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Claims to the Sacred

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Source: *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Fall 2016), pp. 134-138

Published by: Indiana University Press on behalf of FSR, Inc

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/jfemistudreli.32.2.22>

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Men in Charge? takes up only two concepts, both of which are asymmetrical and were the building blocks of every aspect of male superiority that has been in practice and was part of a mindset for perhaps fourteen centuries: *qiwamah* and *wilayah*. Both are interpreted to deliver subservience of the female to the male in every kind of relationship between them: parent to child, brother to sister, and husband to wife. Once a means to overcome this asymmetry is proposed using the primary text to support it, then the path to transforming both the ethics and the politics of gender hegemony and all other forms of oppression is made transparent. Furthermore, this is built upon the faith-based location of accepting the Most Holy as partner in this liberation and even as its primary architect.

The *Tawhidic* paradigm is also useful in addressing the stagnation over issues of international human rights. If the human being is seen as only one part of a set of dynamic relationships that includes other human beings and the sacred, then *Tawhid* becomes the rubric for equality and justice. Instead, the way Hidayatullah has read it, God stands at one lonely spot in a rigid, literal triangle. As a result, transformation cannot come about. I can only wager that she missed this because it is missing in her experience; for that, I can only offer hope for a broader perspective through a more intimate experience. But she is free to maintain her location, which is the exact place of patriarchal readers, and for the moment, still the dominant reading, the one we are still working to dismantle.

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CLAIMS TO THE SACRED

Aysha A. Hidayatullah

It makes sense to me that my book *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* could mask the deep ambivalence, theological struggle, and faithful search that produced

Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 32.2 (2016), 134–138

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it. After all, academic books, in order to be published, must read in a tone of assertiveness that may, or perhaps even must, obscure the vulnerability and tentativeness of the transformations entailed in the act of writing them. I had anticipated the problem of this very masking and had attempted to address it in a careful preface to the book. In hindsight, I was perhaps mistaken, as a first-time book author at the start of my career, to imagine that a mere preface, or maybe any well-intentioned efforts of my own, could preempt misunderstandings related to that obfuscation. How else, then, could a reading of my book, such as Asma Barlas's, draw such bold, demarcating lines around my positions so as to question my standing as a Muslim and attribute my efforts to an anti-Qur'an stance?

I have asked myself: What are the conditions that produce such misunderstanding? How could such a reading of my book happen at all? What *kind* of response is Barlas's? In the field of feminist scholarship about the Qur'an, can there be a critique of other scholars' works that does not appear to—or actually—dismiss them? Is it possible to disagree theologically in a manner that builds and edifies? Can we actually talk with each other at all across major disagreements?

Barlas suggests that my engagement with feminist exegesis of the Qur'an was a detour I could have avoided if I wanted simply to repeat patriarchal assessments of the Qur'anic text. I submit that it was not a detour but a journey that itself generated the positions I reach in my book, and it was Barlas's work that in fact helped make *Feminist Edges* possible. Her work, and that of others I draw upon, forged a path that I have traced and followed in my own way. When I traced that path, it led me to different conclusions that even I did not expect, ones that have suggested to me that a new direction of thinking is needed to step out of a methodological quagmire I point to in feminist exegesis of the Qur'an. Grappling with feminist Qur'anic exegesis, of which Barlas is a pioneering scholar, was central to the process that led me to the conclusion that a reassessment of the Qur'an's revelatory nature is in order—a position which, I might add, grants me the ability *not* to abandon the Qur'an as a sacred text. My mistake, perhaps, was in hoping that my contributions in *Feminist Edges* might be readily seen as an expansion of feminist work on the Qur'an, as a critical and deeply felt tribute to the groundbreaking work of my predecessors, rather than a dismissal of it. I now fear the consequences of this miscalculation, and I am left asking what this might imply about the field.

In *Feminist Edges*, I am careful not to claim that the Qur'an is an intractably patriarchal text. I argue that the application of feminist exegetical methods to the Qur'an has reached an impasse from our vantage point as contemporary readers. Both the Qur'an's egalitarian and hierarchical meanings are significant elements of the text that exist alongside each other, and I am unconvinced that we can find clear support in the text itself for privileging either set of meanings

over the other. This means we cannot definitively establish that the Qur'anic text coheres with contemporary values of male-female equality. I reach—with an anguish that perhaps cannot register with every reader—a place of *uncertainty* about the text's reconcilability with contemporary values of male-female equality. This is a deeply engaged (or what I call “radical”) uncertainty, which has led to some theological disorientations for me as a Muslim that, while very painful for me to bear, also free me to be hopeful that one can cope with and survive that uncertainty as both a Muslim and feminist.

Given the major differences between my positions and Barlas's claims about my book, again, how is a reading like hers made possible? My respect for Asma Barlas's erudition and the fact of my being quite well understood by so many other readers cause me to rule out the possibility that this is a simple case of misunderstanding what I have written.

In the limited space of this short response, one way to examine what could be at work here is to say more about why we cannot equate God and the Qur'an, something which is significant to what I argue in *Feminist Edges*. It is not unusual among Muslims to hold that the Qur'an does not encompass all of God's revelation to humankind. Another uncontroversial observation is that the Qur'an is God's *revelation to humans*, and I cannot encounter the Qur'an except through my limited human faculties. Now, if I maintain my belief—as a Muslim—in a just and all-knowing God, but the meanings I am able to derive from the Qur'anic text, after a faithful struggle with it, do not definitively cohere with notions of male-female equality, then I am prompted to deduce that the Qur'an could be God's speech directed to human beings in a different way than I have assumed thus far. This deduction does not seek to reduce God or the Qur'an to a human experience of God or my contemporary sense of justice. Rather it means that, since I can only experience God's revelation and justice as a human being, my *human* encounter with the Qur'an must be adjusted.

If we treat the Qur'an as a “repository” of principles, norms, or values that are simply to be extracted from it (to draw from the language of other scholars Barlas cited), we will extract meanings of male-female mutuality in some textual cases but also the meanings of male-female hierarchy in other textual cases. These meanings will continue to be taken up and/or privileged selectively by those who are interested in either interpretive agendas of egalitarianism or interpretive agendas of patriarchy and lay claim to what the text says. (It is in this sense that we notice a methodological parallelism between both interpretive approaches, even while appreciating their important differences.) But when we view these meanings comprehensively rather than selectively, and if I am correct that there is no clear reason based on the text itself to privilege one set of meanings over the other, then I must confront the possibility that the Qur'an may not be reconcilable with contemporary values of male-female equality, and thus face the false paradox implied between the justice of God and the Qur'an.

I submit that this false paradox is produced precisely by treating the Qur'an as a repository of norms. Treating the text in this manner and trying to avoid the false paradox this treatment produces, encourages a form of ventriloquism whereby we present the text as saying things *for* us which it perhaps does not coherently support, instead of claiming the human authority to privilege some meanings of the Qur'an over others when the text does not offer clear support for doing so. This is the set of observations that led me to conclude that the text should be understood as God's revelation differently than it has been in much of feminist scholarship on the Qur'an. My position is that feminist scholarship on the Qur'an should reassess the revelatory nature of the text in a manner that allows for interpretive roles beyond extraction.

While Barlas seems to view the problem of deriving unjust meanings from the Qur'an as well as its solution as *hermeneutical*, I understand both to be primarily *theological*. That is to say, I understand the interpretive contradictions we encounter in feminist exegesis to be symptoms of a problem with how we understand what kind of revelatory text the Qur'an is and how God speaks to us through it. Since the problem is theological, so must its solution be theological. I believe that this theological way of proceeding is the best way of avoiding the false paradox between God's justice and the Qur'an.

While drawing out the differences between Barlas's positions and my own, it is important to also note our shared theological starting points: the premises of a just God and the Qur'an as the sacred revelation of God. After these starting points, we then diverge on how to proceed in understanding the relationship between a just God and God's sacred revelation, and how that revelation is sacred. I hold that we should reassess *how exactly*—that is, in what way—the Qur'an is the word of God. To be clear, there is a world of difference between denying the sacredness of the Qur'an and seeking to understand the complexities of how exactly it is sacred.

Thus, I would submit that, if we were to understand the Qur'an as a discourse (following the route suggested by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd), then we *would* best approach the Qur'an as a sacred discourse. Working out potential theological solutions is a vast and difficult project to which I hope to contribute in the future. For now, I would agree that in proceeding, we must absolutely be vigilant against the imperial projects of which Saba Mahmood speaks (as I suggest in *Feminist Edges*). This will necessitate a careful engagement with the larger field of anthropological scholarship on secularism where Mahmood is a central thinker. That field has not only deftly undermined the binarization of "religious" and "secular" but also rigorously analyzed the genealogical relationship between secular liberal political projects and modern modes of Muslim religious authority—a relationship that, as it turns out, directly informs contemporary declarations that certain views on the Qur'an are heretical, blasphemous, or outside the bounds of Islam.

This, of course, brings me to Barlas's assessments of heresy, blasphemy, and things no Muslim would ever do. In presenting her normative claims about the Qur'an as though they are self-evident, and in drawing the demarcating lines she does around the possibilities for legitimate Muslim views, what kind of religious authority is Barlas invoking? That Barlas does not recognize the positions I reach in *Feminist Edges* as the product of a faithful search by a Muslim makes me unsure about the potential of the field of feminist scholarship on the Qur'an to expand through intellectual and theological disagreements without reinscribing the same kinds of demarcating lines and boundaries the field arose to challenge. I can only hope that moving forward, scholars in the field (including myself) will be willing to accept the unintended results of our work as part of new directions in the field and to disagree with them productively, rather than disowning or denouncing them as a kind of heresy.

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BEYOND THE TEXT: BETWEEN ISLAM AND FEMINISM
Fatima Seedat

My contribution to this roundtable addresses the space between Islam and feminism and ventures to imagine what might be “beyond” the text to illustrate how, at this interstice, the Qur'an may remain central to Muslim meaning making yet open to evolving understandings of justice. Caught under the weight of Margot Badran's now well-rehearsed approach to Muslim women's equality work under the label “Islamic feminism,” Asma Barlas finds her work so “inextricably linked” that in responding to her critics she finds herself also responding on behalf of Islamic feminism. For the feminists among her critics, Barlas argues, Islamic feminism is “a straw woman on which they cut their academic teeth but without taking it seriously” (112).

Theorizing against the easy convergence of Islam and feminism as Islamic feminism, I have argued instead for a tentative engagement that neither inflates nor conflates the distance between the two intellectual paradigms but maintains a productive tension that lends itself to translucence rather than transparency