

## EDITORIAL: Contesting the Dichotomy of Islam and Modernity: Islamic Feminisms

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Even nowadays, Muslim women, who are or are not veiled, are still not treated individually, but collectively, often reduced to „*Muslimwoman*”, an artificial determination that collapses all the aspects related to gender and religion. By promoting this insidious concept of „*Muslimwoman*”, Islamist men, non-Muslim men, orientalists, and even Muslim or non-Muslim states deny and mask the national, ethnic, cultural, historical, philosophical, and spiritual diversity of Muslim women and forcefully assume the right to decide what is good or bad for Muslim women and on their behalf.<sup>1</sup> However, during the last decades, a salutary path for progress has been made, especially in academia; the new ideas and attitudes are also reflected in Muslim activist feminist movements. A new type of Islamic feminist resistance against the limited neo-orientalist or Islamist gender-related imaginary preserves the faith-based point of reference and facilitates the emergency of a series of various alternative Islamic gender concepts and theories, doubled by an enhanced representation of Muslim women by their own agency.

The development of the last century’s political Islam that had to allow public access to classical books of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) in order to justify its return to *Shari’ah* and that opportunistically resorted to logic, reasoning and non-religious sources of knowledge, paradoxically and involuntarily generated the configuration of an internal critique and demystification of the sanctity of the so-called divine Islamic law’s diverse patriarchal interpretations. On the background of the confrontation between traditionalism and modernism, new Islamic feminist reformist studies approached the *fiqh* reglementations that consolidated gender inequality in pre-modern Islamic theories as simple human constructions conceived by the male jurists’ minds, subjective and

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<sup>1</sup> Cooke, Miriam, *Deploying the Muslimwoman*, in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Indiana University Press, volume 24, number 1, Spring 2008, pp. 91-99.

fallible constructions that contradict the essence of divine will revealed in the sacred text.<sup>1</sup>

De-essentializing „the Muslim-woman problem” uncovered the complex and inextricable process of interference of social, political, cultural, economic and religious-related factors responsible for the institutionalization of gender inequities in societies with a predominantly Muslim population. Many recent Islamic feminist studies concentrated on more subtle and rigorous theological analyses that take into consideration the distinction between the sacred text (Qur’an) and its various exegesis, the special character of prophetic traditions whose authenticity and understanding depend on a series of political, historical and social variables, as well as the multiple factors that determined the formation of Islamic normative traditions in the first three centuries after the demise of the prophet Muhammad or the influence of history and of specific social and cultural suppositions in the „canonization” of the major Islamic sciences.

There is no homogenous Islamic feminism; different methodologies and approaches have formed; the unity is however identified regarding the goals targeted by different types of Islamic feminisms. Some Muslim feminists plead for preserving and exploiting in a new manner the categories and goals specific to Islamic traditional jurisprudence. Other Muslim feminists propose a radical reform of the fundamental suppositions and principles that informed pre-modern Islamic exegesis and jurisprudence. Another category of Muslim feminists prefers to adopt and integrate the discourses, approaches and terminology used by Western feminists, sometimes translating them into the Islamic idiom, other times importing them as such, even from a secular perspective. Their position is often contested not only by some Western feminists tributary to a neo-colonialist perspective, but also by the traditionalist and neo-traditionalist Muslims (especially Salafi Muslims), men or women, still visible and quite vocally centered on a defensive, excessively apologetic construction of – allegedly “Islamically justified” – gender inequalities. Nevertheless, the proliferation of various forms of Islamic feminisms functioned as a positive, revealing factor of the Western modernist and Islamic reformist projects’ convergence, stimulating the elaboration and

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<sup>1</sup> See more in Mir-Hosseini, Ziba, „*Towards Gender Equality: Muslim Family Laws and the Šarī‘ah*”, in Anwar, Zainah (ed.), *Wanted: Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family*, Petaling Jaya: Musawah, Malaysia, 2009, pp. 23-55.

promotion of some theoretical systems that construct alternative, viable modernities that are able to overcome the pre-conceived dichotomy of Islam and modernity.

The current number of AnAlize Journal focuses on different facets of the Islamic feminisms, often from an interdisciplinary perspective. A synthetic, complex, multidimensional, nuanced presentation of Islam(s) is to be first found in Professor Lazăr Marius's article ***Islam: Faith and Practice*** that opens the present volume, in order to facilitate understanding of the general background on which all the subsequent debates, reforms, and proposals related to the major theme of gender in Islam are carried out. ***Islamic Feminism(s): A Very Short Introduction***, by Alina Isac Alak, is the following article that intends to familiarize the reader with a few notions and general questions regarding the formation, development and problems of contemporary Islamic feminisms.

Islamic feminist hermeneutics holds an important place in the Islamic academic analyses as it proposes a re-reading and de-construction of the misogynistic interpretations of the Qur'an. ***"Reverence the wombs that bore you": On Unearthing a Female Legacy Transgressive to the Patriarchal Social Order*** is a study submitted by Nahida S. Nisa that investigates the logical inconsistencies in patriarchal male scholarship, defined as the line of scholarship that claims traditional precedent and mainstream consensus, in regards to classical Islamic rulings on women's behaviors, dress, and spiritual location relative to men's spiritual location, by exploring the implications of exemplary Qur'anic verses that have been problematized by Islamic feminist scholarship. Vanessa Rivera de la Fuente's article ***Feminist Hermeneutics of the Qur'an and Epistemic Justice*** explores the basic principles of feminist hermeneutics of the Qur'an that intend to establish an epistemic justice through a discourse that recognizes gender equality as a Qur'anic cosmological framework. Basic debates and commentaries present in the premodern and even modern exegesis of the Qur'anic verses regarding the marriage (including polygyny) of women – be they Muslim, non-Muslims, slaves – are analyzed by Virgil Nicolae in his article: ***Les dispositions coraniques en matière de mariage. Courte analyse des versets qui donnent les dispositions générales et qui formulent les interdictions.***

The realities that confront Muslim women are diverse and complex, depending on many external factors and personal choices. Veronica Mohamed-Salih proposes an analysis of some demographic aspects of the Muslim community in Romania, classifying

it according to various criteria, followed by a qualitative analysis of the stereotypes regarding Muslim men and women as manifested on the Romanian internet. The recurrent stereotypes have been aggravated by the January 2015 events in Paris and by the incessant politically-originating conflicts in the Middle East. Whether or not we can identify Islamophobic attitudes in Romania – with a main concern on the gender dimension of Islamophobia: Hijabophobia – we realize in the article entitled ***Stereotypes regarding Muslim men and Muslim women on the Romanian Internet: a qualitative comparative analysis for 2004-2009 and 2010-2015.***

Some Muslim and/or Middle-Eastern intellectuals have been striving to create alternative modernities in order to answer to the contemporary challenges in a way that integrates the common values of two different civilizations. The study presented by Ana-Maria Niculescu-Mizil – ***The 'Princest Diaries'. A 'Middle-Eastern' Reading of American Popular Culture*** – engages critically with sixty-five animated artworks of Middle-Eastern artist, Saint Hoax. Saint Hoax's artworks promote critical assessment of dominant discourses concerning gender roles, representations of femininity and masculinity, family relations, and self-respect, along with giving voice to the silent, the marginal and the vulnerable, strengthening civic engagement and co-operation within a participatory democracy, and stimulating creativity and reasoning by means of exhilarating forms of presentation.

The articles gathered in this volume reflect the variety and the richness of the theme proposed: ***Unveiling the Feminisms of Islam.*** From different perspectives, analyses regarding the Muslim woman identity construction processes, influenced by various factors as race, ethnicity, nationality, region, historical period, are presented. On the other hand, the process itself of producing knowledge about Islam is questioned. The sacrality of the Qur'anic text is not contested, but its various interpretations, historically monopolized by men/males conditioned by different socio-political contexts, are. The various Islamic gender studies included in this volume gravitate to the central idea that there is no ideal, uniform Islamic tradition, but a diversity of complex interpretations that can be reformed and reassessed according to new knowledge and contemporary societal development.

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