

Review of Jardim, Georgina L., *Recovering the Female Voice in Islamic Scripture: Women and Silence*, New York: Routledge 2016, 256 pp., ISBN 978-1-4724-2637-6 (hb), ISBN 978-1-4724-2639-0 (eb)

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The ambitious work *Recovering the Female Voice in Islamic Scripture: Women and Silence* by Georgina L. Jardim is a critical contribution to the field of feminist hermeneutics of Islam. Along with its focus on the Qur'anic affirmation of the female voice, it also advances knowledge on the social relevance of Jewish, Christian and Islamic scriptures. The volume starts by providing the reader with the two possible origins of Islamic feminism: modernity or, instead, Islam's ethical history. Islamic feminism repositions women as 'shapers of Islamic history' (XIX). Focusing on the principle of scriptural reasoning, defined as the reading of Christian, Jew and Islamic scriptures together and relating each other on specific issues (p. 4), the book begins with a vital question: is women's silence prescribed by the sacred text, or does the Qur'an instead provide a space for women's engagement with the divine discourse?

Following Mahmood's work in *Politics of Piety*, the first chapter explores discussions on feminist agency in relation to the constitution of Qur'anic female subjectivities. It provides the reader with an exploration of the debates on Islamic female subjectivity and the feminine voice in relation to philosophical thought. The analysis of scriptural practices of silence in the intersections between Judaism, Christianity and Islam leads to the emergence of common deliberations by exploring the relationship between Qur'anic feminine subjectivities and religious practices based on women's subjectivities.

In Chapter 2, Jardim explores the importance of Eve, Khadijah and A'isha as Qur'anic characters to understand the building of their role as Islamic female ideals. Highlighting the similarities between various Abrahamic traditions, the author presents the figure of Eve as an incorporation of Jewish and Christian referents into Islam. This point helps stressing the similarities between these Abrahamic traditions, which is completed with the analysis of Khadijah's, Muhammad's wife, as the ideal of Islamic femaleness. As Jardim notes, the

multiplicity of female personalities was restructured in medieval times to conform to ideals of purity, chastity and submission (p. 60).

Chapter 3 is based on a comparative study of the female characters found in the work of Barbara Stowasser and Amina Wadud. By noting the difficulties found in their assumptions, this section presents itself as an excellent scrutiny of the modes of reading for female action in the Qur'an. While Chapters 1 and 2 could be easily read by non-experts, this theoretical chapter could constitute a strenuous read for a general audience. Jardim makes an important addition by exploring the obstacles presented by Wadudian hermeneutics in opposition to Barlas's work. From the theological approach of Chapter 3, Jardim shifts the focus in Chapter 4 to literary approaches towards a Qur'anic hermeneutic for gendered readings. Chapter 5 starts Jardim's analysis of sign as Qur'anic hermeneutic, discussing the meaning of sign (varying from 'prophetic message' to 'the self of the human being') to explore how it reflects on the relationship between women and revelation. Following this, the sixth chapter completes the previous ones through a categorisation of the typologies of sign in the Qur'an in terms of the index of titles to *surahs* focusing on women, such as 'the house of Imran', 'Mary' and 'the woman to be tested'. Both Chapters 5 and 6 show the complexity of Jardim's research through the careful examination of *surahs* and their categorisation following thematic divisions.

Chapters 7–9 focus on the concept of *mujadilah* ('the woman who disputes') in the 58th *surah* of the Qur'an. These chapters are a vital addition for the building of interfeminist dialogue through a feminist narratological approach which provides women with the role of speaking characters in the Abrahamic religious texts. Some of the sections will be of special interest for experts working in the field of feminist hermeneutics, while a general audience might not find them easily accessible at times. In any case, these chapters demonstrate the silencing of women's voices in Islamic tradition through patriarchal exegesis. An example of that is the fact that several translations have eliminated the word 'woman' in the titles. Through her work, Jardim offers the reader testimony of the empowering possibilities of new Qur'anic hermeneutics for women.

As Muslim women are often the central character in many discussions on Islam, the production of literature aiming to give voice to them assumes an increased urgency to develop progressive Qur'anic exegesis. Jardim's book makes an important addition to the literature on women in Islam: its style, with both deeply theoretical discussions and clear and illustrative examples, can be useful not only to scholars working on Islamic studies, feminist theology and interfaith studies, but also to those interested in expanding their knowledge on techniques to analyse religious texts. Ultimately, *Recovering the Female Voice in Islamic Scripture* is effective in finding the voice of women within religious texts and, as the author puts it, extend the divine revelation on which Abrahamic religions are founded (p. 217). This is evidenced through the case of the *mujadilah*, which Jardim explores to conclude the study. In *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Amira El-Azhary points at the women's lack of participation in Qur'anic interpretations because of the patriarchal character of Muslim theology. It is now time to stress, and encourage, the significance of producing literature that finally brings to the fore the critical role of Muslim women throughout Islamic history.