

Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians, edited by Ednan Aslan, Marcia Hermansen, and Elif Medeni (Wiener Islamstudien, 3), (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013), 340 pp., ISBN 978-3-631-62899-7, €48.40 / \$62.95 (hb)

At first glance, the title *Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians* emphasizes that female Muslim theologians have had their say: different voices discuss female-related issues from a theological perspective. The title *Muslima Theology* itself appears to avoid association with the “feminist” genre of Christian Theology. One glance at the table of contents is enough to recognize that this anthology explicitly addresses women’s issues and questions from an Islamic and theological viewpoint instead of formulating or stating theological positions, which do not solely relate to female matters.

The volume starts with an introduction by one of the editors, Marcia Hermansen, a well-known scholar, inter alia, of women in Islam. She underlines that after gaining better access to education of religious texts, the voices of Muslim women are now more audible than ever before. These voices comprise those who critically examine their religious tradition as well as those who fervently voice their conservative perspective (p. 11). As Hermansen explains, the contributors not only offer their perspectives as women on certain issues, perspectives that may appear typically female, but also confront the modern-day challenges of their socio-cultural contexts and positions. In her introduction, Hermansen traces the current trends in religious thought as well as the social and political activism of Muslim women that concurrently integrates, more or less, the ideas of all authors in this volume. Instead of Islamic Feminism or Muslim Feminism, I expand the name of this field’s discourse to “Islamic-Theological Gender Studies and Activism.” Although more women and contemporary scholars are able to write and speak out, one wonders whether these voices are, in fact, heard in broad theological debates. Women’s issues are discussed in a specific niche and do not represent a self-evident section of theological debates in the Islamic world. The title itself, however, clarifies that male scholars would not typically contribute to this text;

editor Ednan Aslan is the only man who has contributed.¹ Muna Tattari makes this fact clear in her essay (pp. 155-166), stating that the awakening of Muslim scholars, once described as a gender-jihad, is not over yet. Therefore, Hermansen makes space in her introduction to discuss various women's movements and emancipation efforts in the last few decades.

The volume is divided into four chapters. In Chapter 1, "Muslim Women as Theologians: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives," Hermansen states that "the four writers address the development of women's theology and activism within Islam, covering both classical and contemporary periods" (p. 25). Ednan Aslan briefly discusses the importance of female companions after the Prophet Muḥammad's passing with regard to conveying prophetic narrations and their knowledge, to which early Islamic scholars showed a depreciative attitude. Zainab Alwani, Ndeye Adújar and Aysha Hidayatullah offer an overview on the female contributors in this context as well as during the last century in their own contexts. These authors note that terms such as "feminism" should not present an obstacle to others who may consider ideas and new approaches within theological debates seriously (see especially Ndeye Adújar, pp. 59-80).

In Chapter 2, "Theological Anthropology and Muslim Women," Riffat Hassan, compares Jewish and Islamic beliefs and observes that Eve was not guilty for the fall from heaven; from this perspective, Eve therefore cannot represent the evil in human creation. Hatice K. Arpağuş (pp. 115-132) approaches this subject from an anthropological perspective with a thorough exploration.

Chapter 3, "Muslim Women and Islamic Religious Law," addresses three crucial questions pertaining to women: divorce (Carolyn Baugh), sexualization of rituals (Etin Anwar), and violence against women (Rabha Al-Zeera), as related to Sūra 4:34 in the Qur'ān. The combination of these essays' themes may seem repetitive, but the essays in fact suggest that these issues remain relevant worldwide for many Muslim women and their circumstances, which requires further elaboration.

¹ Nonetheless, there are also male scholars like Farid Esack from South Africa who show their solidarity with Muslim feminists and activists and contribute by their writings.

The most compelling part of this book is the last section, entitled “Muslima Constructive Theology,” which offers a fresh perspective and infuses constructive thinking into the debate. Jerusha Tanner Lamptey (pp. 231-246) begins by inviting the reader to consider religious differences or pluralism with “an alternative conception of difference [which] is the work of Muslim women interpreters of the Qur’ān” (p. 231),² after which she presents the various intra-Islamic discourses on pluralism. Debra Majeed, a Muslim convert from Christianity, narrates the difficulties encountered when applying interpretative skills of Western Academia in Muslim communities, and how this is especially true for female African-American Muslims. She states at one point, “Muslim womanist philosophy creates space for Muslim women to situate themselves and, through their own lived realities, articulate who they are, what they value, and where they belong” (p. 263). In her essay, Sa’diyya Shaikh argues “that there is an organic and a dialogical relationship between Sufism and Islamic Law that remains relatively unexplored in terms of its potential to enhance a rethinking of gender ethics” (p. 267). She believes that egalitarian options, which are authentically part of Sufism, could engage questions of gender ethics with implications for Islamic law regarding gender issues. Her essay is the only Sufi-related contribution to this volume.

With this compilation, the editors wished to make a further contribution that empowered Muslim women and subsequently enabled their theological concepts to be more perceptible and better appreciated. In summary, this volume provides several new keynote essays rather than offering a full inventory of new trends in the Islamic-Theological gender debate.

Tuba Işık

University of Paderborn, Paderborn-Germany

² This essay is actually a summarized version of her dissertation (*Toward a Muslima Theology of Religious Pluralism: the Qur’ān, Feminist Theology and Religious Diversity*, Georgetown University, 2011).