

Gender and Islam through Leila Ahmed's Lens: Methodology, Social Realities, and Personal Insights

Yulia Hafizah

Universitas Islam Negeri Antasari Banjarmasin

taradhi@uin-antasari.ac.id

Abstract: Study on women and gender in Islam has become an intriguing subject for many scholars over the past few decades. One of these is Leila Ahmed's work entitled "Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots in Modern Debate." This work has made a significant contribution in deconstructing stereotypes and expanding understanding of how religion and culture shape views of women in Muslim societies. This article aims to analyze Leila Ahmed's thoughts on the methodological aspects and approaches she employs. The research utilizes a qualitative literature review method with documentary analysis techniques. The research findings indicate that Leila Ahmed's life experiences, crossing social and cultural boundaries, have had a profound influence on the development of her scholarly identity. She has encountered a personally "lived" Islam, acquired and taught by her mother, as well as a ritualistic and at times oppressive Islam imposed by the state. She has experienced educational opportunities afforded to her by Western influences in Egypt, yet suffered racism and stereotypes from teachers and peers in England. These diverse experiences have imbued meaning into her work and compelled her to provide balanced and sensitive analyses in her book. There, Leila Ahmed does not highlight what is right or wrong but instead portrays a complex situation by presenting multiple possible responses to each question.

Keywords: *Cultural and Social Contexts; Islam and Gender; Leila Ahmed; Methodology in Islamic Studies; Women and Gender in Islam*

Abstrak: Kajian tentang perempuan dan gender dalam Islam telah menjadi subjek yang menarik bagi banyak akademisi selama beberapa dekade terakhir. Salah satunya adalah karya Leila Ahmed yang berjudul *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots in Modern Debate*. Karya ini memberikan kontribusi penting dalam mendekonstruksi stereotip dan memperluas pemahaman tentang bagaimana agama dan budaya membentuk pandangan tentang perempuan dalam masyarakat Muslim. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pemikiran Leila Ahmed pada aspek metodologis dan pendekatan yang dipergunakannya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif jenis kepustakaan dengan teknik analisis dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengalaman hidup Leila Ahmed yang melintasi batas sosial dan budaya telah memiliki pengaruh kuat dalam pembangunan identitas kerjanya. Ia telah mengalami Islam pribadi yang "dihayati" yang diperoleh dan diajarkan oleh ibunya, serta Islam yang ritualistik dan terkadang menindas yang dipaksakan oleh negara. Ia telah mengalami peluang pendidikan yang diberikan kepadanya oleh pengaruh Barat di Mesir, tetapi menderita rasisme dan *stereotype* para guru dan teman sebayanya di Inggris. Berbagai pengalaman ini telah memberi makna bagi pekerjaan dan memaksanya untuk memberikan analisis yang seimbang dan sensitif dalam bukunya. Di

sana, Leila Ahmed tidak menyoroti apa yang benar atau salah namun justru menggambarkan situasi yang kompleks dengan menunjukkan beberapa kemungkinan jawaban atas setiap pertanyaan.

Kata Kunci: *Islam dan Gender; Konteks Budaya dan Sosial; Leila Ahmed; Metodologi dalam Studi Islam; Perempuan dan Gender dalam Islam*

INTRODUCTION

In Aristotle's view, women are seen as incomplete human beings, lacking in productivity due to weaknesses in their desires. They are incapable of transforming the fluids in their womb into something that grows. Their contribution to life is limited to providing eggs and serving as the vessel for the embryo's development (Ikhlas, 2019). In this context, the term "woman" is understood solely in terms of the physical characteristics of human sex, specifically the XX chromosome composition, along with the presence of ovaries and a uterus (Saptandari, 2013). Over time, this understanding has evolved to include more than just biological concepts. Discussions of "women" when viewed through a morphological lens, for instance, go beyond mere anatomy or reproductive functions. These discussions now encompass relationships with men and families, as well as considerations of age. However, the conversation also extends towards efforts to advance and promote a specific social order for women. Women must be positioned as active subjects, so that the meanings derived do not only address linguistic issues but also find their roots in social practices. Women must actively participate in the creation of cultural and political realities (Yuliawati, 2018; Mutiah, 2019, hlm. 63–64). In this sense, women are seen as part of roles, behaviors, and identities that are socially constructed and linked to specific gendered identities.

Gender is a social construct encompassing the norms, values, and expectations established by society for individuals. According to the *Women's Studies Encyclopedia*, gender is a cultural concept aimed at creating distinctions in roles, behaviors, mentalities, and emotional characteristics between men and women as they evolve within society (Kasmawati, 2013, p.57). Fakhri defines gender as the difference between men and women not based on biological factors, nor on sex as a divine and permanent distinction, but as behavior differences that are socially constructed—differences created through a long process of social and cultural development (Fakhri, 2008, hlm. 8–9; Zahroh, C. A. D. W., 2019). Heddy Shri Ahimsa emphasizes that the term "gender" can be understood in several ways: first, as a foreign term with a specific meaning; second, as a socio-cultural phenomenon; third, as social consciousness; fourth, as a socio-cultural issue; fifth, as a concept for analysis; and sixth, as a perspective for viewing reality (Kasmawati, 2013, hlm. 58).

Feminist activists, as the main proponents of gender ideas, consistently strive to mainstream gender issues so that they become part of public consciousness. Many of them, utilizing various social science tools, seek to critique different aspects such as ideology, religion, culture, and even systems of knowledge, all of which are perceived to play roles in perpetuating discriminatory and unjust practices against women (Arbain, J., Azizah, N. & Sari, I. N., 2015). In particular, religious doctrines have often been the target of criticism, as they are seen to embody gender-biased understandings that tend to favor men. Islam, as a religion followed by more than one-fifth of the world's population, is not immune to such critiques. It is often argued that Islamic teachings place women in a lower societal position compared to men. Issues such as inheritance, where women receive only half of what men

inherit, along with matters of testimony, leadership, marriage (e.g., polygamy), and inheritance, frequently emerge as points of contention. Many of these doctrines are seen as limiting women's autonomy and freedom. This view is further reinforced when observing the status of women in many Islamic countries, where women are often marginalized and positioned as mere ornaments in the lives of men (Kususiyanah, A., 2021).

Amina Wadud, for instance, has attempted a methodological reconstruction of how to interpret the Qur'an in a way that promotes gender-sensitive and just exegesis. Charles Kurzman notes that Wadud's work *Qur'an and Woman* (1992) is a response to the historical context of African-American women's experiences and their struggle for gender justice (Arbain, J., Azizah, N. & Sari, I. N., 2015, hlm. 77; Masrurroh, I. S., 2022). Asghar Ali Engineer has been equally vocal in advocating for liberation. A recurring theme in his work is human rights, women's rights, the defense of oppressed peoples, and ethnic and religious peace. This commitment cannot be separated from his background as a leader of the Ismaili Shia community in Bombay, India (Juliani, A., & Hambali, R. Y., 2022).

Equally notable is Leila Ahmed, a feminist who has seriously engaged with the issues of women and gender. Known for her long-standing attention to these subjects, Ahmed has written extensively on the intersection of gender and Islam. Some of the scholarly works on Ahmed's thought include Rohmatin's study of her analysis of the factors triggering the resurgence of the hijab in the late 20th century, exploring whether this was due to rising religious consciousness or external factors, including foreign intervention (Rohmatin, T). Sari's work compares the concepts of gender in Islam and Christianity from the perspectives of Leila Ahmed and Anne Hege Grung. It concludes that for both feminists, gender is not merely a biological distinction, but is also tied to fundamental social constructs shaped by culture and religion. Both scholars offer important perspectives that contribute to a better understanding of gender justice and challenge misconceptions about women's roles in religion (Sari, Y., 2023).

From the writings mentioned, it is evident that Leila Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, published by Yale University Press, has not yet been explored in-depth, particularly with regard to its methodological approach. This article aims to focus specifically on examining Leila Ahmed's methodology and the approaches she employs in her work. Upon its release, her book was warmly received and is regarded as the magnum opus of her scholarly contributions.

METHODS

This article is a literature review (library research) that examines Leila Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, published by Yale University Press in 1992. The data gathered from the text will be analyzed by identifying the patterns of thought, values, beliefs, and perspectives reflected in the writing. The author applied a sociology of knowledge approach and a psychology of knowledge framework to understand the social and cultural context in which the text was written, as well as the psychological and emotional dimensions of the author, to explore how these elements influence the author's thought process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Life of Leila Ahmed

Leila Ahmed was born in 1940. She spent her early childhood in a modest villa with a large garden on the outskirts of Cairo. As a young child, her mother and grandmother provided her with an education in Islam, a faith that would play a crucial role in her future career. It was here that she learned about the unique relationship between women and Islamic teachings. She discovered that this "living" Islam was as important and profound as the ritualistic aspects of the religion (Thomas & Elizabeth Hook, 2001).

In 1952, a revolution brought Gamal Abdel Nasser to power in Egypt, ushering in an era of Arab nationalism. For Leila Ahmed, this marked a period of upheaval in her family's life. Her father lost his job due to his opposition to the Aswan High Dam project. A well-educated civil engineer, Leila's father believed the project was politically motivated and ecologically harmful, as it could lead to severe environmental damage. However, in the context of intense nationalism, his opposition was seen as an act of betrayal. As a result, the government harassed the family, which nearly prevented Leila Ahmed from realizing her dream of studying abroad (Thomas & Elizabeth Hook, 2001).

The revolution also forced her to reconsider her identity. Leila's family was regarded as "other" due to their affinity for Western ideas about culture and education. A striking example of this came during Leila's time at school, when a Palestinian teacher slapped her for identifying herself as Egyptian rather than Arab (Thomas & Elizabeth Hook, 2001).

While in Cairo, she attended Western-style schools where English was the primary language of instruction, which led to sharp emotional contradictions. Although she deeply valued European-style education, she was also confronted with the racism and stereotyping of her British teachers. During her time at Cambridge University in the 1960s, this internal conflict persisted, and she became acutely aware of her "otherness." She grew frustrated with the simplistic portrayals of Arab culture by her classmates. At the same time, she began to view the socialist and nationalist ideas held by some of her American and European classmates with skepticism, particularly after witnessing their constricting effects in Egypt. This period marked her effort to cultivate a more balanced perspective, rejecting both extremism and oversimplification. She earned her Ph.D. at Cambridge and, in 1981, became a professor of Near Eastern Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. In 1999, she became a professor of Women's Studies in Religion at Harvard Divinity School, where she continues to teach today (Thomas & Elizabeth Hook, 2001).

Given her background, much of Leila Ahmed's work ultimately revolves around the themes of Islam and women. Some of her notable works include *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America - A Woman's Journey* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), *Women and Gender in the Islamic Middle East* (Fairfield University Media Center, 1993), *Women and Islam* (Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 1993), *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (Yale University Press, 1992), and "Feminism and Cross-Cultural Inquiry: The Terms of Discourse in Islam" in *Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, and Politics* (Routledge, 1989). Additionally, she has contributed "Arab Women: 1995" in *The Next Arab Decade: Alternative Futures* (Westview Mansell, 1988), "Between Two Worlds: The Formation of a Turn-of-the-Century Egyptian Feminist" in *Life Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (Cornell University Press, 1988), "A Traditional Ceremony in an Islamic Milieu in Malaysia" in *Muslim Women* (St. Martin's Press, 1984), and *Edward W. Lane: A Study of His Life and Works and of British Ideas of the Middle East in the Nineteenth Century* (Longman, 1978).

Women and Gender: A Historical Journey

Leila Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, published in 1992, seeks to uncover the historical roots of the gender debate and the evolving status of women throughout history. Ahmed's thorough analysis earned her the University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award for Religion in 2013, particularly for her study on the use of the hijab among Muslim women in the United States. Ahmed structured the book into three parts: first, pre-Islamic middle east, which includes two chapters on Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean Middle East; second, discourses of development, which consists of four chapters: Women and the Rise of Islam; The Transition Period; Elaborating the Discourses of Development; and Islam in the Medieval Period; the last, new discourses, which is made up of five chapters: Social and Intellectual Change; The Discourse on the Hijab; First Feminists; Diverse Voices; and Struggles for the Future, concluding with a summary.

In her book, Ahmed opens the discussion on the discourse surrounding women and gender in Islam by tracing the origins of female subordination in the Middle East, showing how it became institutionalized alongside the rise of urban societies. Contrary to the common belief that women's social status was based on biological differences, Ahmed highlights archaeological findings, such as those from the Neolithic settlement of Çatalhöyük in Anatolia (around 6000 BCE), which suggest that women in early Middle Eastern societies were highly respected and held elevated positions. Evidence supporting this includes larger and more elevated burial sites for women and wall decorations that clearly portray women as noble figures (Ahmed, 1992, p.11).

A shift occurred, however, as urban states began to emerge in Mesopotamia. The arrival of Semitic nomads and the onset of wars between city-states marked a significant change. Warfare demanded strong military forces, which were often composed of tough, capable men. As a result, male roles became increasingly dominant, leading to the rise of patriarchal family structures. In these societies, men were seen as the inheritors of wealth and the controllers of women's sexuality. Women's sexuality, first the property of their fathers and later their husbands, became institutionalized as a valuable commodity, contributing to the emergence of practices such as prostitution. As urban challenges grew and populations expanded, the role of women in public life became further subordinated. The erosion of respect for goddesses paralleled the rise of male gods in religious life (Ahmed, 1992, pp.12–13).

Over time, various empires and rulers dominated Mesopotamia, and the laws governing these regions shifted. These laws became progressively more restrictive for women, consolidating authority and power in the hands of husbands and fathers. Wives and daughters were expected to comply fully with the demands of male figures in the household. The head of the family had the right to arrange the marriages of his children, offer his daughter to the gods, or even pledge his daughter or sell his wife to settle debts (Ahmed, 1992, p.15). This societal structure revealed the absolute power that men had over their wives, children, and slaves, with women being treated as commodities that could be exchanged for debts or legal settlements.

Another significant topic Ahmed addresses in her work is the use of the hijab or veil. She explains that during this time, the hijab served as a marker of status, with specific social implications. The veil was reserved for the wives and daughters of the powerful, concubines accompanying royalty, and women who had been married to their masters. In contrast, prostitutes and slaves were forbidden from wearing the veil, and if caught doing so, they faced harsh punishment. For Ahmed, the hijab functioned as a symbol

distinguishing respectable women from those deemed dishonorable based on their sexual roles. It also acted as a visual signal to men, indicating which women were under male protection and which were available for legitimate marriage (Ahmed, 1992, pp.14–15; Guindi, 2003, pp.30–31). While women in higher social classes enjoyed certain privileges, such as owning property, engaging in contracts, and serving as witnesses in legal matters, these rights remained dependent on their male relatives. This societal structure reveals, at least conceptually, how women were often viewed as either human beings or possessions within the patriarchal system.

Following the Roman conquest of Egypt, the prevalence of European legal systems resulted in a decline in the status and rights afforded to Egyptian women. Following the arrival of the Arabs, notable transformations took place regarding the status of women in the region. In the 6th century CE, the Arabian Peninsula, particularly Mecca, exhibited a predominant marriage structure characterized by matrilineal and uxorilocal practices. Women stayed within their tribes, allowing men to visit or live alongside them. Children resulting from these unions were affiliated with their mother's tribe, and the marriages were marked by practices of polyandry and polygamy. Consequently, women during that period assumed vital roles and exerted considerable influence. This is exemplified by the life of Khadijah before her marriage to Muhammad, including her involvement in trade and her societal influence.

Leila Ahmad, in her book, also highlights the roles of women on the battlefield. Their presence was vital in motivating and uplifting the morale of soldiers. For instance, Hindun's actions during the Battle of Uhud are notable. After mutilating the body of Hamzah, she adorned herself with the severed parts as ornaments, stood on a rock, and recited satirical verses to incite her side. Such accounts align with the interpretations of several exegetes regarding QS An-Nahl (16:58-59), which prohibits the killing of baby girls in Islam. These verses further affirm that the advent of Islamic teachings brought about improvements in the status of women in all aspects.

Leila Ahmed typically finds these interpretations to be simplistic and inaccurate. She contends that these perspectives frequently demonstrate a predominance of sexual autonomy in the enjoyment of women beyond the parameters of Islam (Ahmed, 1992, hlm. 43–53). Rather, Ahmed contributes to the discourse by asserting that the regulations enacted in Islam were intended to provide women with a status of honor by imposing specific restrictions. This was a result of the highly aggressive behavior of Arab women during that era, as evidenced by Hindun's actions previously mentioned; ed. As a result, Ahmed posits that Islam aimed to regulate these behaviors by introducing concepts such as seclusion, the veil (hijab)—which was initially mandated for the wives of Muhammad—and the institutionalization of patrilineal and patriarchal marriage as the sole legitimate form of union when it emerged.

Leila Ahmed argues that the Prophet Muhammad established a barrier between his spouses and the broader community by institutionalizing seclusion and the separation of men and women. Seclusion was a plainly patriarchal rule at that time, as it was reserved exclusively for the wives of leaders. Muhammad established non-architectural boundaries of separation, such as provided harems' living accommodations. Ahmed posits that this tradition originated from patriarchal societies in the vicinity of Mecca, including Iran and Byzantium. Ahmed also posits that the Prophet Muhammad may have incorporated these practices from those regions (Ahmed, 1992, hlm. 55).

Leila Ahmed contends that the introduction of the hijab was not exclusively initiated by the Prophet Muhammad for Arab society. Ahmed traces this tradition to the

garments worn by women in Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Assyrian cultures, all of whom utilized veils that mirrored their social status. The connection is explicitly stated in QS An-Nûr (24:31–32), which instructs women to cover their bodies and to extend their hijab over their chests (Ahmed, 1992, hlm. 55). There are no records of reactions from Muhammad's wives to this ruling. They remained silent about it, which may indicate that—initially—they might have reacted to the new institution but refrained out of fear. This fear may have stemmed from the Prophet's warning of a mass divorce against his wives. Thus, Muhammad's wives were placed in a dilemma: either to accept divorce or to remain his wives under the condition of adhering to these special rulings, with the promise of rewards in the afterlife. This interpretation is highlighted by Leila Ahmed (Ahmed, 1992, hlm. 56).

Conversely, Leila Ahmed highlights the respectful conduct exhibited by Prophet Muhammad, regarded as the most noble individual, towards women. In her book, Ahmed elucidates the manner in which he accorded honor to Aisha and his other wives. Umar ibn Khattab expressed his concerns to the Prophet, stating, "We, the Quraysh of Mecca, previously held dominance over our wives; however, upon encountering the Ansar, we observed that their women held authority over their men." As a result, our women commenced acquiring the practices of the Ansari women. Leila Ahmed presents various historical facts regarding the contributions of Muslim women to warfare, hadith narration, and marriage, which have maintained a level of respect (Ahmed, 1992, hlm. 64–70).

The subsequent period occurred during the Abbasid dynasty, during which women's roles ceased to be the primary focus of society. They were not represented as participants or contributors in diverse social activities. A significant portion of the Abbasid aristocracy emulated the attitudes and practices of the Sassanian nobility, including the maintenance of extensive harems and the use of eunuchs to guard concubines. This period also emphasized virginity and the preference for women to marry multiple times, behaviors similarly observed in Zoroastrian teachings.

Leila Ahmed's notes indicate that this period emphasized androcentric interpretations of ethical teachings in Islam, especially concerning male-female relationships. The Khawarij, in this context, exhibited varying interpretations of verses permitting concubinage and marriage to girls at the age of nine. Orthodox scholars regarded these actions as permissible. Ahmed emphasizes the increasing significance of interpretation in influencing these perspectives.

Leila Ahmed posits that the history of Islam encompasses two distinct interpretations of gender. A collective that articulates gender roles via the practical regulations of society. This group is legitimized by political interests and the influence of rulers, resulting in more dominant interpretations. Additionally, it articulates gender through an ethical vision, while, according to Ahmed, it continues to highlight the spiritual and ethical aspects of human equality and existence. This group lacks political support and endorsement from authorities, resulting in insufficient evidence to substantiate their egalitarian message. This encompasses interpretations by Sufis, Khawarij, and Qarmatians (Ahmed, 1992, hlm. 65–87).

Ahmed elaborates that various sects dismiss the ethical teachings of Prophet Muhammad, perceiving them as contingent upon the social context of his time, and therefore, temporal. Consequently, they are not considered binding, as interpreted by Orthodox groups, for Muslims universally and at all times. The teachings in the Qur'an primarily present broad and general ethical propositions rather than specific legalistic directives. This allows for various interpretations of the same text, which are significantly influenced by the interpretive frameworks employed by scholars and their underlying

interests. The Sufi group illustrates how the narratives of Rabia al-Adawiyah, the Khawarij, and the Qarmatians exemplify the diverse interpretations of Islamic events and texts, despite their divergence from the prevailing cultural norms. These readings carry important implications for the understanding and diverse social norms related to gender (Ahmed, 1992, hlm. 90–100).

Ahmed's discussion then shifts to the early nineteenth century in the Middle East, a period marked by significant social transformation within society. Colonialism and global economic barriers faced by countries such as Egypt and Syria have resulted in a range of intricate problems. The emerging cultural effects significantly influenced various aspects, including the status of women. During Muhammad Ali's administration, men were mandated to enlist in the military, while women were concurrently required to assume the roles previously occupied by men. Reports indicated that during that period, women were the primary laborers in the agricultural fields of the villages. The shift also resulted in modernization across education, technology, and social dimensions. The state's initiatives significantly influenced women, largely attributable to the prevalence of education. The government established schools to train translators, under the leadership of Rifa'ah at-Tahtawi (1801–1873), to enhance European knowledge. In one of his works, Tahtawi asserted that women ought to receive equal educational opportunities as men, mirroring the practices of the strongest European nations (Ahmed, 1992, hlm. 127–134). During the 1890s, there was a notable increase in advocacy for women's education and reform. Women increasingly asserted themselves in public forums, articulating their grievances openly, as evidenced by contemporary newspapers and magazines aimed at women. Poet Aisha Taymour published the work *Mir'at at-Ta'amul* in 1874, which critiques the conduct of upper-class men towards their wives.

The influence of European ideals significantly affected women's perceptions and lifestyles, prompting calls to reject roles considered trivial, including domestic responsibilities and the hijab, which began to be increasingly abandoned. *Tahrirul Mar'ah*, authored by Qasim Amin, is referenced in this book, particularly in chapter seven, which is titled "Discourse on the Hijab." Qasim Amin's book is regarded as the catalyst for the first major controversy in the Arab press, prompting the publication of over thirty books and articles in response. The majority of responses were critical; however, a subset of supportive reactions emerged, particularly from members of the British administration and pro-British factions. The pro-British newspaper *Al Muqattam* lauded the book as exemplary, highlighting Amin's commendation of British and European civilization alongside his critique of indigenous peoples, rulers, scholars, and lower-class customs.

While Amin presented his criticisms, numerous rebuttals subsequently arose in the form of affirmations. In conventional narratives of Arab resistance, the book faced rejection. Leila Ahmed asserts that the book offered numerous justifications for Muslim nationalists in Egypt to harbor disdain towards it. Ahmed articulates that the discourse involved feminists aiming to impose Western civilization on indigenous societies, contrasted with anti-feminists characterized by patriarchal and frequently misogynistic views. Ahmed posits that the book merely advocates for replacing Islamic male dominance with a Western-style equivalent. Amin is more accurately characterized as a product of Cromer and colonialism rather than the progenitor of Arab feminism (Ahmed, 1992, hlm. 162–163).

In the last few chapters, Ahmed delineates the socio-political landscape of Egypt during the early 1900s. Significant developments occurred, including the advent of the telephone and automobiles, as well as the founding of the first cinema. The changes

fundamentally indicated British dominance over the Egyptian administration. Some perceived this as progress; however, nationalists regarded it as an affront to the Egyptian populace. The pivotal moment occurred during the Denshawi incident, in which British soldiers engaged in a recreational outing to hunt pigeons. The practice of shooting pigeons was widely embraced by the British; however, for the farming community in Denshawi, it was perceived as an affront, as the pigeons were regarded as pets. A bullet inadvertently struck a female farmer, resulting in significant outrage among the local agricultural community. The individuals subsequently assaulted the soldiers with sticks following the soldiers' voluntary disarmament, leading to an escalation that resulted in the shooting of the British soldiers.

The incident was ultimately brought to the attention of Lord Cromer, who mandated a trial for the implicated farmers. In late June 1906, 52 individuals were apprehended for trial; 31 were subsequently released, while the remaining were sentenced according to the gravity of their purported offenses. The court classified the farmers' shooting of the soldiers as a premeditated action. Four individuals received death sentences, two were sentenced to life imprisonment, while the remaining were subjected to imprisonment and received fifty lashes each. This brutality profoundly unsettled Egyptian society. Qasim Amin observed, "Everyone I encountered exhibited broken hearts; their throats appeared constricted... sorrow was evident on every countenance." The spirits of the executed appeared to pervade every location within the city. This event ultimately awakened the Egyptian populace from their prolonged complacency, induced by the modernity introduced by the British.

This awareness was evident in the formation of numerous organizations aimed at enhancing women's intellectual capacity and promoting the significance of education for them. In 1908, certain women established The Society for the Advancement of Women, a conservative Islamic organization. Subsequently, in 1914, Huda Sha'arawi, a notable feminist leader of the 1920s and 1930s, along with Mai Ziyadah, an intellectual and feminist writer, founded The Intellectual Association of Egypt. Throughout this period, numerous pharmacies, nursing schools, and women's endowment organizations were founded, frequently offering services to both children and adult men (Ahmed, 1992, hlm. 172).

The life stories of certain feminists are examined, alongside the social contexts that influenced their experiences. Ironically, some individuals experienced significant personal suffering while attempting to articulate the discourse on women's subjectivity, enduring the direct consequences of the prevailing destructive system. For instance, Mai Ziyadah passed away in an irrational manner. In her later years, she experienced significant pressure in her life, felt haunted, and made an attempt on her life. She gradually developed a distrust towards those in her vicinity, including her servants, former employees, and even her friends. She passed away in 1941, with her body discovered in her residence three days post-mortem.

Likewise, the narrative of Doria Shafik encompasses challenges related to mental health, and parallels Ziyadah's experience with suicide. The unfortunate outcomes experienced by these feminists were frequently attributable to various factors, including the social and psychological repercussions imposed by society for contesting prevailing cultural norms (Ahmed, 1992, pp. 173–188). In this section, Ahmed aims to illustrate the severity and challenges faced by women in their quest for justice and equality.

Leila Ahmed's Intellectual Landscape: Exploring Texts and Contexts

The examination of a thinker's ideas is intrinsically linked to two significant interrelated dimensions: the sociology of knowledge and the psychology of knowledge. Both are essential for a thorough examination of the concealed aspects within a body of knowledge. Knowledge emerges not in isolation but as a response to the social realities or facts encountered by the thinker (Hamka, 2020, hlm. 76-84).

The sociology of knowledge seeks to establish knowledge as inherently interdependent, indicating that it is consistently shaped by the social conditions surrounding it. Ibn Khaldun posits that the advancement of knowledge is contingent upon the progression of civilization. Rational knowledge exists solely within civilizations. Thus, a relationship exists between knowledge advancement and the progression of civilization in established societies (Fanani, 2008, hlm. 32).

Mannheim, a prominent figure in the sociology of knowledge, asserts that this discipline aims to uncover the social determinants of belief within society, which are subsequently examined in relation to societal perceptions of those determinants. Mannheim posits that human knowledge is inextricably linked to the subjectivity and psychological conditions of the individual participant. Knowledge and belief are, in his view, outcomes of social and political processes. Mannheim proposed the theory of relationalism, asserting that knowledge cannot emerge independently of the surrounding social structure (Abidin, 2015, hlm. 44).

The psychology of knowledge pertains to the mental aspects of the thinker, particularly during the construction of a body of thought. The psychology of knowledge enables the exploration of the profound context surrounding a thinker's ideas, revealing the nuances and complexities inherent in their thought processes (Labiba, 2021).

Both approaches indicate that Leila Ahmed's experiences in identity construction across social and cultural boundaries significantly influence her work. She has encountered both Arab and Western cultures. She has experienced both the personal interpretation of Islam, as imparted by her mother, and the ritualistic, at times oppressive, version enforced by the state. She has gained from the educational opportunities provided by Western influences in Egypt; however, she has experienced racism and stereotyping from teachers and peers in England. These diverse experiences have imbued her work with significance and compelled her to deliver a nuanced and thoughtful analysis in her writings.

In her work, Leila Ahmed refrains from delineating right from wrong. She illustrates complex situations by presenting various potential answers to each inquiry. Upon arriving in the United States, she encountered numerous prominent Muslim feminists; however, their understanding of women's issues within the Islamic world was notably constrained. Their focus was limited to issues such as polygamy, the hijab, and female circumcision. Furthermore, their comprehension was minimal (Thomas & Elizabeth Hook, 2001).

In this book, Leila Ahmed initiates her investigation into the history of the Arab Middle East and Islamic history, while analyzing the mindset and institutions employed by early Muslim societies, which are pivotal to understanding the status of women in Islam. She asserts that the discourse surrounding women and gender in Middle Eastern Islamic societies must explore the societal context in which it is embedded, especially regarding the social, institutional, and verbal articulation of gender within that society. Leila Ahmed contends that examining the history of women through the lens of socio-economic and historical conditions is the suitable approach for her research (Ahmed, 1992, hlm. 2).

Her multicultural background as an immigrant in the West, along with the influence of her grandmother during childhood and her comprehension of cultural Islam's emphasis on gender roles, appears to have profoundly influenced her writings. Leila Ahmed's writings, akin to those of Amina Wadud, have emerged as a significant reference for Muslim feminists in recent years. In contrast to Amina Wadud's theological-exegetical approach to the Quran, Leila Ahmed emphasizes the socio-historical contexts of Middle Eastern societies in her research. Leila Ahmed analyzes Islamic laws within society using a historical framework, scrutinizing diverse historical sources pertinent to the revelation of a verse and the circumstances surrounding the formation of Islamic law. Leila Ahmed's examination of this book centers on the influence of social events and occurrences on the interpretation of Islamic legal texts. The influence of social events on text interpretation constitutes a fundamental element of her research.

Leila Ahmed's book, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, provides an examination of historical social conditions, with a particular focus on the status of women. Employing a socio-historical approach, Ahmed presents a novel perspective on the discourse surrounding gender development during that period. A significant instance is her assertion that diverse models of understanding, attitudes, and behaviors towards women are evident in groups such as the Sufis, Khawarij, and Qarmatiah. In the current context, the Sufi movement is noteworthy as it typically positions itself as a political, religious, and cultural counter to the prevailing society. The Sufis prioritize the inner, spiritual interpretation of the Quran, emphasizing the ethical principles and vision underlying divine commandments.

Ahmed conducts a thorough examination of the historical origins of the discourse on women, analyzing its evolution within Islamic contexts, beginning with pre-Islamic Arab society, progressing through the era of Prophet Muhammad, and continuing into the Islamic golden age and beyond. Ahmed meticulously documents the historical conditions pertaining to the status of women, addressing both positive and negative dimensions. Her objective is to situate these records within a more equitable framework.

Nonetheless, several aspects appear to receive insufficient emphasis in her book. The topic of inheritance in Islam is addressed only briefly, especially concerning the status of women in pre-Islamic society. The Islamic inheritance laws established by Prophet Muhammad remain undiscussed. In her discussion of the egalitarian condition of Egyptian society prior to the Roman arrival, she appears to concur with the assertions made by Ramses III. The inquiry pertains to the specific form of egalitarianism referenced by Ahmed, particularly in the context of the ongoing practice of slavery during that period. Furthermore, in the cases of Khadijah and Hindun, the representation of women's esteemed roles appears to be limited to specific groups, notably the nobility, rather than being universally applicable across society.

CONCLUSION

Leila Ahmed's work, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, significantly contributes to the deconstruction of stereotypes and enhances our understanding of the influence of religion and culture on perceptions of women in Muslim societies. This work did not arise in isolation. The author's ideas and methodology, analyzed through the frameworks of sociology of knowledge and psychology of knowledge, can be interpreted as a response to the social realities she encountered. Ahmed's methodological approach involves an examination of the history of the Arab Middle East

and Islamic history, alongside an analysis of the mindset and institutions of early Muslim societies, which subsequently informs her discourse on women and gender in Islamic society. The discourse should analyze the societal context in which it is embedded, focusing on the social, institutional, and verbal articulations of gender within that society. Leila Ahmed asserts that an effective method for her research involves mapping the historical landscape of women through an analysis of socio-economic and historical conditions.

In conclusion, Leila Ahmed's life experiences, encompassing diverse social and cultural contexts, significantly shaped her professional identity. She has encountered a personal, experiential Islam imparted by her mother, alongside a ritualistic and at times oppressive Islam enforced by the state. She had the opportunity to obtain an education influenced by Western ideals in Egypt; however, she faced racism and stereotypes from her educators and classmates in England. These diverse experiences have provided significance to her work and compelled her to present a balanced and nuanced analysis in her book. In her work, Leila Ahmed presents a nuanced exploration of the subject, illustrating the complexity of the situation by offering various potential responses to each inquiry.

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