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An Analysis of Muslim Women's Rights Based on the Works of Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, and Riffat Hassan

Roohi Khan Stack

A Thesis in the Field of Religion

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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Abstract

This thesis will analyze the arguments, methods, results and contexts of Islamic feminist scholars Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, and Riffat Hassan. These women have been at the forefront of writing about the equal rights of women in Islam. Although each looks at Islam from a different scholarly lens, their work involves trying to elucidate Muslim women's equality as stated in Islamic religious texts such as the Qur'an and the ahadith, as well as looking at the actions of the Prophet Muhammad and Muslim women in the early Islamic period. Hassan, Mernissi and Wadud's work makes them leaders in clarifying and defining Muslim women's rights. The goal of this thesis is to primarily analyze what these important Muslim women scholars are arguing, why are they arguing it, and how do they go about arguing it.

Therefore, a detailed analysis of Amina Wadud's *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text From a Woman's Perspective*, Fatima Mernissi's *The Veil and the Male Elite*, and Riffat Hassan's "Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam" has been done in this thesis. A plethora of other relevant books and peer reviewed articles were also referenced and researched for this thesis. All the books and articles were written in English or had an English translation. The research done for this thesis shows that there are many positive and negative critiques of Hassan, Mernissi, and Wadud's innovative and necessary work on clarifying Muslim women's equality within a religious framework and from a female perspective. However, what is apparent is that these three scholars

have done very thorough and illuminating research which has created the opportunity for dialogue and provided valuable information about Muslim women's agency and empowerment in Islam. It is imperative that Hassan, Mernissi, and Wadud's findings be reexamined by the Muslim community as a way to promote equal rights for Muslim women.

Author Biography

Roohi Stack earned a BA in Economics from the University of California, Berkeley in 1989. She earned a MBA, with a concentration in Finance and Consulting, from the University of Southern California in 1992. Ms. Stack also completed a Certificate in Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures from the University of California, Los Angeles in 2006. Ms. Stack worked in the Banking and the Software industries from 1992 until 1998. She was Planning Commissioner for the City of Malibu from 2010 to 2016.

Dedication

To my father A. R. Khan (February 16, 1941 - February 8, 2001)

who taught me the value of education.

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I would like to thank: my husband, Brian, who always supports me in all my endeavors; my mother who encourages me to achieve my dreams; my children Farah, Tariq and Azim, who came with me to Cambridge for two summers and spent almost every week in swim camp at Harvard's Blodgett Pool; and my friends, Catherine, Diane, and Linda, who understood my Harvard journey.

Also, thank you to my research advisor, Dr. Stephen Shoemaker, and my thesis advisor, Dr. Cheryl Giles, for their advice and insights. Finally, thank you to the Harvard Extension School for creating the ALM degree program. My joy at being a Harvard student and learning about a variety of fascinating topics from the most knowledgeable professors has helped me get through some challenging events in my life. I always looked forward to escaping from them with my Harvard coursework and classes.

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Chapter I

Introduction

I undertook my journey of obtaining a Masters Degree in Religion starting in the spring semester of 2014. I had worked in the banking and software industries before leaving the work force in 1999 to start my hardest and all consuming new job as a homemaker for my family. Along the way, I stayed involved with the outside world through numerous volunteer activities. However, even while living a very busy life, I felt that I was still missing something intellectually and there were two events which occurred in my life that brought me to Harvard and, ultimately, this thesis. The first event was the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, and the second was helping my daughter with her 6th grade Humanities class writing assignments almost ten years ago.

When 9/11 happened, I was living in Greenwich, Connecticut. I remember that morning clearly because it was an extremely beautiful and sunny Fall morning and I was sitting in my family room drinking coffee and watching my one year old daughter play with her toys that were scattered around the floor. Later, we were going to go pick up my mother from JFK airport because she was coming to visit from California. Thinking about my plans for the day, I was surprised when my husband called me around 8:30 am

and told me to turn the television on. There, unfolding before me, on that glorious day, was the horror of the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks.

It was a surreal, crazy scene unfolding on TV, but reality was even worse. Greenwich is a popular place to live for people who work in New York City's financial industry, and on that day some of my friends' and neighbors' husbands were either in the World Trade Center Towers or elsewhere on Wall Street. Mr. Watanabe, my front door neighbor, was on Wall Street that day. My friend Sophie Pelletier's husband, Mike, who worked for Cantor Fitzgerald, was in the World Trade Center. Susan Wohlforth, who was the president of the Junior League of Greenwich, her husband, Martin, worked for Cantor Fitzgerald and he was also in the World Trade Center. There were plenty of other friends who were in a panic because their husbands were either in or around the World Trade Center and no one knew what was going on. As the day wore on, I learned about the tragic fate that befell my friends' husbands. Mr. Watanabe was fine but both Mike Pelletier and Martin Wohlforth died in the World Trade Center. There were so many friends who lost their husbands, and there were so many heart breaking funerals I went to for all these newly created widows and their fatherless children.

The 9/11 attacks were a shock to my system not only because of the tragic loss of life that occurred but also because I was familiar with the Islamic tradition. My parents had emigrated from a Muslim country in South East Asia to the United States because they loved its democratic principles and meritorious society which rewarded those who worked hard. I could not believe that the destruction which the terrorists had perpetrated was in any shape or form Islam. The religion I knew had not been about randomly killing

innocent victims. The Islam I knew had focused on: valuing and seeking education; helping others; being humble; and being an upstanding member of society. I did not understand why the terrorists were saying, through their horrific actions, that Islam was about death, destruction, chaos and hatred. Thus, 9/11 awakened in me the curiosity and desire to reexamine Islam in order to prove to myself that those terrorists were wrong. However, it was not until 2004, after I had moved back to California, that I started working on the Certificate in Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures at UCLA which I completed in 2006.

The Certificate mainly focused on learning Arabic with a couple of classes on Islam. After completing it, I was very motivated to pursue a higher degree, but my family obligations made me stop. This was difficult to do because since 9/11, Islam had been shown by some Western media in an extremely negative light especially with respect to Muslim women who were being stereotyped as burqa clad and submissive with no rights whatsoever. I was saddened and hurt by what I saw on TV, but it was not until 2010 when I was helping my daughter with her history homework that I realized I really enjoyed history, religion, and writing, and I needed to go back to my studies to focus on religion, specifically, Islam and Muslim women's rights.

Due to my family commitments and responsibilities which came first, I could only pursue a very flexible degree program that allowed me to work from home and gave me plenty of time to finish. Additionally, I had wanted to attend Harvard since I was in third grade and read about Radcliffe in a book. Therefore, the Harvard Extension School's Masters degree in Religion (ALM) was the perfect opportunity for me to

continue my quest to get clarification on Islam from an academic perspective. During the process of obtaining my education at Harvard, I knew right away that I would end up writing my thesis on Muslim women's rights because even some of the religion classes I took at Harvard did not clarify what the status of Muslim men and women was relative to one another. Hence, I started my thesis proposal in August of 2018, and, while working on it, I encountered three Islamic feminist scholars, Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, and Riffat Hassan who have done crucial work elucidating the equal rights of women in Islam. After reading their work, I was surprised to realize that since the beginning of Islam, some 1400 years ago, mostly men have interpreted or written anything to do with the tradition such as the ahadith. This male dominance has led to a patriarchal bias in the religious literature which the majority of Muslims refer to in order to understand, interpret, and live the religion.

Consequently, I believe it was necessary for me to write my thesis on these scholars to shed light on their work which combined shows that women and men are equal in Islam. Each scholar uses a specific methodology to highlight, reevaluate and objectively reinterpret the areas of religious tradition that denigrates women primarily because only a patriarchal interpretation had been done before. Hassan, Mernissi, and Wadud have done interesting and probing work about women's equality in Islam. Hassan in her article "Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam" talks about how three main assumptions in the ahadith, which were taken from the Judeo-Christian religion, have blocked the road to equality for Muslim women. Mernissi in her book *The Veil and the Male Elite* also looks at ahadith and carefully analyzes the history of the reporters of two

misogynistic ahadith, Abu Hurayra and Abu Bakra, Mernissi, then, looks at the early Islamic period, specifically, years three to eight of Muhammad's life in Medina, when certain events led to the loss of independence and equality for Muslim women. Wadud in *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text From a Woman's Perspective* gives a clear analysis of what she believes are misinterpreted or mistranslated sections of the Qur'an which, when reinterpreted by her, provide proof that Muslim men and women are equal in the Qur'an. Hassan, Mernissi, and Wadud's works are important to read and analyze because they show that men and women are equal as far as God is concerned, and His is the only opinion that should matter for Muslims. Hence, an analysis of their seminal work will assist in the reexamination of the status of Muslim women relative to Muslim men in Islam.

Given the importance of these scholars contribution to Muslim women's equality, this thesis will attempt do a thorough analysis of their work that is listed above. Chapter Two will make a case for why a feminist interpretation of Islamic texts and history is important and necessary in order to show that Muslim men and women are equal. Chapter Three will give background information about Muslim women's equality and discuss others scholars' critiques of Hassan, Mernissi, and Wadud. Chapter Four will provide a detailed analysis of Amina Wadud's book, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text From a Woman's Perspective*, and what she says about equality for Muslim women. Chapter Five will be a comprehensive evaluation of Fatima Mernissi's book *The Veil and the Male Elite* and its discussion of Muslim women's equality. Chapter Six will be a further analysis of Riffat Hassan's article "Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal

Islam" and her contribution to elucidating Muslim women's equality. Finally, the Conclusion ties the strands of facts and insights provided by Hassan, Mernissi and Wadud together to form a strong thread which supports the idea that Muslim men and women are equal and efforts must be made to use their work as the spring board to further reestablish equality among the sexes. Their focus on sacred texts, the actions of Muhammad toward women, and the actions and behavior of the women themselves is done in order to determine how Islam should be interpreted without a patriarchal bias. Through their important, necessary, and groundbreaking research, Hassan, Mernissi and Wadud argue that Muslim women have independence and a clear voice in Islam. Ultimately, they assert that, aside from biological differences, men and women are equal and can have equal roles in Islam which is a message that should be vociferously and profusely expressed and promoted throughout the Islamic world so that Muslim women are no longer suppressed and relegated to a lower status than men.

Finally, aside from motivating me to go to Harvard and learn more about Islam and the works of Hassan, Mernissi, and Wadud, the impact of the 9/11 attacks had lasting repercussions on my life as well as others. From that traumatic day, I saw many Muslims slowly stop going to mosques for fear of surveillance or retaliation. While this was not as emotionally devastating for me, what was heartbreaking was seeing the deep sense of loss many older members of the Muslim community felt by not being able to go to the only place that had provided them with both a religious and cultural safe haven and sense of community since they had emigrated to the United States. Additionally, whereas before 9/11 most Muslim Americans had always felt a part of the fabric of our nation, the

Islamophobia that they saw in the country they loved made some feel they were no longer accepted here. Fortunately, this sense of not belonging began to change with the relatively recent public and proudly defiant resurgence of Muslim Americans in all aspects of society. Hearing Khizr Khan's speech at the 2016 Democratic Convention, seeing Linda Sarsour co-chair the 2017 Women's March, watching the election of Muslim Congresswomen Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib in 2018, and learning that Faiz Shakir in 2020 is the first Muslim American campaign manager of a major U.S. presidential campaign were all reassuring signs that Muslims were confidently reasserting their rightful place in American Society. My hope with this thesis is to show from the analysis I have done of Hassan, Mernissi, and Wadud's work, that men and women are equal in Islam from which starting point more Muslim women can move forward and stand next to men on a level playing field.

Chapter II

Importance

The importance of analyzing the works of Hassan, Mernissi and Wadud cannot be overstated because they are providing an alternative to the mainly patriarchal interpretation that has dominated Islamic religious literature by giving a scholarly feminist interpretation. A scholarly feminist interpretation shows that Muslim women have equal rights to men in Islam and should not be delegated to any lower level. For example, even from the beginning of Creation, Wadud shows through her interpretation of Qur'anic verse 4:1 that there was no defined gender of the first being which has broad implications for the entire idea of man being better than woman because he was created first. Another example, is Mernissi's historical analysis of the reporters of two misogynistic ahadith who, for various reasons, turn out to be unreliable. The fallibility of these transmitters calls into question their ahadith and the importance of critically reexamining all ahadith especially the ones that are negative towards women. The final example is Hassan's article which shows how three assumptions that are from the Judeo-Christian religion infiltrated Islamic religious tradition to the detriment of Muslim women. Hence, the work of Hassan, Mernissi, and Wadud must be looked at if there is to be an improvement in the lot of Muslim women who are being repressed around the world because of erroneous religious convictions.

Amina Wadud (b. 1952) is an African American, Muslim academic, activist and theologian who did her work in Islamic Studies and Arabic at the University of Michigan (Abugideiri). Wadud began researching Muslim women's rights in 1986 in an attempt to "pursue a female inclusive reading of the Qur'an" which was, surprisingly, an unheard of idea in the fourteen centuries of Islamic thought (Wadud 8). She tries to see how Muslim women in Muslim cultures are reflecting the objectives of the Qur'an, and uses the Qur'an as a basis for understanding Muslim women's rights because it "enjoys overwhelming consensus among Muslims" (8). Wadud looks at the Qur'an without being hindered by "centuries of historical androcentric reading and Arabo-Islamic cultural predilections," and she finds that all Muslims are equal in Islam (8). She uses her findings to challenge the inequitable treatment of Muslim women in Muslim communities and throughout the world because in the Qur'an they are not considered so.

The female voice is a part of the Qur'an, however, the "Islamic intellectual ethos" had negated this voice and relegated it to be "awrah, or taboo" (Wadud 9). Hence, Wadud believes her goal is to stress how "Qur'anic hermeneutics" which include "female experiences and ... the female voice" will lead to more gender equity in "Islamic thought and praxis" in Muslim communities (9). Wadud uses the holistic approach to Qur'anic interpretation because it uses "the whole method of Qur'anic exegesis with regards to various modern social, moral, economic, and political concerns —including the issue of woman" (3). She also uses hermeneutic methodology which includes examining the: "context," "grammatical composition," and "*Weltanschauung* ... or world-view" of the text (3). Wadud further believes that the language and cultural context, or "prior text," in

which the scripture is read is an important part of each readers experience because it determines their point of view and their judgements about the interpretation and demonstrates “the individuality of the exegete” (5). With respect to prior text and gender specific languages such as Arabic, Wadud writes there is no “neuter” gender in Arabic (6). Hence, Wadud states that the Qur’an cannot be interpreted correctly based on gender distinction because of the lack of neuter, and she proves how it is “overcome by the text in order to fulfill its intention of universal guidance” (7). Wadud does her analysis against the prevailing idea in Muslim societies that women are “‘inferior’ and ‘unequal’ to men” (7). However, she argues that while the Qur’an recognizes the biological difference between a man and a woman, it does not designate specific roles to each gender.

Moroccan Fatima Mernissi (1940-2015) was a sociologist, writer, and Muslim Feminist who studied at Mohammed V University in Rabat and earned her PhD in sociology from Brandeis University (Rassam). Mernissi studied the traditional Islamic religious texts such as the Qur’an and the ahadith, but she also read the texts that Islamic scholars refer to which include writers like: “al-Tabari, … Ibn Hisham, author of the *Sira* (biography of the Prophet); Ibn Sa'd, author of *Al-Tabaqat al-kubra* (a biographical collection); al-'Asqalani, author of *Al-Isaba* (biographies of the Companions of the Prophet); and the Hadith collections of al-Bukhari and al-Nasi’i” (Mernissi 8). Mernissi analyzed the works of these lesser read Islamic authors because she wanted to discover where the misogyny against Muslim women began, and, then, she wanted to elucidate that it was not part of Islam. Therefore, Mernissi looks at Islamic history because “ample historical evidence portrays women in the Prophet’s Medina raising their heads from

slavery and violence to claim their right to join, as equal participants, in the making of their Arab history" (viii). Mernissi looks for evidence of women's rights in the "religious history" and "in the biographical details of sahabiyat," who were women that were full citizens that migrated to Medina and participated equally in the Muslim umma (viii). When looking at Medina in 622 CE, Mernissi sees that the Prophet had an "egalitarian" message, and she realizes that, "women's rights are a problem for some modern Muslim men [not] because of the Koran nor the Prophet, nor the Islamic tradition, but simply because those rights conflict with the interests of the male elite" (ix). Mernissi believed that the elite were trying to foster "egotism and mediocrity," but states that Islam was sent to the "Arabian desert lands to encourage ... higher spiritual goals and equality for all," and "for the first Muslims" democracy was a common goal and a "dream" they were attempting to achieve.

Mernissi's methodology includes being advised by Alem Moulay Ahmed al-Khamlichi and Ali Oumlil from the Université Mohammed V de Rabat, and by M. Bou'nani from Institut Ibn-Ruchd of the Faculté de Lettres of Rabat. Mernissi studied the early Islamic period (especially the year 622 CE), the Qur'an, and ahadith. Mernissi analyzed the al-Bukhari ahadith where she found "more fraudulent traditions than authentic ones," that made her further investigate, "which Companion is being referred to, what battle is being discussed, in order to make sense of the dialog or scene that is being transcribed" (Mernissi 3). Mernissi states that ahadith originated in an attempt to stop the *fitna,* or civil war, but it became "a formidable political weapon" that led to the creation of many "false, fabricated Hadith" (34, 36). Mernissi also says there were

"conflicts over interpretation of the power texts — the Koran and Hadith" because "the body of the 'ulama (scholars) was very heterogenous, riddled with conflicting interests of all kinds, with ethnic not being the least" (48). Mernissi believes this environment created "the magnitude of the political and economic stakes that presided over, and still preside over the manipulation of the sacred text since the Monday of the year AD 632 when the Prophet, who had succeeded in creating a community that was both democratic and powerful, lay forgotten and unburied" (48). In addition, Mernissi looks at controversial anti-women ahadith and Surahs, e.g about the veil, and tries to show how they have been misinterpreted.

Riffat Hassan (b.1943) is a Pakistani American theologian and a feminist scholar of the Qur'an who received her PhD in philosophy from Durham University in England (riffathasan.info). She worked on the discipline of Islamic feminist theology and has "engaged in a study of women's issues from a non-patriarchal, theological perspective" (Hassan 59). She wants to "examine the theological ground in which all the anti-women arguments were rooted to see if, indeed, a case could be made for asserting that, from the point of view of normative Islam, men and women are essentially equal despite biological and other differences" (59). Hassan saw there were very prominent Muslim women e.g. Khadijah, A'ishah, and Rabi'a of Basra in the Prophet's time in early Islam, but it was still traditionally "strongly patriarchal" because the Qur'an, ahadith, *fiqh*, and sunnah were interpreted by Muslim men. Hassan's work lays out an argument which shows how women have been relegated to a position of less than men not only by Western society, but also by other Muslims. Hassan says there are three "fundamental

theological assumptions," which are not in the Qur'an, that have made Muslims as well as non-Muslims believe that, "men are superior to women." These assumptions are: God's main creation was man not woman who was made from man's rib; woman is responsible for man's fall from *al-jannah* or Paradise; and woman is made from man for man. Hassan shows that the Qur'an does not say that man and woman are unequal, and the above three assumptions are not even present in it. Hassan believes the first two assumptions about woman being created from man and that woman was the cause of man's fall from Paradise are Judeo-Christian concepts that have been incorporated in the ahadith and most Muslims erroneously believe them to be related to the Qur'an. The third assumption that woman was made for man is from the mistranslation of some sections of Surah *An-Nisa* and Surah *Al-Baqara*.

Given the backgrounds of Wadud, Mernissi, and Hassan, the goal of this paper is to closely analyze the work of these Muslim women activists, authors and scholars in order to have a better understanding of their important perspectives regarding Muslim women's equality. While Wadud, Mernissi and Hassan use different approaches to identify and demonstrate Muslim women's equality in the Islamic tradition, their conclusions about equality are remarkably similar. Wadud, Mernissi and Hassan assert that Muslim men and women are equal as demonstrated in the Qur'an, however, ignorance about this equal role is due to misinterpretation, by primarily male scholars, and the lack of knowledge of Islamic religious texts and early Islamic history by the general Muslim population. In order to achieve my goal and test my hypothesis, I will use evidence such as reading the books and article written by Wadud, Mernissi, and Hassan

which include Wadud's *Qu'ran and Woman: Rereading the Sacred text from a Woman's Perspective*, Mernissi's *The Veil and the Male Elite,* and Hassan's "Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam."

Chapter III

Background

According to Islamic scholar Asma Barlas, whose goal, like Hassan, Wadud, and Mernissi's, is to "affirm the importance of an anti-patriarchal Qur'anic hermeneutics to Muslim women's struggles for equality," critics of Islamic feminism, such as Nasr Abu Zayd and Raja Rhouni, "want Muslims to secularize the Qur'an as a precondition for having any rights" (Barlas 418). For Barlas, secularization here means a way "to hollow out Islam from the inside by chipping away at the Qur'an," and "such a strategy tends to gut secularism itself" because unlike what occurs "in the West, [where] secular democracy allows citizens to claim not only political and civil rights and liberties but also religious freedom ... in Muslim societies, secularization seems to require" Muslims to undo "their core beliefs in order to savor the promises of democracy" (418-419).

Unlike Barlas, Abu Zayd believes,"the Qur'an ... was better regarded as a historically produced discourse incorporating both divine and human voices than as a sacred text" (Barlas 419). This perspective would liberate Muslims from the urge "to recontextualize one or more passages in the fight against literalism and fundamentalism or against a specific historical practice that seems inappropriate for our modern contexts" (419). Zayd also criticized "Islamic feminists [among others], for reading the Qur'an as a [sacred] text because, according to him, doing so meant taking [a] 'focal

point that will always point to God'" (419). Additionally, here Zayd means to say that the problem with "feminist hermeneutics" is if the Qur'an is treated as a written reference which suggests an author who would be God then, "one is forced to find a focal point of gravity to which all variations should be linked. This automatically implies that the Qur'an is at the mercy of the ideology of its interpreter" which would vary depending on the ideology, e.g., for either communists, fundamentalist or feminists it would respectively affirm communism, fundamentalism, or feminism (419). Hence, by removing the "focal point," there is no longer a need to ideologize the Qur'an (419). Abu Zayd's position would not be a valid one and a monumental departure for most Muslims, feminists or not, who believe that the Qur'an is the word of God. Hence, Zayd's position would be considered heresy and not help further the cause of Muslim women's equality by working within the given religious framework which is what Qur'anic hermeneutics does.

Somewhat similar to Zayd, Rhouni believes the Qur'an is "'an oral discourse involving divine and human communication rather than a divinely authored text that has been revealed to all humanity regardless of its context of production, or historicity'" (Barlas 420). Furthermore, Rhouni states that she disagrees "'with the approach that reinterprets verses to invest them with a more modern and more egalitarian meaning, on the one hand, and that resorts to a historical and contextual reading when no progressive meaning can possibly be invented, on the other hand'" (419). However, as Barlas puts it, Rhouni like Zayd and others "who favor contextualizing the Qur'an (a nice

euphemism for secularizing it) fail to do so themselves by ignoring the belief structure within which it is embedded" (420).

There are still other scholars such as professor Jonas Svensson of the Linnaeus University in Sweden who looks at the work of Mernissi and Hassan and calls it an "accommodation position" (Svensson 41). Svensson believes there is no reconciliation between "the international standard on gender equality and women's rights" that "are based on the premise of secular state legislation" and were stated in the 1979 United Nations "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women," and Islam because he believes, that for Muslims, "God has once and for all decided upon the 'divine law', the shari'a" (41). Thus, for Svensson, Hassan, Mernissi and Wadud are proponents of an "accommodation position." However, what Hassan, Mernissi and Wadud are saying is that sharia law itself is open to interpretation due to the fact that, until recently, it has been only been looked at from a patriarchal and androcentric perspective and not from a female inclusive perspective which is what their work is about. The reexamination of the sharia by female Muslim scholars is observed in Mariam Cooke's article "Women, Religion, and the Arab World," where she says that Mernissi "dared to question the ... reliability of a 'sound' Tradition" or hadith which is one of the religious texts that sharia law draws from. Hence, Svensson is buying into the historical arguments about the lack of women's rights in Islam based on a patriarchal interpretation of the sharia and not going beyond it to recognize that what was interpreted by Muslim men from their perspective was ignoring half the population.

Additionally, there are scholars such as Anouar Majid, professor and author, who writes about Mernissi in his article “The Politics of Feminism in Islam.” Majid says: “the recovery of an Islamic past, thoroughly cleansed of the residue of centuries of male-dominated interpretations, can be useful to women fighting for freedom in the Islamic world” because it shows “that a popular form of mosque-centered democracy existed during the Prophet’s time” (Majid 331-332). Additionally, according to Miriam Cooke, Islamic feminists are contributing to the overall goal of equality for Muslim women by “challenging and deconstructing traditional interpretations of authoritative texts that have served to construct norms that exclude them as women,” while at the same time they “are creating such a transnational sense of belonging, resistance, and steadfastness” (Cooke 181). Professor and sociologist Jasmine Zine has a “‘critical faith-centered’ approach to Islamic feminism” which means developing “an understanding of how religious and spiritual identities and identifications represent sites of oppression and are connected to broader sites/systems of discrimination based on race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and colonialism, while acknowledging that religion has at times been historically misused and become complicit in the perpetuation of these oppressions” (Zine 17). Zine goes on to say that a “faith based feminism .... based on anti- patriarchal readings of religious texts and advocating new understandings of gender justice in Islam [that is] moving ... away from narrow, patriarchal interpretations as the only authoritative or legitimate epistemic possibilities” is the only way for Muslim women scholars going forward (15, 17).

Unlike Barlas, Cooke, and Zine, professor of Educational and Women's studies at the University of Toronto, Shahrzad Mojab, writes in her article, "Theorizing the Politics of 'Islamic Feminism,'" that she believes Islamic feminism to be a "contradiction in terms" which does "not have the potential to be a serious challenge to patriarchy" and "far from being an alternative to secular, radical and socialist feminisms, 'Islamic feminism' justifies unequal gender relations" (Mojab 131). However, Mojab primarily discusses Islamic feminism and Muslim feminist ideas in Iran immediately before and after the Iranian revolution of 1979. She believes that Iran had achieved a high standard of Islamic feminism pre-revolution because "Iranian society had, since the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-11, undergone considerable transformation. Women constituted a vital political force, now organized into numerous leftist, socialist, nationalistic and Islamic organizations" (132). Here, Mojab implies that having a number of organizations and women in politics means that Iran was reaching the feminism ideal. With the onset of Khomeni's Islamic state, she further suggests that Islamic feminism became impossible because of sharia law. Mojab looks at two shari'a laws dealing "with the custody rights of women, and their right to judge" under the Islamic State and shows how they "reveal a world view, which does not treat women as normal, rational human beings" (133). Once again with Mojab, we see that she is criticizing sharia law which has been defined and interpreted by the patriarchy and, hence, filled with androcentric views and opinions. Mojab is not understanding that Muslim feminists like Wadud, Mernissi, and Hassan are looking at sharia from a female perspective. Wadud, Mernissi, and Hassan have all clearly stated that the entire system of Islamic law which is derived from the Qur'an and

the hadith has to be reexamined and reinterpreted from a non-patriarchal, non-androcentric, and female inclusive perspective. Additionally, Mojab is looking at Muslim women's rights being enforced and carried out under one of the most conservative, fundamentalist, patriarchal regimes, the Islamic State, and trying to show how Islamic feminism is not viable there, which is stating the obvious.

Margot Badran is another very prominent Egyptian Muslim feminist and a professor at Georgetown University who analyzed "patriarchy," which she stated as "the power men had accorded themselves, irrespective of class, to make rules and to impose their rules on women to keep them subordinate" (Badran 3). Badran defines feminism as the "ideas and actions expressed individually and collectively about personal life, family life, societal life; about being Muslim or Christian, about being a member of the Egyptian nation; in short, about being a woman in its totality and plurality of meanings—about gender and power" (3). Badran states that, "secular feminism is Islamic and Islamic feminism is secular, the way Islam as *din wa dunya*, to translate the phrase, joins 'religion and the world'" (12). She goes on to say that, "Islamic feminism took from secular feminism its Islamic modernist strand and made progressive religious discourse its paramount discourse. And ... extended secular feminism's Islamic modernist strand and made it more radical by affirming the unqualified equality of all human beings (*insan*)" (14).

Furthermore, Badran calls Muslim feminist scholars "gender jihadists" who are "strugglers in the cause of gender justice that includes promoting full equality" (Badran 16). Many Muslim feminist scholars do call themselves "scholar activists" rejecting the

name of feminist because the movement in its first stages did not include all women, e.g. African American women like Amina Wadud (16). Additionally, scholar activists believe they are engaged in "re/thinking or ijtihad (intellectual struggle to understand) and jihad (activist struggle)" (16). Badran states that the Lebanese activist Nazira Zain al-Din who argued in 1928 "that women, because of their experience as women, were better equipped to render women sensitive exegesis" is exactly what Wadud has been doing several decades later (18). Al-Din's statement, thus, shows that the desire to elucidate Muslim women's equality and rights is not new. Badran also writes about Mernissi using "classic Islamic analytical methods, exposing spurious, perennially circulating, female-hostile hadith, and brilliantly deconstructing the misogyny masquerading as Islam that so blatantly 'inferiorized' women'" (20). For Badran "Islamic feminist thought is concerned about ideas of equality and justice and their application to this world, while the ideas of secular feminist thought are in accord with the basic principles of religion. ... the gap between secular feminism and Islamic feminism is diminishing" (22). The end of the separation between the two is best seen in the women's marches that occurred post the Trump election where there were secular feminists and Muslim feminists, such as Linda Sarsour, marching together.

Allison Weir, on the other hand, also discusses the works of Muslim feminists and scholars including Wadud and Hassan and says their argument is that the "affirmation of gender equality can be found in the Qur'an but, moreover, that gender equality is unequivocally supported by the Qur'an" (Weir 108). However, Weir states that "the evidence for this argument is problematic" because "while there are many passages that

do affirm gender equality, there are also others that pose significant problems for feminist interpretations" such as the ones regarding "sexuality," "marriage and divorce," and verse 4:34 which states that men are responsible for women and women who rebel should be "first admonished, then left alone in bed, and finally, beaten" (108). Wadud delves into this verse and analyzes and reinterprets it by looking at the Arabic wording and grammar to show that it does not mean what it has been traditionally interpreted to mean under a patriarchal view. Weir goes on to say, "faith itself can be a practice of freedom" and "Islamic feminists are exploring a very creative tension between conceptions of freedom as critique and as faith" (116).

Suzanne Schroter writes a chapter called "Islamic Feminism" in the book *Islam, Gender, and Democracy in Comparative Perspective* where she identifies the work of Wadud and Hassan. Schroter calls Wadud's work "gender just Qur'an exegesis" which is the most "important references for Muslim women's rights activists" (Schroter 119). Schroter further goes on to call Wadud "a political visionary" who is trying to promote a "gender justice model" which is "in its simplest form, basically gender mainstreaming, and entails making women present in all spheres of Muslim life, as well as including them in political and religious leadership positions" (120, 121). This gender justice model seems to be working in the U.S. as is seen by the election of two Muslim women, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, who from their different outward appearance and ways of conduct in Congress show how Muslim women cannot be typecast in one mold. Schroter also says that Wadud "stands for a Western Islam that is as much against sexism as it is against racism and anti-Islamic prejudice, and which ultimately strives for a general

egalitarian utopia" (123). Regarding Hassan, Schroter says that Hassan has also "undertaken the project of reinterpreting the Qur'an and Islamic traditions," and she along with Asma Barlas represents "an academic Islamic feminism that has taken hold primarily in universities and major international non-governmental organizations (NGOs)" (124).

Schroter's statement that Wadud, Hassan and other Muslim scholar activists "use the freedom of Western society and the protection of the state security forces to spread their versions of a new Islam" is true and different from Haideh Moghissi's who is saying that Islamic or Muslim feminism in Muslim or Muslim majority countries is not as easy to promote or be accepted (Schroter 124). For Moghissi, usually, in these countries while "the reality of women's resistance against rigid religious and cultural practices and their ingenuity in finding ways to cross the male-serving legal and social boundaries may be recognized, recorded and discussed," on the other hand "this romanticized notion of Islam ... as an alternative way of being and acting for change ... [is] to the detriment of secular progress" (Moghissi 77). Moghissi believes that Muslim feminists are transforming "Islamic Sharia in favor of women ... who, while embracing Islamic ideology as liberating, are genuinely trying to promote women's rights within the confines of Islamic Sharia by proposing a more moderate and more female-centered interpretation of the Koran" (79). However, she believes, that Muslim women's "activism on gender issues, regardless of its goal, makes them "feminist" activists is, at best misleading. For the 'agency' of some of them is positively damaging to feminists' struggles for gender equity, dignity, and basic human rights" (79). Moghissi sees Islamic

feminism as an impediment to the "West-initiated feminism" because Islamic feminism is "not only workable but desirable as the only culturally viable alternative" (81). Hence, any feminist secular projects will be identified as "Western" and "worse, secularists projects for women's liberation are condemned" because, here, Moghissi refers to Anouar Majid who "suggests that secularism and the idea of separation of state and church are Western phenomena, and a new form of Orientalism, which cannot be superimposed on Islamic cultures" (81).

Fatima Seedat in her article "When Islam and Feminism Converge" discusses Islam and feminism and she identifies three approaches to their convergence: "resistance," "Islamic feminism," and "taking Islam for granted," which is done by "scholars who work toward a convergence between Islam and feminism" (Seedat 406, 413, 414). Thus, for Seedat, Mernissi, who "wrote about Muslim women and the history of Islam in a manner that no longer lauded Islam's progressive perspective on women, but implicated the patriarchal norms of early Islamic society and contemporary Islamic practice in a continuum of declining Muslim women's status," would fall into the "taking Islam for granted category" (405). Seedat goes on to say that, "Mernissi's critique of hadith separates 'risalah Islam,' envisioned as egalitarian and transformative, from 'political Islam,' considered misogynist and restrictive, and argues that the generations subsequent to the Prophet failed to maintain his spirit of gender equality" (405). Additionally, Seedat would further say Wadud would fall into the Islamic feminism approach to convergence, which Wadud "rejects" personally, but, at the same time, she and other scholars are using the "methods of feminism" (413-414). Ultimately, Seedat

says both Wadud and Mernissi “have won popularity amongst those seeking more critical readings on women in Muslim society and become the foundational reference points for further critical gender readings of Islamic thought” (406).

Hence, there are many positive and negative critiques of Hassan, Mernissi, and Wadud’s innovative and pioneering work on clarifying Muslim women’s equality and rights within a religious framework and from a female perspective. Regardless of the critique, what is apparent is that these three scholars have done their best to create dialogue and provide valuable information about how women have agency and empowerment in Islam. The negative critiques of their work mostly discuss how sharia law, as currently understood, does not allow for equality between Muslim men and women, but these critiques are missing the main point of the Hassan, Mernissi, and Wadud's argument which is that sharia law, itself, needs to be re-examined by reinterpreting Islamic sacred texts and early Islamic history from a female inclusive perspective. Other critiques of Wadud, Mernissi and Hassan’s work debate whether their work will overpower the work of secular feminists. This critique overlooks the point that the final goal is equality for men and women, regardless of how it is reached. The critiques supporting Wadud, Mernissi, and Hassan realize the importance of their work and how it could improve the lot of Muslim women around the world if accepted and implemented in Muslim and Muslim majority countries.

Chapter IV

Amina Wadud

As the title of Amina Wadud's book, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text From a Woman's Perspective,* implies, Wadud employs the science of hermeneutics to focus on reinterpreting the Qur'an from a woman's perspective: "I propose to make a 'reading' of the Qur'an from within the female experience and without the stereotypes which have been the framework for many of the male interpretations" (Wadud 3). Wadud's book shows how the idea of men being superior to women is incorrect due to a true lack of understanding of the Qur'an as a consequence of not knowing the intricacies of the Arabic language. Wadud divides her book into an Introduction, four chapters, and a Conclusion. Chapter One deals with human creation in the Qur'an with respect to what role woman played during Creation. Chapter Two deals with how the Qur'an perceives women relative to men in this world. Chapter Three primarily asks the question "Is there an essential distinction between the women and men in the Qu'ranic portrayal of the Hereafter?" (44). Chapter 4 discusses some controversial passages in the Qur'an regarding women. Finally, the Conclusion summarizes Wadud's main points from the preceding chapters about the role of woman in Islam as defined in the Qur'an.

In Chapter One, Wadud focuses on the origins of humans in the Garden of Eden, and, here, Wadud states that when reading the Qur'an, it is important to look at the Arabic

language and pay extremely close attention to the words being used because the "discussion of the creation of woman and man in the Qur'an is primarily a discussion of language" (Wadud 16). According to Wadud "the Qur'an does not consider woman a type of man in the presentation of its major themes. Man and woman are two categories of the human species given the same or equal consideration and endowed with the same or equal potential" (15). Wadud believes verse 4:1 or Surah *An-Nissa* is the "story of the origins of humankind, … commonly understood as the story of Adam and Eve," who she calls the "original parents," and she writes that, "serious implications have been drawn from the discussions, myths, and ideas about the creation of the first parents which have had lasting effects on attitudes concerning men and women" (16). Verse 4:1 says, "And *min* His *ayat* (is this:) that He created You (humankind) *min* a single *nafs*, and created *min* (that *nafs*) its *zawj*, and from these two He spread (through the earth) countless men and women" (16). When reinterpreting verse 4:1, Wadud focuses on the Arabic words "*ayat*, *min*, *nafs*, and *zawj*" (17).

The word *ayah* (pl. *ayat*) means "a 'sign' which indicates something beyond itself" and there are both implicit and explicit *ayat*. Implicit or empirical *ayat* are things that can be perceived by humankind such as the known world. Explicit *ayat* are linguistic verbal symbols or words which give information about the Unseen and cannot be entirely grasped by normal human understanding (Wadud 17). Wadud says *min* has two meanings which are: "'from' to imply the extraction of a thing from other thing(s)"; and "to imply 'of the same nature as'" or "'in/of the same type'" (18-19). The common usage of *nafs* (pl. *anfus*) is 'self' referring to the "common origin of all humankind" and

"grammatically *nafs* is feminine" while "conceptually, *nafs* is neither masculine or feminine" (19). In Sufism and in Islamic philosophy, *nafs* has come to mean "soul as a substance separate from the body," but "in the Qur'an *nafs* means mostly 'himself' or 'herself' and in the plural 'themselves' and sometimes 'person' or the 'inner person'" (19). Wadud goes on to say that in the "Qur'anic account of creation, Allah never planned to begin the creation of humankind with a male person; nor does it ever refer to the origin of the human race with Adam … not even with the *nafs* of Adam" (20). This important "omission is noteworthy because the Qur'anic version of the creation of humankind is not expressed in gender terms" (20). The word *zawj* is "used in the Qur'an to mean 'mate,' 'spouse,' or 'group'" and the plural *azwaj* means "'spouses'" (20). Hence, based on Wadud's interpretation of the words "*ayat*, *min*, *nafs*, and *zawj*" the translation of verse 4:1 could be the following: And *from* His *sign* (is this:) that He created You (humankind) *from* a single *self*, and created *from* (that *self*) its *mate*, and from these two He spread (through the earth) countless men and women. In this translation, there is no male or female identified in Creation just the self.

Additionally, Wadud is saying that the word *zawj* "is the second part in the creation of human-kind whom we have come to accept as Eve, the female of original parents," but there is no indication that the first self was male or that the second self is female, these are cultural assumptions that have been accepted as fact (Wadud 20). According to Wadud, "The Qur'an states only two things about Creation and the original parents: that it is *min* the first *nafs*, and is *zawj* in relation to the *nafs* (4:1, 7:189, 39:6)," and this means that when talking about the creation of the "original parents," the Qur'an

says that the first person, or *nafs*, created is not specified as being either male or female, and that the second person created, who is also not specified as being either male or female, is from the first person and is that first person's partner (20). Wadud writes that the "scarcity [of interpretive] language may have caused commentators like al-Zamakhshari and other Muslim scholars to rely on Biblical accounts which state that Eve was extracted from (min) the rib side of Adam" (20). This is a very crucial statement because the first and second beings that were created did not have a specified gender order in the Islamic Creation story, however, patriarchal assumptions have been made that the first person created was a man and the second was a woman. Hence, all the negative connotations associated with the second human made by God as being a woman are not a part of Islam but rather taken from the Bible due to a lack of clarification of the Arabic language. Wadud goes on to state "that the Qur'an gives very little information about this primal *zawj*" so no conclusions can be drawn about him or her (20). However, for all intents and purposes, because there is no direct statement of gender order and the language is ambiguous, the implication might also be that the first person made could have been woman and the second person that came from that first person could have been man. The lack of a gender specific order for the creation of man and woman gets rid of the supposition of female inferiority because the creation of woman may not necessarily have been second but first.

Furthermore, Wadud says that while the Qur'an emphasizes the importance of pairs (*zawjayn*) in the Creation story and their interdependence, it also states that, "the two are equally essential" and "it does not attribute explicit characteristics to either one or

the other, exclusively" (Wadud 21). The only reference that the Qur'an uses to distinguish the pair is the "biological function of the mother-not the psychological and cultural perceptions of 'mothering'" and the role and responsibilities of "child care and rearing" are not assigned based on gender (22). Additionally, the Qur'an does not create feminine and masculine characteristics, they are created culturally but "they have figured very strongly in interpretation of the Qur'an without explicit Qur'anic substantiation of their implications" (22). Hence, Wadud interprets the Qur'an as saying that biologically men and women are different because women can have babies but aside from this biological difference, the Qur'an does not say anything about females having to be mothers or having certain characteristics attributed to being female and the same for males. These are roles and characteristics that have been culturally assigned.

Another point that Wadud makes, is the importance of looking at the Arabic dual form of words when interpreting the Garden of Eden story. The dual form shows "how Satan tempted both Adam and Eve and how they both disobeyed. In maintaining the dual form, the Qur'an overcomes the negative Greco-Roman and Biblical-Judaic implications that woman was the cause of evil and damnation … moreover, it signifies the Qur'anic emphasis on individual responsibility" (Wadud 25). Therefore, the Qur'an shows, due to the use of the dual form, that Adam and Eve were individually responsible for their actions and Eve does not bear the burden for departure from Garden of Eden. In fact, Wadud states "the one exception to the Qur'anic use of the dual form to refer to the temptation and disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden singles out Adam … 'And verily We made a covenant of old with Adam, but he forgot … And Adam

disobeyed his Lord, so went astray (20: 115-21)'" (25). Therefore, Wadud is saying that in actuality, the Qur'an departs form the dual form only when it talks about Adam and how it was his disobedience that resulted in the pairs departure from the Garden of Eden and not Eve's who as the woman "is never singled out as the initiator or temptress of evil" (25). For Wadud, one of the main points of this story, regardless of fault, is that, "Allah forgives Adam, accepts his repentance and gives him guidance" which shows "Allah's mercy and His guardianship" (25).

In Chapter Two, Wadud discusses the significance of some of the women who are mentioned in the Qur'an. First, Wadud tries to establish equality between men and women by saying that: "the Qur'an treats the individual, whether male or female, in exactly the same manner … With regard to spirituality, there are no rights of woman distinct from rights of man" (Wadud 34). She further writes that religious "authors" have interpreted the Qur'an as saying that there are innate differences between and men and women, and, then, these authors have assigned "values" to the differences where "men represent the norm and are therefore fully human" and "women … are less human … limited and therefore of less value" (35). This unequal patriarchal interpretation promotes "stereotypes about women and men which severely hamper the potential of each" and "justify the restrictions placed on the woman's right to pursue personal happiness within the context of Islam" (35). Wadud very critically points out that, unfortunately and incorrectly, most Muslims believe this unequal value system is from the "Qur'an itself rather than … the authors who" promoted these views and that the "Qur'an depicts human individuals as having inherently equal value by looking at three stages in human

existence" (35, 36). Wadud says in first stage the "Qur'an emphasizes the single origin of humankind: 'He created you (all) from a single *nafs*' (4:1)" (36). Then, Wadud says that, "with regard to development here on earth, the Qur'an emphasizes that the potential for change, growth and development lies within the *nafs* of the individual (or the group) as well: 'Allah does not change the condition of a folk until they change what is in their *anfus*' (13:11)" (36). Finally, Wadud says: "all human activity is given recompense on the basis of what the individual earns (4:124)" (36). Thus, Wadud is arguing that the Qur'an very clearly says that men and women are created from the same self, *nafs*, and each has the same rights and potential for evolving and being compensated by God based on their individual behavior.

Moreover, while men and women have equal value according to the Qur'an, Wadud says that the one way to create distinction between individuals is based on *taqwa* which means "piety" or "a pious manner of behavior … [and] In the Qur'anic *Weltanschauung*, this term always reflects both the action and the attitude" (Wadud 37). Hence, according to Wadud's interpretation of the Qur'an, individuals are judged on pious behavior regardless of their gender. Furthermore, Wadud demonstrates how Surah *al-Hujarat* (49:13) highlights the importance of individual *taqwa*, "'We created you male and female and have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. *Inna akramakum 'inda Allah atqa-kum* [Indeed the most noble of you from Allah's perspective is whoever (he or she) has the most *taqwa*]'" (36). Wadud cites this verse because it shows that God distinguishes individuals as being "noble" based on who

shows the most piety and not on a person's gender. Thus, both men and women are equal in their ability to be pious in front of God.

Once Wadud shows how God rewards individuals equally based on *taqwa* or pious behavior, she then discusses three important women who are mentioned in the Qur'an: the mother of Moses, Mary, and Bilqis who was the Queen of Sheba. These women demonstrate a specific Qur'anic view about the role of women. In Surah (28:7), God shows compassion towards Umm Musa, or Moses' mother, and He reassures her He will make Moses a Prophet and bring him back to her: "… do not fear or grieve. Lo! We shall bring him back to you and shall make him (one) of Our messengers" (Wadud 38). Umm Musa's story also shows that women are equal to men in receiving divine communication or "*wahy*." Another woman Wadud discusses is Mary, the mother of Jesus. Here again, according to Wadud, the Qur'an "demonstrates Allah's sympathy for her predicament: 'Grieve not!' (19:24) and she is asked to eat, drink, and be comforted (19:26)" (39). Wadud says that God is showing Mary compassion because she is in labor and, "the unique experience of childbirth is [not] given such detailed consideration in any Christian theological work — not even the Bible" (40). Mary is said to be a "*qanitin*" or "one devout before Allah," and here the masculine plural form is used to "emphasize that the significance of Mary's example is for all who believe — whether male or female. Her virtue was not confined by gender" (40). The final woman that Wadud discusses is Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba because she highlights the fact that the Qur'an does not say anything negative about a woman ruler, but, "On the contrary, the Qur'anic story of Bilqis celebrates both her potential and religious practices" (40). Additionally, according to

Wadud, Bilqis' diplomatic behavior of choosing to send "a gift rather than to show brute strength" when Solomon invites her to become Muslim and her reaction after the gift is rejected, implies God is saying that Bilqis had better "judgement" than other male rulers, and she used it wisely (42).

In Chapter Three, Wadud discusses the Hereafter in the Qur'an, where it states that "the value of the Hereafter is greater than this world" (Wadud 45). Wadud divides the discussion of the Hereafter into three stages which include "Death, Resurrection, and Judgement" (45). Wadud talks about Death which she states as being "inevitable for all humans (male or female), and distinct only on the basis of the quality of one's deeds and consciousness" (46). Similarly, Resurrection will depend on each *nafs* which "corresponds equally to that male and the female human essence, which is the fundamental determinant of being— not gender, race, nationality, nor even religion" (47). Finally, Judgement, according to Wadud's interpretation, is where it is decided what is "the ultimate goal for each individual" and, here, the criteria, or "scales," for the Day of Judgement is the same for all individuals and based on their individual deeds (48).

Wadud also discusses the penalties or rewards that come after death which she calls "the equity of recompense" (Wadud 49). Wadud says these penalties or rewards have been misinterpreted because of "gender constraints in" the Arabic language which she clarifies. For example, in one verse it states that, "*man*/does good *min* (from)/ *dhakarin aw untha*, (male or female), and is a *mu'min* (believer) [singular masculine form] /*ula'ika* (they:masculine plural form) will enter the Garden" (49). Wadud says the word *man* means "who" or "whoever" and in Arabic it takes the same grammatical form

"for both masculine and feminine" (49). However, in the usual patriarchal and "androcentric analysis" *man* is misconstrued and taken to mean masculine and only feminine after "it becomes obvious the word applies to something feminine (plural or dual)" (49). She emphasizes that in Arabic "the use of the masculine *lafz* [word or term] represents the neuter and therefore equally includes the female" (49). Also, the plural form "*ula'ika* proposes inclusiveness; not only each male and female, but also, every male and female who fits the description" (49). Hence, based on Wadud's analysis, the above verse is trying to say: whoever does good from male or female and is a believer they will enter the Garden. Thus, heavenly rewards are for the "individual - in the Qur'an" regardless of gender (50). Additionally, while "*zawj*" is often incorrectly translated as female wife there is "no compensations attained or retained on the basis" of an earthly relationship (50). Wadud points out that even the "commentators" agree that the Qur'an clearly states that everyone is equally treated regardless of gender on Judgement Day and will be compensated for their individual behavior: "'Unto men a fortune from that which they have earned, and unto women a fortune from that which they have earned'" (51). With respect to entry into Hell, Wadud states that in the Qur'an "there is no gender distinction supplied or assumed in terminology or interpretation" (52).

In contrast to Hell, the discussion of Paradise in the Qur'an is more nuanced. Wadud discusses the difference from the Meccan period to the Medinan period in how Paradise was depicted in the Qur'an which was largely due to the characteristics of the demographic that was receiving the message. One of the main areas of misinterpretation is with respect to the female companionship that is offered in the Hereafter. Wadud argues

that the "early Islamic audience had to be convinced to change their way of thinking and their manner of living … specifically the Qur'an attempted: … to persuade or entice them through offers and threats that appealed to their nature, understanding and experience" (Wadud 54). Consequently, the word *huri*, was used to describe consorts in Paradise who were "youthful, virgin females with large dark eyes, white skin, and a pliant character," which, Wadud says, "meant something specific to Jahili Arabs" (54). The term *huri* is used only in the Meccan period as an "incentive to aspire after truth" and is never used again. From then on, consorts are described in general terms like "*azwaj*" or partners which is used for both males and females in the Qur'an (55). Wadud looks at what the word "*zawj*" or partner means in the Hereafter because it can also be translated as spouse depending on the context. She says *zawj* is misinterpreted to mean in certain parts of the Qur'an as, "a man has the power to directly determine the fate of his spouse," which is contradictory to the idea that individuals are judged based on their *taqwa* regardless of gender or relationship to each other, and "thus the use of 'you and *zawj*' means 'you and whoever is paired with you because of like nature, deeds, faith, etc.'" (56). However, one might be reunited with his or her earthly mate in Paradise "provided that the basis for the reunion is shared belief and good deeds" (57).

Wadud goes on to write, "Most authors assume every use of the word *zawj* is equal to … the word *huri*, especially in light of the verse that uses *huri* and the verb *zawwaja*: 'thus, we will pair them with the *hur-ul 'ayn'* (44:54)'" (Wadud 57). In the previous verse, the term "*zawwaja* means 'to join together, or, to pair up,'" while the term *hur-ul 'ayn'* means *huri* and not *zawj*. The previous passage was from the Meccan period

and it is trying to entice the Jahilliya Arab male to become a Muslim by saying that in Paradise "a man will be joined by a delightful companion according to his ideal" (57). Wadud states that another misleading and paradoxical idea that occurs when thinking about rewards in Paradise is the notion that, "a pious man will go to Paradise and have multiple *huri* for his pleasure" (57). This really "is a contradiction of terms" because what is the point of practicing piety on Earth only to go have "an erotic orgy with multiple women" in the Hereafter (57). For Wadud, the notion of having multiple women awaiting to pleasure you after a life of religious devotion is ridiculous for two reasons. First, Wadud states "the use of the plural *azwaj* corresponds to the use of the plural preceding it: for 'believers' (and such terms). This usage is meant to indicate that companionship awaits those who believe (male and female) in their attainment of Paradise—not that each man will get multiple wives" (57). Secondly, Wadud goes on to say more significantly for her analysis, that "each use of *zawj* and *azwaj* is not equated with *huri*, because equating the terms reduces the Qur'anic depiction of the highest reality to a single ethnocentric world-view" and the purpose of going to Paradise "is attaining peace, ending all want, transcending all earthly limitations and, finally, coming into the company of Allah" which either gender can achieve (57-58). That is why Wadud says one needs to differentiate between "the Makkan and Madinan descriptions of Paradise" and not doing so has resulted in "erroneous conclusions" because the Qur'anic message "was not complete in Makkah … [and] needed further development … before … completion … in Madinah" (59). Wadud emphasizes that the greatest goal in attaining Paradise was being close to Allah not being with multiple *huris*. Wadud's interpretation

regarding the rewards of the Hereafter is of immense importance in the context of terrorism, specifically, suicide bombers who are mostly young males that commit the heinous act because they are erroneously led to believe by those in power that they will die as martyrs and go to Paradise where they will be greeted by *huris*. Wadud shows through her interpretation that they are being greatly misled.

In Chapter Four, Wadud says she is analyzing the Qur'an from two points of view. First, men and women have no intrinsic value or rank based on their gender, and, second, there are no rigidly assigned roles for men and women based on gender which they must accomplish (Wadud 63). Then, Wadud starts with the discussion that having children is mistakenly thought to be the primary function of women. She reassesses this point, and says what is meant is "since only the woman can bear children, it is of primary importance that she does," because it is essential for the "continuation of human existence." The Qur'an also emphasizes in Surah 4:1 the "respect for the needed procreative capacity of women" (64). This is the only thing that differentiates men and women according to Wadud, aside from *risalah*, or revelation, which was given mostly to men because "the likelihood of failure for the message might have been greater if women, who are given so little regard in most societies, were selected to deliver the message" (65). Thus, pregnancy and *risalah* are specific roles that are given to woman and man because only women have the biological characteristics to become pregnant and men could only receive *risalah* because society at the times of prophecy did not give much credence to women. However, these roles themselves do not make one gender superior to another.

After clarifying the two roles above that were specifically assigned to men and women, Wadud goes on to discuss the verses in the Qur'an that incorrectly imply male superiority because they contain two Arabic words that are often mistranslated. These words are *darajah*, which means "step, degree, or level" and *faddala*, which means "preferred" (Wadud 65, 66). *Darajah* is in Surah two verse 228 which is about divorce and says: "… And [(the rights) due to the women are similar to (the rights) against them, (or responsibilities they owe) with regard to] the *ma'ruf*, and men have a degree [*darajah*] above them (feminine plural). Allah is Mighty, Wise. (2:228)'" (70). According to Wadud, *darajah,* here, mistakenly implies that men are superior to women "in every context" (70). Wadud states that this verse is about divorce and the advantage, or *darajah,* men have, is that they can divorce their spouse by simply proclaiming it, but for Muslim women, "divorce is granted … only after intervention of an authority (for example, a judge)" (68). Wadud says due to the use of *ma'ruf* (which implies "equitable, courteous and beneficial") before the word *darajah*, the intent of the verse is to say, "the basis for equitable treatment is conventionally agreed upon in society. With regard to this, the rights and responsibilities of the woman and the man are the same" (69).

Wadud then looks at another contentious verse in Surah *An-Nisa*, in which the first part states that "'Men are [*qawwamuna 'ala*] women, [on the basis] of what Allah has [preferred] (*faddala*) some of them over others, and [on the basis] of what they spend of their property (for the support of women) (4:34)'" (Wadud 70). This part is problematic due to the use of the word *qawwamuna 'ala* which has traditionally been translated to mean "'in charge of'" by Pickthall, or "'managers of'" of by Al-

Zamakhshari, but Wadud says its intent, based on Aziza al-Hibri's translation, is to imply "moral guidance and caring" (71). Given al-Hibri's meaning of *qawwamuna*, Wudud translates the verse as saying, "Men are encouraged to fulfill their trusteeship of the earth, especially in relationships with women, the child bearers and traditional caretakers …" (74). Ultimately, Wadud is saying that the Qur'an needs to be looked at "with regard to human exchange and mutual responsibility between males and females" (73).

Wadud then looks at the more controversial second part of Surah An-Nisa where it says, "So good women are [*qanitat*], guarding in secret that which Allah has guarded. As those from whom you fear [*nushuz*], admonish them, banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them" (Wadud 74). She delves deeper into the words *qanitat* and *nushuz* to clarify their meaning because most people believe it means "a woman must obey her husband and if she does not, he can beat her" (74). Wadud says the word *qanitat*, means good, not obedient, and *nushuz*, based on Sayyid Qutb's translation, means "a state of disorder between the married couple" (75). Without Wadud's translations of *quanitat* and *nushuz*, the verse is saying if there is disharmony in the marriage, then God provides three steps to attempt to resolve this. While the first two steps may not be too difficult because they involve doing activities such as mutual consultation and sleeping in separate beds, it is the third step involving scourging or beating that is controversial. Here, very importantly, Wadud says "scourge" is being mistranslated because the word *daraba* in Arabic means "to strike" and it "does not necessarily indicate force or violence. It is also used when someone leaves, or 'strikes out' on a journey" (76). However, in most patriarchal interpretations of this verse,

daraba is translated in "the second intensive form" which means to "strike repeatedly and intensely" (76). Thus, when using Wadud's interpretation of *daraba* as meaning strike out or leave, this verse is not controversial because it is essentially saying: if there are problems in a marriage then the partners should first try arbitration, then sleeping apart, and, finally, let them strike out or leave. This ending is consistent and makes complete sense because Islam allows for divorce. This translation is also consistent with the Qur'an and the sunnah of Muhammad both of which did not promote cruelty. Additionally, it elevates the rights of women because in pre-Islamic Arabia, women were in marriages of subjugation where they had to obey their husbands and were sometimes beaten.

Wadud also talks about the topics of divorce, patriarchy, polygamy, witness, male authority, and child care. She asserts that when looking at these topics in the Qur'an, context and chronology have to be taken into account in order for them to be correctly interpreted, so, there is no inequality for men and women. For example, with respect to chronology, the revelations about women that occurred during the Meccan period were a "generic example for all humankind," and the revelations about women during the Medinan period were about "the social reforms introduced [that] were related to existing practices … [and] were the benefit of the females" (Wadud 78). The Medinan Qur'anic reforms dealing with the issues of divorce, patriarchy, polygamy, witness, inheritance, male authority, and child care all improved what had been the pre-Islamic situation for the majority of women in Arabia. Another example, is the topic of male authority, Wadud states that, "even at the time of revelation, there is nothing implied or stated in the Qur'an which supports the opinion that males are natural leaders" because Bilqis is discussed as

a female leader with good judgement (89). Thus, according to Wadud, the Qur'an "inclines" towards the best suited and most efficient person to lead, which could be either a male or female. Wadud does this same analysis on the other Medinan reforms that were revealed, and her conclusion is that, "those who truly believe in the Qur'an would equally wish for the woman the opportunities for growth and productivity which they demand for the man" (91).

In her book, Wadud goes through some major topics and verses in the Qur'an regarding women and does a groundbreaking non-patriarchal reinterpretation of them which shows that women and men are equal in Islam. Her analysis is crucial to learn about in order for Muslim women to achieve full empowerment and be freed from the rigid myths and doctrines that are holding them back. In addition, while it might require great strength of character, it is equally crucial for Muslim men to recognize Wadud's point of view with respect to Muslim women and change their behavior towards them.

Chapter V

Fatima Mernissi

Fatima Mernissi's book, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, looks at Muslim women's roles and rights in the early Islamic period and is divided in two parts. Part one includes chapters one through four which focus on: Muslims current preoccupation with time, specifically, looking back in order to regain control of the present as a response to the democratization process occurring in the world which has led Muslim men to fear they are losing their power; early Islamic history and Islam's basic tenets; and an analysis of misogynistic ahadith by Abu Bakra and Abu Hurayra. Part two primarily looks at Muhammad's life in Medina, especially, years three through eight and how the events that occurred during this time period set the stage for the introduction of the hijab into Islam. The main objective of Mernissi's book is two fold. First, its aim is to show that the ahadith as well as all sources of Islamic reference and authority still need to be carefully vetted because there are detrimental statements made about women that are taken as fact and need to be removed. Second, the first three years of the Hijra was the time when Islam was reaching its full potential as a religion that believed in equal rights for both its male and female followers. However, during year three to year eight, due to a variety of reasons, that initial utopian society filled with the hope of democracy and equality began to crumble and fall apart.

In Chapter One, Mernissi's primary point is that twentieth century Muslim men felt a structural disturbance occurring in society because women were entering the male only realms of school and workplace which made these men question everything "in their personal life as well as in their public role" (Mernissi 23-24). To resolve this chaotic situation, Muslim men wanted "'to put things 'back in order'" by demanding a "return to the past" and a "return to … tradition" (24). Consequently, "the 'return' to the veil" is an attempt to force "women who have left 'their' place" to go back to the era where they are once again confined by society "to be marginal, and above all subordinate, in accordance with the ideal Islam, that of Muhammad" (24). However, according to Mernissi, in 610 AD, Muhammad was actually advancing a radical deviation from the status quo regarding women which forced the Meccan elites to expel him to Medina (24).

In Chapter Two, Mernissi discusses pre-Islamic and early Islamic history and how Islam, aside from its religious aspect, unified the disparate Arab tribes, who futilely fought each other, into a great empire that eventually spread from Europe to China. However, after Muhammad's death, there were succession issues and it was with the 4th caliph Ali, who was Muhammad's nephew and son-in-law, that the first *fitna* or civil war occurred. Hence scholars started collecting ahadith (sing. ahadith) "to protect themselves against political terror and violence" and to use as an "important political weapon" (Mernissi 34). The ahadith are the teachings, actions and sayings of Muhammad which represent a "panorama of daily life in the seventh century" (35). Yet, Mernissi says there was an "increase in false, fabricated Hadith" as can be seen by the presence of a chapter in a book by Islamic intellectual and Hanafi school jurist Muhammad Abu Zahra

called “The Increase in Lying Concerning the Prophet and the Schisms and Divisions in the Ranks of the Fuqaha” (36). According to Zahra, the lying occurred because after Muhammad’s death, the Muslim community was torn by dissension and divided into Sunni and Shi’ites based on their allegiance to Ali and there were many different political, social and religious groups who had a strong desire “to seek legitimacy in and through the sacred text” (43). Additionally, there were two conflicting and opposing forces during the collection and discussion of ahadith. These forces included male political leaders who wanted to exploit religion in order to gain power and fervent scholars who wanted to stop them by the use of *fiqh*, or religious science, that emphasized continuous and thorough authentication and proof.

Muhammad Al-Bukhari, who was an Islamic scholar and collector of the most “authentic” ahadith which he compiled in a volume of books called the *Sahih al-Bukhari*, was a good example of someone caught between the tensions of an “intellectual” who wanted to do objective research but who was also the “object of political pressure.” Al-Bukahri interviewed 1080 people and collected 600,000 Hadith. Al-Bukhari wanted “to be true to Muhammad” by ensuring that nothing was written that Muhammad had not said (Mernissi 44). Mernissi says that even before the two hundred year anniversary of Muhammad’s death, 596,725 false ahadith were already disseminated and it is easy to envision that there are many more now, but what she finds astounding is that the distrust and hesitation that religious scholars had in the past about immediately accepting a hadith as true is missing today. Mernissi goes on to say that men with wealth and power have attempted to purchase “genealogies, which were the equivalent of our identity cards …

[or] trying to falsify one's papers" in order to create ahadith (47). Additionally, the religious scholars included a diverse group of Arabs and foreigners with different cultural backgrounds who had conflicts and biases that influenced their decision to accept a given hadith. This make up of the *ulama* shows "the magnitude of the political and economic stakes that presided over, and still preside over, the manipulation of the sacred text, since Monday of the year AD 632 when the Prophet, who had succeeded in creating a community that was both democratic and powerful, lay forgotten and unburied" (48).

Thus, given the background behind the ahadith and the controversies in collecting them, Mernissi, in Chapter Three, "A Tradition of Misogyny," discusses a hadith from al-Bukhari which was reported by Abu Bakra who "heard the Prophet say: 'Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity'" (Mernissi 49). The fact that this hadith is included in *Sahih al-Bukhari* and "is *a priori* considered true and therefore unassailable without proof to the contrary" shows how a given assumption about the hadith collector makes it impossible for it to be objectively critiqued and analyzed (49). However, Merinissi does investigate it with the *Fath al-bari* which is "a line-by-line commentary on al-Bukhari" written by al-Asqalani who "For each Hadith of the Sahih, … gives … the historical clarification: the political events that served as background, a description of the battles, the identity of the conflicting parties, the identity of the transmitters and their opinions, and finally the debates concerning their reliability" (50).

Mernissi brings up important issues from al-Asqalani's commentary about Abu Bakra's hadith. For example, Bakra remembered this hadith 25 years after Muhammad's death when 'A'isha, Muhammad's youngest wife, lost the Battle of the Camel in Basra to

the third caliph Ali. Additionally, Abu Bakra was a non-native notable of Basra, and "in a difficult position" when choosing which side he should be on, either Ali's or Aisha's (Mernissi 51). Bakra had been a slave in the city of Ta'if, but Muhammad freed him during the siege of that city. After gaining his freedom, Bakra became well off and the "incarnation of Muhammad's dream — that all the poor, the humiliated of the world, could accede to power and wealth" (51). In the 656 AD, the 36th year of the Hijra, Aisha was in Basra seeking support from the Muslim community for a battle against the caliph Ali because he did not punish the killers of the 3rd caliph Uthman (54). The community was split up over supporting Ali or A'isha. They were extremely hesitant about being involved in a *fitna* or Islamic civil war which Muhammad would not have wanted because it "turned the weapons of the Muslims inward instead of directing them, as Allah wished, outward, in order to conquer and dominate the world" (54). Consequently, Bakra, who had not taken sides in the conflict between A'isha and Ali conveniently remembered Muhammad's words after A'isha lost the battle (57). There were many Companions, like Abu Musa, who also decided to remain neutral, but only Bakra "justified" his reason for not entering the battle was because "one of the parties was a woman" (57). Mernissi says that: "Abu Bakra also remembered other Hadith just as providential at critical moments" which implies that the value of a Hadith is to be questioned when it is recalled only at times that benefit the narrator (58).

In addition to analyzing the historical context of Bakra's suspicious and opportune remembrances more than two decades after Muhammad died and at "critical moments," Mernissi also looks at the "methodological rules that the *fuqaha* (religious scholars) had

defined as principles of verification" (Mernissi 59). In order to accept Bakra's hadith as valid, aside from hearing and seeing Muhammad say or do something, he also needed to have a certain moral standing in the community which he did not have because "he was convicted and flogged for false testimony by the caliph 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab" for being the 4th witness testifying in the *zina* (fornication) trial of al-Mughira Ibn Shu'ba. Thus, Mernissi states that, "If one follows the principles of Malik ibn Anas for *fiqh*, Abu Bakra must be rejected as a source of Hadith by every, good well-informed Malikite Muslim" (61). More importantly, Mernissi stresses that although she has attempted to show the correct "historical record [of] … the line of transmitters and witnesses who gave their account of a troubled historical epoch," she states the imperative for "redoubled vigilance when taking the sacred as an argument, someone hurls at the believer as basic truth a political axiom so terrible and with such grave historical consequences" (61).

In Chapter Four, "A Tradition of Misogyny," Mernissi discusses another misogynistic Hadith in al-Bukhari reported by Abu Hurayra which says, "The Prophet said the dog, the ass, and woman interrupt prayer if they pass in front of the believer, interposing themselves between him and the qibla" (Mernissi 64). The meaning of this hadith has grave negative connotations for Muslim women because all Muslims pray toward Mecca which is the qibla or the "orientation … toward the place of the Ka'ba, the age old sanctuary taken over by Islam in year 8 of the Hejira (AD 360)," and it "gives to Muslim prayer — in addition to its spiritual objective (meditation) and its pragmatic objective (discipline) — its cosmic dimension" (65). Therefore, Mernissi says that Hurayra's hadith is important because in equating a woman with dogs and asses, then,

"Like the dog and the ass, she destroys the symbolic relation with the divine by her presence" causing the Muslim to restart the prayer (70). Mernissi goes on to say that according to Ibn Marzuq, when someone said this Hadith in front of A'isha she responded with, "'You compare us now to assess and dogs. In the name of God, I have seen the Prophet saying his prayers while I was there, lying on the bed between him and the qibla and in order not to disturb him, I didn't move" (70). Yet, Mernissi notes that al-Bukhari did not remove Bakra's hadith after hearing A'isha's words (70).

Mernissi also does a historical analysis of Hurayra and says that his name change by Muhammad to "Father of the little Female Cat" and his job of assisting "'in the woman's apartments'" made him dislike women (Mernissi 72). Hurayra even said to A'isha when she repudiated him was, "'O Mother, all I did was collect Hadith, while you were too busy with kohl and your mirror'" (72). Hurayra also was heard saying on the topic of purification after sex that: "'he whom the dawn finds sullied [*janaban*, referring to sullying by the sex act] may not fast'" (73). The Companions went to the Prophet's wives Umm Salma and A'isha who told them "'The Prophet used to spend the night *janaban* without making ritual of purification, and in the morning he fasted'" (73). Upon hearing their response from the Companions, "'Abu Hurayra … confessed, under pressure, that he had not heard it directly from the Prophet, but from someone else. He reconsidered what he had said, and later it was learned that just before his death he completely retracted his words'" (73). Therefore, Hurayra's ahadith have had lasting negative implications for Muslim women but they are accepted as truth because many Muslims do not know they are inaccurate and were renounced by A'isha.

Mernissi believes Abu Hurayra is important to discuss because he is "the author of Hadith that saturate the daily life of every modern Muslim woman" and because his ahadith are in al-Bukhari, they are accepted as true by many Muslims (Mernissi 78). While, Hurayra has provided a large amount of commentary in the religious literature, he is a controversial figure who is not universally accepted as a trustworthy authority. However, attempts at criticizing Hurayra have resulted in literature which defends him such as 'Abd al-Mun'im Salih al-'Ali book, *In Defense of Abu Hurayra,* which begins by stating that Zionists are behind any attempt to question Hadith. As stated previously by Mernissi, even before Zionism existed, Hurayra's reputation was questionable from the start, and al-Bukhari acknowledged this when he wrote, "'people said that Abu Hurayra recounts too many Hadith'" (79). Mernissi also mentions that in the third caliph Umar's biography by al-'Asqalani, Umar says about Abu Hurayra "'We have many things to say, but we are afraid to say them, and that man there has no restraint'" (79). Mernissi states that Abu Hurayra was with Muhammad for three years from which he recounted "5,300 Hadith" and "Al-Bukhari listed 800 experts who cited him as their source," hence, revealing the truth about these Hadith is very important (80). Consequently, Mernissi reiterates the necessity for Muslims, to assiduously analyze and question all ahadith, the *fuqaha* and the imams in order to expose the true Islam and sunnah of Muhammad which has become shrouded over time with inaccuracies (76).

Going from a discussion of the importance of critically investigating ahadith and looking at the histories of who reported them and in what context they were reported, in part two, Mernissi discusses how the role of Muslim women changed from years three to

eight of the Hijra to Medina relative to years one to three. Mernissi believes that Muslim women lost their freedom in years three to eight and a manifestation of this loss is the hijab. The loss was due to circumstances that were occurring in Muhammad's personal life because of his dwindling health and other societal, political, and military reasons that affected him and his wives. Mernissi analyzes historically what was happening in this period and then she analyzes the Qur'anic verses that were revealed during this time. Mernissi states that the practice of veiling of women was not a part of the early Muslim community and was "introduced into Islam by the Umayyads, probably under the influence of the Sassanid civilization … [and] was first practiced at the time of Mu'awiya" (Mernissi 94). In chapter five, which is called "The Hijab, The Veil," Mernissi discusses how the hijab or the veil first came into being in year 5 (AD 627) of the Hijra in Islam and is described in verse 53 of Surah 3 (85).

Verse 53 was revealed the night the Prophet married his cousin Zaynab and some wedding guests would not leave their bedroom: "the descent of the cloth hijab, a material object, a curtain that the Prophet draws between himself and the man who was at the entrance of his nuptial chamber … the hijab descended in the bedroom of the wedded pair to protect their intimacy and exclude a third person" (Mernissi 85). Hence, the first mention of hijab was a cloth to separate two men, Muhammad and Anas Ibn Malik, from each other (85). Mernissi says that, according to al-Tabari "the veil was God's answer to a community with boorish manners whose lack of delicacy offended a Prophet whose politeness bordered on timidity" (86). Thus, how did the hijab go from separating two men to being "a symbol of Muslim identity, manna for the Muslim woman" when it was

not initially practiced by Muhammad's wives or women of the early Muslim community (97)? Mernissi discusses the reasons for revelations about the hijab and the consequential ramifications it had for Muslim women because it "was to turn into a segregation of the sexes … cover up women, separate them from men, from the Prophet, and so from God" (101).

In the chapter called "The Prophet and Space," Mernissi describes the relationship that Muhammad with his first wife, Khadija, which was the template for his relationship with his other wives. Khadija was a divorced, financially successful, independent, single mother who was around two decades older than Muhammad when she married him. Kahdija became the first Muslim and he relied on her for the strength and guidance he needed to continue with his mission. At Muhammad's death he "had nine wives," some of whom he had the same "strong intellectual relationship" that he had with Khadija (Mernissi 104). His wives were with him "during his expeditions, … [they] were not just his background figures, … they shared with him his strategic concerns" and "he listened to their advice" (104). Additionally, Mernissi refers to historian Ibn Sa'd to show the importance Muhammad's wives had in his life which was reflected in facts such as there was only a door between A'isha's apartment and the mosque and Muhammad would "'lean his head from the mosque to 'A'isha's doorstep'" to have his hair washed (107).

However, in the chapter called "The Prophet as Military Leader," Mernissi says that during year three to the beginning of year eight, Muhammad's "project for equality of the sexes foundered" because he did not hide his wives who were "directly involved in public affairs, moved around freely and inquired about what was going on" (Mernissi

162). For example, in year five in Medina, Umm Salma openly spoke her mind about freeing a Jewish prisoner named Abu La Bamba. After confirming his freedom with Muhammad, she told La Bamba of his liberation, thus, acting "as if this were a matter in which women had a say. The household was not their sole legitimate domain" (163). Muhammad was surrounded by "remarkable and distinguished women like Umm Salama, Aisha, and Zainab … they were younger than he, intelligent and … actively involved in political life" and they wanted equality for women (163). Mernissi goes on to say that because Muhammad's wives were constantly at his side and advising him, he was attacked via rumor and gossip and humiliated by those in the community that opposed such freedom for women. Ultimately, those enemies won and he surrendered "his aims for the equality of the sexes" (163).

Prior to the revelation of the hijab, Muhammad was experiencing "uncertainty in his military career and physical decline due to increasing years" and these things created a situation where the women in Muhammad's life were subject to negative scrutiny, gossip and false accusations (Mernissi 163). In year five of the Hijra, Surah 4, *An-Nisa* or "Women," and Surah 33, *Al-Ahzab* or "The Clans," highlight Muhammad's problems because they contain verses that describe the "debates" about issues such as "the equality of the sexes, … inheritance rights of women and young girls, the accusation of adultery against 'A'isha and the decent of the hijab" (164). These Surahs also describe the Battle of Dhat al-Riqa when Muhammad first said "the Prayer of Fear" and the Battle of the Trench when 3,000 military men were in Medina. These men publicly harassed the women of Medina, including Muhammad's wives (170).

As a result of the harassment, Mernissi says we need to "reinterpret" the verses of the hijab and al-Tabari's "explication" of them (Mernissi 170). Mernissi states Muhammad's persistence in keeping his wives at the forefront and not separating his public and private lives created a space for personal attacks to be made against him and his wives which would force him to separate the private from the public and result in the veiling of women (172). According to Mernissi, the attacks on Muhammad were made by two new groups within the Hypocrites and these attacks motivated Muhammad to acknowledge the reality of a delineation between his public and private life with the hijab (172). Prior to this time, women were not "cloistered" and "usually went out at night, … because the city, … which was sleepy during the day because of the heat, woke up at night" (172-173). The Hypocrites would harass the Prophet's wives when they went out and the attacks were so bad that God "intervened" in verse 60 of Surah 33: "'If the hypocrites, and those in whose hearts is a disease, and [those who spread disorder] in the city do not cease, We verily shall urge thee on against them, then they will be your neighbors in it but a little while'" (173).

Due to the verbal and physical harassment, Muhammad's "entourage" told him that the veil was the way to protect "free women" while female "slaves" would remain unveiled which was a tacit acceptance of the fact that these slaves "could be approached and be attacked" (Mernissi 178-179). Mernissi says that the separation of free women from female slaves with the hijab caused a symbolic relapse in social and sexual equality for both groups, but the reason why the hijab was introduced eventually became blurred in society causing it to become a requirement for all Muslim women for the next 1400

years. In the chapter called “The Hijab Descends on Medina,” Mernissi goes into further detail as to why the hijab was proclaimed necessary. She says, “Islam, put to the test militarily and challenged by the Medinese civilians, sacrificed women slaves in order to protect women aristocrats” because, many men were going after any and all women in the streets and “subjected them to the humiliating practice of *ta'arrud* - literally ‘taking up a position along a woman's path to urge her to fornicate,’” (180). Hence, Muhammad had to take action to protect his wives and other women “in a city that was hostile and out of control” (180).

Muhammad discovered that the men who were doing *ta’arrud* said they were approaching women they thought were slaves and because there was nothing distinguishing a free woman from a female slave they excused “themselves by claiming confusion about the identity of the women they approached” (Mernissi 180). Consequently, soon after, the verse that discusses veiling of women was revealed to Muhammad: “‘O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close around them (when they go abroad). That will be better, that so they may be recognized and not annoyed’” (187-188). This verse suggested that some women should identify themselves by using their *jilbab*, which was “a very large piece of cloth worn by a woman” that was already part of their attire, to cover themselves (180). Thus, while free women were no longer bothered by *ta’arrud*, Mernissi writes that the female slaves were still being sexually assaulted. Mernissi says that historian Ibn Sa'd “reports: In Medina slaves where being solicited by some foolish men (*sufaha*) who approached them in the public street and harassed them” (182-183).

According to Mernissi, slavery was economically very lucrative for Arab men and Muhammad's views on women having equal rights would hinder their ability to make large amounts of income from slavery (181). Mernissi believes that in order to move forward from the polytheism of the pre-Islamic era and the tribal slave economy, Islam needed to make a strong stand against slavery "thus making the idea of the believer as an individual not only logical but necessary" (182). Mernissi says one also has to look at Arab men's behavior towards women, e.g. *ta'arrud*, based on what was happening in pre-islamic Arabia, especially the four types of marriages that took place where two were basically forms of prostitution. Al-Bukhari states that in these two marriages women had multiple partners. It was in response to the complaint of two slave women that Allah revealed the Qu'ranic Verse 33 of Surah 24 "which deals with the problem of *zina*, [and] verifies the existence of organized prostitution in Medina: 'Force not your slave-girls to whoredom that ye may seek enjoyment of the life of the world, if they would preserve their chastity.' And for those who were indulging in this kind of business Allah had this advice: 'And such of your slaves as seek a writing (of emancipation), write it for them'" (181). Later on, even under the Islamic Fatimid dynasty, prostitution was not eliminated but taxed.

Mernissi states the rumors and accusations by the two Hypocrite groups created dissension between the Prophet and his wives which made him "withdraw from them for some days" and produced "the Verse of Choice" (Mernissi 173). Some of the commentaries analyzing the dispute say for "at least half of the Prophet's nine [wives, the reason] was of an economic kind, and others say it was of a sexual nature" (173-74).

Mernissi writes that according to Islamic Law, a polygynous husband has to satisfy the financial and sexual needs of all his wives. Additionally, if a wife is not sexually and economically happy in a marriage, she might look for "satisfaction elsewhere" and thereby create discord (174). Verse 51 of Surah 33 "exempts Muhammad, by order of Allah himself, from sharing the bed of those of his wives for whom he no longer feels desire … moreover, Allah himself cannot force a sexually unsatisfied wife to stay with her husband" (174). Thus, the Verse of Choice gave Muhammad's wives, who complained of his inattentive behavior, the choice of leaving him if they wanted to (174). Mernissi goes on to say that, "according to such accepted authorities as al-Tabari and Ibn Sa'd, five of his wives were affected by this verse and only four of the nine continued to enjoy his favors, 'A'isha and Umm Salma obviously among them" (174). Hence, after the Verse of Choice was revealed to Muhammad, he returned home and asked them to decide if they wanted to stay with him or not. The Verse of Choice showed that Muhammad, instead of beating his wives, sought guidance from God about his marital issues and he gave them free agency to leave him if they wanted to.

Muhammad's actions regarding the dispute with his wives shows that he, and implicitly Islam, did not believe in violence against women but there was also "the contrary opinion represented by Umar" (Mernissi 155). While the Qur'an does contain the controversial verse 34 of Surah 4 which states, "'As for those from whom ye fear rebellion [*nushuz*], admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them,'" however interpretations of this verse vary (155). Mernissi says that, "Muslim commentators explain that *nushuz* means a

rebellion by women, a refusal to obey their husbands in the matter of the sex act. It is not just infidelity that is meant here. The most grave offense according to them, is women's refusing themselves to their husbands" (156). She says that al-Tabari tries to explain *al-nushuz* to "mean that the wife treats her husband with arrogance, refuses to join him in the marital bed; it is an expression of disobedience" (156). Even though verse 34 of Surah four is problematic, and al-Tabari's "27 pages of commentary on it" does not help clarify it in an egalitarian manner for women, what is important to note is that al-Tabari "wrote a century after Ibn Sa'd and often referred to his work" because Ibn S'ad realized hitting women was not part of the Islamic tradition (156). Additionally, as we have seen, in Amina Wadud's female inclusive interpretation of this verse, the Arabic word for scourge also means "to strike out" or "leave." In addition to the "Verse of Choice," which clearly let the Medinese community know of Muhammad's marital difficulties, other issues such as marriage to his cousin Zaynab in year five, rumors of A'isha's adultery in year six, and his perceived scandalous marriage to a Jewish captive in year seven influenced the decision for free women to wear the hijab.

Hence, according to Mernissi, a number of important events and conditions existed during years five through eight of the Hijra that culminated in the deviation from the early years of the Hijra and led to free women being told to veil in order for their own protection. These events included: Muhammad's weakness as a military leader which translated in a less secure leadership identity; the tactlessness of people who came into contact with Muhammad; the Companions, especially Umar's, disapproval of the freedom exhibited by Muhammad's wives; Muhammad's failing health and stamina

relative to his young, healthy, and intelligent wives; scandals dealing with his marriages to Zaynab and the Jewish slave; slanderous rumors about ‘A’isha’s infidelity; and the presence of thousands of military men and other men who were practicing *ta’arrud*. Therefore, the ideal democratic community where the individual had the power to control their spiritual and physical lives that Muhammad had initially established in Medina soon deteriorated back to the patriarchal mentality where women were objects whose will was subordinate to that of men’s. According to Mernissi, introduction of the hijab in Medina “cut short that brief burst of freedom” that Muslim women had and “15 centuries later it was colonial power that would force the Muslim states to reopen the question of the rights of the individual and of women” (Mernissi 188).

Chapter VI

Riffat Hassan

Riffat Hassan's article "Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam" lays out the argument that Muslim women have been relegated to a position less than men not only by Western society but also by Muslims. Hassan first begins by saying that the "Islamic tradition … does not consist of, or derive from, a single source" but includes "more than one of the following: The Qu'ran (the Book of Revelation believed by Muslims to be the Word of God); Sunnah (the practical traditions of the Prophet Muhammad); Hadith (the sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad; *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence) or *Madahib* (Schools of Law): and the *Shariah* (the code of life that regulates all aspects of Muslim life)" (Hassan 39). However, according to Hassan, "these 'sources' … do not form a coherent or consistent body of teachings or precepts from which a universally agreed upon set of Islamic norms can be derived" (39). Additionally, and importantly, Hassan states that there is "inconsistency between various sources … and also of inner inconsistency within some, for example the Hadith literature" (39). While the Qu'ran is the "primary source" for Muslims because it is the word of God, Hassan believes that the "Hadith literature has been the lens through which the words of Qu'ran have been seen and interpreted" (40). Unlike the Qu'ran, "every aspect of this literature is surrounded by

controversy. In particular, the question of the authenticity of individual ahadith … as well as of the Hadith literature as a whole" (40).

Hassan goes on to give examples of "scholars of Islam" who had issues with Hadith literature such as Ash-Shafi who died in 809 AD to the 20th century Faslur Rahman. Rahman said in his book, *Islam,* that he found many Hadith "'… to be spurious and forged by classical Muslim scholars themselves' (Rahman, 70)" (Hassan 40). Hassan mentions that while most moderate Muslims would not go "as far as Ghulam Ahmed Parwez, leader of the Tulu e' Islam, or the Dawn of Islam, movement in Pakistan" who dismisses all ahadith, but are rather like "Moulvi Cheragh Ali, an important Indian Muslim scholar" who was "'… seldom inclined to quote traditions having little or no belief in their genuineness, as generally they are inauthentic, unsupported and one-sided (quoted in Guillame, 97)'" (40). She also cites Alfred Guillaume from his book, *The Traditions of Islam*, as saying that, "'The Hadith literature as we now have it provides us with apostolic precept and example covering the whole duty of man: it is the basis of that developed system of law, theology, and custom which is Islam' (Guillame, 15)" (40). However, Hassan goes on to say that according to Fazlur Rahman, the Hadith literature needs to be looked at otherwise the "'historicity of the Qur'an is removed with one stroke' (Rahman, 70)" (40). Hassan also refers to H.A.R. Gibb who "observed perceptively: 'It would be difficult to exaggerate the strength and the effects of the Muslim attitude toward Muhammad. Veneration … admiration and love … have echoed down the centuries, thanks to the … hadith … which would supplement the legal and

ethical prescriptions contained in the Koran … [with] examples set by Muhammad in his daily life and practice' (Gibb, 194)" (41).

Once Hassan shows how important the Hadith is second only to the Qur'an and that both are seen "as primary sources of the Islamic tradition" (Hassan 41), she goes on to state that these "sources have been interpreted only by Muslim men, who have arrogated to themselves the task of defining the ontological, theological, sociological, and eschatological status of Muslim women" (41). Hassan says that aside from the prominent Muslim women in the early Islamic period such as "Khadijah and A'ishah (wives of the Prophet Muhammad) and Rabi'a al-Basri (the outstanding woman Sufi) … the fact remains that the Islamic tradition has, by and large, remained rigidly patriarchal until the present time, prohibiting the growth of scholarship among women particularly in the realm of religious thought" (41- 42). Therefore, because of the patriarchal interpretation of the Islamic tradition, Hassan states "that until now the overwhelming majority of Muslim women have remained totally or largely unaware of the extent to which their 'Islamic' (in an ideal sense) rights have been violated by their male-centered and male-dominated societies" (42). Hassan believes that: "as long as these women are conditioned to accept the myths used by theologians or religious hierarchs to shackle their bodies, hearts, minds, and souls, they will never … stand equal to men in the sight of God" (43).

Consequently, Hassan believes there are three "fundamental theological assumptions," which are not in the Qur'an, that have made Muslims as well as non-Muslims believe that, "men are superior to women" (Hassan 43-44). These assumptions are: God's main creation was man not woman who was simply made from man's rib;

woman is responsible for man's fall from *al-jannah* or Paradise; and woman is made from man for man. Hassan shows that the Qur'an, Islam's primary scripture and the word of God, does not say that man and woman are unequal, and the above three assumptions are not even present in it. The first two assumptions about woman being created from man and that woman was the cause of man's fall from paradise are Judeo-Christian concepts that have been incorporated in the ahadith and most Muslims erroneously believe them to be somehow related to the Qur'an. The third assumption that woman was made for man is from the mistranslation of some sections of Surah *An-Nisa* and Surah *Al-Baqara*. Despite the fact that Hassan gives numerous examples of where the Qur'an explicitly says they are equal, people still think women are inferior to men.

Hassan first discusses the issue of woman being created from man which she says is incorrect because "In none of the thirty or so passages that describe the creation of humanity … by God … is there any statement that, could be interpreted as asserting, or suggesting that man was created prior to woman or that woman was created from man" (Hassan 44). Hassan goes on to say this story "has no basis whatever in the Qur'an, which in the context of human creation speaks always in completely egalitarian terms," and it "has obvious footage in Yahwist's account of creation in Genesis 2:18:24" (44). On the contrary, according to Hassan as well as Amina Wadud, in the Qur'an "there are some passages that could —from a purely grammatical/linguistic point of view — be interpreted as stating that the first creation (*nafs in wahidatin*) was feminine and not masculine" (44). Yet, many Muslims believe the Genesis story. Hassan says the reason they believe it might be true is because it "became part of Muslim heritage through its

assimilation in the Hadith literature," and the idea that woman was made from Adam's rib "did in fact, become incorporated in" six ahadith, which are "ascribed from the Companion known as Abu Hurairah" (45). Hassan goes on to give examples of the six ahadith, which say things such as "women, … are created from a rib and the most crooked part of the rib, its upper part; if you try to straighten it, it will break, and if you leave it, it will remain crooked" (46). Given that the Qur'an does not state anything about woman being made from man, especially the crooked part of his rib, these ahadith are inconsistent with the Qur'an. Therefore, Hassan says they should have been rejected because "Muslim scholars agree on the principle that any Hadith that is inconsistent with the Qur'an cannot be accepted" (46). However, these ahadith have not been rejected because of the fact they "come from the two most highly-venerated Hadith collections by Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari (810-870) and Muslim bin al-Hallaj (815-75)," which are *sahihan* or sound authority (46). So, these ahadith are almost "indestructible" (46). Hence, even though the Qur'an does not say that woman was made from man or his rib, Muslim religious scholars have accepted the inconsistent ahadith that borrowed a Judeo-Christian story and relegated women to a lower status relative to men instead of exploring this topic further and possibly correcting the fallacy.

The Adam's rib story is not the only assumption that is incorrectly believed by Muslims to come from God. Muslims also believe the Judeo-Christian concept of woman causing man's fall from Paradise. There are two aspects to this story that are both false in Islam. First, it was not woman who caused the eviction from Paradise, and two, there was no fall. With respect to who was to blame for man and woman's exit from paradise,

Hassan says that according to the Surahs which talk about this event, "the act of disobedience by the human pair in *al-jannah* [is seen] as a collective rather than an individual act for which exclusive or even primary, responsibility is not assigned to either man or woman" (Hassan 47). Additionally, Hassan discusses the Surahs in the Qur'an that show it is Adam who is "held responsible for forgetting the covenant [with God] and for allowing himself to be beguiled by the Shaitan [devil] … and eating from the tree is committed jointly by Adam and '*zawj*' [wife]" (47). Hassan goes on to show excerpts from ahadith that say Muslim women are to be blamed for the fall, for example, "In al-Tabari's Tarikh (1:108) the very words Satan used to tempt Eve are then used by her to tempt Adam" (48). In the Qur'an, not only is Eve, or woman, innocent of tempting Adam, or man, and thereby causing them to fall from Paradise, but there is no fall. What Adam and Eve face "is the moral choice that humanity is required to make when confronted by the alternatives presented by God and the Shaitan" (49). Hassan says, "the order to go forth from *al-jannah* given to Adam or children of Adam cannot be considered a punishment because Adam was always meant to be God's vicegerent on earth" (49). Hence, there is no fall, and, moreover, woman or Eve did not tempt Adam to leave Paradise. God presented the pair with two choices and they made the decision which led to their departure from Paradise. This after all was not a bad thing because they were supposed to leave it any way. Thus, the Muslim community needs to reexamine religious scripture and stop blaming women for something they are not responsible for.

Finally, Hassan states that another way women have to come to have a lower status than men is based on the misguided belief that "woman was created not only from

man but also for man" and even though Hassan provides many passages from the Qur'an that say "men and women are equally called upon by God," there are two Surahs from the Qur'an, Surah *An-Nisa* and Surah *Al-Baqara*, that have been grossly mistranslated to create this false perception. These Surahs have given Muslims and non-Muslims the incorrect belief that man is superior to woman. Hassan shows how A.A.Maududi's translation of the word *qawwamun* to "managers" of women stops any further attempt to "discuss the issue of woman's equality with man in the Islamic ummah" (Hassan 55). She translates *qawwamun* to mean breadwinners, and says the point of Surah *An-Nisa* is to "guarantee women the material (as well as moral) security needed by them during the period of pregnancy when breadwinning can become difficult or even impossible for them" (57). Similarly, Surah *Al-Baqara*, which is referred to by Muslims to show that men are superior to women, is incorrectly interpreted to say that women have to wait three months before they can remarry after divorce. However, as Hassan says, "the main reason why women are subjected to this restriction is because … a woman may be pregnant," and the three months will show if she is or is not because the pregnancy will become apparent by then. Hence, there is a logical scientific reason for this *iddat* or waiting period. Another, Hadith which states that Prophet Muhammad said, "if it were permitted for one human being to bow down to another (*sajada*) I would have ordered the woman to bow down to her husband…" also supports the misguided idea that Muslim men are superior to women. Hassan, however, clearly points out that to bow down to anyone aside from God is shirk, or the sin of being a polytheist. Hence, because there is inconsistency in this Hadith and the Qur'an, it must be rejected. Thus, in her article

Hassan clearly and logically elucidates how the misconception of man being superior to woman is not true based on the Quran and ergo in the sight of God.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was described succinctly in the title *An Analysis of Muslim Women's Rights Based on the Works of Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, and Riffat Hassan*, and this paper has proceeded to go ahead and do that. After analyzing Amina Wadud's book *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, Fatima Mernissi's book *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, and Riffat Hassan's article "Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam" some important issues about Muslim women's rights in Islam become apparent. The main point that all three scholars make is that since the Prophet Muhammad's death in Medina in 632 AD, the Islamic tradition which includes its major texts has been interpreted by men. This patriarchal interpretation has not only been wrong and unjust with respect to Muslim women's rights and equality but it has also led to the marginalization of Muslim women by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Not until recently, when female scholars of Islam have reexamined and reinterpreted what is written in the texts and looked at Islamic history has there been elucidation of how Islam realizes that men and women are equal in all aspects of their spiritual and societal lives. Hassan, Mernissi, and Wadud critically analyze three different areas of Islam which all show that men and women are equal.

Wadud does a hermeneutic analysis of the Qur'an, which is the word of God and the most widely known unadulterated sacred scripture that is accepted by all Muslims. She goes through and looks at Surahs and verses that are detrimental to women. Wadud shows how misinterpretation of the Arabic language results in conclusions being drawn about Muslim women that are not true. Therefore, by examining the words and the grammar of the Qur'anic language, Wadud clarifies the meaning of anti-women verses in the Qur'an to their correct meaning.Her work shows that Muslim women and men are considered equal in the Qur'an and the main difference between them is that women are biologically different because they can have children. Additionally, God judges individuals on their *taqwa*, or deeds, which have not related to gender.

Mernissi's book is in two parts. Part one takes a look at ahadith, especially two degrading ahadith about women that were reported by Abu Bakra and Abu Hurayra. Mernissi does a further analysis of the history of these two men and the background history of what was occurring when they said these ahadith. By looking history, Mernissi shows that the ahadith should not be taken as truth. Mernissi also cites the words of A'isha, Prophet Muhammad's wife, who had first hand knowledge of him, that refute Abu Bakra and Abu Hurayra's ahadith. In part two of her book, Mernissi goes into the actual history of what was occurring in Medina from year five to year eight of the Hijra that caused women to lose the democratic role and independence, as exemplified by Muhammad's wives, that they had in years one to three. She discusses the events in Muhammad's personal life and his public life which were being impacted by the Medinese society and politics that he was a part of. Mernissi shows that in this period

their were certain Qur'anic revelations that ultimately resulted in Muhammad's acceptance of the hijab, something he was opposed to but had to give in to because Medinese society, for the large part, did not have the same progressive, polite and tactful beliefs that he had.

Hassan primarily writes about the patriarchal misinterpretation of the Islamic tradition, specifically the ahadith. She discusses three assumptions by Muslims and Islamic scholars which are not a part of Islam but have been incorporated into ahadith and have denigrated the role of Muslim women. These assumptions are God's main creation was man not woman who was simply made from man's rib; woman is responsible for man's fall from *al-jannah* or Paradise; and woman is made from man for man. She says that the first two are Judeo-Christian concepts which have been mistakenly been taken as a part of the Islamic tradition while the third is a mistranslation of some sections of Surah *An-Nisa* and Surah *Al-Baqara*.

Hassan, Mernissi and Wadud's works show the necessity of not taking hundreds of years of Islamic religious traditions at face value because there has only been a patriarchal interpretation of them. The concept of women's equality in Islam is not an easy one to clarify. All three writers attempt to show that Islam elevates women, which they go about in different ways. Hassan, Mernissi and Wadud have a very distinct feminist perspective about male and female equality in Islam which their individual work tries to prove in a fairly logical manner by: focusing on what the Qur'an and ahadith actually say; determining the importance of correct Arabic translation; and reexamining early Islamic history. However, not everyone agrees on what the Qur'an is saying

because it is interpreted by many people in many different contexts. Most Muslim religious scholars and clerics inability to reevaluate and readjust their positions by taking off their patriarchal lens and look at Islam as represented by the actual words of God, only hurts Muslim women because many Muslims listen to these scholars. Consequently, more Islamic women scholars are needed to vigorously probe the traditional Arabic translations and historical record of the Qur'an and ahadith to ensure the correct meaning is strongly and emphatically being revealed to all of society not just Muslims. Additionally, if there is inconsistency between the Qur'an and any other religious Islamic literature then that literature must be reevaluated. If after detailed analysis, it is still found to be inconsistent then it must be stated as such. Only by this important and necessary process will Muslim women regain an equal footing with men that is in accordance with the Qur'an and with the actions of the Prophet Muhammad who by his first marriage to Khadijah, a much older, independent, divorced, single mother and successful business woman clearly demonstrated his progressive beliefs about women's equality which he continued to encourage in his other wives until Medinese society restrained them.

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