



Do Women Need Feminism?

by Zara Huda Faris

This is the official MDI Transcript of the opening presentation of Zara Huda Faris' (Muslim Researcher and Speaker for MDI), which was delivered at the debate with Natalie Bennett (UK Green Party Leader), 'Do Women Need Feminism', held on 28 February 2013.

It is claimed that women need feminism because there are women who suffer injustice – but this ignores that nearly *all* human beings will suffer injustice at some point in their lives at the hands of other men or women – and justice for only *one* group of society, to the exclusion of another, is like a bird with only one wing – it just does not fly.

Men have a *fundamental* need for justice just the same as women do – and whilst the very word 'feminism' discriminates, the word 'justice' does not. Justice means giving people what they deserve or merit but, as we will see, feminism and justice are *not* synonymous.

Feminism is a highly ambiguous term, straitjacketing instead of liberating, it is the call for gender privilege masquerading as equality. In essence, feminism denies the human reality, it is unclear, and not a cause for justice.

Feminism is unjust

To begin. Feminists advocate that women have traditionally been dehumanised by a male dominated society, which they call the *patriarchy*; and that it has always been better to be a man. But this one-sided claim snubs the privileges that women have often *enjoyed* simply for *being* women.

The dynamics of society, at the most basic level, show that it has actually always been better to be a woman. Biologically, every woman counts in reproduction and perpetuating life itself – giving *each* woman an intrinsic worth, regardless of what she does. It only takes *one* man, however, for many women to have children. Historically, this gave rise to the idea amongst human societies that men are largely disposable, whilst every woman is indispensable.

This is why, instinctively, we prioritise safety and comfort *for women* rather than men; why women are rescued first in any emergency or disaster, and get the first seats in lifeboats; why men tend to work longer hours, risking life and limb in the more dirty and dangerous jobs like being coal miners, oil drillers, foot soldiers, construction workers, rubbish collectors, and the male relative acting as the unpaid bodyguard in the home. To quote one activist, 'women are

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human *beings* whilst men are human *doings*.ⁱ This privilege is not appreciated by feminists because, as pro-feminist Michael Kimmel once said, '*privilege is invisible to those who have it*'.

When it comes to violent crime, the reality is that the more violent the crime, the more likely the victim is to be a man. Men are more than twice as likely to be murdered than women in the UK.ⁱⁱ When it comes to domestic violence, the Guardian reported that men are the victims more than 40% of the time – excluding unreported cases – and men are half as likely to tell anyone about it in the first place.ⁱⁱⁱ When it comes to the provision of refuges, there are 7,500 for females in England and Wales but only 60 for men. As for male rape victims within UK prisons, there's a collective state of denial – it's just not taken seriously.^{iv v} Men are held to a higher standard of self-defence, so they often suffer in silence, reluctant to be re-victimised by an unsympathetic legal system or disbelieving treatment from professionals.

Yet feminists generally remain egregiously quiet about male suffering as a result of social roles. Whilst feminists seek "liberation" from the "shackles" of the traditional female role, the man is still expected to continue his traditional, disposable role. This *one-sided* narrative of feminism is not the way forward.

For feminists, "equality" is merely a facade to favour women, often at the *expense* of others. Like when former Equality Minister, Harriet Harman (a feminist) publicly requested employers to discriminate against white men and hire women instead if both candidates were *equally* qualified.^{vi} Or when former Equality Minister, Patricia Hewitt, (also a feminist), was found guilty of breaching the Sex Discrimination Act by "overlooking a strong male candidate for a job in favour of a *weaker* female applicant".^{vii}

Feminists claim to seek "equality", and call for a 40% minimum female quota on management boards, but conspicuously do not call for a 40% female quota for soldiers, prison guards, lumberjacks, miners, body guards, or construction workers – why is that? Why not campaign for an end to the 'women and children first policy' for lifeboat rescue – why not make it first come, first served? Why not have women and men compete side by side at the Olympics – as equals? Of course, the reason feminists will not advocate this is because they are not really after equality, but the *means* to achieve gender privilege.

Another shocking example is the feminist campaign for closing women's prisons. The Fawcett Society, the UK's leading feminist campaign for *closing the inequality gap* between women and men, campaigned that female prisons did not suit women's needs.

So, as recommended in a report by Baroness Corston^{viii}, they should be closed and replaced with what is in effect, women's social clubs, where female offenders get to spend time with each other "organising their own shopping, budgets and cooking", and then go home to their children at the end of each day.

The Corston Report also stated that '*Women and men are different. Equal treatment of men and women does not result in equal outcomes*', going on to claim that "*women are governed by hormones and a monthly cycle, which affects their moods and emotions. [...] these biological factors have a direct bearing on the way in which women experience stressful events during their lives.*"

If a man were to say that about treating women differently in the workplace, he'd be called a misogynist. Strangely, feminists are completely happy to say women are 'governed by hormones' and cite 'biological factors' when it comes to obtaining privileges for women.

So, for feminists, male criminals are to be punished to the full extent of the law while female criminals should get comfort and help. Why is female suffering and injustice more important than male suffering and injustice? Surely *justice* does not discriminate. But as we can see, *feminism does!* Feminists are not asking for equal treatment – but *special* treatment – *gender privilege*.

Women do not need gender privilege and therefore they do not need feminism. In reality, they, along with men, need justice – a comprehensive justice for all.

Feminism is unclear

Secondly, women need *clear* solutions – but feminism is *unclear and evasive*. Feminism comes in *many* different factions: conservative, liberal, socialist, post-modern, ecofeminism, and so on – with no shared value system or moral guidance, feminists do not agree on anything but the name - and will happily contradict *themselves* if need be. For example, feminists have no clear position for the sexual objectification of women – some feminists advocate androgynising the female appearance and others campaign for *safer* breast implants without adequately challenging why women feel compelled to get them in the first place.

Because feminism cannot deal with complexities, it promotes the idea of *individualism* instead – that women should be “empowered” through “redefining their own expectations” - and feminists are always on hand to dictate that women should make men the benchmark for these expectations. Instead of freeing women from male expectation, feminists expect free women to be male.

Feminism denies the human reality

Finally, I argue that feminism denies human reality – it straitjackets women, and does not understand or accommodate the natural proclivities of the genders.

Virtually all species, from bees to primates have different gender roles, with different biological abilities across the sexes. Yet feminists insist that any gender difference between humans is invented and there is nothing biological about men or women that should inform their social roles. Scientific studies have clearly demonstrated, however, the role of testosterone in building muscle, in increasing competitiveness, confidence and risk taking - making men *better* suited to the more hazardous and competitive roles of society. Because of testosterone, men naturally tend to be faster, bigger, possess more stamina and are physically stronger. So teaching a girl that she can naturally compete equally with men in *everything* is misleading.

One absurd example of this is when feminists, attempting to achieve equal outcomes between the sexes, had the strenuous physical tests for UK firefighters lowered and the standards relaxed in order to accommodate more female firefighters.^{ix}

The *standards* you can now expect from professionals in burning buildings (and boardrooms – as I mentioned earlier), whether male *or* female, is now much lower than before because of feminists. It seems feminists are implicitly agreeing with Plato who said that women should be treated equally to men, except that not so much should be expected of them – leading feminists in their absurd quest for ‘equal outcomes’ between the sexes, to campaign for mediocrity in the workplace rather than meritocracy.^x

Feminists argue that the division of labor in traditional families constrains women's opportunities and that women are discriminated against in getting jobs and wages, and that there exists a wage gap between the genders. However, these arguments collapse upon further scrutiny, because if employers could get away with paying a woman *less* for the exact same task that they could pay a man – why would they not just hire women? Furthermore, statistics cited by feminists as evidence of the wage gap, lump full-time hours in with overtime hours (of which women tend to choose to do far less than men)^{xi}. They also average earnings from disparate jobs, like primary school teachers with investment bankers, sales engineers with chemical engineers, HR executives with finance executives. So they do not compare like for like jobs.

Nor are women *discouraged* from entering higher-paying fields. They outperform men at university,^{xii} but are more likely to choose languages, arts and social sciences (which pay less), whilst men are more likely to choose engineering, technology, math and sciences (which pay more).

The division of labour once children are born, also means mothers tend to intensify their home commitments, and fathers tend to heavily intensify their work commitments. Men seem to make this trade-off more than women – perhaps because men feel more obligated to work than women do. The reality is that the statistics do *not* reflect *discrimination* but *choices*. If there is a ‘glass ceiling’, it seems that women are the main architects of it, because they get to trade-off higher paying jobs for more flexible hours to combine work and family life, which means they not only get the benefit of the father’s wage, but also a better work life balance for herself. Is not that more important than arbitrarily chasing the highest paying jobs?

Feminists do not want to be thought of as sexual objects, but seem happy to be valued according to their economic worth. Both assessments are materialistic, and neither should dictate the worth of a man or woman.

The wage gap *is* telling in that feminists cannot deny the impact of motherhood on the woman’s life choices – that men and women cannot live lives completely autonomous from one another - that men and women actually *need* each other to make a whole.

So that’s the wage gap – but if feminists are so keen on equality, what about their silence on the cancer research gap, the education gap, the violent crime gap, the death on the job gap, the suicide gap,^{xiii} the life expectancy gap – all of which discriminate *against men*?

In idolising the male and trying to create an androgynous sexuality where men and women are virtually identical except for their anatomy, feminists have perpetuated a misogynistic self-loathing for the traditional female role – motherhood, and female tenderness is now viewed as a weakness. The strength of men which can be used to lead wars just as it can be used to be fierce protectors, is often kept in check by the compassion and temperance of women. But when women abandon these qualities, and want the same aggression that they perceive in men, what will be left?

When feminists are insisting on taking over the male role, is it any surprise that men are shirking the responsibilities which they once did with pride, diligence and self-less duty? If feminists want to 'have-it-all', they will most likely end up having to 'do-it-all', often at the expense of their own wellbeing, and most importantly, at the expense of our children.

Islam

In Islam, men and women and their actions are equal in the eyes of God, God says in the Qur'an "*Never will I allow to be lost the work of [any] worker among you, whether male or female; one of you is as the other*" (The Holy Qur'an 3:195). Islam primarily addresses men and women the same because men and women, by and large, share the same human characteristics – men and women are addressed separately only in relation to the few areas where men and women differ.

The Islamic system is not based on selfish individualism but a God-centred world view promoting mutual reciprocity. In Islam, women do not serve men, nor do men serve women. Rather, we serve God by helping each other and giving to each other based on human needs, with the understanding that humans are not all the same.

Islam guards the female from the moment she enters the world, by rebuking and prohibiting the practice of female infanticide as one of the gravest crimes to be committed. Such a religion can only go on to challenge the ill-treatment of women, and secure her wellbeing, at every stage of her life. Through property rights, marriage contracts, political participation, inheritance laws, and dress code, it advocates complementarity with men and not competition. Marriage is the bedrock of family life and the fundamental unit of Islamic society, giving us *rights and duties* to one another. As a wife, she has the right to be provided for, including her own living space, and is guaranteed financial safeguards *should* her marriage not work out.

Yet Islam does not straitjacket women – it allows women to enter the workplace – but *not out of the necessity of the struggle to support herself, but out of choice*, to be pursued at her leisure. In Islam, nobody has a right over her earnings. However, Islam mandates that a man's earnings must be used to provide for the women of the household irrespective of whether they work or not. Furthermore, as a mother, the woman is given preference for respect from her children over their father. Such is the esteemed role she plays as the heart and soul of the family and, by extension, society.

Islam provides a clear, natural and just solution to ensuring justice for all humans, and has no need for feminism's vain attempts to reinvent the wheel that Islam set in motion over 1400 years ago.

In Islam, power is not a virtue – it is a burden and responsibility. Instead of seeking to empower ourselves, *we should empower justice*. In Islam, women are liberated from the servitude of men, and liberated from the expectations of other women. It is *virtue*, which all human beings, regardless of gender, career or social role, can equally strive for. In the end, true self-worth and contentment does not come through submission to any aspect of creation but rather, by submission to the Creator Himself and all that He Commands.

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ⁱ Man Woman & Myth - www.manwomanmyth.com

ⁱⁱ Home Office Statistical Bulletin, Crime in England & Wales - 2009/10, p.51

ⁱⁱⁱ The Guardian, 5 September 2010 - More than 40% of domestic violence victims are male, report reveals - <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/sep/05/men-victims-domestic-violence>

^{iv} The Guardian, 17 March 2010 – Rape is not just a women’s issue - UK charity Mankind suggests that three in 20 men are victims of sexual violence - <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/mar/17/stern-review-male-rape> (See also article on prison ombudsman - <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/may/02/male-rape-prison-jail-howard-league>)

^v It was also noted in a Home Office publication in 1999 that some studies of rape-case attrition had deliberately and inexplicably excluded cases of male rape. See: ‘Policing Male Rape and Sexual Assault’ by Philip N. S. Rumney, Journal of Criminal Law (2008), Volume 72, Issue 1, February, (JCL 72 (67)).

^{vi} <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7474801.stm>

^{vii} <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/female-champion-hewitt-discriminated-against-man-510584.html>

^{viii} The Corston Report, March 2007 – <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/docs/corston-report-march-2007.pdf>

^{ix} <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1375381/Fire-service-strength-fitness-tests-relaxed-allow-women-firefighters.html>. The tests were originally designed to identify candidates that could carry a certain weight over a certain distance and do other tasks involving upper body strength. Recently, however, the tests were hugely relaxed in order to accommodate more female firefighters. The 'ladder lifting' tests that all new recruits have to go through were made easier, and strenuous 'beep test' runs were scrapped. Women can also repeat fitness tests if they fail, without having to go back to the beginning.

^x Plato’s Republic (457a10)

^{xi} Office for National Statistics – 2011 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (SOC 2000) – 23 November 2011

^{xii} <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-16530012> - More women than men were studying for degrees in 2010/11 (57%). 66% of degrees awarded to women were either firsts or 2:1. The figure was 61% for men.

^{xiii} There were 4,552 male suicides in 2011 and 1,493 female suicides. <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/subnational-health4/suicides-in-the-united-kingdom/2011/stb-suicide-bulletin.html>