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A HERMENEUTICAL EXAMINATION OF CREATION IN ISLAM AT GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

by

NDOLA M'BALIA OWUO-HAGOOD

Under the Direction of Kathryn McClymond

ABSTRACT

In traditional Islam, Adam is the first human created. Eve, or *Hawa,* was created to be his mate and she was made from Adam's uppermost left rib. There has been a move to argue that Eve and Adam were created simultaneously. I will argue that, because of the negative patriarchal and misogynistic imagery that has been attached to Islam, some feminist Muslim thinkers are attempting to move Islam into a realm where they believe is revolutionary enough to make a new statement in the modern world. These feminist Muslims are making strides to make the Qur'an the sole authority in Islam, while simultaneously dismissing all traditional accounts that have historically been used to assist in interpreting the Qur'an. Although their conclusions are interesting, their methods will be the focus of my thesis. What these feminists are attempting is a method of interpretation that has never been widely accepted in Islam.

INDEX WORDS: Eve, Adam, Creation, Exegesis, Hermeneutics, Scripture, Islam, Interpretive authority

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NDOLA M'BALIA OWUO-HAGOOD

A Thesis Submitted In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2010

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Ndola M'Balia Owuo-Hagood
2010

A HERMENEUTICAL EXAMINATION OF CREATION IN ISLAM AT GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Allah subhana wa-taAllah who has endowed me with the capacity to increase in knowledge and wisdom and has guided my path thus far.

I dedicate this thesis to my children, Aziza, the little one who is due any day now as well as any the future may hold. I sacrificed my time, money and energy to achieve this accomplishment so that I can not only better prepare myself to be gainfully employed but also to give you all something to aspire toward.

I dedicate this thesis to my husband who has pushed me when I wanted him to and when I wished to be left alone, who has supported me, loved me, encouraged me, reinforced me, financed my dreams and assisted in bringing them to fruition.

I dedicate this thesis to my parents who have never allowed less than my best, who have seen me at my absolute worst and still love me more than I can imagine.

I dedicate this thesis to my amazing family and friends who were consistently in my corner, giving me confidence when I was hesitant, providing care for Aziza when I was too fatigued to continue and continuously reassuring me that I could and would realize my goals.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to you, the reader, with the hope that it will assist you in your pursuit of knowledge.

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1INTRODUCTION

In traditional Islam, the Qur'an has been interpreted using stringent methods and any *bid'a*, or innovation, employed was considered both blasphemous and hazardous. Over the last century, however, scholars of Islam have begun using modern methods of exegesis while arguing for the application of their innovative interpretations. By "exegesis," I mean the practice of scriptural analysis and interpretation, and the term "hermeneutics" will be used to denote an analytical or critical study of these interpretations.

I intend to analyze the various exegetical practices of several contemporary Muslim thinkers, using each of them to help understand the work of the others. Throughout this thesis, by traditional I will mean the methods and applications of Sunni Islam. Traditionally, orthodox Sunni Islam has adhered to fairly strict exegetical and hermeneutical methods. Whenever there has been a point of contention, the scholars of the day would research and debate the topic, eventually disseminating their results throughout their community. These decisions would be based on the Qur'an, the *ahadith* and the commentaries on both. In literary tradition over the last century, a new trend has developed in that more scholars of Islam, especially those in academia, feel less obligated to depend on traditional exegetical and hermeneutical methods and often disregard any literary sources aside from the Qur'an. This attempt to rely on one text as authoritative is akin to the way many Christians have utilized the Bible since the Protestant Reformation. I intend to analyze a representative group of scholars from within an Islamic framework, some of whom, for a variety of reasons, exclusively use the Qur'an in their arguments. In doing this, I intend to demonstrate some exegetical methods of Qur'anic study and what can potentially be gained or lost in the different methods. This is important because although there has always been flexibility in Qur'anic interpretation, there have also always been

boundaries which Qur'anic exegetes remained within. By incorporating new methods of exegesis into the more traditional ones, it is possible that the understanding of Islam may undergo a drastic shift. The focus of this analysis will be on interpretive arguments about the creation of Eve and Adam in the Qur'an.

This paper consists of three major sections. First, I provide some background information about Islam. In this section, I quickly explain some of the basic tenets of Islam as well as Islamic traditions that have had the most impact on traditional Sunni exegesis and hermeneutics. In addition, I explain the concept of revelation from a traditional Sunni point of view. Also, throughout this thesis I have chosen to use Yusuf Ali's *The Qur'an Translation* when I found it necessary to provide direct quotes from the Qur'an. Next, I provide some background information about the five exegetes whose arguments are examined in this thesis. Subsequently, I comparatively analyze the argument of five scholars who provide various arguments, mostly about the creation of, and relationship between, Eve and Adam. This is done in an attempt to demonstrate some of the disparities among Muslim exegetes and their methods. Finally, in my conclusion I summarize the topics with which I have been dealing as an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the various exegetical methods surveyed.

2 BACKGROUND

As with many religions and traditions, Islam is extremely complex in its beliefs and practices. For the purposes of this thesis, I will be referring to the most commonly shared beliefs of Sunni Muslims who practice and observe the *sunna,* or traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. I will begin by laying out the historical tradition of Islam. Classical or orthodox Islam heavily relies on traditional interpretative methods which include the use of the Qur'an, *ahadith*, and other sources (such as writings of scholars and the informed opinion of believers in Islam). Plainly put, the *ahadith* are a collection of the *sunna*. When used in an Islamic context, *ahadith* refer to the traditions of the last Prophet of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad. They include, but are not limited to, any and everything that he said or did not say, the way he dressed, the way he wore his hair and even the way in which he relieved himself. Traditional Muslims use the *ahadith* to inform and guide their daily decisions. It is important to develop a clear understanding of the traditional beliefs within Islam in order to understand the methods of both Riffat Hassan and G. F. Haddad.

Observant Muslims consider Islam to be a complete way of life. There are five basic "pillars," or tenets, to which Muslims ascribe. Although the exact pillars are not important for the purposes of this thesis, it is important to note that they are all orthopraxic and not simply orthodoxic. In addition to these pillars, there are six articles of faith in which every Muslim must believe. They are more theological in nature. While all these articles are an important aspect of Islam, my primary focus will be on the third, which is the belief in God's word which has been revealed to man and *jinn*. God has been revealing Himself and His word to humankind since the first people were created. A prophet is someone who has been specially chosen by God to lead

their people in God's way. The belief in revelation is central to the religion of Islam because in Islam, there is a strong emphasis on revealed scripture.

The holy book of Islam was revealed in Arabic, a root-based language. This is an extremely important aspect of Qur'anic exegesis because, in Arabic, simply having an understanding of a word is insufficient. One must also know and understand the root and be familiar with most or all of the words that are derived from that root. Also, many words are best understood by understanding the meaning of their root. The tri-consonantal root of the Qur'anic word that is commonly translated as "revelation" or "to reveal" is W-H-Y. It can also be understood as "to inspire," "to incite," or to refer to a sound or noise like thunder. In Islam, God is the creator of all and, according to Yahya Michot, "it is as if creation were nothing but an occasion for revelation" (Winter 181). In other words, Michot sees revelation as one of the primary reasons for which humankind was created as well as integral to having a relationship with God. Therefore, the revelation and inspiration that are divinely based are also reasons for humankind's existence. As such, revelation is an important link between the Creator (God) and the creation.

> However great His creative power would be, a God who would not do anything else and, specifically, would not communicate with humans, would be a remote abstract principle closer to the prime mover of Aristotle's metaphysics than to the God of the Qur'an. The latter has indeed frequently spoken and has been the source of innumerable revelations in different ages. (Michot 181)

According to traditional Sunni beliefs, God has sent at least one prophet to every group of people that has ever existed. Each prophet has come with the same essential message: there is only one God and the people should worship Him alone, without partner.

> To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what God hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If God had so willed, He would have made

> you a single People, but (His Plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute. (Ali, Qur'an 5:51)

According to tradition, the message has not changed since Prophet Adam, the first man and messenger but the way each prophet conveyed the message to his people was slightly different. As mentioned before, prophets are people who are specially chosen by God to lead their people in God's way. A messenger is a prophet in the sense that this duty is bestowed on them. However, they have the added responsibility of receiving revelation and being accountable for disseminating it to their followers. Therefore, some practices may be different, such as manners of prayer or dietary restrictions.

Although God does reveal Himself to creatures of all kinds, He makes it clear that there are boundaries that He chooses to maintain while revealing Himself or His word. The *surah* titled *Shura,* or "Consultation," says, "It is not fitting for a man that God should speak to him except by inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by the sending of a Messenger to reveal, with God's permission, what God wills: for He is Most High, Most Wise" (Ali, Qur'an 42:51).

There are three ways God communicates with humankind. The first is direct inspiration, either while awake or asleep. This "comes directly from God to the person intended, without voice or messenger. The person who receives it 'understands' that it is from God" (Saeed 31). This is not meant to imply that the receiver of the message actually sees God.

The second is when God addresses one from behind a veil, "without the hearer's seeing the one who speaks, since in His essence God is invisible" (Saeed 31). The primary difference between these is the directness of the contact. A prominent example is the case of Moses at Mount Sinai. "And We called him from the right side of Mount (Sinai), and made him draw near to Us for mystic (converse)" (Ali, Qur'an 19:52). *Surah* 20 explains this in more detail:

> Has the story of Moses reached thee? Behold, he saw a fire: so he said to his family, 'Tarry ye; I perceive a fire; perhaps I can bring you some burning brand there from, or find some guidance at the fire.' But when he came to the fire, a voice was heard: 'O Moses! Verily I am thy Lord! Therefore (in My presence) put off thy shoes: thou art in the sacred valley Tuwa. I have chosen thee: listen, then, to the inspiration (sent to thee). Verily I am God: there is no god but I: so serve thou Me (only), and establish regular prayer for celebrating My praise. (Ali, Qur'an 20:9-14)

The third way in which God communicates with humankind is through a messenger angel who brings God's word to the recipient. For example, in the Qur'an it reads, "Say: Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel –for he brings down the (revelation) to thy heart by God's will, a confirmation of what went before, and guidance and glad tidings for those who believe" (Ali, Qur'an 2:97). It was such a messenger angel who caused Muhammad to "recite."

In Sunni tradition, the Qur'an is interpreted using a very particular form of exegesis or *tafsir*. "These works [*tafsirs*], which number in the thousands, were written, and continue to be written, as attempts to explicate the meaning of the Qur'an" (Rippin I:45). Additionally, as Rippin points out, "any worker in the field of *tafsir* should be able to testify [that], one person's ambiguous verse is another person's obvious or clear verse." He adds, "a simplistic use of a term of interpretation (and, potentially, of polemic) must always be guarded against" (Rippin XI: 227). Basically, Rippin is arguing that the *tafsir* literature is an immense body of literature and that the interpretation of each verse has a varying level of difficulty. This is important because it illustrates the vast range of *tafsirs* and the potential for a variety of interpretations. In addition, it complicates the interpretation of words by noting the diverse array of possibilities.

In addition to Qur'anic exegesis, some scholars perceive a necessity for hermeneutics. One such scholar is Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (who will hereafter be referred to as al-Tabari). He was born in 838 CE in the Sassanian province of Tabaristan which is near the Caspian Sea. Although he traveled extensively, he made Baghdad his home, where he wrote

numerous volumes and taught many students. “A statement by the eleventh-century historian and jurisconsult al-Khatib al-Baghdadi sums up pages of laudation: ‘He had a degree of erudition shared by no one of his era’” (Rippin (ed) McAuliffe 48). In a book chapter entitled “Qur’anic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir,” Jane Dammen McAuliffe states:

> The practice of interpretation was equated with what we would now term ‘exegesis’, while the term ‘hermeneutics’ was used to denote the aims and criteria of that practice. In conventional theological usage, then, hermeneutics was the enterprise which identified the principles and methods prerequisite to the interpretation of texts. (Rippin (ed) McAuliffe 47)

In this, McAuliffe is marking a distinction between “exegesis” and “hermeneutics.” She commends al-Tabari, a prominent scholar of Islam, on his “hermeneutical considerations”:

> In addition to linguistic and lexical concerns, al-Tabari discusses the problematic status of *tafsir bi’l-ra’y* (interpretation by personal opinion), the objections of those who oppose all exegetical activity, and the reputations of previous commentators, whether revered or denigrated in the passage of time. (Rippin (ed) McAuliffe 48)

McAuliffe is making it clear that even as early as the beginning of the 9th century, or the 3rd century of the Islamic calendar, scholars of *tafsir* acknowledged that there were different opinions about exegesis and the standards that should apply. In addition, al-Tabari argues that there are “various ways by which an individual may arrive at knowledge of the interpretation of the Qur’an” (Rippin (ed) McAuliffe 49).

Traditionally there are three categories placed on the interpretation of the verses of the Qur’an. The one most useful here is the third category of verse which is “that of which everyone who possesses knowledge of the language in which the Qur’an was sent down knows the interpretation” (Rippin (ed) McAuliffe 50). Al-Tabari adds:

> The particulars of this linguistic communality are three. They include, first of all, a comprehension of inflectional functioning. Secondly, there must be recognition of the inherent signification of nouns which are not homonyms. The last thing required of the linguistically competent is that they understand the exclusionary nature of descriptive qualifiers. (Rippin (ed) McAuliffe 50)

This example is simply cited to explain how a fluent speaker of Arabic will be aware of many of the texts' linguistic nuances and particularities. As McAuliffe notes, although al-Tabari initially separates methods of Qur'anic exegesis into a seemingly neat package, he goes further to explain how Qur'anic exegesis becomes extremely complex and multifaceted. Although his hermeneutical explanation yields much interesting material, for the purposes of this thesis the use or disavowal of *ahadith* in Qur'anic *tafsir* will be the primary focus.

Before fully explaining the proper usage of *ahadith* in exegesis, al-Tabari describes at length "the wrongheaded exegete," or those who attempt to interpret the text recklessly or unwisely. This type of scholar, he claims, is "'one who deliberately seeks out the more obscure Qur'anic verses and then manipulates their meanings in order to support his own misguided preconceptions'" (Rippin (ed) McAuliffe 53). He goes on to note, "the basic spiritual fault of such a one [the wrongheaded exegete] is the inclination to religious innovation (*bid'a*)" (Rippin (ed) McAuliffe 54). As was mentioned earlier, *bid'a* is not a matter which is taken lightly as in traditional interpretation; it is often seen as potentially dangerous, since the purpose of a tradition is inherently conservative, confirming and passing on revealed knowledge. While Hassan, al-Hibri, Stowasser and Wadud all base their arguments on the Qur'an, and all seek to illuminate what they see as the truly egalitarian ethos of Islam, it is likely that they would be classified as "wrongheaded exegetes" by more a traditional-minded scholar such as Haddad. Although they have varying exegetical methods, they all base their arguments on the Qur'an. I have chosen to analyze not only what these scholars are arguing but also how they are composing their arguments with attention to where authority is located.

3 THE SCHOLARS

I have chosen to analyze the exegetical methods of five scholars of Islam. I chose these five because although many of them are working within a feminist agenda, they are representative of diverse interpretive methods. After a close reading of each writer's arguments, I will analyze their arguments and occasionally compare and contrast them with one another. In my analysis, I endeavor to reveal some of the ways meaning is obtained from, or produced in, the Qur'an and where this interpretive authority originates.

The first scholar I analyze is Riffat Hassan. Hassan is a feminist Muslim scholar who believes that the traditional methods of exegesis have resulted in justification of the oppression of women. While traditional methods of interpreting the Qur'an rely heavily on the *ahadith*, Hassan has all but disregarded their authority. She argues that the Qur'an is "the repository par excellence of divine wisdom—[which] gives its readers an infinite worldview embracing every aspect of life" ("On Human Rights" 51). She in turn argues that *hadith*-based Qur'anic exegesis should end. "Islam, does not discriminate against women… biases which existed in the Arab-Islamic culture of the early centuries of Islam infiltrated the Islamic tradition, largely through the Hadith literature" ("Theological Reflections" 135).

The next scholar is Azizah al-Hibri. Like Hassan, she discusses the patriarchal culture that has long surrounded most common understandings of both the Qur'an and Islam and vehemently argues against any and all forms of hierarchy. She also maintains that a modification in Qur'anic exegesis is of the utmost importance. She believes that "Islamic literature has been saturated with a patriarchal perspective on women's rights" and aims to provide lucid Islamically-based arguments against this (al-Hibri 51).

The third scholar is Barbara Freyer Stowasser. Stowasser adopts a historical critical perspective to interpreting the Qur'an and argues that it is sometimes most useful to read scripture metaphorically. She argues that "the exodus from the Garden is a parable," and that many read the Qur'an out of proper context (Stowasser 34). This will have significant implications for how she understands the relationship between Eve and Adam.

Amina Wadud is the fourth scholar whose exegetical method is examined. While her methods are similar to the above scholars, her arguments develop in different ways. She argues that there should be flexibility in interpretation across communities and that there are particular principles that should be understood. She adds, "Those principles are eternal and can be applied in various social contexts" (Wadud 9). Like the others, she makes use of nontraditional methods of interpretation that are mostly based on the Qur'an and argues that a proper understanding of the Qur'an will promote an egalitarian understanding of Islam that is absent in most current understandings.

Gibril Foud Haddad is the final scholar I analyze. Unlike the others, Haddad believes strongly in traditional methods of exegesis and explicitly disputes many of Hassan's points in particular. He argues that it is un-Islamic to rely solely on the Qur'an for religious information by saying, "It cannot be imagined that one rejects the entire probativeness of the Sunna and remain a Muslim" ("Probativeness" 10). An examination of Haddad's work will prove useful in understanding the mindset of mainstream Sunni orthodoxy.

This thesis is about interpretive authority and a hermeneutical analysis of various contemporary structures of Qur'anic exegesis. While traditional orthodox Sunni Islam has maintained fairly narrow exegetical and hermeneutical methods based on the Qur'an, the *ahadith* and the commentaries of both, many scholars of Islam no longer feel obligated to depend on

these methods and often disregard literary sources outside the Qur'an. I intend to analyze the aforementioned group of scholars, attempting to elucidate their distinctive methods of Qur’anic study and potentially what there is to gain or lose in their methods.

3 RIFFAT HASSAN

Riffat Hassan attempts to look at the Qur'an anew, to try to pull new meanings from the ancient book. Hassan argues that traditional methods of exegesis have led to a justification for the oppression of women. While traditional methods of interpreting the Qur'an rely heavily on the *ahadith*, Hassan has disregarded their authority. She argues that *hadith*-based Qur'anic exegesis should end. Her arguments bring attention to problems that she sees in the practice of Islam. The article I will focus closely upon is "Women in Muslim Culture: Some Critical Theological Reflections," because in it she thoroughly lays out the argument on which most of her academic career is based.

As a self-confessed Muslim whose scholarship is primarily on Islam, Riffat Hassan works from the premise that the Qur'an is the revealed word of God ("Gender Equality" 1). She believes that Islam, in its origins, was intended to be a blessing to mankind, but as it is practiced it lays an oppressive burden on women ("Theological Reflections" 124). She reasons that if one were to read the Qur'an "from a non-patriarchal, theological perspective" he or she would leave the text with the understanding that "men and women were *essentially* equal, despite biological and other differences" ("Theological Reflections" 126).

Although Hassan challenges many of the ways in which the Qur'an is interpreted, she believes that it is a divine text originating with God ("Theological Reflections" 124). She clearly says "the Qur'an—which to me as to other Muslims is the repository par excellence of divine wisdom—gives its readers an infinite worldview embracing every aspect of life" ("On Human Rights" 55). In this, she is saying not that the text is infinite but that its applications are infinite. This is a key point for Hassan because she believes the Qur'an is a finite text. Interestingly enough, while she sees the Qur'an as finite, Hassan still argues that it can provide an infinite

amount of interpretations and applications. While there are multiple means of interpretation, she sees herself as restricted only by the content of the book. By choosing to work from the position that the Qur'an is divine and authoritative, Hassan is limited in what she can and cannot legitimately argue.

According to Hassan, while Muslim women figure significantly in early Islam, over time Muslim men "have arrogated to themselves the task of defining the ontological, theological, sociological, and eschatological status of Muslim women" ("Women in Islam" 11). She also makes the point that "if a man and woman have been created equal by Allah who is the ultimate arbiter of value, then they cannot become unequal at a later time. On the other hand, if man and woman have been created unequal by Allah, then they cannot become equal at a later time" ("Women in Islam" 12). Further, "the Qur'an, as God's Word, cannot be made the source of human injustice, and the injustice to which Muslim women have been subjected cannot be regarded as God-derived" ("Theological Reflections" 136). These points are vital for Hassan because she sees a major divide between her understanding of the stories within the Qur'an and what she perceives as the understanding of the populace. According to Hassan, both Islam and the Qur'an are perfect and treat women and men as equal before God. However, because of the negative associations that have accompanied the *ahadith* and other sources that have influenced the practice and understanding of Islam, many if not most Muslims do not treat women and men as equal. Rather, she argues, women have been placed in a subordinate role which is contrary to "God's Word."

This is one of Hassan's most important points because it brings to the forefront her most substantial contention with current practices of Islam. As she understands it, the hierarchy that

has been imposed on Islam by *ahadith* and other sources "clash sharply with the Qur'anic accounts of human creation" ("Creation in Islam" 12). She asserts:

> Most Muslims, if questioned about its sources, are likely to refer to more than one of the following: The Qur'an (the Book of Revelation); *Sunnah* (the practice of Prophet Muhammad); *Hadith* (the sayings attributed to Prophet Muhammad); *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence); or *Madahib* [also known as *medhab*] (Schools of Law); and the *Shar'iah* (the code of life which pertains to all aspects of Muslim life). While all these "sources" have contributed to what is cumulatively referred to as "the Islamic tradition," it is important to note that they 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. ("Women's Empowerment" 51)

In this, Hassan is acknowledging the sources that are traditionally utilized and trusted by most Muslims while maintaining consistency within her argument. Of the sources listed, the Qur'an is the only one which has actually been firmly canonized. Hassan believes that while some aspects of the *sunnah*, along with many *ahadith*, are widely agreed upon, the additional sources have not been formed into a fully dependable collection. In addition, despite the fact that there are Islamic norms, there is no one source from which they originate.

Hassan's arguments are based upon her "exegesis" of verses within the Qur'an, which she believes generate the "three theological assumptions on which the superstructure of men's alleged superiority to women has been erected" in Muslim beliefs ("Creation in Islam" 8). The first is the assumption that Adam was created first and Eve was created from his rib. According to Hassan, the average Muslim sincerely—but incorrectly—believes that "Adam was God's primary creation and that Eve was made from Adam's rib" ("Creation in Islam" 8). However, she continues, "this firmly entrenched belief is derived mainly from the Bible and is not only extra-Qur'anic but also in contradiction to the Qur'an" ("Creation in Islam" 8).

The second assumption is that Eve was the "temptress" or "first sinner" who tempted Adam to sin. According to the story Hassan is referencing, Satan, who had already been cast

from the Garden, whispered to Eve to lure Adam into eating the fruit of a tree that God had specifically instructed them to avoid. Although the Qur'anic version of the story describes the two "sinning" together, the sin is the action that results in their expulsion from the Garden of Eden to the earth. One very important point to note is that, according to Hassan's interpretation, Adam and Eve's descent to earth was not God admonishing them but rather Divine destiny. She says that "the order to go forth from the Garden given to Adam or Children of Adam cannot be considered a punishment because Adam was always meant to be God's vicegerent on earth" ("Theological Reflections" 130). Basically, Hassan is arguing that God always knew His intent for humankind to inhabit the earth and become His vicegerent. This could not be done as long as Eve and Adam occupied the Garden.

The third assumption is the belief that Eve was created to be a helpmate to Adam ("Theological Reflections" 126). Like the other two assumptions, Hassan argues that this idea "infiltrated the Islamic tradition, largely through the *Hadith* literature, and undermined the intent of the Qur'an to liberate women from the status of chattel or inferior creatures, making them free and equal to men" ("Women in Islam" 12). She is confident that this assumption has resulted in a superiority complex by Muslim men on the unfounded basis that "women—who are inferior in creation (having been made from a crooked rib) and in righteousness (having helped *ash-Shaitan* [Satan] in defeating God's plan for Adam)—have been created mainly to be of use to men who are superior to them" ("Theological Reflections" 133). This, to Hassan, is demeaning and unjust.

Hassan estimates that the most critical of these three assumptions is the first, because it sets the stage for women to be considered secondary to men. Using the Qur'an, Hassan interprets the verses dealing with the creation of man as saying that humankind (man and woman) were created simultaneously ("Theological Reflections" 128). She contends that although the word

Adam occurs twenty-five times throughout the Qur'an, twenty-one of those times it is referring not to a person but to humanity. She argues that the Arabic word itself is derived from the Hebrew word *adamah,* which means "the soil," and that it functions generally as a collective noun referring to "the human" rather than to a male person. According to Hassan, in the Qur'an, the word "Adam mostly does not refer to a particular human being. Rather, it refers to human beings in a particular way" ("Theological Reflections" 127).

She argues that the idea that woman was created from the rib of a man entered Islamic theology through *ahadith* that were heavily influenced by outside sources, namely "pagan Arab chauvinistic" beliefs, Christianity, Judaism, and Greek Hellenism. As Barbara Freyer Stowasser notes, as early as the 10th century C.E., a variety of stories were in circulation about the creation of Eve and Adam, many of which were based on traditions external to Islam. Because of the geography of the area in which Islam originates, there was much diversity in and around the city of Mecca. The prophet of Islam was Arab and spoke the Arabic language. There were many Jews, Christians and "pagans" living in Mecca and caravanning to and through it. Mecca was a center of trade and people came there from east Africa, western Asia, and southeast Europe. In addition, the Qur'an openly acknowledges truths within both the Torah and the Gospels.

No religion develops in isolation of the community in which it originates. Hassan attempts to make the case that all of the discriminatory effects that have been incorporated into Islam come from the communities and cultures that were around at Islam's inception. In addition, "the Qur'an, which to Muslims in general is the most authoritative source of Islam, does not discriminate against women." On the contrary, "it affirms, clearly and consistently, women's equality with men and their fundamental right to actualize the human potential that they share equality with men" ("Theological Reflections" 135).

Hassan maintains that the *ahadith* dealing with the creation of women have been detrimental in large part because they, for the most part, either imply or explicitly state that women are "crooked." One such *hadith* reads:

> Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should not hurt (trouble) his neighbor. And I advise you to take care of the women, for they are created from a rib and the most crooked part of the rib is its upper part; if you try to straighten it, it will break, and if you leave it, it will remain crooked, so I urge you to take care of women. ("Theological Reflections" 128)

Hassan characterizes this *hadith,* along with the others she quotes, as "weak with regards to their formal aspect (with reference to their *isnad* or line of transmitters). As far as their content (*matn*) is concerned, it is obviously in opposition to the Qur'anic accounts about human creation." In her opinion, *ahadith* such as this "ought to be rejected on material grounds. However, they still continue to be a part of the Islamic tradition" ("Theological Reflections" 129). While she directly quotes six *ahadith* to prove this point about the theological assumptions about the creation of women, she neither provides their *isnad* nor does she directly quote the Qur'an. This is important because the validity of *ahadith* depends on both.

While Hassan acknowledges that religions are influenced by what she calls "external sources," she asserts that the use of *ahadith* to interpret the Qur'an is particularly detrimental because of the authoritative status that is often placed on the validity of *ahadith*. Traditionally, when a Muslim interprets the Qur'an, she does not do so by reading the Qur'an in isolation but rather with two tools, the *ahadith* and/or a learned scholar who has studied the Qur'an and *ahadith* with others. However, Hassan finds this problematic. "The reading of the Qur'an through the lens of the *hadith* is, in my opinion, a major reason for the misreading and misinterpretation of many passages which have been used to deny women equality and justice" ("Theological Reflections" 134). Aziza al-Hibri would argue that not only has this occurred but

many of the verses in the Qur'an have also been taken out of context. Although Hassan believes in the legitimacy of the Qur'an, Hassan believes that certain tools that have traditionally been used to interpret the Qur'an have contributed to the downfall of Islam as it is practiced. When discussing locations of the practice of Islam, Hassan mentions "Muslim countries" in general. However, most, if not all of her research was conducted in Pakistan. This is important because many of her arguments appear to be based on her experiences in Pakistan and are being projected onto the larger Muslim world.

The second theological assumption she addresses is that of the "fall." Hassan argues, "There is, strictly speaking, no "Fall" in the Qur'an or in Islam at all" ("Theological Reflections" 130). However, she asserts that if the average Muslim were asked if Eve was responsible for "the fall of man" they would "answer in the affirmative":

> The association of the episode described in Genesis 3 with fallen humanity and illicit sexuality which has played such a massive role in perpetuating the myth of feminine evil in the Christian tradition, also exists in the minds of many Muslims and has had extremely negative impact on the lives of millions of Muslim women. ("Theological Reflections" 131)

Hassan finds this problematic because she believes that this assumption has created a second-class reality for Muslim women, even those who seek to empower themselves and live up to the true egalitarian nature of Islam and the Qur'an. She holds that Muslims cannot fully do so because of an extreme sense of guilt. "If we do not deal with the theological foundations of these negative attitudes we cannot free women from the burden of guilt and fear, because religion is very powerful and it goes very deep" (Milstead 4). It is interesting to note that although the Torah's authority is granted in the Qur'an, Hassan seems unwilling to acknowledge it as a credible source.

The last assumption Hassan addresses is the purported reason for Eve's creation. This assumption is "that women were created not only *from man but also* for man" ("Theological Reflections" 132). Hassan stresses that this assumption is at the root of women's subordinate position, and it is totally contrary to the teaching of the Qur'an because it sets up a hierarchy between the sexes that should not truly exist in Islam. "The Qur'an … [explains] that man and woman stand absolutely equal in the sight of God ... [and] does not create a hierarchy in which men are placed above women, nor does it pit men against women in an adversary relationship" ("Theological Reflections" 133). Instead of maintaining the Qur'an's position that women and men have been created simultaneously and equally, the assumption of a hierarchy rooted in creation suggests that women were created "instrumentally" (to be utilized by men and to comfort them) and not inherently or because they were important in and of themselves. Hassan contends, "The issue of woman's creation is more fundamental theologically than any other" ("Theological Reflections" 129), because most if not all other injustices that women have been subject to are rooted in this theological assumption and others like it.

Hassan asserts that this imposed chain of command which places men above women is enormously disrespectful to women. Al-Hibri completely agrees with this claim about hierarchy and she argues that "the most favored individuals in the eyes of God are those who are most pious" (al-Hibri 60). Interestingly, many of those who support hierarchal structures would argue that the differences in position or status are meant to protect women and to show women respect. To make matters worse, she supposes that many if not most Muslim women are unaware of the unfortunate position they are in because they do not know what the Qur'an truly says about women. To use her words, "the Qur'an… is a very humane document; but the intent of the Qur'an was subverted by the fact that there were all these inherited traditions and that Muslims

don't even know what is Islamic" (Milstead 2). She argues that Muslim men who practice oppression against women are also mostly unaware that the way in which they practice their religion is misogynistic. To illustrate her point, Hassan uses the metaphor of someone who is in a cage that may be so large that she is unaware of it, but this spaciousness hides the fact that she is caged. "You may be in a cage and not know it. And the others who are out of it of course see that you are in oppression and bondage. Unless you in a sense are able to get out, you don't know what [it] is to be inside" (Milstead 3). Hassan sees Muslims throughout the Muslim world as those within the cage; she alone has an accurate view of their predicament. While the previous premise is arrogant, she is ultimately trying to show Muslims that they are in bondage.

Hassan has developed her own interpretive approach to the Qur'an that applies to women, verses she argues which have been problematically interpreted. According to her exegesis, the Qur'an argues for the parity of men and women, argues that their creation was concurrent, and argues that man and woman are fundamentally the same ("Theological Reflections" 128).

Hassan also maintains that many, if not most, Muslims believe that the oppressive teachings of *ahadith* are true to Islam, but in reality, they are not (Milstead 4). She sees the patriarchal, chauvinistic and misogynistic features that are attributed to Islam originating in "external sources" that have infiltrated Islam via *ahadith*. She does not trust *ahadith* as authentic, and she loathes the manner in which they are used to endorse inequities that she does not see as inherent to Islam. She argues that in reality, the Qur'an "is characterized by justice, and it is stated clearly in the Qur'an that God can never be guilty of *zulm* (unfairness, tyranny, oppression, or wrongdoing)" ("Theological Reflections" 136). She believes that the injustices seen in Islam will be difficult to eliminate because changes are seen "as a great threat to what they [conservative Muslims] understand as the integrity of the Islamic way of life. Liberals…

[are] liberal in virtually every area, except concerning women" ("Revivalism" 4). This is particularly important because:

> Tradition gives these men so many benefits and privileges, and it's very hard for them to let go of these. When you are the beneficiary of a system, even if you think there is something wrong with the system, you can critique it at one level, but at another you don't want to renounce it. ("Revivalism" 5)

This quote is relevant because it illustrates the predicament that Hassan implies is alive and well in the Muslim world. It also demonstrates why these problems will prove to be difficult to overcome.

According to Hassan, the Qur'an is a divinely inspired text that treats women and men equally. "In fact, when seen through a non-patriarchal lens, the Qur'an goes beyond egalitarianism. It exhibits particular solicitude toward women as also toward other classes of disadvantaged persons" ("Theological Reflections" 135). Through this, Hassan is insisting on the initial premise on which her argument is founded, which is that while the Qur'an is the revealed word of God and essentially trustworthy, Islam as it is practiced, is an oppressive burden to women ("Theological Reflections" 124). She makes the case that contrary to popular belief, women and men were created concurrently and equally. Neither has an inherent status or prestige over the other. Until observant Muslims learn to make themselves aware that the injustices imposed upon women are unfounded in the Qur'an, the status of women will not improve.

It is useful to examine and attempt to understand Hassan's arguments because while they are radically different from those found in an orthodox Sunni setting, she brings attention to problems that she sees in the practice of Islam. Although potentially useful, such a dynamic shift in the method of interpreting the Qur'an will not only affect the landscape of the study of Islam but, if internalized by Muslims, has the potential to transform the practice of Islam. Hassan would probably argue that the major advantage of her proposed method is a renewed

understanding of the status and perception of women within an Islamic framework. From Hassan's point of view, the Qur'an is absolutely egalitarian and any hint of inequity one might see in the practice of Islam has been imported from sources other than the Qur'an. Therefore, if those sources were totally disregarded and no longer associated with Islam, what she considers is Islam's true nature will be easier to observe. This, indeed, may be Hassan's ultimate goal. She has focused on specific points that she finds most problematic and has developed an argument to support her claims. As is done traditionally, she bases her arguments in the Qur'an but falls short of the traditional use of *ahadith*. It is here where there is potential loss. By discounting the *ahadith*, Hassan will most likely severely limit the number of Sunni Muslims willing to adopt her methods. She may be taken as innovative in the negative sense and potentially disregarded. This, as we will see, is Haddad's criticism of her. So while she has an ethical agenda and seriously wants to see her understanding of Islam become widespread, her proximity to *bid'a* may discourage those who agree with her end but not her means.

5 AZIZAH AL-HIBRI

Azizah al-Hibri is another noteworthy scholar in the field Islam. Aside from her many written contributions, al-Hibri seeks to impart her understanding of Islam among the lay people. Although her methods are far from traditional, she is committed to grounding her arguments in the Qur'an, and she argues that through a proper understanding of it, the true egalitarian systems that are within Islam will eventually be implemented by many.

In the chapter of *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar-Activists in North America* entitled "An Introduction to Muslim Women's Rights," al-Hibri gives an introduction to one of her arguments about Qur'anic exegesis. Al-Hibri argues, "Because jurists are partly the product of their societies and these societies were and continue to be highly patriarchal, Islamic literature has been saturated with a patriarchal perspective on women's rights" (al-Hibri 51). She systematically aims to reexamine "traditional Islamic jurisprudence… from a woman's perspective" and considers this introduction to be a part of that project.

In this introduction, al-Hibri does not challenge the authority of traditional Islamic source material itself but rather the way in which it has been both interpreted and implemented. With much of her argument based in the Qur'an, a main component al-Hibri's argument concerns gender hierarchy in Islam and the truth of its origins. According to al-Hibri, notions of gender hierarchy are actually rooted in what she has termed "Satanic logic." In the Qur'anic account of the creation of Adam, once Adam was created, God commanded Satan to bow to Adam and Satan refused. "Satan's disobedience resulted from his arrogance, which was justified by a self-serving worldview. Satan believed that he was better than Adam because God created him from fire and Adam from clay" (al-Hibri 53). She continues her argument stating that the underlying logic behind Satan's arrogance was "a subjective hierarchical worldview that ranked fire higher

than clay" (al-Hibri 53). It is this logic, according to al-Hibri, that is at the foundation of patriarchal hierarchy, which is opposed to gender justice. In addition, she believes that this logic is at the foundation of any hierarchy, and she sees the Qur'an as fundamentally egalitarian. Al-Hibri is particularly opposed to the patriarchal, hierarchal and authoritarian worldviews that she believes are responsible for denying Muslim women their God-given rights (al-Hibri 59). She goes on to say, "Islam rejects the view that humans are organized in a hierarchy, whether that hierarchy is based on gender, race or class. As the Qur'an clearly states, the most favored individuals in the eyes of God are those who are most pious" (al-Hibri 60). This contention against hierarchy is the pedestal of al-Hibri's argument. It may be likened to the third erroneous theological assumption that Hassan points to in which Eve is said to have been created to be a helpmate for Adam instead of having been created equal to him ("Theological Reflections" 126). As stated by Hassan, this assumption is at the root of the superiority complex that many Muslim men have about women's creation. She argues that it is this presumption which has led men to believe that women "have been created mainly to be of use to men who are superior to them." Based in her exegesis of the Qur'an, the Qur'an itself "does not create a hierarchy in which men are placed above women" ("Theological Reflections" 133).

In addition to offering a change in Qur'anic interpretive methods, another major aspect of al-Hibri's argument is her point that a change in the implementation of exegesis is of the utmost importance. Although she believes change is of the essence, she posits that the patriarchal method of change favors force or coercion which "lasts for only as long as the source of the coercion continues to exist" (al-Hibri 55). Amina Wadud echoes al-Hibri's concerns with interpretive methods. However, Wadud does not suggest that there should be a preference for one manner over another. Rather, Wadud insists that the real danger surfaces when one method

of interpretation becomes compulsory and others are not allowed to come to their own understanding.

While al-Hibri is adamant that change is imperative, she is not in favor of an abrupt change "because abrupt change usually requires coercive action and coercion is the antithesis of freedom" (al-Hibri 54). What she would rather impress upon societies is what she has termed "gradualism." Through gradual change, which al-Hibri points out "need not be agonizingly slow," and is more in tune with "yet another important Qur'anic principle, namely, that there be no compulsion in matters of faith," al-Hibri sees the opportunity for permanent and positive change (al-Hibri 54). She also sees gradual change as "more stable and less destructive of society than a radical coercive change" (al-Hibri 55). This process is especially important for al-Hibri because she also seeks a change in the legal system, which she believes is the source of many injustices.

Ijtihad is a term used in Islamic law that describes methods of developing legal decisions through individually autonomous interpretations of the legal sources. Traditionally, this includes the Qur'an and the *sunna*. '*Illah* means justification or reason and is often coupled with *ijtihad*. "By agreement of scholars, when the '*illah* disappears, so must the law, unless there is another '*illah* for it. Much of our heritage of *ijtihad*, however, was formulated hundreds of years ago and has not been reexamined recently to determine whether the '*ilal* (plural of '*illah*) for the related laws are still in place" (al-Hibri 56). Al-Hibri reasons that Islamic laws and issues need to be reexamined "in light of Qur'anic text, traditional nonpatriarchal *ijtihad*, and my present state of knowledge and consciousness as a Muslim woman preparing to live in the twenty-first century" (al-Hibri 57). One aspect of this reexamination is family law, which she argues is overflowing with outdated '*ilal* and patriarchal *ijtihads*.

In her discussion of family laws, al-Hibri outlines common traditions including the *mahr* requirement, guardianship, family planning, maintenance, polygamy, interfaith marriage and divorce. "Because the Qur'an was revealed in a world that was and continues to be highly patriarchal, it engaged in affirmative action to protect women" (al-Hibri 64). This is almost identical to Hassan's argument in which she says, "When seen through a non-patriarchal lens, the Qur'an goes beyond egalitarianism. It exhibits solicitude toward women as also toward other classes of disadvantaged persons" ("Theological Reflections," 135-136).

In al-Hibri's analysis, because of a lack of appropriate *ijtihad*, much of what was meant to be a protection for women and their rights "has been used to assert the general superiority of men over women" (al-Hibri 63). For example, in her discussion of polygamy, which she believes has been treated by Western writers "as one of the most controversial Islamic practices," she argues, "Qur'anic reasoning clearly favors monogamy" (al-Hibri 66). Hassan makes a very similar case using an extremely controversial verse of the Qur'an that, according to Hassan, is "generally cited to support the contention that men have 'a degree of advantage over women'" ("Theological Reflections" 133). Hassan argues that popular analysis of this verse has led to a set hierarchy between men and women that is "akin to the one created by St. Paul and his followers in the Christian tradition." She posits that the word that is commonly translated as "rulers" actually refers to one who provides "support or livelihood" for someone else. A common translation of the actual verse reads **"**Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because of what Allah has preferred one with over the other and because of what they spend to support them from their wealth" (Qur'an: 3:34). She firmly states:

> In my exegesis of this verse, I have argued that the function of supporting women economically has been assigned to men in the context of child-bearing—a function which can only be performed by women. The intent of this verse is not to give men power over women but, rather, to ensure that while women are performing the important tasks of

> child-bearing and child-raising they do not have the additional responsibility of being breadwinners as well. ("Theological Reflections" 134)

Hassan is providing an alternate rationalization of the verse which she argues has often been utilized as justification for women's inferior status.

Al-Hibri bases her aforementioned argument about marriage on two verses of the Qur'an. The first says, "If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four; But if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly [with them], then only one, or that which your right hand possesses. That will be more suitable to prevent you from doing injustice" (Qur'an 4:3). The second, which is from the same chapter, states, "Ye are never able to be fair and just as between women, even if it is your ardent desire" (Qur'an 4:129). According to al-Hibri:

> Some Muslim jurists have interpreted the first *ayah* to mean that a man has the right to marry up to four wives as long as he is equally just with each of them. In providing this interpretation, these jurists ignored the first part of the *ayah*, which conditions the permission upon a certain context that obtained at the time of its revelation, namely, one of justice and fairness concerning the treatment of orphaned wives. Secondly, these jurists ignored the last part of the *ayah*, which states that (even in that context) justice considerations make it preferable to marry only one wife… These same jurists also ignored the second *ayah*, which flatly states that men are incapable of satisfying the condition precedent for engaging in polygamy, namely, justice and fairness. (al-Hibri 66)

Here, al-Hibri is clearly asserting that many verses of Qur'an have traditionally been taken out of context and oft times misread. For many centuries, traditional jurists have offered interpretations of the Qur'an that are based on patriarchal ideals and an attempt to oppress women in the name of Islam. This argument from al-Hibri is similar to Hassan's argument about the use of *ahadith* in Qur'anic interpretation. While al-Hibri's argument is primarily about the context of exegesis, Hassan argues, "the reading of the Qur'an through the lens of *ahadith* is…a major reason for the misreading and misinterpretation of many passages which have been used to deny women equality and justice" ("Theological Reflections" 134).

While al-Hibri regularly makes use of the Qur'an as an authoritative source, she does not explicitly reference any *ahadith* or particular collectors or commentators of them. However, there are many instances in which she either implicitly references a *hadith* or provides one in her footnotes. Since she does not overtly utilize *ahadith*, she does not offer an argument either for or against them. But from the way they are employed in her work, I believe it would be fair to state that she would like to see the *ahadith* and commentary approached in the same manner in which she is approaching the Qur'an, which is by reexamining "the issues of Qur'anic text, [using] traditional nonpatriarchal *ijtihad*, and my present state of knowledge and consciousness as a Muslim woman preparing to live in the twenty-first century" (al-Hibri 57). This is different from Hassan, because Hassan does not seem interested in finding a way to incorporate *ahadith* into a progressive understanding of Islam but rather to abandon them altogether because of the damage she believes they have caused. For this reason, it appears that while al-Hibri makes bold arguments that might be considered radical by some conservative or traditional Muslims, they would most likely be more willing to accommodate her manner of thinking because it is not blatantly offensive to their conception of *Shari'ah*.

Al-Hibri's argument is against all forms of hierarchy. If Sunni Muslims were to adopt her understanding of Islam, there could be a monumental shift in the practice of Islam. For example, there is a common understanding in Sunni Islam that a man is the head of the household. He is encouraged to exercise the option to consult his wife and other members of the house, but ultimately he possesses the right and responsibility to make final decisions regarding said household. This situation of mutual consultation with the understanding that the final decision rests with one person is not only the way many Muslims understand the family structure but also the way communities are set up and extends into the Islamic legal system. If all of these

hierarchical structures were abandoned and replaced with a fully egalitarian system in which no one person or opinion has more value than another, the result could be a system full of equality. There could also develop a transformed understanding within relationships that is based in mutual respect because all involved parties will know that no one person has the final say on any topic without the concurrence of all others. However, the potential loss of such a revolutionary shift in relationships is this very same change in structure. Not only can the decision-making process become very inefficient due to the need for everyone's input but also decisions may neglect to be made if the group cannot come to a consensus.

6 BARBARA FREYER STOWASSER

The next scholar who proposes a somewhat nontraditional method of Qur'anic exegesis is Barbara Freyer Stowasser. In “The Chapter of Eve” in *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation,* Stowasser offers some insight into the Qur'anic account of Eve and Adam. She argues for a Qur'an-based method of exegesis without the use of *ahadith* literature. She also identifies many figures over ten centuries of Islamic history and their methods of interpretation. Her system of presenting these individuals is chronological; after she introduces and explains the story of Adam, she begins with a 10th century scholar of *ahadith* and moves through scholars to the 20th century.

As she begins with the Qur'anic accounts, she works through the many *ayah* of Qur'an that discuss Eve and Adam and the interactions they had with *Iblis,* or Satan. In her analysis, Stowasser argues not only that the movement of humankind to earth was always the destiny of Adam and Eve, but also that Satan’s role in this movement was major. This is akin to Hassan’s argument that “the order to go forth from the Garden given to Adam or Children of Adam cannot be considered a punishment because Adam was always meant to be God’s vicegerent on earth” (“Theological Reflections” 130). Stowasser claims that Satan needed man to realize his inevitable rebellion and that Satan’s sole purpose is to “seduce and tempt man away from morality to sin” (Stowasser 26). In addition, after listing the *suras* from which she draws the majority of her account of the story of Adam and Eve, she then provides what she claims is a standard chronological order of the *suras’* revelation. Stowasser believes that this is useful because the oral Qur'an was compiled over a period of almost three decades at the end of the Prophet Muhammad’s life, but the written Qur'an was not fully compiled until after his death. By examining the *suras* in the order in which they were revealed one may develop an interpretation

of the *suras* from a historical-critical perspective, because situating each *sura* in its own particular revelatory context may provide information unattainable without that context. Wadud discusses the importance of context at length and adds that it is of the utmost importance not to situate any *sura* too firmly in any perspective because this will place arduous restrictions on the universality of its application.

The bulk of Stowasser's chapter examines various Qur'anic exegetes and catalogues various scholars who examine the creation of humankind. Stowasser is clear to note, "extraneous detail transmitted in Hadith form and frequently originating in the Bible and Bible-related sources not only fleshes out the story but drastically changes it, especially with regard to the woman's role" (Stowasser 28). This, too, is similar to Hassan's argument about literatures that have traditionally been used to interpret the Qur'an. Hassan argues that traditional *hadith* literature was written "Reflecting the culture of the seventh- and eighth-century Arab world, the sayings voice the cumulative biases, against women, of the Jewish, Christian, Hellenistic, and pre-Islamic Bedouin Arab traditions" ("Justice in Islam" 6). Stowasser contends that many of the Biblical interpretations that were imposed by exegetes on the Qur'anic account indicate socially accepted gender disparities and the fundamental structures that had been incorporated to preserve them. She goes on to note that until the eighteenth century, many learned scholars of Islam both accepted and promulgated these inequities without questioning the authority of the sources, even though they are contrary to the evidence in the Qur'an itself (Stowasser 28).

The first scholar Stowasser cites is al-Tabari (d. 923). Al-Tabari wrote a well-known commentary on the Qur'an using *ahadith*. Stowasser remarks that by the time al-Tabari was writing, there were numerous accounts of the story of Adam and Eve in circulation "which the Muslim scholars—as Tabari repeatedly acknowledges—'had learned from the people of the

Torah.' While he quotes large numbers of these traditions, al-Tabari remains cautious as to these traditions' reliability; frequently he indicates mental reservations with the phrase… ('God knows best')" (Stowasser 28). She reviews more versions of the garden and humankind's creation and first sin, including much of the material that made its way into al-Tabari's compilation. It is unclear if the information in the collection was to be regarded as *ahadith* and therefore authoritative or as commentaries and accounts of the story that are contemporary to al-Tabari. Either way, Stowasser argues that the information did become authoritative and was used as a weapon to exploit and oppress women throughout the centuries. Stowasser argues that based on the information in this text, some came to view women as "Satan's tool and was seen as afflicted with the curse of moral, mental, and physical deficiency. Conversely the man, in the Qur'an her partner and spokesman, now alone embodied the human conscience, was aware of his error, and repented; free of God's curse, he was forgiven" (Stowasser 30). This resonates with Hassan's argument that women and men were created equal. According to Hassan, "if man and woman have been created equal by God who is the ultimate giver of value, then they cannot become unequal, essentially, at a subservient time" ("Theological Reflections, 129). Both scholars are making the argument that the Qur'an is incalculably clear about the egalitarian terms of the creation of humankind and that any inequity that may appear has been imposed by people.

Throughout the centuries, prominent scholars of Islam disagreed on the egregiousness of the "first sin" and who was or was not responsible. Stowasser maintains that the main interest changed not necessarily because of an interest in uplifting women to the status afforded them in the Qur'an but because of other social or political conditions of the time. Until the twentieth century theologians the one aspect of interpretation that all of the scholars had in common was that they all utilized *ahadith*.

Interestingly enough, Stowasser posits that some early contributors seemed unconvinced of the accuracy of the *ahadith* but used them anyway. The fourteenth century historian, theologian and Qur'anic exegete Ibn Kathir (d. 1373) is one such figure. "Ibn Kathir records mental reservations toward the reliability of esoteric legendary information generally derived from *isra'iliyyat* but continues to include such information in both of these works" (Stowasser 33).

Stowasser perceives a genuine conflict occurring in the 1900's regarding "this state of affairs" and a substantial change in "the interpretation of the Qur'anic story of Adam and his wife" (Stowasser 34). In this time period an important and famous exegete, Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905), "approaches the Qur'anic text here under consideration in his own exegesis in new ways. He pays attention to the time and place of the revelations, emphasizes the literal meaning of the Qur'anic verses as well as their context, and largely de-emphasizes the Hadith, most particularly its *isra'iliyyat*" (Stowasser 34). In this description of Abduh, Stowasser implies that former exegetes simply followed established methods of exegesis, methods that were atemporal, acontextual, ahistorical, and which offered an interpretation that included "foreign lore." Stowasser's opinion of the traditional use of *ahadith* is one that resonates not only with Hassan, but with al-Hibri as well.

Another point of Abduh's is that the story of Adam's creation is best understood metaphorically.

> Adam's story in the Qur'an, he says, is meant to serve as an example of admonition and guidance; its purpose is to define human nature as well as man's God-willed mission on earth. This story, then, has nothing to do with history, because history does not concern religion. The very faultiness of the Biblical creation story lies in its claim to be history, where (even) modern science has proved it to be wrong. (Stowasser 34)

She goes on to add, “the exodus from the Garden is a parable for the hardship the human encounters when he permits his original nature to go astray” (Stowasser 35). Stowasser’s argument resonates with Hassan’s assertion that many people read the Qur’an out of context and literally “ignor[e] the fact that the Qur’an often uses symbolic language to portray deep truths” (“Justice in Islam” 2).

Stowasser believes that the claim that men and women are equals is becoming increasingly popular in the modern Muslim world. “In faith, dignity, and moral responsibility, male and female Muslims are now increasingly hailed as equals. Mode and arena of their struggle for righteousness, however, are seen as different by God’s command” (Stowasser 38). Stowasser is asserting that all Muslims have similar responsibilities to God but there are some differences in their responsibilities. This argument is dissimilar to Hassan’s argument in that while Stowasser is acknowledging some disparity between women and men, Hassan would argue that women and men are fully equal and that any perception of an inequity has been imported into Islam from its contact with other cultures and religions.

If Stowasser’s methods were implemented at large, there could develop among lay Muslims a deeper historical understanding of the development of Qur’anic exegesis. Many Muslims most likely believe that the exegetical methods they are most familiar with are not only correct but also have roots extending back to the beginning of Qur’anic exegesis. Stowasser’s process of examining this history not only demonstrates some continuity in the exegetical tradition but also some disparities in the tradition that may not be commonly known. For example, Stowasser notes that as early as the 10th century there was doubt about the authenticity of many stories that were in circulation about the creation of Adam and Eve. To the modern reader, having doubts about these stories may seem rather novel, but Stowasser shows how long

these uncertainties have existed. In addition, her argument about how women and men are equal resonates with traditional sympathies in that she is arguing that women and men should have equal faith and morality but have different responsibilities in the sight of God. The prospective loss of embracing her methodology is in her desire to abandon *ahadith*. By renouncing *ahadith*, Stowasser, like Hassan, will most likely drastically restrict the number of Muslims willing to entertain her arguments and ultimately implement her methods and ideas. This is a loss because Stowasser seeks to see improvements in the practice of Islam so it would behoove her to appeal to as many Muslims as possible.

7 AMINA WADUD

Amina Wadud, who is probably best known for leading a Friday prayer for a group of followers who were both male and female, is another renowned scholar of Islam. In her well-known book, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective,* Wadud seeks "to make a 'reading' of the Qur'an that would be meaningful to women living in the modern era. By 'reading' I mean the process of reviewing the words and their context in order to derive an understanding of the text" (Wadud, 1). She does not attempt to offer a "fully objective" approach to the Qur'an but rather what she has termed a "holistic" one. Through this method of Qur'anic exegesis, Wadud allows room for social, moral, economic and political concerns in the process of interpretation. She proposes that this method, which originates in the female experience, will be offered without "the male interpretation" (Wadud, 3). It is important to note that Wadud is conducting an analysis of the Qur'an itself and not of traditional interpretations of the Qur'an.

In her analysis, Wadud pays special attention to hermeneutics and language. She claims that hermeneutical models are concerned with three facets of the text. The first is the environment in which the text is written or revealed. The second is the grammatical structure or syntax of the text. The third is the whole text, its world-view or its "Weltanshauung." She believes that differences in interpretive opinion and choices can be linked to differences in emphasis between a combination of these three aspects (Wadud, 3). Wadud argues for the implementation of what she considers the "spirit" of the Qur'an. As a self-confessed Muslim, Wadud believes that the Qur'an was revealed and not written. By this, she means that she believes the Qur'an is the revealed word of God, which was written down by the companions of the Prophet Muhammad. She rejects the notion that any person had any input in the actual words of the Qur'an. The divine revelation, she argues, contained messages and guidance that are

neither limited by time nor space. “The implications of the Qur'anic expressions during the time in which they were revealed assist in determining their proper meaning which offers insight that should be utilized to understand and implement its teachings” (Wadud, 4). In doing this, one is grasping for an understanding of the “spirit” of the Qur'an. In discussing the need for textual analysis, Hassan also, discusses the importance of the “spirit” of the Qur’an. She says, “I think a textual analysis of the Qur’an is necessary at this point because the spirit has to be reconstructed by means of the words” (Milstead, 5). Hassan goes on to add that translation is key in an understanding of the Qur’an’s spirit because “if we mistranslate words, we can really do a lot of damage to the spirit by rendering the complex concepts in too simplistic a fashion” (Milstead, 5).

In searching for this “spirit,” Wadud chooses to pay particular attention to the use of language. “Words have a basic meaning—that which can be understood by it, in isolation—and a relational meaning—that connotative meaning derived from the context in which that term is used” (Wadud, 10). She offers that since words have contextual restraints, words must be understood within them. As part of this project she argues that in her exegesis, “every usage of the masculine plural form is intended to include males and females, *equally*, unless it includes specific indication for its exclusive application to males” (Wadud, 4). She bases this interpretive move on Arabic grammar. Arabic nouns are both gendered and numbered. Regarding male forms of words, Wadud says, “there is no form exclusively for males [so] the only way to determine if the masculine plural form… is exclusively for males would be through some specific indication in the text” (Wadud, 4). In other words, she is offering an interpretation of the Qur'an through her understanding of the grammar and composition of the Arabic language. Unfortunately, Wadud explains the dynamics of Arabic in this way and leaves the reader unclear. Al-Hibri discussed the importance of paying close attention to language in her discussion of polygamy.

The difference in al-Hibri's analysis is that she was more concerned with portions of the text being ignored by exegetes without an attempt to interpret them in relation to other verses.

Another consequence of the "spirit" of the Qur'an is its universality. "The Qur'an must be flexible enough to accommodate innumerable cultural situations because of its claims to be universally beneficial to those who believe. Therefore, to force it to have a single cultural perspective—even the cultural perspective of the original community of the Prophet—severely limits its application and contradicts the stated universal purpose of the Book itself" (Wadud, 6). She sees the Qur'an as having particular examples and principles that transcend time and space and speculates that "each new Islamic society must understand the principles intended by the particulars. Those principles are eternal and can be applied in various social contexts" (Wadud, 9). Because each community must do this for itself, she argues that no interpretation of the Qur'an can be considered conclusive or final (Wadud, 10). In one article Hassan alludes to universality in the application of rights that are outlined in the Qur'an. However, she does not explicitly mention that the Qur'an is universal in the same way that Wadud does. Hassan does note that she sees it as "a profound tragedy and irony that today's Muslims, in large numbers, regard Islam in monolithic terms and regard the '*shari'ah'* (the code regulating all aspects of a Muslim's life) as fixed" ("Justice in Islam" 4).

Another important element of interpretation Wadud identifies is that of "prior text." This is "the language and cultural context in which the text is read. It is inescapable and represents, on the one hand, the rich varieties that naturally occur between readers, and, on the other hand, the uniqueness of each" (Wadud, 5). She continues by saying that differing prior texts are not necessarily good or bad but become harmful when someone with a particular prior text claims

that his or her understanding is the only likely or acceptable one and tries to prevent others with differing prior texts to develop their own understanding (Wadud, 5).

In her examination of the Qur'an, Wadud furthers her assessment of the language of the Qur'an. She bases much of her analysis on the first verse of the fourth chapter which reads, “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” (Wadud, Qur'an 4:1). She then goes through a very detailed explanation of the meaning of the four italicized words in the verse, eventually coming to a conclusion about the meaning of the verse as a whole. She begins with *ayat*. The word *ayat* is the plural of *ayah* which means “a sign” indicating something beyond itself. It is also the word used to refer to verses of the Qur'an. Wadud argues that explicit *ayat* are linguistic in that they are verbal symbols or words. They may pertain to portions of the known world as well as to the domain of the Unseen. “Those *ayat* which give information about the Unseen cannot be fully ascertained or perceived via human capacities because humans are incapable of fully understanding the unempirical” (Wadud, 10).

The word *min* is typically used to mean “from” or “of the same nature as.” When it is understood as meaning “from” Wadud argues that the understanding that follows is “the idea that the first created being (taken to be a male person) was complete, perfect and superior. The second created being (a woman) was not his equal, because she was taken out of the whole, and therefore, derivative and less than it” (Wadud, 18-19). She believes that English translations tend to use this translation of the word and therefore this understanding of the verse which she believes is incorrect.

The term *nafs* is commonly translated as “self,” but in its technical Qur'anic usage it refers to the common origin of all humans. Wadud argues, “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 origins of the human race with Adam. It does not even state that Allah began the creation of humankind with the *nafs* of Adam, the man" (Wadud, 19-20). While grammatically the word *nafs* is feminine, conceptually it can be thought of as neutral because it forms essential parts of both the masculine and feminine (Wadud, 19).

The final term, *zawj*, is used in the Qur'an to mean "mate," "spouse," or "group." "This is the term used in referring to the second part in the creation of humankind, whom we have come to accept as Eve, the female of the original parents" (Wadud, 20). This understanding has developed despite the fact that the word *zawj* is grammatically masculine. Though this is true, it too is conceptually neutral because it is also used in the Qur'an in relation to plants and animals. Connected to the term *zawj* is the dualism of creation. Essentially, everything was and is created in pairs. Wadud argues that in regard to creation this means that "the counterpart of each created thing is part of the *plan* of that thing." In addition, "Each created thing is contingent upon its *zawj*. In this contingency, the creation of both the original parents is irrevocably and primordially linked; thus, the two are equally essential" (Wadud, 21). She finalizes her explanation of the definition of *zawj* with an analysis of the characteristics that have been widely understood as essential to men and women. "Femininity and masculinity are not created characteristics imprinted into the very primordial nature of female and male persons, neither are they concepts the Qur'an discusses or alludes to" (Wadud, 22). She sees each as culturally defined and believes that these determinations have negatively affected Qur'anic exegesis concerning the term. This detailed analysis of these terms is very much like Hassan's inquiry of the words "*qawwamun*," and "*adamah*," where she makes an argument about how the popular translations and understandings of these two words have made a tremendous impact on women's reality.

After concluding her analysis of the Arabic terms, Wadud discusses the portions of the story that occur in the Garden. She insists that "with one exception, the Qur'an always uses the Arabic dual form to tell 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" (Wadud, 24-25). She stresses that the story is clear in stating that Adam and Eve are both warned not to approach the tree, they both become forgetful of their warnings, sin, and ask for forgiveness. Also, not only is their repentance accepted but they are forgiven. She sees this story as moral, teaching that "any human might disobey through forgetfulness, the general nature of human weakness, and the temptations of Satan, but he who recognizes his error, repents, and asks for forgiveness, can and will be forgiven" (Wadud, 24). Wadud's discussion of the use of the dual form is analogous to Hassan's understanding of this verse. Conversely, Hassan adds another dimension and argues, "in addressing them the Qur'an uses the dual form of address only once (in *Surah* 18: *Ta-Ha*: 123); for the rest the plural form is used which necessarily refers to more than two persons and is generally understood as referring to humanity as a whole" ("Theological Reflections," 130). The latter part of Hassan's statement connects to previous arguments of Wadud's in which she posited that the Qur'an tends to use grammatical forms that can and should be understood as referring to both men and women unless otherwise noted.

One last important aspect of creation Wadud describes is the unique and dynamic relationship between the Creator and the created. "[T]he *ruh* [spirit, essence] of Allah which is blown into each being, male and female" is a part of that relationship. She also adds, once again, that "no specific cultural functions or roles are defined at the moment of creation" (Wadud, 26). In this, Wadud is arguing that Allah pays special and equivalent attention to each person He

creates without the imposition of any particular cultural responsibilities. Rather, she would argue, those responsibilities are imposed on individuals, often in opposition to the Qur'anic ideals. For Wadud, interpretive authority lies with the individual and it is perfectly all right for an individual to interpret the Qur'an independently. If Wadud's methods became widespread, it would likely follow that more people would feel confident interpreting the Qur'an for themselves. This could be immensely empowering because the authority will have shifted from the scholarly class to people and more people might become confident in attempting personal Qur'anic interpretations. If this method became reality, the biggest loss in such a shift in interpretive authority is the variety in interpretations that is sure to result. Instead of somewhat widespread understandings of scripture and practices there could develop as many understandings as there are people attempting personal interpretation. This could result in a lack of continuity in practices which could lead to countless discrepancies and a breakdown in many prevalent understandings. Traditionally, whenever there has been a controversial point, the scholars would research and debate the subject matter, eventually circulating their results in their society.

8 G.F. HADDAD

To provide some contrast to exegetical methods of Hassan, al-Hibri, Stowasser and Wadud I will review the work of G. F. Haddad. This contrast will be useful in seeing how some exercise the available flexibility in Qur'anic interpretation while attempting to remain within the boundaries which have been established. Dr. Gibril Foud Haddad was born in Beirut, Lebanon in 1960. He currently resides in Brunei and is an author and translator, spending much of his time translating Arabic works and critiquing the writings of Muslims, both in Arabic and English. While Riffat Hassan is the scholar whose arguments and methods Haddad chooses to critique explicitly, I will apply his contentions with her to the methods of the others. This application of his criticisms is legitimate because he is the only scholar who is arguing from a strictly traditional Sunni point of view and is being used to show distinctions with the methods of the others.

Like the other four scholars, Haddad is committed to Islam and its propagation. They all wish to see what they believe is "true Islam practiced." Haddad, however, believes strongly in traditional Sunni methods of exegesis. This is a key point for Haddad because he sees the integrity of the entire tradition at stake. An examination of Haddad will prove useful in an understanding of the mindset of the majority of those who observe orthodox Islam.

In his article "Some Critical Fact-Finding Reflections on Riffat Hassan's 'Women in Muslim Culture: Some Critical Theological Reflections' A Qur'an-only Feminist," Haddad offers a rather harsh critique of Hassan's method as well as alternative explanations of some of the "theological assumptions" to which Hassan refers. He questions her motives and dedication to the struggle of women. He even asserts that Hassan's objectives can be likened to those of the "anti-Muslim crusaders… to promote the dismantlement of the *Sunna* as the second source of

Islam so as to clear the field and improve chances in the onslaught on the Qur'an" ("Reflections" 2). Haddad also calls Hassan's writing "a string of superficial indictments and factual inaccuracies" ("Reflections" 1).

Haddad is a staunch supporter of what he sees as traditional Islam and has conservative opinions about its practice. One of his main arguments is about the "probativeness" of the *sunna* of the Prophet Muhammad, and he argues that it is un-Islamic for one to act solely on the basis of the Qur'an. This is a sharp contrast to Hassan, Stowasser and Wadud as they see the use of *ahadith* as unnecessary and sometimes even dangerous. Haddad argues that while the Qur'an is a miracle in its own right, it is also multifaceted so humankind needs the *sunna* in order to comprehend it properly. In essence, he believes that the Qur'an is an extremely complex text that can only be fully understood with the assistance of the *sunna*. He says:

> It is impossible for any human being upon whom divine revelation did not descend with Allah's support, to understand the Shari'a, its details, and its ruling autonomously, from the Qur'an alone. It is inevitable that one must look into the Sunna which was revealed together with the Qur'an and the Sunna which the Prophet – Allah bless and greet him – inferred from striving to understand the Qur'an, in which inferring he received divine confirmation. ("Probativeness" 1)

Simply put, Haddad is putting forth the argument that "messengers," the people to whom God sent a revealed message, are the only ones who may have been able to discern the meanings of those revealed messages without extra assistance. He is saying that it would be virtually impossible for any other person to understand the intentions behind or within God's words from those words alone. However, Haddad argues, when combined with the *sunna* or traditions and customs of the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an becomes clearer.

To support his claim that the *sunna* is needed in order to understand fully and explain the Qur'an, Haddad provides examples of prescriptions within the Qur'an that he believes require information that cannot be found in the Qur'an to fully understand them. For example, many

verses of the Qur'an command the establishment of prayers (*salah*). The Qur'an says, "But establish regular prayers" (Qur'an 4:77). The same is repeated in *sura* 24:56 and again in *sura* 73:20. Haddad asks, "What is the exact description of this obligatory prayer? What is its modality? What is its timing? What is its quantity and number? Upon whom is it obligatory? How many times is it obligatory in one's lifetime?" ("Probativeness" 1-2). Haddad goes on to point out that in an extension of this prescription, the Qur'an says, "O you who believe! Bow down and prostrate yourselves (Qur'an 22:77). Again, Haddad asks, "What is their [the prostrations'] exact modality and what is precisely meant by such bowing and prostrating? Are they the same as prayer or something else? If what is meant by them is prayer, then is the number of bows and the number of prostrations in it equal?" ("Probativeness" 2). As with the former, the latter example is based on a recommendation that is in the Qur'an. Haddad argues that it cannot be fully understood without some supplemental information that can only be found in the *sunna*. Haddad offers the challenge:

> Try to empty your mind from all that the Sunna explicitly provided in the way of explanation pertaining to…verses as well as what the jurists mentioned on the basis of the Sunna through analogy (qiyas) and other methods of elucidating the Sunna. Then see if anyone is able to answer to a single question among those we have mentioned above, and other questions of the same type. ("Probativeness" 3)
> .

Haddad is saying that if someone who was educated about Islam in a traditional manner were to think about the Qur'an without the *sunna* it would be very difficult to understand the Qur'an completely or to apply its teachings. He believes that for the Qur'an to be properly understood, the *sunna* is absolutely necessary. Haddad says:

> Allah Almighty and Exalted did not task us with these responsibilities which He listed in broad terms in His Book – in the full knowledge that our minds fall short of understanding His meaning – except that He first put in place an elucidator and patient explainer in charge of clarifying all these matters. This is Allah's Messenger – Allah bless and greet him – And He did this by means of His revelation and His support. ("Probativeness" 3)

The responsibilities Haddad is referring to include but are not limited to discussions of prayer and prostration. These examples illustrate the relationship Haddad is attempting to emphasize between the explicit word of God (Qur'an) and the tradition of interpretation (the *ahadith*). This argument is in absolute opposition to those of Hassan, Stowasser and Wadud. Where they all believed it was absolutely possible and probably most beneficial to provide understandings of the Qur'an without the *sunna* or *ahadith*, Haddad fervently disagrees as he is fully convinced that the Qur'an was not meant to be understood without the assistance of the *sunna*, which is to be used to elucidate and clarify all of the ambiguous matters within it. He argues:

> It cannot be imagined that one rejects the entire probativeness of the Sunna and remain a Muslim. For the foundation of Islam is the Qur'an, which cannot be described as Allah's word when one unconditionally rejects the probativeness of the *Sunna* since the fact that the Qur'an is Allah's word was not established by other than the Prophet's – Allah bless and greet him – explicit statement that this was Allah's Word and His Book. ("Probativeness" 10)

Haddad is making the argument that because the Qur'an was delivered to humankind via the Prophet Muhammad, it would be difficult for one who believed in the authority of both the Qur'an and the Prophet not to believe in the Prophet's word. He believes that since the Qur'an can be referred to as "the foundation of Islam" and this foundation was laid by way of the Prophet Muhammad, it would follow that the other information that was delivered to people through this same prophet would have similar weight and authority. It is interesting to note that throughout Haddad's defense of the sunna, he fails to consider the possibility that even if the Prophet's example were perfect, this does not mean that the accounts of his actions were perfectly transmitted. This, I believe, would be the counterargument offered by the other scholars.

Haddad goes on to deal directly with Hassan's "three theological assumptions on which the superstructure of men's alleged superiority to women has been erected" ("Reflections" 2).

The first theological assumption that Hassan points to is “that God’s primary creation is man, not woman, since woman is believed to have been created from man’s rib, hence [she] is derivative and secondary ontologically” (“Reflections” 2). Hassan fervently maintains that the Qur’an actually says that the creation of humankind was simultaneous, and this made woman and man, if nothing else, chronologically equal. Haddad counters this theological assumption by asking, “Is this assumption not reversed for all time with the first child born of a woman and so until the end of time? Hence Allah commands respect of the wombs second only to Himself” (“Reflections 2”). In this, Haddad is responding to Hassan’s claim not by refuting the claim but rather by putting it into relationship with human birth. Basically, Haddad argues, every person is born to a woman. If the first person created was a man, that man would be the only person in the history of the existence of humankind not to be born to a woman. Therefore, from Haddad’s perspective, the first theological assumption presented by Hassan would become reversed. Also, in traditional Islam, Allah commands that observant Muslims should respect Him, then the womb that bore them or their mother. A verse of the Qur'an reads “reverence Allah, through whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (That bore you): for Allah ever watches over you” (Qur'an 4:1). For Haddad, this *ayah* would reiterate his interpretation.

Haddad then quotes from the Qur’an, “O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women” (Qur’an 4:1). This verse is saying that God created humankind from a single person. He then created a mate for the initial person from the initial person. According to this translation, no gender is specified. All women and men are descendents of these two original people. This verse from the Qur’an directly counters Hassan’s claim that the creation of humankind was simultaneous.

The second theological assumption that Hassan claims exists in popular Islam is, "woman, not man, was the primary agent of what is generally referred to as 'Man's Fall' or man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, hence 'all daughters of Eve' are to be regarded with hatred, suspicion and contempt" ("Reflections" 2). Hassan is referring to the version of the story of Eve and Adam in which Eve tempts Adam into disobeying God's command not to eat of a particular tree in the Garden of Eden. The two partake of the forbidden fruit of the tree and God becomes upset with them and banishes them from the Garden, casting them to earth as a part of their punishment for their sin. Hassan argues that this story is the basis for a theological assumption that has resulted in women being "regarded with hatred, suspicion and contempt."

Haddad responds to this with the claim that this interpretation of responsibility "is the reading in Judeo-Christianity exclusively. In the Qur'an, the responsible party is identified time and again as Adam, upon him be peace. Nor do expressions such as 'daughters of Eve' have any place in Islam" ("Reflections" 2). In traditional Islam, Haddad argues, a man is regarded as the head of the household and as such, is responsible for any decisions made within that house. Adam and Eve would be considered the very first household or family of humankind. Because of this, the wrongdoing that was committed by the couple would be blamed primarily on Adam since he was the head of that household. In addition, the traditional manner of delineating one's lineage is paternal. Therefore, when tracing one's identity back to the original people, all women and men are traditionally referred to as either the offspring of Adam, not Eve. Many verses of the seventh chapter of the Qur'an begin with "O ye Children of Adam!" (Qur'an:26-27, 31 and 35).

Haddad goes on to address Hassan's assertion that "There is, strictly speaking, no 'Fall' in the Qur'an" ("Theological Reflections" 130). Haddad claims that the "Fall" of Eve, Adam and *Shaitan* from *Jenna* (paradise) is mentioned in five separate verses of the Qur'an. In the *sura*

called the Heifer, Allah says to Eve and Adam, "Then did Satan make them slip from the (Garden), and get them out of the state (of felicity) in which they had been. We said: "Get ye down, all (ye people), with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling-place and your means of livelihood for a time" (Qur'an 2:36). This is repeated in *sura* 7:24. In the *sura* called the Heights, Allah says to *Shaitan*, "(God) said: 'Get thee down from this: it is not for thee to be arrogant here: get out, for thou art of the meanest (of creatures)" (Qur'an 7:13). In the *sura* called Mystic Letters T. H., the entire story is told with more detail. Allah says,

> But Satan whispered evil to him: he said, 'O Adam! Shall I lead thee to the Tree of Eternity and to a kingdom that never decays?' In the result, they both ate of the tree, and so their nakedness appeared to them: they began to sew together, for their covering, leaves from the Garden: thus did Adam disobey his Lord, and allow himself to be seduced. But his Lord chose him (for His Grace): He turned to him, and gave him guidance, He said: 'Get ye down, both of you, - all together, from the Garden, with enmity one to another: but if, as is sure, there comes to you guidance from Me, whosoever follows My guidance, will not lose his way, nor fall into misery. (Qur'an 20:120-123)

Thus, although Hassan is correct in that the Qur'an mentions "a fall" of Eve, Adam and *Shaitan*, Haddad argues that the traditional Muslim understanding of this "Fall" is not in line with the Christian understanding of the Fall that results in Eve being blamed for the first sin committed by humankind. This claim is echoed by Stowasser who argued that the relocation of humankind to earth was always the fate of Adam and Eve.

The third theological assumption that Hassan claims exists in popular Islam is, "woman was created not only from man but also for man, which makes her existence merely instrumental and not fundamental" ("Reflections" 2). Hassan is arguing that one of the reasons women are mistreated is because of the belief that woman was created for the pleasure of man. Once again, Haddad responds not with a refutation but rather an explanation. He explains that there is actually a "utilitarian aspect [which] is reciprocal as explicated by the Qur'an and not a unilateral

proposition as misrepresented above. Man and woman's existence are both instrumental to each other and fundamental in themselves" ("Reflections" 2). Haddad is arguing that as woman was created for man, so too was man created for woman and the creation of each was important in and of themselves. In reference to men and women, a verse of the Qur'an reads "They are your garments and ye are their garments" (Qur'an 2:187).

More broadly, Haddad takes issue with Hassan and her use of *ahadith*. He challenges Hassan's argument about the strength of the *ahadith* she cites that she argues elevates men above women. This challenge can be applied more generally to the criticisms of all of the aforesaid scholars' treatment of *ahadith*. Haddad claims:

> [T]hese *hadiths* have ironclad chains of transmission. It is not only unlikely but simply impossible for a hadith master today to declare any of them weak, let alone someone, such as Ms. Hassan, who is devoid of even a student's qualification in hadith. Yet she rules – without the least basis – their chains of transmission to be weak and avers that their content contradicts the Qur'an when it is in fact supported by verse 4:1! None of those *hadiths*, contrary to Ms. Hassan's wild assumptions, are questioned by the scholars as contradicting the Qur'an at all. To insist that they do is to bury one's head in the sand and complain that the night lingers for too long. ("Reflections" 2-3)

Another argument of Hassan's that Haddad addresses deals with the way she defines words. The meaning of the word *qawwamun* is based in the Arabic term for standing. It denotes one who "stands over" or "stands up for," therefore possibly incorporating a sense of authority and responsibility. Hassan claims that the word "*qawwamun"* is in *sura* 2:228. However, the word is not there. It does show up in *sura* 4, which is sometimes translated to read, "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient and guard in (the husband's) absence what God would have them guard" (Qur'an 4:34). Hassan translates this word as "rulers" or "managers." She insists that this ruling or management is only intended for the time in which women are in their childbearing years; that

their husbands are obligated to provide for them in this time. She bases this argument on her personal "exegesis of this verse" ("Theological Reflections" 134).

Haddad maintains that in the Qur'anic translations provided by "Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, Palmer and Dawood, none translates *qawwamun* as 'rulers' or 'managers" ("Reflections" 1). He goes on to argue, "she [Hassan] cites their popular interpretations as examples, similar to the use of hadith in her view, for sexist promotions of 'the alleged superiority of men to women which permeates the Islamic tradition'" ("Reflections" 3). He is charging that Hassan is misusing this word, in the same way she misuses *ahadith*. He argues that Hassan's argument is sexist against men in the same way that she argues most Muslims are sexist against women. More fundamentally, he believes that Hassan's translation and interpretation of the word *qawwamun* is incorrect. According to Haddad, the verses actually "denotes the superiority of men in **maintenance** and **financial responsibility**. If the man does not work and support his wife then he loses that degree" ("Reflections" 3). Thus Haddad argues that the status difference being discussed in the abovementioned verses place man above woman in terms of their responsibilities. Men are responsible for more than women are and if the men do not fulfill their responsibilities adequately, they lose their elevated status. This criticism of Hassan could very likely be applied to Wadud's definition of the terms from 4:1. Wadud goes through the possible meanings of four key terms in the verse and concludes that many cultural factors have negatively affected their exegesis. Haddad would probably argue that she chose the most derogatory interpretations.

Haddad also addresses Hassan's use of *ahadith*. One of the *ahadith* she quotes states, "if it were permitted for one human being to prostrate to another I would have ordered the woman to prostrate to her husband" ("Reflections" 4). Hassan responds to this by saying:

> A faith as rigidly monotheistic as Islam which makes *shirk* or association of anyone with God the one unforgivable sin cannot conceivably permit any human being to worship anyone but God! … This *hadith* makes it appear that if not God's, it was the Prophet's wish to make the wife prostrate herself before her husband … How such a *hadith* could be attributed to the Prophet who regarded the principle of *Tauhid* (Oneness of God) as the basis of Islam, is, of course, utterly shocking ("Theological Reflections" 135).

Haddad begins by endorsing the authenticity of the *hadith* because it was "narrated from over ten Companions from the Holy Prophet." However, Haddad continues, "the *hadith* of prostration is not about worship. Nor are the verses of Yusuf's brothers' prostration to him, nor those of the prostration of the angels to Adam" ("Reflections" 4). In this criticism, Haddad is more explicitly questioning her method of interpretation. He implies that her reading of the verse is based on a narrow understanding of prostration instead of an attempt to understand possible reasons why the command may have been appropriate. This too can generally be applied to the way in which *ahadith* are treated by the first four scholars because many times they lump *ahadith* together into one patriarchal or misogynistic protuberance instead of attempting to pull anything useful from them.

At this point, Haddad questions not only Hassan's knowledge of the topics she addresses but also her faith in the Qur'an. He says:

> Unless Riffat Hassan is more knowing of the wish of God than His Prophet, it remains clear that the Prophet was speaking of respect precisely in light of God's Law despite her own implicit protestation of knowing better. Yet, to this observer at least, it is clear that Ms. Hassan has a problem with the Qur'an regardless of the Hadith. The Hadith is only used as a scapegoat, {while that which their breasts hide is greater} (brackets his). ("Reflections" 4)

In this, Haddad is being tactical. Traditionally, there is a strong tendency for Muslims to promote that the *sunna* of the Prophet Muhammad be imitated as closely as possible. Like with the Qur'an, if one were to critique an idea, practice or recommendation from the *sunna*, a typical question she or he might expect to be asked is, "Who are you criticizing, God or His prophet?"

This is essentially the question Haddad is asking of Hassan. However, instead of allowing her the opportunity for rebuttal or an explanation, he takes his critique one step further, asserting that while Hassan claims that she believes in the authenticity of the Qur'an, she actually does not agree with the Qur'an. If a Muslim wishes to gain the support of other Muslims using the tenets of Islam, the Qur'an is typically the base on which she would build her arguments. By challenging Hassan's commitment to the Qur'an, it becomes easier for Haddad to undermine Hassan's argument, especially within Muslim communities. Expanding on his criticisms of Hassan, Haddad goes on to say that Hassan and others like her are:

> [A]t home mostly away from the serious study and service of Islam and Muslims. They are unexceptional accidental Muslims in the pursuit of originality in places where one-eyed opinions about Islam can still be king… The writer of 'Women in Muslim Culture' should have shown far more familiarity with the history in her own title and less indulgence in facile phrases. She should be ashamed of her protestations of justice in light of her unrelenting misrepresentations of the Qur'an and *Sunna.* (Haddad 4)

In this transparent attack on Hassan's dedication to Islam and Muslims (and, by implication, anyone who agrees with Hassan), Haddad references the popular quote, "in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king." With this, Haddad accuses Hassan of using people's ignorance about Islam to promote her own interpretation of Islam. In addition, he asserts that her true intentions are to make a name for herself among those who are unfamiliar with traditional Islam and would be better served spending her time and energy learning more about the subject matter. He says that she uses superficial phrases and is not truthful in the representation of the Qur'an and the *sunna,* or tradition of Prophet Muhammad. Here, Haddad could possibly use al-Tabari's description of "the wrongheaded exegete" to describe Hassan. He argues that she and those like her seek out obscure Qur'anic verses, ignore the *ahadith* that can be used to clarify them, and then manipulate their meanings in order to support their misguided presumptions. Again, some of these same criticisms may be applied to al-Hibri, Stowasser and Wadud.

Since the main question of this thesis is about interpretive authority and hermeneutics, it is not only useful to examine scholars who have developed new methods but also those who have adhered to the fairly strict exegetical and hermeneutical methods of traditional Sunni Islam. As is traditionally done, Haddad bases his interpretations of the Qur'an on both the Qur’an and *ahadith* and their commentaries. Unlike the other contemporary scholars I examined, Haddad relies solely on traditional exegetical and hermeneutical methods.

9 CONCLUSION

At the base of my thesis is the question of interpretive authority and how it functions and is established. It is certainly arguable that many, especially women, feel ill-served by traditional Qur'anic interpretations. So instead of using the traditional resources which are Qur'an and *hadith* to develop new interpretations, the disenfranchised seek to develop new methods of interpretation. This is where the comparative study of exegesis is important. All of the scholars I have analyzed seem to have something of a grassroots agenda and would like to see their manner of thinking become widely accepted by Sunni Muslims everywhere. However, in my opinion, aside from Haddad, it is these methods that will most likely turn off the vast majority of Muslims who are exposed to them. A part of this rejection may simply be knee-jerk. But underlying that can be a well thought out refusal to incorporate innovative Qur'anic interpretive methods into a religion that has so long been understood as perfect, *ahadith* and all. Although it is widely recognized that *ahadith* can be controversial, there is also the belief that if a *hadith* directly contradicts the Qur'an, it cannot be true. All true *ahadith* come from the *sunna* of the Prophet Muhammad. Sunni Muslims believe that Prophet Muhammad was a perfect human example for humankind. They also believe that the Qur'an was perfect. It is commonly understood that since the Prophet Muhammad was a perfect human and the Qur'an is a perfect text, it is absolutely impossible for the two to oppose one another. Muslims, by and large, believe these points are self-evident. For someone, no matter how well-seeming, to come along and propose such a radically new and progressive manner of exegesis can result in very strong opposition by many if not most Muslims.

While some, such as Haddad, may view innovative methods of interpretation as controversial and wrong, others believe that fresh exegesis is exactly what is needed in modern

Islam. Hassan, al-Hibri, Stowasser and Wadud are all part of a larger field of scholars who are dissatisfied with the disparities they see between their understanding of Islam and the way in which it is often understood and practiced. All of these scholars believe that Islam is a true religion, revealed from God, and they also believe that the Qur'an is authentic and infallible. Still, since it is a text, it must be interpreted. The point at which they part ways is in their methods of interpreting the Qur'an. Although their arguments are based on unconventional methods of Qur'anic exegesis, they never question the Qur'an itself but rather challenge what they believe are patriarchal uses and interpretations. Also, they part from the majority of mainstream Muslims in terms of their beliefs about the *ahadith* and its commentaries. All four women use nontraditional methods of interpretation and argue that an accurate understanding of the Qur'an will promote an egalitarian understanding of Islam that is absent in most current understandings. Furthermore, these four scholars are widely read and utilized when studying Islam.

At the same time, even if the just intentions of the scholars I have analyzed take hold and become a reality for women and men across the Muslim world, what could the acceptance of such a different method of exegesis mean for Islam? It would be unwise to suggest that no one in the history of Islam has ever questioned traditional methods of exegesis and hermeneutics. However, it is true that no other method has ever been accepted widely enough to supersede traditional Sunni ones. On one hand, one may argue that the traditional methods have not served the population well and need to be revamped so that they are in line with modern sensibilities and freedoms. On the other hand, many might argue that the reason the population is not being served as it should be is not because of flaws within Islam, including the Qur'an and *hadith*, but rather when Muslims who corrupt Islam and spread their corruption.

The thinkers I have placed alongside one another give a fascinating portrayal of how differently similar exegetical methods can produce various interpretive results when applied to the same text. If Sunni Muslims were to adopt the exegetical methods of Hassan, al-Hibri, Stowasser or Wadud, the result could be a surprising array of interpretive authority. Since authority is already dispersed, it would likely become more difficult isolate and privilege any one method over another.

This may seem obvious, but what is somewhat less evident is the potential outcome of such a radical shift from traditional authority-structures. I believe that their arguments might resonate with any Muslim who is interested in uplifting the status of the disenfranchised and those who believe in the qualities these scholars see in the Qur'an. However, they would probably be uncomfortable with parts of some arguments. For example, Hassan's criticisms of *ahadith* are misleading because she often cites partial *ahadith* or some that are far more marginal in their use than she claims. An examination of the arguments from the other scholars appears to have a much more realistic portrayal of the realities of the Muslim world and taken together, may provide a pragmatic method of improving the problems they seek to improve.

I am interested in who has the authority to insist that their method of exegesis becomes the one that is most widely utilized in the Muslim world. By bringing together Hassan, al-Hibri, Stowasser, Wadud and Haddad, I have shown the remarkable diversity of interpretive authority and the way in which it is integrated in various manners. At the beginning of this project, I simply sought to examine what I believed was a novel idea in Qur'anic exegesis, which is to perform it without the use of *ahadith*. It has, however, developed into a far more extensive analysis not only of various methods of exegesis but also of how and why the different methods are potentially useful or detrimental. I find that the methods proposed by modern exegetes can

concretely be likened to the Protestant Reformation in Europe especially since many of them, particularly Hassan, tend to blame Judaism and Christianity for the injustices that have been absorbed into the practice of Islam over the centuries. A more focused criticism would have narrowed this critique to the responsible story which is in Genesis. With this comparison in mind, I believe it is conceivable to argue that the face of Islam can become much like that of Christianity in the world: no one method or authority or version of a text will have any status over another while moving between communities. Instead of having what is now considered to be Sunni and Shi'a, there could develop as many ways of being Muslim and understanding Islam as there are of being Christian and understanding Christianity. For some, this would be ideal. For others, this is one of the worst things that can happen to Islam. The risk here is that this is no longer Islam as it has been practiced and observed over the centuries. This is not to say that there is, or has ever been, one simple way to be Muslim or to practice Islam. There are, however, guidelines that allow some ebb and flow in manners of practice, but still remain as guidelines. As stated above, many may make a valid case that if a religion or tradition is no longer serving its community, the community should either abandon it or make significant changes within. Still, there is the opposing side that would argue that instead of making changes to the religion, the change needs to come from those who observe the religion. While the flexibility may be very attractive for some practitioners and thinkers, others will be totally repulsed by these innovative manners of being and totally turn away from it. I believe that because there are such strong traditions within Sunni Islam, the most effective method of introducing one's ideas or methodologies to the populace is to link those ideas in some shape or form to its traditions.

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GLOSSARY

- Adam – the name of the first man and Prophet
- Adamah – the soil
- Ahadith – plural of hadith
- Al-Qadar – the belief in divine predestination
- Ash-Shaitan – see Satan
- Ayah – same as ayat; miracle; a sign; also a verse of the Qur'an
- Bid'a – same as bidha; innovation
- Fiqh – Islamic jurisprudence
- Hadith – the sayings attributed to Prophet Muhammad
- Iblis – see Satan
- Ijtihad – term from Islamic law describing methods of developing legal decisions through individual autonomous interpretations of the legal sources
- 'ilal – plural of 'illah
- 'illah – justification or reason; usually coupled with ijtihad
- Isnad – list of transmitters of ahadith
- Isra'iliyyat – myths originating in Israelite sources
- Jenna – paradise; heaven
- Jinn – creatures created from a smokeless fire who exist in the unseen realm of this world
- Madahib – same as medhab; schools of law in Islam
- Matn – content (usually referring to the ahadith)
- Min – from; of the same nature as
- Nafs – self; spirit
- Qawwamun – to stand over or stand up for; also understood as to protect or maintain
- Qiyas – analogy
- Ruh – spirit; essence
- Salah – prayer
- Satan – the devil
- Shariah – the legal codes which pertain to all aspect of a Muslims life
- Shura – mutual consultation (and the name of a surah)
- Sunna – same as sunnah; the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad
- Sura – same as surah; a chapter of the Qur'an
- Tafsir – exegesis or commentary, usually of the Qur'an
- Tafsir bi'l-ra'y – interpretation by personal opinion
- Tauhid – belief in the oneness of God
- Yawm ul-qiyam – the Day of Judgment
- Zawj – spouse; group; mate
- Zulm – unfairness; tyranny; oppression; wrongdoing