مجلة المعيار ISSN :1112-4377
مجلد: 27 عدد: 4 (رت 73) السنة: 2023

A Hermeneutical approach to interpreting Feminist Epistemic Agency in Christianity and Islam.

المنهج الهرمينوطيقيي في مقاربة أبستيمولوجية لمكانة المرأة بين المسيحية والإسلام

1-Benelmouffok Shahnez Soumaya1
shahnezsoumaya.benelmouffok@univ-saida.dz
Saida University, (Algeria)
Laboratory : STUDIES IN LINGUISTICS AND DIDACTICS
2-Berrezoug Hanaa
hanaa.berrezoug@univ-saida.dz
Saida University, (Algeria)
Laboratory : STUDIES IN LINGUISTICS AND DIDACTICS

تاريخ الوصول 2023/04/16 القبول 2023/05/04 النشر على الخط 2023/06/05

Received 16/04/2023 Accepted 04/05/2023 Published online 05/06/2023

ABSTRACT

The current paper seeks to explore the feminist epistemological category of analysis in the study of religion and gender particularly as it relates to the study of Islam and Muslim societies. My approach is twofold. First, I present a critique of particular contemporary presentations of women's experience and feminist subjectivities in relation to Islam. Second, I offer a creative and reconstructive feminist engagement with the category of "experience" in reading aspects of the Muslim tradition. The study seeks to explore the common stereotypes that have been established through the male-dominated field of hermeneutics and how women are beginning to participate in this area to regain help promote equal rights. The goal of this research will be to prove that Faith and Feminism can coexist within the constructs of religious context. Highlighting the role sacred texts play in the interpretation of the gender functions. It will investigate what Feminists Theology is, and how the word "Feminism" can be taken into different context and be generated into a different meaning by different approaches to the use of discourse.

Keywords: Epistemological Feminism, Gender and Agency, Hermeneutical approach, Religious Experience.

ملخص:

تسعى الورقة البحثية إلى استكشاف فئة التحليل المعرفي النسوي في دراسة الدين والنوع خاصة فيما يتعلق بدراسة الإسلام والمجتمعات الإسلامية. توجهي ذو شقين: أولاً، حاولنا تقديم نقد لعروض معاصرة معينة لتجربة المرأة والذاتيات النسوية فيما يتعلق بالإسلام. ثانيًا، سعينا إلى إبراز مشاركة نسوية إبداعية وإعادة بناء لِمُختلف القراءات من التراث الإسلامي. تسعى الدراسة إلى استكشاف الصور النمطية الشائعة التي تم إنشاؤها من خلال مجال التأويل/الهرمينوطيقا الذي يهيمن عليه العنصر الذكوري وكيف بدأت النساء في المشاركة في هذا المجال لاستعادة تعزيز المساواة في الحقوق. يهدف هذا البحث إلى إثبات أن النزعة الإيمانية والنسوية يمكن أن يتعايشان ضمن بنيات السياق الديني. إبراز الدور الذي تلعبه النصوص المقدسة في تفسير وظائف النوع الاجتماعي. كما يتولّى البحث في ماهية اللاهوت النسوي وكيف يمكن أن تؤخذ كلمة "النسوية" في سياق مختلف ويتم توليدها في معنى مختلف من خلال مناهج مُتعدّدة لاستخدام الخطاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية المعرفة، النسوية، النوع، النوع والسلطة، المنهج التأويلي، الخبرة الدينية.

[1]Correspondind author : soumayamouffok19@gmail.com Mail: **shahnezsoumaya.benelmouffok@univ-saida.dz**

1-**Introduction**:

Religious interpretation presupposes a Hermeneutic Epistemic Exegesis. That is, how are we to approach the Holy Word of God? Certainly, with reverence and awe, for theology is to be done, principally, on one's knees in prayer. But, more to the point, a certain openness is required to transcend the letter of the text in the Spirit. Now, this pertains to the spiritual sense of Sacred Scripture. But how is this spiritual sense attained or, better, received? we can define the spiritual sense, as the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in the context of the paschal mystery of Christ. It is therefore quite acceptable to re-read the Scriptures in the light of this new context, which is that of the "*the Fuller Sense":* "The fuller sense is defined as a deeper meaning of the text, intended by God but not clearly expressed by the human author. Its existence in the biblical text comes to be known when one studies the text in the light of other biblical texts which utilize it or in its relationship with the internal development of revelation." It is then a question either of the meaning that a subsequent biblical author attributes to an earlier biblical text, taking it up in a context which confers upon it a new literal sense, or else it is a question of the meaning that an authentic doctrinal tradition or a conciliar definition gives to a biblical text. For example, the definition of original sin by the Council of Trent provided the fuller sense of Paul's teaching in Romans 5:12-21 about the consequences of the sin of Adam for humanity. But when this kind of an explicit biblical text or by an authentic doctrinal tradition–is lacking, recourse to a claimed fuller sense could lead to subjective interpretations deprived of validity. In other words, one might think of the 'fuller sense' as another way of indicating the spiritual sense of a sacred texts in the case where the spiritual sense is distinct from the literal sense. It has its foundation in the fact that the Holy Spirit, principal medium of the holy scriptures, can guide human authors in the choice of expressions in such a way that the latter will express a truth the fullest depths of which the authors themselves do not perceive. This deeper truth will be more fully revealed in the course of time–on the one hand, through further divine interventions which clarify the meaning of texts and, on the other, through the insertion of texts into the canon of Scripture. In these ways there is created a new context, which brings out fresh possibilities of meaning that had lain hidden in the original context.

2-Literature Review

Although having different interests, Islamic feminists are interpreting the Qur'an through a common woman's perspective. What defines their research is the unexplored world of female agency in different fields. Many, for instance, look at the legal status of women or their role in mediaeval society. But rather than looking at the consequences sacred texts have on the society, the mufassirat (sing. mufassirah, as they often refer to themselves) go to the source of shari'ah law and look for the attitude of the Qur'an towards women. Amina Wadud (1999) conducted a study in her book Qur'an and Woman to investigate the concept of woman in the Qur'an. She proposes a contemporary methodological approach based on the methods of Fazlur Rahman. She explains (ibid., pp. 3-4) her hermeneutical model as concerned of three aspects of the text: 1) context; 2) language; and 3) weltanschauung, the world-view. Using these interpretative tools, Wadud refines the different topics of the Qur'an and shows how women are part of the Sacred Scripture. In the last chapter, she does an analysis of the "incriminating" verses that seem to justify a patriarchal Islam. Her conclusion is that

using the right methodology and refuting traditional interpretations, the Qur'an reads as liberatory for Muslim women. Such Qur'anic reading has never been formulated in this manner.

Her powerful reading is, for some authors, the result of cherry-picking conclusions (Ali, 2006), or unfaithful translations (Sana and Ammad, 2016). For creating such a stir in the Islamic feminist discourse and for being considered as the focal point for the new wave of feminists, it is worth analyzing her tafsir in her methodology. Few years after the publication of Qur'an and Woman, Asma Barlas published her own feminist tafsir (2002). In Believing women in Islam (from now on Believing women) 1 It is, in fact, worth noting that all the publications from the authors mentioned were done in English. While giving a hint on their origins or the academic environment in which they operate, it also speaks about their audience and the influence they attain. Especially the works of feminists have a Janus-faced purpose: on one hand, they aim to provoke discussions in the academic world regarding Islam, on the other, their audience target consists of non-Muslim readers which makes their work apologetic literature. 2 Barlas tackles the ontological question on "whether or not the Qur'an is a patriarchal text" (2019, p. ix). Her modus operandi base its foundation on the paradigm of the unicity of God (tawhidic principle) and the debunking of the association of God and God's Prophets as male/father figure. This unravels in the following chapters where she discusses the Qur'an's stance on sex/gender and the role of women in the family and society. What Barlas finds in her reading of the Qur'an is its rigidity towards transgressions of women's rights. This is very similar to Wadud. By looking at the holistic interpretation of the Qur'an, Barlas shows that gender inequality is a sin similar to shirk (polytheism). However, while they both arrive to similar conclusions a comparison of the two tafasir is fruitful in order to understand what is the reason of their interpretative similarities so that future interpretation of the Qur'an can benefit from similar readings. Kecia Ali (2006) warns from these kinds of interpretations labelling them as "fundamentally dishonest and ultimately futile" (153). She claims that such readings distort the view of the Qur'an as it deprives it of its androcentric essence. In a later publication (Ali, 2016, p. 124) she clarifies that although having some controversial verses, the Qur'an is not misogynist. Ali challenges not the legitimacy or the utility of such endeavours but, rather, the ability to yield an egalitarian meaning from the Qur'an. Her attack on Barlas and Wadud is directed to their methodology and their biases blaming these authors for doing apologetic interpretations. She states that an honest interpretation should account of the androcentric language of the Qur'an as of its interpretative biased reading by further commentators. On a similar vein, Aysha Hidayatullah (2014) criticizes Wadud and Barlas for having manipulated the Qur'an under their own will. For Hidayatullah feminist exegetes extort from the text what they want it to say. In this "ventriloquism" they tailor the meaning of the Qur'an according to their set of values. She is critical on what feminist exegetes are doing on an academic level: the way they are juxtaposing contemporary values to a historically situated text. Having reached a methodological impasse, feminist exegetes have associated the Qur'an with irreconcilable modern values (Hidayatullah, 2016, p. 135). In Feminist Edges of the Qur'an (2014, p. 11), Hidayatullah affirms that both readings, the equalitarian and the androcentric, are part of the text and as such can live alongside each other. This does not imply the exclusion or the denial of one of the two. Much of the exegetical framework of Wadud and Barlas builds up upon the work of Pakistani scholar Fazlur Rahman. The reason Islamic feminist movement particularly 3 reference Rahman is the mutual conception that the tradition has led Muslim intellectualism astray (1982, p. 151). The closing of the gate of ijtihad and the consequent ossification of Islamic moral understanding of the Qur'an resulted, in contemporary times, in what the Islamic

world has experience when facing the West: the decay of Muslim societies. Thus, Qur'an is central to the revival of Islamic society. While rejecting traditional tafasir, he believed that Islam required a new form of hermeneutical methodology. Here, we find the same features that Islamic feminists use, namely historical contextualization and the rejection of the atomistic approach in favour of a cohesive view of the Qur'an. But Rahman's methodology does not stop to these key features. Likewise, crucial in his methodology is the theory of prophecy and the nature of the revelation (1999, p. 11). What authors such as Wadud and Barlas take from Rahman is mainly the contingent and the universal principles of the Qur'an, his way of historicizing the text, but equally important was the role of the Prophet as receiver and mediator of the revelation (Saeed, 2004, p. 49). It appears that the Islamic feminist's attempt to find egalitarian meaning in the Qur'an leaves many unsatisfied whether in the conclusions or in the premises. The compelling work of Wadud and Barlas has received as publicity as much criticism from the academia. But, although, many of their peers have contested that the Qur'an cannot be upheld as neutral or against the patriarchy, none has shown interest in disproving through a methodological and epistemological analysis the conclusions of such works. Besides, the writings of Fazlur Rahman seem to be the key asset in the understanding of feminist tafsir. The relationship between Wadud and Barlas on one side, and Rahman on the other has not yet been clarified, thus, it is not obvious what features of modernism do they retain from the theory of the latter. As Barlas remarked (2019, p. 262) most of their critics have focused on discarding their project or refuting the principle-extraction altogether, but much can still be discussed within this framework. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze Qur'an and Woman and Believing women as the manifesto of Islamic feminism. This study addresses the methodology and epistemology used by the authors in light of the contribution of Fazlur Rahman on the Qur'anic interpretation.

The foremost question that I'll try to answer in this thesis is: to what extent do the works of Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas follow Fazlur Rahman hermeneutic? And how do they change? 4 Since most of the exegeses done with women as the main theme have not fully explored the possibilities a modernist approach can lead to; it seems that such analysis is in order to if we want to move on to further considerations or critiques. For this reason, and following the hints of the authors who critique Wadud and Barlas' commentaries, a second question will be: what is the reach of their hermeneutical models? Finally, I believe answering these questions entails an understanding of the exegete's experience of their religiosity as this can give more insights on their project. Therefore, the last question will be: how is their reading of the Qur'an shaped by their belief and social context? Methodology This study will be a documentary research, meaning that the methodology applied will be a library research. Specifically, is an examination of the views on tafsir of Wadud and Barlas through a comparison with the publications of Fazlur Rahman. Such an approach, therefore, follows the qualitative methods since this work will focus on interpretations and observation of tafasir and how to carry out a Qur'anic exegesis. However, this way of proceeding may have some pitfalls. The present study might benefit from a mixed methodology since a research that comprehends a quantitative method on the patriarchal verses and how they fit into the ethos of the Qur'an may improve drastically the depth of reflections we can propose on this topic.

3-Analysis and discussion of the main concepts:

3-1-Christian Feminist Epistemology:

While retracing the course of the literature on women and religion, it is important to bear in mind that for the most part it has sprung from the need to recognize the importance of the role played by women – with the purpose of showing the uniqueness of the female experience –, of analyzing the role of women in religion, of claiming equality between women and men, or of questioning gender inequality. For this reason, the sources of this re-examination are to be found in sociology and in the history of religions, in women and queer studies and in the history of feminism (Woodhead, 2001; Braidotti, 2008; Korte, 2011). Concerning the history of feminism, its first wave, as pointed out by Woodhead, was characterized by strong criticism of institutionalized religions, which was accused of promoting the submission of women both on a practical and symbolic level (2001). In this context, historical feminism is mainly anti-clerical and rejects religious tradition as being part of the dominant structure. On the other hand, religious women's rights movements also emerge within Christianity, as is the case with the Catholic *Société des féministes chrétiennes* and the Protestant *Mouvement Jeunes Femmes*, which are at the root of feminist theology (see Forcades, 2015; Stanton, 1895 and 1898). Therefore, the relationship between the secularization process and historical feminism is a complex and ambivalent one. Furthermore, many left the Christian religion and converted to other forms of religiosity (Höpflinger *et al*., 2012). In the '60s and '70s, also in connection with the so-called second wave of feminism and the achieving of women's rights, there was a growing interest in those forms of religiosity which subverted the hierarchy between genders or which excluded men, such as some New Age movements, faiths based on the Goddess Earth and theories based on forms of primal matriarchy and on a privileged bond between women and nature. This has not necessarily to do with the denying of religion, but rather with the acknowledging of the proper value of forms of religiosity – especially female ones – both outside (see Woodhead, 2001) and within traditional religions (Saiving, 1979; McLaughin, 1975). In the meantime, within traditional religions, holy texts started to become the object of a critical re-reading. The Protestant female minister Brackenbury Crook (1964), for example, offered a feminist reanalysis of theology and the Bible, while the Catholic theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1983), one of the female founders of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, used a feminist perspective with a political and hermeneutical slant in her re-reading of holy texts. Feminism too is confronted with religion. Thus for example the books of the radical feminist Mary Daly (1973), who is deeply critical of what she calls the sexism of the Catholic Church, are well known. At the opposite end, other feminisms (e.g. *black feminism* in the USA) combined political activism with strong religiosity within traditional religions (Lorde, 1984; hooks, 1990). In this regard, mention should be made of the extremely inspiring development of womanist theology, with its focus on the construction of black womanhood and its attention to the role of religion in the experience of black women (Walker, 1983). In the years that followed, the literature on this topic evolved and became more systematic, revolving around several key issues: the relationship between religion and women's rights, the relationship between 'West' and 'Islam' in the perspective of subaltern studies – leading to a reflection on the role of women in the Islamic religion and the relationship between religion and the construction of a gender identity. Four approaches seem especially relevant to a gender analysis of secularization.

First of all, feminist theology tends, to a great extent, to develop mainly within monotheistic traditions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism): the key issues are the re-reading of the holy texts from a feminist perspective and the exploring of creative strategies of "resistance" (among recent publications, see Barlas, 2002; Borresen, 2009; Briggs and Fulkerson, 2011; Henriques and Toldy, 2012; Ruether, 2007;

Kamitsuka, 2007; Vuola, 2011; Zorzi, 2014). Contemporary feminist theology views the notions of 'God', 'Christ', and 'Church' as symbolic places around which religious communities build their faith and practices, i.e., as the basic notions, or elaborate forms of symbolic knowledge, underlying such communities (Vuola, 2009: 220). Keeping this in mind, the tension in the relationship between religion and women's rights is understood more as a historical contingency than an irreconcilable difference.

A second particularly significant field of study is the analysis of female devotion. The studies on spiritual movements or on New Religious Movements testify to the variety of experiences and to the ways of building and using sexual identity and gender relationships (Fedele, 2013; Fedele and Knibbe, 2013) as well as of exploring the female dimension of spirituality (Sointu and Woodhead, 2008) [5]. Other studies focus instead on the forms of female religiosity and the role of women and men in monotheistic and traditional religions, especially in conservative and fundamentalist religious forms, showing that there exist various types of agency and power for women (Deeb, 2006; Sudda, 2010; Mahmood, 2005). This second field of studies sheds light on the construction of the religious female subject in a secular age.

The third important trend in the literature involves studies within feminism or on feminism. In the former case, some feminists involved in forms of alternative spirituality analyze, from the point of view of gender studies, the deconstructive and generative power of a number of religious practices, such as heresy and profanation, in relation to male and female identity (Starhawk, 1999). In the latter case, studies on religious feminism rethink the relationship between female emancipation, women's rights, agency and religious forms. Studies of womanism, black feminism and Islamic feminism are particularly interesting in that they critically re-read European and North-American feminism from a post-colonial point of view. With regard to Islamic feminism in particular, female academics like Gole (2000), Ahmed (1992), Yamani (1996) and Mir-Housseini (1999) address – although from different perspectives – the relationships between religion and women's agency, showing that a feminism deeply-rooted in religion does exist. In her excellent reconstruction, Stéphanie Latte Abdallah recognizes three different traditions of Islamic feminism: a critical theology movement, formed mainly by female academics, which offers a universalistic analysis and an Islamic feminism that amounts to a "universal, post-identity, hybrid and certainly post-colonial feminism" (2013: 222); a second current of religious feminist activists, which adopts a pragmatic activist perspective tightly linked to citizenship and which firmly criticizes laws that are seen as discriminatory against women; and a third movement made up of exponents of political Islam, engaged in the defense of women's rights in the public sphere while valuing the role of women with regard to morals and family life.

Lastly, gender and queer studies of religion analyze the construction of gender and sexual identities and practices of resistance and negotiation within religious traditions (Althaus-Reid, 2003; Loughlin, 2007; Browne *et al*., 2010; Schippert, 2011). We can identify three types of contributions. A relevant part of such studies focus on the relationships between sexual orientation and religious practices, identity, and beliefs (Wilcox, 2012 and 2009), for example by analyzing homosexuality in several religious traditions (Bergeaud-Blackler, 2013). Another relevant focus concerns the analysis of the construction of gendered subjects and gender differences in religions (see, for example, the recent studies on the construction of the male subject – Krondorfer, 2009; Sawyer, 2004). A third type of contributions use a queer perspective to analyze the complex and manifold intertwining of religious and gender identity, especially with regard to "intimate" citizenship (Plummer, 2003), that is, all aspects related to the right

to make an individual choice of one's body, values, romantic relationship and sexual and gender identities (see, for example, the collective volume *Queering Religion, Religious Queers,* Taylor, 2014). These studies support the questioning not just of the binary constructions of gender identity (male/female) and sexual orientation (hetero-, homo-, bi-sexual), but also of the binary construction of the religious v. secular subject, making room for a more nuanced and consistent analysis of the social and political implications of these binary frames. Broadly speaking, these studies call into question the implicit dichotomy between religion and sexual rights, showing how "feminists and queer activists cannot be simply secular, or be secular in a simple or self-evident sense" (Braidotti, 2008: 4), because the – secular – society in which they live is the same society that limits their emancipation. At the same time, they suggest a different analytical perspective, based on the intersectional subject rather than binary categorizations.

The analysis of the literature on women, gender, and religion highlights four important elements. First, the fight for women's rights does not evolve solely within a process of secularization, as is clearly shown by the experiences of religious feminism as well as by feminist and womanist theologies. Second, female emancipation from subordinate or unequal relationships is not exclusively related to forms of political agency; there are several forms of agency, even within religious traditions, and the role of women in religion is a complex and diverse one. Third, a secular context does not guarantee rights and self-determination; the fight of historical feminism and the more recent fight for rights on the part of LGBT movements show that a secular state does not automatically guarantee full citizenship for all its inhabitants. Fourth, an analysis that is based on practices of identity (gender, sexual, religious/secular) rather than on categorized subjects may be more effective and consistent for the analysis of the role of religion in contemporary societies.

3-2- Islamic Feminist Epistemology:

Feminists strongly believe Islam is not incompatible with modern social movements. As a matter of fact, the origin of Islam has seen the rise of women in the societal context. In the Qur'an and the ahadith (sing. hadith), there is proof of equal exchange between the women of the earlier companions and the Prophet. This makes women in direct control of the development of the first Muslim communities, and included in Islam′s formative discussion. Feminists strongly believe Islam is not incompatible with modern social movements. A definition of Islamic feminism and patriarchy is in order if we want to establish what category to analyze when reading the Qur'an. After all, Barlas claims that most of the mistakes in the hermeneutics of ungendered readings of the Qur′an come from a misrepresentation of notions (2019, p. 13). It is not easy to pinpoint the exact meaning of these words since there is not a unified definition. Scholars take one of the concepts these words represent and adapt them to their own agendas. What it comes out of this are different shades of words, each of them with a distinct implication. This is specifically the case for the phrase ″Islamic feminism″, written both with or without capital first letters. If some refuse it and see it as an oxymoron (Yassine, 2008), others accept it as it "advocates women's rights, gender equality, and social justice using Islamic discourse as its paramount discourse" (Badran, 2002). While in early stages of what is now called Islamic feminism, the term was disputed, it is nowadays uniformly accepted as to reclaim it from those who saw the project incompatible with Islam. It is also a way of contesting a binary way of reasoning:

secular/religious, West/Islamic feminism (Badran, 2009). These categories have to be acknowledged as a response to a confrontation with different cultures to the Islamic one, but cannot limitate themselves for the same reason. Although the meaning has changed with time and is still undergoing changes in meaning, Islamic feminism creates problem to scholars of different background. The perspective with which they analyze the term and the project they have in mind changes significantly the facets of the phrase. Ultimately, if some neglects the need to specify the egalitarian purpose behind the name ″ Islamic feminism″ given the fact that Qur'an is already equalitarian in its essence, others embrace the name as most representative of their overall project. In this study, the use of Islamic feminism aims to the movement that seeks to study Islam (specifically the Qur'an) from a female perspective. It uses women's lenses as a category of analysis among other possible ones. The continuum in which I situate this term is in the discourse of misogynist tradition produced in the history of Islam, in other words, the struggle to lay claim women′s part in Islam. Patriarchy is another controversial issue. When it comes down to the Middle East the matter is mixed with reminiscences of colonialist connotations. Falling into the trap of orientalism is what makes the definition of patriarchy so diverse among scholars of Islamic studies (Said, *Orientalism*, 1978) . It is, again, a matter of perspectives. The definition of patriarchy given by the Cambridge Dictionary is: ″a society in which the oldest male is the leader of the family, or a society controlled by men in which they use their power to their own advantage.″ What is clear from this definition is that there is a duality of meaning. The advantages of this phrasing are that on one side there′s the Man being the dominant figure of the family- and by extension of the society-, and on the other, there′s the Man as the catalyzer of human- and divine- knowledge. In other words, it incorporates both the breadwinner aspect and the power-centered aspect of the term, both of which are present in the authors we are going to study. This definition, also, introduces hierarchy into consideration. Contesting the idea that the Qur′an has started gender hierarchy into society is another mission that Islamic feminism has tried to debunk since the origin of the movement. Barlas's definition focuses on the relationship between the ″privileged figure of male/father as seen in direct contact with its divine nature (God′s connection) and female as unclean, weak, and sinful" (2019, pp. 1-2). It is a definition of patriarchy focused on biological differences. Her conception of gender hierarchy goes in line with Murata (1992, p.44) which states that differences in gender are not compatible with God′s creation, and are barely earthly representations of material differences". Murata concludes that ″for God, only faith is the canon of evaluation". Wadud's view on the patriarchy is deeply embedded in history. Showing a major concern with its historical connotation, Wadud (1999, p. 80) sees the revelation as part of the process in the changing society of the Arabian Peninsula. Her definition of pre-Islamic society-a patriarchal one- is of "a culture built on a structure of domination and subordination which demands hierarchy″. In this description of patriarchy, Wadud, is recognizing thetendency of the Arabs of the time to lean on converging power towards an elitist structure, in this case, a gender hierarchy.As we′ll later see from Egyptian professor El-Azhary Sonbol′s study, Wadud is already

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

4-Conclusion:

This paper attempts to provides a theoretical and analytical implications of the feminist epistemological analyses while dealing with women's rights, agency and the deconstruction of gender roles, where religion is often perceived as an obstacle. Indeed, many religious agents involved in the debate take a firm stand against some typically feminist issues and against the concept of gender itself. Wadud and Barlas, who both argue in favor of deconstructing this relationship, point out that, even if women's rights have been achieved primarily in secularized environments, from a historical point of view there is no necessary connection between secularization and the promotion of women's rights. For this reason, the analysis of women's role in religion and of the contributions of religious feminism could offer an interesting approach to a further examination of the issue. Interest in the "women and religion" theme has developed through various phases. In the '60s and '70s many European and North-American female researchers began to focus on the analysis of female religious experience, often starting from a feminist point of view internal to the most common religious traditions. Studies and analyses on this topic evolved in an interdisciplinary perspective, involving mainly sociology, history of religions, and feminist studies. The "women and religions" theme has become increasingly appealing in the European academic world, especially since the second half of the '90s, and has moved beyond the disciplinary limits within which it was prevalently confined.

This increasing resonance can be explained in various ways. Firstly, the issue of religion and its role and place in contemporary societies in general is attracting growing interest among non-specialized scholars, as is underlined by Badran (2009). Secondly, the experience and the role of women in religion became more relevant, especially when compared with non-Christian religious traditions in the context of migration. In a more general way, the influence of these factors can be placed within a much broader transformation in the theoretical apparatuses of the social sciences, alongside the development of specific interests in alterity, which contributed to the questioning of the implicit assumptions of the analytical categories used to analyze social processes. More generally, all theoretical movements born within the discursive turn in the social sciences. Broadly speaking, these studies shed light on the plurality of the constructions of the male and female subject in various denominations as well as the plurality of religious experiences, both within traditional religions and in non-mainstream forms of religiosity that overturn gender hierarchy. We observed theological implications and how they can shape the overall hermeneutical process. Particularly I pointed out how the affiliation with the rationalist doctrine Mu'tazilah was crucial in defining their methodology. Even though they diverge in their project- since Wadud is focusing only on gender inclusiveness- both Rahman and Wadud believe

a new Qurʹanic interpretation can be achieved through reasoning (ijtihad*)*. Barlas openly adopts an opposite stance on the theological debate, for she offers a paradigm that operates within the framework of Islamic orthodoxy. While for Rahman the revelation is both a human and a divine product, Barlas believes in the uncreatedness of the Qurʹan and, therefore, its indivisibility. Lastly, the flaws in Wadud's work is to find expressions of gender equity in a text where such terminology was not implied (Badran, 2001). This reduces the range of confusability that her view may have and more importantly, reducing the extent of Wadud's methodology in other fields. Conversely, Rahman's Qurʹanic message was intended as universal, making its applicability to the gender issue possible and preferred. Barlas too starts her hermeneutic with the intent of disproving misogynist readings of the Qur'an rather than finding a universal message. Barlas' self-disclosure principles, as she calls them, suffice to the feminist readings but do not sufficiently extend to other scopes.

5- BIBLIOGRAPHY:

-Ahmed, Leila. *Women and gender in Islam: Historical roots of a modern debate.* Yale:University Press, 1992.
-Aichele G. and Phillips G. A. "Exegesis, Eisegesis, Intergesis." *Semeia* , 69-70, (1995.
-Al-Hibri, Azizah Y. *Women and Islam.* Oxford: Pergamon, 1982.
"A study of Islamic herstory: Or how did we ever get into this mess?" *Women's Studies Internat ional Forum* 5, no. 2 (1982): 207-219.
-Ali, Kecia. "Timeless Texts and Modern Morals: Challenges in Islamic Sexual Ethics." In *New Directions in Islamic Thought: Exploring Reform and Muslim Tradition,* ed. by Kari Vogt, Lena Larsen, and Christian Moe, 89-99. New York: LB. Tauris, 2009.
-Al-Sharmani, Mul ki. "Marriage in Islamic Interpretive Tradition: Revisiting the Legal and the Ethical." *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 2, no. 1-2 (2018): 76-96.
-Ammad, Sana, and Hashimi, S. J. Ahmad. "Hermeneutical Models Proposed by Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas for the Exegesis of the Qur'an- An Analytical Overview." *Hazara Islamicus* 5, no. 1 (2016): 1-18.
- Arkoun, Mohammed. "The concept of authority in Islamic thought." In *Islam: State and Society,* ed. by Klaus Ferdinand and Mehdi Mozaffer, 53-73. London: Curzon Press, 1988.
-Badran, Margot. "Islamic Feminism: What's in a Name?" *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences.* Oxford: One world, 2009.
- Barlas, Asma. *Believing women in Islam: Unreading patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.
- "Secular and Feminist Critiques of the Qur'an: Anti-Hermeneutics as Liberation?" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 32, no. 2 (2016): 111-121.
-Bauer, Karen, ed., *Aims, Methods, and Contexts of Qur'anic Exegesis, 2nd/8th – 9th/15th Centuries.* Oxford: Oxford University Press in Association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013.
-Böwering, Gerhard. "Time." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an,* ed. by Jane D. McAuliffe, Vol. 5, 278-290. Leiden: Brill, 2001.
-Burge, Stephen R. "The Search for Meaning: Tafsīr, Hermeneutics, and Theories of Reading." *Arabica* 62, no. 1 (2015): 53-73.
-El-Azhary Sonbol, Amira. "Rethinking women and Islam." In *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,* ed. by Yvonne Y. Haddad, John L. Esposito, 108-146. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001.
-Esack, Farid. *Qur'an, Liberation & Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression.* Oxford: one world, 1998.

-Gilliot, Claude, "Exegesis of the Qur'an: Classical and Medieval." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an,* ed. by Jane D. McAuliffe, Vol. 2, 99-124. Leiden: Brill, 2001.
-Hanafi, Hassan. "Method of Thematic Interpretation of the Qur'an." In *The Qur'an as Text,*ed. by Stefan Wild. Leiden: Brill, 1996.
-Hassan, Riffat. "Made from Adam's rib: The woman's creation question." *Al-Mushir Theological Journal of the Christian Study Centre* 27, no. 1 (1985): 110-124.
-Hidayatullah, Aysha A. *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
-Hourani, George F. *Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of 'Abd al- Jabbar.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.
-Jesse, Mary Catherine. *A Modern Muslim Intellectual: The Thought of Fazlur Rahman with Special Reference to Reason.* Regina: University of Regina Press, 1991.
-Leemhuis, Fred. "Origins and early development of the tafsir tradition." In *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an,* ed by. Andrew Rippin, 13-30. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
-Lerner, Gerda. *The creation of patriarchy.* Vol. 1. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
-Mernissi, Fatima. *The veil and the male elite: A feminist interpretation of women's rights in Islam.* Translated by Mary Jo Lakeland Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 1991.
-Murata, Sachiko. *Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.
-Muttaqin, Farid. "Early Feminist Consciousness and Idea Among Muslim Women in 1920s Indonesia." *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 3, no. 1 (2015): 19-38.
- Nagel, Tilman. "Theology and the Qur'an." In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an,* ed. by Jane D. McAuliffe, Vol. 6, 256-275. Leiden: Brill, 2001.
-Netton, Ian R. *Allah Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology.* New York: Routledge, 1989.
-Powers, David S. "The exegetical genre Nasikh al-Qur'an wa Mansukhuhu." In *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an,* ed. by. Andrew Rippin, 117-138. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
-Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam.* 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.
Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition. Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 1984.
Major Themes of the Qur'an. Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980.
Revival and reform in Islam. Oxford: one world, 1999.
-Rhouni, Raja. *Secular and Islamic feminist critiques in the work of Fatima Mernissi.* Leiden: Brill, 2010.
-Saeed, Abdullah. "Fazlur Rahman: a framework for interpreting the ethico-legal content of the Qur'an." In *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an,* ed. by Suha Taji-Faruki, Vol. 1, 37-65. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Saeed, Abdullah. *Interpreting the Qur'ān: towards a Contemporary Approach.* New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).
-Schacht, Joseph. *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950.
-Toshihiko, Izutsu. *God and Man in the Koran.* Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964.
-Völker, Katharina. "Two Accounts of Qur'anic Revelation." In *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 26, no. 3 (2015): 271-286.
-Wadud, Amina. *Qur'an and woman: Rereading the sacred text from a woman's perspective.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
Inside The Gender Jihad: Women Reform's in Islam. Oxford: one world, 2006.
-Zayd, Nasr Hamid Abu. *Reforma tion of Islamic thought: A critical historical analysis.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006.