will, and send (good deeds) before you for your souls, and fear Allah, and know that ye will (one day) meet Him (2:222-223; Pickthall, n.d. 53).

Before I say anything else, let me clarify that the root meanings of *adan* are "damage, harm, injury, trouble, annoyance, and grievance."⁸ That is, menstruation is hurt, etc., and not pollution. I make this point because of the misogynistic tendency among many Muslims to view the women's body itself as polluting. It is also important to keep in mind that the Qur'an counsels cleansing after calls of nature as well, indicating that uncleanness results from biological functions and not from biological differences, as many Muslims seem to assume.

In any event, these verses are said to have been revealed after some men asked the Prophet as to when and in what positions they could have sex. The Qur'an's

⁷ Marlise Simons, "Graphic Film of Protest, and Cries of Blasphemy," *NYT*, Sept. 27, A4.

⁸ J.M. Cowan, *Arabic-English Dictionary*. Ithaca, NY: Spoken Language Service, 1976: 12.

response to the “when” is to forbid sex when women are menstruating since it is a time of hurt for them (as we know, the Qur’an also forbids sex during the fast).

The Qur’an’s response to the “how” is to refer to what God “has enjoined.” But what has God enjoined? The preceding line says that men are not to go into women until they are cleansed. So, most obviously God has enjoined cleanliness.

However, the line following this phrase refers to women as “harth” which Muslims translate as tilth or property and, based on this translation, as well as the phrase “as ye will,” they assume that a husband may take his wife in any time, manner, or place as he wants since she is his sexual property.

However, this is a contextually inappropriate and unwarranted reading for a number of reasons.

First, at the time that the Qur’an was revealed, there was no concept of property in land and so harth could not have meant property or ownership. Rather, as early Muslim scholars understood it, harth meant tillage or sowing; to put it bluntly, vaginal sex since the concept of tilth denotes the sowing of seed.

On a separate note, it is also instructive to look at how the Qur’an uses the word harth in other contexts and in at least one, it uses the word for paradise. Since paradise is not private property, it is reasonable to assume that the word harth in the Qur’an denotes some sense of reaping what one sows, not ownership.

Second, while the Qur’an does not refer to the wife’s consent or will in this verse, it does so in other verses and if we want a composite picture of its teachings we need to read all the verses on a particular subject rather than just one or two. Thus, in 4:19, the Qur’an outlaws the practice of inheriting “Women against their will” (in Ali, 185), a reference to the seventh-century Arab practice of acquiring a dead father’s wives as part of his estate. What is significant is not just that the Qur’an banned this heinous practice but that it did so by imputing a will to women. Now, if the Qur’an acknowledges a woman’s will and instructs men to respect it, what reason is there to believe that a wife has no will or that her husband has no obligation to respect it if she expresses it by declining a certain mode of sexual behavior?

Third, and this speaks to the idea that men can engage in any sort of sexual activity with their wives, the Qur’an categorically forbids lust in marriage. As it says, marriage should be based in “chastity, not lust” (4:24; in Ali, 187) and it includes among chaste women Jews and Christians as well. In its words, permitted to Muslim men are “Chaste women among The People of the Book,

Revealed before your time,--When ye give them Their due dowers, and desire Chastity, not lewdness, Nor secret intrigues" (5:6; in Ali, 241-42).⁹

Obviously within the context of marriage chastity can't imply the absence of sex; rather, it denotes a mode of sexual behavior that is uncorrupted and is mutually acceptable and pleasurable.

This is also clear from several ayat that say that God created helpmates from ourselves so what "ye might find [sukun] in them, and [God] ordained between you love and mercy " (30:21; in Pickthall, 291). Sukun is often rendered as love but it implies a deeper intimacy that grows from sexual gratification and mental peace.¹⁰ By emphasizing the mutuality of sexual desire, the Qur'an establishes women as sexual beings and affirms that sex is a joyful and purposive activity in and of itself. How could such a view of marriage be compatible with sexual abuse?

So, for all these reasons, the permission to a husband to go into his wife as he wills and God enjoins isn't as open-ended as reading one line out of context suggests.

3. Polygamy

If marriages are not to be based in lust, then how do we understand the Qur'anic permission for polygamy which most Muslim men interpret as accommodating men's sexual needs (as we know, a claim that has been made historically is that men have a more active libido and thus more sexual needs than women).

Significantly, in the Qur'an, the purpose of polygamy is not to cater to men's sexual needs but, rather, to ensure justice for orphans:

Give the orphans their property, and do not exchange the corrupt for the good [i.e., your worthless things for their good ones]; and devour not their property with your property; surely that is a great crime. If you fear that you will not act justly towards the orphans, marry such women as seem good to you, two, three, four; but if you fear you will not be equitable, then only one, [aw] what your right hands own; so it is likelier you will not be partial (4:1; in A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, 1955: 100; my emphases).

This reference to women whom men's "right hands own" is said to be war captives, slaves, and concubines, all of whom were part of the structure of seventh century

⁹ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation, Commentary*. New York: Tehrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1988.

¹⁰ Mustansir Mir, *Dictionary of Islamic Terms*. NY: Garland Publishing, 1987.

tribal Arab society and for whose just treatment the Qur'an laid down guidelines. However, some scholars, like Asad, translate "aw" as "that is;" on their reading, the Qur'an is referring to women whom men's right hands possess, that is, their spouses. In other words, it is encouraging men to remain married to their spouses.

Even if one does not accept this translation, the point is that polygamy is restricted to orphans, and then too only in those cases where the guardian feels that

- (a) he may be unable to do full justice to his charge outside of marriage (the assumption being that marriage gives the husband a stake in the honest management of his wife's property), and,
- (b) if the marriage does not do injustice to the wife; if there is such a likelihood then the Qur'an is clear that a man should marry only one wife.

Indeed, in another verse the Qur'an says that men in polygamous situations are never "able to be equitable between your wives, be you ever so eager" (4:125; in Arberry, 119). So, the Qur'an itself makes it clear that men are generally not able to treat more than one wife justly.

So then why did it even permit polygamy?

In a predatory tribal society, marrying a woman, specially someone as vulnerable as an orphan, was the only way to secure her protection. It was thus an ethical concern for orphans that motivated the Qur'anic provisions on polygamy, not the desire to cater to men's sexual needs or their desire to acquire male offspring.

Lastly, to keep things in perspective, Islam did not invent polygamy; other than Jesus, none of the Hebrew prophets was celibate or monogamous and some, like David, had 900 wives and concubines. Islam, however, restricted such practices.

4. Age of marriage

Among Muslim practices that I find most disturbing is the tendency for old men to marry little girls on the pretext that they are following the Prophet's Sunnah.

This fascination with girl children isn't restricted to Muslims of course. Even in the U.S. the age of consent for girls was between 7-10 years as late as 1889 and was raised to 18 only as the result of feminist campaigns.¹¹ However, now that there are laws protecting children in Western countries, many U.S. and European men go to Third World countries to have sex with minor girls and boys some as young as 6.

¹¹ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Really Are*: New York: Basic Books, 1997.

I wanted to make this point at the outset because I don't want to make it seem that Muslims are aberrant in this respect. Moreover, very few Muslims actually marry girl children. However, there is no denying that those who do justify the practice by pointing to Ayesha's age at the time of her marriage to the Prophet.

Of course, I'm sure you know that his first marriage to Khadijah was monogamous and that he was 25 when they got married. She, on the other hand, was twice widowed and 15 years older than him. You also probably know that all his other wives were either widows or divorcees and with some, he had no sexual relations but took them in as a way to protect them for reasons that I've just mentioned.

As for the Prophet's marriage to Ayesha, we need to keep several things in mind:

- Most obviously, there was no concept of childhood in the seventh century and such marriages were not unusual;
- the Prophet was allowed certain marriages as "a privilege for thee only, not for the (rest of) believers" (33: 50; in Pickthall, 305). So not all the types of marriages he contracted are binding on Muslim men;
- since all his wives, except one, were widows and divorcees, Muslim men who want to follow his example could just as easily follow the norm rather than the one exception;
- most importantly, there is no conclusive agreement about Ayesha's age.

Some people put it as low as nine because of hadith that she was playing with dolls when she got married. But then there are other hadith that say that she had "good knowledge of Ancient Arabic poetry and genealogy" and could pronounce the "rules of Arabic-Islamic ethics,"¹² which a child of nine could hardly have done.¹³ Based on these hadith as well as what we know of her sister, Asma's age and of the Prophet's migration from Makkah to Madina, some people say that she was over 13 and perhaps between 17-19 at the time of her marriage.

The point is that everything we know about her is from stories of her life written a century and a half after her death, so that even the earliest written sources "already capture [her] life as a legacy, an interpretation." Therefore, in studying Ayesha, we are studying "male intellectual history, not a woman's history, but reflections about the place of a woman, and by extension, all women, in exclusively male assertions about Muslim society."¹⁴

12 Wibke Walther, *Woman in Islam*. Montclair, N.J.: Abner Schram, 1981: 75.

13 Some hadith speaking of her menstruating, which a child of 6 or 9 generally does not do.

14 D.A. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past*. NY: Columbia University, 1994: 2; 191.

That is why drawing on Ayesha's example to justify pedophilia is wrong and it also tarnishes the Prophet's life by obscuring the differences in historical understanding between his time and ours. Equally troublingly, it ignores that an Islamic marriage is to be based in chastity not lust, as I have argued, and it seems reasonable to assume that men who go in search of little girls are not really looking to be chaste.

5. Gender preferences

The fact that girls and boys and men and women are treated differently in Muslim societies also has to do with gender preferences. In fact in some societies gender preferences even lead some men to believe that they have the right of life and death over women; I am referring of course to so-called "honor" killings. Although such killings are not as pervasive as they are sometimes made to seem by the media, the point is that they are extreme manifestations of gender preferences for which one can find no sanction in the Qur'an whatsoever. Indeed, the Qur'an provides powerful arguments against gender discrimination.

The issue of gender—or, rather, sex—preferences comes up in the Qur'an in two contexts. One is in the context of its criticism of the polytheists (i.e., people who worship many gods) who were in the habit of ascribing daughters to God. As the Qur'an notes, these same Arabs were burying their own new-born girls alive and abusing those whom they allowed to survive, and it condemns both practices:

And they assign to God daughters; glory be to Him!—and they have their desire [for sons]; and when any of them is given the good tidings of a girl, his face is darkened and he chokes inwardly, as he hides him from the people because of the evil of the good tidings that have been given unto him; whether he shall preserve it in humiliation, or trample it into the dust. Ah, evil is that they judge! (16: 55-60; in Arberry,, 292; my emphasis).

It is clear that what the Qur'an finds contemptible is not daughters, since it refers to their birth as "good tidings," but ascribing paternity to God, and other verses condemn those polytheists who, says the Qur'an, falsely ascribe both sons and daughters to God. Indeed, the Qur'an even forbids sacralizing God as the father of Jesus. As it says, "Jesus the son of Mary Was (no more than) An apostle of God. ... God is One God: Glory be to Him: (Far Exalted is He) above Having a son" (4: 171; in Ali, 1988: 234). In other verses, the Qur'an forbids depicting God even as a figurative father. So, what is at issue are not gender preferences since the Qur'an rejects not just ascribing daughters to God, but the male gender for God. Rather, what is at issue is a rejection of the patriarchal imaginary of God the Father.

The second context in which the issue of gender preference comes up in the Qur'an

is in the context of female infanticide and the Qur'an promises that on Judgment Day "the female (infant) Buried alive [will be] questioned For what crime She was killed" (81:8-9, in Ali, 1694). In other words, God will hold men accountable for the murders they commit based on their gender/sex preferences.

I am not sure how any Muslim man who has read the Qur'an can still believe that he has the right to murder his daughter, or any other female relative, on any pretext and I am not sure why Muslim jurists have passed over in silence the significance of this case of evidence giving when a baby girl will testify against her own father.

6. Women's Testimony

And this brings me to the last issue, the question of women's evidence. As we know, the Qur'an stipulates that if two men cannot be found to witness a financial transaction than one man and two women can be taken as witnesses; and the purpose of the second woman is to remind the first, in case she forgets something. From this Muslim jurists have devised what Wadud calls a two for one formula: in other words, the idea that women's testimony is half that of a man's because a woman herself is of less worth than the man.

However, it is instructive to examine other cases of evidence giving in the Qur'an, including the far more consequential one of adultery. If a husband accuses his wife of adultery, he generally has to produce four male witnesses of upstanding character who saw the act of penetration. This seemingly bizarre standard was meant to safeguard women from slander as is also evident from the fact that if a man brings a false charge, he is to receive 80 lashes with the whip and his testimony is to be discounted in the future.

Now if a husband cannot produce four witnesses, he also can stand witness himself by swearing an oath four times that he is telling the truth, and a fifth time that he invokes God's curse on himself if he is lying. In turn, the wife also can swear an oath four times that her husband "Is telling a lie," and a fifth time that she invokes God's wrath on herself if he is not (24:6-9, in Ali, 898). And her word is the last; if she is guilty, says the Qur'an, God will punish her, but it does not give her husband any legal recourse against her.

Clearly, the Qur'an here privileges the evidence of a wife over her husband's and a woman's over a man's but this principle has not passed into Muslim law and no jurist seems to have been troubled by this glaring omission.

This has been a rather exhaustive talk and my point has been to alert you to the possibilities inherent in the Qur'an for alternative readings to the dominant ones that we have been socialized to accept as its only legitimate readings. My own

view is that we need to reject all those readings that project misogyny, sexism, and any form of hatred onto God because they debase our very concept of God.

I want to wrap up now and I realize that my argument so far has also been by way of negation: that is, I have concentrated on what the Qur'an does not say about certain issues. So, by way of a conclusion, I want to speak about what it does say about sexual equality specially as it bears on spousal relationships.

Equality as spousal praxis

The Qur'an tells us to privilege its foundational ayat over its allegorical ones and its foundational ayat clearly establish the ontological equality of women and men by teaching that both originated in the same Self (Nafs), and that they "proceed one from another" (2:195, in Pickthall, 78). This theme is an inversion of the Christian claim that women proceed from men. In the Qur'an's telling, however, the woman was not created from the man's rib and nor was she responsible for the Fall. In fact, the Qur'an does not teach the concept of original sin or the Fall.

The Qur'an also teaches that all human beings have the fitrah, or nature, that men and women are both God's representatives on earth, and that they are equally capable of moral personality. In other words, it does not discriminate against human beings based on their biological sex.

To the contrary, the idea that human beings are same/ similar/ equal (and I realize that these are not identical terms) is central to the Qur'an's teachings on marriage:

God has made for you
Mates (and Companions) of your own nature
And made for you, out of them
Sons and daughters and grandchildren
And provided for you sustenance
Of the best
(16:72; in Ali, 675; my emphasis).

(Note that daughters are as much a sign of God's Grace as sons!) Other ayat say that God created "helpmeets from yourselves so that ye might find [sukun] in them, and [God] ordained between you love and mercy" (30:21; in Pickthall, 291).

We often forget that the idea of mutual love and sexual fulfillment in marriage is of recent origins; in the seventh century, it was truly radical and it distinguishes the Qur'an from the contexts not only of its own times, but also from those of

ours, given both ancient and modern tendencies to Otherize women, making the possibility of genuine love between women and men difficult at best.

It is true that the Qur'an does not treat women and men identically on all issues, but treating people identically doesn't necessarily mean treating them equally. And treating people differently doesn't always mean treating them unequally. Specially since the Qur'an does not tie its different treatment of women and men to claims about ontology or biology, it seems utterly inappropriate to confuse its different treatment with unequal treatment as most Muslims do.

It is equally wrong to argue that women may be equal to men in the sight of God but that they are unequal to men in their own sight. This is the most pernicious form of hubris for which there is absolutely no basis in the Qur'an.

Of course, men gain power over women by corrupting God's words to suit themselves but at the cost of corrupting their own understanding of and relationship to God. Is that not too a high a price to pay for worldly gain?