

Islamic fundamentalism, gender and new hermeneutics

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ABSTRACT: *Control of women has been worldwide one of the most common subjects of fundamentalisms. Claiming allegiance to their sacred text, interpretative authority (monopoly of interpretation) and legitimacy for its implementation, the fundamentalists in their will to power deny to women equal conditions to those ones offered to men, claiming a hierarchical distinction between men and women in the social order as well as an ontological distinction between them, being men considered naturally superior to women. This article aims to clarify the relationship between Islamic fundamentalism and the domination of women and argue about the importance of the emerging feminist Hermeneutics in the context of Islam for the confrontation of female subjugation.*

Keywords: *Islam; Fundamentalism; Women; Hermeneutics*

I. FUNDAMENTALISMS, GENDER AND THE WILL OF POWER.

One day in October 2012, tuned on a radio station while I was driving to work, I heard the news about a 15 year-old Pakistani girl who had been targeted by the Taliban militia on a school bus. Later I sought more information and came across the fight of Malala Yousafzai for the education of girls in the Swat Valley. The attack on Malala was a show of force against women's access to education and, consequently, against their emancipation. Control of women has been worldwide one of the most common subjects of fundamentalisms. According to Rouanet, "the fundamentalists have in common the traditionalism on moral issues and a backward position on the status of women" (2001, p.12). Claiming allegiance to their sacred text, interpretative authority (monopoly of interpretation) and legitimacy for its implementation, the fundamentalists in their will to power deny to women equal conditions to those ones offered to men, claiming a hierarchical distinction between men and women in the social order as well as an ontological distinction between them, being men considered *naturally superior* to women. The fundamentalists' speeches and practices affect the social relations of gender in contemporary society, and challenge religious studies to consider the gender category and its intersectionalities as class, race / ethnicity, age, etc., in the analysis of this phenomenon.

Gender inequalities are not a reality for Islamic societies only. The monotheistic world religions are patriarchal, so it is not intended here to apply only to Islam a reality that is also present in Judaism and Christianity (Ahmed, 1992), besides other patriarchal religious expressions. The Egyptian feminist Nawal El Saadawi, author of *The Hidden Face of Eve: women in the Arab world* (1991), in a conference in Montreal, said that "the most restrictive elements towards women can be found first in Judaism in the Old Testament and Then in Christianity (in the New Testament) and Then in the Qur'an." (DYER, 1990)

Religion is a cultural system (Geertz, 1989), and as such it expresses the cultural meanings objectified in patriarchal societies. It doesn't mean that it is mere reproduction, because the subject questions, reframes, reinvents and deconstructs senses that seemed to be immutable. As a product of patriarchal societies, Judaism, Christianity and Islam became patriarchal religions apparently homogeneous in their misogynistic characteristics. The homogeneity of the discursive practice and aversion to women is only apparent because these religions were always dissonant voices of men and women who opposed the prevailing androcentrism in their midst.

It is around the 1960s that the regulation of women in the Christian context appears in the fundamentalists agenda. The early twentieth century classical Protestantism saw within its own audience the birth of a movement whose size was far from calculating: the fundamentalism. This emerging movement advocated the need for uncontested statement of the grounds of the Protestant faith, namely: biblical inerrancy; the Trinity; the virgin birth of Jesus; the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus; the doctrine of salvation in Christ; and the belief in the return of Christ, among others. Fundamentalists harshly criticized modern science and innovations, particularly the theory of evolution propagated by Darwinism, and they wove harsh criticisms against liberal Protestants. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there are also in the context of Catholicism movements demanding a "restoration of the Church." These fundamentalist oriented movements are known as integrists or integralists and, just as the Protestant fundamentalists, constitute themselves from the critique of modernity, and its objective revolves around the avoidance of the influence of modernity on the Catholic Church, which is, according to them, in need of recovering their doctrines and reaffirming of its hierarchy in front of the modern heresies.

Later on other guidelines were added to Protestant fundamentalist and Catholic integrist agendas. The emergence of fundamentalist institutions, the use of media, literature and political integration, have been some of the means by which neofundamentalists have widespread fundamentalist ideologies. It is within this context, especially from the 60s, that gender issues began to draw the attention of this sector. In the case of Protestantism, referring to the movement in the United States, Eliane Moura da Silva notes that:

The role of the youth, the sexual revolution and the emancipation of women, equal rights for minorities and homosexuals, who seemed to shake the society, provided strong arguments in favor of the fundamentalists his conservative slogans (...) there was an increasingly clear and public opposition against the secular and pluralistic measures of the Supreme Court and the State seeking to restrict religion to the realm of the private. This seemed a wicked crusade and at the same time, an invasion of the sacrosanct values of family, home and education of children. Although the constitution conferred to women equal civil rights and labor, for the fundamentalists her place was at home and with the children; they had to stand against the "infamy" of abortion, homosexuality and freedom of expression. (SILVA, 2006, p. 16)

According to Leonardo Boff, Catholic integrism can be seen as doctrinal fundamentalism and ethical-moral fundamentalism (2002, pp. 18-19). In its doctrinal aspects, fundamentalism affirms the doctrine of the Church and its hierarchy, including those aspects regarding restriction of women to priesthood and, with respect to the ethical and moral aspects, there is a predominance of objections to women's rights, such as the use of contraceptives, the decriminalization of abortion etc. In Brazil neofundamentalism is also perceived in the political sphere, among other areas. The discourse of evangelical and Catholic parliamentarians in defense of the family necessarily implies a criticism against the struggle for reproductive rights of women, the rights of LGBT people and the rights of sex workers. Posing as critics of the moral decay of society, neofundamentalists interfere in public policies for women, such as the decriminalization of abortion, the right to abortion in cases prescribed by law, sex education in public schools, which is an important mechanism to prevent teenage pregnancy etc.

Within the so-called Jewish fundamentalism identified as part of the orthodox ultra (*haredi*), there is also a predominance of the tension between tradition and modernity. I say part, because as in other religions, fundamentalists make up a minority of the Jewish supporters. Alongside reformist positions and assimilationist attitudes of modern dynamic process there was also strengthening Orthodox tendencies, rigidly critical to any cognitive contamination stemmed from Enlightenment ideals (TEIXEIRA, 2010, p.16). It is important to note that orthodoxy and fundamentalism are confused, but that does not mean that every orthodox movement is fundamentalist. In Judaism there are several groups that were formed around the strict observance of the law (Torah and Talmud) and, to the extent that these groups understood that there was a risk of them distancing themselves from it, they took different attitudes, in some cases, fundamentalist attitudes. This is, for example, the case of the Neturei Karta, an anti-Zionist movement emerged among Orthodox Jews in 1939, which works against the process of secularization of Israel. This movement has the share of sympathy of ultra-Orthodox Jews, especially relating their Modesty campaigns, as indicated by Motti Inbari in his 'The modesty campaigns of Rabbi Amram Blau and the Neturei Karta Movement' (2012). According Inbari, these campaigns focus on aspects related to keeping the Sabbath, political participation, the use of technology and to women's clothing (2012, p. 108).

Issues related to women are among the many reasons for conflicts between ultra-Orthodox fundamentalist and other sectors of Judaism. The Portuguese researcher Ana Santos Pinto (2012) reminds us two events that exemplify this issue. One has to do with the conflict unleashed in 2011 when, in the city of Beit Shemesh, an eight years old girl was approached by ultra-Orthodox Jews when she was going to school. The girl was harassed because, they said, she was not dressed in accordance with the applicable principles of modesty (PINTO, 2012, p. 102). The fact was reported by TV and it provoked public manifestations of the moderate sectors against the attitude of the *haredi*. Conflicts between *haredis* and moderate intensified and gained national dimension with the moderates on one side accusing the *haredis* of religious coercion and, on the other side, *haredis* accusing the moderates of racism, of being biased against the religious who leaned towards Jewish orthodoxy and of being encouraging a kind of spiritual holocaust. Spatial segregation between men and women is also presented as another source of conflict. According to Ana Pinto, the *haredi* tradition determines the separation of gender in schools and public places, as well as the conditioning of female participation in the public sphere. (2012, p. 101) This restriction on women's participation in public space is contested by men and women in various actions. The *haredi* oppose, for example, conducting prayers for the women at the Kotel (Western Wall), having confronted again and again with those who approached the wall under the same order. Too often these women were arrested because the Justice understood that they were offending the ultra-Orthodox Jews. In May 2013, the Wall Women movement, formed by women distinct currents of Judaism, and fighting for more than two decades for the right of Jews women to conduct prayer at the Kotel in equal footing as men, implying lead Rosh Chodesch prayers, use the tallit (shawl) and tefillin, got the support of justice for the fulfillment of prayers. Despite the now legal state support, the group was harassed by ultra Orthodox, which did

not conform to the decision of justice. Women could not fully approach of the wall, which was taken over by ultra-Orthodox students summoned by rabbis not to allow their approach in what is considered the sacred place of Judaism. The prayers were made under police protection, but the problem is far from over. As we shall see, things are not different in Islam, the second largest world religion, whose patriarchal origin as well as its political and economic interests promote gender domination and in the case of their fundamentalist expressions it is even more serious.

II. CONSTRUCTION OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM BY THE WEST

Despite the reference to Islam in the singular, there is a great diversity in terms of beliefs, discourses and practices under such designation. Edward Said says that the term "Islam" narrowly defines the Islamic world as it involves more than one billion people and dozens of countries, societies, traditions, languages and of course, an infinite number of different experiences. (1997, p xvi.) Trying to create the idea of a homogenous Islam, both on the part of some Islamic segments that evoke a collective subject - Muslims - to affirm the religious political power of the huge Islamic contingent in the world, as well as on the part of the west, which reduces Islam to its extremist segments, ends up hiding the polyphony of this political-religious system. The phenomenon referred as to Islamic fundamentalism calls for an honest debate on its representations. A peculiar conception of Islam grew in European imagination since the seventh century, when Islamic expansion begun. Karen Armstrong, in her book *In the Name of God* (2009) focuses on this issue highlighting this western construction. This theme could be expanded to the discussion of the actual construction of the east, as Said has shown in his *Orientalism: the east as an invention of the West*. According to Said, "Islam come to symbolize terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians. For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma." (1990, p.69)

During the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini to religio-political power of Iran in 1979, the so-called Islamic Revolution, media and scholars had troubles in saying this culturally other. As Antonio Flavio Pierucci, *Western common categories in political speech could not quite tell what it was that which for many of us seemed a huge setback. (...) In the 80s the most diverse names came to associate the unknown to the known in an effort to designate the new phenomenon, this strange thing tirelessly chased by a kind of essentialist obsession, a unified background despite the diversity of designations, if not conceived at the organizational or institutional level, at least in the attitudinal. It was as if once again the threatening existence of an essential "deep Islam," was taken for granted* (1992, pp. 144-145)

This stigmatization of Islam and thus of Muslims prevailed until today. The representations of Muslims as fundamentalists, extremists, intolerant, antidemocratic, among others, is part of the process of social invention of Islam, and has created a Western common sense about it. Said in *Covering Islam* commenting on how Western media discusses Islam producing meanings about it states:

the deliberately created associations between Islam and fundamentalism ensure that the average reader comes to see Islam and fundamentalism as essentially the same thing. Given the tendency to reduce Islam to a handful of rules, stereotypes, and generalizations about its faith, its founder, and all of its people, then the reinforcement of every negative fact associated with Islam – its violence, primitiveness, atavism, threatening qualities – is perpetuated. (1997, p. xvi)

The news published in non-Islamic countries generally have a homogeneous Islam essentially fundamentalist, which is in general interpreted as terrorist. This direct association between Islam, fundamentalism and terrorism has been very effective in the way the West constructs and rejects the Islamic world. When analyzing the perception of Western media professionals on the Arab population Hamada notes that most of its respondents believe that the Arabs are fundamentalists, anti-Western and aggressive. (2003, p. 103) In recent times the most important event that has taken over the interest of academia and the media about Islam, and significantly strengthened the dominant stereotypes about them, was perhaps the attack of 9/11 in the United States in 2001 claimed by Taliban. Moreover, the war involving US and Iraq, and the Arab Spring, also gave greater visibility through the media to the Islamic world. The Muslim created by media agents and by social scientists, synthesize Islam in its essence, there is no distinction between Muslim and terrorist, leading to believe that every Muslim is a terrorist. In fact, terrorism and fundamentalism are confused, making it seem that every fundamentalist is a terrorist, as shown by Hamada (2003).

Gender constructions and its resulting roles in society for both men and woman are not left out in western constructions of Islamic fundamentalism. Silvia Montenegro (2002) analyzed the discourse about the other Muslim produced by media and its critical assimilation by Sunni Muslims segments organized in the Muslim Beneficent Society of Rio de Janeiro (SBMRJ) (Brazil). Montenegro found an interesting process of defining oneself using other's definitions. According to her, one of the aspects that stand out in the media approach on Islam, especially in Brazil, has to do with the place of women according to Islamic worldview. The western consensus that Islam was synonymous with oppression of women by restricting their public life and to regulate their daily lives would take the Muslim communities in Brazil to produce a counter discourse

emphasizing the Koranic opposition to gender inequality; and contextualizing the use of the burka as tribal custom in Afghanistan and therefore not applying to all Muslims. (Montenegro, 2002, p.78) Montenegro indicates, however that what is at stake is also the desire of SBMRJ to be an attractive community for women who are adhering to Islam in Brazil almost in the same proportion of men (2002, p. 79). Anyway, when focusing on the place of women as an important agenda for accusing the fundamentalist Islam or its use by Muslim community to defend themselves from Western discourse, this speaking of themselves from the speech of others reveals the importance of thinking Islamic fundamentalism in gender perspective.

III. GENDER IN ISLAM

In the last *The Global Gender Gap Report*, released in 2013, one cannot fail to notice that among the 136 countries where the survey on gender equality was realized, from those occupying the last ten places in the ranking nine are Muslim-majority countries, where inequality between men and women is far from being overcome. The debate on women's oppression in Islam shows that this is a very controversial topic. On the one hand there are those men and women who claim Muslim worldview to be a way to legitimize male domination, subjecting women to such an extent that they lose their status as subject. Among these, we can mention Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who in his autobiographical book *Nomad* (2011), argues Islam is a violent way of life, especially with regard to women. On the other hand, there are also those who claim the need for decolonizing the look on Islam, which would involve, among other things, recognizing the place of the subject of Muslim women from their own cultural reference, without ignoring, of course, gender tensions in religion (Leila Ahmed, 1992; Nawal El Saadawi). The fact is that despite Muslim woman being a common denominator, one cannot make generalizations. Islam is plural in its composition. This means that under Islam name there will be a plurality of currents of thought; a marked cultural diversity especially by Islamic presence in different countries where the status of women is also quite distinct; a plurality of men; a plurality of women; which implies a plurality of possible interpretations and greater or lesser adherence to religious orthodoxy.

Islam is a religion that has a strong influence on daily life, which proposes an active participation and regulation of daily life of its adherents. (ZAIA, 2007, p.59) The statement of Marcia Zaia presents a religion that is strongly present in the lives of its followers, and has regulatory effect on them. The patriarchal brand of Islam origin of society and the important influence of this religious system on the daily lives of its adherents demand a gender perspective analysis. Despite its plurality, aspects such as spatial segregation of men and women, the criterion of gender establishing unequal rights in the transmission of heritage, the lowest value of the testimony of a woman, the social disruption caused by the birth of a girl, more rigorous control over the bodies of women among others can not be ignored when analyzing this religion.

Maria Cristina Castro (2008) states that, historically, Islam in its origins, that is, in the context of its revelation, contributed to important changes regarding the treatment of women by Arab societies denying them fully rights. Similarly, Mernissi Fatima (1991) argues that Mohammed would have affirmed the equality of women, and that the assertion of gender inequality in later Islamic societies has to do with the misrepresentation of the prophet's words. One must remember that at that time women were denied the right to property, the right to inheritance, the right to choice in marriage, and the birth of girls was not viewed favorably by society, infanticide against them being a common practice. According to Karen Armstrong, "The emancipation of women was a project dear to the Prophet's heart. The Quran gave women rights of inheritance and divorce centuries before Western women were accorded such status "(2002, p. 16). According to these authors, this does not imply that the Quran equates men and women, since the idea of their secondary status prevails, but the emphasis on women's inequality through religion would appear more strongly a few generations after the Prophet's death. (Armstrong, 2002, p. 16)

Nikky Keddie (1990) shows less optimism about the emphasis on transforming aspects inaugurated by the Koran. According to her it is difficult to access information about what were the practices in many tribes before the Koran establishment as a legal reference for regular social practices, but refers to the Koranic opposition to infanticide and the determining of the payment of the dowry for the bride, and not to her guardian, all of those changes provided by the sacred text. However Keddie remembers that the right to inheritance, stated by some scholars as a law implemented by the Koran was a common practice in society at that time. The author cites the very Khadija, the first wife of Muhammad, who was a widow and would have kept her patrimony even after the death of her former spouse. (1990, p 83) In addition, it points out that the right claimed by the sacred text was not necessarily observed:...it has been noted by anthropologists and others that many, and possibly the majority of Muslim women have never inherited as the Qur'an says they should, especially with regard to land. The inheritance rules of the Qur'an were very hard to follow in rural and nomadic societies since most daughters marry out of the family, with a minority meeting the first-cousin marriage ideal, and land or flocks given away reduce the property of the patrilineal line. Hence, especially in rural areas, means are found to evade women's inheritance rights. (1990, p. 84)

Nikky Keddie also quotes Gertrude Stern, (1939 apud KEDDIE, 1990, pp. 81-82) who shows that before Muhammad marriages between cousins were rare. After the Koran, there is a significant increase in this type of marriage in the Arab countries from the adherence to Islam. This would be a way to keep the patrimony in the hands of the family, even with the wedding of the woman.

If in some respects the Koran brings changes that benefit women, even if not always followed to the letter, in others it tightens control over them. The segregation of women and the coercive power of husbands over their wives somehow undermines their autonomy. Women would have troubles even in securing a possible inheritance because they would be subject to the will of their husbands. However Karen Armstrong (2002, p. 16) states that the practice of women's segregation and veiling present in the Quranic text would be prescriptions exclusively to Muhammad's wives, being extended to all Muslim women over time. The fact is that the headscarf (hijab) has been one of the most common themes when analyzing the condition of Muslim women. Fatima Mernissi refers to the veil as a sign of female oppression:

I think that one of the major trends affecting women is the wave of fundamentalist conservatism (...). The fundamentalist wave is a statement about identity. And that is why their call for the veil for women has to be looked at in the light of the painful but necessary and prodigious reshuffling of identity that Muslims are going through in these often confusing but always fascinating times (MERNISSI, 1987, p. viii-ix) It is necessary to understand the cultural variations in the use of the hijab. The veil, which summarizes the perception of others on Islamic women and men can not be reduced to the condition of the material evidence of the oppression of Muslim women. It is important to realize that the veiling contains a wide range of meanings. It is polysemic. As stated by several specialists on the subject such as Marcia Zaia (2010), the use of the hijab has social, political and religious implications. This does not mean, however, that one can deny its domesticating character, and the denial of veiling may also involve a critique of domination. As Mernissi points, if there is a fundamentalist clamor for women to return to wear the veil it is because they have decided to stop using it. (1987 p.xi)

The stiffening of control over women is also observed in the issue of divorce treated in the Koran where men are free to separate from their wives while such separation isn't allowed for the latter. For a man it would be enough to declare three times that he no longer wish to remain married whereas women depends on a court decision based on analysis of the alleged reasons for divorce. According Keddie, women in pre-Islamic Arab societies had equal right to divorce. (1990, p. 83) Karen Armstrong, in turn, argues that the Koran has introduced the right to divorce for women (2002, p.16).

In short, despite the differences as to how greater or lesser influence has the Koran on the status of women in contemporary Islamic societies, the fact is that the text is appropriate for different segments to affirm the submission and oppression of women, as well as to claim the disruption of gender domination system in these societies.

IV. HERMENEUTICS OF GENDER EQUALITY

The arguments underpinning many of the disagreements about equal or unequal status of Muslim women in society relies on the bias of hermeneutic possibilities of the Koran and also the reproduction of certain hadith whose authenticity is questioned by some Islamic segments and reaffirmed by others. Cristina Maria de Castro shows that there are many differences, both regarding the arguments on the place of Muslim women in society, their rights and duties, as well as the multiplicity of interpretations and applications (or not) of their own Islamic laws: the Islam vision and its laws as defining the actual situation faced by Muslim women must be relativized due to the failure in the compliance of its laws, those in which female condition is enhanced by religion as well as those which are oppressive to women (2008, p . 82). The Koran was written in a sexual context of inequality, and as we have seen, has brought significant changes to the status of women, and reinforced some restrictions on them. The *hadith* may have been one of the most important features of legitimization of gender domination in the Islamic context.

After Khadidja's death Muhammad married several women at the same time, among them Aisha, who, after the death of the Prophet, stood out in the activity of clarifying the followers of the Koran on its applicability in the life of the faithful. The *ahadith*, which together make up the Sunna, were written after the death of Muhammad, and are considered as sayings which translate his words and actions and that would guide the daily life of the faithful, from domestic issues to economic and political issues. A *hadith* then mean what the prophet would have said and done if he were among the living. As the *ahadith* were written after the death of Muhammad, Aisha played a key role in the production and systematization of these sayings, as she might have been the most legitimate heir of the prophet's memory. Nevertheless, many *ahadith* were invented according to the convenience of their creators. According to Mernissi (1991), Muhammad's successors were responsible for the distortion of *ahadith*, aiming to legislate on their own account and to ensure the privileges of men over women, thus reinforcing the misogyny of the pre-Islamic tribal societies. The *ahadith* constituted an important political weapon used by the elite in times of crisis. (Mernissi, 1991, p. 33) and the dispute over its authenticity would have turned among other things around the points relating to women. As Fatima Mernissi says in her

introduction referring to the extensive work of Al-Bukhari, for each *hadith* is necessary to check the identity of the Prophet's companion for whom it was dictated, in what circumstances and what purpose he had in mind, as well as the network of people that passed it through. There are more fraudulent traditions than authentic (Mernissi, 1991, p. 3). This would imply that the legitimacy of the *hadith* would rely on the legitimacy of the original message recipients (the companions of the Prophet), their intentions and the recognition of those who continued the transmission of the sayings of the prophet. For Mernissi, some *ahadith* have been used as a way to legitimize the domination of women. She said she was in a store and asked the owner if a woman could lead the Muslims since there are so many Muslim women voters but so few are in institutional politics. Another person responded with a *hadith*: "Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity!" (1991, p. 1). The saying was presented as the truth of the prophet concerning women, legitimizing in this case, the political inequality of women.

According to Mernissi, the *ahadith* "Constitute, along with the Koran (the book revealed by God), both the source of law and the standard for distinguishing the true from the false, the permitted from the forbidden - They have shaped Muslim ethics and values" (1991, p.1). The appeal to tradition represented by the Koran and the *hadith*, stands as a nodal point for analyzing the condition of women in Islamic societies, implying deconstruct the fundamentalist reading of the text. The many possibilities of interpretation of a sacred text that exceed the four recognized legal schools (Madhhab), might frighten because they indicate there is no absolute *truth* - which is an central value to fundamentalisms. This clearly explains Asma Barlas claiming for a Quranic hermeneutics of sexual equality as a path to democratic reform in Islamic societies. This would require a "fundamental epistemic shift in how Muslims interpret and practice Islam. Such a shift would involve the willingness to read liberation from the same scripture that Muslims use to discriminate against women. " (2004, p.1) Barlas (2004) states that the Koran is opposed to gender inequality, affirming equality and justice between the sexes. Despite the controversy surrounding the Koran around equality / gender inequality, as noted earlier, the reading of the sacred text as justice mechanism for women, denatures and desacralizes hierarchies built on sex differences. This enables women to break with gender discrimination, ascend to the public sphere, including the religious, and fight against the control of their bodies and minds.

Perhaps another element that may confront the notion of a supposedly natural (and sacred) inequality of women is the very practices of women themselves that deny prescriptions of the Islamic legal system; a kind of social subjects heterodoxy before the orthodoxy of the law. This can be seen in the statistics presented by the Pew Forum, which indicate differences between the Muslim population about issues related to the obedience of women to their husbands, the use of the veil, divorce, the right to inheritance. Regarding the use of the veil, for example, the question whether a woman should have the right to decide to use it, there are cases in countries like Bosnia and Turkey where, respectively, 92% and 90% of respondents answered yes to this right of women, while the Republic of Congo, Nigeria and Afghanistan did not exceed 30% of people who favored the empowerment of women in this regard. Even in countries where Islam is the predominant religion, as in Indonesia, there is a clear affirmation of the autonomy of women to decide for the use or not of the hijab (79%). As for obedience to husbands data is still subtle, but it indicates a trend. With the exception of Eastern European countries, other countries show high levels of agreement with the obedience of women to their husbands. However, in any country there was 100% agreement of respondents in this regard.

Another factor contributing to new hermeneutics is the adhesion process to Islam (reversal, in the native language) in the world, which in a certain way is transforming their ethnic bases. Like other religions, Islam undergoing a diversification of its ethnic roots, despite its efforts in affirming an ethnic identity. The non-Arab neophytes are spread all over the world, and they are concentrated "in a wide arc stretching from West Africa to Indonesia, through the Middle East and India" (DEMANT, 2008, p. 13). Islamic adherents coming from other ethnic backgrounds are, even if subtly, redesigning the Islamic worldview.

The intense migratory flow of Muslims to European countries in the second half of the twentieth century is also important in the process of achieving gender equality by redesigning the Islamic worldview. The Muslim presence in the world through migration promotes intercultural dialogue, cultural translation of Islam beyond the original geographical and cultural boundaries, expanding the hermeneutical possibilities of religion.

1. A girl, a book and a pen

One night (...) the Mufti gathered some elders and opinion leaders of our neighborhood and brought a delegation to our house. There were seven people (...) The Ghulamullah mullah began to speak: "I'm representing the Ulema, Tablighian and Taliban," he said, trying to give an air of importance referring to organizations of Islamic scholars. "I'm representing good Muslims, and all think your school girls is haram and blasphemous. We also think you should close it. Girls should not attend school," he continued. "They are so sacred that should be prisoners in a purdah; They should be so modest that there is no woman's name in the Koran, as God does not want them to be named." (MalalaYousafzai, 2013, p. 104)

I return to Malala, the small Pakistani who was targeted by the Taliban militia. The Taliban was created under the influence of *wahabbismo* in the context of the Pakistani religious schools. According to Evandro Farid Zago, "the group follows the wahabbista Islamic Sunni line and is world renowned for the fundamentalist character of their militancy. (...) In the formation of the Taliban, it is remarkable the presence of Afghans who studied in Pakistani Islamic schools ". (2009, p. 32) The Taliban were supported and sponsored by Arab, Pakistani, British and US in the fight against the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, and were the rulers of that country from 1996 to 2001, when they experienced international reprisal for the attack to the US and were removed from power. The influence of the Taliban in Pakistan is accentuated after this period, as they found themselves with little chance of re-articulation in Afghanistan because of the international military presence, so they chose the neighboring country to restructure. (ZAGO, 2009, p. 33) Although highly present in the media, which can create the impression of a great movement, the Taliban represent a small minority of Sunni Muslims. Among the many prohibitions imposed by the Taliban to the population, and stated as the truth of Sharia, it stands out the strict control of women. Women are only lawful within domestic space. The presence of women on the street should be an exception, and even then, they should be covered with the veil. The dress in violation of the rules is subject to public punishment. Women can not laugh out loud, use cosmetics or high heels, talk to men who are not close relatives, do sports and use public restrooms. Women can not work outside the home, and the school is not considered as a place for them, and is therefore prohibited from studying. Countering these and many other rules may result in the legitimate murder of women.

As the media have shown, Malala personifies the struggle for girls' education, or as she said, for the education of all children of the world, but perhaps it has to be understood beyond the mere access to school. As we stated at the beginning of this chapter, the regulation of women has been one of the most common agendas in many different religious fundamentalist groups. The struggle of Malala for access to school is the struggle for public presence of women, access to the labor market for their autonomy, recognition, implementation of public policies aimed at women, for the lives of women. Access to education means make the archeology of knowledge (Foucault, 2008), creating the possibility of new hermeneutic, because as Malala said, a child, a teacher [male or female], a book and a pen can change the world. (MalalaYousafzai, 2013, p. 324)

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