

## Book Review: Wadud, A. (2006). *Inside the Gender Jihad:*

### *Women's Reform in Islam. Oneworld.*

Hinasahar Muneeruddin

To cite this article: Muneeruddin, H. (2021). Book Review: Wadud, A (2006). *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam. Al-Raida*, 44(2), 87-89

© 2021 The Author(s)

Corresponding author: Hinasahar Muneeruddin

Article type: Article

Published online: 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2021

Publisher: Arab Institute for Women

Publication support provided by: Escienta

Journal ISSN: 0259-9953

Copyright: This is an Open Access article, free of all copyright, and may be freely reproduced, distributed, transmitted, modified, built upon, or otherwise used by anyone for any lawful purpose. The work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license.

---

## *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*

Amina Wadud

Oneworld, 2006

ISBN 1851684638

Reviewed by Hinasahar Muneeruddin

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

---

*Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* by Amina Wadud is a hard-hitting text that illuminates the significance of establishing gender justice in Muslim thought today. Taking a semi-autobiographical approach, Wadud guides us through the marginalized lived realities of Muslim women. For Wadud, fighting the gender jihad means fighting for one's identity, and for humanity, against the pervasive ills of patriarchy that seep through Islamic traditions. This monograph demonstrates how Islam can be transformed through its own egalitarian spirit, values, and inclinations so as to bring about greater justice for women. Wadud hopes that by discussing gendered structural inconsistencies within Islamic traditions, and by positioning this struggle within her own experiences, she can reclaim her voice as a Black Muslim woman. In fact, Wadud urges all Muslim women to take the initiative to engage with Islamic primary sources so they can lead the struggle for practical implementations of woman-inclusive interpretations. In this way, she seeks to establish indigenous theoretical and practical constructions of human rights discourse for Muslims that are separate from Western geneses of such conceptions. Ultimately, for Wadud, gender justice becomes absolutely indispensable to the divine order of the universe. Ignoring such a mission would not only be gravely unjust, but also immoral.

A main theme in *Inside the Gender Jihad* is one's reckoning with the *Tawhidic* paradigm. For Wadud, one way to approach gender justice is to engage in a *Tawhidic* paradigm, which binds those who completely surrender to God in "a covenant of conscientious moral and autonomous agency." This covenant includes an irrevocable commitment to justice, truth, and resistance to

any and all forms of oppression. For this reason, injustice becomes impossible for those bound to God in this way because “injustice as well as all forms of dominance and oppression undermine and at the same time completely obliterate a human being’s moral agency—they rob people of their autonomy—of their ability to be responsible before God for their own moral judgment and actions.” In this way, meaningful surrender to the oneness of God can only occur if one continuously strives against all oppression and authoritarianism. Consequently, any patriarchal interpretations of Islam that suppress women’s agency and integrity are in direct contradiction to this covenant, ultimately impeding upon the goal of achieving a close relationship with God.

Another major theme of *Inside the Gender Jihad* asks the reader to evaluate the harmful consequences of patriarchal interpretations of Islam, in which women are rendered invisible and their agency is effectively erased. Furthermore, since men monopolize claims to authority, this tends to render patriarchal interpretations of Islam as normative and most legitimate, which—in turn—further normalizes the erasure of women’s experiences and voices. Wadud elaborates on this very lack of legitimacy of women’s claims to authority in Chapter Five. There, she recounts a controversial event that took place in South Africa in 1994, in which Wadud herself performed the role of *khatibah* during Friday prayers in an explicit effort to subvert the existing restrictions for women. She illuminates the ways in which women lose their humanity, and their identities, by being excluded from participation in Islamic ritual practices. Ultimately, Wadud maintains that a more radical hermeneutic methodology is necessary to revolutionize the tradition through gender-just interpretative possibilities. To enact practical reforms towards greater gender justice within Islamic traditions, Wadud maintains that spirituality is key. She says that “the *only* reason [she has] been engaged in the *jihad*, struggle for gender justice, is because that justice and full human dignity granted to us by Allah has been ignored or abused” (p. 262). In this way, by invigorating faith through spiritual activism, one can be in a better position to reform Islamic traditions from their gender-oppressive practices and thought.

Although positing a persuasive case for the struggle of gender justice within the Muslim context, this monograph does not include the struggles of gender justice for Muslim gender non-conforming or genderqueer populations. While Wadud addresses the erasure of women in mainstream interpretations of Islamic texts and traditions, opening up possibilities for legitimizing

and humanizing women, the question regarding the humanity and visibility of gender non-binary Muslim remains unanswered. In a religious tradition that is so invested in the gender binary (from performing rituals to legal traditions), how is a Muslim who does not adhere to gender labels able to struggle and create space for their justice? While Wadud's text would have been doubly enriched by this inclusion, the exclusion does not necessarily take away from the impact of the work she does within this book—as subverting patriarchal and androcentric interpretations of Islam proves to be beneficial and more equitable for all genders. This is because Wadud's book serves as a personal exploration of her life's work, as well as highlighting the lived realities that are intertwined with her everyday struggle for gender justice. Ultimately, this book serves as a testament to Wadud's agential subjectivity and survival, as well as her struggle for gender justice for Muslim women everywhere.

*Inside the Gender Jihad* contributes to a wide body of scholarship that specifically aspires to not only address gender injustices within Islamic traditions and Muslim communities, but also to restore the humanity and agency of Muslim women for the sake of moral spirituality. Wadud's awe-inspiring narrative creates waves within the status quo of patriarchal, androcentric Islamic/Muslim traditions and societies. Conclusively, it joins the many voices of Muslim women seeking to gain full inclusion and survival within a tradition they admire.

## References

Wadud, A. (2006). *Inside the gender jihad: Women's reform in Islam*. Oneworld.