

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

TALK 2

NETHERLANDS

How Gender Justice Has Oppressed Families

Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullah wa Barakatahu

Dear Sisters,

Allah (swt) says ﴿وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ﴾ **“The believers, men and women, are protecting friends (Awliya) of one another...”** [9:71]

In this verse of the Qur'an, Allah (swt) with His infinite wisdom teaches us exactly what the role of men and woman should be towards one another – to be protecting friends of one another. Subhaanallah, how beautiful is that? Isn't this exactly what any woman and man would desire from their husband or wife?

But the question that we need to answer is does 'Gender Justice' or rather 'Gender Equality' achieve this important goal? This is what I will address in my talk today Insha Allah.

Firstly sisters, we must understand that the call for Gender Justice is not simply a call for women to have the same political, economic, educational and judicial rights as men but rather it is to make the rights, roles and duties of men and women in marriage, family life and society in general the same under the guise of 'Gender Equality' and by associating gender differences with discrimination, injustice or even oppression against the woman. It argues for example that men and women should share the role of being breadwinner for the family as well as household duties and child-rearing, claiming that this represents 'gender justice'.

Over many decades, feminists championed Gender Equality under the narrative that it was the means for women to secure respect, happiness, better marriages, and happier children as well as achieve progress for societies. They promoted it using sugar-coated terms such as 'Women's empowerment', 'Women's Rights' and 'Gender Justice' to entice women and the general public to embrace them and for states to enshrine it in their constitutions and laws. Hence, those who opposed the call for gender equality and the re-definition of gender roles in family life were labelled as backward and outdated and accused of supporting injustice against women.

However, this sugar coating hid a bitter pill, for gender equality and this dangerous experiment in social engineering has served as one of the most destructive forces on marriage, motherhood and the family unit and caused untold misery for women, children and men alike, as well as generating a plethora of problems for societies. This is because this socially corrosive concept encouraged women to selfishly define their own entitlements and duties rather than what was best for women, men, children and society overall. Its women-centred approach to organising family life and its narrow gender-based outlook to solving problems in society caused confusion and discord in marital life and parental responsibilities, caused the rights and wellbeing of children to be neglected, devalued motherhood and disempowered women to fulfil their vital role as homemakers and mothers. Dale O'Leary, a US journalist and lecturer, and one of the opponents of the feminist philosophy, wrote in her book, 'The Gender Agenda: Re-defining Equality', *“Feminists claimed to promote the progress of women, but the feminists appeared to me to have a very warped idea of what it meant to be a woman, and an even weirder idea of what constitutes progress.”*

However, despite this, gender justice and its principle concept of gender equality spread beyond the Western nations from where it originated to the Muslim world as a result of

colonial policies and the rule by secular systems and governments who imposed and promoted the Western viewpoint and ideals, including that of feminism, upon their people through their constitutions, laws, media, education systems and initiatives, as seen for example in Tunisia's Personal Status Code as well as its new constitution that establishes full gender equality between men and women in society; or as seen in the intensive campaign in the Arab world to push the idea of gender equality through the education system - one example being that schoolbooks depicting women as mothers and wives are now seen as outdated, gender biased and in need of change. These secular governments also permitted feminist-based women's movements to operate freely within their societies, spreading their corrupt ideas to the Muslim Ummah. This is in addition to embracing international treaties and conventions such as CEDAW which forcefully propagated gender equality in the laws and policies of nations.

As a consequence, many within the Muslim Ummah adopted gender equality and other feminist ideas, believing that it would lead to respect and progress for women in the Muslim lands as well as elevation of their societies politically, economically and socially. It re-shaped our view of success as Muslim women of a woman who is financially independent of her husband, shares in his roles and duties, and has a successful career, rather than being a successful servant to our Rabb (swt), which includes being a successful wife and mother. Consequently, suspicion and hatred developed amongst many in the Muslim Ummah towards the Islamic family and social laws such as male guardianship, obedience of the woman to the husband, her primary role as home-maker and caretaker of the children, polygamy, the Islamic process of Talaq (divorce) and rules on inheritance. These Shariah laws were accused of preferring men over women or reflecting servitude of women towards men due to the gender differences, rather than recognizing that those differences were a reflection of Islam's recognition of the physical differences of the sexes and hence a means to organize family life and society effectively.

Other Muslims promoted gender equality using the false argument that Islam endorses it, as we see with the narratives of so-called Islamic feminists today who call for the re-interpretation of the Islamic texts through the perspective of gender equality – such that Islamic laws on inheritance, divorce and marital roles and rights are 'equalized' for men and women.

Fundamentally however, the Muslims who embraced and advocated the ideal of gender justice, failed to understand that the concepts of feminism, including gender equality, that advocate the idea that women should define their own rights and roles in life, fundamentally contradicts the Islamic belief. This is because in Islam, men and women do not define their rights, roles and duties based upon equality or their own desires but upon the Laws of Allah (swt) alone. Allah (swt) says, *﴿وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَىٰ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ﴾* ***"It is not (fitting) for a believer, man or woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter that they should have any option in their decision. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he has indeed strayed in a plain error."*** [Al-Ahzab: 36] In addition, Islam prescribes certain clear differences in roles, duties and rights for men and women within family life and society. He (swt) says, *﴿الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ﴾* ***"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means."*** [TMQ An-Nisa: 34]. And the Prophet (saw) said, *«كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ، وَالْأَمِيرُ رَاعٍ، وَالرَّجُلُ رَاعٍ عَلَىٰ أَهْلِ بَيْتِهِ، وَالْمَرْأَةُ رَاعِيَةٌ، عَلَىٰ بَيْتِ زَوْجِهَا وَوَلَدِهِ...»* ***"Each of you is a guardian, and each is responsible for those under his care. A ruler is a guardian; a man is the guardian of his family; a woman is the***

guardian of her husband's house and children..." (Reported by Bukhari and Muslim) Furthermore, the Muslim woman does not evaluate her success by measuring herself against the man and his rights and responsibilities but based upon how her Creator (swt) views her and according to her fulfillment of the duties He (swt) has prescribed for her. Allah (swt) says, *﴿وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا مَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهِ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبْنَ وَسَأَلُوا﴾* ***“And do not wish for that by which Allah has made some of you exceed others. For men is a share of what they have earned, and for women is a share of what they have earned. And ask Allah of his bounty. Indeed Allah is ever, of all things, Knowing.”*** [An-Nisa: 32]

Those Muslims who embraced the ideas of feminism also failed to realise that its concepts were born from the historical experiences of injustice, oppression and absence of basic political, economic, educational, and legal rights that women within Western states experienced due to living under the flawed man-made secular system - a history and experience that Islam and Islamic rule does not share. But importantly, those Muslims who adopted the gender justice narrative, failed to truly understand the scale of social devastation that gender equality and other feminist ideals cause for the family structure, for women, children and for society overall.

(1) A Reduction in Marriage Rate, a Baby Gap in Nations and Increased Extramarital Relations.

Firstly, feminism and gender equality created an aversion towards marriage amongst many women due to viewing it as an oppressive and patriarchal structure which was more advantageous to the man than the woman and where as a wife, she would be in servitude and enslaved to her husband. It also resulted in many women viewing the status of being a wife and mother as a second-class role, inferior to pursuing a career and employment. All this led to many women delaying or rejecting marriage or motherhood causing a drop in marital and birth rates and a 'baby gap' in nations with fewer people to care for ageing populations. In addition, feminism's promotion of sexual freedom for women, spurred a huge rise in extramarital relationships including adultery, which served as a major cause of the epidemic of broken marriages resulting in countless numbers of children being brought up in single parent families. It also resulted in higher numbers of children being born out of wedlock, and hence an increase in abortions within states, causing much heartache and misery.

(2) Confusion and Conflict in Marriage

Secondly, feminism and gender equality caused confusion and discord in marital and parental responsibilities due to the erosion of clearly defined roles and duties within marriage for the man and the woman with regards to providing for the family, domestic chores, and looking after the children. Marriage therefore became dominated by competition between the genders over roles and responsibilities rather than a harmonious union where the husband and wife fulfilled their defined and complementary marital and family obligations. It also became a battlefield over personal choices and rights rather than a bond of companionship defined by love, mercy and responsibilities of the spouses towards one another. Furthermore, with many men and women working often long and demanding jobs, there was less time and energy spent on making marriages work, weakening the marital bond. For example, in a PEW Research Centre survey on the US published in 2013, half of the adults surveyed said that the increasing numbers of women working had made marriages harder to succeed.

(3) Women Pressured into Employment

Thirdly, the feminist 'gender equality' narrative that the roles of men and women in life should be the same and that the value of women comes from work and financial independence from men created societies where women no longer have the option to work but are expected to. This is the case even if they are single mothers with sole responsibility for the care and upbringing of their children. Women were therefore often forced to adopt the man's role as the breadwinner for their family, becoming slaves to the market, even if they wished to stay at home and look after their children. In 2013, the UK *Guardian* published an article under the title, "*The rise of 'breadwinner moms' is less a win for equality than it looks*" in which it cited statistics from a report by the PEW Research Centre that in 40% of all US households with children, mothers are the sole or primary breadwinners. The article described how the majority of the 40% - two thirds – were single mothers, many of whom were struggling with the task of juggling home and childcare responsibilities. It stated, "*For single moms, in particular, the reality of primary breadwinner status feels like less of a feminist victory than simply being overworked, under-supported and broadly stigmatized.*"

The link of women's success with employment has also resulted in many women delaying or avoiding having children in order to pursue a successful career, or even keep a job. Feminism and gender equality have therefore cheated many women out of motherhood, and nations out of a well-populated, strong future generation! Furthermore, the idea that employment would bring the woman a higher status in society and economic security was an illusion, for many women entered low paid, poor quality, and often exploitative jobs.

(4) Rights of Children were Neglected

Fourthly, feminism's drive to push mothers into the workplace in the name of gender equality disempowered women to fulfil their vital role as mothers and ignored the needs of children. With both parents as breadwinners, it impacted the ability of many to effectively raise their children with inevitable consequences. In a 2013 PEW Research Centre survey on the US, almost 75% of adults said that the increasing numbers of women working have made it harder for parents to raise children. Professor Martha Albertson Fineman, one of the most influential figures in feminist legal theory describes the creation of the two-parent family, which is, "*an institution with potentially NO available caretakers*", while Brenda Almond, Professor of Moral and Social Philosophy and author of the book, 'The Fragmenting Family', writes that for the majority of working mothers have to accept "*the inevitability of the absence of both parents from the home for the whole of the working day.*" This shortness of time spent by working mothers in nurturing their children has also been blamed by many as one cause of the significant levels of delinquent and anti-social behaviour amongst the youth that plagues many societies today, as well as affecting the mental wellbeing and educational performance of children.

(5) Women's Lives Became Strained

Fifthly, the strain on women having to struggle the pressures of work with the responsibilities of home and family life has been attributed to the significant rise in anxiety and depressive disorders in women. A study conducted in 30 European countries by the European College of Neuropsychopharmacology and published in 2011, found that depression amongst women in Europe has doubled over the last 40 years due to the 'tremendous burden' of having to juggle family duties with the demands of work. Also in 2009, the UK National Health Service Information Centre reported that there was a significant rise in women being referred for extreme stress due to the pressures of keeping a job, raising children, and looking after elderly parents. The call for gender equality therefore acted as a form of injustice, as the dream of the 'have it all woman' became the nightmare of

the 'do-it all woman', who suffered the stress of being both homemaker and wage-earner with inevitable consequences. This is far from being a paradise of fairness and justice for women.

(6) Motherhood Became Devalued

And finally, feminism's promotion that women's domestic duties and childrearing were a waste of their talents and that they were holding women back from achieving their true potential within society, and that employment and a career were what gave women value, respect, success and empowerment lowered society's view of the vital importance of the role of motherhood. Those who supported the idea of the primary role of women as being a wife and mother were accused of reducing women to 'baby-making machines'. This is despite the fact that successfully caring for and raising a child is one of the most valuable assets of a society. Consequently, full-time mothers became second-class citizens and disrespected, and made to feel ashamed as if they were betraying 'women's liberation' and not contributing fully to society. Their lives were seen as lacking purpose, and they were often presented as a lower, uneducated class of 'non-persons' who were less skilled, less successful and of less value to society. Hence, by placing the roles and duties of men as the gold standard, the call for gender equality achieved the exact opposite of the empowerment of woman. It caused woman to devalue and even scorn their own unique biological nature and exclusive quality as the child-bearers of the human race, demeaning their status as women.

So in conclusion sisters,

Gender equality is a rationally flawed and socially corrosive concept that has inflicted immeasurable damage upon the harmony and unity of family life as well as the wellbeing of children. It ignored the biological nature of women as the child bearers of the human race, trying to push this aside as irrelevant, while it should be a central factor in defining the roles and rights within marriage and family life for the genders. It also rejected the central position that a mother has in a child's life. Additionally, it created competition and struggle between men and women rather than cooperation and making them protectors and supporters of one another as Allah (swt) commands of us in the Qur'anic verse at the beginning of my talk. Hence, the idea of women defining their own rights and roles did not liberate them from oppression but rather subjected them to different forms of injustice and misery. This is because this narrow individualistic feminist perspective of always looking at what is best for the desires and interests of women often overlooks what is best for a marriage, children, a tranquil family life and society overall.

Despite this, gender equality and gender justice – this non-Islamic foreign idea - continues to be peddled to the Muslim lands through further laws, policies and programs, as a concept that will elevate the position of women. Surely as Muslims, rather than replicating failed foreign social experiments, we should embrace and promote the divine Islamic beliefs, values, laws and system that have a sound, time-tested approach to organizing the roles, duties and rights of men and women in the most just way as well as creating harmonious and strong family units. Islam has provided detailed answers and guidance to every matter in our life. Therefore, it is to our Deen that we need to look to solve the many problems that women, children and families face today. Allah (swt) says: ﴿وَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ تَبْيَانًا لِّكُلِّ شَيْءٍ﴾ **“And We have sent down to you the Book explaining everything.”** [TMQ 16-89]

Yasmin Malik

Member of the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir