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Zahra Ali brings together the most relevant scholars, researchers and activists in what is called Islamic feminism in a second edition of this volume that captures the latest developments in the field. The work starts with two fundamental desiderata: the need to decolonize the reading and understanding of feminism in the Islamic space and to place it in the continuation of efforts to reform Islamic societies by reinterpreting its fundamental sources. In the introduction to the book Zahra Ali draws attention to the danger of generalization in approaching the Islamic world and the social status of Muslim women who live in a variety of environments each of them contextualized politically, economically and culturally. The editor warns that the articles making up the volume are in clear rupture with the orientalist and racist vision that characterizes the controversies about women in the Islamic world. Islamic feminism as conceptually described by the authors of this volume develops within the Islamic religious system by strongly challenging the patriarchal dimension of the reading of the Koranic text, overturning several general lines present in the common perception, Western and Islamic alike. Thus, Islam is antinomic with the emancipation of women, as are all patriarchal systems, and the struggle for equality between the sexes can only be waged by removing religion (p. 12). Islam is also a static, dogmatic and sexist reality, and feminism can only be an avatar of Western modernity (p. 12).

The militants of this movement are placed in the continuation of the efforts to reform Islamic society at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, emphasizing the role of the effort of interpretation (*iğtihād*) and denouncing the sacralization of the views of the ancient theologians. Feminists emphasize the difference between Islamic law (*fiqh*), historically elaborated by theologians (and, therefore,

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subject to historical context and the human dimension of interpretation) and the *šarī'a* (the way) which enunciates a set of higher principles of the Islamic religion. Islamic law is also the field that can and must be reformulated through a continuous *ijtihad* and a non-patriarchal and non-contextual reading of the Qur'anic text. This is the main desideratum, but also the main direction of study and action of Islamic feminism through its best-known voices: Amina Wadud, Margot Badran, Asma Lamrabet, Asma Barlas, Malika Hamidi, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Zainah Anwar, Omaira Abou-Bakr and others.

The manifestations of feminism in the Islamic world, from its timid beginnings at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day, have demonstrated “a porosity of boundaries between secular and religious activism, especially since the intellectual tools and type of engagement of feminist activists are most often diverse and hybrid, difficult to define as secular or religious” (p. 23). Feminisms in the Islamic space are in line with the critique of hegemonic feminism of the North American type and call for the recognition of the plurality of ways of women's emancipation, thus following the line of research opened by Chandra Mohanty who questioned the “universality” of the category “woman” as characterized by a common consciousness beyond economic, social and political realities (p. 23).

In her article, *L'islam au-delà du patriarcat: lecture genrée et inclusive du Coran*, Amina Wadud draws attention to the principles of equality and social justice on which the Qur'anic text is built, appealing directly to them and rejecting interpretations of Islamic law (*fiqh*) that are the products of theologians and tributary to the patriarchal social contexts of the time. Amina Wadud finds in the Qur'anic text the foundations of the notion of pluralism, but also the intrinsic warning against possible deviations from the message conveyed. “The noblest of you, men and women alike, is the most pious in the sight of God,” the Qur'anic text (49:13) paraphrases, emphasizing the notion of *taqwā* or moral integrity. The Qur'anic text's references to men and women as beings equally responsible to God are highlighted by the author (40:40) who demonstrates how the patriarchal society in which Islam emerged imposed its pre-existing characteristics on the new system. “After the Qur'anic revelation, to what extent have Muslim thinkers and theologians succeeded in overcoming the patriarchal limits of pre-Islamic society and applying the principle of social justice to women in harmony with the Qur'anic text?” asks Amina Wadud rhetorically. Amina Wadud proposes the notion of *mu'āwada* – defined as a relationship of reciprocity between persons (p. 42) that implies mutual knowledge (*ta'ārafū*, 49: 13), but also mutual support between members of a family or community – as a response to the patriarchal order in which the Qur'anic text has been read. Moreover, Amina Wadud associates the idea of male superiority with a serious deviation from the Qur'anic norms, more specifically with the ideas of *širk* (the association of another entity with God) and *istikbār* (the devil's pride in disobedience to God). In the author's view, the Qur'an is a reforming text

which, in the historical context of revelation in a society marked by anarchy and patriarchy, set out to put an end to social, political, economic and moral imbalances, including those whose victims were women (p. 45). The fundamental idea of gender equality implicitly follows from the Qur'an's worldview, the author believes, but this reading simply did not find a place in the traditionally and historically male-dominated society of oriental medieval Islam. The author also appeals in her demonstration to secondary texts, the prophetic hadiths, which reiterate and reinforce the idea of equality between the sexes, but also in general the notion of balance and fairness in the treatment of other members of the community (p. 46). I would note here, as in other parts of the article, a lack of care and consistency with the Latin transcription of the Arabic text<sup>2</sup>, which makes its content difficult to understand in places.

In her article, *Féminisme islamique: qu'est-ce à dire?*, Margot Badran very usefully summarizes the main set of arguments on the basis of which this current is formulated in the Islamic space (p. 61). Thus, the Koran explicitly upholds equality between all human beings, while patriarchal ideologies and practices have undermined the implementation of this principle, which is the basic social vision of the Qur'anic text. The Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) that was consolidated in its classical form during the ninth century was strongly influenced by the patriarchal conceptions and behaviors of the time. Hadiths were, in turn, used haphazardly to support the paternalist view of Qur'anic norms, not to mention that some of them fall under the specter of inauthenticity. As for the working and research methods of Islamic feminism these are the classical ones applied to the Qur'anic text, *iğtihād* and *tafsīr*, in addition to the tools and methods of modern sciences: linguistics, history, literary analysis, sociology, anthropology and others (p. 62). In the same way, Margot Badran reveals the three hermeneutical methods used by Islamic feminism: a re-reading of Qur'anic verses in order to correct historical misinterpretations (e.g., verses that speak of the creation of the world and the Garden of Eden episode on which successive theories of male superiority have been built); the citation and highlighting of those verses that unequivocally affirm the equality of men and women; the contextualized reading of verses that evoke gender difference and that have been intensively exploited to support, legitimize and legalize male dominance in Islamic society (p. 63).

<sup>2</sup> p. 46, in author's transcription: (...) inna li-rabbi ka 'alayka haqqan wa li-ahlika 'alaka haqqan wa li-nafsi-ka alaka haqqan, fi'ti kulla dhi haqqan haqqahu.

The Hadith to which the author refers is as follows:

(...) قَالَ إِنَّ لِنَفْسِكَ عَلَيْكَ حَقًّا، وَلِرَبِّكَ عَلَيْكَ حَقًّا، [وَلِوَضِيئِكَ عَلَيْكَ حَقًّا]، وَإِنَّ لِأَهْلِكَ عَلَيْكَ حَقًّا؛ فَأَعْطِ كُلَّ ذِي حَقٍّ حَقَّهُ

<https://dorar.net/hadith/sharh/15223> :(...)

Fa-qāla 'inna li-nafsi-ka 'alay-ka haqq<sup>am</sup> wa-li-rabbi-ka 'alay-ka haqq<sup>am</sup> wa-li-ḍayfi-ka 'alay-ka haqq<sup>am</sup> 'inna li-'ahli-ka 'alay-ka haqq<sup>am</sup> fa-'a'ṭi kulla dī haqq<sup>am</sup> haqqa-hu (our transcription).

At the beginning of her article, *Entre refus de l'essentialisme et réforme radicale de la pensée musulmane*, Asma Lamrabet quotes Einstein's saying that it is easier to disintegrate an atom than to demolish a preconceived idea. For the same is true of the stereotypical view of 'women in Islam', a phrase that the author dismantles as a conceptual legacy of the Orientalist and postcolonial Islamic worldview, but also part of current geopolitical strategies (p. 69). The plurality and diversity of the Islamic world translates into an undeniable diversity of the "Muslim woman" that only a hermeneutic vision limited by the conceptual framework of Western feminism can view in a monolithic and uniformizing manner (p. 71). The author draws attention to the need to maintain a balance in the approach to Islamic feminism between Western hegemonic tendencies and those of the religious extremist rigorist ideologies of the Islamic world, as each of these two rejects the existence of the other. The discussion about women in Islamic societies has to start from within the Islamic tradition long 'anchored' by patriarchal readings of religious texts (p. 73). The only recurring criterion of judgment in the Qur'anic message is the degree of piety and honesty of acts committed by men and women alike, according to Asma Lamrabet; while Muslim scholars, as with other monotheisms, have built their theological argument on philosophical and metaphysical theories, partly reproductions of earlier religious interpretations, which have enshrined the dictum that "women were created from and for men" (p. 77). In this context, making the fundamental distinction between *šarī'a* (the teachings of divine revelation) and *fiqh* (Islamic law, human and social construction), the author believes that the latter must be subject to change, in accordance with the vision of the early jurist founders of the schools of interpretation, which translates into a continuation of *ijtihād* (p. 80). The author asks rhetorically what happened to the writings of the 300 women of the third century of the Hejira indexed by the historian Ibn Ḥağar (1372-1449) who studied religious texts and produced interpretations of them in harmony with the egalitarian spirit of the Qur'an. Muslim women need to resume the habit of studying religious sources and producing knowledge in an attempt to deconstruct a strictly masculine and patriarchal approach to them (p. 81).

A remarkable contribution to this volume is the article *Femmes musulmanes et oppression: lire la libération à partir du Coran* by Asma Barlas, which addresses what she calls in feminist terminology *textual-sexual* oppression. In the context of the specificity but also the diversity of the Islamic world, Asma Barlas believes that Western feminism cannot be applied and cannot have any results, so the process of female emancipation in Islam must happen as a phenomenon intrinsic to the Qur'anic text and its re-reading. The contextualization of a reading, as we know, gives it certain particularities, and the fact that the Qur'anic text has been interpreted as unfavorable to women is due to "the contexts and methods of reading", Barlas explicitly states. The patriarchal reading of the Qur'anic

text, unfavorable to women, can be explained by the conservative reading produced by a group of medieval theologians with the support of the state, which was involved from the outset in defining religious knowledge (p. 90). A masculine society, therefore, deeply concerned with political continuities and power, in which men interpreted in a conservative key texts that were perhaps far too reformist for the reforming capacity of the society of the time. Recognizing the theological difference between the Discourse (the revealed text) and its terrestrial realization, Barlas finds no fault whatsoever in the Qur'anic text and draws attention once again to the confusion that is (perhaps intentionally) being made between the Qur'an and its exegesis. The former is of divine origin, Barlas asserts, the latter is the work of Muslim men (p. 91). Barlas also warns against the danger of considering any reading of a text as legitimate, appealing to hermeneutics understood here as the method and critique of textual interpretation. In fact, the Qur'an itself draws attention to the multitude of readings to which it will be subjected and to their lack of correctness (p. 93). Invoking similar research, Barlas points out that Islam readily incorporated pre-existing misogyny into society by shaping the discourse on gender and women for centuries to come; likewise, the author notes the religious continuities with earlier monotheisms, Judaism and Christianity, especially since early exegetes of Islam included Christian and Jewish converts (p. 94). One of the examples of contamination between monotheisms that Barlas highlights is the episode of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib which does not appear as such in the Qur'an, but is a borrowing from the biblical tradition (in the Qur'an, the two beings Adam and Eve are created from a single *nafs*, and Eve is in no way culpable for the banishment from heaven and there is no original sin associated with her as in the biblical tradition). Another idea that merits attention is the influence that colonial policies have had in exacerbating anti-feminine social practices in Islamic societies, given that the space traditionally occupied by women is seen as the last bastion of identity resistance to the cultural invasion of the West. The struggles for national emancipation in fact reinforced the traditionalist specificity of Islamic societies to the detriment of women's rights, which the colonizing West was making itself the flag bearer (p. 96). However, in the spirit of balance to which she has accustomed us, Asma Barlas draws attention to the misinterpretation by which the West is blamed for the injustice inflicted on women in Islamic societies. Returning to the hermeneutics of the Qur'anic text – the key to an equitable and non-patriarchal reading of it – Barlas notes that the principle of male superiority held by classical Islamic theology is in blatant violation of the principle of the oneness of God, *at-tawhīd*, which underpins Islam. This principle refers to the fact that God's power and sovereignty are indivisible, thus theories of male superiority that portray men as either superior to women, having the right to decide for them, or as intermediaries between them and the divinity, must be rejected altogether as anti-Qur'anic (p. 100). Among the Qur'anic attributes of God is *al-'adl*

(The Just or Authorized and Straightforward Judge of Dealing Justly), who does injustice (*ẓulm*) to no one, so it is impossible that inequality, discrimination and hatred are divine emanations. The Qur'anic text is not built around a biology of sexual differences and the roles that flow from this dichotomy, Barlas believes quoting Thomas Laqueur, but rather this image is the product of Western secularism that has biologically legitimized women's inferiority. This is why Western feminism faced a different situation in a binary society characterized by phallic thinking (pp. 102-103). In fact, it should be noted, Barlas believes, that the only distinction that the Qur'anic text makes between men and women refers to their ethical-moral qualities<sup>3</sup>, without making associations between sex and its social meanings (gender). Noting that the Qur'anic text is among the rare texts that directly address women and men, Barlas insists that the struggle for a non-patriarchal reading of the Qur'an will prove a difficult process because in the current political contexts the states of the Islamic world jealously guard their monopoly on religious knowledge and are not at all willing to endanger their position and privileges (p. 108).

Egyptian scholar Omaila Abou-Bakr's article, *Le féminisme islamique et la production de la connaissance: perspectives dans l'Égypte post-révolutionnaire*, enriches the perspective on the process of Muslim women's empowerment and reminds that the main objective of the Islamic feminist project is to eliminate theological patriarchy from the Islamic tradition in order to create a space for women to develop and give voice to a discourse based on justice and equality ('*adl* and '*musāwāt*'). The author identifies the main lines of action of the feminist project, which already benefits from a favorable academic context in which Muslim women have begun to do theology. Drawing on a transnational network, Muslim women scholars are claiming the right to revisit Islamic jurisprudence in order to change family codes and thus improve the situation of women in Islamic societies (p. 175). Another important line of research is history, which must bear witness to the many Muslim women who acted in the public sphere and participated in shaping religious principles in pre-modern times. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, she advocates the study of the cultural history of the Islamic tradition by analyzing various types of texts beyond the religious, such as historical chronicles, biographies, memoirs, treatises of all kinds. According to this theory, any text refers explicitly or implicitly to another text, either in the form of a *refutatio* or in the form of its acceptance (pp. 176-178). As a rule, texts produced in the same epoch (perhaps even at some distance in

<sup>3</sup> يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ.

Yā'ayyu-hā n-nāsu 'innā ḥalaqnā-kum min ḍakar<sup>m</sup> wa 'unṭā wa ḡa'alnā-kum šu'ūb<sup>m</sup> wa qabā'ila li-ta'ārafū 'inna 'akrama-kum 'inda llāhi 'atqā-kum 'inna llāha 'alīm<sup>m</sup> ḥabīr<sup>m</sup> (Qur'an, 49: 13).

*O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware.* (translated by M.M. Pickthall, <https://legacy.quran.com/49/13>)

time) dialogize even when they ignore each other. The author confronts relevant texts from the 15<sup>th</sup> century: the biographical dictionary of Šams ad-Dīn as-Saḥāwī which includes a number of Muslim women teachers of hadith described by the formula *dātu ‘aqlīn* (rational, having mind, being wise) and the works of the theologians Ibn **Katīr** and as-Suyūṭī who insist to the point of obsession on the concept of the subordination of women to their husbands (p. 177). Hard to believe that these texts are not in fact dialogues and that they do not express a particular reality of the time. Of course, the idea of the existence of a discursive conventionality is not to be dismissed in a society known for the formalism of its classical literary production, as the author states (p. 179). I note, as in previous cases, a certain lack of attention as regards the Latin transcription of the Arabic text (I will refer specifically to the wrong vocalization *taḥta riyāsati-hum* on page 182, where grammatical correctness would have required the use of the genitive case for the affix pronoun -hum, in the form -him: *taḥta riyāsati-him*).

The texts by the researchers Ziba Mir-Hosseini (*Le projet inachevé: la quête d'égalité des femmes musulmanes en Iran*) and Malika Hamidi (*Le féminisme musulman en Europe: "activisme textuel" et engagement transnational*), as well as the interviews with Muslim activists of this cause, are also very comprehensive for the phenomena described. A universe in motion and a much-needed social recovery project that aims to correct mistakes where they have been made in patriarchal interpretations of Islamic religious texts.

This volume can be extremely useful for scholars interested in the project of feminism in Islamic societies, but especially for those outside the field for whom the generalization and standardization of Islamic realities has so far been the handiest key to interpretation. This volume will help them discover a plural and by no means uniform world. The volume does not deal with the history of the modern Western-inspired feminism that has marked part of Arab and Islamic societies, especially in the first part of the 20th century through personalities such as Hudā Ša‘rāwī, Nabawiyya Mūsā or the more recent Nawāl as-Sa‘adāwī.