

From Victims to Suspects Muslim Women since 9/11

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Issues involving Muslim women are recurrent in contemporary times, given that the interest in the topic reappears when events involving Muslim populations are reported. Whether they are majority or minority populations, the conditions of Muslim women are highlighted to justify narratives about Islam and its practitioners. The present work by Shakira Hussein, *From Victims to Suspects: Muslim Women since 9/11*, offers a synthesis of recent questions about these women, covering the last years of the 1990s to the last years of the 2010s, considering events that occurred in Australia, Afghanistan, France, the United States and other locations, bringing the researcher's experience as a Muslim woman and as an academic.

Reflecting on a very important theme for Muslim and non-Muslim communities, articulating academic readings and facts disseminated in the media, as well as interviewing Muslim women in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the work clarifies that in order to understand Islam, Muslims and Islamist movements today requires a consideration of the role played by women in these arenas – or even the role assigned to them by external agents.

A book like this joins other initiatives by Muslim women writing about their life experiences, contributing to the redundancy of some information, but also offering original reflections and links between events that are often not connected. It is not a theoretical book: the author is not concerned with concepts, in deepening an epistemological or theoretical discussion about gender and Islam. However, this is not a negative point of the work: such an expedient choice makes it an accessible read that different readers, from the most versed to the less knowledgeable, will be able to enjoy.

The accessibility of the work is apparent from the beginning, in the *Prologue*, which anticipates the spirit of the book to the reader: it is a letter addressed to the author's daughter. Involved in the work of explaining what the news means to Muslim women, she ends this prologue hoping that her daughter does not need to do so much explaining as she and so many Muslim women have to nowadays. In the *Introduction*, the author raises questions that will be relevant throughout the entire work: through the perspective that the clothes a woman wears are more important than her voice and the uses of gender issues to feed the rhetoric of the Clash of Civilizations, the author outlines a scenario where Muslim women play the role of either being a fifth column against the imagined construct of Western Judeo-Christian civilization or being people at the mercy of patriarchal powers that supposedly demand interventions to free them from their tormentors

In Chapter 1, *Afghan Girls*, the author discusses how Muslim women are icons of victimization despite the existence of organizations that defy patriarchal logic, such as the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). In this chapter, the author discusses the situation of Afghan women before and after 9/11, focusing on women in that country to highlight, for example, that Muslim women are victimized to justify imperialism. The dichotomous sympathy for Afghan women versus the fear of these Afghan women's husbands, children and brothers is highlighted by the author, indicating the ompon xenophobic component that structures the apprehension about Muslim women in general in many contexts, not only Afghan women.

In the second chapter, *Candle in the Wind*, the author begins her discussion with the figure of Malala and her struggle for the girls education being hijacked by a pro-imperialism rhetoric. Focusing on Pakistan, the author discusses Jammāt-e-Islami, and in this chapter she criticizes secular feminist movements that exclude Muslim women, propagating an exclusivist Western conception of women's rights.

Chapter 3, *Shifting Perceptions*, reports changes in perceptions of Muslim women after 9/11. From the burkini issue in France, which contemplates the modesty market, with products aimed at Muslim women's consumption, emerges the perception of branding as a form of soft-power that is favorable to Islamization. There are changes even in the public meaning of the hijab, the Islamic headscarf. Another highlight is the stereotype of the Muslim woman who in turn breaks stereotypes. Such a stereotypical woman repudiates elements of her religion and in so doing gains visibility and prominence. Thus, the hijab is seen as a sign of backward tradition, which repudiates modernity. Where there is some discussion about the place of the veil in modern societies, then a moral panic about Islamization becomes the keynote. There would thus be no options for the Muslim woman but to be placed under permanent suspicion.

In *Proxy Wars*, the fourth chapter, the author points out that Muslim women are sometimes mobilized as elements of proxy wars around different themes. Gender norms, multiculturalism, freedom of expression and feminism come to be understood as having a rhetorical element that relate to the conditions, imagined or real, of Muslim women in predominantly Muslim societies or in which Muslims are a minority. The author then argues that the Muslim issue is mobilized for issues other than those relating to Muslims or Islam. It indicates the post-Arab Spring period as a period of a sharp emergence of negative perceptions with a major emphasis on Islam as a problem. As an example of this proxy war mobilizing Muslim women, the author cites criticism of feminists for supposedly having abandoned Muslim women and, therefore, being hypocrites. On the other hand, in this chapter the author makes interesting provocations: she indicates how Muslim academics are negotiating patriarchal morality in their writings, as well as indicating that there

are conditions for the emergence of an Islam of and for women. Such a way of being Muslim emerges from these segregated spaces, beyond male surveillance, and where women develop their own reflections – which would enable or give development conditions to a possible Islamic feminism.

Chapter 5, *Invisible Menace*, focuses on the hidden threat, the stealth jihad, that Muslim women are supposed to undertake. The author returns to the economic question, this time indicating the halal industry as a way of Islamization. In addition, the fear of the Muslim woman's womb is cited, which translates into the idea of a demographic jihad, as an instrument for the de-whitening of nations. Such a perspective would lead to the idea that there is no aspect of Muslim life that cannot or should not be investigated: their particular choices, their ways of being and feeling are all suspect because they relate to Islam. The private lives of Muslim populations within a white nation are forms of silent Islamization that trigger alarms and paranoia.

The sixth chapter, "*Jihad Brides*" and *Chicks with Sticks*, refers to the paradox of the Islamic State (Daesh) being a patriarchal organization that still attracts women. Joining this organization would remove women from the role of victim to that of a participant in Islamization. The Muslim family itself is placed as one of the fronts on which the War on Terror should unfold, with Muslim men and women being invited to establish the role of anti-radicalization watchmen in their own homes – as if they were extensions of the power of state surveillance. The chapter closes with the author giving her account of an attempt at the co-optation of her image as an agent of influence, as someone who could influence Muslim communities in order to be more acceptable to non-Muslims.

In the *Conclusion*, the author takes up other sexual anxieties and pressing social issues, such as Muslim women's clothing as a threat to national security, the perception that Muslim women, being women, would be docile and easy to manipulate. She also discusses the impact of migration policies as new images of immigrants and refugees emerge in the public space. Significantly, Muslim women have gained greater visibility, especially after 9/11: from entertainment, to media, to politics, Muslim women have come to be seen as allies of the enemy and,

therefore, as enemies of themselves. Hence the normalization of hostility towards Muslim women on social media, which the author points out.

From the perspective of the method used by the author, it is important to emphasize that the writing involved more than one methodological step. This is because at times the text refers to the author's experience, especially in the interview with members of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan and Jamaat-e-Islami in the first two chapters. On the other hand, qualitative and observational methodologies are the focus of most of the work, composing a complex picture of the situations that Muslim women experience. Macro and micro perspectives are interrelated and the author is highly competent in demonstrating how this plethora of actions and discursivities engender demeaning representations of Muslim women. The work cites a number of other works, such as Sara Farris's *In the Name of Women's Rights: the Rise of Femonationalism*, and refers to a range of expert authors, such as Lila Abu-Lughod, making the book an excellent starting point for thinking about gender and Islam in contemporary times.

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