The hermeneutic of Fazlur Rahman in the feminist *tafsir* of Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas

Filiberto Rodano

s2114046

Middle Eastern Studies: Islamic studies

Master of Arts

Faculty of Humanities

Universiteit Leiden

Submitted to:

Prof.dr. Nico J.G. Kaptein

Institute for Area Studies

Universiteit Leiden

February 11th, 2020

Table of Contents

Introduction

Today, the discourse on Islam revolves around understanding its principles in light of the new set of values that the West keeps bringing forward. While discussions over women's role in Islam are much older than the last century, these topics have crossed the path of Islamic feminism which is trying to redefine Islam by picking out a gender-biased view on religion. Coming from Western scholars or Western-based scholars, Islamic feminism has the object of talking about Islam under the female's view. Islamic feminism is looking at Islam without the dogmatism connected to the tradition (Mernissi, 1991; Ali, 2006; Hidayatullah, 2014). For instance, it contests the traditional literature for being male-oriented and rewrites its own one.

The subject of this study focuses on feminist *tafsir* (the Qur'anic commentary's genre). This interpretation of the Qur'an has the possibility of going to the main source of the religion without the uncompromised view of patriarchal scholars that might have subdued the texts. The liberatory reading of the Qur'an has relevance both within the Muslim community and for the non-Muslim audience. This, also, sets an important value of reference on the possibility of outcomes of such endeavours. By shrugging off the traditional understanding of the Qur'an, the feminist exegesis is free of giving a more inclusive view on Islam. But this poses questions of validity. Namely, the methodology implied in the reading and the theological and epistemological approaches feminist exegetes use.

Among the modern feminist exegetes, few have gained as much popularity as Amina Wadud and more recently Asma Barlas. What makes these two authors set apart from the other is their full engagement with the Qur'an and the original outcome they share. In a field often dominated by male exegetes and often patriarchal interpretations, Wadud and Barlas have offered a contrasting and novel standpoint. Their exegesis has led them to state the Qur'an is a neutral (Wadud, 1999) and even an anti-patriarchal text (Barlas, 2019). These conclusions have left polarizing views. It is important to say that what distinguishes them from the previous efforts in doing so is the affiliation-acknowledged or not- with the feminist movement. Previous *tafasir* (sing. *tafsir*) have not kept the female's perspective as the focal point and none has taken this thematic approach. However, the writings of Wadud and Barlas only focus on rewriting Islamic feminism and the experience of future Muslim women. What is different, then, is the context in which their exegesis arises. They no longer have the urge

to address the Arabic speaker Muslims but are addressing the community across the world reaching to non-Muslims. English as the language for feminist *tafsir* is, therefore, another innovation (Badran, 2002)[1].

Literature Review

Although having different interests, Islamic feminists are interpreting the Qur'an through a common woman's perspective. What defines their research is the unexplored world of female agency in different fields. Many, for instance, look at the legal status of women or their role in mediaeval society. But rather than looking at the consequences sacred texts have on the society, the *mufassirat* (sing. *mufassirah*, as they often refer to themselves) go to the source of shari'ah law and look for the attitude of the Qur'an towards women.

Amina Wadud (1999) conducted a study in her book *Qur'an and Woman* to investigate the concept of woman in the Qur'an. She proposes a contemporary methodological approach based on the methods of Fazlur Rahman. She explains (ibid., pp. 3-4) her hermeneutical model as concerned of three aspects of the text: 1) context; 2) language; and 3) *weltanschauung*, the world-view. Using these interpretative tools, Wadud refines the different topics of the Qur'an and shows how women are part of the Sacred Scripture. In the last chapter, she does an analysis of the "incriminating" verses that seem to justify a patriarchal Islam. Her conclusion is that using the right methodology and refuting traditional interpretations, the Qur'an reads as liberatory for Muslim women. Such Qur'anic reading has never been formulated in this manner. Her powerful reading is, for some authors, the result of cherry-picking conclusions (Ali, 2006) or unfaithful translations (Sana and Ammad, 2016). For creating such a stir in the Islamic feminist discourse and for being considered as the focal point for the new wave of feminists, it is worth analyzing her *tafsir* in her methodology.

Few years after the publication of *Qur'an and Woman*, Asma Barlas published her own feminist *tafsir* (2002). In *Believing women in Islam* (from now on *Believing women*)

[1] It is, in fact, worth noting that all the publications from the authors mentioned were done in English. While giving a hint on their origins or the academic environment in which they operate, it also speaks about their audience and the influence they attain. Especially the works of feminists have a Janus-faced purpose: on one hand, they aim to provoke discussions in the academic world regarding Islam, on the other, their audience target consists of non-Muslim readers which makes their work apologetic literature.

Barlas tackles the ontological question on "whether or not the Qur'an is a patriarchal text" (2019, p. ix). Her modus operandi bases its foundation on the paradigm of the unicity of God (*tawhidic* principle) and the debunking of the association of God and God's Prophets as male/father figure. This unravels in the following chapters where she discusses the Qur'an's stance on sex/gender and the role of women in the family and society. What Barlas finds in her reading of the Qur'an is its rigidity towards transgressions of women's rights. This is very similar to Wadud. By looking at the holistic interpretation of the Qur'an, Barlas shows that gender inequality is a sin similar to *shirk* (polytheism). However, while they both arrive to similar conclusions a comparison of the two *tafasir* is fruitful in order to understand what is the reason of their interpretative similarities so that future interpretation of the Qur'an can benefit from similar readings.

Kecia Ali (2006) warns from these kinds of interpretations labelling them as "fundamentally dishonest and ultimately futile" (153). She claims that such readings distort the view of the Qur'an as it deprives it of its androcentric essence. In a later publication (Ali, 2016, p. 124) she clarifies that although having some controversial verses, the Qur'an is not misogynist. Ali challenges not the legitimacy or the utility of such endeavours but, rather, the ability to yield an egalitarian meaning from the Qur'an. Her attack on Barlas and Wadud is directed to their methodology and their biases blaming these authors for doing apologetic interpretations. She states that an honest interpretation should account of the androcentric language of the Qur'an as of its interpretative biased reading by further commentators.

On a similar vein, Aysha Hidayatullah (2014) criticizes Wadud and Barlas for having manipulated the Qur'an under their own will. For Hidayatullah feminist exegetes extort from the text what they want it to say. In this "ventriloquism" they tailor the meaning of the Qur'an according to their set of values. She is critical on what feminist exegetes are doing on an academic level: the way they are juxtaposing contemporary values to a historically situated text. Having reached a methodological impasse, feminist exegetes have associated the Qur'an with irreconcilable modern values (Hidayatullah, 2016, p. 135). In *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* (2014, p. 11), Hidayatullah affirms that both readings, the equalitarian and the androcentric, are part of the text and as such can live alongside each other. This does not imply the exclusion or the denial of one of the two.

Much of the exegetical framework of Wadud and Barlas builds up upon the work of Pakistani scholar Fazlur Rahman. The reason Islamic feminist movement particularly

reference Rahman is the mutual conception that the tradition has led Muslim intellectualism astray (1982, p. 151). The closing of the gate of *ijtihad* and the consequent ossification of Islamic moral understanding of the Qur'an resulted, in contemporary times, in what the Islamic world has experience when facing the West: the decay of Muslim societies. Thus, Qur'an is central to the revival of Islamic society. While rejecting traditional *tafasir,* he believed that Islam required a new form of hermeneutical methodology. Here, we find the same features that Islamic feminists use, namely historical contextualization and the rejection of the atomistic approach in favour of a cohesive view of the Qur'an. But Rahman's methodology does not stop to these key features. Likewise crucial in his methodology is the theory of prophecy and the nature of the revelation (1999, p. 11). What authors such as Wadud and Barlas take from Rahman is mainly the contingent and the universal principles of the Qur'an, his way of historicizing the text, but equally important was the role of the Prophet as receiver and mediator of the revelation (Saeed, 2004, p. 49).

It appears that the Islamic feminist's attempt to find egalitarian meaning in the Qur'an leaves many unsatisfied whether in the conclusions or in the premises. The compelling work of Wadud and Barlas has received as publicity as much criticism from the academia. But, although, many of their peers have contested that the Qur'an cannot be upheld as neutral or against the patriarchy, none has shown interest in disproving through a methodological and epistemological analysis the conclusions of such works. Besides, the writings of Fazlur Rahman seems to be the key asset in the understanding of feminist *tafsir*. The relationship between Wadud and Barlas on one side, and Rahman on the other has not yet been clarified, thus, it is not obvious what features of modernism do they retain from the theory of the latter. As Barlas remarked (2019, p. 262) most of their critics have focused on discarding their project or refuting the principle-extraction altogether, but much can still be discussed within this framework.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze *Qur'an and Woman* and *Believing women* as the manifesto of Islamic feminism. This study addresses the methodology and epistemology used by the authors in light of the contribution of Fazlur Rahman on the Qur'anic interpretation. The foremost question that I'll try to answer in this thesis is: to what extent do the works of Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas follow Fazlur Rahman hermeneutic? And how do they change?

Since most of the exegeses done with women as the main theme have not fully explored the possibilities a modernist approach can lead to, it seems that such analysis is in order to if we want to move on to further considerations or critiques. For this reason, and following the hints of the authors who critique Wadud and Barlas' commentaries, a second question will be: what is the reach of their hermeneutical models?

Finally, I believe answering these questions entails an understanding of the exegetes experience of their religiosity as this can give more insights on their project. Therefore the last question will be: how is their reading of the Qur'an shaped by their belief and social context?

Methodology

This study will be a documentary research, meaning that the methodology applied will be a library research. Specifically, is an examination of the views on *tafsir* of Wadud and Barlas through a comparison with the publications of Fazlur Rahman. Such an approach, therefore, follows the qualitative methods since this work will focus on interpretations and observation of *tafasir* and how to carry out a Qur'anic exegesis. However, this way of proceeding may have some pitfalls. The present study might benefit from a mixed methodology since a research that comprehends a quantitative method on the patriarchal verses and how they fit into the ethos of the Qur'an may improve drastically the depth of reflections we can propose on this topic.

Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into four main chapters. In the first one, it will be presented the context of Islamic feminism. Drawing from its origins in the early 20th century, an outline of feminism in the Islamic world will help us understand the trajectories and the aims of such works. Since a pivotal aspect in the hermeneutic of these authors is the historical contextualization, giving a brief introduction to the discussion over the early stage of Islam seen through the female perspective is necessary. Within the Islamic feminism, moreover, it is essential to define the terminology in use, starting from feminism itself and its historical connotations and framing patriarchy. Part of this chapter will define such terminology. The

last part of chapter one will explain the exegetical genre of *tafsir,* its meaning, origin and purposes. This section will set the base for understanding the methodology that the *mufassirun* apply in their reading. This will also help us understand how and through which methods they achieved their results.

The second chapter is an in-depth analysis of the life and work of Fazlur Rahman, since they are mutually linked. The hermeneutical model he develops in his major works will be the blueprint for modernist interpreters to come, hence, much of the chapter will be dedicated to the various implications it entails. His hermeneutic will be divide into two sub-chapters: II.II.I) historicization; and II.II.II) prophecy and revelation.

The third chapter will delve into the feminist readings of the Qur'an by Amina Wadud in her work *Qur'an and Woman*. Starting by introducing its author and her contribution to the Islamic feminism case, the same questions asked in the work of Fazlur Rahman will be proposed. Therefore, after individuating Amina Wadud's methodology and projects we'll directly address it by dividing it into her three main categories: III.II.I) historical contextualization; III.II.II) grammatical composition; III.II.III) world-view or *weltanschauung.*

Chapter four will then compare Asma Barlas' work *Believing women* in similar manners. Barlas' work is of particular interest since it has the same structure as *Qur'an and Woman* by Amina Wadud but differ in the authors' conception of the theology of Islam. Barlas has also shown much more engagement in the exegetical work and therefore has attracted more criticism and sparked new discussions. Similarly, her hermeneutic can be divided into three recurring themes: IV.II.I) divine unity; IV.II.II) justness; IV.II.III) incomparability.

In the Conclusions chapter, I'll draw together their similarities and points of departure and define what trends are visible from what has been already delineated in the previous chapters.

I.I Islamic feminism

Feminists strongly believe Islam is not incompatible with modern social movements. As a matter of fact, the origin of Islam has seen the rise of women in the societal context. In the Qur'an and the ahadith (sing. hadith), there is proof of equal exchange between the women of the earlier companions and the Prophet. This makes women in direct control of the development of the first Muslim communities, and included in Islam's formative discussion.

The feminist discourse in the last century has developed as a global phenomenon throughout the whole Muslim world. In this chapter I'll propose a brief history of women in Islam and their role in the building discourse of Islamic theology and tradition. The importance of this first paragraph will become clear when dealing with the justification of feminist interpreters and how they revise history in light of their commentary on the verses of the Qur'an.

I.II Definitions

A definition of Islamic feminism and patriarchy is in order if we want to establish what category to analyze when reading the Qur'an. After all, Barlas claims that most of the mistakes in the hermeneutics of ungendered readings of the Qur'an come from a misrepresentation of notions (2019, p. 13). It is not easy to pinpoint the exact meaning of these words since there is not a unified definition. Scholars take one of the concepts these words represent and adapt them to their own agendas. What it comes out of this are different shades of words, each of them with a distinct implications.

This is specifically the case for the phrase "Islamic feminism", written both with or without capital first letters. If some refuse it and see it as an oxymoron (Yassine, 2008), others accept it as it "advocates women's rights, gender equality, and social justice using Islamic discourse as its paramount discourse" (Badran, 2002).

While in early stages of what is now called Islamic feminism, the term was disputed, it is nowadays uniformly accepted as to reclaim it from those who saw the project incompatible with Islam. It is also a way of contesting a binary way of reasoning: secular/religious, West/Islamic feminism (Badran, 2009). These categories have to be

acknowledged as a response to a confrontation with different cultures to the Islamic one, but cannot limitate themselves for the same reason. Although the meaning has changed with time and is still undergoing changes in meaning, Islamic feminism creates problem to scholars of different background. The perspective with which they analyze the term and the project they have in mind changes significantly the facets of the phrase. Ultimately, if some neglects the need to specify the egalitarian purpose behind the name "Islamic feminism" (Mernissi in primis) given the fact that Qur'an is already equalitarian in its essence, others embrace the name as most representative of their overall project. In this study, the use of Islamic feminism aims to the movement that seeks to study Islam (specifically the Qur'an) from a female perspective. It uses women's lenses as a category of analysis among other possible ones. The continuum in which I situate this term is in the discourse of misogynist tradition produced in the history of Islam, in other words, the struggle to lay claim women's part in Islam.

Patriarchy is another controversial issue. When it comes down to the Middle East the matter is mixed with reminiscences of colonialist connotations. Falling into the trap of orientalism[2] is what makes the definition of patriarchy so diverse among scholars of Islamic studies. It is, again, a matter of perspectives. The definition of patriarchy given by the Cambridge Dictionary is: "a society in which the oldest male is the leader of the family, or a society controlled by men in which they use their power to their own advantage."[3] What is clear from this definition is that there is a duality of meaning. The advantages of this phrasing are that on one side there's the Man being the dominant figure of the family- and by extension of the society-, and on the other, there's the Man as the catalyzer of human- and divine- knowledge. In other words, it incorporates both the breadwinner aspect and the power-centered aspect of the term, both of which are present in the authors we are going to study. This definition, also, introduces hierarchy into consideration. Contesting the idea that the Qur'an has started gender hierarchy into society is another mission that Islamic feminism has tried to debunk since the origin of the movement.

Barlas's definition focuses on the relationship between the "privileged figure of male /father as seen in direct contact with its divine nature (God's connection) and female as unclean, weak, and sinful" (2019, pp. 1-2). It is a definition of patriarchy focused on

[2] See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).
[3] *Cambridge Dictionary*, s.v. "patriarchy," accessed December 27, 2019. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/patriarchy.

biological differences. Her conception of gender hierarchy goes in line with Murata (1992, p. 44) which states that differences in gender are not compatible with God's creation, and are barely earthly representations of material differences" Murata concludes that "for God, only faith is the canon of evaluation".

Wadud's view on the patriarchy is deeply embedded in history. Showing a major concern with its historical connotation, Wadud (1999, p. 80) sees the revelation as part of the process in the changing society of the Arabian Peninsula. Her definition of pre-Islamic society-a patriarchal one- is of a "culture built on a structure of domination and subordination which demands hierarchy". In this description of patriarchy, Wadud, is recognizing the tendency of the Arabs of the time to lean on converging power towards an elitist structure, in this case, a gender hierarchy.

As we'll later see from Egyptian professor El-Azhary Sonbol's study, Wadud is already projecting an idea of the *jahiliyyah* that bounds her to future possibilities of change in the Muslim society.

In the next part of this chapter we'll see how Arabian society was not as straightforward as imagined. Its heterogeneous nature was evident in the history of the Prophet itself where cities managed their society autonomously and so was the position of women. Coming back to the comprehensive Cambridge Dictionary's definition, therefore, we see how "patriarchal" does apply to the society of the time of the revelation only to the extent that we may project on the history. This is not to say that misogyny was not taking place, but the use of patriarchy as a gatekeeping concept should be justified and defined in order to avoid theological metonyms.

I.III Women in early Islam

Much of the history of Muslim women has been only recently rediscovered, cleansed of the colonialist propaganda that has infiltrated in this academic field. Remarkably, Leila Ahmed, Fatima Mernissi, Azizah al-Hibri, to name a few, have dedicated their careers to re-examine the history of women and the Islamic tradition with a different outlook.[4]

[4] A significant case has been brought up by Leila Ahmed (1992, pp. 144-198) where she explains how Egyptian feminism is intrinsically connected to British colonialism. Ahmed, for instance, critiques how Egyptian author and jurist Qasim Amin (1863-1908) was endorsed by British General Lord Cromer for his publication "*The liberation of woman*" (in Arabic *Tahrir al-Mar'a*) published in 1899. What Western scholars have failed to

I here refrain from claiming that such analysis is objective since even history is undertaken with some sort of subjectivity. As El-Azhary Sonbol (2001, pp. 108-111) pointed out, there are three major conceptions of women's history within Islam: the first one being those who believe Islamic law secluded women and made them a mere child-bearer; secondly, those who believe that Islam improved women's life and think of the Muslim civilization as a step further than pre-existing societies; thirdly, those who regard pre-Islamic society as highly advanced gender-equality-wise. Nonetheless, historical reconstructions have often proved to be an important tool to understand the process that hasn't been analyzed under a certain perspective, in this case, the feminist outlook.

According to Egyptian-American scholar Leila Ahmed, (1992, p. 4) we should also start seeing Islam as the continuation of the Judeo-Christian tradition even when looking at the position of women. This view helps us identify the already established Middle Eastern Jewish and Christian society as the river bed in which Islam grew. Muhammad was, in fact, the seal of the Prophets, the last of the Abrahamic heritage. One should not only see pre-Islamic Arabs as blindfolded towards other religious cultures. Women in pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula have been believed to have an important role in society. There are archaeological proofs of matrilineal and matrilocal forms of marriages were practiced which lead historians to believe that women may have been upheld as a strong part of the community (ibid., p. 11). Especially in a nomad or semi-nomad society as the one on pre-Islamic Arabia, women constituted a significant part of the tribe since their role was less empowered than men. With the settlement of urban society, according to theories on how patriarchal society came to be established, the power switched gradually toward a male dominance (ibid., p. 12).

However, it is not for the shift of the society from nomadic to sedentary that Islam changed the perspective on women. Rather, it is the phenomenon of assimilation to neighbour cultures that influenced the condition of women in the Islamic milieu. The most influential cultures that Islam had to assimilate, or to face in the earlier phases of its growth were the

admit is that women's right by the time of the publication were marching at a rate higher/faster than in Europe and that Amins' book was not portraying a fair picture of it. Moreover, what Qasim was endorsing as fundamental rights for women' equality were already achieved years before (Ahmed, 1992, p. 172). The critique is that it "represented the rearticulation in native voice of the colonial thesis of the inferiority of the native and Muslim and the superiority of the European". Only recently the academia has started to reevaluate the previous conception of women in Islamic society without the burden of the Western point of view, hence the critique of Ahmed in 1992.

Byzantine Empire, with Christianity as religion, the Sassanid Empire, where Zoroastrianism was the official religion, and Jewish communities scattered across the Middle East for millennia. In these societies, women have been historically veiled, segregated, and excluded from the power[5] and battlefield. This is not to say that in principle Christianity or Zoroastrianism allow as fundamental of their religion the mistreatment of women as objects. The historical developments of certain practices may not be related to the tenets behinds specific religions. Nonetheless, during the rise of the Caliphate the Muslim community had to comply with the customs of the place they reached to. Newly converts were also not so keen to abandon in toto the way of living with its worldview- as, for instance, the practice of concubinage (ibid., p. 87)[6].

It is reported (from Bukhari, *Sahih*, vol. 3, p. 258 in Mernissi, 1991, p. 143) that the second caliph 'Umar al-Khattab, when moving to Medina realized how the *ansari*[7] women have started to follow the attitude of the local women. This shocked at first 'Umar since also the wives of the Prophet started to raise their voices against Muhammad, and when confiding himself to his daughter Hafsa, wife of the Prophet, was admonished not to discuss the way the Prophet deals with his wives. This small anecdote shows us that women were entitled to reprehend men and shows as well the heterogeneous attitude of women in Arabia where communities were scattered and not uniformed by a single custom. Yathrib, what will become Medinat an-Nabi, was a city with a high presence of Jews and Christians who have blent with Arabs in syncretism.

In this historical context, we have to place the revelation, which lasted for approximately 24 years, and the societal changes that Islam brought to the semi-nomadic communities of Arabia. Fundamentally important is the understanding of the Qur'an as part of the legacy of the Abrahamic religions. Without this very basic conception of Islam, everything analyzed after it becomes deprived of its context and therefore, unintelligible. The first proto-Christian communities were itself a subversion of the order at the time of the

[5] Exception made, as Lerner reminds us in Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 74), for those women whose relationship with men of power put them in such position.

[6] In this regards Ahmed writes: "Islam lent itself to being interpreted as endorsing and giving religious sanction to a deeply negative and debased conception of women".

[7] The *ansari* ("helpers" in Arabic) were the people of Yathrib who helped Muhammad to settle after the emigration from Mecca. Watt, W. Montgomery. 'Al-Anṣār'. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Accessed December 23, 2019. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_0678.

Romans occupation. Women in early Christian times were held in high esteem. Women martyrs were as abundant as men martyrs and praised to the same extent (Ahmed, 1992, p. 22). What followed next was the distortion of dogmas due to the institutionalization of the religion's core precepts in which patriarchy found a virgin soil to plant its coercive seed. Surprisingly, Islam has not been acknowledged to have had similar distortion.

To prove this, we ought to look at the Qur'an or at the tradition.

Proof can be found by looking at the women who lived concurrently to Muhammad. Firstly, Muhammad's wife Khadija. An important business woman who commissioned a young 12 years old Muhammad his first job to travel at her expenses to Damascus (Ahmed, 1992, p. 42). When the marriage between her and Muhammad was announced, she was widowed and had had multiple husbands in the past. Moreover, she was in charge of an important enterprise that worked with the Quraysh family and economically supported Muhammad for most of his life. It is commonly acknowledged, that she was the first to convert to Islam and the one to comfort Muhammad and protect him with political ties in the brief time between Abu Talib's death and hers. During her lifetime Muhammad didn't marry any other woman.

Another important woman in Muhammad's life was 'Aisha. Her accounts on the actions of the Prophet are one of the most transmitted in Sunni Islam[8]. Despite the various assumptions and implications that her age of marriage brings, 'Aisha is revered as one of the founding figures of orthodox Islam. 'Aisha, and the other wives of Muhammad, were titled "mothers of believers".

While it is true that the women that circled around the Prophet's life had a privileged role than those who didn't, the historical records are plentiful of examples of outspoken women. One such instance arise after the death of Khadija when Muhammad started to gain political importance and with this was trying to strengthen his ties with local families of Medina. It is reported that one of the women in Medina offered herself in marriage to the Prophet, he agreed. She only withdrew her proposal after having it discussed with her family and have realized she wouldn't accept not being the only wife (Ahmed, 1992, p. 53 as

[8] It is reported by Montgomery Watt. "Aisha Bint Abi Bakr." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, that 300 traditions over the 1210 related to her were part of the compilations of al-Bukhari and Muslim.

reported by Ibn Sa'd, 8:107-8). This small incident is symbolic of a certain authoritative and uninhibited voice that women had during the Prophet's lifetime.

The Qur'an is the only sacred text of the monotheistic religions of the Middle East that addresses women in the first person and often talks about men and women as on the same level.[9] The Qur'an condemns specific pre-Islamic practices such as of female infanticide calling it reprehensible towards the eye of Allah and will punish the wrongdoers in the afterlife. There are historical implications behind this shift in view, making this sudden change deriving not only by the book. Theories about the abandon of practice of female infanticide speculate that it is closely related to the change of society that was occurring during the time of the revelation of such verses. As society was already shifting towards a more urban-centered system, women were becoming less of a burden of care for the family and more of a trade asset to reinforce relationships with other families. This might be a sufficient explanation that provides the Qur'an to be a unifier of practices within the Arabian societal system. As mentioned earlier this dialectic of interpretation of history is the root of feminist debates. On one hand, scholars have interpreted the Qur'an statements as revolutionary and proof of the unmistakable gender egalitarianism message of the Qur'an, on the other some saw it as the natural process through which pre-Islamic communities were heading. However, it is important to keep in mind that the Arabian Peninsula was a widely heterogeneous land looking for a unifying belief and seeking a strong identity (Mernissi, 1991, p. 68). What Islam was providing was not only a monotheistic religion- already present under certain aspects[10]- but a national identity and a sense of civilized society.

Certain practices were adopted by the early communities of believers for there was no precedent in creating a unified community in Arabia. Most of the innovation, therefore, was not introduced by the Qur'an- in which we find a minimal amount of laws- but via assimilation with previous cultures. The Qur'an set the standard for those practices. Most predominant was the Byzantine culture that persisted and was used as the mold for the ruling and administrative aspect of the early Islamicate areas.

[9] See for instance Surah al-Ahzab 33:32-38, particularly *ayah* 35.

[10] It is reported by Ibn Hisham that Muhammad and the Quraish family were sympathiser of the Hanifism, a monotheistic religion of Arabia stemmed from Judaism. For more accounts on the subject see Fueck, Jonathan. "The originality of the Arabian prophet." *Studies on Islam* (1981): 86-98; and Rubin, Uri. "Ḥanīfiyya and Kaʿba." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990): 85-112.

With the formation of the orthodoxy in Islam, the trend has evolved around the centralization of power towards a patriarchal structure. This was, again, a phenomenon of incorporation of previous cultures customs. What comes next is the consolidation of this tradition through a methodology that can allow a selective codification of the Text. Consolidation is formed by selective choice of one's agenda. Orthodoxy, in this period, gives a clear example of roles of power in the making of Islam's tradition when addressing gender Islam. Fuqaha, ulama, and a'immah (sing. imam) were predominantly, if not only, male. This makes it easier to cut out of the discourse women even though the Prophet never outlawed women to lead the prayer. Umm Waraqa[11] was appointed by Muhammad himself to be the imam. What we witness in modern times is, therefore, the results of a tradition that anihilated women's role as solely believers and not in charge of taking up roles above it.

Mernissi implies in her famous publication of 1991 (p. 54), that a possible explanation is to be found in the schism between Sunni Islam and Shia. The first *fitna* of the Islamic community consisted of a party ruled by 'Ali, the descendant of the lineage of the Prophet and 'Aisha, the beloved wife of Muhammad. During this time, those who align with 'Ali, especially after the battle of the Camel in 656 A.D., numerous ahadith were narrated in order to legitimize 'Ali's power over 'Aisha. The content is often aimed to undermine women's abilities since no direct insult against the Mother of the Umma could be addressed directly. This seems to be the most plausible and most historically accurate reason for the discrimination of women in power. As stated earlier, during the previous ruling of both Byzantine Empire and Sassanid, it was no exception for women to be in power and be regarded as the legitimate ruler of the communities (Mernissi, 1991, p. 50). This historical evaluation seems to be the key reason why later, especially in modern times, a conviction of Islam precluded women to be in charge of issues involving the community, from a governmental standpoint to the private space.

[11] As reported by Imam Zaid Shakir, the narration of Umm Waraqa is "found in the compilations of Abu Dawud, ad-Daraqutni, al-Bayhaqi, al-Hakim, the Tabaqat of Ibn Sa'd, and other sources" in Imam Zaid Shakir, *Female Prayer Leadership (Revisited)*, NEW ISLAMIC DIRECTIONS, Accessed December 23, 2019 https://www.newislamicdirections.com/nid/articles/female_prayer_leadership_revisited/. Although the narrations creates some controversies on the meaning of "dar", since Umm Waraqa was appointed to lead the prayer in her "dar" (home but also area, locality). Some argue that her authorisation to lead the prayer was confined within her domestic walls, while others point out that mosques were mostly situated within devouts' houses.

Mernissi, however, goes on to claim that most of these ahadith were, according to Malik Ibn Anas's classification, to be disregarded as the source was a corrupted one and, thus, not worthy of being categorized as *sahih* (truthful). Nevertheless the hadith that says "Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity" (Bukhari, *Sahih*, vol. 4, p. 226) made it to the compendium of al-Bukhari, one of the most authoritative source of fiqh in Sunni Islam and it is still cited as indicative of the attitude towards women.

What is important to keep in mind is the relevance of the Qur'an as historically situated text. Modernists know this as well and as we shall see in the next chapters. It is the historical interpretation of the Qur'an that these authors want to underline as a key component to understand the message of Islam.

But as history can be interpreted, leaving aside sources and debatable theories, so does the text of the Holy Book changes its meaning. There is, in the author's mind, no way to reach an objective historical truth, hence meaning can only be obtained individually even if this implies a subjective interpretation of a generally known historical fact. This goes back to El-Azhary Sonbol division of interpretation of women's role and change of paradigm that Islam brought. According to one's starting point (i.e. women were oppressed in the pre-Islamic era but the Qur'an subverted this trend), the way the reading of the text will be done will significantly change.

Islamic feminism capitalises on this when they claim that Islam has been corrupted. Precisely they claim that the barbaric way of treating women, or the freedom they had during *jahiliyyah* was outlawed by the verses of the Qur'an. It follows up with a number of easily mistakable ayat in which women are seen as subservient to men (Q 2:282; 4:3; 4:34 to enumerate a few). These conclusions are originated by a distorted interpretation of the history in which the salaf lived and developed the Islamic message. A modernist feminist, therefore, starts with a new interpretation of history.

I.IV Tafsir

Tafsir is the Qur'anic science of finding the meaning of the Qur'an. The meaning of the word *tafsir* derives from the root f-s-r, in Arabic translates as "explanation" or "interpretation"; as a substantive it refers to the actual commentary. While it is not clear how

or when it became the main way of describing the discipline, suppositions claim that it is because of its dual grammatical function (as a verbal noun and as a substantive) that made the term the most used (Gilliot, 2001, p. 104). Another way of describing the act of explanation of the verses is *ta'wil* (litt. interpretation, discovery). This term appears multiple times in the Qur'an and it has been used arbitrarily during the course of history by exegetes since there is not a set definition to these two terms.

Qur'anic exegesis has its roots in the early converts who addressed the Prophet for further inquiries on the verses revealed. The first Muslims asked for the meaning of certain passages of the Qur'an and how to apply them into their life. A wave of later commentators[12] emerged after the first companions and until the "Golden Age" of Islam it grew to become the cornerstone of the Islamic tradition. (Leemhuis, 1988).

Tafasir were of different natures. Some composers focused on the significance of the text, some on the practice to perform, and others on the lexicography of the words. Saeed (2006, p. 64) suggests that a lexicographical explanation of the Qur'an was necessary when the community was englobing converts whose native language was foreign to the Qurayshi dialect, hence in need of an explanation. *Tafsir* became an established discipline from the third century AH when collections of *tafsir* started to be assembled, notably the *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl al-Qurʾān* by al-Tabari. The genre received a distinct break with Shah Waliullah (1703-1762), an important theologian and reformer of Indian origins, and the rise of the modernist trends from the Nineteenth century onwards (Saeed, 2006). This set of scholars (often lay) started to call for the opening of the gate of *ijtihad.*[13] Modernist have found a way to reopen the intellectual *ijtihad* by historicizing the Qur'an. What brings these authors together is the attempt to dispute traditionalists' commentary with a neglected historicization of the revelation and of the early Umma. In the words of Fazlur Rahman, "[T]radition can be studied with adequate historical objectivity and separated not only from the present but also from the normative factors that are supposed to have generated it" (Rahman, 1982, p. 8). The caliph 'Umar is often cited as an example of its Qur'anic spirit. After conquering Iraq, 'Umar decided not to distribute the land to its fellow conquerors as

[12] It is, however, still debated whether or not the early commentators intended to write what we now call *tafsir*.
[13] Ijtihad is what in Islamic law is referred as "individual thinking". This term is used to symbolize the act of an 'alim to deduce laws from the Qur'an. After the consolidation of the fiqh, islamic scholars have settled and have stopped questioning the doctrines in favour of a standardized tradition.

customary, infringing on the Qur'anic precept that is cited in al-Anfaal 8:69[14]. The caliph 'Umar was, nevertheless, considered and ascetic and just ruler and by deciding to apply Qur'anic laws arbitrarily set an important precedent at which modernist look back as proof of the metaphorical meaning of the Qur'an over its literal interpretation (Saeed, 2006, p. 46-49).

With the rise of feminist literature, particularly from the nineteenth century (Badran, 2009), scholars have started to flag traditional *tafsir* and hadith as patriarchal. Their main agenda became the identification of how and where patriarchy permeated into Islam. From the stories of the early converts to the rituals that Muslims practice every day, everything had to be regained from the yoke of patriarchy. Their purpose was to rediscover the real Islam without the biases of gender constructions. In this sense, Islamic feminism is just an extension of modernism with a focus on gender sensitivity. While Muhammad 'Abduh (among others) was declaring that Islam has to be renewed through the Qur'an and discarded of the enclosing tradition that stiffed its fluidity and universality ('Abduh quoted in Saeed, 2006, p. 12), Islamic feminists embraced the same mentality by stating that Islam does not advocate for gender disparity but, if we look at the core teaching, discourages such practices and declares its neutrality/equity on the topic. In other words, the modernist movement gave to feminist *tafsir* the momentum to start its own campaign against gender inequality in the Qur'an. What they got from this movement, was both the methodological approaches but also the resolute intent in fitting modern narratives (either political, cultural or, gender-related).

I.IV.I Types of interpretation

There are a number of ways through which the Qur'an can be interpreted, I will list the two main approaches. The first one is by looking at the ahadith, from the Prophet to the companions and beyond. This approach was prevalent during the early years after the revelation started, for most of the people who lived with the Prophet (the Companions) or the *tabi'un*[15] were still alive and the context of the Qur'an was still clear to them. *Tafsir*

[14] "So enjoy what you have gotten of booty in war, lawful and good" from Surah al-Anfal 8:69, Translated by Sahih International.

[15] Commonly translated as "Successors" the *tabi'un* (sing. tabi') were the generation of Muslim who came after the Companions of the Prophet. The Successors did not meet the Prophet but had their stories narrated by those who lived with him, for this reason their validity in the science of hadith is still highly regarded.

bil-hadith refers, then, to the explanation of the Qur'an given by Muhammad or by his loyal companions who had a greater understanding of the book. This method is, however, contested by the modernists, to the extent that Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), one of the forefathers of modernism, rejected this method altogether (Rahman, 2002, p. 219). One of the reasons it is discarded by feminists involves the authenticity of the hadith that have been collected. As has been suggested, ahadith have often been fabricated to the point that even legal ahadith are for the most part to be considered deceitful (Schacht, 1950). A second reason is that even when the hadith is found trustworthy, one cannot follow the gender sensitivity that the Prophet had at his time (Wadud, 1999, p. xvii). The way of explaining the Qur'an through the people of the seventh century implies that only by preserving the morals and practices of the time contemporary Muslim can understand the Qur'an. This results in different types of gender equality and therefore those ahadith cannot be used to justify modern moral sensitivity.

Another way of interpreting the Qur'an is by utilizing the verses of the Qur'an to explain other passages less clear. This is called *tafsir al-qur'an bi l-qur'an* and it is the most acceptable way of explaining the Qur'an. By limiting the meaning to what has been already written in other suwar or ayat the exegete wants to guarantee that the meaning is not exceeded in the explanation but it's fortified by it. To give an example, one of the most common tools is the doctrine named *al-nasikh wal-mansukh*, which means "the abrogating and the abrogated". It consists of the repeal of one verse that has been revealed after a previous and contradictory one (Powers, 1988). For instance, at the beginning of the revelation wine is tolerated although seen as a sinful act, as quoted in Surah al-Baqarah 2:219. Then, in the Medinan suwar, it becomes strictly forbidden and the stance of the Qur'an towards it changes (i.e. Surah al-Ma'idah, 5:90). Other ways of recalling verses make wide use of the contextualization of the suwar in order to understand the purpose of the verse.

These methods are not mutually exclusive and often authors use to different extent both of them. Following Saeed's subdivision of *tafasir* (2006), these are to be considered the tradition-based interpretative *tafasir*, although not mutually exclusive, reason-based *tafasir* are what modernists (and feminists as well) predilect as the Qur'an itself encourages to do so "Do they not earnestly seek to understand the Qur'an, or are their heart locked up by them?" (transl. Yusuf Ali, p. 1321, Surah Muhammad, 47:24). Ration-based *tafsir* is an approach that overlooks the comprehensive meaning of the text and applies it to the single verses. When

dealing with slavery, for instance, apologists apply the compassion and sense of equity that pervade the Qur'an and adapt it to the specific verses that incite slavery.

The core of the interpretation of feminist exegetes differs from classical *tafasir* in methodology. Their methodology fulfils the same ambition that modernists have: contextual interpretation as a key aspect for a new kind of *tafsir*; and an in-depth analysis of the language of the Qur'an often referred to as gender-biased (Muttaqin, 2015).

Feminist *tafsir* is referred to as "interpretation by theme". While a linear commentary of the Qur'an has the purpose of presenting and analyzing the text verse by verse in a textually coherent way, it lacks a rational structure that can identify the main concepts. For this reason, modern exegesis has started to focus on specific themes to adopt as *fil rouge* while reading the Qur'an. Proceeding by themes rather than starting from Surah al-Fatiha to Surah al-Nas gives the reader a cohesive understanding of a particular topic in the Qur'an without getting lost in complex academic digressions. With a thematic approach, instead, the author is left on his own to exhibit a particular subject that he foresaw in the whole text. Moreover, it is still bound to the text, meaning that its deductions are legitimated by the Qur'an itself. The reader, thus, did not become just a redundant link between the text and the Muslim but is in charge of giving meaning from his perspective. The thematic interpretation has the asset of inducing meaning, instead of only deducing it (Hanafi, 1996).

In hermeneutics, the relationship between the text and the exegete is seen in three distinct ways (Aichele and Phillips, 1995): the text is what creates meaning (exegesis); the exegete reflects its projection of knowledge onto the text (eisegesis); the reader and the text create meaning by interaction (intergesis). It is difficult to say whether the author's idea comes out of the text or if it is the author who found proof of its ideas in it. Postmodernist theory of hermeneutics claim that whenever readers approach a text they bring to it their own experiences, projections, and ideas (Burge, 2010). Similarly to a piece of art, a religious text can be read as one's subjective experience of that religion. As Abu Zayd reminds us (2006), the Qur'an can be seen as solely a literary text. Like many previous scholars, Abu Zayd sees the Qur'an as a collection of literary stories of the communities of the seventh century Arabia that serve the ethical and spiritual purpose of that time. Limiting to this view the text it is clear how a verse by verse paraphrase of the Qur'an does not achieve this purpose. Conversely, Hassan Hanafi states (1996, p. 210), a thematic interpretation is relativist. This

way of seeing hermeneutic denies a single understanding contained in the Qur'an. It is for this reason that a feminist interpretation of the Qur'an has been done, from the mid-twentieth century, in this way: by seeking the Qur'an for answer women are looking for, they replicate that original purpose that *tafsir* was: the questioning of the way of living a Muslim life directly from its book.

II.I Fazlur Rahman

Fazlur Rahman was the modernist considered by many to be the founding figure of Islamic feminism (Saeed, 2004; 2006; Hidayatullah, 2014; Barlas, 2002). Although much of his thought originated from previous scholars that have the merit of having started the conversation on the modernization of the theological discussions on the Qur'an, Rahman had the originality of having it expressed with unprecedented simplicity. The effectiveness of his theological ideas had such an impact to still be cited and admired to this day by the most relevant authors of our time.

Born in September 1919 in what would become Pakistan, Rahman was raised in a family deeply involved in religious doctrine (Rahman, 1999). His father was a graduate from the Deobandi school Dar al-'Ulum[16] and thanks to his knowledge, Fazlur Rahman grew up knowledged of fiqh, *kalam* (theology), hadith, *tafsir*, and Islamic philosophy. After having studied in Lahore where he obtained the B.A. and the M.A. degree in Arabic with distinction, he wrote a final dissertation for his Ph.D. in Oxford about Ibn Sina commenting on the philosopher's psychology and providing a translation and commentary of part of *Kitab al-Najat.* Later in his life, Rahman switched the focus of his studies on theology and the application of the law in an Islamic context. This period corresponds with Rahman's decision to abandon the academic career to start working for the government of General Muhammad Ayyub Khan in his Central Institute of Islamic Research and later as an advisor in the Council of Islamic Ideology. During this time Rahman had to adjust his philosophy-minded attitude towards Islam into the political machinery of the newly born Islamic state of Pakistan. His job was to study Islam in a rational and liberal manner, however, this was no easy task as he was often the target of Khan's opposition and his views on social and legal matters were often criticized by parties and other religious groups. For this reason, he decided to resign from his position and accepted the offer of teaching Islamic thought at the University of Chicago until his death in 1988.

His peculiar life experience made him a perfect vehicle for the progression of Islamic thought into the modern Western world. First, a Muslim raised in a religious and learned

[16] The Deobandi madrasa was founded in 1866 as a response to the British colonialism in India. Its aim was to provide to Muslim the indoctrination of Islamic doctrines (specifically Hanafi) to battle the British ruling. An emphasis on Islamic tradition is key to the Deobandi's teaching as consequence of the historical circumstances it emerged.

family, constantly exposed to Islam under different facets. Then, becoming one of the most relevant academics in the field of philosophy of Islam only to give up on his academic career to bring into being what he taught in theory in university. This opportunity of becoming the counsel of the newly born Pakistan was for Rahman an occasion to prove the applicability of his ideas. He tried to bridge the gap between Islamic and secular ethics in what he believed to be a country that could implement such envision of the Islamic nation. Unfortunately, he faced opposition coming from the political and religious adversaries that made him the scapegoat of their agenda.

II.II Hermeneutical project

Fazlur Rahman's critique of the traditional ways of doing hermeneutics on the Qur'an starts from the lack of an adequate method in understanding the values of the Qur'an (Rahman, 1982, p. 2). Rahman denounces, from the period of the consolidation of the tradition, how the focus of Islamic intelligentsia was aimed more on the tradition itself rather than looking at the revealed text. What medieval exegetes missed was the reinterpretation of the Qur'an via personal reading. This was overcome by re-proposing the same fixed meaning of the Qur'an and by analyzing the text stylistically and theologically. The greater loss was that theologians were not looking anymore at the overall meaning of the Qur'an but limiting their knowledge to their predecessor's understanding without proposing new ones. Rahman recalls the example of Ibn Taymiyya and al-Ghazali as the only ones who made possible a new renovation of identity for Islam. "Every critique or modification of a tradition involves a consciousness of what is being criticized or rejected and hence to that extent, self-awareness" (ibid., p. 10). The lack, in modern times, of consciousness, comes directly from the way Islam approached its past and envision its future. Rahman brings into the study of the Qur'an a conception of hermeneutics that is linked with Western philosophy (Saeed, 2004, p. 39). His main adversary in hermeneutical thought was the German philosopher on hermeneutics Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) with whom he shared many notions on understanding the meaning of the text through history, but, differed in its logical conception of the substance behind it. Gadamer views the text as fundamentally empty of his hidden meaning while Rahman brings into it his Muslim experience. For Rahman the objectivity is that the text is ascribed to God's intention of the revelation (Rahman, 1982, p. 9). Although they both share

an interest in seeing the interpreter in its historical context- and so the text- the central key to understand Gadamer's hermeneutical conceptions is, therefore, the precondition of the subjective experience he acknowledges that happens in history. In contrast, Rahman believes in the objectivity of these horizons that refer to the transcendence of God's will (ibid.). In other words, while Gadamer thinks that history lies beneath the fabric of the text and therefore understanding is an objective endeavour, Rahman believes that a text is substantiated with a theistic meaning. In this hermeneutical debate, Rahman's approach follows the lead of the Italian jurist Emilio Betti (1890-1968) as they both share a conception of text based on the objectivity of the meaning. Rahman, as Betti, can be defined as part of the "objectivist school". In his own words, Rahman defines this hermeneutical group as those who seek the meaning of the text in the mind of the author (ibid., p. 8). This process is a reversal process that leads to the origins of the creative mind.

Rahman's hermeneutic is centred around two main discourses: the theory of prophecy and the nature of the revelation; and his understanding of history. The main proposal of Fazlur Rahman is the double-movement theory which is a continuation of the four canons of interpretation of Betti (Rahman, 1999, p. 18). The double-movement theory is strictly connected with these two notions of history as the producer of the meaning of the Qur'an and prophecy as involved in the psychology of the Prophet which made the Qur'an the way it is. According to this theory, Rahman proposes an interpretation based on two distinct analyses: the first one being a historicization of the text, from when it was revealed, the social context, the economic and military background of the Prophet and his companions. During this phase, the verses are contextualized and framed under a coherent narrative that follows the origins of them among the first Muslims. Then, in the second movement, the exegete attempts to bring back to the present time the same ideas, needs, and values that pertained to the first phase and adapt them to the current social scenario. It is vital, in this phase to deeply understand the complexity of the current time in order to objectively predispose the same value of the revelation to modern times. With this process, Fazlur Rahman hoped to reproduce the same value offered in the Qur'an to the present day without losing the authenticity that permeated the early Islamic times. (Rahman, 1980; 1982)

Fazlur Rahman's understanding of Islam and the problem faced in modern times goes hand in hand with the history of Islamic doctrines. As Rahman himself is said to be a

"rational objectivist" (Hourani, 1971, p. 10) he was a strong advocate for rationality in Islam and saw in the rejection of the process of ijtihad the key moment for the ossification of Islamic thought. In most of his works, Rahman explicitly mentions the Mu'tazilah movement of the ninth century as the apex of this intellectual rebellion against the mainstream philosophical thought. As the core of their belief was the createdness of the Qur'an. The Mu'tazilites were ostracized by other groups as they violated one of the main principles of the traditional view that saw the Qur'an as uncreated. The dispute was essentially on whether the Qur'an has always existed in conjunction with God itself (as many believe). The Mu'tazilites, however, reject the possibility of seeing the Qur'an as an attribute of God, but they advocate for its creation through the revelation. This subtle difference reflects in Rahman's hermeneutics because it lays the foundation of the historical understanding and interpretation of the text. Rahman firmly believed that the revealed verses were a response to the circumstances in which the early Muslims lived and experienced the world. By seeing the Qur'an as always been there in time and abstraction, both the Mu'tazilites and Rahman view it as removed it from its potential value, making it a book discharged of its universal message.

Rahman roots the opposition to a rational Islam from the original distinction between the religious/traditional sciences and the rational/secular sciences (1982, p. 33). This distinction has, over time, leaned towards a traditional science for a number of reasons: a first reason is the eschatological motive of the religious science since the hereafter depends on the deeds of the present the most crucial issue to keep close is the piety against one's intellectual strive; a second reason has to do with the spread of Sufism and its adversity against intellectualism and science in general; thirdly, the way in which society was changing was allowing *qadis* and *muftis* to become more relevant in the societal structure while philosopher and scientists were neglected of such relevance; lastly, some important figures such as al-Ghazali openly showed their opposition to such philosophical concepts that were doomed as heretical.

One major critique moved to Rahman comes by the South African Muslim scholar Farid Esack. Esack pointed out (1998) that Rahman's concern to read the élan of the Qur'an through its social justice and equity is itself a form of intergesis in which Rahman lets the Qur'an say what he intends to. This is a pitfall in which most exegetes fall into. However, Rahman defends himself by saying that the way the Prophet taught his disciples to read the

Qur'an and to rule has to be done by going towards “moral improvement [...] and communal sense rather than the private and metaphysical” (1982, p. 2). This means that the rules the Qur’an gives have the purpose of helping the community and not being an obstacle to the building of a harmonious society. The answer that Rahman gives is not Islamically oriented, but one rooted in the Prophetic example.

II.II.I Historicization

For Fazlur Rahman historicizing the Qur’an was of crucial importance if Muslims wanted to adapt Islam to modern times. He saw that traditional Islam was clashing against the trend that the Western world was imposing and was not satisfied with the teaching of the ‘ulama either. The possible response to make the Qur’an a book of the twentieth century- as for the later times- was to understand its nature, its context, and its message. Rahman was not the first one approaching Islam in this way. A long list of scholars and thinkers had already established the basis for what Rahman built upon. Most notably, Rashid Rida (1864-1935) tried to bridge the gap between Islam and modern science by justifying new scientific discoveries by claiming that such ideas were present in the Qur’an under different forms. The purpose of Fazlur Rahman was to explain the occasions of the revelation and from there understand the unified message of the Qur’an. Jurists have taken norms from the Sunnah and applied them to any time with no regard for the new evolution of the society, but contextualizing the verses would give to the believers the moral behind those teachings. To him reducing the word of Allah to a series of dogmas and laws was not admissible. Firstly, the Qur’an was the direct word of God and as such, it was the word of a moral instructor, a compass for human society at large. Taking those words and making them into regulations was for Rahman an idle and futile distortion of the Qur’anic message. Secondly, the unity of this message would be lost if the whole text is dissected into small fragments. The Qur’an, as a guide to mankind, is supposed to be understood as a whole. (Rahman, 1982, p. 3-4)

One such example of this distortion of moral with law is about polygamy. In the Surah al-Nisa’ 4:3, the Qur’an clearly states that Muslims were allowed to marry up to four women with the caveat of being able to treat them fairly. This has been interpreted by

Muslims as a licit act and to this day polygamy is widely diffuse in the Islamic world[17]. Rahman, however, points out that the permission of having multiple wives arose in the Arabian context of the post-battle of Uhud where many of the companions died (Ahmed, 1992, p. 52). When historicizing this verse we discover how it addresses the needs of the community in favour of orphans and widows. The Qur'an is, in this instance, not ruling over the Umma with eternal forward thinking but is giving the norm on how to deal with that specific situation so that the posterity may learn from similar events. What traditional 'ulama have done instead, was to decontextualize the verse and to allow the possibility of marrying instinctively multiple women with only a few restrictions. Rather than learning from the verse, 'ulama have applied blindly this specific ruling. Rahman adds (1980, p. 32) that if we look at the verses of the Qur'an revealed before and after Surah al-Nisa' 4:3 we discover that there is a sort of contradiction. Specifically, the need for justice among the co-wives and the "unequivocal declaration" of the impossibility of such justice when having multiple wives. This, concludes Rahman, is a clear example of the specific ruling of the Qur'an as an answer to a particular problem. Polygamy was allowed under that circumstance but, as a general rule, it is not attainable to have multiple wives without treating them unfairly, which is, the ultimate goal of the Qur'an.

In this instance, it is clear the importance of the contextualization of the verse. This has repercussions on the overall meaning of the verse and can delineate a different trajectory from the apparent meaning. However, this method was not new to Islamic exegesis. The *asbab al-nuzul* (literally the occasion of the revelation) is a traditional genre where the verses of the Qur'an are put into a historical timeline. Since the Qur'an had not been revealed in its entirety, each verse, or surah has a historical connotation attached to it. Here, the Mu'tazilah conception of the Qur'an as created returns to permeate Rahman's view on the Qur'anic revelation. In Rahman's idea, it is important for the Qur'an to be revealed in bits rather than its entirety in order for the meaning to make sense. The fact that the Qur'an has a historical value means that every verse refers to a particular moment and in response to a particular need of the community. As mentioned before, traditional scholars have argued that the Qur'an has always existed and that the revelation is just the materialization into Muhammad's mind of an already completed book. The traditional tool of *asbab al-nuzul*,

[17] Al-Sharmani, Mulki. "Marriage in Islamic Interpretive Tradition: Revisiting the Legal and the Ethical". *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 2.1-2: 2018, p. 76-96.

then, is not new to Qur'anic exegesis but it has circumscribed itself to a speculative science and has not been made the centre of the methodological hermeneutic of the Qur'an. Esack (1998, p. 56) admits the lack of interest towards this discipline from the traditional Qur'anic scholarship, and only a few had in the past called for more attention on the subject. What Rahman denounces is the misuse by jurists and *qadi* of taking the Qur'an as a depository of laws. The real purpose of the Qur'an, instead, lays in the meaning concealed beneath the verses, in the stories told and but most importantly in the dialectic between the Prophet, his disciples and the word of God. Historically the Qur'an has been neglected of such value in favour of its juristic aspect.

Part of the idea behind the double movement theory stems from this need of bringing the moral élan of the Qur'an back to its primary position. The double movement theory, as explained before, has the merit of stretching the Qur'an and its universal message to, virtually, any topic and any circumstance. This method helps each new generation of Muslims to deal with the problem of their time by always being able to refer back to the Holy Scriptures. Since it does not propose the same meaning to new generations, but adapt the original one to new circumstances, Rahman hoped that this will forge the original message in continuity.

II.II.II Prophecy and revelation

The role of the Prophet is of major importance when dealing with the interpretation of the meaning of the Qur'an. The classical view wants the Prophet to be the recipient of the word revealed by Allah through the archangel Gabriel. The Qur'an, while being already present in its entirety, was revealed bit by bit in different periods of time. This view sees the message being transmitted in an unchanged manner, with Muhammad having nothing to add nor interfering with it. The communication between God and its messenger becomes a one-way speech reported in fully-fledged Arabic where Mohammed is the vehicle through which God speaks to its people. Furthermore, this view makes of the seal of the Prophets (*Khatam an-Nabiyyīn*) a mere reporter giving him no credits except for being chosen by God. This is what Rahman called the "dictation theory" and it was particularly supported by Hanbali traditionalists and by the later theological movement of Ash'arism. (Rahman, 1960 cited in Saeed, 2004, p. 45)

Fazlur Rahman, however, saw the revelation as a process. A process in which the Prophet and the first Islamic community were involved. It wasn't, then, just a dictation of verses but a mutual dialogue between God and its disciples. The complexity of this process was for Rahman the key to understanding the Qur'an as a revealed text. Starting from the presupposition that the Qur'an was, in fact, the word of God alone, Rahman adds that it was actualized in the mind and the heart of the Prophet. This made of the revelation a more meaningful message to the Muslims. In this way, not only the voices of the Prophet and his companions were heard, but the universality of its message was conveyed through their example. Much of this has been taken by later scholars such as Arkoun (1988) and Nasr Abu Zayd. Rahman was not the first one to mention this alternative scenario. Jesse has shown how Rahman's theory of prophecy resembles Avicenna's view on the revelation (1991), and more recently, Völker (2015) found similarity between Rahman and Ibn Sina's intellectualization. The general idea behind Rahman's theory of prophecy is, therefore, the mutuality with which the universal pragmatism of the message of the Qur'an meets the contingency of the revelation. In other words, the word of God is actualized in the mind of the Prophet. It is the psychology of the Prophet that intervenes in the shaping of the universal message into the contingency of Muhammad's mind. Moreover, Rahman clarifies that the way Muhammad received the Qur'an was under the form of idea-words[18] (1980, p. 99), in order to make sense of them they had to be translated into Arabic. The process of revelation, thus, does not exhaust itself in the act of transmission by God to Muhammad, but another layer has to be added from the Prophet's mind to the final product which is the Qur'an. In this process, the psychology and *sitz im Leben* of the Prophet plays a fundamental role. Rahman's conception of the revelation is split into two paradigms: divine and human.

When we start introducing the historical implications in the Prophet's life while reading the Qur'an, even the role of God changes as the guider of the humankind, the one that gives direction and, at times, supports the Prophet in his political choices. For instance, when the Prophet changed the orientation of the prayer (*qibla*) towards Mecca instead of Jerusalem the Qur'an recites:

[18] This concept in Rahman makes a key difference from medieval thinkers since while the words are mentally heard during the revelation, it is only when "the Prophet moved his tongue of his own ordinary human volition" that those ideas became words. (Rahman, 1980, p. 69)

"*We have certainly seen the turning of your face, [O Muhammad], toward the heaven, and We will surely turn you to a qiblah with which you will be pleased. So turn your face toward al-Masjid al-Haram. And wherever you [believers] are, turn your faces toward it [in prayer]. Indeed, those who have been given the Scripture well know that it is the truth from their Lord. And Allah is not unaware of what they do.*"[19]

This way of seeing the revelation also gives a different outlook to the *asbab al-nuzul* science. The outlook being that the occasions of revelation are not only explanatory of the moment in which the verses have been revealed but also give the circumstances in which Allah wanted to deal with his community. This last instance makes of the Qur'an a living proof of the relationship between Muslims and God.

To conclude, Rahman tells us that if we consider the Qur'an as a response to human needs and we see the revelation as the direct response to those needs, the Qur'an will make sense as a book from which extrapolate moral teaching. Moreover, this communication between God and Muslims can be perpetuated through history by adapting it to new circumstances. What this way of interpreting the Qur'an goes against, ultimately, is the codification of the Qur'an as a book of laws, devoid of any moral and compassionate meaning.

Following in the chronological order, the next chapter will similarly analyze Amina Wadud. Trying to draw a line that links these two authors together, I'll identify where Wadud departs from Rahman's hermeneutic.

[19] Surah 2:144, Sahih International.

III.I Amina Wadud

Amina Wadud[20] is arguably the most notable academic of Islamic feminism outside the academic world. Her success is due to her of international works in favour of women's right, academic research in the field of gender in Islam, and for breaking the barriers of what is consider Islamic and un-Islamic. In particular, she led the Friday prayer of mixed gender in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York in 2005. This stirred controversy since the majority thought this to be an unprecedented event.[21] However, Wadud and other *'ulama* brought up numerous instances from the traditional point of view that proves that it is allowed in Islam to do so. [22]

Born as Mary Teasley from a religious family of Methodist African-American in 1952 Bethesda (Maryland, U.S.A.) Amina Wadud became Muslim in 1972 after having started college. After finishing her degree in BSc. Education Wadud decided to learn Arabic and travelled to the Arab world where she became fluent in classical and modern Arabic. She then moved her career closer to her new identity and graduated in a Master's degree in Near Eastern Studies and in 1988 obtained a PhD in Islamic and Arabic Studies at the University of Michigan. During her time at the International Islamic University in Malaysia, where she was offered a position as an assistant professor in Quranic Studies, she co-founded an organization for women in Islamic countries named the Sisters in Islam (SIS) and became involved with the feminist discourse in Islam. It is in this period that she started writing her famous book *Qur'an and woman* that will be first published in 1992 then reprinted in 1999. She later accepted a position as Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University until her retirement in 2008. Since then she continued her campaign for plurality in Islam and, to this day, Wadud continues to advocate for equality within the Umma.

According to Barlas (2004), Wadud's work exhaustively "establishes the Qur'anic basis of gender equality in Islam, and thus raises questions about patriarchal (mis)readings of

[20] All the information about her biography are retrieved from the article by Asma Barlas "Amina Wadud's hermeneutics of the Qur'an: women rereading sacred texts." *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an* (2004): 97-123. Most of her information are gathered from the partial autobiography of Amina Wadud in "On Belonging as a Muslim Woman." *My Soul is a Witness: African-American Women's Spirituality* (1995): 253-265.

[21] https://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/19/nyregion/woman-leads-muslim-prayer-service-in-new-york.html.

[22] It is often quote the hadith Bukhari (380) and Muslim (658) for the mixed gender prayer and the tradition of 'Umm Waraqa for an instance of women leading the prayer.

the scripture". While this definitions of Wadud's influence on Islamic feminism seems an overstatement, Wadud's presence in a field occupied mainly by men indeed represent a challenging voice in the Qur'anic exegesis. Other authors too have accomplished so much, most noticeably Riffat Hassan and Fatima Mernissi, however, Amina Wadud has reached an in-depth analysis in the Qur'anic exegesis through the female's lens that was never fully explored. Thus, starting an official and methodical re-reading of the Qur'an. Amina Wadud, therefore, has the merit of having launched a new trend in Islamic feminism that doesn't seek to be acknowledged by the rest of the academia but has started to work on their agenda. The work of Wadud is by any means flawless but is an important stepping stone towards a new outlook on women's voice in Islam.

III.II Hermeneutics in *Qur'an and woman*

Wadud's hermeneutics is much in debt with Rahman's contribution to the critique of the traditional *tafsir*. She regards patriarchal reading as a building up from predecessors understanding of the Qur'anic text. Instead of focusing on their realization of the divine words, commentators have "collapsed divine discourse with its human interpretation" (Barlas, 2004, p. 106) hence abandoning the original meaning and diverting towards a centralized understanding of the Qur'an. A second feature she borrows from Rahman is the theory of the double movement in producing meaning from the Qur'an. She continues Rahman's project in dividing the meaning of the text from the circumstantial to the universal. Wadud expands on this by giving a further contextual explanation on the conception of universalism that people in Arabia had at the time of the Revelation (Wadud, 2006, p. 194). Since there was no sense of universal meaning (Böwering, 2001), there could have been no mention of it in the Qur'an for the following generations. Both these keys of reading the *tafsir* are fundamental to the feminist project. Both question the very purpose for a new *tafsir* but also open new possibilities of reading.

Wadud positions herself in the genre of *tafsir* through a classification she identifies specifically when dealing with feminist exegesis (Wadud, 1999, p. 1-3). The first category of *tafsir* is the traditional one. These *tafasir* have the characteristic of utilizing traditional ways of dealing with the issue of women, specifically by gathering the experiences of women, only through men's. Even when using the methods of interpreting the Qur'an bil-Qur'an (as

described in chapter 1) they focus their attention to single words rather than seeking for the overall meaning. Wadud claims that it is for this reason that misogynist readings originate. The second type is the reactive interpretation and refers to those interpretations of the Qur'an that react to the implications that the previous interpreters have proposed about the position of the woman in the Qur'an. These interpretations do not attempt to recollect pieces of information from the text itself but they accept those views and dispute that view of Islam altogether, it is often the category of feminists. The last category is the holistic interpretation. The substantial difference with the previous one is that the analysis is of the text and not of the interpretation already given. It considers many of modern-days approaches, the feminist one being among them with women's experience as part of the Qur'anic message. In order to do so, Wadud proposes a new hermeneutic.

As Barlas (2004, p. 113) has pointed out, Wadud's hermeneutical project can be divided into two halves: the first part is the creation of an exegetical space that does not abide by the canonical *tafsir* of the past. This can be made by providing a hermeneutical model that follows the guidelines of the Qur'an. The second part is the gender-sensitive *tafsir* itself. It provides the base for new future readings and gives a mean of starting other liberatory readings.

Lastly, what Wadud seeks to prove in her *tafsir* is posed in the first chapter of *Qur'an and woman*. Namely, that the Qur'an does not imply male ontological superiority towards women. Wadud (1999, p. 34), as much as previous authors (Hassan, 1985; Al-Hibri, 1982a), notes that the Qur'an does not make any distinction between men and women outside of the biological differences of natural inherence, rather, it is often stated in multiple verses that they both belong to the same essence (in Arabic *nafs*)(Wadud, 1999, p. 18). This particular is sufficient, to her, to prove the ontological equalitarian structure that rules over the Qur'an. Moreover, the Qur'an never separates human being according to their gender, nor does it advocate any sexual differentiation (Barlas, 2019). However, what critics have challenged in Wadud's work is the non-existing conception of such differentiation in seventh century Arabia (Hidayatullah, 2014). According to Badran (2001, p. 288), not only the word gender or sex is not in the Qur'an, but it was not even in the Arabic language, and, even more significantly, the Qur'an uses indistinctly terms that refer to sex and gender. Moreover, Badran explains that the contemporary term for gender (*jins*) was a later loan from other

languages. This implies that even though the Qur'an was aware of these concepts as a religio-cultural and biological construct, the differences were not yet defined.

III.II.I Historical contextualization

Always following the guidelines of interpretation provided by Rahman, Wadud continues to remark the importance of historical contextualization of the verses and the Qur'an at large. Wadud does not consider the Qur'an as a historical record book strictly speaking, but says that it provides enough historical details to give information of the historical social context but, at the same time, give deeper meaning that adds other layers of understanding (1999, p. 31). She underlines the importance of the *asbab al-nuzul* as the key method in the process of contextualization. The issue that arises after acknowledging this method, however, is to recognize where the Qur'an is meant as an allegorical text or just an account of the life of the Arabs. "We have no sure indication for many accounts to determine if they are historical or metaphorical, literal or allegorical" (ibid., p. 30). To solve this, Wadud adopts the double movement theory as a mean of retrieving the moral behind the verse through the historical situations. This allows to read seventh-century Arabian customs and direct them into an adaptable meaning. The reader, proposes Wadud, must apply the same teaching shown in the Qur'an to modern applications, this is called following the "spirit" of the Qur'an. Although the text must be seen as placed into a historical context, the reader must think of the book as a depository of moral and ethical values. Therefore, bringing the Qur'an always as close as possible to his/her own life (ibid., p. 34). This is especially true when dealing with verses regarding women's subalternity to men. The Qur'an did not mean, according to Wadud, the verses regarding women to be interpreted as specific but to be understood in their historical context. It is crucial, here, the distinctions on specific verses (*khaas*) and general (*'amm*). As Sana Ammad[23] and Shah Junaid Ahmad Hashimi[24] (2016, p. 5) have pointed out, Amina Wadud doesn't seem to be aware of a branch of knowledge in Islamic jurisprudence which is in charge of retrieving legal maxims, hence the name *al-Qawa'id al-Kulliyyah*, from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Although part of a long juridical

[23] Islamic studies teacher at the ADNOC school of the United Arab Emirates.
[24] Associate Professor at the International Islamic University of Islamabad.

tradition, these maxims, continue Ammad and Hashimi, are not prejudiced by the patriarchal views of the jurists and are applicable to the feminist cause.

Feminists like Wadud call for a revision of which verses are to be considered specific to the time of the Prophet and which need to be upheld as universal. Since "[s]ome of the greatest restrictions on women, causing them much harm, have resulted from interpreting Qur'anic solutions for particular problems as if they were universal principles" (ibid., p. 99) Wadud claims that a re-evaluation of these verses is in need in order to start a de-patriarchalized reading of the Qur'an. Where Wadud fails in her new hermeneutical model is in addressing how to distinguish from the two. She seems to leave the reader to apply the twofold movement, possibly, in every circumstance.

III.II.II Grammatical Composition

In drawing her methodological model, Wadud cannot avoid making examples of what has been disregarded as linguistic misrepresentation. The case of the grammatical analysis and the consequent translation is one of those instances. More specifically she draws into her hermeneutical model those verses that have been used to justify or condemn the Qur'anic patriarchal output. She believes that many of the discrepancies between the message of the Qur'an and the textual interpretation by traditional *mufassirun* belong also to the linguistic field. For instance, she quotes Surah al-Nisa' 4:34 "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means" (Yusuf Ali), transliterated: ar-rijālu qawwamūna ʿala-n-nisā'i bimā faḍḍala-llah baʿḍahum ʿalā ba'ḍin wa-bimā anfaqū min 'amwālihim[25]. From Pickthall to al-Zamakhshari to Abbas Mahmud Al-'Aqqad, Wadud shows how this verse has been used to prove unquestionably man's superiority on the woman (Wadud, 1999, p. 71). However, she points out how in Arabic "some" (baʿd) does not have gender and in this verse too it does not exclude the possibility to be referring to "some men or women". This implies that it may be true the opposite: some women being gifted more than some men. One of the most common fallacy when reading the Qur'an is, as mentioned earlier, the shift between particular to universal. Therefore, this is an example of a specific instance taken as a general rule.

[25] "لرِّجَالُ قَوَّمُونَ عَلَى لنِّسَآءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ ٱللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ وَبِمَآ أَنْفَقُواْ مِنْ أَمْوَٰلِهِمْ"

American scholars Azizah al-Hibri supports this view and defends women's position over this particular verse. It is noteworthy, however, how al-Hibri particularly points out the contextual aspect of this verse rather than the terminology used. Her claims (al-Hibri, 1982a; 1982b) is that the Qur'an has been revealed in a patriarchal society (position acknowledged by Wadud as well) and this chapter highlights the duty of the men towards women, protecting them and their offspring from being neglected economically by their spouse. Wadud's position, instead, focuses on refusing previous interpretations.

On this regard, Sana Ammad and Shah Junaid Ahmad Hashimi (2016) openly oppose Wadud's entitlement to confute the translation of renowned scholars in favour of her translation. To them, being an outsider and, thus, being able to make observations that do not belong to a gendered language (Wadud, 1999, p. 6) does not suffice as proof of her capability. They claim that what being a non-arabic speaker furthers her understanding of the language instead of giving her a position of privilege. Moreover, they refute this assumption on a theological level since the message of God is above gender-language problems which have been a concern only in recent time with the development of new social and feminist movements (Ammad and Hashimi, 2016, p. 6).

Therefore, Wadud's attempt to bring language into the feminist discussion is another tool to justify possible misreading of the Qur'an. To the author's mind, this seems to be the weakest of the points Wadud proposes in her hermeneutical model since translation can be a tool to justify different meaning. The way Wadud does her translation is with clear apologetic intent, making it, for an Arabic speaker, inaccurate and far-fetched.

III.II.III World-view

Amina Wadud's foremost argument is against the extrapolation of verses out of context. Contrary to the modus operandi of traditional scholars, her method consists of a general understanding of the Qur'an and then the reading of the text through this idea (1999, p. 5). Wadud's standpoint when dealing with a patriarchal accusation of the Qur'an belongs to a generation of Islamic feminists cornered by a number of ayat which proved the indisputable misogyny of the Qur'an. When Wadud started developing her hermeneutical model she was aware of the accusations from Western feminists as from the Muslim apologetics. This led her to condemn the atomistic approach as the source of Western

aversion towards Islam and, at the same time, the internal view that relegates women secondary position in the relationship between God and mankind. This view could be easily discarded, Wadud claim, when engaging in a holistic view of the Qur'an (Wadud, 1999; 2004). There are numerous references in the Qur'an in which women are directly addressed and are considered worthy of other men, making the reading of those few verses a misrepresentation of the Qur'anic original message. Wadud's argument, therefore, builds in the feminist discourse and is a response to it. The argument, too, gives for granted the already pre-existent literature on the argument. By proposing a different approach to the reading of those verses, and by quoting authors who dissent on that interpretation Wadud describes a framework of interpretation to which redirect future Qur'anic interpretations. It is an interpretation directed towards a holistic comprehension of the text. This includes women as much as men.

Many scholars[26] have opposed Wadud reductionist view on traditional exegetes as it simplistically portrays medieval and modern *mufassirun* as not sufficiently prepared for the task (Ammad and Hashimi, 2016). Wadud makes the mistake of proposing her approach as free of prejudice and preconception (Wadud, 1999, p. 6), with no regards of the preparation of Arab traditional scholars. Moreover, when discussing the holistic approach she ignores the ability of those scholars of being able to quote the Qur'an by heart and being aware of the limitless origins of the words of the Qur'an.

The overall magnitude of Wadud's work extends far beyond the hermeneutical model she suggests. It opens a new discussion in the feminist movement as it aims a genre far to often dominated by male dominance. As for the leading of the prayer in 2005, Wadud has shown a new facet of Islam where women have a contributing role in the defining of Islam.

In the next chapter we will see how Asma Barlas expands on the work of Amina Wadud to continues her hermeneutical work. Although being similar works, Amina Wadud was the first effort to depatriarchalize the Qur'an from its traditional understanding while *Believing women* will be done with a specific emphasis on the language and how it is associated with patriarchal readings.

[26] Kecia Ali in primis has condemned Wadud's interpretation since "progressive approaches to the Qur'anic text cannot be limited to selective presentation of egalitarian verses in isolation from their broader scriptural context." Ali, Kecia. *Sexual ethics and Islam*, 2015, p. 153.

IV.I Asma Barlas

From the late '90s to the new twenty-first century, one of the most outspoken scholar regarding gender in Islam has been Asma Barlas. Her staunch critique to traditional views on the Qur'an and even her critiques within the feminist contest made of Barlas the torchbearer of the Islamic feminism in the academic world. As Hidayatullah (2014, p. 8-10) has noted, Barlas, even though chronologically speaking belongs to the second generation of feminists (in which Hidayatullah, Ali belong to), she is more closely related to the first generation (together with Hassan, al-Hibri, and Wadud) because of her tendency of bringing her own experience in her interpretative process and for the predisposition in engaging with the works of her predecessors rather than her contemporaries.

Asma Barlas is a current professor of Politics at Ithaca College (New York) born in Pakistan in 1950. After a B.A. in English Literature and Philosophy, she continued her academic career with an M.A. in Journalism in Lahore. At the end of which she was offered a position in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in which she worked from 1976 until 1982, Barlas was among the first women to work in the Pakistani government. Her experience in the office under General Zia-ul-Haq ended after having criticized his military regime[27]. She later was forced to leave the country for security reasons and moved to the U.S. where she continued her studies at the University of Denver in International studies, obtaining an M.A. and Ph.D. in 1990. Since then her interests ranged from colonialist oppression to gendered violence and religious/secular debates. Her main field of interest, however, has leaned into the feminist reading of the Qur'an. It is in this field that Barlas made the most influential publications and still engages in debates about women in Islam. Barlas thinks that every Muslim has the right to read the Qur'an according to one's own experience of Islam. Although she acknowledges her debt towards the feminist thinking and the progress they have achieved, Barlas doesn't want to be associated with the feminist movement since it carries a burden of great significance that can at times be an obstacle to her hermeneutical project.

Among the *mufassirat*, Barlas relates mostly with the previous author Amina Wadud. Her works were for Barlas of great importance since it put the basis of her hermeneutics and gave Muslim women a new approach to follow when reading the Qur'an. Arguably, the

[27] https://web.archive.org/web/20050728081142/http://www.islam-democracy.org/barlas_bio.asp.

reason why Barlas often put Wadud at the centre of her work is that it is a female voice in a field dominated by male exegetes. Moreover, she seems to distance and oppose most of the other female Islamic scholars for their work often trespass the boundaries of Islam putting their faith and the very notion of Islam at risk[28]. Barlas's mission is drenched in Islamic morale in which the basic knowledge of Islamic tenets is seldom put into question. Although she deals with an innovative interpretation of the Qur'an, she does so in a way that preserves the orthodox view.

IV.II Hermeneutics in *Believing Women*

Barlas's aim in writing the exegesis of the Qur'an is to portray a text that is not tied to the readings of previous traditional commentators. One of the reasons Barlas denies her affiliation with feminism is that rather than being addressed as such she draws her gender-equality sensitivity from the Qur'an itself. It is the Qur'an, states Barlas (2019, p. 19), that taught her that men and women are ontologically the same. The starting point of her analysis, as Rahman and Wadud, is not to prove the Qur'an of being acceptable to modern standard awareness of gender sensitization, but to bring forward the evidence from the text. This point of view Barlas shows in *Believing women* challenges the classical patriarchal understanding of the Qur'an not only in the historical aspect and the semantic but goes beyond-and here's the innovation compared to the previous *mufassirun*- and explains how the Qur'an's conception of men and women is equalitarian on an ontological level. The question she asks when re-reading the Qur'an is whether do the Islamic Scripture condone sexual inequality or oppression, and if is the Qur'an a patriarchal text in which women's liberation can't be read. Barlas has the objective of retrieving what Leila Ahmed called the "stubbornly equalitarian" voice of Islam (Ahmed, 1992, p. 63). By looking at these questions the episteme of the Qur'an is directly addressed. Her main point is to go to the root of the Qur'anic message and find whether we can cast out an oppressive reading of it.

As the starting point of her thought, she poses the polysemic value of the text. This implies that every text can be read in multiple ways without the possibility of denying one's reading. The caveat to this point is that meaning has to be contextualized through its logical

[28] An example of such instance can be found in Barlas, Asma. "Secular and Feminist Critiques of the Qurʾan: Anti-Hermeneutics as Liberation?." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 32, no. 2 (2016): 113-114.

position in time and history. She claims that the Qur'an is long been interpreted as patriarchal text from her predecessors but, this is not the only possible interpretation. What they have failed was to see the Qur'an as a whole and focusing on a few specific verses that allowed the patriarchal reading to emerge. Again, we see how important it is for modernist exegetes the anti-atomistic approach when dealing with a text. Tradition, Barlas explains (2019, p. 10), has been the vehicle of this unified version of the Qur'an. By via of commentaries and super-commentaries, this paternalistic view of Islam made its way to become the only interpretative explanation of the meanings of the Qur'an. It is, therefore, throughout the Golden Age of Islam that misogyny became an integral part of Islam. In other words, the "textualization of misogyny" (Rashaand Saas, quoted in Barlas, 2019, p. 9), was put forward by the secondary religious texts and not by the Qur'an per sè.

For Asma Barlas, the hermeneutics of the Qur'an is already manifest in the self-disclosure of God. The way the Qur'an suggests its own reading is self-evident in its meaning (ibid., p. 13). These principles are: 1) the divine unity; 2) the justness; 3) the incomparability of God. Beside these theological principles, explains Barlas, the Qur'an encourages those who read by using analytical reasoning and emphasize the holism behind the text.[29]

Barlas, however, never fully defines why these are the principles through which the Qur'an expose its meaning but, instead, she chooses them as self-evident. The only explanation she gives[30] is that she regards these as the crucial in the understanding of the Qur'an, and because in lack of others. It can be argued that this way of approaching Qur'anic hermeneutics serves to the sole purpose of apologetic of patriarchal readings. What is missing in this framework of interpretation is a principle that can read the Qur'an through other lenses than the gendered/patriarchal one. This, in my opinion, proves the subjectivity of the reader in approaching a text by themes.

Even Barlas recognizes the relevance of the affiliation to the Mu'tazilah movement. Specifically, she points out that the secular-/feminist intelligentsia critiques the relationship between the Qur'an and God through the Mu'tazilah doctrine (Barlas, 2019, p. 244). Barlas identifies a set of authors that belongs to the same stream of thought of the Mu'tazilah,

[29] In this regard, she quotes the Qur'an Surah al-Hijr 15:91-93 "Who have made the Qur'an into shreds. Therefore, by the Lord, We will, of a surety, Call them to account, For all their deeds." (transl. Yusuf Ali, p. 728).
[30] Notably in the 2002 edition but also in the 2019 edition of *Believing women*.

particularly Rhouni, Wadud, Hidayatullah, and Abu Zayd. What she implies in her critique against these authors is the accuse of the secularization of the Sacred Scripture. Since engaging in a view that may be difficult to combine to a text whose verses cannot be adjusted, Barlas fears that their intent is to desacralize the Scripture and endorse the Mu'tazilah view of the uncreadteness of the Qur'an. For her, stating that the Qur'an is not of the same nature of God is tantamount to say that the Qur'an is a secular text, empty of religious meaning. As Moroccan scholar Raja Rhouni clarified in her *Secular and Islamic feminist critiques* (2010, p. 16) such an approach does not contradict its sacred or transcendental dimension. Barlas critique to her colleagues does not address, however, the Mu'tazilah aspect of their theology, rather it condemns it for being anti-theology. It is the secular aspect of their rational thought that threatens, in Barlas view, the core belief of the Qur'an. To her, therefore, the new trend with which the feminist exegetes are approaching the interpretation is incorrect from its starting point, from a theological perspective.[31] Barlas aligns with the idea that these scholars resort in a secular view- or anti-theological- of the Qur'anic text as a solution to the discrepancies between new Western feminist values and religious Islamic teachings.

IV.II.I Divine unity

As a first premise, Barlas keeps the unity of the divine ontology and the divine discourse. "There is a congruence between God (divine ontology) and God's speech (divine discourse)" (2019, p. 13) failing to understand that is failing to read the Qur'an. After this step, Barlas starts reading the Qur'an through its most defining among the hermeneutical principles, the *tawhidic* principle. This concept only would be sufficient to understand the overall meaning of the Qur'an and refute the patriarchal readings out of it. Being one of the foundational descriptions of God (ibid., p. 201), Barlas sees the *tawhid* as on the opposite spectrum of the traditional patriarchal assumptions made of the Scripture for two reasons: firstly, its implications undermine any comparison with God's rule over human beings with men's rule over women (qiwama) meaning that there is no place for patriarchy in a society

[31] This is a discordant note in Barlas argument since, as reported by Hidayatullah (2014, p. 137) "Barlas seems to view the problem of deriving unjust meanings from the Qur'an as well as its solution as *hermeneutical*, I understand both to be primarily *theological*".

with God at its command. Secondly, it states God's absolute sovereignty, to which no one can partake (ibid., p. 14).

The conjecture that Barlas makes is that "if God is indivisible, God's sovereign is indivisible" makes of patriarchy *shirk* or polytheism since it is a dissociation of God's original unity. Barlas objection then is on a masculinized vision of God. Her claim is that the patriarchy has been reinforced by the vision of God as Father figure. She adds (ibid., p. 103) that the translation of God as "he" made this association even more accentuated. And while the argument of God's indivisible entity and incomparability is justified and academically accepted[32], her own view of the passage between the personification- or masculinization- of God is not supported by the many scholars (Hidayatullah, 2014; Bauer, 2013, Ali, 2009) since patriarchy is not only conveyed by language but it's a pre-existing social construction that institute itself in the fabric of Islamic theology and became an integral part with it (Ahmed, 1992).

The misrepresentation of the signifier God "He" with the signified Allah is at the root of the interpretation of men as vice-regent of women, says Barlas (2019, p. 108), since it masculinizes the pronoun for Allah. This semiotic collapse, as Ian Netton calls it (1989), does not operate only as masculinization of God, a distortion where God is seen as gendered, but also in the concept of viceregency of God over human beings that transfers now to men over women. This is a process of analogy made possible by a misrepresentation of semiotic. Again, this recounts as an infringement of the *tawhidic* principle and assign to men the sovereign belonging to God only. Netton, moreover, claims that the Mu'tazilites were aware of this linguistic polyvalence and broke through any link between Allah and its name almost to the point of nullifying its meaning (ibid., 331). Barlas, however, believes that it is for this very rupture with the word of the Qur'an with its signifier that the later tradition was able to give an androcentric connotation to the word God. She, then, is reversing the common perception which sees the Mu'tazilah's attempt to de-anthropomorphize Allah to an institutor of patriarchy in Allah's name.

Thus, from this schism of the significance of the meaning of the word God was the cause of the first step for the patriarchy to permeate Islamic theology posing the base for the transfer of God's viceregency on humans to men's viceregency on women. The *tawhid,*

[32] See "Theology and the Qur'an" by Tilman Nagel in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*. ed. McAuliffe, Jane Dammen, Vol. 6, Leiden: Brill, 2001, pp. 256-275.

however, denies this possibility and rejects any coexistence of sovereign between God and men.

IV.II.II Justness

When reading the Qur'an as a whole, instead of dissecting it into pieces, we can see that the attitude of Allah towards wrongdoings is rejection. This, for Barlas, is evident and should be taken as a clear principle to be held true. Even though the Qur'an is revealed in clear (*muhkam*) and unclear (*mutashabih*) verses, and that the definition of oppression and injustice can be stretched to one personal belief, Barlas (2019, p. 18) finds the concept of *zulm* (litt. injustice) to be one of the foundational principles of God's self-disclosure. By extension, if God in the Qur'an doesn't do *zulm* on his disciples, neither condones humans to do it between each other it, then the word of God cannot advocate for it. When dealing with the oppression of women, it is clear how the subordination of women in many aspects of society is against the fundamental of justness advocated from the Qur'an. Patriarchy, therefore, is a social structure that abides this commandment by sanctioning sexism and gender discrimination, misogyny and violence against women (ibid., 13). The central idea behind it is that the way we read the Qur'an cannot be different from what we think of God, meaning that the way the patriarchy has to insinuate in Islam through its Text is via the violation of God's image as protector of all human rights. In other words, traditional understanding of the Qur'an has taken those few verses that taken out of context can be read misogynistically regardless of the core principle of *zulm*.

To this regard, Toshihiko Izutsu[33] reiterates the concept that the God of the Qur'an is the "God of justice, who never does any wrong (*zulm)* to anybody"(1964, p. 137). Izutsu, as Barlas, extends God's attitude to injustice to the way human beings are supposed to treat each other following the example set in the Qur'an. However, not everyone agrees with this. Feminist scholar Aysha Hidayatullah starts with the syllogism that if God is just, and the Qur'an is the word of God, then the Qur'an must also be just (2014, p. 193). The conclusion, for Hidayatullah, falls far from Barlas and Izutsu interpretation as her reading of the Qur'an is

[33] Toshihiko Izutsu (1914-1993) was a professor at Keio University in Japan, famous for his original approach to comparative religion and in Islam is specialized in the ethical aspect. Among his most famous publications, Toshihiko, Izutsu. "Ethico Religious Concepts in the Qur'an." (1966). and "God and Man in the Koran." *Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies* (1964).

of an unjust text towards women. The implication she makes is that the Qur'an is a blatantly androcentric text that oppresses to some extent women. Thus, she questions whether is God unjust and oppressive or its divinity has to be put on the test. It is worthy of consideration that Hidayatullah ascribes to the Qur'an its misogynist verses with no confutations since she is not concerned with seeing the Qur'an as sacred text and does not consider it as such. Once again, what is clear from this divergence is how exegetes read texts can have implications on their theological view of the text. Barlas's contextualism, allows her to justify *zulm* as a value of reference to interpret the rest of the text. Conversely, Hidayatullah's way of reading of the Qur'an denies this possibility and undertake a different process to bridge sexual equality with an androcentric reading.

IV.II.III Incomparability

The last of the self-disclosures of God that Barlas has individuated and that can help us to retrieve the Qur'anic message is the incomparability of God. What is evident from the Text is that God cannot be compared or associated with anything. The implications that such principles carry are manyfold, two of particular importance. The first is the association with human features as God does not have human appearances it cannot be thought of having faces or hands, as often stated in the Qur'an. Therefore, any suggestion made of human features has to be understood as an allegory. To the same extent, says Barlas, God cannot be attributed to any sex/gender, since these are exclusively prerogatives of living things. At the root of the image of God is its incomparability, as quoted in the Qur'an Surah as-Saffat 37:180: " Glory to thy Lord, the Lord of Honour and Power! (He is free) From what they ascribe (To Him)" (transl. Yusuf Ali, p. 1152). Barlas agrees with Murata (1992) about when Muslims started to narrow the imagery of God to a more relatable figure. Yet maintaining the *tasbih* (incomparability), God's figure became closer to an anthropomorphize God (Barlas, 2019, p. 104). From here the representation of God to a ruler, lord, or a king became immediate, to the extent of being equiparated to a Father. Murata argues that the "theological patriarchy" was introduced into *kalam* in the early stages of Islam and was never abandoned since it was for a better understanding of God as not only an ontological essence related to Muslims.

A second implication, of which Barlas focuses on, is the association of God with the Father-figure. This requires a further explanation since in Barlas's study is intrinsic within the concept of patriarchal reading of the Qur'an. Notwithstanding the linguistic problem discussed above, in which the personification of God is perpetuated through associations of human-related concepts, Barlas underlines not only the anthropomorphization but also the choice of gender regarding God: "Masculinizing God is the first step in positing a hierarchy in which males situate themselves beneath God and above women, implying that there is a symbolic [...] continuum between God's rule over humans and male rule over women" (2019, p. 110). Barlas stresses the point that there is no mention in the Qur'an of any possible representation of God as human, let alone as man. However, this masculinization of God allows reading the Qur'an through these patriarchal standards. Seeing God as a King (as mentioned in Surah al-Nas and others with the masculine noun *malik*) would translate according to the traditional view, to a man-like figure. This led, claims Barlas, to a misrepresentation of human sovereignty with God's sovereignty in which patriarchal readings have taken over the Qur'anic concepts of *tawhid* and *tanzih* (incomparability). Lastly, there's one more extension to this argument, namely the "sacralization of *p*rophets as fathers". Since an argument about the rejection of the God-Father idea can be made, while still keeping a patriarchal outlook on the Qur'an, Barlas acknowledges that it is the Prophets who, mistakenly, hold the key to the patriarchy in Islam. This links to the idea of men being in between God and women and, by extension in charge of women. However, Barlas points out two main objections to be found in the Qur'an: Firstly is that through the Prophets the Qur'an establish God's rule and not the institutions of the father's rule. Secondly, the Prophets of Abrahamic bloodline, which include Muhammad too, are never endorsed as fathers.

To conclude, Barlas approaches her hermeneutical mission from a *Muslimah* perspective, putting up front her religiosity before anything. Her intent is to profess an Islam that is up-to-date but does not bend to any theological reconsideration made by her feminist colleagues. This makes her an outsider in the community but at the same time an original and challenging viewpoint.

Conclusions

As we have seen, different authors have tried to implement a methodology for reading the Qur'an in a way that combines modern values to the holy text of Islam from different perspectives. While Rahman was aware of the potentiality of his interpretation he had not in mind to create a foundational methodology for feminist readings. On the other hand, Wadud and Barlas, although with some objections from their side, would fall into the category of feminists since their purpose when undertaking their exegetical endeavour was to intentionally make a reading of the Qur'an suitable to those specific sets of values. The answers that these authors give are similar: the God of the Qur'an does not condone any ethical discrimination based on gender, and patriarchal readings have arrived in Islam only from the outside.[34] However, as the Senior Research Associate at the Institute of Ismaili Studies Stephen Burge suggests (2015, 72), "to understand an exegete, fully, there is a need to understand the methodology rather than the answer." Hence an analysis as this one was due in order to distinguish the characteristics of these methodologies.

From the previous chapters, it emerged that the major meeting point that Rahman, Wadud, and Barlas share is their contextualist approach to the Qur'an. They all seek the meaning of the Qur'an through a historical recollection of the occasion of revelation. They all think that the historicization of the verses has been overlooked by traditional *mufassir* and therefore, make it as the most crucial feature of their methodology. More than anyone, Rahman poses the basic of his theory precisely on this aspect.

Wadud's most original contribution to the hermeneutical model for the liberation of gender is her scepticism towards the words of the Qur'an. While adopting Rahman's double movement theory, she moves forward by reframing the Qur'anic interpretation through the different meanings of the words. Therefore, she redefines and rewrites what classical exegetes have adopted as canonical readings (i.e. Surah an-Nisa' 4:34). However, this process is only fully completed by Barlas who continues Wadud's effort to depatriarchalize the lexicon of the Qur'an by contrasting it with the central dogma of Islam, the *tawhid*. This is the full-fledged application of the holistic approach with a specific application to the linguistic aspect of the text. Barlas carries on Wadud's process of explaining how the

[34] Ahmed (1992) and Mernissi (1991) would argue that it was pre-existing in the societies of the time, while the three *mufassirun* shown here focus on the tradition of *'ulama*.

masculinization of the pronoun for Allah and of the association of the God/Father figure came to be through a historical and linguistic explanation.

We observed theological implications and how they can shape the overall hermeneutical process. Particularly I pointed out how the affiliation with the rationalist doctrine Mu'tazilah was crucial in defining their methodology. Even though they diverge in their project- since Wadud is focusing only on gender inclusiveness- both Rahman and Wadud believe a new Qur'anic interpretation can be achieved through reasoning (*ijtihad*). Barlas openly adopts an opposite stance on the theological debate, for she offers a paradigm that operates within the framework of Islamic orthodoxy. While for Rahman the revelation is both a human and a divine product, Barlas believes in the uncreatedness of the Qur'an and, therefore, its indivisibility.

Lastly, the flaws in Wadud's work is to find expressions of gender equity in a text where such terminology was not implied (Badran, 2001). This reduces the range of confusability that her view may have and more importantly, reducing the extent of Wadud's methodology in other fields. Conversely, Rahman's Qur'anic message was intended as universal, making its applicability to the gender issue possible and preferred. Barlas too starts her hermeneutic with the intent of disproving misogynist readings of the Qur'an rather than finding a universal message. Barlas' self-disclosure principles, as she calls them, suffice to the feminist readings but do not sufficiently extend to other scopes.

Therefore, in relation to the first research question that I posed, "to what extent do the works of Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas follow Fazlur Rahman hermeneutic?", I have shown how Wadud shares the same conception of history and the revelation as Rahman, but she adds the lexical analysis since that is an important aspect of the feminist agenda. Barlas, then, starts from Wadud's hermeneutic and adapt it even more to the feminist case by further analyzing lexicon in relation to the patriarchal view of the Qur'an; however, she does not share the same theological belief of Rahman and Wadud (i.e. the theory of prophecy).

The second question was regarding the reach of their hermeneutical model. To answer this one we looked at the reason behind their exegetical ambitions. Rahman was moved by a deep desire to apply his view of the Qur'an to the society at large, a utopian interpretation; Wadud and Barlas, instead, have the mission to read and interpret the Qur'an within their feminist movement. While the methodology of Rahman can have multifold implication in

society (as shown by the fact of being easily borrowed and fitted into feminist interpretations), the latter is only suitable for the anti-patriarchal readings.

The last question considers the implication of their life experience and how it reflects on their work. This especially concerns their social milieu but, most importantly, their theological belief. I have shown how the discussion of the feminist movement has shaped the need or a new hermeneutical model in Wadud and Barlas' tafasir, but also I uncovered how their theological views were the key aspect of their interpretations. This has shown us how feminist interpretation can be made regardless of the theological standpoint, thus opening new channels of interpretations for future readings.

This research has only focused on three *mufassirun*, however, it would be beneficial to extend this inquiry to other thinkers who have been neglected in this instance. Particular attention deserves the work of Nasr Abu Zayd, or Muhammad Arkoun, as of Riffat Hassan or Bint al-Shati'. This bringing into perspective a wider range of authors who carry with themself a personal relationship with Islam would expand the possibility of tackling these topics from different angles. A further study would be necessary as complementary to this one since new questions still need to be answered. Specifically an outlook on how Western and Islamic epistemology have affected the methodology of these aforementioned authors would be interesting. In order to do so, it is necessary to expand the research to the general trends in the Islamic world and in the Western one and include these authors into such narrative.

This thesis is by no means an exhaustive study on the topic of Islamic feminism and Qur'anic interpretation. It is, on the contrary, aimed to amplify the discourse on the intersection between these two topics. Although the concerned authors have been critically studied in their thought and, at times, even disagreed upon, it is important to acknowledge their importance and distinction in this field and for making a case for an Islam that does not exclude believers but welcomes them to make their own reading out of the Qur'an.

Bibliography

-Ahmed, Leila. *Women and gender in Islam: Historical roots of a modern debate*. Yale: University Press, 1992.

-Aichele G. and Phillips G. A. "Exegesis, Eisegesis, Intergesis." *Semeia*, 69-70, (1995): 7-18.

-Al-Hibri, Azizah Y. *Women and Islam.* Oxford: Pergamon, 1982.

_____, "A study of Islamic herstory: Or how did we ever get into this mess?" *Women's Studies International Forum* 5, no. 2 (1982): 207-219.

-Ali, Kecia. "Timeless Texts and Modern Morals: Challenges in Islamic Sexual Ethics." In *New Directions in Islamic Thought: Exploring Reform and Muslim Tradition*, ed. by Kari Vogt, Lena Larsen, and Christian Moe, 89-99. New York: LB. Tauris, 2009.

-Al-Sharmani, Mulki. "Marriage in Islamic Interpretive Tradition: Revisiting the Legal and the Ethical." *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 2, no. 1-2 (2018): 76-96.

-Ammad, Sana, and Hashimi, S. J. Ahmad. "Hermeneutical Models Proposed by Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas for the Exegesis of the Qur'an- An Analytical Overview." *Hazara Islamicus* 5, no. 1 (2016): 1-18.

-Arkoun, Mohammed. "The concept of authority in Islamic thought." In *Islam: State and Society*, ed. by Klaus Ferdinand and Mehdi Mozaffer, 53-73. London: Curzon Press, 1988.

-Badran, Margot. "Islamic Feminism: What's in a Name?" Consulted online on October 1, 2019. http://www.feministezine.com/feminist/international/Islamic-Feminism-01.html.

_____, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2009.

_____, "Gender." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. by Jane D. McAuliffe, Vol. 2, 288-292. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

-Barlas, Asma. *Believing women in Islam: Unreading patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.

_____, "Secular and Feminist Critiques of the Qurʾan: Anti-Hermeneutics as Liberation?" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 32, no. 2 (2016): 111-121.

_____, *Believing women in Islam: Unreading patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an*. London: Saqi Books, 2019.

-Bauer, Karen, ed., *Aims, Methods, and Contexts of Qur'anic Exegesis, 2nd/8th – 9th/15th Centuries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press in Association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013.

-Böwering, Gerhard. “Time.” In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an*, ed. by Jane D. McAuliffe, Vol. 5, 278-290. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

-Burge, Stephen R. “The Search for Meaning: Tafsīr, Hermeneutics, and Theories of Reading.” *Arabica* 62, no. 1 (2015): 53-73.

-El-Azhary Sonbol, Amira. “Rethinking women and Islam.” In *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. by Yvonne Y. Haddad, John L. Esposito, 108-146. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001.

-Elliott, Andrea. “Woman Leads Muslim Prayer Service In New York”. *The New York Times*, March 19, 2005. Consulted online on October 10, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/19/nyregion/woman-leads-muslim-prayer-service-in-new-york.html.

-Esack, Farid. *Qur’an, Liberation & Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*. Oxford: Oneworld, 1998.

-Gilliot, Claude, “Exegesis of the Qur’an: Classical and Medieval.” In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an*, ed. by Jane D. McAuliffe, Vol. 2, 99-124. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

-Hanafi, Hassan. “Method of Thematic Interpretation of the Qur’an.” In *The Qur’an as Text*, ed. by Stefan Wild. Leiden: Brill, 1996.

-Hassan, Riffat. “Made from Adam’s rib: The woman’s creation question.” *Al-Mushir Theological Journal of the Christian Study Centre* 27, no. 1 (1985): 110-124.

-Hidayatullah, Aysha A. *Feminist Edges of the Qur’an*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

-Hourani, George F. *Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of ‘Abd al- Jabbar*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

-Jesse, Mary Catherine. *A Modern Muslim Intellectual: The Thought of Fazlur Rahman with Special Reference to Reason*. Regina: University of Regina Press, 1991.

-Leemhuis, Fred. “Origins and early development of the tafsir tradition.” In *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’an*, ed by. Andrew Rippin, 13-30. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

-Lerner, Gerda. *The creation of patriarchy*. Vol. 1. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

-Mernissi, Fatima. *The veil and the male elite: A feminist interpretation of women's rights in Islam*. Translated by Mary Jo Lakeland Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 1991.

-Murata, Sachiko. *Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.

-Muttaqin, Farid. "Early Feminist Consciousness and Idea Among Muslim Women in 1920s Indonesia." *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 3, no. 1 (2015): 19-38.

-Nagel, Tilman. "Theology and the Qur'an." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. by Jane D. McAuliffe, Vol. 6, 256-275. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

-Netton, Ian R. *Allah Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology*. New York: Routledge, 1989.

-"Patriarchy," *Cambridge Dictionary*, Consulted online on December 27, 2019. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/patriarchy.

-Powers, David S. "The exegetical genre Nasikh al-Qur'an wa Mansukhuhu." In *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, ed. by. Andrew Rippin, 117-138. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

-Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

_____, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

_____, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*. Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980.

_____, *Revival and reform in Islam*. Oxford: Oneworld, 1999.

-Rhouni, Raja. *Secular and Islamic feminist critiques in the work of Fatima Mernissi*. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

-Saeed, Abdullah. "Fazlur Rahman: a framework for interpreting the ethico-legal content of the Qur'an." In *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*, ed. by Suha Taji-Faruki, Vol. 1, 37-65. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

_____, *Interpreting the Qurʾān: towards a Contemporary Approach*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

-Schacht, Joseph. *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950.

-Shakir, Imam Zayd. "Female Prayer Leadership (Revisited)." *New Islamic Directions*, April 22, 2008. Consulted online on December 23, 2019. https://www.newislamicdirections.com/nid/articles/female_prayer_leadership_revisited/.

-Toshihiko, Izutsu. *God and Man in the Koran.* Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964.

-Völker, Katharina. “Two Accounts of Qur'anic Revelation.” In *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 26, no. 3 (2015): 271-286.

-Wadud, Amina. *Qur'an and woman: Rereading the sacred text from a woman's perspective*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

_____, *Inside The Gender Jihad: Women Reform’s in Islam*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2006.

-Watt, Montgomery W. “al-Anṣār.” In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, ed. by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on January 25, 2020. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_0678.

_____, “ʿĀʾisha Bint Abī Bakr.” In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, ed. by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 14 January 2020. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_0440.

-Yassine, Nadia. “Le Féminisme islamique: Combats et Résistances.” *Oumma,* December 20, 2008. Consulted online on October 27, 2019. https://oumma.com/les-feminismes-islamiques/.

-Zayd, Nasr Hamid Abu. *Reformation of Islamic thought: A critical historical analysis*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006.