TAWHID – NOTAS (N)ETNOGRÁFICAS SOBRE AS DESPROGRAMAÇÕES NORMATIVAS EMPREENDIDAS POR MUÇULMANAS-OS ATIVISTAS DA TEOLOGIA ISLÃMICA INCLUSIVA.

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Abstract: Esta comunicação oral busca elaborar um diálogo entre minha experiência (n)etnográfica com Muçulmanas-os Inclusivas da França (MIF) e uma breve cartografia da Teologia Islâmica Inclusiva, movimento que ganha folego no final dos anos 1990 e que possui como uma de suas principais protagonistas a islamóloga estadunidense Amina Wadud; e em sua primeira obra, “Qur’an and Woman”, uma das referenciais teóricas mais prestigiadas. As-os ativistas dessa Teologia se empenham no exercício de desprogramar as normativas jurisprudenciais islâmicas consagradas, na medida em que acreditam que estas promovem um ordenamento social pautado em determinismos biológicos que se apropriam da ideia da anatomia como destino. Para tal, procuram nas escrituras sagradas, sobretudo no Corão e na Sunnah, elucidações sobre questões de gênero, igualdade e justiça entre os seres humanos, a fim de visibilizar as apropriações instrumentalizadas que tem dominado durante séculos a interpretação dos mesmos, pautadas numa ótica de leitura patriarcal e chauvinista, produtora de uma perspectiva funcional de gênero. Diante disso, esta comunicação busca elucidar como este movimento de desprogramação normativa engendrado por atoras-ôs da Teologia Islâmica Inclusiva tem sido elaborado e como minhas-meu interlocutor-as (muçulmanas-ôs inclusivas-ôs da França) de pesquisa têm se apropriado deste.

Keywords: Islam, Teologia Islâmica Inclusiva, Muçulmanas-ôs Inclusivas-ôs da France, Gênero.

It has become mandatory to initiate academic texts dealing with the Islamic religion and its adherents with the proviso that September 11th has certainly (re) placed Islam and consequently Muslims at the center of political, internationalist, religious, media, and university discourses, who have produced different perspectives. However, at the level of the easily accessible-visible, it has floated northcentered perspectivisms and dichotomous ontologies narratives alike, which invalidate the perception of religion in general and especially of the Islamic religion, while historical constructions as other social forms and the category of religion as a descriptor of objects, institutions, cognitions, practices, experiences, identities, values, moralities, among others whose properties varied in time and space" (Almeida, 2010,p.65). Thus, the text that follows intends to contribute to the enlargement of the academic discussions, especially in the field of Human Sciences, regarding other ways of equation of this religious belonging.

It is of the utmost importance to begin this text by mentioning that Muslims in general take the Quranic provisions as prescriptions that shape all spheres of their lives, especially through the jurisprudential schools, which has direct implications in the ways of equating marriage and kinship relations and thus in gender relations.. Moreover, it is pertinent to rescue a quote from the

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anthropologist Paulo Pinto and point out that “beyond the sectarian divisions and shared articles and pillars of faith, there is a great diversity in the ways of interpreting, practicing and experiencing Islam (…)” (PINTO, 2010, P.23).

The Inclusive Islamic theology (also called *progressive* by some of its actors) is part of the contemporary branch of the so-called Liberation Theology and constitutes a contemporary arrangement of different but articulate modes of resistance to dominant Islamic theologies among which the Islamic feminisms stand out, insofar as they have been the protagonist in the elaboration of critics to the hegemonic and/or Orthodox jurisprudence, as well as in the deconstruction of the Salvationist narratives engendered by feminist studies of first and second wave (and often by recent ones as well), to which the Islamic feminist Leila Ahmed calls "colonial feminism" (Ahmed, 1992), these, in turn, together with the great media of communication, would have constructed the “Muslim woman as a figure whose oppression is inextricably linked to her sexuality; her oppression is a particularly sexual one, symbolized by fanatical concern with women’s bodies, “the veil,” and female seclusion” (Ali, 2006, p.xiv).

The first articulations of these movements can be perceived already in the late 70's, increasingly organized and strongly supported both in the production of a literature engaged in rescuing the social and political importance of women in the history of the Arabian peninsula of Prophet Muhammad's time, in order to (re) build the Koranic tradition as the bearer of an unequivocal message of fairness and justice between men and women, as well as to question the validity of the ahadiths attributed to the Prophet\(^2\); as the occupation of religious offices, the promotion of movements and / or groups and everyday religious practices (Abdallah, 2010, p.11). To the extent that this movement activists believe:

> It’s a profound irony and tragedy that the Qur'an, despite its strong affirmation of human equality and the need to do justice to all of Allah’s creatures, has been interpreted by many muslims, both ancient and modern, as sanctioning various forms of human inequality and even enslavement. For instance, even though the Qu’ran states clearly that man and woman were made from the same source, at the same time, in the same manner, and that they stand equal in the sight of Allah, men and women are extremely unequal in virtually all Muslim societies, in which the superiority of men is taken to be self-evident (Hassan, 1991, p. 10)

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\(^2\) Work to which the Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi, a leading exponent of the Islamic feminism, devoted herself in detail on her classical book “*Le politique Harem. Le prophète et les femmes*” [The political harem. The Prophet and the Women], 1978.
The term Islamic feminism emerged in the late twentieth century, particularly in academic circles, notably in Iran\(^3\), to the extent that in the 1990s, fueled by the accumulation of disgust at the setbacks of women's social status in post-revolution Iranian society (Mir-Hosseini, 1999), men and especially middle-class Muslim women from this country engaged themselves in the public promotion of several articles, in which two activists stand out: Nahid Tavasoli, one of the great experts in tafsir (proposal of an alternative exegesis) of Iran; and Fazeh Hashemi Rafsanjani, founder of the first post-revolution women's newspaper - Zan (Woman) in 1998. Other publications have juxtaposed with them and, according to Abdallah (2010), have contributed "to spreading the works of interpretation of the Koran (tafsir) and reflection on jurisprudence (fiqh)" (p.9).

Therefore the importance of (re) apprehensions of the scriptural sources, which Islamic feminists in general, according to Houria Bouteldja (2014), claim to be "very feminist in the letter and sexist in the reading" (p.80), that is to say, they have been interpreted in a chauvinistic way, through a misogynistic hermeneutic that hijacks what the activists of these movements believe to be inherent in them: an antipatriarchal epistemology. However, they punctuate, as underline by Asma Barlas (2006), that the Koran itself states that "not all readings are appropriate," so it is up to each Muslim to use his "intellect and reasoning, aql and ilm, to decipher each aya "(p.5).

This, of course, has been extensively explored by the great holders of the monopoly of religious hermeneutics, whom still have the legal apparatus as the main mechanism for producing symbolic violence, as we are told by Fátima Mernissi in El poder olvidado: las mujeres ante un Islam en cambio\(^4\)(1995), in which she elucidates that there are two concepts in the Koran related to the unreliable trend of women: according to her, in the Koran there are two concepts related to the unreliable tendency of women: nushuz – corresponding to the wife’s rebellious behavior toward her husband in the context of sexuality – and qaid – it is the central word of the Surah of Joseph, where an adulterous and unscrupulous wife pursues her husband. These concepts have been highly explored by what Barlas (2005) calls "enveloping masculinity" (p.1), that exploits religious readings in order to legitimize their methods of domination. Therefore, in claiming the right to undertake religious hermeneutics, Islamic feminists not only contribute to the emptying of the crystallized

\(^3\)According Khian (2010) : « Le féminisme islamique iranien a vu le jour dans le context d’une société au sein de laquelle s’enracinent les valeurs modernes. Aujourd’hui, 70% de la population iranienne est urbaine, le taux d’alphabétisation des filles âgées de 6 ans et plus avoisine 80%, le nombre moyen d’enfants par femme est 2 et le nombre des étudiantes dans les établissements d’enseignement supérieur est de 1 500 000 (…) " (p.47) / "Iranian Islamic feminism emerges in a social context in which modern values are rooted. Today, 70% of the Iranian population is urban, the literacy rate for girls over 6 years is approximately 80%, the average number of children per woman is 2 and the number of students in higher education institutions is 1,500,000 (...) " (p.47) / "Iranian Islamic feminism emerges in a social context in which modern values are rooted. Today, 70% of the Iranian population is urban, the literacy rate for girls over 6 years is approximately 80%, the average number of children per woman is 2 and the number of students in higher education institutions is 1,500,000 (…) " / "Iranian Islamic feminism emerges in a social context in which modern values are rooted. Today, 70% of the Iranian population is urban, the literacy rate for girls over 6 years is approximately 80%, the average number of children per woman is 2 and the number of students in higher education institutions is 1,500,000 (…) " / "Iranian Islamic feminism emerges in a social context in which modern values are rooted. Today, 70% of the Iranian population is urban, the literacy rate for girls over 6 years is approximately 80%, the average number of children per woman is 2 and the number of students in higher education institutions is 1,500,000 (…) " / "Iranian Islamic feminism emerges in a social context in which modern values are rooted. Today, 70% of the Iranian population is urban, the literacy rate for girls over 6 years is approximately 80%, the average number of children per woman is 2 and the number of students in higher education institutions is 1,500,000 (…) " / "Iranian Islamic feminism emerges in a social context in which modern values are rooted. Today, 70% of the Iranian population is urban, the literacy rate for girls over 6 years is approximately 80%, the average number of children per woman is 2 and the number of students in higher education institutions is 1,500,000 (…) " / "Iranian Islamic feminism emerges in a social context in which modern values are rooted. Today, 70% of the Iranian population is urban, the literacy rate for girls over 6 years is approximately 80%, the average number of children per woman is 2 and the number of students in higher education institutions is 1,500,000 (…) " / "Iranian Islamic feminism emerges in a social context in which modern values are rooted. Today, 70% of the Iranian population is urban, the literacy rate for girls over 6 years is approximately 80%, the average number of children per woman is 2 and the number of students in higher education institutions is 1,500,000 (…) " / "Iranian Islamic feminism emerges in a social context in which modern values are rooted. Today, 70% of the Iranian population is urban, the literacy rate for girls over 6 years is approximately 80%, the average number of children per woman is 2 and the number of students in higher education institutions is 1,500,000 (…) " / "Iranian Islamic feminism emerges in a social context in which modern values are rooted. Today, 70% of the Iranian population is urban, the literacy rate for girls over 6 years is approximately 80%, the average number of children per woman is 2 and the number of students in higher education institutions is 1,500,000 (…) " / "Iranian Islamic feminism emerges in a social context in which modern values are rooted. Today, 70% of the Iranian population is urban, the literacy rate for girls over 6 years is approximately 80%, the average number of children per woman is 2 and the number of students in higher education institutions is 1,500,000 (…) “. (Our own translation).

\(^4\) “The Forgotten Queens of Islam”.
readings until then, but also destabilize consecrated conceptions of them as woman, mother and wife, which, in turn, overflow in the notions of man, father, husband and, consequently, in the notions of kinship, marriage, gender and sexuality. Insofar as, as Mernissi (1987) points out, “The link in the muslim mind between sexuality and the shari’a has shaped the legal and ideological history of the Muslim family structure and consequently of relations between the sexes (…)” (p.18).

Inclusive Islamic initiatives are therefore an exercise of rethinking the religion itself, as well as the terms of filling its frames. In this way, the Islamic feminist movement(s), as well as the Inclusive Islamic theology in which it is inserted, revive the practice of *ijtihad* (Badran, 1994; Wadud, 2008) – the effort of interpretation of Islamic texts – Which, according to El Ketab (2012), "goes beyond the simple optics of reinterpreting the Qur'an in search of improving the feminine condition, but designates an applied and erudite reading of religious writings (p.6), in order to make visible the instrumentalized appropriations that have dominated for centuries their interpretation. Based on a patriarchal and chauvinistic perspective, producing a functional gender perspective, Impelled to delimit the male / female border in an insurmountable way and to guarantee the maintenance of male domination (Badran, 2010; Abdallah, 2010).

Islamic feminists also engage themselves in the exercise of tafsir (exegesis exercise of the Islamic Holy Book) and seek in the scriptures, the Koran and the Sunnah, elucidations about gender issues, equality and justice among human beings (Badran, 2010, p. 53), through the reappropriation of these writings, as well as the deconstruction of those ayas and ahadiths exhaustively exploited by the dominant currents in order to legitimize their views and their patriarchal and heteronormative practices. Among the verses reappropriated by these feminists, the following stand out: “O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you (…)”. (Koran, 49:13). With the revival of this and other writings, Islamic feminists and inclusive Islamic theologians

(...) contestent surtout l’analyse classique qui stie que l’inegalité entre hommes et femmes et son corollaire de mesures discriminatoires font partie inhérente du Texte sacré en démontrant que ce sont, en fait, certaines lectures tendancieuses, avalisées par des coutumes patriarcales, qui ont plutôt legitimé ces mêmes inégalités (Lambaret, 2007, p.20)\(^5\)

\(^5\) “(...) they challenge, especially the classic analysis that places inequality between men and women and their corollary of discrimination are inherent in the sacred text, demonstrating that they are, in fact, some biased readings, approved by patriarchal customs, Which legitimized these inequalities ”(in free translation).
That is, when Inclusive Islamic theology defends absolute equality (al-musawa) among all human beings (insan) as a religious principle (Badran, 1994), it not only reverberates the claims made by Islamic feminists, but also fosters them and together with them produces both the revival as the emphasis of erased religious writings and / or expropriated by the traditional legal schools that hold the monopoly of Islamic exegesis (tafsir), insofar as both conceive the Koran as a sacred book endowed with a "humanistic spirit" that privileges the "human being without distinction of gender" (Lambaret, 2007, p.19) and that, as pointed out by Ali (2006), "textual Islam has historically been the province of a male elite, and does not accurately represent the understandings of Islam embedded in the experiences of many Muslims, especially women" (Ali, 2006, p. xix).

After all, as Donna Haraway has warned us, "at the end of the twentieth century we are literally the embodiment of writing technologies" (Haraway, 2004, p.205). In view of this, inclusive Islamic theology and Islamic feminism (s) engage in activism not only against discrimination against women, but also demand a reappropriation of religion by and for women, as well as by and for those discriminated against and violated by the dominant hermeneutics, since, according to Barlas (2005), the Koran "does not teach that men are ontologically superior to women" (p.5) nor "prescribes a particular type of sexual practice" (p. 6).

Amina Wadud, born in the United States, daughter of a Methodist pastor, and reverted to Islam at the age of twenty, a theologian and Professor of Islamic studies at a university from USA, is one of the leading exponents of inclusive Islamic theology and Islamic feminism (s), so her work *Qu'ran and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (1992), is considered one of the founding books of Islamic feminisms. In it, Amina Wadud devoted herself deeply to the study of the Arabic vocabulary employed in the Koran, in which she engaged what she called as "a female inclusive reading" of this text and worked on an exegesis based on what she calls the *hermeneutics of the divine oneness* (tawhid), principle that sustains Islamic Theology in general, inasmuch as it constitutes the first faith’s pillar of Muslims—the belief in a single God—which, not coincidentally, is one of the main axes of Islamic inclusive initiatives as exemplified by the Inclusive Muslims of France, who appropriated it as the denomination of their mosque (*mosquée du tawhid*). On this track, the activists of this collective echo Wadud’s ideas and, like her, argue that

We should likewise continue to engage in the process of establishing just and equitable societies given our new experiences and current realities (al-waagiyyah). This includes new ideas about justice and about the valuable roles played by women as individuals, as members of the family, and as public servants in Muslim civil societies today. What is uppermost is the belief that Islam is a fair and just way of life (din). (WADUD, 2009, p.95)
Moreover, that “both the male and the female must be considered responsible for the formulation of laws and policies and be equal beneficiaries of the justice inherent in those laws and policies” (WADUD, 2009, p.97). The theoretical production of this theologian has also materialized in her daily actions, since she was the first woman to perform a sermon (khoutbah) at a Friday prayer- a ceremony consecrated to men - in 1994 in South Africa, besides being the first woman to lead a mixed prayer - orthodoxly it is argued that women can conduct prayer only when in groups composed exclusively of women – in 2005 in New York City. However, it is important to note that her actions, both bibliographical and ceremonial, have been severely criticized by some Islamic leaders, such as Sheikh Yusuf al-Quradawi, who several times denominated her actions as profane and anti-Islamic.

Furthermore, Inclusive Muslims seek, especially in the last fifteen years, to produce a queer-friendly Islamic hermeneutic, this implies, according to Samar Habibi (2009), deprogram the established rules of jurisprudence, since they promote a social order based on biological determinisms that appropriate the idea of anatomy as destiny. In this sense, these activists undertake a critique of hegemonic Koranic exegesis, which they believe has compromised the "integrity" not only of the one who interprets it, but also of the Sacred text itself (Abou El-Fadl, 2001). They argue, therefore, the importance of considering the asbab al-nuzul (the context of revelation) and to move away from Tahlili and Tazzi (literal methods of interpretation), that is, it would be imperative to conceive each ayah (Koranic verse) in its specificity, to the extent that, according to Kecia Ali (2006), they believe that a “(...) legal methodology offers legitimacy for a flexible approach to the Qur’an and the Prophet’s sunnah as revelation that emerged in a historical context”. (p.xxii).

**Conclusion**

Through this brief text, it was sought to elucidate that Islam is made up of many Muslims, and that "there can be no universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and their relations are historically specific, but because this definition is itself a historical product of discursive processes " (Asad, 2010, p.264) and thus contribute to the deconstruction of one-dimensional narratives about them, as well as the potential relationships between them. Besides that, It was attempted to suggest the urgency of extending the theoretical and methodological references generated in the studies of these new ways of equating religious experience, since Islam - although essentially delineated by the hegemonic mediatic apparatus - has diverse and plural adherents in all countries, whom build different Islamic affinities’ networks, with different ways of
approaching religious scriptures and thereby rethink and reconfigure terms, concepts and practices previously considered licit and / or illicit, which in the case of Islamic Inclusive Theology takes a special regard towards gender’ issues.

References


Tawhid - (n) ethnographical notes on normative deprogramming undertaken by Inclusive Islamic Theology's activists muslims.

**Abstract:** This paper seeks to elaborate a dialogue between my (n) ethnographic experience with Inclusive Muslims of France (MIF), and a brief cartography of Inclusive Islamic Theology, a movement that gained weight in the late 1990s and which has as one of its main protagonists the american islamologist Amina Wadud, and in her first book, *Qur'an and Woman*, one of the most prestigious theoretical frameworks. The activists of this theology are engaged in the exercise of deprogramming the established islamic jurisprudential regulations, since they believe that these last ones promote a social ordering based on biological determinisms that appropriate themselves of the idea that anatomy is the destiny. For this, they seek in the sacred scriptures, especially in the Qur'an and Sunnah, elucidations on issues of gender, equality and justice among human beings, in order to make visible the instrumentalized appropriations that have dominated for centuries the interpretation of these, based on a patriarchal and chauvinistic reading view that produced a functional perspective of gender. Thus, this communication seeks to elucidate how this movement of normative deprogramming engendered by Inclusive Islamic Theology actors has been elaborated and how my research interlocutors (France’s Inclusive Muslims) have appropriated themselves of this one.

**Keywords:** Islam, Inclusive Islamic Theology, France’s Inclusive Muslims, Gender.