

Paper Presented at

***The AMSS 33rd Annual Conference
George Mason University,
Arlington Campus – Virginia
Sept. 24 - 6, 2004***

*Abstract Only - Work in Progress
Contact Author for further details*

**“Islamic Feminism in Transnational Contexts:
Re-Conceptualizing Gender Through the Qur'an”**

By: Zainab T. Alwani (International Islamic University of Malaysia)

Islam's encounter with western ideology caused an often radical change in the way many concepts were used and understood among members of the Muslim community. Feminism as an ideology and movement has been studied and developed through western sciences and practices and exists within a conceptual framework rooted in western culture. This framework is not always capable of dealing with non-western structures. Today, Muslim women engage in serious debates from within. Although delineating feminism as a concept and ideology through an Islamic paradigm is crucial, defining Muslim woman's role and position in Islam theoretically and practically through a *Fiqhi* perspective is critical as well. Muslim women intellectuals seeking to renegotiate their place and role in a changing world, can no longer take ready answers on the authority of others, no matter how hallowed the transmission. We turn to the Qura'n and the prophetic model to reestablish links with the source of some basic knowledge about ourselves, our world, and the origin of our values and convictions. We ask critical questions about our role and status in society today, as well as major issues influencing the world community, which will determine the direction of a future generation for whom we feel responsible. The Qur'an reveals a constructive system that deals explicitly with women issues toward fulfilling the ultimate purpose as vicegerents. This paper attempts to reexamine women's status and role through engaging the Qur'an as the transcendent record of revealed guidance in re-conceptualizing gender through the concept of *Zawjeya* "pairing," and through highlighting the missing dimension of Qura'nic spirituality and its implications on marital relationships. With this in mind, the Qur'an unequivocally denies the inevitability of a confrontation between the sexes and dislodges traditional male-bounded authoritarian theories on the gender question.