

# RETHINKING THE *QIWĀMAH*: A QUR'ĀNO-CENTRIC EVALUATION OF MODERN WOMEN EXEGETES' PERSPECTIVES

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## Abstract

*This article examines the Qur'anic concept of the Qiwāmah in light of the interpretive articulations of modern Muslim women exegetes. It starts with a theoretical foundation that seeks to highlight the need for the Qur'āno-reasoned approach proposed by Muslim scholars such as Fazlur Rahman, Muḥammad 'Ābid al-Jābirī, and Mohamed Arkoun. It argues that the interpretations of "canonical female exegetes" like Fawkiyah Sherbini and Fatma Kariman Hamzah of the issue of qiwāmah have to be reconsidered not only in view of the socio-historical and hermeneutical methods proposed by former scholars, but also with regards to the Qur'anic inimitable and unceasing functionality within various socio-cultural, economic and political contexts. More significantly, the work sheds light on the intra-Islamic feminist debate between these canonical women scholars and those of "unorthodox" female interpreters such as Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas. Hereby, I enquire about serious matters that stand at the core of these controversies, among which religious "authority" and "legitimacy". Moreover, the article links these thorny terminologies to the American feminist theologian Mary Daly's concept of "methodolatry," as well as endeavors to see whether the latter could fit into an intra-Islamic framework.*

**Keywords:** *Qiwāmah, exegesis, Qur'āno-reasoned, Islamic feminism, methodolatry, modernism.*

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## On Rethinking the Qur'ān

I have always been intrigued by the quasi-dichotomous connection the Moroccan scholar Muḥammad 'Ābid al-Jābirī (1936-2010) makes between reason (*al-'aql*) and thought (*al-fikr*).<sup>1</sup> In fact, al-Jābirī's distinction opens wide doors to serious and audacious revisions of the Muslim scholarly heritage—more adequately Islamic thought (*al-fikr al-Islāmī*)—and not only with regards to the other elements of the dichotomy such as—Islamic reasoning (*al-'aql al-Islāmī*) that al-Jābirī himself critiques, but also in light of what one could effectively call Qur'anic reasoning (*al-'aql al-Qur'ānī*). The powerful nature of *al-'aql al-Qur'ānī* lies in its unceasing stimulating force allowed, which still permits the generation of meaning in different times and for various socio-cultural, political and economic contexts.

In this paper it is argued that the Qur'āno-Centric perception (*al-'aql al-Qur'ānī*) would never cease to allow for the socio-cultural recontextualization of controversial notions as *qiwāmah* (guardianship), a recontextualization that would permit us to measure and judge the extent to which a particular community has come to comprehend the Qur'anic *weltanschauung* or worldview. Undoubtedly, the Islamic interpretive corpus as evident—considering the aforementioned division provided by al-Jābirī—is expressive of a specific mode not only of *al-fikr al-Islāmī*,—which definitely includes these interpretive conclusions, but also of *al-'aql al-Islāmī*—that is the complex 'rational,' or 'irrational' stimulating mechanism by which *al-fikr* is produced. The latter stance has also been succinctly described by the eminent scholar Mohamed Arkoun<sup>2</sup> (1928-2010) who did not only embark on a serious and arduous epistemological project that questioned the “traditional scholastic interpretive corpus,” but also, and more significantly, revealed the need for a more profound challenge that inquires into the methods by which the aforementioned corpus is formulated.

It is irrefutable, that any modern attempt at rethinking the

<sup>1</sup> See Muḥammad 'Ābid al-Jābirī, *Takwīn al-'Aql al-'Arabī: Naqd al-'Aql al-'Arabī* (1) (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-'Arabiyah, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> Mohamed Arkoun, *The unthought in contemporary Islamic thought*. (London: The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2004), 148.

Qur'ān should never gloss over those traditional methods through which its meaning had been determined. This is not to say that, the modern exegete should literally stick to all the "orthodox" traditional and modern conservative interpretive renderings, but it essentially draws attention to reassessing the text with respect to the exegetical corpus that has accompanied it throughout its historical trajectory. Unfortunately, it is often at this stage of Qur'anic examination, or in the words of Fazlur Rahman<sup>3</sup> (1919-1988), of "the historical journey" into the Qur'ān, that many interpreters would either fail to get a round ticket to-and-from tradition, or get stuck at the airport of a short-sighted modern Qur'anist position that does not bear in mind these traditions at all. Actually, the majority of modern interpreters often fall short of accomplishing what Rahman calls "the double-movement" while approaching the sacred text. Rahman states in the introduction to his invaluable book, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, that "the process of interpretation proposed here consists of a double movement, from the present situation to Qur'anic times, then back to the present."<sup>4</sup> But why is this double-movement suggested by Rahman important for text interpretation? And what are the methodological risks of both the traditional and modernist interpretive communities failing to consider it?

The dilemma of Qur'anic interpretation throughout Islamic history has always been centered in the complex and extremely vital disagreements between *al-'aql* (reason) and *al-naql* (tradition). Certainly, any exegetical attempt that runs against what is 'consensually' perceived as traditions transmitted from the Prophet Muhammad or his early companions and their successors would inevitably be consigned to oblivion in the mainstream Muslim circles, and hence lack the authoritativeness which is part and parcel of the success of any new intra-Islamic *ijtihadi* (using critical reasoning) endeavor. But a thorny problem that immediately emerges with the *naqlī* approach to the Qur'ān is its, occasionally, illogical negation of the differing and evolving socio-cultural and historical contexts. It is in the aforementioned sense that Fazlur

<sup>3</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 5.

Rahman maintains: “the Qur’ân is the divine response, through the Prophet’s mind, to the moral-social situation of the Prophet’s Arabia, particularly, the problems of the {...} Meccan society of his day.”<sup>5</sup> With this clarification by Rahman, it can be argued that any sound understanding of the socio-historical evolvement of human societies in general and Muslim societies in particular along with the fathoming of the universal nature of Qur’anic injunctions, would necessarily demand the realization of the nuanced epistemological relation, not only between *al-fîkr* and *al-‘aql al-Islâmî*, but also between these two and *al-‘aql al-Qur’ânî*.

Unfortunately, the above articulations of Rahman have often been mistaken to entail “a desacralization of the Qur’ân;”<sup>6</sup> turning it into a historical document with little validity or convenience to today’s realities. In fact, a thorough look into the work of Rahman would offer the modern interpreter a deeper understanding of this eminent scholar’s project and the dire need to reconsider it by both conservative and modernist exegetes. The challenging claims of Rahman have resonated in the work of great Muslim thinkers such as Naşr Hâmid Abū Zayd (1943-2010) and Ḥasan Ḥanafî (b. 1935) who have made an extremely important contribution to what I would call the new Qur’ân-o-reasoned involvement with the sacred text and the implementation of its injunctions in modern day Muslim and global societies.

In his seminal book, *Maḥbûm al-Naşş* for instance, Abū Zayd laid the case for a new hermeneutical approach to the Qur’ân that, for him, would allow for a pluralistic and universalistic comprehension of the text. But the interesting part in the claims of Abū Zayd besides this emphasis on accommodating the text with the contemporary reality of Muslims was also the uncovering of Qur’anic dynamics that provide the appropriate atmosphere for the flourishing of various readings within *al-turâth al-Islâmî* (the Muslim heritage). Abū Zayd asserts:

Renewal demands the existence of “a *traditional foundation*”. But this foundation which is “the

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>6</sup> See Qutb al-Raisouni, *Annas al-Qur’ânî: Min tahâfut al-Qir’â ilâ ufuq al-Tadabbur* (Morocco: Wizârat al-Awqâf wa al-Shu’ûn al-Islâmiyyah, 2010).

*classical scholarly heritage*” is not monolithic. It is as diverse as the various mechanisms that generated it. The classical scholarly heritage then is not only one given product; rather it stands for the numerous products which were formulated by the many different attitudinal and social ideologies and visions.<sup>7</sup>

It is in the above sense that the Jabirian epistemological divisions we started with could be clearly realized. No doubt, it was only the Qur’āno-reasoned approach that allowed for all these diverse context-based interpretations of its injunctions. Ḥasan Ḥanafī<sup>8</sup> also comes to emphasize the above conclusions of Abū Zayd by declaring:

*Al-Turāth* then is the exegetical corpora that are given by different interpretive communities. It relates to the needs of those interpretive generations. “*The primary sources*” allow for this intellectual diversity for they were shaped by this very context. *Al-Turāth* is not a set of theoretical dogmas that are unchanging or static; rather, it is the application of those theories at a particular historical moment, in a certain context, and by a certain interpretive community.

Ḥanafī’s position highlights the generating power of “the primary sources” that had often permitted the formulation of new thoughts in line with the evolving socio-cultural, political and economic circumstances. But for Ḥanafī, as well as for the majority of Muslim scholars who laid emphasis on the generating mechanisms of *al-‘aql al-Qur’ānī*, the key methodological and institutional impediment to their work lied in the mainstream suspicion and rejection of these “alien” hermeneutical and historical perspectives. It was this “dogmatic enclosure”<sup>9</sup>, in the words of Mohamed Arkoun that

<sup>7</sup> Naṣr Ḥamid Abū Zayd, *Maḥmūd al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsah fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān* (Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Āmmah li’l-Kitāb, 1990), 19.

<sup>8</sup> Ḥasan Ḥanafī, *Al-Turāth wa al-Tajdīd: Maḥqifunā min al-Turāth al-Qadīm*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Beirut: al-Mu’assasah al-Jāmi‘iyyah li al-Tawzī’ wa al-Nashr, 1992), 15.

<sup>9</sup> Ursula Gunther, “Mohamed Arkoun: Towards a Radical Rethinking of Islamic Thought.” in S. Taji-Farouki (ed.), *Modern Muslim intellectuals and the Qur’an* (New

led to what al-Jābirī labels “the resignation of reason”<sup>10</sup> in Islamic societies.

## The Trap of “Methodolatry”

Despite the fact that the concept of “Methodolatry”<sup>11</sup> was first coined and subversively deployed by the American feminist theologian Mary Daly to critique the traditional patristic biblical commentaries, I still see that this seditious anti-methodological mechanism should necessarily be brought to the debate over what constitutes an authoritative Qur’anic interpretation. What particular methods have to be adopted regarding exegesis? What is the Qur’anic stance on methodolatry? And more importantly, can the methodolaters in Islam be identified?

Mary Daly laid out her feminist arguments in opposition the traditional biblical exegeses by embarking on a vehement attack against the interpretations of the early church fathers, along with critiquing the very epistemological mechanisms by which that interpretive corpus was generated. Having been excluded for a long time from the process of formulating religious thought, women, claimed Daly, have not only become subject to the androcentric formations of men, but also they themselves, by dealing with the sacred text have had to take *a priori* the methodological routes and trajectories set by the male custodians of the faith. She cogently declares:

The tyranny of methodolatry hinders new discoveries. It prevents us from raising questions never asked before and from being illumined by ideas that do not fit into pre-established boxes and forms. The worshipers of method have an

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York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 125-169.

<sup>10</sup> Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābirī, *Takwīn al-‘Aql al-Arabī: Naqd al-‘Aql al-‘Arabī (1)* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-Arabiyyah, 1982).

<sup>11</sup> Mary Daly, *Beyond god the father: Toward a philosophy of women’s liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985) 11. The concept of methodolatry as defined by the American scholar Mary Daly stands literally for ‘worshiping the method’. It indicates the degree to which methods could be so overwhelming and subtle that the author would be constrained by their preconceived framings.

effective way of handling data that does not fit into the Respectable of Questions and Answers. They simply classify it as nondata, thereby rendering it invisible.<sup>12</sup>

As a believer in the openness of the Qur'ān and its recurrent emphasis on contemplation and personal reflection, I perceive in the critical views of Daly a surprising compliance with the Qur'anic perception that for one, urges the faithful to question the traditions in light of the divine word, and also pressed the early community of the prophet to rebel against and condemn tradition-based religious commitments. The Qur'ān condemns the responses of idolaters in the Meccan community: "Nay, they say: We found our fathers following a certain religion, and we do guide ourselves by following their footsteps."<sup>13</sup> (*al-Zukhruf*: 22). See also (*al-Baqarah*: 170), (*al-Mā'idah*: 104), and (*Luqman*: 21).

Unquestionably, the Qur'anic emphasis on the danger of unreasonable imitation (*taqlīd*) illustrates the degree to which the traditionalists' exegetical articulations may wind up with blind reiterations that Daly labels "methodolatry." The Algerian scholar Mohamed Arkoun was cognizant of the restricting apparatuses of methodolatry within the "orthodox" traditional Islamic circles. With the aim of drawing attention to the peril of the discourse of scholarly dogmatism and its association to the fixture of some outmoded traditional injunctions, Arkoun asserts that the modern interpreter needs to venture into the realm of the unthought in Islamic thought. The latter is a serious epistemological endeavor that "requires analysis of the way in which discourses are integrated within the logocentric and dogmatic enclosure, and thus the modalities of how reason was put into the service of religious truth and used in order to consolidate the monopoly of interpretation held by the representatives and supporters of orthodoxy."<sup>14</sup>

It was with those novel hermeneutical and historical approaches

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>13</sup> Yusuf Ali, *The meaning of the Holy Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-'Alamī li'l-Maṭbū'āt, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Ursula Gunther, "Mohamed Arkoun: Towards a Radical Rethinking of Islamic Thought," 133.

propagated by Islamic scholars like Fazlur Rahman, Arkoun, Abū Zayd, Ḥanafī, and various others from the modernist trend that a number of contemporary women began rethinking the traditional exegetical corpus. Modern Islamic feminists, among which Asma Barlas (b. 1950) and Amina Wadud (b. 1952), who have recently engaged in an arduous project of de-patriarchalizing the sacred text, provide an ample case in the point of modernist interpretation that denounces tradition in favor of a contextualist reading of the Qurʾān. But again, the negation of these women's efforts and prevalent suspicion towards their modernist interpretations raises the questions of who decides what an authoritative exegesis is and what the mechanisms used for the exclusion of these new readings from the mainstream Islamic circles are. In response to the latter inquiries Barlas claims that traditional religious scholars who were basically men:

Have in the name of tradition - in the singular and with a capital T - rejected new readings of the Qurʾān, especially by women, both because such readings unsettle the meanings ascribed to the text by male exegetes and because in doing so, women's readings also pose a threat to men's traditional roles as interpreters of religious knowledge. In this way, conservatives can dismiss women's interpretations without even having read them.<sup>15</sup>

Barlas' statement above is clearly indicative of the problematic nature of the emergent feminist hermeneutical approach towards the traditional Muslim interpretive heritage. Barlas' conclusions reveal the degree to which the conservative discourse had dominated the Islamic mainstream exegetical domain, and also expose the enormously powerful methodolatrical exclusionary mechanisms that would render any 'innovative' interpretive articulations void and useless. A more voiced Muslim feminist scholar was Amina Wadud whose views have been subjected to similar rejection by the majority of Muslims. Wadud also declares:

<sup>15</sup> Asma Barlas, "Qurʾanic Hermeneutics and Sexual Politics," *Cardozo Law Review* vol. 28: 1(2006), 143-151.



As a Muslim woman struggling for gender justice in Islam, I have not only been accused of working from outside Islam doing whatever I want, but also rejected as anti-Islamic... For any who wish to be accepted as truly Muslim, their struggles cannot go beyond established patriarchy or male authorities, otherwise they face the potential consequence of being labeled outsiders to Islam. Many sincere women and men accept the choice to stay in Islam as authoritatively defined by Muslim neo-conservative specialists... or simply choose silence.<sup>16</sup>

It is against the above objections of feminist interpreters like Wadud and Barlas that I endeavor to measure the exegetical views of two modern “canonical” women exegetes whose interpretations have recently been approved and hailed by mainstream Islamic religious structures. Analyzing the latter women’s stance on the controversial subject of *qiwāmah*, the modern reader will be enabled to observe the degree to which these Muslim women have set themselves towards the traditional exegetical heritage not only in light of contemporary realities, but also with regards to the innovative, critical interpretive approaches to the Qur’ān.

### Rethinking *Qiwāmah* in Modern Women’s Exegeses

In the years 2008 and 2010 respectively, the works of Fawkiyah Sherbini and Kariman Hamzah were hailed by Al-Azhar University, as important female contribution to the highly regarded domain of Qur’anic exegesis. I first came across the exegesis of Sherbini entitled: *taysīr al-tafsīr* (the simplification of exegesis) as I was embarking on an exploratory journey that included Mauritania, Morocco and Egypt in search for women exegetes of the Qur’ān. This invaluable female interpretive addition was seen by many in most Muslim countries as a legitimate undertaking at Qur’anic exegesis, which should serve as a model for Muslim women scholars intending to become involved in the domain. The fact that Sherbini was an Azharī educated disciple

<sup>16</sup> Amina Wadud, *Inside the gender Jihad: Women’s reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 4-5.

of Sheikh Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rawī (1911-1998) has also played an important role in the prevalent appreciation of her work. The following is a cursory reading into this exegete's perspective on the debatable concept of *qiwāmah*.

The notion of *qiwāmah* in the Qur'an has recently been the focus of a heated debate in the Islamic scholarly arena. The Qur'anic verse on *qiwāmah* is found in *sūrah al-Nisā* (Q: 4) which states:

*Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah 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 Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, and (last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance): for Allah is Most High, Great (above you all).<sup>17</sup>*

Historically, the classical and modern conservative interpretations of the above verse had often portrayed *qiwāmah* as entailing men's headship (*riyāsah*) and custodianship (*wilāyah*) over women because of women's deficiency in intellect, morality and physical strength.<sup>18</sup> The majority of early exegetes such as Ṭabarī, ibn Kathīr<sup>19</sup>, al-Rāzī<sup>20</sup>, al-Qurṭubī<sup>21</sup>, al-Zamakhsharī<sup>22</sup> and numerous others have linked the verse of *qiwāmah* in *sūrah al-Nisā* to the implications of the *darajah*

<sup>17</sup> Yusuf Ali, *The meaning of the Holy Qur'an*. 114.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, tradition and interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>19</sup> Ismā'īl Ibn 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Aẓīm*. 1st ed. Vol. 1. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981).

<sup>20</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. 1st ed. Vol. 1, 2. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr Li'l-Ṭibā'ah wa Nashr, 1981).

<sup>21</sup> Muḥammad Bin Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Vol.1. (Cairo: Maṭba'ah Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1935).

<sup>22</sup> Jār Allāh Abū Al-Qāsim Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf'an Haqāiq Ghawamiḍ al-Tanzāl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fi Wujūh al-Tāwīl*. Comp. 'Adel Ahmad 'Abd Al-Mawjoud and 'Ali Mohamed Muawwad. 1st ed. Vol. 1-6. (Riyadh: Maktabah al-'Ubaikān, 1998).

(degree of advantage) in verse 228 of *sūrah al-Baqarah* which says: “And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree (of advantage) over them. And Allah is exalted in power wise.”<sup>23</sup>

The degree of advantage shown in the verse above was seen by women such as Wadud and Barlas as exclusively restricted to the husband’s right to initiate divorce. Wadud, for example argues that “the context of the discussion is clearly with regard to divorce. (...). In the Qur’an the advantage men have is that of being able to pronounce divorce against their wives without arbitration or assistance. Divorce is granted to a woman, on the other hand, only after intervention of an authority (for example, a judge).”<sup>24</sup> This interpretation by Wadud has without doubt, glossed over a vast exegetical corpus that links the degree of advantage with male-guardianship and control over women. Wadud’s reading, similar to that of various modernists, has also emphasized the need for a contextual understanding of the verse that would not only connect it to the modern day realities of women, but also to the limitations of historical conventions that are relative to time and place.

Commenting on the above verse of *qiwāmah*, Sherbini states in *the simplification*:

At the surface, this verse seems to convey a privilege of man over woman, but a deeper reflection would rather show that this privilege is for women. A man whether he is a husband, a father or a brother should have this responsibility of *qiwāmah* towards these women. But, *qiwāmah* is an extremely arduous responsibility that puts man in charge of the family’s provision, peace, chastity and security. So, here comes the privilege of men because they have been naturally endowed with much physical power that could allow them to pursue the hardships of work and the maintenance of the family. (...). “Then we said:

<sup>23</sup> Yusuf Ali, *The meaning of the Holy Qur’an*, 49.

<sup>24</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur’an and woman: Reading the sacred text from a woman’s perspective*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 68.

O Adam! Verily, this is an enemy to thee and thy wife: so let him not get you out of the Garden, so that *thou art landed in misery* (*tashqā* meant to Adam only).” (*sūrah Ṭāhā*: 117). Women’s privilege then emanates from their being dwellings of tenderness and love for men.<sup>25</sup>

Not far from the traditional perspective that has often associated *qiwāmah* with the *darajah* found in Q: 2: 228, Sherbini continues to affirm that:

This *darajah* is one of protection, guardianship, care, instruction and leadership. But it should be taken as a responsibility for an appropriate regulation of the family affairs. It should never mean that the husband is superior to the wife or that he could oppress her. Indeed within the family, there are areas wherein the man rules and also there are domains at which the woman excels; each according to his or her capabilities and competence. A man’s *qiwāmah* then is through working for the provision for the family, while the woman has many different other responsibilities. None of them is better than the other, but they live a life of complementarity and solidarity.<sup>26</sup>

Now, despite the fact that the above commentaries of Sherbini have positively laid importance on the “responsibility” element of *qiwāmah*, this exegete’s articulations seem to comply with the traditional perceptions of womanhood. Sherbini’s opinions would then definitely be seen by feminists like Wadud and Barlas as a negative institutionalization of patriarchy by female agents. For Wadud, Sherbini’s stance could be easily categorized as one of methodolatry. She states:

This is evident in the empty articulations combined with simultaneously rendering selected

<sup>25</sup> Fawkiyah Ibrahim Sherbini, *Taysīr al-Tāfsīr*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 1 and 2, (Cairo: Maktabah al-Imān li’l-Tibā’ah wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī’, 2008), 264.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 128.

female scholars and activists as tokens for public window-dressing and by limiting other women. (...). Therefore, women must either cater to masculine standards of evaluation as either facilitators or be castigated as adversaries.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, contrary to the views of women like Barlas and Wadud, which have been automatically pushed to the periphery of the mainstream debate over the rights of women in Islam, I observe in Sherbini's work a more subtle and subversive feminist element that endeavors to incur change from an intra-Islamic position. Still, this canonical exegete's negligence of the contextual reading of *qiwāmah* that would perceive the concept from a Qur'āno-reasoned perspective along with her reliance on the traditional context-bound interpretive corpus, all these actually raise some serious questions concerning the applicability of her exegetical views to the modern day realities of Muslim women .

Kariman Hamzah's exegesis entitled: *Al-Lu'lu wa al-Marjān fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān (Jewels of Qur'anic Exegesis)*, on the other hand, came to light in 2010. Hamzah's contribution has also received the same cadence of appreciation as that of Sherbini. The work was revised and approved by Al-Azhar's Islamic Research Academy, a fact that played an important role in its wide reception in the mainstream religious circles. Hamzah's interpretation held a conservative stance towards the issue of *qiwāmah* in the Qur'ān. She too had been immersed in the classical perceptions of the role of women in the family and the Muslim society at large. But interestingly, in her commentary on Q4:34, Hamzah, instead of showing *qiwāmah* as a divine privilege to males, subtly relates it to a set of social and economic duties a husband has to accomplish. She declares:

*"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women"* means that a man should take the responsibility of ensuring the woman's safety, cater for her needs and protect her rights, particularly her right of religious learning. He should be responsible in that *qiwāmah* before Allah and the people. *"Because*

<sup>27</sup> Amina Wadud, *Inside the gender Jihad: Women's reform in Islam*, 190.

*Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other*”, this is because men work outside, and they have the duty of providing all the necessary demands of their women ranging from lodgment, food, clothing, to even providing a handmaid to work if they could so afford. Moreover, they should protect not only the family, but also the society and *Ummah* at large by way of *Jihād*.<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, Hamzah’s aforementioned articulations show the degree to which her views have been shaped by the conservative interpretive discourse she brought into her work. But, instead of turning the concept of *qiwāmah* into a locus of gender conflict and hierarchy, Hamzah systematically and subversively takes into account the conservative socio-cultural and religious environment of her time. In other words, though she explicitly complies with the traditional description that “men are maintainers and protectors of women”, still she methodically links it to “responsibility”, a concept that places this *qiwāmah* in a context of reciprocity and mutual respect within the Muslim family.

Having analyzed the views of “orthodox” women exegetes of the Qur’ān on the concept of *qiwāmah* with respect to modernist contextual reading strategies, it may be concluded that despite the powerful intrusion of these women into the male-dominated arena of Qur’anic exegesis, their work remains far behind in applying new interpretive mechanisms that take historicity and context into consideration. Unlike those modernists contemplative of the necessity to look at Islamic societies as evolving human structures, the canonical interpreters’ exegetical conclusions have taken only a one-way ticket to classical Muslim traditions ending up with Hassan Hanafi calling the discourse “intellectual stagnation and social immovability.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Fatma Kariman Hamzah, *Al-Lu’lu wa al-Marjān fī Tafṣīr al-Qur’ān*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed., vol. 1 (Cairo: Maktabah al-Shorouk al-Dawliyah, 2010), 196.

<sup>29</sup> Hassan Ḥanafī, *Al-Turāth wa al-Tajdīd: Mawqifunā min al-Turāth al-Qadīm*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 17.

## Towards a Qur'ān-reasoned Interpretation

The readings accomplished earlier on the various exegetical perspectives on the concept of *qiwāmah* should indisputably be seen as proof of the generating Qur'anic mechanisms that paved the way before these divergent interpretations. However, the dilemma that stands at the core of all of these exegetical articulations does not only lie in how they have been able to rid themselves from the shackles of traditionalism, but more importantly, in the way they could be linked to the necessarily just and egalitarian Qur'anic *weltanschauung*.

Notions such as equality and justice surely vary across history, culture and social context. In the words of the Iranian feminist Ziba-Mir Hosseini “the conception of justice that we have in classical Islamic jurisprudence is not in line with the contemporary conception of justice. Because in the classical conception you could be just without having the notion of equality, but in our time and context there can be no justice without equality.”<sup>30</sup> In fact, this statement made by Hosseini highlights the epistemological conundrum we initiated this paper with, particularly that of *al-fikr* and *al-'aql al-Islāmī*, versus what I refer to as *al-'aql al-Qur'ānī*. Unquestionably, unless modern interpreters of the Qur'ān in general and Muslim women exegetes in particular are able to weigh out and see their views in light of *al-'aql al-Qur'ānī*, theirs will always be a stance that either completely ignores the Qur'āno-reasoned manifestation in the traditional interpretive heritage, or more severely, misses the point in considering the Qur'anic consent to recontextualization as it generated from emergent socio-cultural circumstances.

A Qur'āno-reasoned interpretation would necessarily entail an investigation into the mechanisms by which the early classical heritage was formulated through what one could legitimately call *al-'aql al-Islāmī*. But, more significantly, the modern interpreter should not be trapped into idealizing and fixating those traditional mechanisms of *al-'aql al-Islāmī*, a fact that would turn the exegete into a methodolater or worshiper of the method as reasonably claimed by Mary Daly. *Al-'aql al-Qur'ānī*, in contrast, pushes the modern critical reader of the Qur'ān to examine the text not only in

<sup>30</sup> “Ziba-Mir Hosseini on ‘Sharia Incorporated’ <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5SMWm0ZWf0/>> Accessed 5 October 2013.

relation to traditional classical renderings, but also in light of modern day realities and circumstances. In the words of eminent Muslim scholar Fazlur Rahman, the Qur'āno-reasoned reading suggested in this paper; invites the modern exegete to reconsider "the double movement"<sup>31</sup> in his or her journey into the sacred text.

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<sup>31</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, 5.