

## METHODOLOGY USED IN ASSESSING FEMINIST LITERATURE: AN ANALYSIS OF REVIEWS PERTAINING TO QUR'AN AND WOMAN (1992) BY AMINA WADUD

Mheta Bothwell<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Johannesburg

\*corresponding author: [musmheta@gmail.com](mailto:musmheta@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

The article discusses methodological approaches demonstrated in evaluating feminist literature, particularly Qur'an and Woman (1992), by juxtaposing a suggested individualized, multi-dimensional interpretative model (cf. Bothwell Mheta 2017) with seven other reviews, namely those of Nimat Hafez Barazangi (1995), Haifaa Jawad (2003), Rachel M. Scott (2009), Abdulkader Tayob (2009), Aysha A. Hidayatullah (2014) and Adis Duderija (2015). A detail discussion is given of the suggested interpretative model, which is Qur'an and Woman (1992) specific, as well as main features of approaches found in the other chosen reviews.

**Keywords:** feminist literature, Amina Wadud, Qur'an and women

### INTRODUCTION

#### Feminism, feminist writings, and reviews

Feminism can be regarded as a protest movement, a response to certain women's unfavourable experience of the gender reality. The said response usually consists of [1] an evaluation of present circumstances, juxtaposed with [2] an envisaged alternative idealized state of affairs, and [3] an attempt to establish an equilibrium between what is and what can be. The manner in which the desired objective is put into effect will differ according to the environment of the women concerned. In Muslim context the reinterpretation of scripture is viewed as cardinal. The presupposition is that societal norms are informed by a specific reading of scripture in conformity with tradition. Traditional interpretation is thus eyed with suspicion, being regarded as negatively guiding gender assumptions in the community.

Literature abounds with writings of feminists. Even in Muslim circles several prominent studies are available. And together with the production of feminist literature have come responses of diverse nature.

The present article focuses on the latter reviews, moreover on the methodology demonstrated in appraising feminist writings. An individualized, multi-dimensional interpretative approach (cf. Bothwell Mheta 2017) is set off against methodologies of a general nature.

Fortunately, the pioneering work of Amina Wadud, *Qur'an, and Woman* (1992), often discussed by scholars, provides an excellent opportunity to ask critical questions about the manner by means of which feminist literature is reviewed.

### **Modus operandi followed in the article.**

Modus operandi followed in the article below will be to compare a methodology (cf. Mheta 2017), developed during and after intensively analysing *Qur'an and Woman* (1992), with methodologies demonstrated in other reviews and works that give prominent attention to the said book.

As far as the structuring of the present article is concerned, attention will firstly be given to the context and contents of *Qur'an and Woman* (1992) as well as Wadud's exposition of her own methodology.

This will be followed by an exposition of the facets, sub-facets, and sub sub-facets of a suggested interpretative model (cf. Mheta 2017), developed specifically for application to *Qur'an and Woman* (1992). For the elucidation of individual facets, sub-facets, and sub subfacets of the suggested model, examples from the Introduction of *Qur'an and Woman* (1992) will be utilized. The integrated functioning of the facets of the said multi-dimensional model will then be illustrated by applying it on macro-level to the contents of *Qur'an and Woman* (1992). Next an evaluation, in broad terms, of the interpretative model will be given.

As alternative to the said interpretative model, other approaches to the analysis of *Qur'an and Woman* (1992) will be furnished by focusing on existing reviews of *Qur'an and Woman* (1992). Reviews utilized are those of Nimat Hafez Barazangi (1995), Haifaa Jawad (2003), Rachel M. Scott (2009), Abdulkader Tayob (2009), Aysha A. Hidayatullah (2014) and Adis Duderija (2015). Finally, an evaluation will be given of the approaches demonstrated in the said seven reviews of *Qur'an and Woman* (1992), including the way the suggested individualized, multi-dimensional interpretative model relates to each of the seven alternative approaches.

## QUR'AN AND WOMAN (1992)

### Context and contents

Qur'an and Woman (1992) is based upon the author's PhD dissertation accepted at the Michigan University (USA). It is written in a slightly popular, but mostly formal style. The book can be seen as an academic reply to the gender related impressions of Wadud as new convert (1974+), particularly within a USA Muslim community. The main impression to which she responds is the secondary status of Muslim women which she observed and experienced within society. Wadud also sensed that her feelings were shared by other intellectuals and women in general. Of importance is here her sojourn in Malaysia and her making acquaintance with the study group, Sisters in Islam. Qur'an and Woman (1992) is an effort by Wadud to prove that what she regarded as culturally and hierarchically determined gender allocations are not (in her view) supported by the Qur'an, which she believes inherently accentuates justice and gender equality.

The book, Qur'an, and Woman (1992) comprises an Introduction and a Conclusion with four chapters in between. They focus respectively on the creation of mankind seen from a gender perspective (chapter one), woman's portrayal in the Qur'an (chapter two), the married woman's position in the Hereafter (chapter three), and a scrutiny of problematic, seemingly patriarchal-inclined texts in the Qur'an, which Wadud categorizes under the heading, "Rights and Roles of Women: Some Controversies" (chapter four).

### Wadud's exposition and application of her own methodology

Wadud elucidates the strategy she applies during the utilization of scripture within context of the theme of Qur'an and Woman (1992). In explaining her own "Hermeneutic Model", Wadud (1992, 3) concerns herself with three aspects of the text. They are [aspect 1] "context of revelation", [aspect 2] "grammatical composition" and [aspect 3] the text's theological environment typified by Wadud as the [presumed] Qur'anic "Weltanschauung or world-view".

In elucidating the implementation of this model, the author adds the aspect of setting in literature which is determined by establishing "[a chosen portion of scripture's immediate] textual relationship to the discussion of similar topics in the Qur'an", as well as "similar language and syntactic structures". Furthermore, the concept of Qur'anic Weltanschauung or world-view is extended by including "overriding Qur'anic principles". (Wadud, 1992).

Categorized broadly, Wadud regards as requirements for exegesis that the interpreter should focus on setting in life, setting in literature and the theological setting of a

chosen portion of scripture.

The model thus formulated and expanded in the Introduction of *Qur'an and Woman* (1992) makes no reference to the relationship of the setting in life of the present-day interpreter about the text. This aspect receives attention in chapter two ("The Qur'anic view of Woman"). Referring to Fazlur Rahman (1981, 5), Wadud (1992, 31) suggests that:

*The process of interpretation consists of a double movement from  
the present situation to the Qur'anic times, then back to the present*

An example, typifying the application of Wadud's interpretative approach is provided in the Introduction of *Qur'an and Woman* (1992, 9-10). Discussing the issue of veiling by women, Q. 24:31 is used as point of departure, where rules of becoming behavior for "believing women" are stipulated. The Qur'anic verse states amongst others,

*They must not expose their adornment (-lā yubdīna zināta-hunna)  
except what appears thereof ('illā [<'in-lā] mā zaḥara min-hā)*

As 'context of revelation' (cf. aspect 1) Wadud refers to the custom of veiling and seclusion pertaining to women among "wealthy and powerful tribes". According to Wadud the Qur'an "acknowledges" the custom, but from the viewpoint of "the virtue of modesty" (e.g., a manner of clothing not to attract sexual attention).

'Grammatical composition' (aspect 2) of the text is not discussed in her analysis of Q. 24:31. As a matter-of-fact Wadud (1992, 10) only focuses on the second line as quoted above, using the amplified translation of Yusuf Ali (1987 edition), "except what (must ordinary) appear thereof", to which she adds an explicative note (in brackets): "about uncovered parts". Wadud (1992, 10) furthermore comments that the Qur'anic injunction is "to indicate that (ordinary) there are culturally determined guidelines for modesty".

It is not stated by Wadud how her interpretation of the Qur'anic "world-view" (aspect 3) figures, except (by implication) to emphasize the impartiality of the Qur'an about class distinctions. Wadud states, "Modesty is not the privilege of the economically advanced only: all believing women deserve the utmost respect and protection of their modesty—however it is observed in various societies."

No cross references are made to the occurrence of the topic of veiling elsewhere in the Qur'an, neither is the syntactic structure of the focused exceptive clause compared with its use elsewhere in the Qur'an. The author does, however, refer to the restricting of particulars and extracting principles. (Wadud, 1992).

The conclusion may therefore be drawn that Wadud (in the present instance) applies her own hermeneutic model in an eclectic way with her feminist perspective the overriding factor.

### **AN INDIVIDUALIZED, MULTI-DIMENSIONAL INTERPRETATIVE MODEL**

Feminist literature can be reviewed in terms of a general preconceived methodology, or by means of an approach primarily dictated by a concern to do justice to the nature and contents of the work that is focused upon.

As example of the latter, an individualized, multi-dimensional interpretative model (Mheta, 2017), tailored to the contents of Qur'an and Woman (1992), is suggested, consisting of four facets, seven sub-facets (facets 2a -2d, and 3a-b) and three sub sub-facets (2ci-2ciii) as specified below:

*[1] Structure [2] Utilization of scripture [2a] Holistic view [2b] Use of scripture integrated in the discussion [2c] Hermeneutic approach [2ci] Presuppositions [2cii] Textual strategy [2ciii] Application [2d] Wadud's use of scripture compared with her own guidelines / requirements [3] Conversation with Others [3a] Overt conversation' [3b] Covert conversation [3c] Wadud's dealing with overtly and covertly mentioned sources [4] Perspectives upon Wadud.*

The said facets, sub-facets and sub-sub facets will now be discussed, illustrating their application with examples taken from the Introduction of Qur'an and Woman (1992).

#### **Four selected facets of the interpretative model**

Four main facets suggested in analyzing Qur'an and Woman (1992) are 'Structuring of Contents' (facet 1), 'Utilization of Scripture' (2), 'Conversation with Others' (3) and 'Perspectives upon Wadud' (4).

Application of the said four aspects may be illustrated with a sentence from the Introduction to Qur'an and Woman (1992). Wadud (1992, 3) states:

*I propose to make a 'reading' of the Qur'an within the female experience, and [I propose to make a 'reading' of the Qur'an] without the stereotypes which have been the framework for many of the male interpretations.*

First a scrutiny of the 'Structuring of contents' (facet 1) is necessary. The cited sentence consists of two clauses, the first referring to the inclusion of a certain aspect ("female experience") and the second to the exclusion of another aspect ("stereotypes ... male interpretations"). Two alternative ways of studying the Qur'an are alluded to, with Wadud expressing her preference for the first.

The second selected facet is the 'Utilization of scripture'. A specific portion of scripture is not mentioned, but reference is made to a 'reading' of the Qur'an. In this context the participle "reading" could be understood as a synonym for "interpreting" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2010). According to Wadud the Qur'an can be interpreted from two alternative preconceived points of view, a feminist, and a traditionalist.

'Conversation with Others' is a third facet that may be inferred from the cited sentence. Wadud proposes an understanding (or "reading") of the Qur'an informed by "female experience", as opposed to a 'reading' that seeks in the Qur'an affirmation of traditional masculine "stereotypes". No specific source is noted, but she refers covertly to "many of the male interpretations" using as "framework" an approach that is not feminine sensitive. The 'Conversation with Others' in the present instance thus consists of characterizing the alternative 'reading', and abruptly rejecting it.

The fourth selective facet that may be deduced from the cited sentence is 'Perspectives upon Wadud'. Wadud sides with a "reading of the Qur'an within the female experience". Detail of this experience is not given, but it may imply the encountering of gender unfriendliness which Wadud believes is based upon a traditional and stereotypical understanding of the Qur'an.

### Sub-facets of the 'Utilization of scripture' (facet 2)

In the suggested exegetical model, designed to analyze Wadud (1992), the second and third selected facets illustrated above are subdivided.

'Utilization of scripture (facet 2) has as subdivisions 'Holistic view' (subfacet 2a), 'Use of scripture integrated in the discussion' (2b), 'Hermeneutic approach' (2c) and 'Wadud's use of scripture compared with her own guidelines /requirements' (2d).

The advisability of the given fourfold division of the 'Utilization of scripture' may be illustrated with reference to the example (Q. 24:31) elucidated above during the discussion of Wadud's exposition of her own methodology.

Seen in terms of a 'Holistic View' (subfacet 2a), Wadud's use of Q. 24:31 is part of the subsection, Distinctions between Men and Women (1992:8), within context of her elucidation of the application of the exegetical guidelines during the interpretation of scripture.

'Use of Scripture integrated in the discussion' (facet 2b) may be illustrated by Wadud's utilization of the said Qur'anic example to support her conviction that (when interpreting scripture) a differentiation should be made between principles and particulars. Before elaborating her view of Q. 24:31, Wadud (1992, 9) states

*Therefore, each new Islamic society must understand the principles intended by the particulars. Those principles are eternal and can be applied in various social contexts.*

And after concluding her illustration by means of Q. 24:31 Wadud (1992, 10) observes

*The movement from principles to particulars can only be done by the members of whatever context a principle is to be applied. Therefore, interpretation of the Qur'an can never be final.*

'Hermeneutic Approach' (facet 2c) may be exemplified by Wadud's approach during her exegesis of Q. 24:31, i.e., to choose a specific translation that suits her interpretative objective with the example concerned.

'Wadud's use of scripture integrated in her own guidelines /requirements' (facet 2d) has already been dealt with extensively when weighing Wadud's own suggested methodology against the methodology applied.

### **Sub sub-facets of 'Hermeneutic approach' (sub-facet 2c)**

In the case of 'Utilization of scripture' (facet 2), the subdivision 'Hermeneutic approach' (sub-facet 2c) is further subdivided for the purpose of a detail analysis of Qur'an and Woman (1992). Individual sub subfacet that are identified are 'Presuppositions' (2ci), 'Textual strategy' (2cii) and 'Application' (2ciii).

'Presuppositions' (2ci) within context refer to a female pre-understanding in contrast to what is stereotypically categorized as traditional male understanding. The common word used in feminist vocabulary is "prior text" (Wadud 1992, 6), which when it becomes a conviction can be labelled a "presupposition" (Thiselton, 1992, 45).

‘Textual strategy’ (2cii) pertains to the selection of interpretative possibilities that are made in analyzing a text.

‘Application’ (2ciii), the third sub subfacet, is an essential feature of ‘Hermeneutic approach’ (2c). Utilization of scripture in feminist literature is not a theoretical venture. The objective is to use it as vehicle to challenge stereotypes and establish gender equality particularly within Muslim society. Evidence of suggested practical applications is therefore usually to be found.

These three sub subfacets parallel Wadud’s own hermeneutic procedure explained in the Introduction of *Qur’an and Woman* (1992). After focusing on Q. 24:31 Wadud states (1992, 10, cf. 63):

*The method of restricting the particulars to a specific context, extracting the principles intended through the, and then applying those principles to other particulars in various cultural contexts, forms a major variation from previous exegetical methodologies.*

The detail aspects of ‘Hermeneutic approach’ (2c), namely ‘Presupposition’ (2ci), ‘Textual strategy’ (2cii) and ‘Application’ (2ciii) are all illustrated in the cited sentence.

‘Presupposition’ (2ci) within context refers to a certain pre-understanding of Wadud when interpreting Qur’anic material. According to her view (conditioned by gender considerations) Qur’anic material needs to be contextualized and “the particulars to a specific context” determined.

‘Textual Strategy’ (2cii) is “restricting the particulars to a specific context”, but simultaneously “extracting the principles” which Wadud deems to have been “intended through the particular” by the Qur’an.

‘Application’ (2ciii) as hermeneutic approach consists of “applying those principles [extracted from particulars identified in the text] to other particulars in various cultural contexts”.

### **Sub-facets of ‘Conversation with Others’ (facet 3)**

‘Conversation with Others’ (facet 3), is, in turn, subdivided into ‘Overt conversation’ (3a), ‘Covert conversation’ (3b) and ‘Wadud’s dealing with overtly and covertly mentioned sources’ (3c). Diverse opinions identified (overtly, cf. 3a) or assumed (covertly, cf. 3b) are important elements in the reasoning of Wadud (1992). At the beginning of the subsection, *Distinctions between Men and Women*, Wadud (1992, 8)



formulates her view in terms of the sub-facets mentioned above.

The Qur'an does not attempt to annihilate the differences between men and women or to erase the significance of functional gender distinctions which help every society to run smoothly and fulfil its needs [cf. sub-facet 3c].

In fact, compatible mutually supportive functional relationships between men and women be part of the goal of the Qur'an about society 13 [cf. sub-facet 3a]. See Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*, 6 vols. (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1980), Vol. II, pp. 642-3, where he discusses the shared benefits and responsibility between men and women in the Islamic social system of justice. However, the Qur'an does not propose or support a singular role or single definition of a set of roles, exclusively, for each gender across every culture [cf. sub-facet 3b].

'Overt conversation' (sub-facet 3a) is illustrated by means of the second sentence (accompanied by footnote 13) in the quoted paragraph. Sayyid Qutb (1980, 642) is used to underpin and substantiate Wadud's claim that "supportive functional relationships" between genders is a societal "goal" of the Qur'an.

The alternative 'covert' opinion (sub-facet 3b) is illustrated by the third sentence cited above. By using a negative construction Wadud insinuates that unidentified 'Others' are in favour of fixed hierarchical male-female relationship "across every culture".

Juxtaposing the second and third sentence above (illustrating sub-facets 3a and 3b respectively) is already an example of 'Wadud's dealing with overtly and covertly mentioned sources' (sub-facet 3c). The second sentence (with Qutb as overt source) is used by Wadud to state her feminist view. The third sentence presupposes an alternative (covert) view. The first sentence, "The Qur'an does not attempt to annihilate the differences ... or to erase the significance of functional gender distinctions ..." (illustrating sub-facet 3c), however, is particularly relevant as example of Wadud's reasoning. The sentence has a concessive function. Although men and women are equal in status there are "functional gender distinctions" between them.

### **MACRO-LEVEL APPLICATION OF SELECTIVE FACETS IDENTIFIED IN THE SUGGESTED INTERPRETATIVE MODEL**

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As an American lady and newly converted to Islam, Amina Wadud experienced her sojourn as woman within the Muslim establishment as unsatisfactory as regards gender equality. She also found that scripture (particularly the Qur'an) was used by

traditionally minded persons (mostly men) to defend and maintain the status quo.

*Qur'an and Woman (1992) may be a response to her observations and what she had gone through.*

To elucidate Wadud's view, an interpretative model may be used consisting of the four facets, seven sub-facets (facets 2a -2d, and 3a-c) and three sub sub-facets (2ci-2ciii).

Stated in an integrated way, Wadud's written response to her situation can be demonstrated on macro level through her 'Structuring' (cf. selective facet 1) of the book and its various chapters. From the viewpoint of intertextuality, the two main variables at play are the 'Utilization of scripture' (facet 2) and her 'Conversation with Others' (facet 3). The said facets (and subdivisions) featuring on macro level eventually provide overall 'Perspectives upon Wadud' (facet 4) in her pioneering days as contender for woman's rights.

As regards the 'Utilization of scripture' (facet 2), seen from the perspective of a 'Holistic view' (2a) a selection is made of different Qur'anic verses and passages. The way they are used typify 'Use of scripture integrated in the discussion' (2b), i.e., Qur'anic verses and passages by means of which she presents her feminist-minded arguments. Within Wadud's 'Hermeneutic strategy' (2c) during the interpretation of scripture various aspects may be discerned. Her 'Presupposition' (selective facet 2ci) is that the Qur'an does not in essence favor men above women. She suggests in her book, "Qur'an and Woman" (1992), the utilization of a specific 'Textual strategy' (2cii) which would prove her gender-equality outlook. Her purpose is the 'Application' (2ciii) of the outcome of her study to better the presumed unfavorable position of women within Islam. It remains an open question, however, whether the two juxtaposed components as regards 'Wadud's use of scripture compared with her own guidelines / requirements' (2d) are not in opposition to one another, with Wadud using her stated method of interpretation in an elective way to suit her gender objectives.

'Conversation with Others' (facet 3) is demonstrated in Qur'an and Woman (1992) by means of an 'Overt' (subfacet 3a) or 'Covert' (3b) way. Sources are either identified or are only vaguely referred to. This leads to the question regarding 'Wadud's dealing with overtly and covertly mentioned sources' (3c).

Throughout Wadud's 'Structuring' (cf. selective facet 1) of her gender-minded

argumentation, focusing on the 'Utilization of scripture' (facet 2) while constantly in 'Conversation with Others' (facet 3), 'Perspectives upon Wadud' (facet 4) can be deduced.

### Evaluating the model

Viewed in terms of general categorization, the above model firstly demonstrates both a holistic and detail approach.

Secondly, in the interpretative model the aspect of intertextuality comes into focus several times. The second selected feature, "Utilization of Scripture" is subdivided into four aspects, the second of which is 'Use of Scripture integrated in the Discussion' (2b), and the fourth 'Wadud's Use of Scripture compared with her own Guidelines /Requirements' (2d). Furthermore, the third selected feature "Conversation with Others" has as third aspect 'Wadud's dealing with overtly and covertly mentioned sources' (3c).

These three examples of intertextuality function in various ways.

As regards 'Use of scripture integrated in the discussion' (2b) reference to the use of scripture is within a certain frame and forms part of a specific gender related argument.

'Wadud's dealing with overtly and covertly mentioned sources' (3c) relates to her utilizing of sources to support her own views on gender. Alternatively, the sources (usually overtly mentioned) function in a polemical context when they disagree with her own.

'Wadud's Use of Scripture compared with her own Guidelines /Requirements' (2d) focuses on Wadud's actual implementation of scripture contrasted with the specific hermeneutic model which she proposes in the introduction of her study. In the said model (as explained above) she provides guidelines or specifies requirements for the analysis of Qur'anic material. The question that we need ask is to what extent her own guidelines or requirement are adhered to when Wadud uses portions of scripture to further her gender arguments.

*Thirdly, the model directs attention to the role of the author (cf. aspects 2ci, 2cii and 4)*

### ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO THE ANALYSIS OF QUR'AN AND WOMAN (1992)

The suggested exegetical model for the analysis of Wadud (1992) may be typified as multi-faceted and Qur'an and Woman specific. It comprises a detail scrutiny of the said work from various angles that were chosen specifically with a view to elucidate specific aspects present in Wadud's study. Other reviews giving attention to Qur'an and Woman (1992) demonstrate individual approaches. They are those of Nimat Hafez Barazangi (1995), Haifaa Jawad (2003), Rachel M. Scott (2009), Abdulkader

Tayob (2009), Aysha A. Hidayatullah (2014) and Adis Duderija (2015).

### Reviews of Qur'an and Woman (1992)

An early appreciation that appeared is that of Nimat Hafez Barazangi of Cornell University, New York. Her review was published in Journal of Islamic Studies 1995, 324-6.

According to Barazangi "The book [Qur'an and Woman (1992)] originated in the author's University of Michigan PhD dissertation, and is a concise, readable, and invaluable source for understanding woman's 'liberation' written from within the Islamic world-view."

In her review Barazangi has a focused and evaluative approach directly related to Qur'an and Woman (1992). She refers to the essence of Qur'an and Woman ('an analysis of the concept of woman drawn directly from the Qur'an', cf. Wadud 1992, iv), its uniqueness (Qur'an as primary source, focusing on the 'question of the concept woman'; cf. Wadud 1992, v), emphasis (the role of woman as a human entity in the Qur'an), aim ('to make a "reading" of the Qur'an that will be meaningful to women living in the modern era', cf. Wadud 1992, 1), major themes ([1] the Qur'an as a text should be read in space and time; [2] the need for continuous interpretation of the Qur'an), general contents (introduction, chapters 1 [equality in the creation of humankind] and 2 [distinction between individuals on the basis of piety] that are "most effective when read together"; chapter 3 and 4), and major contributions (methodology and the prior text of gender-specific (Arabic) language) particularly hermeneutic methodology (concerned with three aspects of the text; continuity and permanence in the Qur'anic text, and unchangeable principles). Barazangi in conclusion asks critical questions ('how one can draw principles from outside the Islamic world-view and apply them in the study of the Qur'an'; 'how one can draw a line between the universal intent of Qur'anic principles and the subjective interpretation'; and how to reconcile 'humanity' and 'feminist perspective') and an evaluation both negative ('gap between analyzing the principles and determining the contextual application, or the ideals and reality, remains unbridged') and positive ('The pedagogical value of this book then lies in coaching men to read and act within this perspective of the Qur'an, and in making women realize the vastness of their task in educating themselves and others in the Qur'an').

Barazangi views Qur'an and Woman (1992) from a feminist perspective, e.g.,

suggesting a 'non-gendered translation of the Arabic text when Wadud was referring to Allah'. She even takes up a position beyond feminism, e.g., asking 'how a woman may recapture her humanity and move beyond exercising a reading of the Qur'an from a feminist perspective' (cf. the critical questions above). The summary is brief, informative (e.g., identifying and elucidating specific foci) and critical.

Seen from the perspective of the suggested hermeneutical model for Qur'an and Woman (1992) expounded above, it appears that selective feature one [1], "Structure", receives cursory attention without observing how form and contents are aligned; feature two [2], "Utilization of scripture", is addressed by concentrating mainly on Wadud's methodological approach in dealing with the subject of woman in the Qur'an; feature three [3], "Conversation with Others", is only cursorily mentioned, for example referring to alternative approaches. As regards feature four [4], "Perspectives upon Wadud" are not per se provided; remarks relating to Wadud are predominantly of academic nature.

Another article featuring a review of Qur'an and Woman (1992) is that of Haifaa Jawad, Director of Centre for Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Birmingham (UK). The said study, Muslim Feminism: A Case Study of Amina Wadud's Quran and Women, was published in Journal of Islamic Studies, vol. 42, no. 1, 2003, 107-125. The article discusses Qur'an and Woman (1992) after giving an overview of feminism, particularly Muslim Feminism.

Pertaining to feminism, Jawad firstly refers to secular feminism, which according to her "From its very inception ... has associated itself with Western secular tendencies in society". Jawad furthermore states, "This secularist approach has, in recent years, come under heavy pressure; indeed, it has already created a backlash, since it alienates sections of Muslim women who want change, but not at the expense of their Islamic identity." In opposition to the adherents to the secular approach are "ultra-conservative females and those who desire to replicate the historical model of Islam without taking into consideration the complexities of modern life or the impact of modernity on Muslim society". In between, Muslim feminism may be situated, focusing on the re-interpretation of Islamic sources. According to Jawad, Muslim feminism was advocated by both women and men, e.g., Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1323/1905) a nineteenth century Muslim reformer who spoke in favor of reform in personal law; all of them under severe criticism. As far as the specific female reading of the Qur'an is concerned, Jawad refers to early authors such as Bint al-Shati, pseudonym of the Egyptian scholar, Aisha Abd al-Rahman (c. 1913-1998).

Jawad then gives specific attention to Amina Wadud and *Qur'an and Woman* (1992) without showing any links between Wadud and early Muslim feminism. Bint al-Shati, for example, like Wadud (1992, 31), emphasizes "the moral and spiritual guidance of the scripture rather than the historical facts". As far as *Qur'an and Woman* (1992) is concerned a comprehensive summary consisting of eleven pages is given of the contents of the book, covering aspects such as Wadud's utilization of scripture versus those of others, but without systematizing main interpretative trends.

The objective of Jawad was seemingly to be informative rather than evaluative. Jawad is, for example, only mildly critical when referring to Wadud's interpretation of Q. 4:34, stating, "She [Wadud] then advises that this verse [Q. 4:34] should be understood as preventing excessive violence against women rather than allowing it; she does that without any convincing argument". She (Jawad) is a little more outspoken when giving her final assessment of *Qur'an and Woman* (1992). Firstly, Jawad remarks that *Qur'an and Woman's* "relevance lies in the fact that it challenges patriarchal interpretations from within the Islamic tradition bestowing upon it the distinction of acting as a pioneering study for future research along the same lines." But then Jawad declares, "Having said that, it also needs to be pointed out that in her work Wadud demonstrates a tendency to condemn the traditional commentaries of the Qur'an without providing any systematic analysis or comparative studies of these commentaries, which makes her work vulnerable to criticism."

*Qur'an and Woman* (1992) is contextualized as "part and parcel of a recent trend among educated Muslim women of different backgrounds who, while criticizing the patriarchal world-view, make it a point to emphasize their allegiance to Islam as an essential part of their self-identity." Furthermore, Jawad opines that the "rationale behind such an approach is ... to re-visit the traditional legalistic commentaries in order to re-address gender imbalance." Modern contenders for women's rights (such as Wadud) are, however, "principally concerned with the exoteric [i.e. commonly known] aspect of the Law (Shari'ah)", while neglecting "its [less known] spiritual dimension which has, historically speaking, favored women and allowed the pursuit of feminine activities."

As evident from her final remarks, Jawad, to a great extent sides with traditional gender views, honoring women but limiting their domains of public activity. Jawad's resume of *Qur'an and Woman* (1992) is quite instructive, but her contextualizing is unsatisfactory. In addition, references to Wadud's treatment of "traditional

commentaries” may be deemed to be one-sided. It is true that Wadud does not provide a “systematic analysis” of the commentaries, but she does not condemn all of them per se. Qutb, for example, is at times used (cf. Wadud 1992 chapter two and four) with approval of his views.

Compared with the multi-dimensional hermeneutic method expounded above, systematic highlighting of selected features is absent in the study of Jawad. The primary advantage of the latter’s review is the extensive biographical information given by way of footnotes.

Rachel M. Scott (2009) of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia, also provides a perspective on aspects of Qur’an and Woman. She focuses on “A Contextual Approach to Women’s Rights in the Qur’an: Readings of 4:34” in a study published in the journal, *The Muslim World* (99, 60-85).

In her article Scott makes a relatively detailed study of the contributions of Muhammad al-Talbi (b. 1921), Fatima Mernissi (b. 1940) and Amina Wadud (b. 1952), paying attention to their respective contextual approaches to the interpretation of Q. 4:34b (hitting as corrective measure). In the view of Scott “the [said] three contemporary Islamic thinkers ... employ the hermeneutical method of contextual reading to interpret the verse [Q. 4:34b] in a way that does not condone the beating of women” (2009, 63).

Mernissi and al-Talbi, using historical traditions in an eclectic way (Scott, 2009), allege that the reasons for revelation of the verse “lie in the social and political situation of the time” (Scott, 2009) with the community split on the issue of the beating of women. Both refer to the Prophet’s being in favor of the feminist point of view. Both mention the intervention of God through the revelation of the verse, Q. 4:34, but differ as regards the circumstances. Wadud in turn, argues that the said Qur’anic text focuses “on the marital norm at the time of revelation, and applies constraints on the actions of the husbands with regard to wives.” (Wadud, 1992). No divine reasoning is suggested, but Scott (2009, 73-4) refers to a remark in this regard made in another context (Patriarchy) by Wadud. Explaining her trajectory of incremental reform and quoting Zein-ed-Din ([1928] 1982, 224), Wadud (1992, 82), states, “if all these [pre-Qur’anic] customs had been entirely abolished by God, several problems would have ensued ..., not many of his commandments would have been obeyed”.

In presenting the views of the said three scholars of Q. 4:34, Scott (2009) also

discusses and evaluates their respective methodologies. Sources used about Wadud are the Introduction and chapter four of Qur'an and Woman (1992), as well as portions from Inside Gender Jihad (Wadud 2006). About the latter source, reference is, for example, made to Wadud's ultimate exegetical position (Wadud,2006) pertaining to Q. 4:34b, "I have finally come to say 'no' outright to the literal implementation of this passage [i.e., 'hitting' a wife as corrective measure]."

Compared with the foci of the suggested hermeneutic model expounded above, Scott gives attention only to a relatively small segment of Qur'an and Woman (2009). Within the chosen segment, "Utilization of scripture" [facet 2] is highlighted, but "Structure" [facet 1], "Conversation with Others" [facet 3] and "Perspectives upon Wadud" [facet 4] are absent or only indirectly mentioned.

A penetrating reflection of feminists' approach to scripture is found in a publication of Abdulkader Tayob (2009). Within the final chapter (2009,157-180) of A-K Tayob's book, Religion in Modern Islamic Discourse, he pays attention to "Reading Islamic Feminism: Modern and Beyond". In it detail attention is given to Nazira Zein-ed-Din (born 1908) and Amina Wadud (born in 1952). Important observations are made regarding Nazira Zein-ed-Din. However, for the purpose of this overview attention will be primarily focused upon the discussion of Amina Wadud, whose views on women's rights (according to Tayob 2009:173) are "contradictory" and "alternative" to those ascribed to Zein-ed-Din.

Tayob bases his description of Wadud's approach on information gleaned mostly from Wadud's 2006 publication, Inside the Gender Jihad. Reference is occasionally made to Qur'an and Woman, quoting almost exclusively from the extended preface of the 1999 edition. The discussion of Tayob is phrased in a philosophical jargon, highlighting Wadud's contribution to feminism in terms of specific variables.

Prior to the discussion of Wadud (and Nazira Zein-ed-Din) Tayob (2009,157-158) declares

*This chapter accepts women's articulation as responses, in some cases even subversion, of the discourse of Muslim women. More deeply, though, it relates their responses to the central question of the meaning of religion that has pursued this study [!] in general.*

Frequently used variables as regard Wadud in Tayob's reasoning are:



Universals; cf. 2009:1, 3, 4, 6, 14, 17, 18, 19, 21, 26 and 28

Agency; cf. 2009:2, 6, 8, 11 and 12

Reader; cf. 2009:5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 20, 21 and 26

Principles; cf. 2009:3, 5, 15, 17, 24, 26 and 30

Values; cf. 2009: 14, 17, 29 and 32

Key sentences illustrating the use of the respective variables by Tayob are:

- Wadud, as believer, wanted to embrace some universals. As feminist and as woman, she wanted a different set of universals than those pursued by male scholarship (2009, 165).
- The author attempted to keep both agency and universals in the interpretative exercise (Wadud, 2009).
- She also notes that, the meanings of the Qur'an came close to be deconstructed. She repeatedly reassures her readers, though, that principles can be recovered by commitment of a reader who recognizes that the Qur'an has contributed and can contribute to 'equity, justice and human dignity' (Wadud, 2009).
- Wadud added [to the framework of Rahman] elements that emphasized the role of the reader and agent in the construction of values and principles (2009, 166).

Although not always easy to discern, in the above Tayob texts "universals" may be equated with a set of fixed beliefs, or presuppositions; "agency" and "reader" refer to the exegetical activity in arriving at an interpretation; and "principles" and "values" the product of exegetical process.

The expression "universals" is usually used as adjective by Wadud in Qur'an and Woman (1992), e.g., "Rather, the Qur'anic guidelines should lead the various communities towards progressive change within the context of universal Qur'anic guidance" (1992, 81). Although the expression "agency" is foreign to Wadud, the term "reader" is used, much in the same way as mentioned by Tayob, e.g. "Thus, each individual reader interacts with the text" (1992, 6). The use of "principles" by Wadud, echoes that of Tayob, but less technical, e.g. "The implication of this patriarchal context must be understood in relation to the greater Qur'anic principles

and their ultimate intent of harmonious and equitable relationships in society” (1992, 81).

The study of Tayob portrays the feministic approach of Wadud in terms of fixed concepts that are related to each other. Showing their interaction creates a holistic picture of Wadud, suggesting a pattern of argumentation and a paradigm within her reasoning.

However, Tayob’s Wadud is not the Wadud (of flesh and blood) featuring in Qur’an and Woman (1992); it stereotypes more than describes. Detail and practical examples are almost absent. Therefore, the suggested interpretative model expounded above suggests a multi-dimensional approach to the analysis of Qur’an and Woman (1992), which leads to less penetrating focus on, and discussion of the variables illustrated above, but provides a more comprehensive overview of Wadud (1992) in terms of the four selected facets.

In addition to Adulkader Tayob (2009) and Rachel Scott (2009), a third comparative study of Wadud’s feminist writings is that of Aysha A. Hidayatullah in *Feminist Edges of the Qur’an* (2014). The objective of the book is to synthesize and critically respond to the works of late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century scholars engaged in feminist interpretations of the Qur’an (2014, 3). In her analysis, Hidayatullah focuses on six feminist scholars. These are Riffat Hassan, Azizah al-Hibri, Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, Sa’diyya Shaikh and Kecia Ali (2014, 10-16). Five of the six scholar are US based, while Sa’diyya Shaikh is from South Africa (2014, 7). Hidayatullah provides short biographical profiles of each scholar, beginning with a first generation of scholars consisting of Riffat Hassan, Azizah al-Hibri, and Amina Wadud. Hassan commenced her work in the 1970s and the latter two began theirs in the 1980s (2014, 7).

In motivating her choice of the six scholars, Hidayatullah says, “I have chosen to focus on the works of scholars who, through the publication of full-length monographs or a substantial repertoire of works consistently and primarily focused on feminist Qur’anic exegesis, [and] have engaged in feminist interpretation of the Qur’an in a sustained manner by applying a common set of identifiable textual approaches to the Qur’an” (2014,5).

As regard the contents of her book, Hidayatullah firstly provides an overview of the “Historical Emergence of Feminists Qur’anic Interpretation” (Part 1), then compares

the chosen authors in terms of “Three Methods of Feminist Qur’anic Interpretation” (Part 2), and finally offers “Critiques of Feminist Qur’anic Interpretation” (Part 3).

The said “Three Methods of Feminist Qur’anic Interpretation” (Part 2) are “Historical Contextualization”, “Intratextual Method” and “The Tawhidic Paradigm”.

Stated in broad terms “Historical Contextualization” enquires about the setting in life of the text and the interpretative tradition. “Intratextual Method” focuses on the setting in literature of a text, comparing it to related Qur’anic verses, and views it in terms of the overall ethic principles. “The Tawhidic Paradigm”, in fact a subcategory of the “Intratextual method”, argues that sexism is a form of idolatry, that no interpretation of the Qur’an is ever permanent, and that a clear distinction should be made between the divine text of the Qur’an and its human interpretation.

When discussing Amina Wadud, Hidayatullah (2014:252) refers to a variety of articles and books by Wadud (indexing twelve of them in the biography). However, for the purpose of the article Hidayatullah’s use of Qur’an and Woman will be highlighted. Focus will be Hidayatullah’s “Three Methods of Feminist Qur’anic Interpretation” and the way they relate to the four selected facets of the thesis.

Viewing the book, a reviewer must admit that it demonstrates an exceptional caliber of expertise and knowledge of the subject. Technically it is of a high quality. Intensive scrutiny, however, reveals stadia in its growth. Sources mentioned in the final chapters are, for example, not repeated in the bibliography. For the rest, the latter is complete, except for the absence of Al Hibri.

It should be borne in mind that the book focuses on six feminists, including Amina Wadud. The latter receives prominent, but not all the attention. Wadud is methodologically mostly portrayed using Gender Jihad (2006) as point of departure. Qur’an and Woman is often quoted, but within the frame of Wadud’s later writings.

Categorization of feminists’ approaches within the three interpretative methods identified by Hidayatullah provides enlightening insight into their exegetical methodology. However, the categories tend to be too large to reflect subtleties in feminist approaches. It is also debatable whether all information within a method or paradigm is correctly classified. Theoretical discussion of the methods or paradigm within the greater interpretative traditions would have enhanced the quality of the research. Even within the book methodological awareness of steps taken towards

certain conclusions are not always evident.

Hidayatullah at first presents the chosen feminists and their methods in a relatively objective way. Then she criticises their methodology by challenging the way the Qur'an is used to support feminist thinking. Finally, she provides her own approach, which in essence is a "beyond the Qur'an" solution. Hidayatullah thus endorses a kind of higher ethics (which she believes is not unrelated to the Qur'an), and on the other hand denies the existence of a clear-cut differentiation between the genders.

Seen in context of the four selected facets of the model introduced in the article, Hidayatullah primarily confines herself to the textual strategy (cf. selected facet 2b) of the six feminists. The other selected facets and sub-facets of the suggested multi-dimensional, interpretative approach receive only cursory attention.

A theoretical reflection on feminist methodology is provided by Adis Duderija (2015), Lecturer in Islam and Society, in the School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science at Griffith University, South East Queensland, Australia. The article, "Towards Scriptural Hermeneutics of Islamic Feminism," was originally published in the *Journal for Feminist Studies in Religion* (31(2):45-64). In it a brief overview is given of "Scriptural Hermeneutics and Islamic Feminism", but the main focus is on "Delineating Features of Islamic Feminist Scriptural Hermeneutics". Six features are identified and discussed. They are:

1. interpreter-centered hermeneutics.
2. a comprehensive contextualization approach to textual sources.
3. a thematico-holistic approach to textual sources and the dialogical nature of the Qur'anic discourse.
4. a non-salafi-based Weltanschauung.
5. an ethico-religious values and purposive-based interpretation (i.e., teleological hermeneutics).
6. a non-hadith dependent Sunna hermeneutics.

According to Duderija (2015:46) these features respond to "the question as to the kind of Islamic hermeneutics on which Islamic feminism proper is to be based". He states (2015:48) that "Hidayatullah's work (2014) is a useful point of departure for this article as it comes closest to what I purport to achieve." However, Duderija opines that Hidayatullah focuses on "quasi-scriptural hermeneutics since Hidayatullah's work is not consciously grounded in a scriptural hermeneutics framework per se and uses alternative terminology, namely 'strategies of feminist

theology’.”

In defining feature one [1] of his characterizing of feminist hermeneutics, Duderija (2015,49) explains, “Interpreter-centered scriptural hermeneutics is based on the assumption that the meaning of a text is significantly influenced/determined by the prior self-positioning of the reader/interpreter herself/himself ... and that the interpreter does not simply retrieve the meaning of the text but plays an important part in creating meaning.” In this regard attention is specifically drawn to Wadud’s discussion of “prior text” (1992, 4-10).

The second feature [2] is “Comprehensive Contextualization and Dialogical Nature of the Qur’anic Discourse”. According to Duderija (2015, 53) applying this feature, “means methodically investigating the role of context [i.e., grammatical and syntactical structures] in the shaping of the content of the Qur’an and its worldview.”

The third feature [3] is typified by Duderija (2015, 57) as an approach, namely “Thematico-Holistic Approach to Textual Sources Based on an Inductive-Corroboation Approach to Textual Evidence”. This approach is based on a certain premise, namely “that a proper understanding of a Qur’an and/or Sunna-based concept is gained only if all the relevant verses dealing with that concept are analyzed and subsequently synthesized into a larger frame-work of interpretation by means of a corroborative induction.” Duderija (2015, 8) alleges that this approach allows for “alternative, women-‘emancipatory’ interpretations”, for example, Wadud’s “ethical trajectories” (cf. preface to the 1999 edition, p. xiii)”.

A fourth feature is, according to Duderija (2015,59), “A Non-Salafi-Based Worldview”. The kernel concept is Salafism which is “based on the idea of ‘emulation worthiness’ of the so-called salaf ul salih generations of Muslims [deemed to be exemplary pious], including the manner in which they supposedly interpreted/understood the normative religious texts”.

Fifth is “Purposive and Ethico-religious Values-Based Approaches to the Interpretation of Textual Sources (Teleological Hermeneutics)”, which “stipulates (Duderija 2015,60) that the intended meaning of the text embodies or approximates the spirit or the purpose of the text better than the literal meaning itself.” In the view of Duderija (2015,60) “Wadud has discussed this hermeneutical element in the context of what she terms the principles of ‘textual development’ and ‘moral trajectories’” by which she “alerts readers/interpreters to how the Qur’anic text

establishes new moral, social, and political trajectories [preface1999, xiii] whose significance override its literal meanings and point to the underlying rationales instead.”

Sixth and final feature is “A Non-Hadith-Dependent Sunna Hermeneutics”. Duderija (2015,61) argues that “the concept of a ‘sound’ hadith that consists of a chain of transmitters and a text tracing back to the prophet’s saying or action or tacit approval of the same, became epistemologically and methodologically conflated with the concept of Sunna.”, He defines the latter as “a dynamic ethico-religious behavioral concept that is organically linked to the Qur’an’s Weltanschauung and is conceptually, hermeneutically, and methodologically independent of the concept of a sound hadith.”

Seen as a whole, Duderija (2015,63) opines that “these hermeneutical mechanisms are best employed in unison rather than in isolation”. Ideally seen, feminist exegesis is viewed as [1] an act of interpretation, consciously applying contextualization when scrutinizing a chosen portion of scripture: analyzing the portion within its immediate [2] syntactic and [3] thematic environment; while [5] paying attention to the ethical values it communicates; [4] not influenced by classical and stereotyped interpretation; but [6] bearing in mind the Qur’anic Weltanschauung, believed to reflect established Prophetic Sunna.

Duderija quotes Wadud in connection with features one [1], three [3] and five [5]. Wadud also expressly distances herself (1992,1) from traditional tafasir, referred to in feature four [4]. She is convinced that her views of interpretative presuppositions are in accordance with the essential meaning of the Qur’an, but she hardly ever mentions Prophetic Sunna as defined in feature six [6].

Compared with the four selected facets of the suggested hermeneutic model, there are fundamental differences. Duderija’s hermeneutic features are prescriptive, while the facets of the suggested interpretive approach have a descriptive goal. Duderija depicts the procedure in which feminist exegesis ideally takes place; the selected facets categorize the observed data of feminist interpretation into areas of interest. What is absent in Duderija’s model is the polemical context of feminist interpretation of scripture, i.e., “Conversation with Others” (cf. facet 3). However, Duderija demonstrates great insight.

### Evaluation of the Approaches Demonstrated in the Reviews of Qur’an and Woman

**(1992)**

Seen from a methodological point of view, the reviews of Barazangi (1995) and Jawad (2003) are guided by the contents of *Qur'an and Woman* (1992). Jawad also applies general contextualization by specifying the position of *Qur'an and Woman* (1992) within feminism. Scott (2009), Tayob (2009) and Hidayatullah (2014) discuss Wadud's literary contributions in a comparative way alongside other feminist. Methodologically viewed, Scott (2009) focuses on setting in life, and Hidayatullah (2014) on setting in literature. Tayob (2009) generalizes aspects involved in the interpretative process and textual strategy. Hidayatullah (2014) concerns herself with textual strategies related to setting in life, literature, and theology. Her foci can be broadly classified in the same categories suggested by Wadud's hermeneutic model. Duderija (2015), in turn, repeats methodological points of emphasis of Hidayatullah (2014) with the addition of aspects related to the author and interpretative process. The suggested individualized interpretative model focuses primarily on *Qur'an and Woman* (1992) such as Barazangi (1995) and Jawad (2003). It brings into consideration the interaction between reader / author and text like Tayob (2009) and Duderija (2015). Approaches that are suggested overlap with those of Hidayatullah (2014), although her categories per se do not receive attention. Relatively unique in the suggested interpretative model is the taking into consideration in terms of stated methodology the polemical context to which *Qur'an and Woman* (1992) and presumably also other feminist writings respond.

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