

Language, Gender and Religion:
An Investigation into some Gender-
Specific Issues in Religious Texts, and the
Impact of Language on the Role of Women
in Judaism, Christianity and Islam

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This Master's Thesis is carried out as a part of the education at the University of Agder and is therefore approved as a part of this education. However, this does not imply that the University answers for the methods that are used or the conclusions that are drawn.

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*SAY: "If all the sea were ink for my Sustainer's words,
the sea would indeed be exhausted ere my Sustainer's words are
exhausted!*

And [thus it would be] if we were to add to it sea upon sea."

(Qur'an 18: 109)

0.1_SUMMARY

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The thesis begins by providing background information about the concept of gender within the linguistic, feminist and religious context. Possible definitions of the difference between sex and gender are offered and the position of gender issues in the realm of language is discussed. In continuation an introduction to religious feminism and its different types is given.

Before the discussion of the core of the thesis, a presentation of the research investigation included in this work is given. Its aim and methods applied are elaborated.

The central part of the thesis can be divided into four parts which are interconnected. First, different linguistic aspects of the gender discourse are outlined. During this process religious texts of the three Abrahamic religions are in focus. Issues like inclusive and exclusive language, gender-neutral scriptures, the connection between religion and linguistics, the hermeneutical philosophy and the translation of the Word of God are discussed in detail.

As the interpretation of religious texts regarding gender has influenced the lives of women for millennia, much attention and space are given to the various interpretative approaches to some misogynic texts in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The issue of gender in the respective religious traditions is treated generally, with special focus on texts included in the survey in order to offer a theoretical basis for the elaboration of the results of the research investigation.

The gender of God, a controversial, even provocative, topic, is treated in a separate chapter as it is considered significant among religious feminists. In the course of this chapter the linguistic reasons for the masculinisation of God inherent in the Semitic languages were discussed. Furthermore, the alleged necessity of a male God and the possibility of a male saviour to save women are questioned. The interesting female aspects of the Divine in the three Abrahamic faiths are touched upon, as well.

The thesis is concluded with the elaboration of the results arrived at in a research investigation conducted among today's Jewish, Christian and Muslim women. Their responses are presented in the light of the three previous chapters and contrasted to each other.

0.2_ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, I want to thank God for endowing me with the wish to seek knowledge and for making this wish come true!

During my first year of the master studies programme at the University of Agder I had a consultation with Anne Karin Ro regarding one of the papers we had to hand in. While I was sitting in her office and looking around me, I noticed a folder titled “Language and Religion”. Being a religious person and a student of linguistics, I consider these two topics to be central to my life and education. I felt a strong wish to look into this folder. In the following semester I was given the opportunity to do that together with Anne Karin Ro and my fellow students in a course called “Language and Religion”. This was a most interesting and enriching experience, and it was during this course that I decided to write a thesis about one of the numerous aspects of religious language.

I would like to thank Anne Karin Ro for giving me the opportunity to look inside the “folder” of religious language during her course and during the writing of my thesis. I am grateful for her guidance, patience and, particularly, for her deep understanding of my private struggle of raising four children.

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1.0 Introduction and Presentation of the Thesis

1.1 The Aim of the Study and the Hypotheses

The aim of this study is to present some aspects pertaining to the issue of gender and religion in the three Abrahamic religions, i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Since all of these religions are based on linguistic data, be it of written or oral origin, the study will concentrate on parts of these concerning the theme of gender.

Although the sacred texts on which the three monotheistic religions are based are believed to be the authentic and unchangeable Word of God, the interpretations of these texts have changed throughout history and will continue to do so, often caused by different linguistic analyses of the Holy material. We are witnessing a revival of religious feelings all over the world and great political and military decisions, such as the joint Zionist efforts of the neo-conservative Christians and orthodox Jews, or, the suicide terrorism of Islamic radicals, are based on different interpretations of the Scriptures. If, additionally, decisions taken in the private sphere are taken into account, one realises that different readings of the Word of God affect lives of people all over the world.

Religious texts and their interpretation have become a popular occupation of the masses and do not concern only theologians and philosophers any more. This fact also now represents a great challenge for linguists and researchers working within the field of humanities. The aim of this paper is to respond to one aspect of this challenge, which is the gender discourse.

The Messenger of Islam, Muhammad, is reported to have said “I did not leave behind a test more tempting to men than women”. Indeed, the issue of women has had a special status in most societies throughout history. Women have been revered for their motherhood and their role in procreation but simultaneously also feared and detested due to their sexuality and alleged capability to lead men astray. The three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have, unfortunately, rather supported the negative view of women and female nature. Still, a huge number of the world’s women today find consolation, peace and protection in these religions. In order to analyse this, at the first sight, contradictory situation this thesis will offer theoretical information and practical data. The theoretical part will provide the necessary information for a

better understanding of the above mentioned controversy. Special focus will be put on feminist interpretations of religious language and texts. The practical data will be collected in a research investigation conducted among Jewish, Christian and Muslim women of today. Conclusively, I will contrast the theory based information with the results of my research.

1.2 The Organisation of the Work

The study has been organised as follows:

- 1.0 Introduction and Presentation of the Thesis
- 2.0 Data and Methods
- 3.0 The Linguistic Issues Within the Gender Discourse
- 4.0 Theoretical Background for Gender Issues in the Three Abrahamic Religions
- 5.0 Gender of God in Judaism, Christianity and Islam
- 6.0 Presentation and Discussion of the Gender Issues and Religious Texts Today
- 7.0 Summary and Conclusion

1.3 The Thesis

In the first chapter of my thesis a short overview of the thesis will be presented. Additionally, some crucial terms in the discussion of gender within religious traditions will be clarified, e.g. the concepts of gender, feminism and religious feminism.

The second chapter is an elaboration of the type of data collected in the survey and the methods applied in this process.

The third chapter deals with the different linguistic debates going on in the field of gender and religious texts. Issues like exclusive and inclusive language, gender-neutral Scriptures, the connection between linguistics and religion, hermeneutics and the translation of the Scriptures will be addressed.

The fourth chapter of the thesis is dedicated to the theoretical background of the gender discourse in the three Abrahamic faiths. Controversial attitudes are brought up and discussed. Textual support for misogynic practices but also redeeming, women-friendly interpretations of the same texts are presented.

In the fifth chapter the controversial issue of the gender of God in the three religions is discussed.

The sixth chapter is a presentation of my research into the field of gender in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In this chapter I will try to test the following hypotheses based on the answers and comments I have gathered among women adhering to Judaism, Christianity and Islam:

The seventh and final chapter is a summary and conclusion of the whole thesis.

1.4 Background Information and Clarification of Terms

Before starting the discussion of gender within the three Abrahamic faiths it is necessary to present some background ideas and to clarify a number of terms used within this particular discourse.

1.4.1 What is Gender?

Most of us familiar with the English language encounter the term *gender* in its grammatical use, i. e. to differentiate between male, female and neuter nouns. There is, however, a significant difference between the grammatical and social or anthropological modes of deployment of this term. Some social scientists, including sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists, emphasise this difference by stating that gender is not equal to biological sex. According to them, a person's sex is a biological fact, something that cannot be chosen or changed (even though, nowadays, modern medicine offers such possibilities as well), whereas the gender of a person is socially constructed and shaped by the environment. Sex is the result of nature, something a human being is born with. Gender, on the other hand, is the result of culture. The following definition by the anthropologist Judith Shapiro sheds some light on this issue:

Sex and gender serve a useful analytic purpose in contrasting a set of biological facts with a set of cultural facts. Were I to be scrupulous in my use of terms, I would use the term 'sex' only when I was speaking of biological differences between males and females and use 'gender' whenever I was referring to the social, cultural, psychological constructs, that are imposed upon these biological differences. (Shapiro, 1981, in "Theorising Gender in Sociolinguistic and Linguistic Anthropology" by Bonnie McElhinny , in J. Holmes and M. Meyerhoff (eds), *The Handbook of Language and Gender* 2003: 22)

This point of view originated in the feminist movement, the main goal of which was to examine all the traditional concepts and facts for the first time from a female perspective, pointing out gender inequalities and fighting for equal rights for both genders.

The feminist movement is mostly divided into three major waves, the first wave ranging from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, the second taking place in the sixth and seventh decades of the last century and finally the third wave starting in the 90s and being effective until today. A special importance within the global feminist movement is given to the French school of feminism because of its special orientation towards philosophy and literature. The most famous among the representatives of this school is undoubtedly Simone de Beauvoir. Her work *The Second Sex* set the foundations for wider and deeper discussions on gender. Her probably most quoted statement cited in Eckert 2003: 15, "Women are not born, they are made." is the basic idea upon which the feminists build their argument about gender as a cultural construct, not a God-given or rather nature-given fact.

According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (Ecker and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 30-32) there are three major principles determining gender. First, gender is something that is learnt. Second, gender has to be taught, thus it is based on collaboration among members of society. Finally , the third important aspect of gender which is related to the topic of this thesis is that gender practices have to be repeated. By adhering to certain social norms concerning gender roles we re-do gender again and again. Thus, society does not only create gender, it also keeps it alive. If an engendering act is not performed by the members of society, male or female, it eventually disappears. For this reason, it is of great significance for those who want to keep the status quo in a certain social system to insist on existing practices, value systems and orders. Not infrequently do institutions, very often religious institutions as well, undertake this task.

Another aspect feminists insist upon is the omnipresence of gender. Gender is not an independent category existing in society all by itself. It permeates all fields of human existence, e. g. family, neighbourhood, school, restaurants, media and, of course, religious communities as well.

1.4.2 Gender and Language

Many consequences of gender role division are observable and they come to the surface in different forms, like for instance through colours, gestures, and appearance. However, there is one segment of human existence crucial for sharing views and ideologies with other human beings and as such the mediator of gender ideology as well - the human language. The next section will thus be focused on the relationship between gender and language.

Philosophers and linguists have thoroughly discussed the issue whether we create language or whether our reality is created by language. Even though they have not yet come to a final conclusion, it is obvious that the human capacity of speech is central to human existence. Our thoughts and feelings become known and relevant to the rest of the world only by being transformed into sounds, morphemes, words, clauses, paragraphs, texts, i. e. into language.

In the previous section on gender in general the feminist view that gender is learned and taught and, in addition, has to be practised and repeated over time was mentioned. What is, however, even more significant for the theory of gender performance is the idea that social norms are developed by doing things through words and other means of expression. Feminists believe that there is a possibility for change by going beyond the constraints of certain norms. There are century-long discourses in every society, yet feminists believe that they are not fixed, and that they can and should be changed. Thus, there is hope for changes in the gender discourse which can be achieved through language and other performative acts.

Rebecca Chop draws our attention to the connection between society, language and gender in her book *The Power to Speak*. She claims that language is “both the material and the frame for structural and cultural debates about the role of women“. (Chop 1989: 12, in Parsons 1996: 89) The basic dualism, the opposition of male and female, is created and reinforced through language. According to Chop, it is essential to realise how significant the role of language is in the shaping of our reality. Besides, we have to be aware that language governing our lives is not perfect and that change is possible and desirable; that there are “margins and fissures that allow language and

thus the social-symbolic order to be corrected, changed, subverted, and transformed“ (Chop 1989: 14, in Parsons 1996: 89).

Others, like Mary Daly in her book *Beyond God the Father*, suggest a complete transformation of the androcentric and misogynist language, a process which she describes as “the liberation of language” (Daly 1973: 8). According to her, we have to go back to the Creation story of the Bible where Adam is granted by God the right to name the world, including the woman. Daly insists that women be granted the same privilege, namely, to name the world from their perspective, to reshape the human language in order to include the female ways of expression. At some other point she calls for a “castration” of the language (Daly 1973: 9), by which she means a purification of the language from all the misogynist tendencies, e. g. the use of the generic *man*, a phenomenon that will be treated later in the thesis.

1.4.3 Religious Feminism

It is important to note that at its beginning feminism as a movement treated numerous religious issues. Those committed to the emancipation of women used religious rhetoric and expressed religious concerns in the course of argument. Judith Plaskow points out that it was church sewing circles which offered women the opportunity to discuss their legal and social situation. Particularly outspoken, in this regard, were the Quaker women because they had been granted the right to take part in church affairs, a right that was denied to their sisters belonging to other denominations. (Plaskow 1990: 221)

Feminist demands were often met with disapproval by religious officials who used quotations from the Bible to support their own positions. That is the reason why at the first Women´s Rights Convention at Seneca Falls in 1848 the goal of the participants was to “discuss the social, civil, and religious rights of women”. For that occasion Elizabeth Cady Stanton drew up eighteen grievances among which were the subordination of women in the church and man´s abuse of “the prerogative[s] of Jehovah” (Plaskow 1990: 221).

Susan F. Parsons sees theological ideas in the foundation of the feminist movement. Early feminists relied on moral reasoning originating from the liberal paradigm which contends that “the free and transcendent activity of reason is the most essential expression of our uniqueness as human beings” and that “through this activity the objective truth is discovered” (Parsons 1996: 23). It is reason that can raise human beings into the realms of the ultimate, universal and

transcendent or, from a theological point of view, of God. She explains that the arguments of liberal feminists “may be seen as attempts to clear away the idols which hinder the true apprehension of the divine”. (Parsons 1996: 23) The deeply theological implications of such assumptions cannot be denied even though, as Parsons admits, there were many who, based on the same liberal ideas, abandoned religious beliefs and practices.

Despite this intricate relatedness between religion and feminism many religious people discard feminism *a priori* because they associate the term with the secular worldview, something that is opposed to religious beliefs. Others conceive of it as incompatible with traditional values. Judith Plaskow discusses this problem in her book *Standing Again At Sinai*. In the introduction, named “It’s Feminist, But Is It Jewish?” Plaskow refers to a telling occasion from her own life that is very enlightening in the context of religious feminism. At a Jewish theology conference which she attended a rabbi told a story about the Jewish women who were active as gunrunners in a ghetto during the Second World War. At a critical point in time they had to decide whether to act independently and join the partisans or to obey their males and make a last, fruitless stand against the Nazis. Those women, “as Jews first and women second”, chose obedience to their fathers, brothers and husbands. The rabbi ended the story, which was intended to be “a moral tale for the benefit of the feminists present”, with the questions: “What would you have done? Which side are you on?” For Plaskow another unasked question was implied: “Are you a feminist or a Jew?” (Plaskow 1990: X)

Plaskow complains about this “either/or” attitude among Jews and she is particularly annoyed by the fact that the majority of Jewish women never question the aspects of Judaism that are, according to her, degrading towards women.

The same kind of reluctance to identify with feminism is met across the Muslim community. As the majority of Muslims live in the so-called Third World countries they reject feminism on the same grounds as they reject numerous other ideas coming from the West. They look upon such ideas as products of the Western neo-imperialism. On the other hand, many Muslims, along with prominent female Muslim scholars, reject feminism because, as they claim, Islam recognized the equality of women and men 1500 years ago and the term *feminism* attached to *Muslim* or *Islamic* is considered redundant. Among these scholars we can find Amina Wadud, Riffat Hasan and Asma Barlas, who eventually accepted the label expressing the view that what matters is what they do and not what they are called (<http://www.weekly.ahram.org.eg/2002/569/cu1.htm>). Asma

Barlas explains her position in her article “Qur’anic Hermeneutics and Women’s Liberation”. She denies the “master narrative of feminism” which claims that it was feminists who first gained the insight that “men and women are equally human” and that they “deserve equal rights” (Barlas 2005: 11), for she encountered these ideas in the Qur’an years before she had the opportunity to read any feminist literature.

1.4.3.1 *Types of Religious Feminism*

When discussing religious feminism it is essential to realize that this term contains a variety of approaches to religious beliefs, practices and texts. Different authors make different divisions among those feminists who can be regarded as religious, and, Francis Britto in his article “The Gender of God: Judeo-Christian Feminist Debates” offers a very detailed one. According to his classification, there are first of all those feminists who “brand the Bible as the source of woman’s subjugation” and consider it dangerous to women’s ‘health and survival’”. Feminists belonging to this group believe that women should not and cannot reach equality relying on traditional religious texts. Secondly, there are those feminists who believe in some kind of “male conspiracy”. Based on scarce historical evidence they claim that the human society had been matriarchal and Goddess-worshipping in its origins. This system was overthrown after the emergence of the monotheistic, patriarchy-based religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam. They claim that throughout history women have been oppressed by men due to beliefs and ideas found in these religions which have played an influential role in human society. And, finally there is the third group of feminists, the number of whom has been rising in the last years, who contend that “the Bible, early Church fathers, leading theologians, popes and Canon Law have all been contaminated by sexism and androcentrism” (Britto “The Gender of God: Judeo-Christian Feminist debates” in A. Jule (ed.), *Gender and The Language of Religion* 2005: 31). Not God, but male-controlled religious authorities are to blame. This group of feminists explore ideas like the feminist and egalitarian attitude of Christ and female imagery in the Bible. In the Islamic context, I would add, they propose a return to the primary message of the Qur’an, which is egalitarian and ask for a re-evaluation and re-reading of patriarchal texts and rulings. In my view, the last group of feminists offer an approach which is most compatible with the term religious feminism in the context of the world’s major religions. The connection with the religious texts and traditions is upheld while at the same time there is a critical stand towards views and rulings oppressive towards women.

2.0 Data and Methods

One of the goals of this thesis is to compare and contrast the different linguistic, philosophical and feminist theories and gender and religion with data collected through a research investigation among modern Jewish, Christian and Muslim women. This chapter offers an overview of the data and methods involved in this investigation.

2.1 Questionnaire and Texts

All the study participants had to answer the same list of questions regardless of their religion. The list is comprised of ten questions. The first four questions refer to general information about the participant and the remaining six are more specific and deal with gender and religion.

The aim was to find out how women belonging to the Abrahamic religions feel in their respective communities and if they are critical of some aspects pertaining to gender in their religious traditions. Besides, the women's relationship to religious institutions and scholars was of significance for the research in order to show whether the traditional ways of interpreting religious writings is crucial for religious women today. It was also of interest to investigate their view of the relationship between religious theory and practice in reference to the treatment of women. Their answers to this question would indicate whether women feel that the development of religion, which was highly influenced by men, is a derogation of the original egalitarian message of God. The last two questions are supposed to show the women's view of the gender of God, i. e. if they see God in gendered terms and if they are bothered by the male language used for the Divine in religious texts.

When it comes to the religious texts chosen for my study, I had to choose different ones depending on the religious adherence of the person questioned. The participants are confronted with three texts each. The first two texts are provocative and women-degrading excerpts from the written religious documents. They are old and were written at a different time and under different circumstances from ours, but my aim was to find out whether ancient written texts had an impact on women's lives today. I also deliberately picked one text from the respective Holy Book and the other from a collection of texts written by influential, yet human figures. The case of Paul's epistle is somewhat unclear, but I chose it as a part of the Bible which is considered by most Christians to be God-breathed.

The third and final text presented to the interviewees concerns the contradictory topic of the gender of God. In all the three religions I tried to find some prayers or supplications in which God is referred to as a female entity in order to find out how women react to a “female” God.

2.1.1 Initial Approach

In order to receive realistic results each study participant received a questionnaire and three short texts accompanied by either an oral or a written explanation of the aim of the research. In connection with the texts, the informants were also given certain guidelines as to what kinds of comments were expected focusing on gender issues. The Muslim study participants were given an additional explanation of the Sufi poem used in the investigation due to the fear that the symbolic language might be misunderstood. It was also emphasised that there were no correct and incorrect responses or comments and that personal views were welcomed.

2.1.2. Types of Interviews

The initial intent had been to conduct the survey orally, and thus a number of study participants were interviewed in this manner. These interviews were recorded in different settings (at participants’ homes, at my home, at participant’s workplace, on the phone and via Skype). However, due to certain difficulties faced during this process, e. g. a limited number of Jewish women in Norway, and the fact that the aim of the survey was not to detect particular linguistic features in the speech of the informants, it was decided to collect the remaining data in written form. Both, the oral and the written responses vary in length. The orally recorded interviews are attached to the thesis on a cd and the written ones can be found in appendixes 1, 2 and 3.

2.1.3. Types of Questions in the Questionnaire

In the questionnaire a combination of closed and open questions was used. The aim of the closed questions was to collect more data about the participants in order to establish their profiles and to investigate the relationship between their profiles and the responses they gave to the open questions and the religious texts. It was observed that some participants further discussed some of the closed questions because they felt that a simple “yes” or “no” would not be enough. Since

some of the questions were mind-provoking or even provocative, longer and emotional comments were expected and welcomed.

2.1.4 The Texts as Open Questions

The three religious texts the study participants were confronted with were accompanied by a number of open questions in order to guide the participants and their reactions. They were asked to tell whether they agreed with the views and regulations expressed in the texts and what they felt when facing such texts. In reference to the third text which addresses God in the female form, the respondents were asked to give their personal view of such liturgy or poetry and to comment whether or not they are bothered by the female imagery for God. Besides, they should say whether they could imagine praying to God using female nouns, pronouns and attributes.

The gender issue is a highly emotional topic in all the three religions. The choice of texts for discussion was made with this in mind. Misogynic and provocative texts were chosen in order to obtain personal and honest responses. It was even noticed that some women were offended by the choice of questions and texts. They either refused to participate in the study openly criticising my approach, or they expressed their criticism in their response. (See Appendix) Some participants felt that their religion was under attack or unjustly criticised. Thus, a Christian participant even asked me to show her the Muslim texts used in the discussion, because, as she said, Islam is known to be the most woman-unfriendly religion.

2.1.5 Direct and Indirect Approach

In the course of the study a combination of the direct and the indirect approach was used. In reference to the questions the study participants were approached directly, i. e. no instructions were made as to how they should reply or what pieces of information were required.

As for the texts, the indirect approach was applied. As mentioned above, they were given clear guidelines what aspects to pay attention to and on what to focus in their comments. The reason for the choice of this approach is to collect relevant data and to avoid too long discussions.

2.1.6 Quantitative and Qualitative Approach

For the presentation of the results the quantitative approach was used for the questionnaire. This means, that the responses were counted and compared. Since, however, this approach is criticised for not providing rich in-depth descriptions, for the analysis of the comments to the texts the qualitative approach was applied.

The technique used for the analysis of the data is the observer impression, which implies an examination of the data by the observer and a report of the gained impressions.

2.2 Study Participants

2.2.1 Choice of Informants

In order to find out how women react to issues pertaining to gender and religion I decided to select around 20 women from the three religious groups and let them answer a list of questions and comment on a few provoking and, at least at first sight, misogynic religious texts.

The informants chosen for my survey were fairly randomly selected. The only criteria I observed were sex and religious belongingness of the participants, i. e., they had to be female and they had to identify with one of the three Abrahamic religious traditions. Besides, the informants were asked to tell their age and nationality. These two pieces of information and the denominational orientation of the participants were taken into consideration during the elaboration of the research results.

2.2.2 Organisation of the Informants

The informants were organised according to their religious adherence, i. e. into Jewish, Christian and Muslim participants. As mentioned above, age, denomination and nationality were considered to be of interest for data analysis. These variables are presented in the following tables:

2.2.2.1 Age

	Jewish	Christian	Muslim
Age			
Teens	0	0	1
20s	2	4	15
30s	1	7	4
40s	1	1	0
50s	9	5	0
60s	2	3	0
70s	1	0	0
Total	16	20	20

Most of the Muslim informants are quite young, whereas the Jewish and Christian ones belong to various age groups. This was not done with any special purpose in mind since the study participants were selected randomly.

2.2.2.2 Denomination

2.2.2.2.1 Jewish Study Participants

Denomination	
Orthodox	3
Conservative	3
Liberal/Reformist	10
Post-denominational	1
Atheist	1
None	1
Total	19

2.2.2.2.2 Christian Study Participants

Denomination	
Protestant	12
Catholic	3
Eastern Orthodox	4
Pentecostal	1
Total	20

2.2.2.2.3 Muslim Study Participants

All the 20 Muslim study participants belong to the Sunni denomination.

2.2.2.3 Nationality

2.2.2.3.1 Jewish Study Participants

Nationality	Norwegian	US	Total
	2	17	19

2.2.2.3.2 Christian Study Participants

Nationality	Norwegian	Slovenian	Total
	13	7	20

2.2.2.3.3 Muslim Study Participants

Nationality	Bosnian	Austrian	Total
	12	8	20

3.0 The Linguistic Debate within the Gender Discourse

3.1 *Silenced through language*

Silence and *being silenced* are two expressions often mentioned in connection with female gender and language, particularly the language of religion. Some linguists hold the view that even grammar, in our case the grammar of English, is a means of silencing women. In this respect the use of the male pronoun *he*, when in fact referring to both sexes, and of the generic *man* implying humankind are the most controversial features.

3.1.1 The Inclusive Male Pronouns

The most sexist characteristic of English, according to feminist linguists, when it comes to grammar is the use of the male pronoun in the third person singular when referring to persons whose gender is unknown.

Eckert and McConnel-Ginet state that the demands of feminists to replace *he* with *he or she* was ironically diagnosed as "pronoun envy" by some traditional linguists, obviously alluding to Freud's thesis on what he called "penis envy" <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/4/9/6/14969/14969.txt>. And, even though the more recent, descriptive grammars do not justify their preference for the male pronoun on androcentric grounds and come up with explanations that *he* in this case is sex-indefinite, the early grammarians were not that gender sensitive:

The Relative agrees with the Antecedent in gender, number, and person ... The Relative shall agree in gender with the Antecedent of the more worthy gender: as, the King and the Queen whom I honor. The Masculine gender is more worthy than the Feminine. (Poole 1646: 21, in "Androcentrism in Prescriptive Grammar: Singular 'they', sex-indefinite 'he' and 'he or she'" by Ann Bodine, in Cameron (ed.) 1998: 129)

Bearing this statement in mind it would be naive to conclude that feminists are imposing a completely new interpretation upon "an innocent and neutral (grammatical) rule" (Cameron 1992: 96), since the choice of the male pronoun was made on sexist grounds.

3.1.2 The Generic *Man*

Another problematic and often discussed matter in the field of feminist linguistics is the English generic *man*, which is supposed to include all humanity, males and females. Feminists claim that this is not the case and base their view on a number of examples. They point to a number of ambiguous usages of *man*, e. g. : "Man's vital interests are life, food, access to females." or "Man is a mammal. Man gives birth to live young (which he breastfeeds)." (Linda Thomas „Invisible Women“, in Porter (ed.) 1996: 164-5)

The fact that sentences like the previous one are incorrect in the English language is, according to feminists, a proof that generic *man* is not absolutely inclusive of both genders as is often claimed by grammarians and, as will be shown later, by a number of Biblical scholars.

3.1.3 Inclusive vs Exclusive Language

According to the definition from Wikipedia, inclusive language, sometimes labelled as politically correct language, is the language “seen as seeking to minimize offense to gender, racial, cultural, disabled, aged or other identity groups. Conversely, the term "politically incorrect" is used to refer to language or ideas that may cause offense or that are unconstrained by orthodoxy.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inclusive_language)

The use of gender-inclusive language became widely practised in the 1960s and coincided with the second feminist wave. However, a certain feeling of unease about the way women are treated in the Bible has been felt prior to that period as well. As Michael D. Marlowe points out in his article “The Gender-Neutral Language Controversy”¹, the famous American lexicographer, Noah Webster, revised the *King James Version* as early as 1833 with the aim to remove from it all the language he considered “offensive, especially to females”. Feminists concerned with correcting different forms of the oppression of women adopted the term *inclusive* in reference to gender and were busy discovering and criticizing gender exclusive terms in their languages. Androcentric and patriarchal practices were reinforced by the use of sexist language, they claimed. The two features of the English language that have specially been attacked and discussed are the above mentioned inclusive *he* and the generic *man*.

¹ <http://www.bible-researcher.com/inclusive.html>

3.1.4 Gender-Neutral Scriptures

3.1.4.1 *The Bible*

In terms of religious feminism, the above mentioned ideas sparked the debate about a gender-inclusive or gender-neutral Bible. This subject is a very controversial one because of the emotions and beliefs involved. According to the orthodox teachings in Judaism and Christianity, the Bible, as the Word of God, cannot be changed depending on social circumstances. They argue that on the one hand the argument that male pronouns and the generic *man* are exclusive of women is incorrect and, on the other hand, that translating the Bible according to feminist requirements would imply changing the Word of God, which is unacceptable.

The feminists' attempt to re-write the Bible from a feminist, gender-neutral position was a very brave one, not only because of the opposition they met, but also because of the fact that the Bible abounds in patriarchal and androcentric expressions. Besides substituting plural pronouns for masculine pronouns and *human, person* or even *mortal* for the generic *man*, they had to deal with numerous other instances, like *men of war, husbands, sons, fathers* and *brothers*. Sometimes the third person singular was replaced by the second person, in order to eliminate male pronouns at any cost. And, while feminists claim that their intention is not to change the Bible, that they only "in order to avoid gender-specific language in statements of a general kind" agreed "that the plural might be substituted for the singular and the second person for the third person"², orthodox Bible scholars quote the Bible in defense of their objection to gender-neutral Bibles: The evangelical doctrine of Scripture is that every word of the original is exactly what God wanted it to be, because "all Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3: 16).

Apart from the discussion whether gender-inclusive translations of the Bible are a necessary effect of our time or rather unjustified and blasphemous changes of the Word of God, there is a third point of view presented by feminists who claim that gender-neutral renderings of the Bible are just misinterpretations. According to this group of feminists, the Bible is a thoroughly patriarchal text, not at all written in a gender-inclusive language and, as Susan Durber remarks, in order to understand the Bible, women have to read most of it as if they were men. (Durber 1992:

² (<http://www.cbmw.org/Resources/Articles/What-s-Wrong-with-Gender-Neutral-Bible-Translations>)

52-78)³ Hence, it makes little sense to perform an aesthetic surgery on a book that has influenced the lives of many generations and thus shaped their understanding of the world, including the position of women in it. Catherine Innes-Parker claims that such camouflaging of patriarchal and androcentric ideas is not just pointless, but even dangerous because:

changing the language does not necessarily remove the bias or the sexism that remains embedded in the thought patterns, images and metaphors which, with language, combine to form a given text ... The masculine bias has not been removed; it has simply been rendered more subtle and therefore more dangerous, because more difficult to discern and expose. ("Mi bodi henge with thi bodi neiled o rode : The gendering of the Pauline concept of crucifixion with Christ in medieval devotional prose for women", in *Studies in Religion*, 28/1 (1999), cited on <http://www.bible-researcher.com/inclusive.html#note4>)

In the course of the argument between traditional and inclusive Bible translators, the argument has been made, by the traditionalists, that the pressure to translate the Bible according to inclusive-language standards and thus to remove or change all sexist, racist and other biases, has had counter-productive effects. This means the pressure has sometimes been so intense as to cause feelings of inferiority and marginalization with those in favour of traditional Bible translations. Besides, the translators feel so obliged to avoid offensive language that very often they have to expurgate certain expressions from the original. In this way does, as has been remarked "the path from courtesy take us, however deviously, to censorship" (Dutton 1996)⁴. For some, this form of censorship assumes even more serious characteristics and is understood as some kind of conspiracy. Wayne Grudem, for instance, points out that those imposing gender-neutral Bible adaptations are also following a certain agenda. By removing certain words from the Bible it would, eventually, become impossible for people to think in certain ways. While this is precisely what feminists hope for, Grudem sees a form of enforced thought-control in such a process.⁵

³ Susan Durber. 1992. "The Female Reader of the Parables of the Lost", in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 45: 59-78, cited on <http://www.bible-researcher.com/inclusive.html#note4>)

⁴ Denis Dutton. 1996. "What Are Editors For?" in *Philosophy and Literature* 20/2. Cited on <http://www.bible-researcher.com/inclusive.html#note4>

⁵ <http://www.cbmw.org/Resources/Articles/What-s-Wrong-with-Gender-Neutral-Bible-Translations>

3.1.4.2 *The Qur'an*

Obviously, the previously discussed gender issues in the religious setting refer only to the Judeo-Christian circles and concern the translation of the Bible. Islam and Muslim views, as usual, differ in several respects. The majority of Muslims hold the view that the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic for a special reason and that only as such is to be considered holy and divine. Translations have just an assisting purpose, and it would be ideal for every Muslim to learn Arabic in order to be able to relate to the Word of God in its original form. Besides, there is a consensus among all the major Muslim scholars that not one word from the Qur'an can be changed. Also, the process of translation is a very delicate one, and over centuries different translators have approached the Qur'an in different ways. However, only recently has there been an attempt to render some Qur'anic terms or verses (*ayat*) in a gender neutral way, even though it is very far away from the debates and controversies taking place among the Bible scholars and translations treated in the first part of this section. The majority of Muslims believe that, since at the time of its revelation the Qur'an was a liberating text granting women more rights and elevating their position in society significantly, the Qur'an is inherently gender inclusive and in no need of further adaptation. There are, as will be shown later in this thesis, attempts of re-interpreting or de-patriarchalizing certain controversial issues, but there is no tendency towards changing the grammatical characteristics of words like their number or gender.

Such an attempt has been made by Laleh Bakhtiar in the first Qur'an translation by an American woman. Bakhtiar has introduced an innovation in terms of the way the Qur'an treats women that can be described as gender inclusive. It regards the controversial verse authorizing husbands to beat their wives. Her rendering of the phrase *judribu hunne* into "leave them" instead of "strike/beat them" is the first woman-friendly translation after numerous translations in the course of 1400 years. This fact amounts to a revolutionary move in the Islamic context and has caused debates and even requirements for banning this translation completely. I think the fact that one minor change in the interpretation of the Qur'an is reason enough for some to reject a translation as a whole is more than telling if we compare it to the thousands of words changed in the recent inclusive Bible translations.

There are a couple of gender inclusive "amendments" in the Qur'an translation by Tarif Khalidi newly published in the Penguin Classics. Compared with the previous, as Ziauddin Sardar notes in his comment, "patriarchal, sexist" translation by the same publisher, Khalidi's translation

represents a “redeeming take on the Qur’an”⁶ in various ways, including the gender inclusive aspects. Even though still not very numerous, the changes are worth mentioning considering the Muslims’ opposition to any changes in their Holy Book. The *ayah* 2: 21, previously rendered as “Men, serve your Lord!” becomes “O, people! Worship your Lord!” Another instance is the frequently quoted verse about the “chaste virgins” to whom the dwellers of paradise will be wedded to. Khalidi offers a different, more accurate translation: “In these gardens they have immaculate spouses.” This translation is more accurate because the noun previously translated as “virgin”, i. e. *zawj* (plural: *azwaj*) is bound to neither masculine nor feminine sex, which, according to a Qur’an commentary by Murad Hofmann, implies that in paradise both men and women will have partners of the opposite sex (*Der Koran*, translated by Max Henning 2004: 5).

3.2 Religion, Language, Gender

Prior to the analysis of the religious texts of Judaism, Christianity and Islam respectively, I will discuss some concepts regarding the relationship between religion and language, and then expand the argument and include the gender discourse as well.

3.2.1 The Importance of Religion

As a matter of fact, the majority of Earth’s population today regard themselves as religious in one way or another. This number seems to be growing, a fact that might puzzle somebody who is familiar with the obviously influential secular ideology of the modern world. Gallup conducted a poll in 2008 asking people across 143 countries and territories whether religion was an important part of their lives. The median of 82% answered positively. (Emel, June 2010, Issue 69: 19) However, there is a difference between the institutionalized religions, acting through certain organizations and a person’s faith, which is experienced on a private level. Apart from that, even though we live in modern societies which strictly separate religion from the State, it is a fact, as Miriam Meyerhoff points out in her foreword to a collection of texts dealing with the issue of religion, language and gender called *Gender and Language of Religion* (Jule, 2005, XI), that religious beliefs, based on various religious texts, influence the worldview, *das Weltbild*, of the majority of people. Religion is the ideology of religious persons and the prism through which

⁶ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/jun/21/saturdayreviewsfeatres.guardianreview26>

they observe themselves and the rest of the universe. Religion dictates one's attitudes towards worldly issues that do not seem to belong in the realm of faith, like army service, education, business matters, division of labour, sex and gender.

3.2.2 Linguistics and Religion

People have always looked to religion for comfort, security, shelter and peace of mind, but also for answers and solutions in their everyday lives. If a religious person cannot figure out what is right and what is wrong, he or she will consult the Scriptures. Yet, the solutions offered by the Holy Books are not that simple and straightforward, and consulting the Scriptures is something that often cannot and should not be done by laymen. But, that the solution and answers should be sought not from a theologian only but from a linguist as well is something not many people are aware of. In her collection of essays about different forms of interdependence between language, religion and gender, Allyson Jule appeals for a deeper analysis in religious linguistics: "It appears religion sits well in the fields of sociology, anthropology and theology, but it is almost unexplored within linguistic research." (Jule 2005: 2)

3.2.3 History of Linguistics

It is of great importance to acknowledge the fact that the field of linguistics in general had not gained acceptance as a "proper science" in the West until the 20th century. Prior to that, language had been studied as an integral part of rhetoric or poetics. During the "century of the linguistic turn" scholars realized the importance of language for all scientific fields and, thus, it entered, or rather re-entered, the realm of philosophy of religion. I say re-entered because, as a matter of fact, religious thinkers struggled with the issue of religious language from the early beginnings.

In our Western hemisphere the theologians have been very much affected by the Hellenistic philosophical heritage. Ideas produced by Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and other famous Greek thinkers shaped the way in which the first Christians interpreted and understood their new faith. As we will see later, the ancient philosophers influenced the perception of women as well. As to language, there were some basic views regarding the organization and function of human speech of which some were to be repudiated thousands of years later. There were various directions in

Greek philosophy but one common paradigm concerning language seems to be present among all of them, which will be discussed below.

3.2.3.1 *Characteristics of Language inherited from Antiquity*

- Atomistic view of language, which implies that meaning lies in individual words; the context was secondary or insignificant.
- The superiority of univocal language over the symbolic. The primary meaning of words is literal. Thus, figurative language has to be translated into literal language in order to be comprehensible.
- Thought is separate from and superior to language.
- Clarity of language is necessary to express knowledge.
- Certainty was considered a virtue, hence the significant differentiation between opinion (lacking certainty) and knowledge (implying certainty) of something.

These positions and views affected the interpretation of religious texts to different degrees. The atomistic view of words had special consequences for women in different religious traditions, because, as will emerge later, many religious feminists claim that most damage has been done to them due to this particular view of language, which used to leave out the cultural and historical context of religious texts.

Similarly, the superiority ascribed to univocal language affected women's lives, since they were hardly ever given the opportunity to "translate" the symbolic messages in which the Scriptures abound. Moreover, the somewhat contemptuous opinion of symbolic and metaphoric language led to a wide-ranging perception of religious language as misleading and incomprehensible. It placed the language about God in an inferior position in comparison to the clear and certain empirical language of science.

3.2.3.2 *The Three Ways*

The most famous and fruitful debate on religious language, interestingly, took place in the Middle Ages. It has, as we shall see later, influenced feminist linguists as well. It is the debate resulting in

the three traditional ways of viewing religious language: the negative way (*via negativa*), the univocal way and the analogical way.

The *via negativa* is the rather mystical way of approaching the language about the Divine. It is based on the belief that human language is not capable of expressing the Ultimate Truth. It can only be evocative of God and never depict His reality. Facing the shortcomings of language to express religious experience, some scholars held the view that it is easier to express linguistically what God is not than what God is. This way of talking about God is valued by modern schools of thought like structuralism and post-structuralism.

In opposition to the view of human language as incapable of expressing the Divine, which in fact views religious language as being non-cognitive, the univocal way suggests a literal understanding of the Word of God. The fact that God has communicated with humanity via language and thus revealed, albeit not completely clearly, His nature, can be used in defense of religious language as being cognitive. For univocalists literal truth about God is necessary for faith to exist. There is no alternative to univocal knowledge about God. If something like that existed, it would inevitably lead to scepticism.

The third option, the analogical way, is the one broadly elaborated by Thomas Aquinas. This way is an attempt to reconcile both the other ways. Aquinas ruled out the univocal way of speaking about God right from the beginning but, simultaneously, he was very well aware that a certain degree of cognitive revelation is necessary in order to talk about God at all.

All of these three approaches have been either applauded or rejected by philosophers, theologians and linguists over centuries. And this proves exactly how fruitful and influential this medieval discussion was. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, feminists have also shown interest in these ancient approaches to religious language. Surprisingly, Mary Daly, a radical feminist, who believes that a complete reform of human language is necessary in order to make it appropriate for women, too, points out that the three medieval ways offer some fruitful ground for the creation of “female” language. She proposes a “neo-negative way” which women should choose after having realised the androcentrism of all language about God and rejecting it (Daly 1973: 38). Daly also claims that women can find themselves in the univocal, affirmative way of God-language, which she names the “neo-affirmative way”. She does not place this way in the speculative realm of religious language but calls for an active self-affirmation of women which

should enable them to talk about God in their specific way, the “naming toward God”. This can, according to Daly, lead to “theophany, or manifestation of God”. (Daly 1973: 38-39)

3.3 Hermeneutical Philosophy

A discussion of any aspect of religious language necessarily involves some insight into the field of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is concerned with the interpretation of texts. It has a very long tradition and a particular importance for the study of religious language. In the first half of the 20th century, the century of the so-called linguistic turn, hermeneutical philosophy was very much centred around the teachings of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. The second half of the century, though, affected the development of religious studies significantly.

A major character within hermeneutics and religious writing is the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). He proposed a general theory of hermeneutics applicable to the interpretations of any text, including the religious documents. Schleiermacher also emphasized the importance of the so-called “hermeneutical circle”, claiming that every text as a whole has to be understood in respect of the particular words and sentences within it. Yet, on the other hand, in order to understand the basic items of a text we must take into consideration the meaning of the text as a whole.

3.3.1 General Hermeneutics

Another influential figure in the domain of hermeneutical philosophy is Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), who further developed Schleiermacher’s ideas about general hermeneutics. Dilthey realized that, when it comes to the humanities, the traditional methodology of presenting exact and empirical facts as applied within natural sciences was of no help. Thus, the general hermeneutics became the methodology of the humanities, i. e. linguistics, history, literature, religion, philosophy and art. In Dilthey’s view, the humanities were objective and scientific in their peculiar way, involving intuition and empathetic “understanding” (*Verstehen*) and different from the natural sciences which were based on explanation (*Erklärung*). According to this teaching, the whole human race is part of one common Spirit, which makes it possible for us to understand and empathize with the experiences of former generations. Such a view explains why

Holy texts are still relevant to billions of people today even though they were written many years ago in a completely different context and under completely different conditions from ours.

3.3.2 Ontological Hermeneutics

A crucial move from general to ontological hermeneutics happened in this philosophical discipline in the first half of the 20th century. For this shift we are mainly indebted to the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Heidegger's major achievement lies in his claim that all human existence is essentially hermeneutical and that all knowledge, understanding and science, including natural sciences, are hermeneutical in nature.

Heidegger and his student Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) rejected the idea of divinizing the authorial intent and agreed that a text, once it was written, became a public event, so to speak. Consequently, according to Gadamer, "understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well." (Gadamer 1991: 296, in Stiver 1996: 93)

These notions of ontological hermeneutics and the productive activity of the reader affected the way people approached religious texts and are of great importance for the topic treated in this thesis. If we accept that all understanding is hermeneutical in nature, we face the challenge to question the truth value of some religious dogmas based primarily on written documents. And if we, in addition to that, realize that all understanding is productive, we might conclude that we are given the freedom to find out for ourselves what a certain text, in this case an excerpt from the Torah, the Bible or the Qur'an, means instead of relying on some traditional interpretations. This is the road many religious feminists have taken. The presupposition is that there is no eternal and inherently valid and applicable meaning of the Holy texts, and hence the passages treating women have to be re-read and re-evaluated. Different generations living in different parts of the world must decide for themselves what religious texts mean and imply.

3.3.2.1 *The Fusion of Horizons*

Gadamer introduced another innovative idea into the field of hermeneutics, which is his famous concept of "fusion of horizons". The "fusion of horizons" implies two crucial moments in a person's encounter with historical artifacts, including written texts. The first moment is the

moment of alienation (*Entfremdung*) caused by the spatial and temporal distance. This moment of alienation is overcome by a certain feeling of belongingness (*Zugehörigkeit*) since every human being belongs to history and has been shaped from historical “material”. The ancient horizon fuses with the contemporary one, which enables us to understand a historical artifact.

This process is obvious when a person encounters a religious text. The feeling of alienation experienced due to the fact that one is reading a text written hundreds or thousands of years ago by people living miles away is immediately followed by the feeling of belonging to a certain tradition which has its roots somewhere and sometime in history, just like the text he or she is reading.

Gadamer believed in a certain challenge that ancient texts offer us. Neither are we absorbed by the ancient horizons, nor do we let our present horizons absorb the ancient ones. They exist as some sort of mirror which helps us to criticize and change our present existence. This constant interaction between the horizons is crucial, as Gadamer points out:

It is in the play between the traditional text’s strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition. The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between. (Gadamer 1991: 295, in Stiver 1996: 98)

This “in-between”, as Gadamer describes it, has bothered Christian, Jewish and Muslim feminists for decades. Questions like the female aptness to sinful existence or the eternal guilt of the woman in the Judeo-Christian tradition and the intellectual, legal and spiritual inferiority of women in Islam have filled the space between the horizons of numerous religious thinkers and have resulted in various debates, conclusions and sometimes completely opposite points of view. Religious feminists have struggled very hard, because the gap between the strangeness and familiarity of certain parts of the religious texts regarding women has often been too huge to be overcome. The challenge offered to women by religious texts has sometimes been too great, preventing many women from fusing their present horizons with the ancient ones. Those women simply discard the Scriptures as something belonging to history strictly. Others accept the challenge and insist on adjusting the religious texts to the modern circumstances in some way or other. However, either of these groups is engaged in the hermeneutics of historical data.

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) expanded Gadamer's ideas and proposed a method of interpreting ancient texts called "the hermeneutical arc", adding to Gadamer's horizons a third moment, namely, the moment of criticism. The arc consists of an initial moment of understanding, mostly on a symbolic level which is, according to Ricoeur, followed by a process of explanation and finally results in a second, post-critical understanding.

3.3.2.2 *The Reader-Response Theory*

Methods developed by Gadamer and those further elaborated by Ricoeur are appreciated and widely accepted by religious feminists and feminist linguists because of their "dynamic reception of meaning". (Stiver 1996: 107) The movement that evolved from their ideas and expanded this dynamism even further is the so called reader-response theory which in its turn highly influenced the studies of religious texts.

The reader-response theory is mostly associated with the German philosopher Wolfgang Iser (1926-2007) who, like Gadamer, was of the view that meaning takes place between the text and the reader. Advocates of the reader-response theory see the text as a "mirror" rather than as a "window". Figurative language is welcomed, and the opinion of the reader or hearer is inevitable and relevant. There is no final and unique method of interpreting a text. Interpretation is fluid and never ending. These views are very much in accord with the agenda of numerous religious feminists, who require a re-reading and a re-interpretation of the Scriptures in order to adjust it to present circumstances.

3.3.3 The Hermeneutics of the Qur'an

Even though the Western Judeo-Christian hermeneutical methods can be applied for the purpose of interpretation of any historical text⁷, it is important to mention that there is a typically Islamic method of interpretation of the Qur'an, which is almost as old as the Holy Book itself. This method, which is a science in itself, is called *tafsir*, which literally means "interpretation". Scholars working in this field are called *mufasssirun*. Besides *tafsir*, the official exegesis of the Qur'an, there is also a mystical, *sufi* form of interpretation called *ta'wil*.

⁷ Text in the sense of functional linguistics, which implies that objects are also considered as texts because the human understanding is inherently textual.

3.3.3.1 *The Five Sources of Tafsir*

There are five different, hierarchically ordered sources of *tafsir*. The first and highest source is the Qur'an itself since there are Qur'anic verses, *ayah*, which explain and elaborate others. The second source is the *hadith*, the sayings by the prophet Muhammad. The third and the fourth sources in this hierarchy include interpretations by the *sahaba*, the companions of the Prophet, and those who learned such interpretations from them, the so-called *tabi'in*. In cases when there is no applicable interpretation in the previously mentioned four sources, the technique of logical, personal evaluation by a qualified scholar is used. This method is called *ijtihad*.

3.3.3.2 *Closing the Gates of Logical Reasoning*

The term *ijtihad* is a controversial one. On the one hand logical reasoning is accepted as a legal source of interpretation of the Scripture, yet on the other, it is often stated that the gates of logical reasoning (*bab al-ijtihad*), as this phenomenon is usually referred to, were closed in the tenth century C. E. This closure, even though there is no official document supporting it, took place because the major Islamic scholars figured out, at that point in history, that all the questions regarding the Revelation had been answered and all unclear issues clarified. That is why there was no more need for any interpretation of the Qur'an. After the era of rational decision making or *ijtihad* had ended, the era of imitation or *taqlid* started. Hans Kueng, the famous Swiss thinker, mentions this phenomenon in his book called *Der Islam*, which is, actually, part of a trilogy including extensive analyses of the three Abrahamic religions. Kueng notes with remorse:

Faster than anybody could suspect, the hopeful spring of the Muslim jurisprudence was followed by the autumn of traditionalism.⁸ (Kueng 2004: 343)

Kueng, however, points out that the other two Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Christianity, are facing similar challenges in terms of traditionalism. In Christianity, claims Kueng, the Church tradition has gained an absolute status at the cost of the Biblical message. In Judaism, similarly, the oral Torah and the "tradition of the fathers" in the form of Talmud have overgrown the written Law of God. (Kueng 2004: 344-5)

⁸ My translation

This issue of the “Closing of the gates of logical reasoning” is controversial, not only because it is unclear who, when and for what reason closed the gates of *ijtihad*, but also because Islamic scholars have actually never stopped interpreting the word of God in different and often contradictory ways. Asma Barlas points in this respect to one of the most prominent Muslim scholars, al-Ghazali, who as early as the 11th century came to the insight which the hermeneutics of today associates with postmodernism. His ideas stand in contrast with the idea of the end of rational hermeneutics of Holy texts. Barlas explains:

Muhammad al-Ghazali ... argued that religious knowledge was historically grounded and was thus neither sacred nor universal. Tradition, too, he said, was a selective reconstruction of history that necessitated making certain choices and not others. On this basis, al-Ghazali challenged the idea that any interpretive school could *a priori* claim to know the truth which, he believed, could only be arrived at by means of reasoning and through dialogue. (Barlas 2005: 2)

All the great *mufasssirun* have, without exception, been men. Women have not had significant influence on the Qur’anic exegesis, even though, according to the teachings of Islam, they enjoy the same rights as men when it comes to search for knowledge and especially knowledge about God. Women who try to offer a female perspective on the Qur’an face fierce opposition from tradition-bound Islamic scholars, because the process of un-reading patriarchal and misogynist interpretations of the Scripture is something completely new and unheard of. There is even objection to such terms as hermeneutics applied in the Islamic context, since this is not an originally Arabic term.

Regardless of which hermeneutical methods Muslim scholars might choose, the fact is that the constantly growing Muslim community in different parts of the world is in need of more and new interpretations of the religious texts in order to meet the challenges they face in their everyday lives. This is particularly true of those Muslims living as minorities in the Western societies. The challenge is how to let the “horizons” fuse without excluding each other. The challenge becomes even more obvious and serious when it comes to gender issues, as we shall see in the section on Islam and gender.

3.4 Exegesis of Translation

As I will try to show in my analysis of different passages from the sacred texts of the three Abrahamic religions, there are many obstacles facing anyone willing to analyse and disentangle the divine words. It is a journey requiring first of all more than a basic knowledge of linguistics, some knowledge of sociology, anthropology, history, psychology, more than a superficial acquaintance with theology and philosophy, and some basic ideas of Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Arabic would also be desirable.

The first problem one encounters on this daring journey is the fact that, most readers, unfamiliar with the above mentioned languages, will be faced with translated rather than the original texts. Since I have some knowledge of Arabic, the passages from the Qur'an were the only ones I could, at least to a certain degree, relate to in their original form.

3.4.1 Translating the Holy Books

The translation of the Scriptures has been, albeit in different forms, a controversial issue in all the three monotheistic religions. However, the problems that emerged regarding translation were not the same. While the translation of the Holy Books of Judaism and Islam, the Tanakh and the Qur'an, was problematic due to a special significance and power ascribed to the texts written in their original languages, Hebrew and Arabic, the translation of the Bible faced other difficulties. It was the Christian clergy who opposed the translation of the Word of God into vernaculars, because they feared that this process would diminish their status among common people. The reason given by the clergy was that the lay people were ill educated and thus in no position to understand the dark passages of the Bible and that they might be misled by a vernacular version of the Holy Book.

Nowadays numerous renderings of the Tanakh in English are available, the most widely used ones being the New Jewish Publication Society of America Version (NJPS) from 1985. In 2005 this translation was revised with focus on gender accuracy.

The most known and influential translations of the Christian Bible are the Revised Version (1882), the New International Version (1978), and the Revised Standard Version (1952). Worth

mentioning for the purpose of this thesis is the New International Version Inclusive Language Edition, which was published in 1996. It is a politically correct and gender inclusive rendering of the Bible, where sexist and all other discriminatory expressions are replaced by politically correct ones.

There are also numerous translations of the Qur'an into English, but the most widely used ones are those by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1934), Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall (1930) and Muhammad Asad (1980). There have not been any adaptations of previous translations to gender inclusive standards, but there are certain minor changes made in some of the latest translations concerned with the gender neutrality of the Qur'an, e.g. translations by Laleh Bakhtiar and Tarif Khalidi. However, the changes are claimed to be based on the original message of the Qur'an and not on the modern gender neutral trends.

3.4.2 How to translate

Some will argue that every translation necessarily involves interpretation and this argument is not completely wrong. Most readers with an opportunity to read the same poem, play or novel in two different languages will confirm this argument. There seems to be an inherent mood and tone typical of each and every language which cannot be easily transformed into another. Some things get lost in translation, some others added. This is one of the reasons why many have objected to a translation of the Word of God over centuries, and this is one of the reasons why those who decided to translate the Scripture had to overcome much opposition.

3.4.2.1 *Dynamic and Formal Translations*

There are two terms often used in translation theory, especially when it comes to Bible translations. These terms are called *dynamic equivalence* and *formal equivalence*, and they represent two different approaches to the process of translation. Those in favour of dynamic equivalence are more concerned with the naturalness and readability of the translated message than with its form, i. e. grammar, word order, etc. The formal equivalence is the opposite of this approach. These two approaches are significant for this thesis because there is an important debate going on among those translating the Bible today which is very much based on the definition of dynamic equivalence. Namely, gender-neutral translations of the Bible tend to

sacrifice the literal meaning of the Scripture in order to render a politically correct translation based on dynamic equivalence. Of course, such interventions are often disapproved by both Bible scholars and ordinary Bible readers.

On the web-page of “The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood” Wayne Grudem complains in his article “What is Wrong With Gender-Neutral Bible Translations” that the numerous gender-neutral translations in the New Revised Standard Version are “not accurately translating the Bible; it is rewriting the Bible.”⁹ Considering these problems, one has to ask oneself when translation turns into rewriting. Is it possible to draw a clear line between these two processes?

3.4.2.2 *Fidelity in Translation*

In order for a translation to be granted fidelity it must fulfil certain conditions. First of all, a translation must successfully express the meaning of the original. Besides, a faithful translation should keep the dynamics of the original. A dynamic text in this sense implies that the native speaker of the recipient language experiences the translations as natural and easy. Additionally, historical circumstances and didactic purposes of the Scriptures must be taken into consideration. All the three Abrahamic religions are firmly rooted in history. Therefore, it would not be permissible in a translation to omit or change certain historical references. This rootedness in history, however, is sometimes troublesome for those eager to reform certain aspects of religion, including feminists. Social circumstances change whereas religious texts are supposed to be valid and relevant under all circumstances. This conflict will appear repeatedly within this thesis when discussing certain regulations regarding women.

3.4.2.3 *Implicit and Explicit Meanings*

In addition to all these preconditions, a careful translator has to be aware of the presence of implicit and explicit information in the linguistic items of the original language. There are words, expressions, idioms that imply certain meanings in the original language, which, when translated

⁹ (<http://www.cbmw.org/Resources/Articles/What-s-Wrong-with-Gender-Neutral-Bible-Translations>)

into another language might get lost. Therefore, certain implicit information in the Hebrew, Greek and Arabic texts has to be made explicit in the English translation in order to preserve the original meaning. However, this is a very demanding task. In a book by Anne Sofie Roald called *Women in Islam. The Western Experience*, which is based on interviews with Muslims living in western countries, the issue of implicit information carried by words is touched upon in several contexts. A young Muslim woman of Arabic origin reflects on the issue of translation in the following way:

The translation of Islamic texts from Arabic to English is a matter of great concern. I believe that sometimes we have to transform our minds in the act of translation. Look at me, I am an Arab Muslim. When I talk about or listen about Islam in the Arabic language everything seems fine and acceptable. However, when some concepts are translated into other languages, such as English, they are transformed to be understood in a different way. (Roald 2001: 128)

Beekman and Callow differentiate between three types of implicit information in the original texts of Scriptures: information derived from the immediate context, information derived from the remote context and information derived from the cultural context (Beekman and Callow 1974: 49). While the first two types of information are to be found inside the same text, the third one is to be looked for in documents outside the translated text. This is a significant moment in understanding all the three great Books, especially when it comes to the treatment of women. When, for example, people are numbered in the Bible (e. g. Numbers 1: 2, Ezra Chapter 2, etc.), it is, in fact, only the male members that are counted. Even though this sounds insulting and discriminating to many women, one has to be aware of the cultural context of the time in which these events took place in order to illuminate this, at the first sight, misogynist treatment of women. The point is that women at those times were, indeed, not considered morally responsible agents. Their social and every other condition were completely dependent on their male relatives or their husband.

3.4.2.4 Multiple Choice in Translation

In every language there are numerous words that carry various meanings. These words can, usually, not be easily transmitted into another language without additional interpretation. Otherwise, the meaning of the translation might be misleading or even completely wrong. This is

one of the reasons why some believe that it is impossible to translate anything absolutely accurately, especially not something inspired or spoken by God. At some point, however, the translator will have to choose one of the possible interpretations of the ambiguous expression. Thus, implicit information in the original will be made explicit. His or her choice will have to be based on the context.

An example of ambiguity in reference to the Qur`an would be the famous verse (4: 34) authorizing husbands to “beat” their wives if they become “rebellious”. This verse is quite controversial and very significant for the discussion of gender issues inside the Qur`an and I shall return to it in detail later. A brief account, however, might help to show the difficulties a translator can face. The Arabic verb most often rendered into “beat”, “strike” or “tap” is *daraba*. It is a verb that has more than a dozen meanings, several of which would fit the context of the controversial verse, but interpreters, mostly men, have always chosen to opt for the interpretation that derogates the status of the women.

This example brings two points together, both of which are of importance for the topic of this thesis. The first point is that translation inevitably involves a certain degree of interpretation. The second is that, so far, it has almost exclusively been men who have been in charge of translating and exegeting the Word of God and thus very much shaped the perception of it. Too often the perception has been disadvantageous to women.

4.0 Theoretical Background for Gender Issues in the Three Abrahamic Religions

4.1 Getting the Word right

In the previous chapters I have pointed out some major issues in the debate on gender in linguistic terms. I hope to have proved, on the one hand, how deeply rooted the gender ideology is in language, and on the other, to which extent language creates and shapes beliefs regarding gender. These issues might sound confusing and at times even contradictory. One might wonder whether gender inequality had already existed in the society and became a part of our language after a while, or whether language has helped creating the gender differences. In this case we end up

with the old dilemma: What is older: the hen or the egg? An explanation by Spender might shed some light, if not necessarily solve all the problems:

It could be said that out of nowhere we invented sexism, we created the arbitrary and approximate categories of male-as-norm and female as deviant. A most original, imaginative creation. But, having constructed these categories in our language and thought pattern, we have now been trapped for we are most reluctant to organize the world any other ... way. Indeed, it could even be argued that the trap which we have made is so pervasive that we cannot envisage a world constructed on any other lines. (Dale Spender “Extracts from *Man Made Language*”, in Cameron 1998: 96)

Not every reader would agree with the first part of the first sentence in this quotation where Spender talks about sexism which was, as he believes, invented out of nowhere. There are plenty of scholars, not to mention those without the benefit of an education, who would argue that sexism was not invented, and, moreover, that there is nothing wrong with it. A significant number of these “sexists” would, probably, try to justify their view using formulations and arguments originating from their religious beliefs. And, among these, let us call them now “religion-motivated sexists”, the majority would be adherents of one of the three monotheistic, Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity or Islam. As these three faiths are all based on both written and oral traditions, i. e. words, it is now about time to get “the words and the Word right”, to use a phrase by Linda Thomas. (Linda Thomas „Invisible Women“, in Porter (ed.) 1996: 160)

4.2 Gender in Judaism, Christianity and Islam

4.2.1 The Basic Questions

It is not an easy task to summarize the concept of gender and, yet, the whole discourse, in all the three religious traditions, is actually focused on a few essential questions:

- Are men and women created equal, and if so, does it imply absolute or conditional equality?

- Is the androcentric, patriarchal and, at times, downright misogynist language of the Scriptures just reflecting the attitudes towards women and their position in society in those days or does it have a universal character?
- What is the gender of God? If God is beyond this kind of categorization is the use of male pronouns when talking about God justified? (This question often involves discussion of female characteristics and imagery used to describe God.)
- And finally, concerning the linguistic debate, should the translations of the Word of God be adjusted to the modern feminist ideas in order to meet the requirements of political correctness? This debate includes discussion of possible misinterpretations of certain paragraphs in the Holy texts.

Apart from these more or less cross-religious questions there are certain issues characteristic of each of the monotheistic religions. Even though Judaism and Christianity have their roots in the same tradition and share the *Five Books of Moses*, there are differences when it comes to treatment of gender issues in the respective religions. On the other hand, interestingly, certain similarities can be found between Judaism and Islam concerning certain prescriptions regarding women. Nevertheless, all the three religions require a separate approach and treatment even though, as already mentioned, at certain points attitudes will overlap, especially when it comes to analyses of certain passages from the Old Testament common to the Judeo-Christian heritage.

Since, chronologically speaking, Judaism is the oldest of these three faiths, it will be treated first in this thesis. It is followed by Christianity, which springs out of Judaism but is, of course, a religion in itself, and has the largest number of adherents worldwide. Finally, Islam is discussed, which in its turn, is considered (at least by Muslims) to be the final elaboration of the faith in one God.

4.3 Judaism and Women

Within Judaism there are, as in each of the three religious traditions, different streams of thought. There are the orthodox Jews, clinging fast to the written (Torah) and oral (Talmud) Law, not willing to make any exceptions or changes in their beliefs. There are on the other hand more liberal circles in the Jewish communities, which are more critical towards the ancient regulations concerning every-day life. The most prominent of the liberal movements is the Reform Judaism,

which is influenced by the ideas of Enlightenment and is inclined to critically scrutinize, adapt and change religious texts. The majority of Jews in the United States belong to this denomination, which is affiliated with the World Union for Progressive Judaism. A significant number of Jews, however, belong to Conservative Judaism. This branch of Judaism is more liberal than the Orthodox, but more conservative than the liberal branches. The term conservative is not to be confused with political conservatism. However, regardless of the fact to which denomination a Jewish woman belongs, she faces the similar obstacles and looks for answers to similar questions. The solutions and answers she finds vary according to her origin, level of education and sources she refers to. The first dilemma awaits her right at the beginning of the Torah, in the *First Book of Moses* or *Genesis*, which talks about the creation of, among other creatures, man and woman.

4.3.1 The Creation of Man and Woman

4.3.1.1 Genesis 1

According to some critical Biblical scholars¹⁰ there are two different accounts of the creation of humankind that Bible readers have to deal with. There are, on the other hand, scholars who claim that the first account offers the general frame for the creation whereas the other is a more detailed description of this process, implying that there is in fact one story told from different perspectives.¹¹

In *Genesis* 1, the first part of the creation account, we read:

27 And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.¹²

This often cited verse offers an egalitarian perspective of the sexes, yet it is rather short and all too often overshadowed by the story following in *Genesis* 2 and 3.

¹⁰ <http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/2194>

¹¹ <http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/2194>

¹²For quotations from the Old Testament A *Hebrew-English Bible According to the Masoretic Text* is used. On the webpage <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0.htm>

4.3.1.2 Genesis 2 and 3

One of the most often quoted passages from the Bible in the context of gender discussions, be it to prove the superiority of men over women or their equality is *Genesis 2 and 3*. The verses describing the creation of man and woman, their short sojourn in the Garden of Eden, their Fall due to disobedience to God and the consequent expulsion from Eden are, actually, the foundation on which Judaism and Christianity build their negative, discriminating and, at times, even spiteful view of women. The disputable verses can be roughly divided into two episodes, the first one including verses 2: 7-24¹³ describing the creation and the naming process, and the second one starting with verse 3: 6 and ending with 3: 19¹⁴ treating the Fall and the Expulsion.

4.3.1.3 Roots of Biblical Misogyny

The above mentioned short episodes entail the following conclusions often cited in discussions regarding gender in Judaism (and Christianity):

- Man was created first, hence he is superior to woman.
- The purpose of woman`s creation was to help the man and grant him company.
- Woman is derived from man.
- Woman was created out of man`s rib, which entails dependence and derivative not autonomous nature.
- Woman is gullible and easily tempted.
- Woman is *the* temptress, responsible for the Fall and hence for the presence of sin and death in this world.
- God has cursed woman with pain in childbearing, whereas man`s curse is less painful.
- God assigned the man with the leading position on Earth and burdened woman with a deep, never completely satisfied desire for the man.

Upon reading these two episodes (see appendix) the reader concludes that the first human being created by God was a male out of whom God created a helper to cure the male`s loneliness. Man named the woman, as he had previously done with all the other living creatures. The process of

¹³ See Appendix 1

¹⁴ See Appendix 2

naming in the Biblical context implies dominion. Thus, man was granted the dominion over woman. At first sight, all the earlier mentioned stereotypes in connection with the creation story seem to be justified so far. Yet, a deeper linguistic analysis makes a quite different interpretation possible, one that allows for a feminist and more woman-friendly reading of the Torah.

4.3.1.4 Redeeming Interpretations

In her translation of this passage Phyllis Trible leaves some crucial words in their original Hebrew version untranslated. From Trible's rendering of the controversial Biblical verses we see that the word *ha`adam* is etymologically connected with the Hebrew word for "earth" *ha`adama*. The fact that the word *`adam* is preceded by the definite article *ha* indicates that it is a common noun which, furthermore, indicates that "this work of art is neither a particular person nor a typical person but rather the creature from the earth (*ha-`adama*) – the earth creature" (Trible 1978: 80) or "earthling", as called by Adrienne Janis Bledstein (cited in Trible 1978: 140).

There are no physical descriptions of *`adam*, apart from the material from which it was made and the nostrils, in this first episode, hence, there is no sexual identification. The male grammatical gender of the word *`adam* does not denote its natural sex. According to Trible, sexuality is not created until the split of the earth-creature later in the story. Therefore, it would be wrong to assume that the first creature is a male.

Another Jewish author, Judith S. Antonelli, offers some further explanations regarding the first earth-creature, which are taken from rabbinic literature:

The *adam*, or earth creature, was created as male and female joined together – an androgynos, or a gynandromorph or hermaphrodite, according to R. Jeremiah b. Elazar (GR 8: 1; Br. 61a). R. Samuel b. Nachmani agreed that this first human being was created double-faced, split into two backs, with "one back on this side and one back on the other side." The *Zohar*, too, notes that "the *adam* of emanation was both male and female, from the side of both Father and Mother" (1: 22b) and that "the word *adam* implies male and female" (47a). (Antonelli 1995: 4)

The next problematic issue in *Genesis* is the creation of `adam's "helpmate". Feminists, Jewish and Christians, criticize the English rendering of the Hebrew phrase *ezer knegdo* into "helpmate" or "helper", because it implies an assisting, secondary position of the first woman. They point out the fact that the Hebrew word *ezer* does not have such a connotation. Moreover, there are places in the Torah where God is described as *ezer* of Israel and, as Antonelli states: "Surely, God is not to be subordinate to the Jewish people." (Antonelli 1995: 6) As for the word *knegdo* it means "opposite" or "against him" and Antonelli offers a rabbinic perspective of this phrase:

"If he is worthy, she shall be a help (*ezer*) to him; if he is unworthy, she shall oppose him (*knegdo*), to fight him." (Rashi; Yev.63a in Antonelli 1996: 6-7)

Trible translates the controversial phrase as "a companion corresponding to it" tempering the "connotation of superiority to specify identity, mutuality and equality". (Trible 1978: 90)

Up until the verse 2: 21 `adam is to be seen as either an androgynous or an asexual being, and it is wrong, according to feminist readings of the Torah, to assume that it was male. Hence the point that woman's nature is derivative and secondary is not valid since neither male nor female really exists before the verses 21 to 23.

Within this paragraph (21-23) `adam is completely passive as God takes one of its ribs and transforms it into another human being. Furthermore, for the first time it is reported that a creature is created out of something other than earth. This fact leads some feminists to the conclusion that woman is in fact superior to man. Since she is created last, she is to be considered as the "crown of creation". (Antonelli 1995: 6)

In the story of the creation of the woman and, according to feminists, man as well, the part of the body taken from *adam* and used as the material from which *ezer knegdo* is created is commonly translated as *rib*. Antonelli claims that the Hebrew word *tzela*, translated as *rib*, should rather be rendered as *side* due to other uses of this term elsewhere in the Torah where it is translated as "side". (Antonelli 1995: 5)

Upon seeing the woman the man utters an exclamation which, according to feminist readings of the Bible, states mutuality and equality and not derivation and subordination, as commonly assumed: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman,

because she was taken out of Man.” (*Genesis* 2: 23) Yet, this is not where the “scene” ends. The culmination point of this passage is the following line: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh.” (*Genesis* 2: 24) Tribble believes that after a deep analysis of this Biblical account one comes to the conclusion that, opposite to the mainstream Jewish and Christian teachings, the woman is the “culmination of creation” rather than the “weak, dainty, ephemeral creature” (Tribble 1978: 102). The woman completes humanity through sexuality and hence the previously cited closing lines of the passage.

4.3.1.5 *Genesis* 3

However, the bliss and fulfilment experienced by man and woman in that moment are not lasting. In the second episode the first human beings are approached by a serpent, “the sliest of all the wild beasts that Yahweh God had made”. (*Genesis* 3: 1) The serpent speaks to the woman with a special purpose in mind. It is generally claimed that the serpent approached the woman because it knew that the woman was weak and gullible. There are, however, views that the opposite was the case. Judith Antonelli, for instance, claims that the serpent went to the woman because of her “greater closeness to God”. (Antonelli 1995: 10)

Feminist interpreters of the Bible point to the fact that there are no indications that the woman tried to convince her man to eat the fruit. In other words, she did not tempt or seduce him. She just gave him some fruit, and he ate. Interestingly, however, when confronted by God, Adam tries to escape punishment by blaming the woman. This is why the Jewish scholar Nachmanides describes Adam as ungrateful.

Regardless of the question who is responsible for the eating of the forbidden fruit, they have all, the serpent, the woman and the man, to face God’s punishment because they acted contrary to God’s wish. In the ensuing distribution of the punishment between the man and the woman many see a reason to regard the woman as more guilty for the Fall. God punishes her with pain in child bearing (*Genesis* 3: 16), and, additionally, she is punished in terms of the unequal relationship between her and her husband: “For your man is your desire but he will rule over you.” (*Genesis* 3: 16)

This Biblical verse has caused immense calamity for women over millennia, and at this point the opposition between the sexes is created. Even though feminists claim, based on the belief that the Old Testament is prophetic and not apocalyptic, that God’s judgement over the woman is just a

description of reality and not a prescription, this event marked the demise of the woman in the Biblical sense. Tribble sadly remarks: “Oppression resulting from transgression is actualized by a design that emphasizes the man and minimizes the woman.” (Tribble 1978: 128)

Jewish Biblical scholars have interpreted this passage in various ways. Some, like Nachmanides, claim that the woman’s punishment lies in the fact that she will feel sexual desire for the man, despite the pains that she will have to endure during pregnancy and birth. He explains that the Hebrew term *tesuchah* used in this context refers exclusively to sexual desire. Others, however, like Ibn Ezra, interpret these verses as prescribing male dominion in general or derive even from them the argument that it is men who should initiate sexual intercourse and not women. Yet, the verb *mashal* translated as *to rule* her, has to be differentiated from another verb *malakh*, which implies dominion. *Mashal*, on the other hand, has a connotation of affinity or complementarity (Antonelli 1995: 13)

Despite all the discussed arguments, in reality, unfortunately, most people are not aware of all the interpretational possibilities inherent in a text like the Creation story from the Bible. The attitudes of feminist readers, like the ones presented above, are mostly neglected by mainstream Biblical scholars.

The scene in *Genesis* 3 closes with the man and the woman, henceforth called Adam and Chavah (Eve), feeling embarrassed due to their nakedness. This is a feeling they had not been familiar with before. They exchanged a life without shame, work, pain and death, for a life in which they will have to work hard, experience a lot of pain for a limited period of time only to face death at the end and return to earth: “For dust are you and to dust you shall return.” (*Genesis* 3: 19)

4.3.2 Other Jewish Gender Controversies

In addition to the linguistic enigmas of the controversial Old Testament Creation story just discussed, there are numerous other topics causing debates and criticism. I have selected the following ones as the most relevant for this thesis:

- The role of women at Sinai when the Covenant between God and Israel was established
- The daily blessings – thanking God for not being a woman

- Defamed bride – the punishment for a non-virgin at marriage

4.3.2.1 *The Covenant*

The event that took place at Mount Sinai after the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt and after more than two months of wandering in the wilderness is central to the Jewish experience. This is the event that marks the establishment of the Jewish people. God offers the Jews to enter into a covenant with Him, a covenant which would oblige them to abide by the rules of their Lord. In exchange for that, He will make them into “a treasure from among all peoples” (*Exodus* 19: 5) and “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (*Exodus* 19: 6).

After his people have accepted the terms of the covenant, Moses announces the appearance of God, which is to take place in three days. One of the things that he requires from his congregation previous to God’s revelation is not to go near a woman (*Exodus* 19: 15). At this crucial point in Jewish history, Moses addresses only the male part of his people. And, even though the reason for that is the fact that a sexual intercourse resulting in an emission of semen would make both the man and the woman impure for three days, many Jewish women feel offended, excluded and, as often in religious texts, silenced by this address. Judith Plaskow asks whether Moses could use a different form of warning, an inclusive one, like for example: “Men and women do not go near each other” and sees this particular admonition by Moses as a paradigm of “the profound injustice of Torah itself”. (Plaskow 1990: 25) For Plaskow, and probably for many other Jewish women, this passage is a stumbling-block in their effort to reach out to God. Though aware of the fact that this verse cannot be blamed for all the injustices against women throughout history and knowing that the historical and sociological circumstances which counted only male adults as full members of the society dictated Moses’ behaviour, Plaskow complains:

Women’s invisibility at the moment of entry into the covenant is reflected in the content of the covenant which, in both grammar and substance, addresses the community as male heads of household. It is perpetuated by the later tradition, which in its comments and codifications takes women as objects of concern or legislation but rarely sees them as shapers of tradition and actors in their own lives. (Plaskow 1990: 25-26)

Plaskow’s complaint points out two important issues. The first one is the power of language and the significance of language in religious terms. The second issue, which in a way is derived from

the first one, is the fact that the linguistic exclusion of women in this instance served as justification for their exclusion in later traditions. Moreover, the *Five Books of Moses* are not just a historical account. Torah is the living memory of the Jewish people and its reading is part of the liturgy at all religious events. And, every time when the story about the covenant is read, women's marginality is reinstated. How deep and far-reaching the textual exclusion of women at Sinai is, shows a comment by Rachel Adler's, which is a proof of the crisis of identity in which she finds herself as a Jewish feminist:

When we are being invited by Jewish men to re-covenant, to forge a covenant which will address the inequalities of women's position in Judaism, we ask ourselves, 'Have we ever had a covenant in the first place? Are women Jews? (Adler 1983: 22, in Plaskow 1990: 26)

In my view, questions like these put by Adler are an exaggeration because it is a fact that women as well as men are included in the covenant and belong to the Jewish nation. Still, even some male rabbis were bothered by the textual exclusion of women at this central point of Jewish history. Therefore Rashi, for example, in order to read the women's presence at Sinai into the text, interpreted the verse *Exodus* 19: 3: "Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob and tell the children of Israel" as inclusive of women. According to him, by "the house of Jacob" God meant the Jewish women and by "the children of Israel" the men. Yet, for some, this natural assumption of women's presence at Sinai makes it even more painful that at the point where the Jews were about to enter the historical covenant they are not mentioned. (Plaskow 1990: 27)

In my opinion, it is impossible to expect the Torah, a text describing events which took place in a deeply patriarchal social setting, to be sensible to women's issues. Male adults were simply the only ones who were counted, as mentioned earlier, as legally responsible and eligible units. Any mentioning of the male heads of the households in those days was considered gender inclusive, because women did not have the option to choose or decide for themselves individually. Yet, this implied, automatically, that they were also freed from any responsibility in the domains where their opinion was not deemed of any importance.

4.3.2.2 *The Morning Blessings*

Many feminists are annoyed by the three blessings every Jew should say in the morning. This rule of saying the blessings is not established by the Torah but was introduced by Rabbi Judah in the second century C. E. In these blessings a Jew thanks God for not making him a gentile, a slave and a woman. Even though from an inclusive and egalitarian point of view all the three blessings seem to be problematic, since none of these states can be chosen by a person, we will concentrate on the one that seems to be relegating women to a secondary position in reference to men.

Although at first sight one gets the impression that the purpose of the blessings is to thank God for making one a man and not a woman because being a man is preferable to being a woman in the eyes of God and humankind, it turns out that this is not true. Namely, a free Jewish man saying the blessings, in fact, thanks God for the obligations He has put upon him. Rabbi Shlomo Chein explains in detail:

The three morning blessings, thanking G-d for not making me a gentile, slave, or woman, don't refer to the people mentioned; rather they refer to their obligations: mitzvahs. Every morning a man thanks G-d for the mitzvahs He gave him. He says thank you for not making me a gentile—who only has seven mitzvahs; thank you for not making me a slave—who has more mitzvahs than a gentile; and thank you for not making me a woman—who has more than a gentile and slave, but not quite as many as a man.¹⁵

The negative form of the blessings which might seem strange to some and which, as a matter of fact, has been changed by some Jews into the positive form has also a practical purpose. Rabbi Chein points out that the negative form of the blessings should serve as a reminder for the believer that all the *mitzvot*, obligations, he thanks God for, have no meaning unless he fulfills them. He goes on elaborating:

¹⁵ <http://www.askmoses.com/en/article/405,1987851/Why-do-men-thank-G-d-for-not-making-me-a-woman.html>

G-d didn't give man greatness; He gave man the potential to achieve greatness. (Again, "greatness" here is strictly in the context of mitzvahs). Now that man says thank you, he has to go about his day striving to be a "free Jewish man" – which in our context means a fulfiller of mitzvahs.

The question that springs to mind is: What do Jewish women say when they come to the third blessing, because, obviously, they cannot thank God for not making them women. The answer is that women simply say: "Thank you for making me according to your image/will". After all, it seems that these blessings are not meant to thank God for making someone into something better, implying that a Jew is better than a gentile, a free man better than a slave, or a man better than a woman. The purpose of the blessings is to express gratitude for the things as they are.

Seemingly there is a belief among some Jews that the reason why God requires men to fulfill so many obligations is because it is a form of controlling men's drives. Rabbi Chein, for example, holds the view that men and women have some innate differences which God wants to balance. Even though most feminists reject the notion of any natural or inborn differences between the sexes, it is a fact that a belief in such differences is still adhered to by many people, who thereby envisage a division of tasks in daily life. In the light of these ideas Rabbi Chein's point of view seems interesting:

This is indicative of the general difference between men and women: while men feel a constant need to do, women have an innate ability to be. Thus men thank G-d for giving them room to act, and women (with their own blessing, thanking G-d "for making me according to your will") thank G-d for who they already are.¹⁶

Judith Antonelli goes even a step further in this respect. She claims that the reason why God put more *mitzvot*¹⁷ upon men is not merely to satisfy their drive to do things. After stating that the male hormone testosterone is responsible for aggressive behaviour in some men and after offering the results of a number of researches which prove that aggressive inclinations are more present in

¹⁶ <http://www.askmoses.com/en/article/405,1987851/Why-do-men-thank-G-d-for-not-making-me-a-woman.html>

¹⁷ *Mitzvah* is a commandment of the Jewish law or a meritorious or charitable act. There are three equally correct plural forms of this word: *mitzvot*, *mitzvot* and *mitzvahs*.

men than in women, she claims that Judaism has a solution for that, namely the numerous *mitzvot*. Torah and Talmud study, communal prayer and the *minyan* are supposed to channel male aggressiveness in a positive way. And, while Judaism, aware of the fact that women are less inclined to aggressive behaviour, imposes fewer obligations upon women, this fact has mistakenly been interpreted as sexist by feminists. (Antonelli 1996: 64-7)

4.3.2.3 *The defamed bride*

In Biblical stories and rulings women are almost without exception treated as male property due to the deeply patriarchal setting of the revelation. This is why, for example, only extramarital intercourse of a married woman is considered as adultery and her partner in this act as an adulterer, because he is usurping something that belongs to another man. If two persons are caught in such an act, they have both to be executed. Similarly, in the case of rape a clear distinction is made between the rape of a betrothed and a not betrothed girl. In the first case the rapist's act falls under the capital punishment, since he violated a woman belonging to another man, whereas in the latter case, the transgressor has only to pay a certain fine to the girl's father and marry her and never leave her. Not only is the Biblical presupposition that rape is either a crime against a husband or a father and not insulting and degrading a woman, but the raped victim was forced to spend the rest of her life with a "criminal". Even though the Biblical commentators softened these rulings stating that the father could force the rapist to marry his daughter but he could not force the daughter to marry him, the misogynist tone of these Biblical lines hurts a feminist ear. The explanation offered by Antonelli that in those days the fate of a raped, unmarried girl was much worse than that of one married to her rapist might be of some help, since, as always, the historical and cultural settings of the Torah have to be taken into consideration.

In the case of a girl whom her newly wedded husband claims not to be a virgin, the Torah's approach is very similar to the one treating the rape victim, i. e., the punishment and the fate of the girl depend on the relationship to the husband. If she has not been betrothed and is accused by her husband of not being a virgin, her intercourse with another man is not considered adultery but premarital sex and hence not punishable. The only consequence is the reduction of her marital settlement, the *ketubah*. If, however, the girl has been betrothed to the man who marries her and accuses her of not being a virgin, a special procedure follows. In *Deuteronomy 22: 13 - 21* we read:

If any man take a wife, and go in unto her, and hate her, and lay wanton charges against her, and bring up an evil name upon her, and say: 'I took this woman, and when I came nigh to her, I found not in her the tokens of virginity'; then shall the father of the damsel, and her mother, take and bring forth the tokens of the damsel's virginity unto the elders of the city in the gate. And the damsel's father shall say unto the elders: 'I gave my daughter unto this man to wife, and he hateth her; and, lo, he hath laid wanton charges, saying: I found not in thy daughter the tokens of virginity; and yet these are the tokens of my daughter's virginity.' And they shall spread the garment before the elders of the city. And the elders of that city shall take the man and chastise him. And they shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver, and give them unto the father of the damsel, because he hath brought up an evil name upon a virgin of Israel; and she shall be his wife; he may not put her away all his days. But if this thing be true, that the tokens of virginity were not found in the damsel; then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die; because she hath wrought a wanton deed in Israel, to play the harlot in her father's house; so shalt thou put away the evil from the midst of thee.¹⁸

This paragraph, at first sight reminiscent of scenes taking place during the Inquisition and in the course of witch-hunts, has caused trouble for Jewish and Christian women even though it is hardly possible that this form of punishment was ever common in ancient Israel, let alone in earlier history. It is often cited for the purpose of showing the deeply misogynic tone of the Bible. In such instances, as is usually the case, these lines are cited out of context and the feminist feelings of disdain and rage overshadow any aspects of the citation which might sound redeeming.

Apart from the often emphasized historical context of the revelation, there are a couple of other clues within this paragraph which are often overseen. The first one is the hatred of the accusing husband for his new bride and the Torah's assumption that the charges he brings against her are false. And, although the reality of having to show the bed sheets stained with blood in a public place in order to prove one's "innocence" is painful and offensive from our perspective, it, in fact, gave the girls of Israel the possibility to defend themselves from abusive and dishonest husbands. Prior to this Scriptural ruling the mere accusation by the husband led to capital punishment for the girl. It is, of course, hard to accept for modern women that a girl's virginity had such a huge

¹⁸ <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0.htm>

importance in ancient times and, above all, that a girl was punished because her lost virginity was an offense against her father and her husband. From a secular point of view, it is unacceptable that God should interfere in something as private as one's sexual activities, and that these can be reason for public humiliation and punishment. Yet, the circumstances in Israel about more than 2000 years ago were quite different from ours, and they dictated every segment of one's life. The treatment of women was no exception. Moreover, capital and corporal punishments were abolished by rabbis in the early history of Israel, which implied amendments to numerous Laws from the *Pentateuch*. However, as always, there is the question whether there should be changes and amendments to the Word of God, or are Its regulations to be considered valid and relevant for all times. The answer to this question is to be looked for in the domain of Biblical hermeneutics.

After the discussion of the three very sensitive topics concerning the treatment of women in Judaism, namely, adultery, rape and lost virginity, one can collectively conclude that even though these regulations refer to women, their real purpose is to protect patriarchal male prerogatives and control female sexuality or, as Judith Plaskow puts it: "The subject of these Laws is women, but the interest behind them is the purity of the male line." (Plaskow 1990: 4) The Rabbinic texts offer no consolation for the position of women in the three cases, they even deepen the oppressive practices. In the *Mishnah*, for instance, we can find among its six divisions one that is named Women, the largest part of it dealing with laws treating those women who are in an unclear, transitional status. Such statuses include the transition from the house of the father to the house of the husband or the position of women leaving one marriage and entering another. Besides the negative undertone of this tractate, which treats women as goods and male property, there seems to be a great effort to channel female sexuality so that its potential threat to society is eliminated and controlled by men. However, as Plaskow observes, the mere fact that there is a Division of Women in the Jewish tradition where a division of men would be unthinkable is "sufficient evidence of who names the world, who defines whom in 'normative' Jewish sources." (Plaskow 1990: 5) On the other hand, there are some Jewish feminists who claim that such an approach to the *Mishnah* is superficial and simplistic. Judith Hauptmann, for instance, draws our attention to the fact that throughout the *Mishnah* it is male sexuality, which is described as "easily aroused and then hard-to-control", that lies behind many regulations like those pertaining to social relations among sexes. The fact that it is not explicitly mentioned in connection with the rules regarding the formation and solution of the marital bond does not make it completely irrelevant in this context. Besides, as Hauptmann tries to clarify, it is the absolute financial dependence of women upon the male heads of the households which is the reason for such a detailed elaboration

of her transition from one household to another. (Hauptmann “Feminist Perspectives on Rabbinic Texts” in *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies*, Davidman, Lynn and Tenenbaum, Shelly (eds.) 1994: 45-6)

4.3.3 A Jew, A Feminist or Both?

All the three Abrahamic religions are based on history and their historicity defines them in many aspects. It seems, however, that none of them is so much anchored in history and collective memory as Judaism. Martin Buber’s remark “We Jews are a community based on memory” (in Plaskow 1990: 29) emphasizes the fact that the Jewish past in many ways defines the Jewish present. The history of Judaism, however, has too often marginalized women. Women, though numerous in Jewish written and oral tradition, are silenced and their roles diminished. As at Sinai, when accepting the covenant, their existence is all too often assumed, but never properly addressed and valued.

In the present the Jewish past is frequently used as a barrier against change, as for example, in the case of ordination of women. Plaskow’s remarks shed light on this issue: “The notion of a woman as rabbi feels “un-Jewish” for many Jews because it is perceived as discontinuous with a Jewish past that makes certain claims upon its present bearers.” (Plaskow 1990: 30)

The crucial question is: “How should women treat and address their history and memory from which they are largely excluded?” As far as I could conclude there are three possible ways. The first one would be a complete break with traditional Jewish practices and creation of a new liturgy and new ways of being Jewish. Women should realize that dealing with their past would just cause them pain and anger. Esther Boner suggests such an approach in her feminist Passover Seder: “If Miriam lies buried in sand, why must we dig up those bones?” (<http://www.well.com/~ari/writing/hagadah.ari.txt>)

Another possible approach would be the one leaning on the ideas of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, a Christian feminist, in relation to the New Testament. According to her, the feminist approach to religious texts should be based on a “hermeneutics of remembrance” and a “hermeneutics of suspicion”. By doing this, a woman adopts a critical standpoint towards the religious traditions while simultaneously recognizing her connection and belonging to the same. This process is very much reminiscent of Gadamer’s “fusion of horizons” (Stiver 1996: 98), during which the reader

experiences “Entfremdung” and “Zugehörigkeit” at the same time upon encountering an ancient text. Such an approach would embrace for example the Kabbalistic belief in the existence of a primordial Torah which captures the true essence of God, of which the revealed and written Torah is only a limited fragment.

The third and last way of dealing with Jewish tradition, i. e. its history and memory, would be the apologetic one, often, though not always, proposed and supported by Judith Antonelli’s arguments, which have often been quoted in this thesis. The starting point of this approach is a belief in Torah’s divine origin and inerrancy combined with a deep regard for the social circumstances surrounding the revelation and Rabbinic discussions and decisions. One would have to look deeper into a text and search for often overseen or misinterpreted linguistic clues which prove the egalitarian spirit of God’s message and back it up with a sincere belief that the Torah is the authentic word of God.

In my view, Plaskow offers the most realistic and sustainable version of a feminist or female Judaism, based on the ideas of Schüssler Fiorenza. Apart from emphasizing the great importance of memory in Jewish tradition, she makes us aware of the sense of belongingness to a community which has also shaped Judaism. She makes clear that the individualist approach of liberal feminism would have minor results in the Jewish context. After criticizing the “feminist mistake of seeing women as individuals who happen to be discriminated against” she elaborates her point of view:

Women in Judaism – like women in any patriarchal culture – are rendered invisible *as a class*; we are seen as Other *as a class*; we are deprived of agency *as a class*. Until we understand and change the ways in which Judaism as a system supports the subordination of Jewish women as a sub-community within the Jewish people, genuine equality of women and men is impossible. (Plaskow 1990: 89)

Even though the latter approach to one’s Jewishness might be a most complicated and troublesome one, it is probably, at the same time, the most thorough and far-reaching one. By choosing this path one is neither neglecting one’s origin and history, nor being blinded by one’s faith and thus closing one’s eyes to problems and avoiding a confrontation with them.

4.4 Christianity and Gender

The term the Judeo-Christian tradition or the Judeo-Christian heritage has become commonplace in academic discussions. However, as I did my research into the gender issues within the two religions of Judaism and Christianity, I realised that the usage of such terminology is an oversimplification. To put the feminist agenda and gender concerns of Jewish and Christian women under the same label is almost impossible. Before the section on Judaism and gender in Chapter 3 the stories of the Creation and the Fall were treated because their content and implications had huge effects on both of the above mentioned monotheistic religions. However, it seems, this is where the connection ends. All the other burning issues within Judaism regarding gender and feminist issues, e. g. the Covenant, the *Minyan* (required number of men for congregation), the *Sotah* (woman caught in adultery) etc. are quite irrelevant in Christianity. There is an overall disappointment expressed among Christian feminists regarding the treatment of women in the Old Testament, but it is obvious that apart from the story about Adam and Eve in *Genesis*, Biblical stories had minor effect upon lives of Christian women.

4.4.1 Major Issues

The problems women inherited from Christianity are centred around three major questions:

- Are man and woman created equal?
- Is the woman responsible for the Fall of mankind and the Original Sin?
- If God the Father chose to be incarnated in a male offspring, Jesus, does this imply that the position of women is minor to that of men? Or in other words: Does the predominantly male imagery of the Scripture justify the subordination of women?

Since the implications connected with the creation of the first man and woman according to the Bible have been thoroughly elaborated in the section treating the Creation account, there is no further need to dwell on that issue. The question of equality will, however, still be of interest for the discussion especially in connection with the Original Sin.

When it comes to the third controversy considering the male dominated Trinity, it will be more thoroughly elaborated in a separate section on the gender of God in the three Abrahamic religions.

4.4.2 The Original Sin

After their settling down in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve could not resist the temptation and disobeyed God. Consequently, they were expelled from Eden and doomed to a painful existence on Earth, eventually ending in death. According to most traditional Biblical interpretations, it was the woman who instigated the act of disobedience due to her weak and gullible nature, and who is thus responsible for the Original Sin burdening mankind till the end of time.

4.4.2.1 *The Concept of the First Sin*

Interestingly, the concept of the first sin or the original sin committed by mankind has never had the same implications in Judaism and Christianity, although they share the same account describing the Creation and the Fall. In Judaism no one believed in the genetic transmission of the original sin from one generation to another. St. Paul, who had been a Jewish scholar before converting to Christianity, belonged to those who believed the sin of disobedience in Eden to be the first sin. He was the one who introduced the doctrine of the Original Sin into Christianity. He was convinced that all men died in Adam and that Christ is the only saviour of mankind who can free them from the burden of Adam's sin. Paul, however, never mentioned Eve's role in that linking of the Original Sin with the female sex and with sexuality, nor did he ever claim that this sinful state was something passed on from parents to children. He never spoke of humankind being in a damned and hopeless state due to the sin of the first man either. All these ideas and dogmas were introduced centuries later by the Church Fathers.

4.4.2.2 *The Woman and the Transmission of the First Sin*

The role of the woman in *Genesis* is unquestionably the one of the evil seductress for the Church Fathers. This belief caused a deep disgust towards women in general as well as towards sexuality.

Since they were mostly literalists, they were very well aware that the first sin was disobedience and not sex. Where does, then, the highly negative view of sexuality come from, something that was never mentioned in the Bible? This can be traced back to St. Augustine, who held the view that because of the first sin motivated by the woman all men are due to a plague which he called “concupiscence”. This is the constant wish of human beings to find satisfaction somewhere else than with God. He believed that this wish comes to the fore in a most powerful and explicit way in the sexual drive of human beings and in their desire to find satisfaction in one another. Thus, for him, every child that is born has inherited the Original Sin through the sexual intercourse of its parents and is damned eternally.

4.4.3 Christianity and Family

In her book *The Gospel According to Woman* Karen Armstrong at several places claims that the neurotically negative view of sex expressed by the Church Fathers would be bewildering and completely new to Jesus and St. Paul. One must admit, though, that their attitudes were to a certain degree encouraged by Jesus’ view of family life as something irrelevant and secondary and by Paul’s preference for celibacy over marriage. Both Jesus and St. Paul were convinced that the End of Time was at hand and that engagement in anything else than prayer and meditation would simply be a waste of time. Jesus never married and had a rather indifferent relationship towards the members of his family. In the Gospel it is reported of him to have said that: “If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, yes and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14: 26) A similar expression is found in Luke 18: 29-30. At another occasion Jesus ruthlessly demanded from a man to leave his old father and come with him: “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury the dead.” (Mathew 8: 22) It seems that values and patterns of behaviour which we today consider Christian did not have a huge significance for Jesus. In addition to that, it is reported of him to have at times been rather rude to his mother and not to have had a lot of respect for the role of wives and mothers in general. (Luke 11: 27-28, Mathew 12: 46-48, Matthew 10: 34-36, Mark 7: 10-12) Armstrong claims that “the power that Judaism gave to women as wives and mothers seems, in Jesus’ view, to have been lost.” (Armstrong 1987: 12) Yet, another Christian feminist, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, holds the view that this “a-sexual and a-familial ethos of early Christianity is often misunderstood as antisexual and antiwomen” whereas it is “actually an indication of a ‘role-revolt’ which allowed women to ‘legitimately’ move out of the confines of the patriarchal family”. (Schüssler Fiorenza

1992: 90) According to her, Christianity gave women the opportunity to reach spiritual self-fulfillment and independence.

Jesus' teachings on family relations were further elaborated and reinforced by St. Paul. For the first time we have the lurking danger of sex mentioned. So, in the first letter to the Corinthians he states: "Yes, it is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman; but since sex is always a danger let each man have his own wife and each woman her own husband."

4.4.4 Women in the New Testament

Jesus' and Paul's degradation of marriage has to be seen in the light of their firm conviction that time was running out and that all, men as well as women, should prepare for the Kingdom of God which was at hand. In the formulations and suggestions men and women are mentioned side by side. In the Gospels we can read about female disciples and women following Jesus and listening to his teachings. There is a balance of male and female characters in Jesus' stories and parables. At Jesus' crucifixion, as most of his male disciples run away, it is women who stay by his side. It is also women who witness Jesus' resurrection first. His teachings were supposed to free women from the burdens of their lives as housewives as we can see in the story about the two sisters Martha and Mary, where Jesus shows clear preference for Mary's inclination to listen and learn over Martha's typically female efforts to serve and provide for the guests: "It is Mary who has chosen the better part; it is not to be taken from her." (Luke 10: 42) Men and women are to be considered equal because, according to Paul "In Christ there is neither male nor female" (Galatians 3: 28). Jesus also explicitly broke some Jewish rules regarding women, e. g., allowing a bleeding, defiled woman to touch him, speaking to a Samaritan woman and defending an adulteress caught in the act. Armstrong claims that Jesus' and Paul's view of women took a more misogynic turn in the later written parts of the New Testament, e. g. the Epistles to Titus and to Timothy and the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians, which, even though ascribed to Paul, were written a long time after his death by his self declared successors. The neurotic attitudes and fears of the Church Fathers have to be seen as an extension of this development.

4.4.5 Paul's Misogyny

There is, though, one place in the New Testament where Paul expresses, at least at first sight, some deeply misogynic ideas. It is, indeed, the most frequently cited passage by those pointing to Christianity's negative attitudes towards women, and most importantly, by those using this passage to exclude women from ordination as priests:

But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head. (1 Corinthians 11: 3-6)¹⁹

Gradually, he seems to sink deeper into radicalism:

A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels. (1 Corinthians 11: 7-10)

Then, suddenly, as if he realized that he was going too far, Paul added:

Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. (1 Corinthians 11: 11-12)

This passage from Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians has been a stumbling-block for many who try to prove that Christianity, or at least the New Testament, is completely egalitarian. Here, in a couple of lines, a lot of damage is done to the female sex. First of all a hierarchy is

¹⁹ For quotations from the New Testament *New International Version* (2011) is used. On the webpage: <http://www.biblegateway.com/>

established in which women are allotted the lowest position. Besides, women are admonished in a peculiar way whereby a special dressing code is demanded from them while praying or prophesying. Eventually, Paul's statements reinforce most of the prejudices developed out of the Creation account: the inferiority of woman due to her creation after the man, her derivative nature and the reduction of her role to man's assistant. It is *he* who is created in God's image and glory not *she*. Women should bear that in mind and live with it. Despite the reconciling tone of the closing lines of this passage it is impossible to undo the damage done by Paul's words from the first part.

Further in the same Epistle (1 Corinthians 14: 34-35) we come upon another controversial remark by Paul about women. Here he is admonishing women to "remain quiet" and "keep in the background" in the church, thus offering an argument for those who deprive women of the right to minister to congregations.

4.4.5.1 Paul's Double Mission

Even though, as Armstrong claims, "these rather bad-tempered remarks constitute the whole of Paul's misogyny and are not characteristic of his usual egalitarianism" (Armstrong 1987: 18) it is worth mentioning that lines like these have done a lot of damage to women and to the egalitarian image of Christianity. Still, it is, as always, essential to consider the context of these lines. Not only did the church of Corinth cause trouble to Paul through its numerous prophets and tongue-speakers, it is also crucial to bear in mind that at that time Christianity was considered a strange and exotic sect. Its adherents were persecuted and a great number of rumours were circulating regarding this new sect. The Greco-Roman setting in which Paul tried to establish Christianity was patriarchal, and it was his duty, besides spreading the Word of God, to defend his religion from hateful accusations. There was, namely, a common belief that Christianity was an immoral movement breaking family bonds, disparaging marriage, giving women the same rights as men and, moreover, holding orgiastic liturgies in which men and women were allowed to speak out aloud. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza points out in her book *In Memory of Her* that Paul's injunctions have a specific and not a general purpose. She believes that "Paul's major concern is not the behaviour of women but the protection of the Christian community" against accusations of being "one of the orgiastic, secret, oriental cults that undermined public order and decency" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1992: 232).

Paul had a very difficult task to do. He was obliged to communicate the message of Jesus, which was “a deviance from, and opposition to, the religious-social order of his time” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1992: 187) to an audience living according to a set of hierarchical, patriarchal and often misogynist rules. There is a certain clash between the content and the form which the reader experiences as contradictory when reading the Scriptures. Schüssler Fiorenza explains: “Patriarchal imagery and androcentric language are the form but not the content of the biblical message” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1992: 15). It is a contradiction present in all the three Holy Books, which often drives women to reject the authority of revelatory texts as a whole.

4.4.6 Adapting Jesus’ Message

Schüssler Fiorenza also draws our attention to a remarkable fact concerning the New Testament. Despite the obvious struggle of the writers to adapt the role of the Christian woman to the patriarchal setting of the first centuries C. E. there is “not one story or statement ... in which Jesus demands the cultural patriarchal adaptation and submission of women”. (Schüssler Fiorenza 1992: 52-3) It is in this context of adaptation and adjustment that we have to interpret Paul’s statements. Besides, the admonishments of Paul and the attacks of Tertullian and other Church Fathers are just evidence that in the first centuries of Christianity women were very much present in leading positions in the Church as ministers or prophetesses. It is a fact that many influential and wealthy women converted to Christianity because of the egalitarian and liberating spirit of the new religion that they missed in their Greco-Roman cultural setting. It is hence, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, most fitting to read the Pauline Epistles as “historical sources reflecting a much more multifaceted early Christian situation fraught with tensions”. (Schüssler Fiorenza 1992: 68)

Yet, even if we accept the claims that Paul’s words in these instances are to be taken as emotional, uncontrolled outbursts the validity of which has to be accepted only in the Corinthian context, it does not change the fact that Paul’s Epistles constitute a part of the Christian Scripture which is still considered by many to be the literal, unchanging Word of God, valid for all times and in all circumstances. The power of these two rather short passages is obvious, considering the long and exhausting struggle of Christian women for equality within the Church and society as a whole.

4.4.7 The Church Fathers

4.4.7.1 *Fear of Sin*

It is still, despite our awareness of the weight of Paul's misogynist remarks, quite impossible to imagine where the Church Fathers found the inspiration for their terrifying views of human sexuality, the female sex and the absolutely dark and hopeless destiny of human race due to the Original Sin. Suffice it to read one of St. Augustine's outbreaks to realise his terror of sin as an uncontrollable force, a terror that he induced into the hearts of all Christians:

Banished after his sin, Adam bound his offspring also with the penalty of death and damnation, that offspring which by sinning he had corrupted in himself, as in a root; so that whatever progeny was born from himself and his spouse (through carnal concupiscence, by which a fitting retribution for his disobedience was bestowed upon him) – who was the cause of his sin and the companion of his damnation- would drag through the ages the burden of Original Sin, by which it would itself be dragged through manifold errors and sorrows, down to that final and never-ending torment with the rebel angels... (Enchiridion, 26, 27. In Armstrong 1987: 36)

This formulation of the Original Sin with all its consequences is just reiterating the already established attitudes among the most prominent Church Fathers.

3.4.7.2 *Tertullian and Women's Guilt*

Another prominent Church Father, Tertullian, in his treatise called "On the Apparel of Women" expresses a very negative view of women. After a rather friendly address "Beloved sisters", the tone becomes more and more sinister. Finally, which is usual for the writings of the Church Fathers, he cannot control his emotions regarding female "Evenness" and he bursts out into most sinister accusations:

And do you not know that you are each an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil's gateway: you are the unsealer of that forbidden tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so

easily God's image, man. On account of your desert – that is death – even the Son of God had to die. (On the Apparel of Women, Book I, Chapter I)²⁰

What a strange manner to end a passage which Tertullian started by addressing women as his “beloved sisters”. He even managed to put another load of guilt on her back, the responsibility for Christ's death and to round it all up with the theme of female clothing. Further on he reminds woman that causing lust and desire in men by her appearance is a loathsome deed. He is alluding to Jesus' statement that a lustful look equals adultery in heart (Matthew 5: 28). Tertullian misinterprets Jesus' point that what actually counts is what is in our hearts and that sticking to a certain set of outward rules will not bring salvation. The notorious Father manages to twist this deep philosophical insight into a petty issue of female garments. Moreover, he soon realises that the problem of female seduction is much more dangerous. Namely, those women possessing the gift of “natural beauty” are under special treatment. Their “natural grace and beauty must be obliterated by concealment and negligence” since “comeliness is not to be censured exactly, because it is certainly a physical felicity and a kind of goodly garment of the soul, but it is to be feared, because of the injury and violence it inflicts on the men who admire you” (On the Apparel of Women, Book II, Chapter II)²¹. We see all the familiar terms recur, i. e. danger, fear and the uncontrollable power of lust in connection with the woman. Very similar feelings of fear, insecurity and even obsession can be found in Jerome's treatise called “On the Veiling of Virgins”. For the pious Christian man and woman the only solution is to separate from each other, maybe not literally, but by hiding, veiling and disfiguring the female body in order to protect the man from all the perils lurking in every woman. Armstrong makes a point with her short remark regarding this issue: “The only good woman is a sexually repulsive one.” (Armstrong 1987: 64)

4.4.8 The Woman's Place

4.4.8.1 Do Women Have Souls?

This section deals with a topic of particular concern for Christianity or the western part of the world dominated by its ideology, i. e. the topic of female humanity. After realising that the woman is to be blamed for the Original Sin and thus for the humanity's doom to live a life full of

²⁰ <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txu/tertulm1.htm>

²¹ <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txu/tertulm1.htm>

pain and struggle only to die at the end, and after concluding that every woman bears the seed of wickedness and seduction of her foremother, which comes to the fore through her sexuality, the first Christian theologians logically had to ask themselves what was the purpose of this horrible and disgusting creature. As often, Jerome is making pioneering conclusions by strangely linking female dress and make up with the image of the greatest enemy of every Christian, the Antichrist. (Letter LIV, in Armstrong 1987: 69) Augustine is puzzled about the creation of woman in the first place, and wonders why God did not create another man as Adam's companion. (*De Genesis ad Litteram* IX, v, 9. In Armstrong 1987: 69) The puzzlement about woman's place in God's plan was the reason for the bishops at the Council of Macôn in the 6th century to vote on the question whether women had souls.

4.4.8.2 *The Purpose of Woman*

It is amazing that Thomas Aquinas, one of the most influential Christian scholars, shared the view of the Church Fathers who lived almost a thousand years before him regarding the nature of woman and her purpose in the world. He based his ideas on Aristotle's claim that woman is a misbegotten male:

As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from a defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence. (*Summa Theologica*, IV, Part I. Quest. XCII, art 1, 2. In Armstrong 1987: 69)

For Aquinas, obviously, woman is not only a riddle or an enemy, she is even an abnormality of nature. What is more, Martin Luther, the leader of the Protestant movement, expressed similar views in the 16th century. He was ruthless in his belief that the only purpose for a woman to exist is childbearing; to produce as many people as possible that can be saved through Christianity: "If they become tired or even die, that does not matter. Let them die in childbirth – that is why they are there." (Armstrong 1987: 69) It is interesting to notice that the famous term "in the home" referring to woman's place was actually coined by Luther. The connection between the feminist movement and Christian ideas becomes obvious in this respect.

4.4.9 Towards a Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics

The Christian religious texts, as any other text, are open to multiple interpretations. As discussed earlier, religious feminists have approached these texts in different ways. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza presents four different models of Biblical interpretation which can be used as a basis for feminist critical exegesis.

The first model is the “doctrinal approach” which understands the Bible as a canonical text and does not question the divine and revelatory character of it. This model does not offer itself for feminist critical analysis, or indeed for any critical approach, since it favours only a literal, a-historical and dogmatic interpretation of the religious texts.

The second model, called the positivist historical model is the opposite approach to the first one, seeking to interpret the Scripture in a scientific and factual way. It is the model applied by those feminists who doubt the revelatory authority of the Holy Texts and do not believe that they have anything to offer women and feminism as a movement. Even though none of the feminist critics I have referred to in my thesis have taken this stance towards the Bible, they all approach the sayings and the practice of the Church fathers and other theologians in a way that might be called objective, denying religious authority to the words and injunctions stemming from them.

The model mostly applied by feminist exegetes is the third model which combines the historical methods of the second model with a serious consideration of the interaction between the text and the community or the interpreter. This model is called dialogical-hermeneutical and is manifested in the analyses offered by Armstrong and Schüssler Fiorenza, and partly by Mary Daly, whose views were discussed in the section dealing with gender and religious language. The critics using this approach try to understand and interpret the religious texts in their socio-historical context while simultaneously taking into consideration the socio-historical situation of the present religious community. The prophetic-liberating feminist theology suggested by Rosemary Radford Ruether would fit the definition of this model. It is exactly in this prophetic tradition that Rosemary Radford Ruether, a prominent Christian feminist, can see a solution for the subordination of women within Christianity. In her book *Sexism and God-Talk* she suggests a denouncement of the patriarchal ideology based on the prophetic-liberating traditions built-in in the Bible. According to her, feminists should appropriate the prophetic principles for their goals, since according to these principles, any “elevation of one social group against others” and “every

use of God to justify social domination and subjugation” (Redford Ruether 1983: 23) is idolatrous. Just as slavery and racism, despite their continuous appearance in both Testaments, are not acceptable by most Christians any more, the same should apply to patriarchy and misogyny. Cross-religiously speaking, the dialogical approach is the one we encountered with the Jewish feminist Judith Plaskow.

The fourth and last model of Scriptural exegesis is, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, that of liberation theology. There are various forms of this theology, and all of them challenge the objectivity and neutrality of the academic theology. Even though Schüssler Fiorenza understands all feminist theology as belonging to this hermeneutical model, in my view, it is only partly true. There is one prominent feature of the liberation theology which is shared with all feminists and this is their concerns for the oppressed and exploited members of society, in this case women. As far as I could conclude, Mary Daly, who suggests some radical changes of Christian dogmas, e. g. getting rid of the male dominated Trinity or interpreting the successful liberation of women as Christ’s Second Coming, would fall under the category of liberation theologians. She also proposes a complete change of the language used to express religious feelings and beliefs in Christianity. There are also such feminists who believe that changing the God Father into God Mother will have a liberating effect upon women, but then, the question arises, whether these feminists can be regarded as Christian any more.

All in all, most of the Christian feminists agree upon one significant issue, and that is that as far as the sayings and actions of Jesus are concerned, there is nothing which could be interpreted as misogynist or particularly patriarchal. Most of the objections made by feminists refer to the Old Testament, to Paul’s epistles and to the treatises of the founders of the Church.

4.5 *Islam and Gender*

Islam is the most controversial religion today. In the contemporary global discourse it is, besides being identified with religious terrorism, most frequently linked to the oppression of women and the negligence of their rights. For this reason the gender debate within this youngest Abrahamic religion is a burning issue.

4.5.1 The Controversies

Even though the number of Muslims is steadily growing in the West, the social, cultural and religious manifestations of Islam are still considered as something alien in the Judeo-Christian cultural and social setting. Muslims are often “otherised”, and the Islamic aspects are criticized as obsolete, extreme and fundamentalist. Muslims, on the other hand, threatened by this kind of “neo-colonialism”, complain that the Westerners are ignorant of their values and feel that “western postmodern mastery over religious and theological discourse is just another form of cultural imperialism”. (Isasi-Diaz 1966: 57, in Wadud 2006: 65) Considering all these controversies, it should be interesting, and perhaps even essential, to deal with some of the most significant issues within the discourse on Islam and gender. These issues are numerous, e. g., wife-beating, female legal inferiority, marital rape, polygamy, female circumcision, forced marriages, hijab (the Islamic female dressing code), and the scope of this thesis does not allow a thorough discussion of all of them. It is also noticeable that whereas the gender issues of Jewish and Christian women are confined to the academic discourse, articles dealing with the above listed topics fill the newspaper pages all over the Western world.

4.5.2 Gender Relations

The first of the above mentioned issues is the most wide-ranging one, including numerous smaller and more specific problems Muslim women encounter. It is also the most general one and might be useful for the understanding of the issues following it.

4.5.2.1 Double Standards

When it comes to the position of women in Islam, a phenomenon of double standards is observable. All Muslims, even the most radical supporters of the patriarchal order, have no doubts about the fact that Islam does not oppress women. Unfortunately, the reality offers a completely opposite picture. According to the United Nations development statistics the status of women in Muslim countries is far below that of men. Amina Wadud, a convert to Islam very much engaged in the battle for female rights within Islam, makes a good point by saying that at her conversion she was amazed by the high role assigned to mothers in Islamic sources; however, she has so far not been able to find any real effects of this theory in practice. One of the most quoted *ahadith*

(plural of *hadith*, a saying by the prophet Muhammad) in the Islamic context is the one stating that “Paradise is at the feet of the mother”. Wadud, however, referring to her own experience and to the experience of numerous Muslim mothers in her surroundings, claims that the noble idea of this *hadith* is far from the reality of Muslim women. (Wadud 2006: 126)

It is, though, not only one *hadith* which is violated here. The issue is much more serious. The Islamic reformist from Egypt Muhammad ‘Abdu claimed as early as at the end of the 19th century “that it was Islam and not, as Europeans claimed, the West, that first recognized the full and equal humanity of women”. (Ahmed 1992: 139) Referring to the Qur’anic verse which states equal reward for men and women in respect of their deeds, (Qur’an 40: 40), ‘Abdu claimed that there is no difference between the sexes as regards their humanity and that there is also no superiority of one over the other. Still, he was aware that in practice most Muslims did not adhere to these principles.

Obviously, there is a discrepancy between Islam as ideology and Muslims as the practicing community. In my view this is the most significant problem with regard to gender discourse within Islam. The roots of this problem lie in the (mis)interpretation of textual religious sources and, to a certain extent, in the limitations of human language to express the divine. This is why the linguistic analyses in this domain are indispensable.

4.5.3 The Religious Texts

After considering the double-think regarding women in Islam and acknowledging all the inhumane practices towards Muslim women it is inevitable to ask: What is actually the standpoint of Islam regarding gender equality? The only way to find this out is to refer to the religious texts which form the basis of Islamic teachings, i. e. the Qur’an and the *ahadith*.

4.5.3.1 Ontological Equality

Since most Muslims believe that their religion is egalitarian in all aspects including gender it is necessary to cite and explain some of the Qur’anic verses, *ayat*, and sayings by the Prophet, *ahadith*, which support this view.

One of the most relevant and most frequently quoted *ayat* which stipulates the ontological equality between the male and the female is the first *ayah* of the fourth chapter in Qur'an An-Nisa, "Women":

O Mankind! Be conscious of your sustainer, who created you out of one living entity, and out of it created its mate, and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women. (Asad)²²

The phrase "created you from one single entity" is mentioned six times in the Qur'an. The Arabic term translated here as "living entity" is *nafs*. This word can be translated in a number of ways including "soul, spirit, mind, animate being, human being, person, self, humankind, life-essence, vital principle" etc. Most of the traditional interpreters simply assumed that by *nafs* God meant Adam, the first man. However it is a fact that in the Qur'an there is no indication of that. Moreover, the phrase translated as "its mate", in Arabic *zawjaha*, can be used for the male as well as the female component of a pair. Beside the Qur'anic emphasis on the common source of all humanity from one *nafs* the creation of pairs is also a recursive motive. One of the most significant *ayat*, emphasising the common origin of all human beings while at the same time suggesting a peaceful co-existence is the following one: "We created you from a single pair of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another" (Qur'an 49: 13). Moreover, the second part of this *ayah* intensifies the egalitarian principle among all human beings by stating: "Lo! The noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct." Good conduct is the criterion and not gender or any other category.

According to some Muslim scholars, like Muhammad Asad and Muhammad 'Abdu, and the Muslim feminists these *ayat* are a solid proof of the Qur'anic egalitarian paradigm. Among the around thirty passages dealing with the creation of humanity in the Qur'an, there is no indication that man was created prior to woman, that she was created from him or that he is superior to her in any respect. Humanity is always designated by generic terms such as *an-nas*, *al-insan* or *bashar*.

²² For quotations from the Qur'an English translations by Muhammad Asad and Yusuf Ali are used. On the webpage: <http://www.islamicity.com/QuranSearch/>

The creation of human beings in the Qur'an bears some similarities to the Biblical account. As in the Bible, the first being is called Adam. Hassan, similarly to Jewish and Christian feminists, claims that Adam is in fact a collective noun signifying the human in general. In the Qur'an, she explains, "the term Adam refers, in twenty-one cases out of twenty-five, to humanity". (Hassan 1999: 345. In Barlas 2002: 136) Besides, in the Qur'an there is no Eve tempting Adam, but they are both tempted through Satan.

4.5.3.2 *Equality in Agency*

Besides the ontological equality of the sexes stated in the Qur'an, there is also equality in agency. In terms of *ibadah*, worship, for instance, the same injunctions apply to both. These facts are reiterated throughout the Qur'an as for example in the 40th verse of the *surah*, i. e. chapter, called *Al-Ghafir*, "The Forgiver":

Anyone who has done a bad deed will be requited with no more than the like thereof, whereas anyone, be it man or woman, who has done righteous deeds and is a believer withal - all such will enter paradise. (Asad)

Even though in Muslim societies, as in most others indeed, immoral behaviour of men is more easily condoned than that of women, according to the Qur'an no difference is made in regard to disapproval of or punishment for sinful actions:

And [God has willed] to impose suffering [in the life to come] on the hypocrites, both men and women, and on those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Him, both men and women: all who entertain evil thoughts about God. (48: 6, Asad)

With regard to sexuality, the Qur'an does not make any difference between male and female. Besides, there is no criticism of sexuality as such, but only of forbidden forms of it, such as fornication and adultery, which is obvious from the third verse of the *surah An-Nour*, "The Light". Later on in the same *surah* it is stated:

Women impure are for men impure, and men impure for women impure, and women of purity are for men of purity, and men of purity are for women of purity. (24: 26, Asad)

Traditionally there has been put a lot of pressure upon Muslim girls, expecting them to be virgins when entering a marriage. It is a fact, though, that such views are not supported by the authoritative religious texts or *shari'ah*, the Islamic law deduced from these texts. Interestingly enough, the force of tradition is so strong in many Muslim societies that it overshadows the importance of the Revelation, which can even go so far as to make some women reject Islam as their religion, as is the case for example with the famous author and politician Ayan Hirsi Ali of Somali origin.

4.5.3.3 *Mutuality and Co-operation*

There are furthermore two *ayat* which point to the egalitarian and co-operative roles of the sexes assigned to them by God. The first is in the 9th *surah*, called *At-Tauba*, “Repentance”, and reads as follows:

The believers, men and women, are *awliya'* one of another, they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practise regular charity, and obey God and Apostle. On them will God pour mercy: for God is Exalted in power, Wise. (9: 71, Ali)

The term *awliya'*, which is left untranslated here, is mostly translated as “protectors”. Asma Barlas, though, referring to Meryll Wyn Davies, points out in her book, *Believing Women in Islam*, that this Arabic term has much wider implications: “It actually implies that men and women are ‘guides or in charge of one another’”. (Davies 1988: 84. In Barlas 2002: 148) According to Davies, there is mutuality in the relationship which has a moral and spiritual basis in actions.

The second frequently quoted *ayah* is again emphasising mutual understanding and even love and mercy between the sexes:

And among His wonders is this: He creates for you mates out of your own kind (or: from among yourselves) so that you might incline towards them, and He engenders love and tenderness between you: in this, behold, there are messages indeed for people who think! (30: 21, Asad)

The word translated here as “tenderness” is *rahma* in the Arabic original and is often translated as “mercy” as well.

The last two *ayat* elaborate, in my opinion, the equality between women and men even further, since besides acknowledging the ontological similarity between the sexes, they also present an atmosphere of mutual protection, guidance, love and mercy.

In addition to the above discussed *ayat*, which, according to Muslim feminists, undoubtedly establish an egalitarian view regarding men and women, there are also some *ahadith* which seem to support the notion that Islam as ideology does not approve of any kind of hierarchy and discrimination against other human beings based on their nature. One of these *ahadith* states that: “One of you does not believe until he/she loves for the other what is loved for self.” (Wadud 2006: 29)²³ This *hadith* expects from Muslims the highest form of morality. It establishes the principle of reciprocity, which is considered the highest universal ideal in human relations. At some other point Muhammad said: “Would you serve Allah? Serve your fellow creatures.” The logical conclusion ought to be that a system of belief which puts such a strong emphasis on highly moral behaviour and respect for one’s fellow creatures cannot advocate oppression and discrimination against half of the humanity, namely women.

The only difference among human beings which is relevant in the light of Islam is *taqwa*, a person’s consciousness of God. This principle of *taqwa* is the most dominant in a person’s life and controls his or her behaviour and actions. Hence the more a person is conscious of God, the less is the chance for him or her to commit sins. *Taqwa* is something we cannot see or judge since we are limited by our senses. It is only God who has access to a human’s *taqwa*. A famous *hadith* reads: “God will not look at your bodies or forms but at your hearts.” In a similar vein the prophet Muhammad also said: “All actions are judged in accordance to their intentions.” These sayings, as Wadud points out, situate “the locus of judgment on the heart and mind in the actions” (Wadud 2006: 48). In my opinion, this is the locus of *taqwa*. If this is the only criterion for God, it would be contradictory to view humans in “gender-stratified terms”. (Wadud 2006: 48)

²³ I decided to use the gender-inclusive translation by Amina Wadud, since I have always understood this *hadith* as gender-inclusive, even though the most common rendering of this *hadith* is: “One of you does not believe until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.”

Conclusively, Muslim feminists believe that a hierarchical gender structure is unacceptable in Islam based on the above cited *ayat* and *ahadith*. Islam accepts that there is a difference between the male and the female sex, but rejects any kind of differentiation based on anything else but on one's consciousness of God and one's deeds. The ideal relationship would be one of mutual complementarity, respect and mercy. Men and women, according to Islamic ideals, are contraries (A and B) and not contradictories (A and not-A) as in phallogocentric, patriarchal systems. (Barlas 2002: 131-136) Another possible Islamic definition of gender relations would be, according to Sachiko Murata, the "alter-ego". (Murata 1992: IX. In Barlas 2002: 164) This theory is based on the Qur'an's description of spouses as each other's "raiment" (2: 187). All that being said, the following question arises: Where do Muslims find justification for their misogynist attitudes and actions?

4.5.4 The Verse of Abuse or the Abused Verse²⁴

Just as Muslim feminists and supporters of gender equality in Islam turn to the Qur'an and the *ahadith* in order to defend their views, so do those who claim that men are superior to women. Let us first deal with one of the most controversial *ayat* regarding the position of women. I chose to quote two different renderings of the same *ayah* in order to make it more comprehensible:

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more strength than the other and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in the husband's absence what God would have them guard. As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty and ill-conduct admonish them, refuse to share their beds, and last beat them lightly; but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means of annoyance. (4: 34, Ali)

Men shall take full care of women with the bounties which God has bestowed more abundantly on the former than on the latter, and with what they may spend out of their possessions. And the righteous women are the truly devout ones, who guard the intimacy which God has [ordained to be] guarded. And as for those women whose ill-will you

²⁴ I borrowed this title from the following web-site:
http://new.vawnet.org/Assoc_Files_VAWnet/VerseofAbuseorAbusedVerse.pdf

have reason to fear, admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; then beat them; and if thereupon they pay you heed, do not seek to harm them. (4: 34, Asad)

4.5.4.1 Qawwamun ala – Tutoring Husbands

There are three problematic concepts in this *ayah*. The first one is the statement that men are the protectors and care-takers of women since they are bestowed with more strength and bounties than women. The Arabic term used here is *qawwamun ala* and has traditionally been understood as implying general superiority of husbands over wives. What is even more tragic, some Muslim men have been inclined to claim that this *ayah* proclaims male superiority over women in general. The most widely accepted view among Muslims today is that the superiority assigned to men in this *ayat* is limited to marital relationships and only in terms of their role as bread-winners. Islam expects men to provide financially for their families, while women are exempted from this obligation. There is, though, no prohibition for women to work and earn money if they so choose. Thus, according to Rahman, “a wife’s economic self-sufficiency and contribution to the household reduces the husband’s superiority, since as a human, he has no superiority over his wife.” (Rahman 1980: 49, in Barlas 2002: 187)

To a modern feminist ear the concept of men being protectors or guides of women in any sense is utterly unacceptable, yet in the context of 7th century Arabia the revelation of this verse was readily embraced by women, who did not enjoy a very high status in society. Anne Sofie Roald refers to a prominent Qur’anic commentator, Hasan Al-Turabi, who claims that this *ayah* was revealed in order to offer women protection and not to humiliate them. Allah is addressing men as in numerous other *ayat* in order to admonish them not to transgress His borders towards women. (Roald 2001: 154)

4.5.4.2 Qanitat – Obedient Wives

The second problematic term in this *ayah* is the wives’ obedience to their husbands. The term translated as “obedient” is *qanitat*. Muslim feminists as Wadud and Siddique point to the fact that this adjective is in fact used to express human relationship to God. (Barlas 2002: 187) Since God never demands from women to obey their husbands, such a translation is not acceptable. For this

reason the translation “truly devout” by Muhammad Assad without specific reference to husbands makes more sense.

4.5.4.3 *Judribuhunne* – Beat them!

The third, and in my view, most controversial issue is the authorization of husbands to beat their wives. It has been traditionally understood that this injunction refers only to extreme cases of adultery or disregard of the Divine regulations. Even though the way of hitting one’s wife was limited by the Prophet to a non-violent, non-humiliating tap, in my view, it is hard to accept any physical chastisement as a way to solve problems among human beings. Especially so, if we consider the basis the Qur’an set for an egalitarian and respectful relationship between the sexes. The historical and social context, in which husbands did not need permission for physical abuse of their wives, offers the possibility to refer to the previously mentioned argument of At-Turabi that such prescriptions were supposed to protect women from abusive husbands.

Another possible interpretation would be that the verb in question, *daraba*, translated as “hit” or “tap”, means something else. Only in the Qur’an this verb is used in ten different contexts and thus translated differently, e.g. “to travel”, “to get out”, “to set examples”, “to strike”, “to beat”, “to ignore”, “to condemn”, “to cover” etc. Why has *daraba* in the controversial *ayah* been understood as “hit” or “tap”? This *ayah* was also a direct divine intervention into the lives of the young Muslim community, which was still very much under the influence of its pre-Islamic practices. Some Muslim men complained to the Prophet about their wives behaving in a disrespectful manner and sought advice. The *ayah* was revealed as an answer followed by Muhammad’s words: “Do not hit, only the evil ones hit.” Furthermore, in a *hadith* reported by Aisha, one of Muhammad’s wives, it is stated that he never hit any of his wives or any other person indeed. (Muslim, *Book of Virtues*, no. 4296, in Roald 2001: 149) Considering the attitude of the Prophet, which is in Islamic exegesis often used to elaborate or further explain some Qur’anic injunctions, and considering the overall egalitarian spirit and search for justice in the Qur’an, I have come to the following conclusion: This alleged authorization of husbands to hit their wives has either to be understood as a limitation of marital abuse in a tribal and brutal society of the 7th century and hence cannot be characterized as universal, or the verb *daraba* must simply be translated in another way. Earlier in this thesis (page 34) I referred to a translation of it as “leave”. Such a rendering would make more sense, since violence in general happens

spontaneously as the first, uncontrolled act, and almost never as a last measure after calm discussion and physical separation have failed, as the above cited *ayah* seems to suggest. If a person, in this case a woman, does not react to verbal warnings and physical separation, why should she change her mind after a symbolic, non-violent tap? Is it possible that a hermeneutical process was going on which Wadud characterises in the following way: “When a presumption already exists, finding what looks like textual support or evidence is no difficult matter.” (Wadud 2006: 153) She goes on, claiming that the “Qur’an is universal in intent, but not in its contextual epistemology” and calls further in her book for a “conscientious pause” regarding the verse on wife beating. Such a practice, according to her, is “unjust in the ways that human beings have come to experience and understand justice, and hence unacceptable to universal notions of human dignity”. (Wadud 2006: 200)

4.5.5 Women’s Deficiency in Religion and Intellect

Even though the Qur’an as direct Divine revelation has a primacy among Muslims as a religious text, the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad are also of great importance. Muslim feminists have already pointed to the fact that it is often in the *ahadith* that one can find numerous misogynic attitudes towards women. One such *hadith* is the following one:

Once the Messenger of God went to offer the Eid prayer. He passed by the place of the women and said: “O women, give alms as I have seen that you women constitute the majority of the inhabitants of Hell.” They said: “Why is it so, o Messenger of God?” He said: “You curse frequently and are ungrateful to your husbands. I have not seen anyone more deficient in intellect and religion than you. A cautious sensible man could be led astray by some of you.” The women said: “What is deficient in our religion and intellect?” ... He said: “Is not the testimony of a woman worth half of that of a man?” They answered in the affirmative. He said: “This is the deficiency in her intellect. Is it not that woman can neither pray nor fast during her menses?” They answered in the affirmative. He said: “This is the deficiency in her religion.” (Al-Bukhari, Book of Almsgiving, no. 1369. In Roald 2001: 131)

Although at first sight painstakingly misogynic, Muslim scholars have interpreted this piece of Islamic textual heritage in various ways, mostly trying to tone down the misogyny in it. The

Egyptian scholar Ash-Sha'rawi warned men not to use this *hadith* in order to discriminate against women but to understand their nature better. (Roald 2001: 131) According to him, and most Arabs, regardless of religion, women are described as emotional whereas men are taken to be rational. Based on this attitude, which is called biological reductionism, men should be more considerate towards women since they are not always in control of their actions. Besides being completely unacceptable according to modern feminist standards, this explanation, in my view, only reinforces old stereotypes and generalises the relations between the sexes, implying that every woman is by definition more emotional and thus less rational than every man.

Others, like the *Muslim Brotherhood* in their "Report on Women in 1994", state that woman's deficiency in religion mentioned in the *hadith* "only means that Allah Himself has exempted her from certain forms of ritual worship at certain times, such as prayers and fasting during her menstruation period and during her discharging time after delivery". Regarding her deficiency in intellect this refers, as they claim, to the fact that a woman's testimony is half worth of that of a man in certain financial contracts. (The Muslim Brotherhood 1994: 7. In Roald 2001: 132)

According to Abu Shaqqa, another Muslim scholar, it is very important to consider that the formulation of this *hadith* is not to be considered as a general rule. It has rather an educational purpose and refers to a certain group of women who showed disrespect to their husbands and refused to give alms (Abu Shaqqa 1990: vol. I: 275, in Roald 2001: 133). It is also noticeable that the Prophet is addressing women on a holiday, a festival of joy, which should point to the fact that the Prophet was hardly trying to offend women, especially since it was not in his nature to offend anybody. Other scholars, as Al-Gannushi, even doubt the authenticity of this *hadith* or some parts of it. He reverses the meaning of it claiming that it is meant to teach men that they "should not treat women in a harsh way since women are sensitive" and not to point to women's deficiency. (Roald 2001: 136)

4.5.5.1 Textualisation of Misogyny

This *hadith* remains controversial and hard to accept for many women even after all these interpretations. It is interesting to mention that it is mainly male Islamic scholars who have tried to interpret this *hadith*. Islamic feminists have not paid much attention to it, a fact that Roald criticises as "selective". (Roald 2001: 112) Barlas claims that *ahadith*, as "secondary religious

texts”, together with the early commentaries on the Qur’an (*Tafsir*) enabled the textualisation of misogyny in Islam since most of them came into existence in a misogynic social setting:

These texts have come to eclipse the Qur’an’s influence in most Muslim societies today, exemplifying the triumph not only of some texts over others in Muslim religious discourse but also of history, politics, and culture over the sacred text. (Barlas 2002: 9)

Interestingly, her view of this phenomenon is very similar to the previously mentioned overruling of Revelation by tradition elaborated by Hans Kueng.

The feminists’ attitude towards the misogynist elements in Islam reflects the general view of Muslim women, as most of them do not pay much attention to this *hadith*, since it is in conflict with the basic teachings of equality and dignity of human beings.

4.5.5.2 *Selective Approach*

It is noteworthy, though, that this and other woman-unfriendly *ahadith* have influenced the Islamic legal system, the *shari’ah*, whereas other *ahadith* or even *ayat* referring to women’s equality have largely been neglected. With regard to women’s deficiency in intellect, Muslim men too easily refer to the case of financial contracts where a woman’s testimony is worth half that of a man. Consequently, they apply this regulation to all cases in which female testimony takes place, even though in the Qur’an there is no indication of that. Moreover, since this regulation was necessary due to the fact that women were exempted from economic and financial actions in those times, some scholars hold the view that in our time of educated and experienced female economists this injunction can be neglected. (Badawi 1995: 37. In Roald 2001: 141) If a woman’s testimony were generally to be accepted as deficient, it is amazing to note that the most prominent *hadith* transmitter was actually a woman, Aishah, one of the prophet’s wives, who has “witnessed” over two thousand *ahadith*.

The fact that there are so many different interpretations of this *hadith*, the hermeneutically apologetic and not literal approach of the Islamic scholars and the contextual limitation of the *hadith* itself allow Muslim women to observe it as a piece of their textual tradition which should not have a lot of impact on their lives and status in society.

4.5.6 Islam: Oppression or Liberation of Women?

Comparing the discourse on gender in the three Abrahamic religions, one comes to the conclusion that Islam is the most controversial one in this respect. No other religion is so proud of proclaiming its egalitarianism in terms of sexes, while at the same time being criticised for extremely sexist and misogynist teachings and practices.

Another specificity of Islam is the deep conviction of the majority of its adherents that the Qur'an is the authentic word of God and that not one syllable in it can be changed. Nonetheless, as we have seen, the interpretative possibilities of the Divine text seem to be endless. For the position of women this seems to be an encouraging fact.

After considering the different traditional as well as modern feminist interpretations of the Islamic view of women, I have realised that very much depends on the social and historical background of the interpreter and on the agenda he or she is pursuing.

Some Muslim feminists, like Barlas, openly criticise the development in the Islamic exegesis for ascribing more relevance to secondary religious texts as *ahadith* and *tafsir* (interpretation of the Qur'an), which often depict popular misogynist attitudes of that time, than to the Word of God itself. She claims that the overall spirit of the Qur'an is egalitarian, and that the century-long male-biased misinterpretations of Allah's Word are to be blamed for the degradation and oppression of women in Muslim societies.

Amina Wadud supports a very similar view and tries to interpret the Islamic teachings regarding women according to the contemporary context. She simply ignores the misogynist *ahadith* and concentrates on the liberating message of Islam. Wadud holds a position similar to that of Rosemary Radford Ruether, who emphasized the prophetic nature of God's revelation. Criticising the Muslim practice to interpret certain utterances literally, she comments on the purpose of the Qur'an, which I see as prophetic:

Rather the goal has been to emulate certain key principles of human development: justice, equity, harmony, moral responsibility, spiritual awareness and development. Where these general characteristics exist, whether in the first Muslim community or in

the present or future communities, the goal of the Qur'an for society has been reached.
(Wadud 2006: 199)

The Norwegian convert, Anne Sofie Roald, presents very neatly the controversial issues within the gender discourse in Islam. She offers a detailed interpretation of the problematic *ayat* and *ahadith* and includes a discussion of the same with Muslim women and men living in the West. However, she hardly ever offers her own view on the controversial gender issues in Islam. She made, though, a very important point in her book *Are Muslim Women Oppressed? (Er Muslimske Kvinner Undertrykt?)* concluding that in terms of gender relations Muslims much more often rely on traditional views and cultural values than on the religious texts. (Roald 2005: 58-9) Similarly, Muslims living in the West often interpret the religious sources in light of the dominant Western culture.

Leila Ahmed and Fatima Mernissi treat the Islamic injunctions regarding women as utterly social phenomena without ascribing any religious relevance to them. The latter has been criticised or even called un-Islamic by contemporary Islamic scholars due to the lack of respect she shows for some *sahaba*, companions of the Prophet. Interestingly, Mernissi is full of respect and even love for the Prophet, claiming that he was a person of much higher moral and spiritual degree than his contemporaries. She claims that often the men of the first Muslim community were simply not ready to embrace Muhammad's message of egalitarianism between women and men, and that Allah had to decide against Muhammad's views in order to guarantee the continuation of Islam. She mentions that in respect of the *ayah* concerning wife beating, when Muhammad commented on the revelation with the words: "I wanted one thing and God wanted another." As, traditionally, Muslim scholars have used Muhammad's words and actions as a guide to interpret unclear or ambiguous *ayat*, his treatment of women might have a relieving effect upon the allegedly misogynist Qur'anic injunctions.

The effort of Muslim feminists to un-read the patriarchal interpretations of the religious texts along with their appeal to return to the Islamic ideals of equality and mutual respect might offer a plausible approach to controversial gender issues in the Islamic context. Beside the active engagement of women in this process it is of great importance for Muslims, men and women alike, that the re-interpretation and reform of gender positions happen from within due to Muslims' sensitivity to foreign, neo-colonial and "orientalist"²⁵ approaches to their religious and

²⁵ Orientalism is a term coined by Edward Said "which he perceived as a constellation of false assumptions underlying [Western](#) attitudes toward the [East](#). In [Orientalism](#) (1978), Said claimed a "subtle and persistent

cultural values. Due to Muslims' fear of intrusive and abusive ideologies coming from the West, they often too abruptly reject all forms of reform through liberating ideologies such as feminism. They either aggressively deny any change within Islamic rulings or they complacently state that Islam brought liberation to women 14 hundred years ago, which renders feminist readings of Islamic religious texts superfluous. There are also those who are afraid of losing their religious identity by accepting readjustments of Islamic interpretations. This is why it would be absolutely necessary for Muslims to read and understand the explanation of the Islamic law, *shari'ah*, as described by a well known Muslim scholar Ibn Qayyim Al Jawziyya from the 14th century:

The foundation of the shari'ah is wisdom and the safeguarding of people's interest, in this world and the next. In its entirety it is justice, mercy and wisdom. Every rule, which transcends justice to tyranny, mercy to its opposite, the good to evil and wisdom to triviality does not belong to the shari'ah though it might have been introduced in it by implication.²⁶

5.0 The Gender of God

A frequently discussed and very controversial issue within religious feminism is the gender of God. Although this topic might sound banal or insignificant to many believers, there is a strong conviction among feminists that the predominantly male imagery and the male language used for the Divine in the three Abrahamic religions have largely contributed to the submission of women. Feminists "contend that male metaphors for God reinforce androcentrims, subordinate women to men, make women invisible or unimportant, and silence them" (Christ and Plaskow, 1992, in "The Gender of God: Judeo-Christian Feminist Debates" by Francis Britto, in A. Jule (ed.), *Gender and The Language of Religion* 2005: 31).

[Eurocentric](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Said) prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Said)

²⁶ As quoted by Ebrahim Moosa in his "Dilemma of Islamic Rights Schemes", *Journal of Law and Religion*, XV (2000-2001), pp. 209-210. In Wadud 2006: 49

5.1 The Gender in Semitic Languages

Linguistically speaking, it is of great importance to distinguish between the original language of the Scriptures and the English translations. The original language of the Tanakh is Hebrew and of the Qur'an it is Arabic. Both of these languages belong to the Semitic group of languages. The third language in this group is Aramaic, which is also relevant for this topic. It is the language in which parts of the Bible were written, the language of the Talmud and the Zohar, the mystical commentary of the Torah, and, above all, it is the mother-tongue of Jesus, the language in which he originally delivered his message to his followers. The problem lies in the differentiation between the grammatical and the natural gender of nouns. Semitic languages, like Hebrew and Arabic, have grammatical gender which is often in concordance with the natural gender but not always. Hence, for instance, the Arabic word for Sun, *shams*, is grammatically feminine, although it is common sense that no natural gender can be ascribed to the Sun. Besides, these two languages contain only two grammatical genders, masculine and feminine. There is no neutral gender, and thus, if a noun cannot be grammatically classified as male or female, it is automatically seen as male, but only grammatically. In other words, the masculine gender is the default-gender in Hebrew and Arabic. In English which, on the other hand, lacks grammatical gender, God as a masculine noun is mostly understood to imply the natural male gender of the Deity in the monotheistic religions. In order to shed some light on this problem I will discuss this matter in the three religions.

5.2 Judaism: God the Bridegroom and Shakinah

5.2.1 The Maleness of God

According to the teachings of Judaism, God has no gender. God is neither male nor female, beyond any categorization in human terms. According to *Yigdal*, the 13 Jewish principles of faith, God is without material form. God in Judaism is so holy and special that it is forbidden to pronounce His name outside the Temple of Jerusalem; thus the word *Adonai*, translated as “our Lord” is used in prayer. In conversation Jews will use *Hashem* when talking about God, which simply means “name” in Hebrew. Moreover, the name of God in Judaism is a debated issue, since it is never clearly stated in the Jewish Scripture. The most frequently used name for God in the Torah is the Tetragrammaton YHWH. It is most commonly transcribed as Yahweh, yet it is not

certain that this is the right transliteration. The English translation “Lord” for this word added a male bias to the concept of God. Yet, despite this rather neutral name of God used in the Torah, Jewish feminists claim that God in Judaism is heavily overloaded with male images and language so that, even though most Jews know that God has no gender, they link a male image to Him. There is a consistent use of male pronouns in connection with God and male characteristics are attached to Him. The Torah speaks of God as a man of war (*Exodus* 15: 3), a shepherd (*Psalms* 23: 1), king (1 *Sam* 12: 12; *Psalms* 10: 16) and father (*Jeremiah* 3: 19; 31: 9). For the rabbis he was the “father of mercy”, “father in heaven”, “king of all kings”, and simply “he” (Plaskow 1990: 123). Although, as a matter of fact, female imagery used for God can be found in the Bible, e.g. mother (*Hosea* 11: 3-4; *Isaiah* 49: 15 and 66: 13), giving birth (*Deuteronomy* 32: 18), Queen of Heaven (*Jeremiah* 44: 25) or woman in labour (*Isaiah* 42: 14), the idea of God as a powerful male Ruler of the universe is much more present and it dominates the Jewish liturgy.

5.2.2 The Female Aspects

The most prominent female side of God in Judaism is the mystical concept of the *Shekinah* designating God’s manifest presence. And, while the transcendent aspect of God is masculine, the divine immanence in Jewish tradition is seen as feminine. Moreover, it is believed that the *Shekinah* dwelt in the tents of the Matriarchs and that She dwells inherently in every Jewish woman, but comes to men only through marriage. She represents the community of Israel and is described as God’s bride, united with the Him on the Sabbath, which is, as well, a feminine entity. Sometimes Sabbath is called “God’s only daughter”. Yet, all these seemingly powerful celebrations of the female element have not overshadowed the overall masculinity of God in Judaism. According to Plaskow they are just “an important reminder that God is not literally male, and they provide resources for the construction of alternative imagery” (Plaskow 1990: 125). After all, to be *a bride* or *a daughter* in a patriarchal social order automatically implies a lower, subordinate position.

5.2.3 Verbal Idolatry

Even though idolatry is strictly forbidden in Judaism, anthropomorphic depictions of God have always been present on a metaphorical and symbolic level. Yet symbols can become so powerful

that they eventually turn into idols since they do not only depict the human view of the divine, but in their turn also dictate the way a religious community functions. Thus, if the prevalent metaphors used for the Almighty Creator are male, it implies that the male gender is assigned a higher value since it is constantly linked to the Divine. Furthermore, the image of God as male has become so dominant that most people do not even react to it as something unorthodox. Plaskow claims that this fact and the outspoken rejection of female imagery and language in the Jewish religious context are a proof that the maleness of God has become an idol, and even a more dangerous one than those made out of wood or stone, because it cannot be seen. This idolatry, mostly visible in the language about God, can, according to her, only be eliminated through “changes in the patriarchal system and the concurrent creation of new metaphors” (Plaskow 1990: 128) for God.

5.2.4 Necessity of a Male God

Those supporting the traditional language and imagery of the Bible, on the other hand, claim that a male, fatherly Divinity is the only possible one in the Jewish context for two reasons. The first one is the fact that the God of *Genesis* is an entity outside the creation, meaning that God created the world and did not give birth to it, which would imply that the creation is a part of God as in pantheistic world views. The second reason for God’s albeit metaphorical maleness is the chaotic and violent conditions of “our broken, unredeemed world” that “calls forth...a specifically paternal form of authority”²⁷. In such a world maternal, unconditional care would be inefficient while fatherhood which is “far more conditional and hierarchical – demanding obedience, threatening punishment, and setting standards in return for love and approval”²⁸ should guarantee peace and order. Traditionalists oppose the changes made in liturgy whereby God the Father is accompanied by God the Mother, or the Hebrew term *Adonai* (Lord) is replaced by the depersonalized “Eternal One”, which de-images rather than re-images the “personal and active”²⁹ God of the Bible. Besides, as with every piece of literature, “to change the sex of a character is no longer to have the same story”. After all, “God, though not a man or a male, has used masculine

²⁷ <http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9606/articles/berke.html>

²⁸ <http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9606/articles/berke.html>

²⁹ <http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9606/articles/berke.html>

terms in making His self-disclosure to humanity. Our words for God are controlled by the word of God.³⁰

5.3 Christianity: God the Father and Church the Mother

5.3.1 The Holy Male Trinity

Of all the three Abrahamic religions I have come to realise that Christianity is the most challenging one when it comes to explaining and understanding the gender of God. The reason for that lies in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. And, while Judaism and Islam are very strict in terms of their belief in the oneness of God, Christianity has a rather complicated form of monotheism, of one God being at the same time three different entities. It is believed by the Christians that God, the Father, through the Holy Spirit sent his Son, Jesus Christ, on Earth to save humankind. Whereas the figures of the Father and the Son are unambiguously male, the gender of the Holy Spirit has been debated. However, in the New Testament it is mostly seen as male. The concept of the Holy Spirit echoes the old Hebrew tradition of God's immanence through Sophia, the Wisdom, which was later replaced by the concept of Logos, God's Word. Even though God's Wisdom is mentioned in the New Testament, God's Word has been preferred by the authors of the Christian Scriptures. Similarly to Judaism, the female aspects of God have survived mostly in the mystical tradition of Christianity.

Even though the majority of Christians do not literally believe that God is a man, and in agreement with the official statement of the Catholic Church, believe that "God transcends the human distinction between the sexes" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_of_God_in_Christianity), there is also the belief that Jesus is God incarnate, and he was undoubtedly male. The prevalent male imagery and language have troubled Christian feminists because, as do Jewish feminists, they believe that those have belittled the female sex. Mary Daly puts this idea into words by stating that: "If God in "his" heaven is a father ruling "his" people, then it is in the "nature" of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated." (Daly 1973: 13)

³⁰ <http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9606/articles/berke.html>

5.3.2 Lost in Translation

Rosemary Radford Ruether points out an interesting fact, however, in her book *Sexism And God-Talk*. Namely, the process of translation seems to have caused at least some confusion, if not complete misinterpretation of God's fatherhood. The term used by Jesus in reference to God is *Abba*, an intimate word used by children for their fathers. It is a term that, according to Radford Ruether, "affirms a primary relationship to God based on love and trust". (Ruether 1993: 64) It cannot, though, be translated into English as "Daddy", because *Abba* was a term used by adults as well to address an older man with respect and affection. Radford Ruether goes on, claiming that the purpose for the use of this particular term is an important part of Jesus' revolutionary mission to overturn preexisting hierarchical orders and "to liberate the community from human dominance-dependence relationships based on kinship ties or master-servant relationships" (Ruether 1993: 64). Jesus' sometimes criticised negative view of family is, she claims, a replacement of the patriarchal family "by a new community of brothers and sisters" (Ruether 1993: 65) with their *Abba* in heaven. Similarly to the concept of father, I would add, the controversial concepts of God as Lord, King or Master should have a revolutionary meaning in the historical context of Jesus' mission, for "You are to call no man father, master or Lord." (Matthew 23: 1-10) Is it possible that a movement that was originally meant to abolish patriarchy by founding a community of equals who should obey God rather than man would in its later development cause so much injustice to women? Radford Ruether claims that this original idea would later be abused by the patriarchal societies and used to "sacralise the authority of human lordship and patriarchy". (Ruether 1993: 66)

Yet, even if we accept Ruether's assumptions and agree that masculine metaphors for God like *Abba*, Lord, King and Master have been "lost in translation and interpretation" (Ruether 1993: 66), two crucial questions remain unanswered: Why did not Jesus refer to God as Mother or Mummy and why did God choose to save the humankind through a male? Another relevant question would be: Can a male saviour save women?

5.3.3 Anthropological Justification

To answer the first question we have to go back in history to the period of time preceding Judaism when peoples of the Near Eastern and Mediterranean area mostly worshipped a female

deity as the basic creator and upholder of life. The religious system was, though, far from a monotheistic one, and that is why there are plenty of other deities of both genders in addition to the female one. Very often there is the idea of a male God the son of the Mother, who dies and is resurrected and married to his Mother on an annual basis. The pure and strict monotheism of Judaism was a set of ideas pretty alien to and hard to accept by the peoples of the mentioned area, as we know from the Biblical accounts. Anthropologists assume that the emergence of a dominant male deity of Judaism and the absence of female imagery and vocabulary in reference to it is an attempt to break with the preexisting traditions of polytheism. The cult of the Mother-Goddess was widely spread in Europe as well, hence the extremely negative reaction by traditionalists to female metaphors used for God in our Western cultural setting.

5.3.4 “Christolatry”

The figure of the Father ruling over humanity has supported and perpetuated the patriarchal social model. However, it seems that the figure of Jesus as God’s Son and, at the same time, God incarnate and his role as the saviour have had an even more negative impact on the position of women in Christianity. Mary Daly, in her book *Beyond God The Father* blames the centrality and huge significance assigned to the Christ in Christianity for female subordination. She calls Christianity’s obsession with the figure of Jesus Christ “Christolatry” (Daly 1973: 69), because she believes that in the name of defending the status of a saviour, major disadvantages have been caused not only to women, but also to all those not accepting Jesus Christ as their saviour. Since the latter argument is outside the scope of this thesis, I will just concentrate on her statement that “Christolatry” has affected women in Christianity in a negative way. Daly contends that it is still common for some priests and ministers to base arguments for male supremacy on the fact that God became incarnate in a male:

The underlying – and often explicit – assumption in the minds of theologians down through the centuries has been that the divinity could not have deigned to “become incarnate” in the “inferior” sex, and that the “fact” that “he” did not do so of course confirms male superiority. (Daly 1973: 70)

Daly believes that Christianity would be much more woman-friendly if it rid itself of assigning divinity to Jesus, even though she believes in his charismatic and unique personality. Her view is

that Christ as a symbol has been abused by Christians and hence her question: “If the symbol can be “used” that way and in fact has a long history of being “used” that way, isn’t this an indication of some inherent deficiency in the symbol itself?” (Daly 1973: 72)

Regarding the importance ascribed to Christ’s maleness, Rosemary Radford Ruether asks: Can a male saviour save women? (Ruether 1993: 116) She believes that it is possible because “the maleness of Jesus has no ultimate significance” (Ruether 1993: 137). Reasons for that lie, according to Ruether, in Jesus’ role as radical reformer of preexisting social practices and universal liberator from unjust power relationships:

His ability to speak as liberator does not reside in his maleness but in the fact that he has renounced this system of domination and seeks to embody in his person the new humanity of service and mutual empowerment. (Ruether 1993: 137)

Yet, similarly to Daly, Ruether warns against idolatry in the Christian view of God as a male figure. She blames Christianity for having committed the sin of visual and verbal idolatry. She detects visual idolatry in the Christian sculptures and paintings representing God as a powerful old man with a white beard and even at times wearing the robe of human kings and the Pope. Verbal idolatry, which is perhaps even more dangerous, is to be found in the literal understanding of terms such as Father and Son, implying that God is male and can only be represented by males.

5.3.5 The Female Church and the Virgin Mother

The feminine aspect has thus not found its place in the divine concept of the Holy Trinity, but it has been given a certain status by assigning the re-born Christian community, the Church, the attribute of Christ’s bride. Here, again, we see remnants of the Old Testament tradition in which Israel is described as God’s Bride. Another powerful presence of the female in Christianity is the figure of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. However, this concept obviously contains a deep contradiction of a virginal mother, which has, in fact, caused more woe than good to Christian women. The Virgin Mother was given a special status, she was even raised to Heaven and given a place at the Divine Throne, but in reality, she represents an unattainable role model for Christian women. As discussed earlier, the image of the Virgin Mary has had antisexual and antimaternal effects upon the Christian psyche. Hence, the male exaltation of the female through the bridal

Church or the Virgin Mother has led to vilification and demonisation of the female sexuality and maternity. Moreover, the secondary status of the Church in reference to Christ, used as model for human matrimony, has helped to relegate wives to an inferior position in matrimony.

5.4 Islam and the Gender of Allah

The concept of God in Islam is strictly monotheistic and it is called *tawhid*. Ascribing associates to Allah, *shirkh*, is considered to be the only unpardonable sin. Besides, God is believed to be unlike any of his creatures, an entity beyond human conception and imagination. Hence, it would be completely unacceptable or even blasphemous to ascribe gender to God in Islam. The most famous and concise description of the nature of God is the 113th *surah* called *Ikhlas*:

Say: "He is the One God. God the Eternal, the Uncaused Cause of all being. He begets not, and neither is He begotten. And there is nothing that could be compared to Him."

A feminist would probably react to this *surah* with the objection that one cannot claim that God is beyond any human categorisation and then consistently use male pronouns when talking about God. The level of language is, however, human and thus limited. As discussed earlier, the Arabic word for God *Allah* is a genderless noun. In Arabic such nouns, if not clearly feminine, are automatically considered masculine, yet only in a grammatical sense. That is why the masculine pronouns *huwa* and *hu* are used for Allah. These are translated into English as He, Him and His, but they could also be translated as It and Its. The latter form of translation would, however, be unacceptable due to a certain degree of disrespect implied when referring to God as It in the English language.

5.4.1 The Semiotic Collapse

Islam forbids any kind of imagery in the religious realm, and for that reason there have never been any depictions of God in Muslim art. The aim of this proscription is the omission of idolatry, which is considered a great sin. However, similarly to Jews and Christians, Muslims seem not to be able to avoid a certain degree of verbal idolatry. Even though firmly convinced that Allah is beyond gender, most Muslims react negatively to the use of female pronouns when referring to God. This idea of rejecting anthropomorphic images of God but at the same time using and defending masculine language in reference to God is a paradox. It is, furthermore, (ab)used to

justify man’s rule as a continuum of God’s rule. Barlas describes this paradox as a “semiotic collapse in Muslim theology between the signifier (the word “God”) and the Signified (God)” (Barlas 2002: 99).

5.4.2 *Asmau-l-husna* - The 99 Names of Allah

Muslims believe that the only way for a human to grasp Allah is through his attributes. There are 99 of them, and they are called *Asmau-l-husna*, which means “the beautiful names”. It has sometimes been suggested that there is a balance between the masculine and feminine attributes of Allah suggesting that God unifies both genders. Muslim mystics, the Sufis, divided this list into names of majesty, *jalal*, which are considered male, and names of beauty, *jamal*, which are considered female. Some examples are shown in the following table³¹

Names of Majesty (<i>jalal</i>)	Names of Beauty (<i>jamal</i>)
The Powerful (<i>al-Qawi</i>)	The All-Compassionate (<i>ar-Rahman</i>)
The Owerwhelming (<i>al-Jabbar</i>)	The Mild (<i>al-Halim</i>)
The Judge (<i>al-Hakam</i>)	The Loving-kind (<i>al-Wadud</i>)
The Absolute Ruler (<i>al-Malik</i>)	The Source of Peace (<i>as-Salam</i>)
The Victorious (<i>al- ‘Aziz</i>)	The Shaper of Beauty (<i>al-Musawwir</i>)
The Creator of the Harmful (<i>ad-Darr</i>)	The Preventer of Harm (<i>al-Mani ’</i>)
The Taker of Life (<i>al-Mumit</i>)	The Giver of Life (<i>al-Muhyi</i>)

Such divisions seem only to reinforce the preexisting human bias by linking, for example, mercy with the feminine and justice with the masculine realm and have no basis in the Islamic scriptures.

5.4.3 *Nafas ar-Rahman* and Layla – the celestial beloved

There is an interesting and significant link between Allah and the female principle mirrored in two of his most prominent attributes *Rahman*, “the Gracious or Beneficent”, and *Rahim*, “the Merciful, the Compassionate”. These two names of Allah are mentioned in a specific formula

³¹ I borrowed this table from an article by Münevver Tekcan called ”An Overview of God and Gender in Religion“ in *Gender and the Language of Religion* edited by Allyson Jule.

Bismillahi-r-rahmani-r-rahim (“In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful”) at the beginning of every *surah* in the Qur’an, except for one which contains it within itself. Moreover, Muslims are expected to repeat this formula before every action during the day: before getting up, before washing, before eating and drinking, leaving the house, entering a building, reading, going to bed etc. Since, in the Semitic languages the consonantal roots of the words have a great significance it has often been pointed out that these two most frequently mentioned names of Allah have the same root *rhm* as the Arabic word for womb *rahm*. This argument is used by Jewish feminists as well, since we encounter the same link between empathy, *rachamim*, and womb, *rechem*, in Hebrew, “implying a complete identification with another entity, like a pregnant woman with her fetus” (Antonelli 1995: 508). In connection to that a well known *hadith* recounts that the prophet Muhammad, after seeing a woman rejoicing after having found her lost child, compared her joy and mercy to Allah’s joy over repenting souls. He also mentioned in this context that Allah’s mercy towards his creation is much greater than a mother’s mercy towards her children. Mothers are given a special importance in Islam. Besides the previously mentioned *hadith* about Paradise lying at the mother’s feet there is another, emphasising the role of the mother in which Muhammad, upon being asked by a person whom we should honour most after God, repeated *mother* three times before mentioning the father. There are also a number of *ahadith* praising the womb in which this female organ stands for kinship and blood relations, since Islam ascribes great importance to preservation of family bonds. It is interesting that in as highly a patriarchal setting as 7th century Arabia, kinship is connected with the motherly bloodline.

Ensuing from this maternal aspect of God’s mercy, *rahma*, Sufism developed a tradition of identifying God’s creative aspect as feminine. Hence, the term used for creation itself in Sufism is *nafas ar-Rahman*, the Breath of the All-Compassionate. Moreover, this female aspect of God led most of the great mystical poets to refer to God as *Layla*. The meaning of this Arabic name is “night” implying the “veiled, darkly-unknown God who brings forth life, and whose beauty once revealed dazzles the lover.”³²

Yet, in spite of all the discussed connections between the feminine principle and God in Islam, it is impossible to ascribe either feminine or masculine characteristics to the Muslim God in an

³² Abdal Hakim Murad. 1999. “Islam, Irigaray, and the retrieval of gender”. On webpage: <http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ahm/gender.htm>

anthropomorphic manner, since the Creator cannot be compared to the creation. Thus, the incapability of human language to convey the idea of God properly seems to have limited God's reality. Barlas complains that Muslim theology confuses the limitations of human language with Divine Reality, which results in a humanisation of God (Barlas 2002: 105), a phenomenon utterly alien to Qur'anic descriptions of God.

5.5 Looking for solutions

A culture's idea of God is important not only in the religious realm. It shapes the way people organise their lives, and it also influences their view of the world. However, this process goes in the opposite direction as well, meaning that human beings impose their views and ideas upon the Divine concept. In this context we must ask ourselves: Is there any way for human beings to imagine and talk about God without engendering terms? Is it true what Gail Ramshaw claims (Ramshaw 1995: 20, in Barlas 2002: 105) that in "a century obsessed with sexuality, it is difficult to image a being beyond sexuality"? It seems that the limitations of human language make it difficult to refer to a Divinity without imposing either male or female characteristics upon it. Over the years feminists have come with different liberating suggestions for a religious language that does not give preference to one gender over another by engendering God.

As usual, there are different approaches to the problem of God's gender or engenderment among religious feminists, depending on their view of the issue of gender and religion in general. Some have turned away from the monotheistic religions completely and found consolation in ancient Goddess-cults. Others, like Daly, have suggested a radical change of the conventional religious language. Among linguistic reforms suggested by Daly the most crucial one is the change of the word class of the noun God into a verb *Be-ing*. Since she blames the Judeo-Christian view of the relationship between humans and the Divine for hazardous crimes committed against nature and the "Others", meaning peoples having other world views and religions, she believes that by simply changing the sex of God from male to female is not sufficient to undo all the damage. Her concern is not only women but the whole Earth and the ecological system.

In the same vein, the Jewish feminist Judith Plaskow believes in a reform of the religious language, also supporting the view that women can more easily refer to a Deity expressed in the form of various ing-words like "changing, creating, enabling, nurturing, pushing, suffering,

touching, breaking through” (Plaskow 1990: 144). Plaskow believes that women need their own way of addressing the Divine through a feminist liturgy. She complains, however, about the “equation of female God-language with Goddess-worship”, which “presupposes that the God of Judaism is so irrevocably male that any broadening of anthropomorphic language must refer to a different deity” (Plaskow 1990: 150) and is automatically considered pagan. She talks about the contradiction in the argument that the Jewish God transcends sexuality, while at the same time insisting that “new metaphors slander and sully monotheism” (Plaskow 1990: 150). This phenomenon seems not to be exclusively Jewish, since it is observable in all the three Abrahamic religions. Plaskow calls for an affirmation of the multiple images of God, which is also an often neglected Islamic view of God as Barlas points out, stating that “Muslims throughout the ages have understood Tawhid to signify multiplicity-in-unity, meaning that all principles (masculine or feminine) are interconnected in the totality of God’s being” (Barlas 2002: 102).

Rosemary Radford Ruether, on the other hand, expressing a critique of the Christian masculinisation of God, suggests a new concept called God/ess “who is the primal Matrix” and is “neither stifling immanence nor rootless transcendence. Spirit and matter are not dichotomised but are the inside and outside of the same thing” (Ruether 1983: 85). It is a unifying principle which includes all forms of existence “not only women but also the whole community of life” (Ruether 1983: 87). Although denying to be proposing an animistic form of religion and staying within the boundaries of Christianity, she criticizes the Christian limitation of God’s power only in relation to humans. Similarly to Daly, she believes in a more ecologically oriented religion.

Among Muslim feminists no concrete moves have been made in changing the masculine language used for God, apart from Amina Wadud who refers to God by using male as well as female pronouns. This is partly due to the traditional Muslim aversion towards any reforms in the religious realm, but partly also due to the strong belief in Allah's oneness and uniqueness based on the *tawhidic* paradigm.

Despite the different approaches to a liberating, woman-friendly way of addressing the issue of the gender of God, two ideas seem to be prevalent in the treatment of this topic by religious feminists. The first is the view of God as a unifying, multiple force rather than as a remote, monolithic ruler reigning over humankind, and the second one is the avoidance of anthropomorphic images and their supplementation by a different kind of language because, as Ramshaw says, when “anthropomorphisms succeed in containing God, we have no God; we have

instead a glorified image of ourselves” (Ramshaw 1995: 21, in Barlas 2002: 105). These views will inevitably lead to an enriching and broadening of the religious language and will present a very interesting process from the linguistic point of view.

6.0 Presentation and Discussion of the Gender Issues and Religious Texts Today

The theoretical background for my thesis has been elaborated thoroughly so far. The issue of gender and language of religion has shown to be a very deep and significant topic within the humanities. In this chapter the reaction of modern Jewish, Christian and Muslim women to certain gender controversies within their respective religious texts will be presented. The data discussed here are based on the survey conducted among women belonging to the three Abrahamic religions. The survey consists of a list of questions and three texts belonging to the different religious traditions.

6.1 *The Questions and the Texts*

6.1.1 The Questions:

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?
2. Your denomination?
3. Are you religious?
4. Do you practise your religion?
5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?
6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?
7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?
9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?
10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

6.1.2 The Texts

6.1.2.1 The Jewish Texts

1. Deuteronomy 22: 13-21³³

13 If any man take a wife, and go in unto her, and hate her, **14** and lay wanton charges against her, and bring up an evil name upon her, and say: 'I took this woman, and when I came nigh to her, I found not in her the tokens of virginity'; **15** then shall the father of the damsel, and her mother, take and bring forth the tokens of the damsel's virginity unto the elders of the city in the gate. **16** And the damsel's father shall say unto the elders: 'I gave my daughter unto this man to wife, and he hateth her; **17** and, lo, he hath laid wanton charges, saying: I found not in thy daughter the tokens of virginity; and yet these are the tokens of my daughter's virginity.' And they shall spread the garment before the elders of the city. **18** And the elders of that city shall take the man and chastise him. **19** And they shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver, and give them unto the father of the damsel, because he hath brought up an evil name upon a virgin of Israel; and she shall be his wife; he may not put her away all his days. **20** But if this thing be true, that the tokens of virginity were not found in the damsel; **21** then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die; because she hath wrought a wanton deed in Israel, to play the harlot in her father's house; so shalt thou put away the evil from the midst of thee.

2. Blessings recited by all practising Jews every morning. First formulated by Rabbi Judah in the second century:

Three blessings a person should utter every day:
 Blessed be He who did not make me a gentile,
 who did not make me an ignoramus and
 who did not make me a woman.

(T. Berakhot 7:18)

³³ <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0522.htm>

3. A Feminist Psalm

PRAISE HER
MOST AWESOME OF THE MIGHTY
REVERE HER
SHE IS A WOMAN OF THE PEOPLE
* * * *
TEHOMOT ELAT
ACHOTI CALAH
YAH TZVAOT EL SHADDAI
EM HAMRACHAMIM
SHABBAT CHAI OLAMIM
PRAISE HER WHEN YOU COME UPON HER NAME
SINGING INSIDE YOU
SHE IS THE BREATH OF ALL LIVING
PRAISE HER....

(Lynn Gottlieb “A Psalm”)

6.1.2.2 The Christian Texts

1. Tertullian on Women³⁴:

And do you not know that you are (each) an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil's gateway: you are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert, that is death, even the Son of God had to die.

2. Corinthians 11: 2-10 (New International Version)

Propriety in Worship

²I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.

³Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.⁴Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head.⁵And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved.⁶If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head.⁷A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.⁸For man did not come from woman, but

³⁴ <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txu/tertulm1.htm>

woman from man; ⁹neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.

3. A Feminist Prayer

*Our Mother who is within us
we celebrate your many names.
Your wisdom come.
Your will be done,
unfolding from the depths within us.
Each day you give us all that we need.
You remind us of our limits
and we let go.
You support us in our power
and we act with courage.
For you are the dwelling place within us
the empowerment around us
and the celebration among us
now and for ever. Amen*

*Text by Miriam Therese Winter
Medical Mission Sister, Professor
of Liturgy, Worship and Spirituality.
Author of WomanWord and other
books and resources for Ritual.³⁵*

6.1.2.3 The Islamic Texts

1. *Hadith*:

Once the Messenger of God went to offer the Eid prayer. He passed by the place of the women and said: “O women, give alms as I have seen that you women constitute the majority of the inhabitants of Hell.” They said: “Why is it so, o Messenger of God?” He said: “Your curse frequently and are ungrateful to your husbands. I have not seen anyone more deficient in intellect and religion than you. A cautious sensible man could be led astray by some of you.” The women said: “What is deficient in our religion and intellect?” ... He said: “Is not the testimony of a woman worth half of that of a man?” They answered in the affirmative. He said: “This is the deficiency in her intellect. Is it not that a woman can neither pray nor fast during her menses?” They answered in the affirmative. He said: “This is the deficiency in her religion.” (Al-Bukhari, Book of Almsgiving, no. 1369. In Roald 2001: 131)

³⁵ <http://www.herchurch.org/>

2. Qur'an 4: 34

As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty and ill-conduct admonish them, refuse to share their beds, and last beat them lightly; but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means of annoyance. (4: 34, Ali)

3. Sufi Poem: Jamilah

Can't you see that I am sick?
I am shivering with fever
Deep love (Ashk) is tearing me apart
What shall I do without your face?

Jamilah!
Look at me, Jamilah!
Nobody has ever loved you
as much as I do,
As much as my broken heart does!

I have only had one wish,
my dear Jamilah,
to see a strand of your hair
Behind the window-bars!

Clarification: *Jamil* means beautiful in Arabic. Allah has described Himself as Beautiful, and as the One Who loves beauty. *Jamilah* is the feminine form of the adjective and a common female name among Muslims. Even though the poem sounds like a simple love song it is in fact a supplication addressed to Allah. The poem is full of sufi metaphors and it is hard to understand at first sight. *Ashk* is the longing and love a believer feels only for God; to see the face of Allah is the highest level a person can reach in paradise; the window bars are a metaphor for the sinning nature of the human being which hinders him or her from reaching the highest spiritual level etc. The metaphor of the window with the bars (*demir*) has a special meaning for Muslim countries and especially for Bosnia. In former times young couples were not allowed to have any direct contact before getting married. The only way of communication was talking to each other through the barred window (*panjar*). The girl would sit inside and the boy outside often on a ladder. The wooden bars were woven very tightly so that it was impossible to actually see the girl sitting behind. That is why the lover is longing for at least a tiny strand of hair (*soluf*-strand of hair

hanging in front of a person's ear). There is even a verb *panjaring* developed from the noun *panjar* which means window.

6.2 Results of the Survey

6.2.1 Judaism

6.2.1.1. The Questionnaire

Question 1: To which religious tradition do you belong?

All the study participants replied that they adhere to Judaism except for one who declared herself as atheist even though she is genetically Jewish.

Question 2: Your denomination?

The following table shows to which denomination the Jewish study participants belong:

Denomination	
Orthodox	3
Conservative	3
Liberal/Reformist	10
Post-denominational	1
Atheist	1
None ³⁶	1
Total	19

³⁶ This informant refused to participate in the survey but shared some of her views regarding gender and religion in an e-mail correspondence which is to be found in the appendix with other verbatim responses.

Question 3: Are you religious?

Denomination	Orthodox	Conservative	Liberal	Postdenominational	Atheist	Total	Age	Nationality
<i>Answer</i>								
<i>Yes</i>	3	2	5	1	0	11	20s: 2 30s: 1 40s: 1 50s: 5 60s: 1 ? ³⁷ : 1	US: 10 Norwegian: 1
<i>No</i>	0	1	5	0	1	7	40s: 1 50s: 4 60s: 1 70s: 1	US: 6 Norwegian: 1
Total	3	3	10	1	1	18		

The majority of the Jewish study participants consider themselves to be religious. As expected all the orthodox and the majority of the conservative women answered positively to this question. The religiousness among those Jewish women belonging to the liberal denomination is evenly divided. Logically, the participant with the atheist orientation offered a negative answer. It is interesting to note that all the younger interviewees claimed to be religious. Nationality does not seem to be a deciding aspect regarding this question.

Question 4: Do you practise your religion?

Denomination	Orthodox	Conservative	Liberal	Postdenominational	Atheist	Total	Age	Nationality
<i>Answer</i>								
<i>Yes</i>	3	2	10	1	0	16	20s: 2 30s: 1 40s: 2 50s: 7 60s: 2 ? : 1 70s: 1	US: 14 Norwegian: 2
<i>No</i>	0	1	0	0	1	2	50s: 2	US: 2

³⁷ This study participant refused to tell her age.

Total	3	3	10	1	1	18		
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Almost all the Jewish study participants reply that they practise their religion. It is interesting to note that the number of Jewish women who practise their religion is larger than the number of those who feel religious. The reason for that lies probably in the fact that the Jewish religious rituals are tightly connected with family life and the feeling of belongingness to the Jewish nation.

Question 5: Do you feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Denomination	Orthodox	Conservative	Liberal/Reformist	Post-denominational ³⁸	Atheist	Total	Age	Nationality
<i>Answer</i>								
<i>Yes</i>	0	3	9	1	1	14	30s: 1 40s: 1 50s: 9 60s: 2 ?: 1	US: 13 Norwegian: 1
<i>No</i>	1	0	1	0	0	2	20s: 1 70s: 1	US: 1 Norwegian: 1
<i>Other³⁹</i>	2	0	0	0	0	2	20s: 1 40s: 1	US: 2
Total	3	3	10	1	1	18		

³⁸ Practices and understanding of Judaism which come from the entire spectrum of Jewish learning and practice.

³⁹ “Men and women have different roles in Judaism, but I feel equal in terms of respect and opportunities.”
“I believe in the difference between women and men, and see them as equal in value but different in being.”

Upon being asked whether they felt equal to the men belonging to their religion, the majority of women answered positively, i. e. 14 out of 18. Only 2 study participants felt they were not equal. One of them belongs to the orthodox and the other to the liberal denomination, which shows that the feeling of inequality, even though quite weak, can be found among Jewish women irrespective of denomination. Interestingly, all the conservative interviewees responded that they felt equal to the Jewish men. A somewhat dialogical view of equality was offered by two women adhering to the Orthodox Judaism (see footnote 39). It is interesting to note that none of the three orthodox study participants offered a positive answer to this question, which might imply that unconditional gender equality is disputable in such settings. It seems that the age and the nationality of the women do not affect the answers given to this particular question.

Question 6: *Is there anything you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?*

Denomination	Orthodox	Conservative	Liberal/Reformist	Post-denominational	Atheist	Total	Age	Nationality
<i>Answer</i>								
<i>Yes</i>	3	3	7	0	0	13	20s: 2 40s: 1 50s: 7 60s: 1 70s: 1 ?: 1	US: 11 Norwegian: 2
<i>No</i>	0	0	3	1	0	4	30s: 1 40s: 1 50s: 1 60: 1	US: 4
<i>Other</i> ⁴⁰	0	0	0	0	1	1	50s: 1	US: 1
Total	3	3	10	1	1	18		

The Jewish women responded differently to the question about issues that they find hard to accept in their religion. A small number of them answered that there was not anything they have difficulties accepting, whereas the majority found certain difficulties and answered positively. The Jewish women complained about different issues: the view of menstruation as a defilement,

⁴⁰ "I find it hard to accept everything in all religions."

the exclusion of women from the *minyán*, the fact that a woman cannot testify in a court, impossibility for women to initiate and get a divorce without the husband’s consent, separation of sexes in prayer, inability to officiate over religious meals due to presence of male guests, the application of the modesty code only with women, literal understanding of some stories from the Old Testament and unequal distribution of punishment between the sexes.

One of the interviewees offered a personal view of this issue which could not be categorised as either a positive or a negative response to this question. The reason for that lies probably in her declaration as an atheist.

The respondents do not seem to be influenced by their age or nationality regarding this question.

Question 7: Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

Denomination	Orthodox	Conservative	Liberal/Reformist	Post-denominational	Atheist	Total	Age	Nationality
<i>Answer</i>								
<i>Yes</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0		
<i>No</i>	1	3	6	1	0	11	40s: 1 60s: 2 50s: 7 70s: 1	US: 9 Norwegian: 2
<i>Other</i> ⁴¹	0	0	0	0	1	1	50s: 1	US: 1
<i>Not in the plural</i>	1	0	0	0	0	1	20s: 1	US: 1

⁴¹ “There is no god. Religious institutions exist only to perpetuate the myth and appropriate power.”

<i>One, but not only</i>	0	0	1	0	0	1	50s: 1	US: 1
<i>Yes, as much as any</i>	0	0	1	0	0	1	30s: 1	US: 1
<i>Legitimate but not necessary</i>	0	0	1	0	0	1	40s: 1	US: 1
<i>I suppose</i>	0	0	1	0	0	1	?: 1	US: 1
<i>Yes and no</i>	1	0	0	0	0	1	20s: 1	US: 1
Total	3	3	10	1	1	18		

The aim of this question was to find out whether religious institutions play an important role in women's lives since they have very often in history been the ones who perpetuated the degrading practices towards women.

The majority of Jewish women answered negatively to this question. Those who answered positively did that either with some sort of hesitation and uncertainty, e. g. one woman answered: "I suppose" or they added some additional remarks that moderated their reliance on religious institutions, e. g. "Legitimate yes, but not necessary for spiritual enlightenment", "Yes, as much as any" and "Yes one, but not the only". One of the study participants replied: "No, not in the plural", probably suggesting that only one religious institution can be considered the legitimate representative of God. An interesting perspective was offered by a participant who accepted the authority of ancient Jewish scholars and their interpretation of religious texts, but did not exclude the opportunity to look for answers and enlightenment on one's own. She also explained that in Judaism those scholars who lived earlier in time and closer to Moses are considered greater. A significant influence of age or nationality could not be observed in respect to this question.

Question 8: *Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?*

Denomination	Orthodox	Conservative	Liberal/Reformist	Post-denominational	Atheist	Total	Age	Nationality
<i>Answer</i>								
<i>Yes</i>	2	3	9	1	0	15	20s: 2 30s: 1 50s: 8 60s: 2 70s: 1 ?: 1	US: 13 Norwegian: 2
<i>No</i>	0	0	1	0	0	1	40s: 1	US: 1
<i>Other</i> ⁴²	1	0	0	0	1	2	40s: 1 50s: 1	US: 2
Total	3	3	10	1	1	18		

A great majority of the questioned Jewish women replied positively to this question. Only one study participant could not see any contradictions between religious theory and the reality of women's lives regarding gender equality. One of the women adhering to the orthodox branch of Judaism offered the same response to this question as to the question regarding gender equality (Question 5) which supports the ambiguous view of gender equality in this branch. The interviewee with the atheist world view responded in a way that justifies her rejection of religion. Age and nationality do not seem to be of huge significance, besides the fact that the younger interviewees, those in their 20s and 30s could perceive discrepancies between religious theory and practice.

⁴² "Religion is just one more way for men to control women." (Atheist)

"I believe in the difference between women and men, and see them as equal in value but different in being." (Orthodox)

Question 9: What do you think is the gender of God? Male, female, neuter or beyond gender?

Denomination	Orthodox	Conservative	Liberal/Reformist	Post-denominational	Atheist	Total	Age	Nationality
<i>Answer</i>								
<i>Mostly Female</i>	0	0	1	0	0	1	40s: 1	US: 1
<i>Male and Female</i>	0	0	1	0	0	1	60s: 1	US: 1
<i>Beyond Gender</i>	3	2	8	1	0	14	20s: 2 30s: 1 40s: 1 50s: 7 60s: 1 70s: 1 ? : 1	US: 12 Norwegian: 2
<i>I do not believe in God</i>	0	1	0	0	0	1	50s: 1	US: 1
<i>There is no god</i>	0	0	0	0	1	1	50s: 1	US: 1
Total	3	3	10	1	1	18		

When it comes to the gender of God the Jewish women seem to have a quite clear opinion about that. Most of the participants answered that they believe that God is an entity that cannot be ascribed a gender. The atheist participant claimed that there is no god and one of the conservative participants stated that she does not believe in God. One interviewee believes that God is of both genders, and another responded that God was female for the most part. It is very interesting to note that none of the Jewish interviewees considered God to be male or neuter. Reason for that lies probably in the deeply rooted Jewish conviction of God's oneness and the strict rejection of idolatry.

No remarkable deviations due to age or nationality are observable in the respondents' reactions to this question.

Question 10: *If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?*

Denomination	Orthodox	Conservative	Liberal/Reformist	Post-denominational	Atheist	Total	Age	Nationality
<i>Answer</i>								
<i>Linguistic Reasons</i>	2	0	1	1	0	4	20s: 2 1 50s: 60s: 1	US: 4
<i>Male Writers</i>	1	1	2	0	0	4	40s: 1 2 50s: 60s: 1	US: 3 Norwegian: 1
<i>Linguistic Reasons and Male Writers</i>	0	0	1	0	0	1	50s: 1	US: 1
<i>Patriarchal Society</i>	0	1	5	0	1	7	30s: 1 1 40s: 50s: 3 ?:1 70s: 1	US: 6 Norwegian: 1
<i>Reference to the Use of Female Pronouns as Well</i>	0	1	1	0	0	2	50s: 2	US: 2
<i>Breaking away from Matriarchy and Goddess-cult</i>	0	(1) ⁴³	0	0	0	(1)	50s: (1)	US: (1)
Total	3	3	10	1	1	18		

⁴³ This study participant also made reference to the female aspects of God in Judaism and will therefore not be counted twice.

To the question why male pronouns are used when talking about God in monotheistic religions, including their own religion, Judaism, the Jewish study participants offered a variety of opinions. Most of them, though, blamed the male writers of the religious texts and the patriarchal tradition for that. A smaller number of interviewees said that it is due to the tendency of Hebrew to use male pronouns for nouns which are not explicitly of female gender. One woman blamed both, the Hebrew language and the male writers of the scriptures. One participant replied that there were temples which use both genders, suggesting that gender inclusive religious books and prayers are used. Finally, one respondent replied that it was the need to break away from previous Goddess-cults which resulted in the predominantly male language about God. Besides, she pointed out that there is also the feminine concept of the *Shekhinah* within Judaism.

I think that these results show that even though probably in reality the tendency of the Semitic languages to use the male gender as a default-gender influenced the predominantly male usage of pronouns in the religious setting, most of the Jewish women feel that they have been excluded from the shaping of religious texts. This fact has led to the situation that in most parts of the Scripture God is, linguistically and naturally, perceived as a male entity.

Interestingly, the two youngest study participants belonging to the orthodox branch are aware of the linguistic rules and their implications regarding the use of masculine language for the Divine. This fact shows that younger women are more engaged in finding answers to certain dilemmas. However, it might also indicate that in orthodox settings there is a higher respect for religious scholars regardless of the fact that they have predominantly been of the male gender.⁴⁴

6.2.1.2 Conclusion: The Questionnaire

The results arrived at in the questionnaire show that most of the Jewish study participants feel equal to the male adherents of their religion. They are very well aware of the women-degrading aspects of their religion and are able to criticise them. Most of the Jewish study participants do not depend on the religious institutions and scholars when it comes to their relationship to God or spiritual enlightenment. This realm is considered personal and I believe that this helps women to cope with the misogyny in their religious communities. The majority of the Jewish interviewees recognise contradictions between theory and practice in the Jewish religious setting. This

⁴⁴ See answer offered by one of the orthodox participants to question 7.

indicates their awareness of the phenomenon criticised by Hans Kueng, which Asma Barlas called “textualisation of misogyny”, whereby the Word of God is overruled by traditions of a certain time and place. As far as the gender of God is concerned, the Jewish women appear unaffected by the overwhelmingly masculine depiction of the Jewish God in the religious texts. It is, though, also possible that, as Plaskow remarks, the Jewish women are so used to the male language and imagery in their religious texts that they do not react to it as something unorthodox anymore. This might be an indicator of something she calls “verbal idolatry”. Reasons for the male language used for God the Jewish women find in the social male domination, the fact that mostly men were in charge of writing down the religious texts and the tendency of Hebrew to use male pronouns for nouns with unspecified gender.

6.2.1.3 *The Jewish Texts*

After having answered the list of questions the women were asked to comment on three brief texts addressing the issue of gender in different ways.

1. Deuteronomy

The first text is a Biblical passage from Deuteronomy demanding a death sentence by stoning for a non-virginal bride.

My hypothesis was that this kind of religious text does not speak to the modern Jewish woman and is merely regarded as a written historical document. And, the comments made by the study participants confirmed that. The majority of the participants appealed for a contextual reading of this excerpt, pointing out that such texts were problematic for rabbis even in the Middle Ages. Besides, they interpret this text as a part of the Jewish roots and not as eternally authoritative, otherwise Jews would still practise polygamy, slavery etc.

A number of the participants pointed out that this passage from Deuteronomy reflects the ancient view of woman as property or chattel and marriage as a business arrangement.

These reactions are examples of how modern women apply the hermeneutic method of “fusion of horizons”, as elaborated by Gadamer, whereby they try to overcome the feeling of alienation due to spatial and temporal distance by the feeling of belongingness to the Jewish tradition.

I also expected some disapproval of and disdain at this misogynic piece of textual religious heritage, which proved correct. Some participants find the fact that sexual relations were known as “hating her” most disturbing and are astounded by the imbalance of gender equality and the absence of consequences for a non-virginal bridegroom. They also commented that it would be very disturbing to meet people who still approve of stoning of defamed brides as an appropriate punishment.

These comments show how women use Iser’s reader-response theory in order to understand an ancient text. Their personal reaction is very important and they do not just use the text as a “window” to their forefathers, but also as a “mirror” in which their views and attitudes are of relevance as well.

Some of the participants suggested that the literary devices and the different layers used in this passage should be considered. They implied that there was more to a text than the superficial, literal level. This would be an example of Schleiermacher’s “hermeneutical circle”. The women pay attention to singular terms, literary devices and layers of a text, but do not neglect the text as a whole either. Similarly one of the interviewees said that she often looks for deeper, mystical meanings of religious texts, which often prove to be completely different from the superficial meaning. Another woman found this passage only relevant on a general, legalistic level, since the Torah is The Law. For her this excerpt could only be used to teach Jews that if they have promised to deliver something in a certain shape, they have to keep their promise. The metaphorical level offers women, as suggested earlier in the thesis, the opportunity to read the Scripture “for its best meaning”⁴⁵ and neglect the limitations of a literal interpretation. The reference to metaphors is also a device of the reader-response theory.

There were also those who in the apologetic vein tried to explain that such practices even though seemingly inhumane and misogynic were actually “social advances to protect women”, and that such a punishment has never been carried out by a Jewish court. Two women emphasised the importance of reading the texts of the Torah only accompanied by commentaries from the oral Jewish tradition.

⁴⁵ The Muslim feminist, Asma Barlas, believes that it is our duty to read the Word “for its best meanings” (Barlas, 2002: 206) which is actually a Qur’anic injunction (Qur’an 39: 18).

2. The Morning Blessings

In the second text the Jewish women were confronted with the original text of the three morning blessings formulated by Rabbi Judah in which among other things every Jew is supposed to thank God for not making him a woman. As expected, most of the women were quite critical of this text and offered a variety of ways in order to avoid the sexist tone in the blessings. References to the historical context in which the blessings were written were also made.

One of the participants commented by offering a modern reaction to this text, which is to rewrite them in the positive, e. g. “who made me a member of the people of Israel”, “who made me in his image”, “who made me free”, “who gave me wisdom”. She sees that as an example of the development of the liturgy whereby the form is retained but the content transformed in order to address modern understanding and sensibilities.

Another woman offered a very helpful presentation of how these blessings are recited and interpreted today, showing that gender-sensitive language has affected the religious languages indirectly. She explained that the blessings in such a form can only be found in the prayer books of the orthodox communities, however, even then when the wording has not been changed, the perception of the prayer has changed in response to feminist ideals.

I think she brings up an interesting phenomenon, which is that people continue to say the same prayers written in some sort of offensive language, even though they do not agree with the ideas these prayers propose. Thus one of the participants replied that even though she knows that religion, intellect and power, the central values in the time when these blessings emerged, are not relevant today, she prefers to utter the same words that her forefathers and foremothers used.

These reactions and transformations are good examples of the fusion of horizons, whereby modern women try to keep their religious identity, but also respect the values and standards of the society they live in now.

One of the women explained that the practice of changing misogynic language in order not to offend women is not new in Judaism. She referred to a Jewish prayer-book from the Renaissance in which the morning blessing undergoes a radical revision by thanking God “for making me a woman and not a man”.

Of course, there were also those who felt quite offended by the blessing and reacted accordingly. Some women “bristled” at the notion of thanking God for not being a gentile and were even more disturbed by the fact that men should thank God for not being made a woman. One of the respondents commented that it is only logical to thank God for being a man because of the way women were treated in those days. A third even drew a parallel to today’s radical Muslim societies, stating that it was sensible to be thankful for not being a woman then as it might be in some fundamentalist Muslim countries today.

The disdain of these women is an example of the reader-response theory. As usual, they place the text in its social and historical context, which helps them to fuse their horizon with the ancient one.

3. The Feminist Psalm

As far as the reaction to the feminist psalm by Lynn Gottlieb is concerned, one can conclude that the reaction was overall positive. Some women detected the traditional Jewish concept of the *Shekhinah* and the influence of the Goddess-poetry from the 1960s in the female references to God, but criticised the description of God as “a woman of the people” as anthropomorphic or even Christological. For some, however, the anthropomorphic imagery was so prevalent that they could not read this text as a psalm at all.

It is interesting that there were some who found the female nouns and imagery only to be replacing the dominantly male attributes of traditional religious texts with the female ones in order to offer a piece of reactive liturgy. This is exactly what religious feminists like Mary Daly are trying to avoid.

A linguistically significant point was made by an interviewee who confessed that she prefers the traditional, Hebrew prayers even though she does not agree with everything they state. She finds the English translations forced and unnatural, whereas the Hebrew wording has a certain flow. The chanting and the melody of religious texts are important in Judaism and Islam.

6.2.1.4 Conclusion: The Jewish Texts

As expected, the Jewish women of today do not consider ancient religious texts relevant for their lives. Most of them look upon them as historical documents describing the view of women in

another time and under ancient social circumstances, i. e. they regard the social context and do not interpret them literally. None of the women accepted these passages as something sacred and valid for all times and places, still, they acknowledge them to be a part of their tradition.

The modern Jewish women either discard the misogynic texts or interpret and adapt them. In the process of interpretation and adaptation they employ linguistic and hermeneutical methods elaborated in this thesis. Linguistically, they look for mystical and metaphorical meanings of the texts. Interestingly, some women also sacrifice the gender-inclusiveness of some liturgies to the melodic chanting of familiar prayers. Hermeneutically, they use different approaches, the hermeneutical circle, the fusion of horizons and the reader -response theory. Some of them also try to un-read the patriarchal connotations in an apologetic feminist way and use materials from the external context, like the oral tradition.

Regarding the female references to God the results indicate that Jewish women mostly approve of the use of female characteristics and vocabulary for the Divine. Yet, some of the women felt unable to fuse their horizon with the one of the feminist psalm, because they could not perceive it as authentic Jewish liturgy. An aversion to anthropomorphism in reference to God was also observed.

Conclusively, we might say that the variety of comments and reactions of the Jewish women to gender issues in their religious texts prove the notion of every reading being a productive and not only reproductive process as suggested by the founders of ontological hermeneutics. Besides, Dilthey's notion that in the humanities the process of "understanding" is preferred to empirical "explanation" seems to be correct as well.

Still, it must be conceded, that the reason for the received results may be the prevalently liberal orientation of the interviewees. A somewhat different response would be probable in an orthodox setting.

6.2.2 Christianity

6.2.2.1 *The Questionnaire*

Question 1: *To which religious tradition do you belong?*

All the twenty study participants declared themselves as Christians.

Question 2: *Your denomination?*

The interviewees belong to various Christian denominations as presented in the following table:

Denomination	
Protestant	12
Catholic	3
Eastern Orthodox	4
Pentecostal	1
Total	20

Question 3: *Are you religious?*

Denomination	Protestant	Catholic	Eastern Orthodox	Pentecostal	Total	Age	Nationality
<i>Answer</i>							
<i>Yes</i>	9	3	3	1	16	20s: 3 30s: 7 50s: 3 60s: 3	Norwegian: 10 Slovenian: 6
<i>No</i>	1	0	0	0	1	50s: 1	Norwegian: 1
<i>Partly</i>	1	0	1	0	2	20s: 1 50s: 1	Norwegian: 1 Slovenian: 1
<i>Not so much</i>	1	0	0	0	1	40s: 1	Norwegian: 1

Total	12	3	4	1	20		
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Most of the Christian study participants claim to be religious, 16 out of 20. Two women are partly religious and one replied “Not so much”. Only one participant stated that she was not religious. There are no remarkable deviations due to the age or nationality of women in reference to this question.

Question 4: Do you practise your religion?

Denomination	Protestant	Catholic	Eastern Orthodox	Pentecostal	Total	Age	Nationality
<i>Answer</i>							
<i>Yes</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>20s: 3 30s: 6 40s: 1 50s: 4 60s: 3</i>	<i>Norwegian: 12 Slovenian: 5</i>
<i>No</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>30s: 1</i>	<i>Slovenian: 1</i>
<i>If I have to</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>20s: 1</i>	<i>Slovenian: 1</i>
<i>Not so much</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>50s: 1</i>	<i>Norwegian: 1</i>
Total	12	3	4	1	20		

An even greater number of Christian interviewees claimed to be practising their religion. There was only one negative response to this question and two women gave less explicit answers. Neither age nor nationality seems to be affecting the reaction of the Christian women to this particular question.

Question 5: Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Denomination	Protestant	Catholic	Eastern Orthodox	Pentecostal	Total	Age	Nationality
<i>Answer</i>							
<i>Yes</i>	12	3	4	1	20	20s: 4 30s: 7 40s: 1 50s: 5 60s: 3	Norwegian: 13 Slovenian: 7
<i>No</i>	0	0	0	0	0		
Total	12	3	4	1	20		

As regards the equality with men within their respective religious communities all Christian study participants replied that they felt equal. However, some additional remarks were made by some, e. g., “Yes, in theory, not completely in practice” or “Still, sometimes practice deviates from Christ’s ideals”. Interestingly, two women offered completely opposite views in regard to their feeling of equality in religion. One of them stated that she felt equal because she reads the Bible selectively, rejecting the misogynic elements. The other, however, felt that the Bible’s egalitarianism was undermined in practice by Christian communities.

The unanimous response of the Christian respondents indicates that the feeling of gender equality in Christianity is prevalent regardless of denomination, age or nationality.

Question 6: Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

Denomination	Protestant	Catholic	Eastern Orthodox	Pentecostal	Total	Age	Nationality
<i>Answer</i>							
<i>Yes</i>	1	0	2	0	3	20s: 2 50s: 1	Norwegian: 1 Slovenian: 2

<i>No</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>20s: 2 30s: 7 40s: 1 50s: 4 60s: 3</i>	<i>Norwegian: 12 Slovenian: 5</i>
Total	12	3	4	1	20		

Upon being asked whether there is anything in their religion that they find hard to accept, most women replied negatively. There were some comments made explaining that there was nothing unacceptable in their religious setting and implying that they were aware of woman-degrading practice among some other Christian denominations. Two women answered that they were bothered by the fact that women had no access to church due to menstruation. Significantly, they belong to the Eastern Orthodox Church. This practice is not common among other Churches today. There are again opposite views expressed regarding the Scriptures and the treatment of women. One of the participants finds women-unfriendliness in the Bible, while another refers to the Bible when criticising the negative treatment of women in Christianity. Interestingly, this participant, too, as one of the Jewish participants, draws a line between the “awful” treatment of women in her religion throughout history and the way women are treated in some Muslim contexts. She finds it most upsetting that women have been ignored in Christianity for such a long time despite the fact that it had been women who witnessed the basic doctrine of Christianity, the Resurrection.

Responses to this question are evenly divided among the different age groups and nationalities. Even though the Slovenian women seem to have more problems, this has probably little to do with their nationality, but rather with their eastern orthodox denominations.

Question 7: Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

Denomination	Protestant	Catholic	Eastern Orthodox	Pentecostal	Total	Age	Nationality
<i>Answer</i>							
<i>Yes</i>	2	1	2	0	5	20s: 2 30s:2 60s: 1	Norwegian: 2 Slovenian: 3
<i>No</i>	7	1	2	1	11	20s: 2 30s: 4 40s: 1 50s: 3 60s: 1	Norwegian: 8 Slovenian: 3
<i>They try</i>	1	1	0	0	2	30s: 1 50s: 1	Norwegian: 1 Slovenian: 1
<i>Not always</i>	1	0	0	0	1	50s: 1	Norwegian: 1
<i>They mediate God's word</i>	1	0	0	0	1	60s: 1	Norwegian: 1
Total	12	3	4	1	20		

For most of the interviewed Christian women religious institutions and scholars are not crucial in their religious life and for their faith. What is crucial is the personal relationship to God and faith expressed through good deeds and behaviour. One participant even said: “Some people say that Christianity survived despite the Church.” While she acknowledges the role of scholars for the interpretation of the Bible, she also points out that they have made many mistakes over time and that it is necessary to question their interpretations. She also emphasises the role of female theologians, believing that if it was not for them, there would have been no redeeming Bible interpretations and “women would not have obtained the position they have in Christianity today”.

Interestingly the Slovenian women seem to assign more power and authority to religious institutions and scholars (3 out of 7) than the Norwegian respondents (only 2 out of 13). The variable of age does not affect the women's responses regarding this question.

Question 8: Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Denomination	Protestant	Catholic	Eastern Orthodox	Pentecostal	Total	Age	Nationality
<i>Answer</i>							
<i>Yes</i>	6	0	1	1	8	20s: 1 40s: 1 60s: 1 30s: 3 50s: 2	Norwegian: 7 Slovenian: 1
<i>No</i>	5	2	3	0	10	20s: 3 50s: 2 30s: 3 60s: 2	Norwegian: 5 Slovenian: 5
<i>Sometimes</i>	1	1	0	0	2	30s: 1 50s: 1	Norwegian: 1 Slovenian: 1
Total	12	3	4	1	20		

The question whether there are any contradictions between theory and practice in their religion regarding the treatment of women divided the study participants. There were eight positive and ten negative answers. A number of interviewees see the reluctance towards female ministers as contradictory to Christian egalitarianism. An interesting answer was given by a participant who believes that the original Christian theory based on the Scripture is absolutely egalitarian. She finds the basis for some human rights in the Bible referring to Paul's words that there is no difference between Jews and gentiles, men and women, free men and slaves. She even adds that if it were otherwise she could not believe in the Christian God.

The majority of the Norwegian study participants are aware of certain contradictions between religious theory and practice, whereas almost all the Slovenian participants, 5 out of 7, are not. This data is interesting considering the fact that these women belong to the Catholic and Eastern

Orthodox communities, which are known as more women-unfriendly than the Norwegian protestant one. Reasons for such a response may lie in the fact that the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox informants are convinced of Christianity's misogyny and believe that the women-unfriendly practices in their communities are in accordance with that. The Protestant participants, on the other hand, used to a more liberal and egalitarian interpretation of religious texts, still feel that the Christian ideals regarding women are not reached in practice.

Question 9: What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Denomination	Protestant	Catholic	Eastern Orthodox	Pentecostal	Total	Age	Nationality
<i>Answer</i>							
<i>Male</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	6	<i>20s: 2 40s: 1 60s: 1</i> <i>30s: 1 50s: 1</i>	<i>Norwegian: 4 Slovenian: 2</i>
<i>Female</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	1	<i>50s: 1</i>	<i>Norwegian: 1</i>
<i>Beyond Gender</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	9	<i>20s: 2 50s: 1</i> <i>30s: 5 60s: 1</i>	<i>Norwegian: 4 Slovenian: 5</i>
<i>Male and Female</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	1	<i>60s: 1</i>	<i>Norwegian: 1</i>
<i>Male and Beyond Gender</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	2	<i>30s: 1 50s: 1</i>	<i>Norwegian: 2</i>
<i>Made Male</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	1	<i>50s: 1</i>	<i>Norwegian: 1</i>
Total	12	3	4	1	20		

The views of the Christian women regarding the gender of God are diverse. Even though the majority believe that God is beyond gender, quite a few consider God to be male. Some answered “Male and beyond gender” and some “If any then male”. One of the participants admitted that even though she believes that God is beyond gender, she gets a male image in her head when she thinks of God. The reason for that, according to her, might be the maleness of Christ or the historical dominance of men. Another participant, who believes that God is beyond gender and that gender is irrelevant in reference to God, thinks that “God has been made male in the course of Christian history”. Then she adds: “Perhaps unjustly so because there are many female images of God in the Old and the New Testament”.

The majority of the Slovenian respondents believe that God is beyond gender and the rest of them that God is male. The Norwegian participants, on the other hand, came with a variety of responses to this question.

Any remarkable deviations due to age could not be observed.

Question 10: If God is not male why then, in your opinion, are male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

Denomination	Protestant	Catholic	Eastern Orthodox	Pentecostal	Total	Age	Nationality
<i>Answer</i>							
<i>Linguistic Reasons</i>	0	1	0	0	1	30s: 1	Slovenian: 1
<i>Male Writers</i>	1	0	0	0	1	50s: 1	Norwegian: 1
<i>Patriarchal Society</i>	3	2	1	1	7	20s: 1 30s: 3 60s: 1	40s: 1 50s: 1 Norwegian: 4 Slovenian: 3
<i>Linguistic Reasons and Patriarchal Society</i>	2	0	1	0	3	20s: 1 30s: 2	Norwegian: 2 Slovenian: 1

<i>Limitations of Language and Male Writers</i>	1	0	0	0	1	50s: 1	Norwegian: 1
<i>Biblical References</i>	3	0	0	0	3	50s: 2 60s: 1	Norwegian: 3
<i>No Answer</i> ⁴⁶	2	0	2	0	4	20s: 2 30s: 1 60s: 1	Slovenian: 2 Norwegian: 2
Total	12	3	4	1	20		

The responses offered to this question by the Christian women focus on three primary reasons for the predominantly male language used for God: the patriarchal society, the male writers of the Scripture and the limitations of human language. It is, though, noticeable that more women blame the patriarchal view of male as superior and the male transmitters of the Word for this phenomenon. Only one participant considers language to be the only reason for the use of male pronouns for God. She pointed out that it is a linguistic rule to use male pronouns for linguistic items with unclear or unknown gender. Some women referred to the Bible, where God is portrayed as a male figure, or pointed to Jesus' maleness in their attempt to find an answer to this question. Those women who expressed the view that God in fact is male did not answer this question.

The age and nationality did not play a decisive role in the responses given to this question.

6.2.2.2 *Conclusion: The Questionnaire*

The results of the questionnaire conducted among Christian women indicate that they feel absolutely equal to the male adherents of Christianity, even though some are aware of the difference between the ideal and the practice. Interestingly, for some the Bible is the reason for female subordination, while for others it professes equality among sexes. The Christian women, in contradiction to the Jewish women, do not find much to criticise in reference to the position of

⁴⁶ These study participants answered in the previous question that they consider God to be male.

women in their religion. A huge majority claimed that there is nothing that a woman in the Christian setting might find hard to accept. They are quite outspoken when it comes to the role of religious institutions and scholars in their lives. Namely, most of the Christian study participants do not depend on institutionalised religion and prefer a personal relationship to God and a personal interpretation of religious texts. This attitude explains, to a certain extent, their view that there is nothing in their religion they cannot accept, since they interpret the religious texts according to their beliefs. As far as the contradiction between theory and practice in terms of gender is concerned, the Christian study participants are evenly divided. Beside female ordination, they seem not to be able to find any tensions between the Christian theory and practice. This shows, in my opinion, that Christianity has been able, at least in the modern Western setting, where the interviewees come from, either to adapt the Scriptures to the modern egalitarian norms or to find support for equality between the sexes in the Scripture; speaking in Gadamer's terms, the horizons seem to have been fused to a great extent. The view of the gender of God among Christian women, in comparison to that held by the Jewish study participants, is not so univocal. Even though the percentage of those who consider God male is not very high it indicates that the gender of God within Christianity is controversial, as suggested earlier in the thesis (page 82). The reason for that might lie in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the explicit maleness of Christ. Nonetheless, the majority of the women felt that either the patriarchal society and the male writers of the Scriptures or the limitations of language are to be blamed for the maleness of God in linguistic terms and not God's unequivocal maleness.

6.2.2.3 *The Christian Texts*

1. Tertullian on Women

The excerpt written by one of the Church Fathers and most prominent Christian theologians, Tertullian, was more or less completely discarded by the Christian study participants. They did not only deprive it of any authority and relevance, but they also doubted its theological justification. Most of the women expressed the view that this passage only reflects the historical and social circumstances, and some described Tertullian as an extremist and a woman-hater. Moreover, his statements are considered as insulting, but still only personal and without general implications for Christian women of today. As for the lack of theological relevance, the women made the point that the Creation account can be interpreted differently. While some explain that this is the old covenant and that Christians live according to the new covenant dominated by

Christ's revolutionary ideas about women, among other things, others point to the fact of Jesus' role as saviour. According to these women, it is one of the basic doctrines of Christianity that Jesus atoned for the sins of all, women and men alike. Besides, as they note, the whole idea behind the Great Flood, the baptism, death and resurrection is to wash away the humanity's guilt. One participant offered a different interpretation of the Fall – not as the destruction but the birth of mankind and free will.

A very useful opinion was expressed by an interviewee who saw this passage as a good example to use religion to justify the oppression of women: "To collectively accuse women of murdering the Son of God gives a golden possibility to punish and oppress women". She even draws a parallel to anti-Semitic attitudes, according to which all Jews should be punished because Jesus was murdered by Jews. This phenomenon was discussed by Amina Wadud, who remarked that it is easy to find textual support and evidence for already existing presumptions (page 73).

2. Paul's Epistle

A very similar reaction was obtained in connection with the passage by Paul. Even though it is a part of the Bible, Christian women do not seem to accept Paul's words as universal directives. They, almost without exception, point to the fact that these words were written in a different time and place and can only be understood as relevant for a specific group of people at a certain point in time. Some interviewees also emphasised that they accept Jesus and not Paul as the authority, and Jesus never expressed such women-debasing attitudes. On the contrary he elevated and improved the status of women. There were also those who commented on the injunction for women to cover their heads as being something unnecessary, since such banalities as clothes do not matter to God. Some also emphasised that further in the same Epistle (11: 11-12) Paul corrects himself to a certain degree (see pages 56-57) and that such views are overshadowed by the Christian idea of universal love (Matthew, 22: 34-39) and equality among all (Galatians 3: 28).

3. The Feminist Version of the Lord's Prayer

The feminist prayer is the one that caused the greatest variety of reactions, from those completely rejecting this form of prayer to those applauding the exaltation of the female imagery. Beside these two opposite views there were those who believe that a simple change of the gender changes nothing, a gender-neutral version would be more acceptable. Similarly, some of the

women replied that the gender of God is completely irrelevant, since God is so much more than that. One participant commented that there is no need to make God into a woman or genderless since the image of a loving, caring and forgiving father fits best. Several study participants, who did not object to the feminist version of the prayer, added that it could not replace the familiar Lord's Prayer, which was commended by Jesus. One woman who approved of the feminist poem reacted negatively to anthropomorphic imagery in reference to the Divine in general. She criticised the Christian tendency to reduce God to something human and emphasised the necessity for Christianity to make God not only less "man" but less human.

Some women could not accept the notion of a God who is "within us" because it makes God less special and valuable than the Father who is above and outside of us in heaven. This is the same argument traditionalists use when trying to explain the impossibility of a female God. Namely, they claim that the God of Genesis created the world and did not give birth to it, which, according to them, proves God's maleness. The view of God as Mother would imply that God was a part of us and support a pantheistic world view, something that is in opposition to Christianity. Feminists, however, as discussed earlier, tend to imagine God as a part of the creation and not in hierarchical terms. In accordance with that, one study participant commented that the original Lord's Prayer was full of testosterone while the feminist one had more oestrogen.

Similarly to the Jewish women, some Christian study participants preferred the traditional prayer due to a certain feeling of familiarity. For them the male imagery used for the Divine has nothing to do with gender but with a long tradition which sometimes can be irrational. The figure of the Father is acceptable as long as it denotes love and care associated with God.

6.2.2.4 *Conclusion: The Christian Texts*

The reaction to the religious texts by the Christian women shows that most of them are able to ignore the misogynist elements in their written religious heritage. They mostly use the tactic of fusing their present horizon with the ancient one by putting the text in its historical and social context. The atomistic view of language, in which words have their meaning regardless of context is clearly not employed by them. Furthermore, they refer to the textual context of the passage from the Bible, referring to other passages which offer different views of gender. Besides, they question the authorial intent and do not divinise the authors of the Bible. They also approach the texts according to the standards of the reader-response theory, thereby offering their personal

interpretation of, for example, the Biblical account of humanity's Fall. They did not accept the "textualisation of misogyny" and did not allow the traditional misogynic views expressed by Tertullian or Paul to overshadow the original message of the Christian Scripture as expressed by Jesus.

The female imagery in reference to the Divine was not unanimously approved of, not, however, because the Christian women consider God exclusively male. They used theological knowledge and criticised the anthropomorphic descriptions of God, regardless of gender.

All in all, the Christian women tried to understand all the three texts and to interpret them not only according to their personal attitudes, but theological knowledge as well. They seem able to apply the "hermeneutics of remembrance and suspicion", as suggested by Schüssler Fiorenza, accepting the texts as a part of their religious tradition, but at same time scrutinising their meaning and implications. This is the so-called dialogical-hermeneutical method. There were even attempts to interpret the religious texts in a prophetic way, as proposed by Redford Ruether, as one woman commented on all the three texts:

The Bible and religious texts should be interpreted with benevolence for life, nature and people around us. Religion should not be used to judge others and make life difficult. Each and every person should concentrate on showing and doing the good. This would make our world a better place to live in, also "in the name of religion".

6.2.3 Islam

6.2.3.1 The Questionnaire

Question 1: *To which religious tradition do you belong?*

All the twenty study participants declared themselves as Muslims.

Question 2: *Your denomination?*

All the interviewees belong to the Sunni denomination. This fact is just a coincidence since, as already mentioned, the choice of participant was random.

Question 3: Are you religious?

All the Muslim study participants answered this question positively.

Question 4: Do you practise your religion?

<i>Answer</i>		<i>Age</i>	<i>Nationality</i>
<i>Yes</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>Teens: 1 20s: 12 30s: 4</i>	<i>Austrian: 7 Bosnian: 10</i>
<i>Partly</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>20s: 1</i>	<i>Bosnian: 1</i>
<i>Basic things</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>20s: 1</i>	<i>Bosnian: 1</i>
<i>More intensely recently</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>20s: 1</i>	<i>Austrian: 1</i>
Total	20		

These results show that none of the Muslim study participants could be described as non-practising. The great majority practise their religion, 17 out of 20, and the rest practise Islam at least to a certain degree. Responses are evenly divided among the different age groups and nationalities.

Question 5: Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

<i>Answer</i>		<i>Age</i>	<i>Nationality</i>
<i>Yes</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>Teens: 1 20s: 9 30s: 2</i>	<i>Austrian: 4 Bosnian: 8</i>

<i>Not always</i>	1	20s: 1	Bosnian: 1
<i>Yes in theory, not in practice</i>	3	20s: 1 30s: 2	Austrian: 1 Bosnian: 2
<i>I feel privileged</i>	4	20s: 4	Austrian: 3 Bosnian: 1
Total	20		

Most of the Muslim interviewees feel equal to the male Muslims and a certain number even replied that they feel privileged to men in Islam. Especially the Austrian women seem to be aware of these privileges. Interestingly, some women feel equal in theory but not in practice. This response will become even clearer in question 7. Among the positive answers one woman added that it is important to know your rights, probably also implying that the Muslim practice is deviating from the ideals.

No remarkable influence of the variables of age and nationality can be noticed in respect to this question.

Question 6: *Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?*

<i>Answer</i>		<i>Age</i>	<i>Nationality</i>
<i>Yes</i>	4	20s: 4	Austrian: 2 Bosnian: 2
<i>No</i>	13	Teens: 1 20s: 9 30s: 3	Austrian: 4 Bosnian: 9
<i>Not in theory, yes in practice</i>	3	20s: 2 30s: 1	Austrian: 2 Bosnian: 1

Total	20		
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Even though most of the interviewed Muslim women do not have difficulties accepting anything in their religion, quite a few limited their view only to Muslim theory. In reality they found a variety of unacceptable practices, e. g.: female circumcision, total covering of women, no right to vote or receive education, passivity and lack of education among Muslim women, devaluation of the role of the woman, more freedom for men. Even among these who answered positively to this question cultural influences and men misunderstanding religion were named as difficult. Neither of these belongs to Islam as religion but rather to the practising community. One participant said that she found polygamy hard to accept. Muslim women seem to be very much aware of the incompatibility between the way Muslims interpret and practise their religion and the Islamic ideals.

The responses regarding this question are evenly divided among the age-groups and nationalities.

Question 7: Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

<i>Answer</i>		<i>Age</i>	<i>Nationality</i>
<i>No</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>Teens: 1 20s: 11 30s: 3</i>	<i>Austrian: 7 Bosnian: 8</i>
<i>Yes</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>20s: 1 30s: 1</i>	<i>Bosnian: 2</i>
<i>Yes, but not exclusively</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>20s: 1</i>	<i>Bosnian: 1</i>
<i>They try</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>20s: 2</i>	<i>Austrian: 1 Bosnian: 1</i>

Total	20		
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The majority of the Muslim study participants do not consider the religious institutions and scholars as their absolute authorities for understanding religion. They look upon them as human beings representing other human beings. Some commented that God does not need representatives and that it was not God’s intention for humans to represent Him either. There were also those who referred to the Qur’an as their only religious authority. Only two out of 20 Muslim interviewees rely on the religious institutions and scholars in religious issues. These results show that Muslim women, similarly to the Jewish and Christian study participants, see religion as a rather individual matter and are aware of the limitations of human beings who interpret religion. This attitude gives the women an opportunity to interpret religious text according to their own beliefs.

The results also indicate that Bosnian women are more likely to trust the religious institutions than the Austrian ones. Age, on the other hand, does not seem to be of any importance regarding this question.

Question 8: Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

<i>Answer</i>		<i>Age</i>	<i>Nationality</i>
<i>Yes</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>Teens: 1 20s: 12 30s: 4</i>	<i>Austrian: 6 Bosnian: 11</i>
<i>No</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>20s: 3</i>	<i>Austrian: 2 Bosnian: 1</i>
Total	20		

The results arrived at in the question concerning the contradiction between theory and practice in terms of gender are most interesting. Almost all the Muslim study participants gave a positive

answer to this question and even intensified their answers by adding “a lot”, “very much” and “very often”. Among the reasons for their views they mentioned the attempt to adapt religion to people’s needs, the fact that even though equal in theory, women are often marginalized in Muslim societies, the passivity and lack of education among women and the devaluation of the role of women. Such a reaction seems to indicate that within the Muslim context the practice seems to deviate from the theory to a very high degree.

The feeling that in reality Muslim women are not treated according to the egalitarian Islamic principles seems to be even more explicit among the Bosnian women. The age of the participants, however, did not affect the responses to this question.

Question 9: What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

<i>Answer</i>		<i>Age</i>	<i>Nationality</i>
<i>Beyond Gender</i>	18	<i>Teens: 1 20s: 14 30s: 3</i>	<i>Austrian: 8 Bosnian:10</i>
<i>Not Sure, between male and beyond gender</i>	1	<i>20s: 1</i>	<i>Bosnian: 1</i>
<i>Do not know</i>	1	<i>30s: 1</i>	<i>Bosnian: 1</i>
Total	20		

When it comes to the gender of God, the response of the Muslim interviewees is almost unanimous. All, except for two women, replied that they consider God to be beyond gender. One woman claims not to know the gender of God and another could not decide between male and beyond gender. Some made references to Allah’s attributes according to which God is beyond every human category. The Muslim answers to this question are not surprising, since the doctrine of God’s oneness, *tawhid*, is the most prominent one in this Abrahamic religion as stated earlier (page 86).

The Austrian study participants reacted unanimously to this question expressing the view that God is beyond gender, while some of the Bosnian women showed a certain degree of uncertainty. The variable of age did not play a significant role.

Question 10: *If God is not male why then, in your opinion, are male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?*

<i>Answer</i>		<i>Age</i>	<i>Nationality</i>
<i>Linguistic Reasons</i>	8	20s: 8	Austrian: 5 Bosnian: 3
<i>Patriarchal Society</i>	5	20s: 5	Austrian: 2 Bosnian: 3
<i>Linguistic Reasons and Patriarchal Society</i>	1	30s: 1	Bosnian: 1
<i>Do not know</i>	1	30s: 1	Bosnian: 1
<i>Easiest Reference</i>	1	30s: 1	Bosnian: 1
<i>Irrelevant</i>	3	Teens: 1 20s: 1 30s: 1	Bosnian: 3
<i>No Answer</i>	1	20s: 1	Austrian: 1
Total	20		

A significant number of the Muslim women are aware of the fact that the reason for the use of male pronouns for the Divine can be found in the original language of the Revelation, Arabic.

Still, several women hold the male interpreters and the male social domination responsible for that. Some women expressed the view that language is unable to describe the Divine, others that the gender of God is something they never thought about. The belief that the gender of God is irrelevant was also expressed by some participants. For one interviewee the reason for the use of male pronouns is the fact that it is the easiest for people to refer to. She might be referring to the grammatical male gender of the noun God. One woman answered that she does not know the answer to this question and another made no comment at all.

The number of Muslim study participants familiar with the linguistic aspect of God's predominant maleness is quite high. Especially the Austrian participants show a high level of awareness of this phenomenon. The reason for that lies partly in the fact that some of these women have Arabic as their mother tongue or are of Arabic origin, and partly in their participation in a Muslim youth organization in Austria (MJÖ – Muslimische Jugend Österreich), which is very active in educating its members in religious issues. Particular emphasis is made on equal participation and treatment of both genders.

The age of the participants, as in all the previous responses of the Muslim interviewees, did not affect the results in this question.

6.2.3.2 Conclusion: The Questionnaire

The results of the questionnaire in the Muslim setting indicate that Muslim women, as their Jewish and Christian sisters, feel equal to the male adherents of their religion. They do, however, hold the view that certain practices regarding women within the Muslim communities can be criticised. For most Muslim women religious authorities are not institutions or scholars, but the Word of God and their relationship to God. Their recognition that interpretations of the Word of God are not flawless since they come from human beings, opens the door for a re-reading and re-interpretation of the religious texts, which is in fact in contradiction to the phenomenon called "Closing of the Gates of *Ijtihad*", referred to in Chapter 3 (page 28). Especially interesting is the fact that so many Muslim study participants notice many contradictions between the Islamic theory and practice regarding women. Their reactions are in accordance with Amina Wadud's remark that most Muslims consider Islam as a completely egalitarian ideology and even emphasise the respect and reverence paid to the role of women in their religion, but the reality of Muslim women gives a completely different impression. The reason for that lies in a process in

which the tradition and culture of certain societies overrule the primary religious texts, as elaborated by Hans Kueng.

The results obtained in reference to the gender of God prove that most Muslim women do not perceive God as male despite the predominantly masculine language used for the Divine in Islam. The *tawhidic* paradigm and the description of God in Islam as something unlike anything created are the most probable reasons for this perception. A fair number of Muslim women are familiar with the fact that the language of the Revelation, Arabic, lacks the neutral gender, which is replaced by the male gender. Still, a significant number of them believe that the social male dominance and the perception of power and authority as male characteristics are also responsible for the linguistic masculinisation of God. This shows that the Muslim women, though quite convinced of a God beyond gender, sense a certain male notion. Barlas referred to this paradox as “the semiotic collapse”, whereby the grammatical gender of the signifier, the word “God”, is confused with the natural gender of the signified, God.

6.2.3.3 *The Islamic Texts*

1. *The Hadith*

The reactions of the Muslim study participants to this, at least at first sight, quite misogynic *hadith* were very diverse. For the first time I faced rejection to comment on a religious text. Namely, one study participant replied that she did not want to comment because this *hadith* was unknown to her and another that it is difficult to interpret this *hadith* without a suitable reference work which would take into consideration the historical, geographical and cultural circumstances. Some interviewees said that a good knowledge of Arabic is necessary in order to interpret this *hadith*. There was also one who made no comment whatsoever. Though not very numerous, these reactions exemplify, in my view, two phenomena among Muslims in general. The first is the lack of individual approach to religious texts, and the second is a certain amount of scepticism towards translated religious texts.

Still, one participant, who believes that it is the task of *hadith*-scholars to comment and elaborate on the Prophet’s sayings and actions, regrets that in the past it was exclusively men who interpreted the religious texts. This, according to her, allowed cultural patriarchal ideas to expand among Muslims. In her view, it is one of the greatest challenges of the future to examine the

relevance of the century old scholarly interpretations and to intensify gender-neutral research in the Islamic context.

A number of interviewees doubted the authenticity of this *hadith* and said they could not imagine that the Prophet would say something derogatory about women. The reason for that is that Muhammad treated women with respect and love. This is also emphasised by the comments of some other women, who pointed to the fact that there were many more *ahadith* which state equality between the sexes and elevate the status of women.

For some Muslim women it was unnecessary to add anything to this *hadith* since the Prophet explains everything very well. They, however, added that this *hadith* does not imply any form of degradation of women because of the overall egalitarian message of Islam. The point was made by some interviewees that this cannot be accepted as a general rule and that the Prophet must have been addressing a specific group of women.

There were, interestingly, also those who believed that the description of women in this *hadith* was absolutely correct. They supported the theory of biological reductionism and claimed that women are indeed emotional by definition, not capable to make objective judgments and that these traits are especially intensified during menstruation and after child birth. They even added that women were often greedy and quarrelsome. It was also remarked that women and men are different by nature, but that differentiation does not necessarily imply subordination, because the roles of the sexes are complementary in Islam. Such views bear a certain similarity to the view of gender equality proposed by some of the Jewish Orthodox study participants.

2. “The Verse of the Abuse”: Qur’an 4: 34

As far as the Qur’anic verse which allegedly authorises husbands to beat their wives is concerned, a number of approaches were observed. Some Muslim study participants simply discarded the most usual translation of the verb *daraba* as “beat” and suggested other options like “leave” or “divorce”. Some noticed that it would be illogical to expect from a woman who ignores verbal advice and separation to react and change her behaviour after being physically punished. Reference was also made to the fact that Muhammad never hit his wives. One study participant, whose mother tongue is Arabic, remarked that this *ayah* has a very woman friendly tone in its original and referred to the textual context in which it is stated that husbands must take care of

their wives and that they are financially responsible for them. It was stated by some interviewees that there are plenty of other *ayat* and *ahadith* which demand a fair treatment of women and establish gender equality.

Surprisingly, there were also those who expressed the view that this is a perfect way of solving problems in marriage. It is, though, important to proceed gradually and not abuse the limitations set by the Islamic texts, which explain that the blow should only be weak and symbolic.

3. The Sufi Poem: Allah as a Woman

The majority of Muslim study participants expressed a feeling of strangeness upon being confronted with the female metaphors used for Allah. A significant number of the women did not approve of such a presentation of Allah; however, not because of the female imagery, but because of the anthropomorphisms. Even those who explicitly stated that they did not mind the female aspects emphasised the fact that Allah has no gender and cannot be imagined by human beings. Many Muslim women had difficulties recognizing that the poet was addressing God, because they read it as a love poem. Some criticised the use of such metaphors based on the Islamic axiom that about Allah may only be said what He has said about Himself.

An interesting perspective was offered by a woman of Arabic origin that she prefers the Arabic word Allah, used by Arab Christians, as well, for God, because the Arabic term contains no gender bias. Interestingly, Allah is a noun that has no plural form in Arabic either.

There were, however, some clearly approving comments regarding the Sufi way of addressing God. These comments show an understanding by the participants for the symbolic language used in Sufism which, if interpreted literally, may sound alienating and even blasphemous.

6.2.3.4 Conclusion: The Islamic Texts

The responses by Muslim women in the questionnaire were very often similar to those offered by their Christian and Jewish co-participants. However, their reactions to the three religious texts differ in various respects.

The Muslim women seem to divinise the authors of the Holy texts to a much higher degree. When discussing the controversial *ayah* 4: 34, they either claim that certain parts have been translated or interpreted in a wrong way or, what is astonishing, accept physical punishment of wives by their husbands. None of the participants discarded the Qur'anic text as obsolete and irrelevant for our time and circumstances, as was the case with other two religions. The author was less divinised in the case of the *hadith*, e. g. some women questioned the authenticity of this *hadith* based on the fact that the attitudes expressed therein do not concord with the egalitarian message of Islam. Still, most of the women accepted this *hadith*. Among those women there were some who toned down the misogyny by explaining that the Prophet was addressing a particular group of women, but there were also those who accepted this woman-unfriendly descriptions as completely appropriate.

Besides, a higher awareness of linguistic aspects regarding gender issues within religion is observable among the Muslim interviewees. They very often mention the fact that translation affects and changes the original message. Consequently, they hesitate to comment on the translated excerpts or refer to religious scholars for interpretations. The reason for that is, partly, the fact that some of the participants are of Arabic origin or have a better knowledge of the Arabic language. However, as mentioned previously in this thesis, Muslims are generally suspicious of translations due to the fact that they only consider the original Arabic version of Qur'an to be the authentic Word of God.

There was also a higher degree of reluctance towards the female presentation of God, since this is considered unorthodox.

Muslim respondents seem to be less applying the hermeneutic methods of the fusion of horizons, the reader response theory and hermeneutics of suspicion. Moreover, when Muslim women referred to the context in their elaborations, they mostly meant the immediate context or the remote context (Beekman and Callow 1974: 49), which are frequently used methods in Islamic hermeneutics. They never mentioned the cultural context which was the prevalent point of reference for the Jewish and Christian interviewees. Even though they actively engage in the interpretation of the religious texts, they thereby mostly rely on opinions of religious scholars and are afraid of offering a completely individual view. This is in fact contradictory to the response by Muslim women in the questionnaire, which indicated that they consider religion and the relationship to God as not dependent on institutions and scholars.

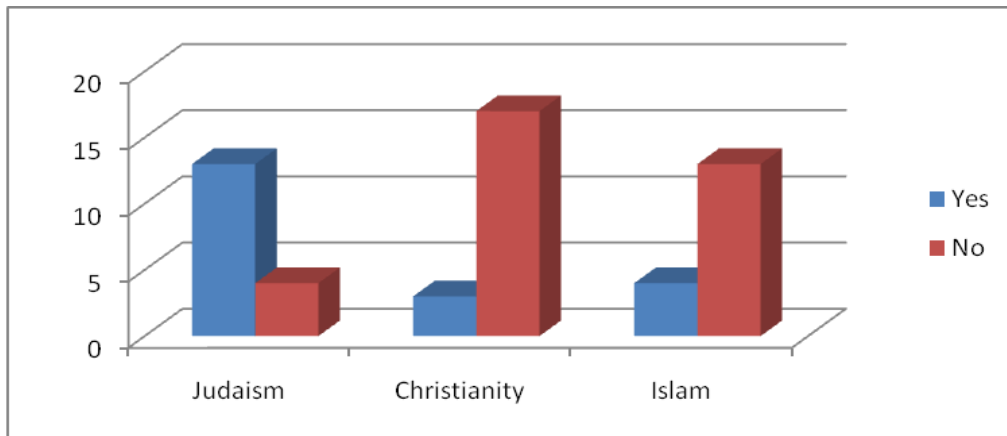
The reason for this different approach by Muslim women lies in their belief that each and every word in the Qur'an is spoken by God, and is thus universally and eternally valid. The words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad, *ahadith*, are also considered to be inspired by God and thus inerrant as long as their authenticity is confirmed. Hence, Muslim women fear that any criticism of the religious texts would amount to blasphemy. Another reason might be that Muslim women, as well as Muslim men indeed, are deeply convinced and proud of the image of Islam as an egalitarian and woman-liberating ideology. Thus, when confronted with derogatory views within the Muslim written tradition, they either conclude that they do not possess enough theological knowledge to explain it or they simply accept the misogyny as a part of the Divine plan.

6.2.4 *A Comparison of the Responses based on the Answers to the Questionnaire*

Although the study participants reacted similarly to many of the questions in the questionnaire their responses diverged at certain questions. This diversion was highly noticeable regarding their answers to questions 6, 8, 9 and 10, which will be discussed below.

6.2.4.1 Question 6: *Is there anything in your religion that you find hard to accept?*

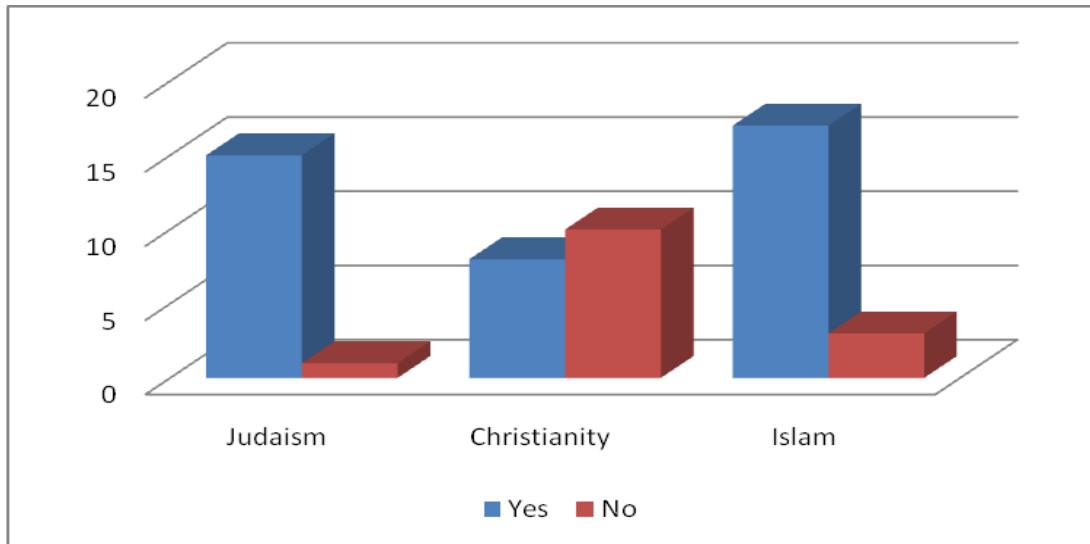
Even though all the three groups responded similarly to the fifth question referring to gender equality in their respective religions, it was interesting to notice that in the following question the Jewish women offered a response which was very much at variance with the Christian and Muslim ones. Despite the fact that the majority of the Jewish interviewees, in line with the Christian and Muslim ones, claimed to feel equal to Jewish men, they found many things in their religion which they did not approve of as women. Their Christian and Muslim sisters, on the other hand, seemed not to have difficulties of this sort. The following diagram depicts the differing points of view:



Such differences can be accounted for by analysing the responses further and by considering the women's reactions to the religious texts as well. The Christian women often stated that they feel equal in the Norwegian Lutheran setting, while the Jewish women criticised the misogynic practices regardless of denomination. Even though they, for instance, belong to the liberal denomination, which has discarded many women-degrading traditions, they criticise women-degrading practices as they view them as Jewish. As regards the Muslim respondents, their responses should be seen in the light of their overall reaction to misogynic elements within Islamic texts. They are convinced of the egalitarian message of the Islamic theory and simply ignore or deny any woman-unfriendliness in their religion based on this conviction.

6.2.4.2 Question 8: *Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?*

The next question that reflects differing views among the religious groups is the question which treats the possible contradictions between theory and practice regarding gender equality in religious settings. Here the Jewish and the Muslim respondents offered a concordant response. These two groups show a high level of awareness of contradictions between theory and practice in reference to gender issues. This awareness is even higher in the Muslim setting. The Christian women, on the contrary, seem not to be affected by such contradictions to such a great extent. However, the number of Christian women who responded positively to this question must not be neglected either. The differing reactions are presented in the form of a diagram:

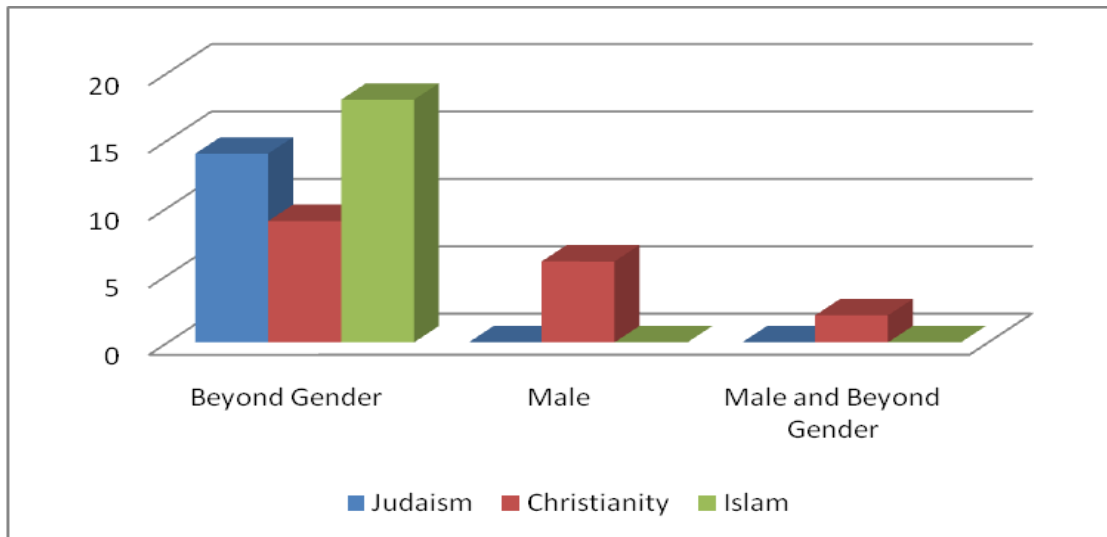


The reason for these differences lies probably in the fact that in theory both Judaism and Islam ascribe high qualities to women, especially to their roles as mothers. The practice, however, does not reflect the theoretical equality. The contradictory behaviour is probably the most obvious in Muslim settings, as stated by Muslim feminists and the Muslim study participants, as well. Even though most of the Muslim women feel equal, and some even privileged, to men in Islam, they notice that the religious practice diminishes their role. The response offered by the Christian women can be interpreted in two different ways. Either the Christian women are aware of the woman-unfriendliness of their religion and feel that reality fits the misogynic theory, or they believe in the egalitarian teachings of Christ and feel that they are put into practice by Christians today.

6.2.4.3 Question 9: *What do you think is the gender of God? Male, female, neuter or beyond gender?*

The question regarding the gender of God caused very similar reactions in the Jewish and Muslim groups of women. The similarity is reflected in the fact that a great majority of them consider God to be beyond the category of Gender (Jewish women: 14 out of 18; Muslim women: 18 out of 20). Another shared characteristic is that none of the women belonging to these two religions considers God to be male. Only one Muslim woman responded that she could not decide between male and beyond gender. Despite the fact that 50% of the questioned Christian women, as well, believe that God is beyond gender (10 out of 20), it was interesting to notice that a significant

number of them responded that God was male (6 out of 20). Two women claimed that God was male and beyond gender and one interviewee said that God was made male.



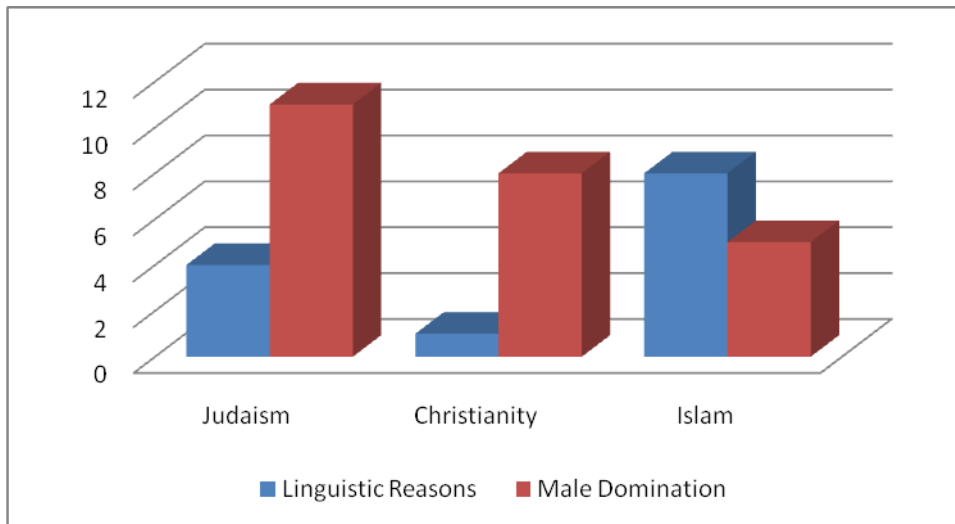
Reasons for such reactions might be found, as suggested earlier in the thesis, in the basic doctrines of the three religions. In Judaism and Islam the idea of God’s oneness and uniqueness is central. In Christianity though, the divinization of Christ and the doctrine of the predominantly male Trinity seem to have resulted in a masculine image of God. As one of the Christian respondents explained: “Even though I believe that God is beyond gender, I get a male image when I close my eyes and think of God.”

6.2.4.4 Question 10: *If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?*

When it comes to the explanation for the use of male pronouns for God, it could be noticed that only a few Jewish (4 out of 18) and Christian (1 out of 20) women were aware of the linguistic aspect of this phenomenon. The majority of the respondents from these two groups blamed the male social domination⁴⁷ for the linguistic masculinisation of God. The Muslim study participants, on the other hand, seem quite aware of the linguistic reasons and the tendency of the Semitic languages to use the male gender as default for nouns with indefinite natural gender due

⁴⁷ The responses “patriarchal society” and “male writers” from the questionnaire were comprised under the label “male domination” in the diagram.

to lack of the neuter gender. 8 out of 20 respondents mentioned the linguistic rules as the reason for the use of male pronouns for the Divine.



This reaction might be due to the fact that some of the respondents are of Arabic origin or are familiar with the Arabic language. It is also possible that the Muslim women are more often confronted with the original Arabic version of their Holy Book than their Jewish and Christian sisters. It must, however, also be noted that a significant number of the Muslim women, 5 out of 20, blamed the patriarchal social norms for the use of male language for God.

7.0 Summary and Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to present some aspects of the gender discourse within the three Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These three religions are known for their androcentric and sometimes misogynic ideas. Interestingly, however, most of today's women adhere to one of these three religions and find peace and guidance in these allegedly woman-unfriendly traditions. This thesis was supposed to shed some light on this contradiction. In order to do that in a most thorough way the thesis was divided into seven chapters.

The first chapter offered an introduction to the topic presenting the aim of the thesis, how it was organised and explaining some key terminology used in the discussion of gender and the religious language, e. g. difference between sex and gender, some basic characteristics of gender, the relationship between gender and language with focus on the language of religion.

The second chapter was dedicated to the nature of data collected in a study conducted among Jewish, Christian and Muslim women. The scientific methods applied in the research were explained. Besides, the chapter presented the study participants in reference to their denominations, age and nationalities.

In the third chapter an overview of the linguistic issues within the gender discourse was given. The reason for that is the relevance of such topics for the elaboration of gender issues within the Abrahamic faiths, which are in the focus of this thesis. The themes elaborated in this chapter should be of importance for the discussion of the results of the survey as well.

The topics dealt with here are the inclusive and exclusive language debates and the gender-neutrality in the context of the Scriptures. Besides, the history of linguistics with focus on the language of religion was discussed. In this context the three ways of talking about God were mentioned: the negative, the univocal and the analogical way. Moreover, this chapter discussed the issue of hermeneutical philosophy including the general and the ontological hermeneutics. Special emphasis was made on Gadamer's theory of the fusion of horizons and the reader-response theory since these were considered important for the topic of gender and religious language both in theory and practice. The hermeneutics of the Qur'an was discussed separately due to its special characteristics and history. Furthermore, this chapter dealt with the issue of translation of the Holy Books of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This is a very controversial topic in all the three religious traditions and is intertwined with the issue of interpretation which lies at the heart of many controversies and debates regarding gender and the treatment of women. This will be proven by the theoretical discussion of gender in the three Abrahamic faiths but by the research results as well.

Chapter 4 deals with the theoretical dimension of the issue of Gender in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Some basic issues shared by all the three faiths were discussed before concentrating on topics particular to each religion. In connection with Judaism the Creation account was elaborated first since it represents the basis for several misogynic views not only in Judaism but in Christianity, as well. The traditional way of interpreting this story was contrasted with a redeeming, feminist one. After that other Jewish gender-controversies were dealt with: the role of women at the establishment of the covenant between God and Israel, the controversial daily blessings which could be read as women-excluding if not women-degrading, and, finally, a problematic Biblical prescription regarding the treatment of a defamed bride. The last two

controversies were included in the survey, and the theoretical background was considered useful for a better understanding of the religious texts in question, but also, for the discussion of the responses by the study participants. Conclusively, different approaches to gender-relevant religious texts by Jewish feminists were presented. In reference to Christianity the focus was put on the issue of the Original Sin, the treatment of women in the New Testament and the controversial relationship of the Church Fathers, and consequently of the Church in general, to the female sex. Two excerpts which have been used in the research were discussed in detail, one stemming from Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians and the other from a treatise by the prominent theologian Tertullian named "On the Apparel of Women". Finally, different models of Biblical interpretation as suggested by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza were elaborated. In connection with Islam the position of women and the view of gender relations within Islam from a feminist angle were presented. Furthermore, two controversial excerpts from the religious texts were discussed, the first one being a Qur'anic verse allegedly authorising husbands to beat their wives and the second a saying by the prophet Muhammad which derogates the status of women. Both these texts were used in the research investigation, as well. At the end of the discussion of the Muslim gender-controversies different perspectives and ways of interpreting religious texts proposed by the Muslim feminists were discussed.

The fifth chapter treats the somewhat controversial issue of the gender of God. Religious feminists claim that the predominantly male imagery used in reference to God in the Abrahamic religions, especially in Judaism and Christianity, has contributed to the degradation of women in religious settings and that is why this topic was discussed thoroughly. Besides, this chapter should serve as the theoretical basis for the discussion of the gender of God in the survey. Before dealing with this discourse within the three Abrahamic religions, a particular characteristic of the Semitic languages relevant for this topic was discussed. Namely, languages belonging to this group lack the neutral gender and use the masculine gender instead for nouns which are not clearly feminine. The noun "God" in Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic belongs to this category. Since the Torah was originally written in Hebrew, the Qur'an in Arabic and Aramaic was the language in which Jesus revealed his message, it is crucial to mention this phenomenon. In reference to Judaism and the gender of God the female concept of God, *Shekinah*, was dealt with and possible reasons for God's maleness in the Jewish Scriptures were mentioned. As regards Christianity, the often criticised male aspect of the Holy Trinity was discussed with special focus on the so-called "Christolatry", a term coined by Mary Daly. The female aspects of the Divine in Christianity, i. e. the Virgin Mother and the female Church were also discussed. The Islamic view of the gender of

God was also presented pointing out the *tawhidic* paradigm of God's oneness and uniqueness as central to this religion. The Sufi division of the 99 names of Allah into the "feminine" and the "masculine" ones and their view of Allah as the celestial bride, Layla, were also discussed. Some possible connections between the Arabic and Hebrew words for womb (*rahm* and *rechem*) and the most prominent attributes of Allah, *Rahman* and *Rahim*, meaning the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful, were also mentioned.

In the sixth chapter of the thesis the results of the investigation conducted among today's Jewish, Christian and Muslim women were elaborated. Their responses to the questions from the questionnaire were presented in forms of tables. The reactions to the three excerpts from the respective religious documents were discussed verbally. Interestingly, the study participants responded quite similarly to the questionnaire. Their responses diverged only at four questions (6, 8, 9 and 10) and these diversions were discussed in detail and presented by diagrams.

The idea behind this survey had been to investigate whether modern women adhering to Judaism, Christianity and Islam agree with the predominant view of the Abrahamic religions as woman-degrading. Moreover, the responses of the study participants should be compared and contrasted to the claims of religious feminists that considerable changes have to be carried out regarding the language of religion in order to undo all the damage done to women and in order to make these religions acceptable and practicable for the women of today.

The results arrived at after the research investigation among today's Jewish, Christian and Muslim women are not univocal; however, a couple of general conclusions can be drawn from the responses. The first and perhaps most relevant point coming to the fore in this survey is the fact that most women feel equal to the men in their respective religious communities. This response contradicts the common belief that women in the three discussed religions feel subordinated and inferior. The reasons for this feeling of equality are presented and elaborated in the course of the questionnaire, but also in the reactions to the misogynic religious texts. The study participants have shown that they are able to detect and criticise woman-unfriendliness in their religious texts and practices. They have also displayed a certain amount of independence from religious institutions and beliefs established by predominantly male scholars, which enables them to read and interpret the religious texts from their own female angle. Significantly, many interviewees have expressed an awareness of the contradictions between religious theory and practice. This is probably the crucial point of this investigation because it shows that women, and

particularly Jewish and Muslim women, are convinced that they were created equal and that gender-equality, as equality among people in general, is at the core of God's plan. They believe in the overall egalitarian message of God's Words and this enables them to cope with the misogyny in certain religious texts or practices. This will become even more obvious in their comments to the woman-unfriendly texts following the questionnaire. The respondents' view of the gender of God, even though varying from woman to woman and from religion to religion, still makes a general impression that most women do not perceive God as a male entity. This is particularly true for the Jewish and Muslim women. Even those informants who believe that God is male often comment that this aspect is irrelevant for their belief or claim to find comfort with the figure of God as a loving and caring Father. The study participants show an awareness of human limitations which make them inclined to use anthropomorphisms in reference to God. They are also aware of the limitations of human language to address and reflect on the Divine and use this argument to explain the usage of male pronouns for God. A great majority of the respondents blame the patriarchal cultural values and the fact that mostly men have interpreted the Scriptures for the dominance of masculine language used in reference to the Divine. These views regarding the gender of God are contrary to the claim of religious feminists that women feel intimidated, degraded and offended by God's maleness in the religious context. Their call for a change of the noun God into Being, a verb or God/ess seems also to be irrelevant.

In regard to the short religious texts containing misogynic elements, modern Jewish, Christian and Muslim women provided a variety of different approaches to such controversial writings. Many, mostly Jewish and Christian respondents, put the mentioned excerpts in their historical, social and geographical context and discarded them as irrelevant for their lives and religious feelings. Others questioned the authenticity of such passages and pointed out the multiple meanings of words and the possibility that some terms have been translated and interpreted in a wrong way. The study participants were able to interpret the excerpts on a metaphorical level and some even criticised them from a theological point of view. The Jewish women have shown in respect of the controversial morning blessings two interesting phenomena. First, they explained how Jewish women over millennia have managed to avoid the misogynic undertone of the blessings by changing them linguistically in different ways. And secondly, some participants declared that they choose to stick to the traditional wording of the blessings despite the offensive language due to a feeling of familiarity and belongingness to a certain tradition. Similar comments were made by some Christian women regarding the feminist version of the Lord's Prayer. In my opinion, this offers also a clue to a better understanding of women's adherence to

the Abrahamic faiths despite the woman-unfriendly image of the same. It is exactly this feeling of belongingness or *Zugehörigkeit*, to use Gadamer's term, to a certain tradition which creates a feeling of security and stability and makes it possible to ignore certain gender inequalities within the respective tradition. Furthermore, religious women, as all religious people in general, share a feeling of being part of a larger, cosmic plan. This belief offers them comfort and meanings in respect of their existence. Not all parts of this plan are logical and comprehensible, but they are necessary for the system to function as a whole. This reliance on God or a greater Power makes their lives easier and that is why religious women are sometimes ready to accept certain injustices as a part of this large plan, hoping that at the end it will all make sense. This has especially come to the fore in the reactions of the Muslim women to misogyny in their written tradition. In fact, "God knows best" is an expression frequently used by Muslims, ordinary believers as well as religious scholars trying to interpret God's message. The reactions of the study participants to the female language used for God vary. However, generally, it seems that women do not have problems with the female aspects of God but with the anthropomorphisms implied in such formulations. In this respect they agree with the view of the religious feminists.

Finally, it could be said that, according to this survey, the radical changes of the language of the Scriptures suggested by some religious feminists are not necessary since modern religious women are able to cope with the misogyny within their religious tradition. Women seem to be able to fuse their modern horizons with the ancient ones of their religious texts without necessarily demanding a detailed, radical and official change of every single politically incorrect expression. They choose to, as Amina Wadud says, "grapple with and challenge the inherent sexist biases of the historicity of words" instead of "trying to change the immutable words". (Wadud, 2006: 206) A very useful explanation of this phenomenon is offered by one of the Jewish study participants who actually refused to participate in the survey directly but shared some of her views with me:

For example, I have a friend that is a practicing Catholic. She has sent four children to Catholic school and attends church regularly. Everything I read and study makes it hard for me to imagine her being comfortable as a woman with the strict beliefs of Catholicism. Yet, when you talk with her, she replies that she and almost all her female friends interpret and ignore much of the offensive liturgy and rules to their modern life. From the outside you would think these women accept the mores of the public image and the Pope's proclamations of Catholicism. Yet, in practice, there is a thriving female community that considers themselves religious and follows a modern level of practice

that is not reported publicly or in writing by anyone. Perhaps that is the reality of modern religion for many women, irrespective of any official texts. (See appendix, Jewish research, Participant 15)

However, it has to be conceded that the religious women of today are to a certain degree indebted to feminism in general and religious feminism in particular for the improvement of woman's position in all spheres of society, including the religious structures.

The limitations of human language to address and express the Divine were recognised by the ancient scholars and religious feminists, as discussed earlier in the thesis, but also by the women participating in this study. In order to disclose Himself to the humans God had to choose language as the most sophisticated facility relative to human perception. However, no matter how powerful, symbolic and multifaceted the language of the Scriptures is it is still adjusted to human parameters and far from being able to fully reflect God's essence. Human language, as human understanding, is limited, and God is not. Besides, through reading the various books and articles treating the issue of gender in religion and after having studied the reactions of the study participants I have realised that religion and faith cannot be restricted to written words, linguistic rules and textual analyses. A person's relationship to God is so much more. As one of the most prominent modern Muslim thinkers, Khaled Abou Fadl, in his book *Speaking in God's Name* says: "A person develops knowledge of God, not through textual indicators alone, but through a complex matrix of relationships that are collateral to the text." He goes even further claiming that even though the texts contribute to the shaping of a person's beliefs and convictions, at times certain frictions can emerge between those convictions and certain parts of the texts. "A person can read a text that seems to go against everything that he or she believes about God and will feel a sense of incredulous disbelief, and might even exclaim, "This cannot be from God, the God that I know!" (Abou Fadl 2001: 213, in Wadud 2006: 201) It seems that both religious feminists as well as the religious women of today are going through this process and trying to grapple with these contradictions each in their particular way.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1:

Genesis, 2: 7-24

7 Then the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. **8** And the LORD God planted a garden eastward, in Eden; and there He put the man whom He had formed. **9** And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. **10** And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became four heads. **11** The name of the first is Pishon; that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; **12** and the gold of that land is good; there is bdellium and the onyx stone. **13** And the name of the second river is Gihon; the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Cush. **14** And the name of the third river is Tigris; that is it which goeth toward the east of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. **15** And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. **16** And the LORD God commanded the man, saying: 'Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; **17** but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.' **18** And the LORD God said: 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.' **19** And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto the man to see what he would call them; and whatsoever the man would call every living creature, that was to be the name thereof. **20** And the man gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found a help meet for him. **21** And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the place with flesh instead thereof. **22** And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from the man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man. **23** And the man said: 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' **24** Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh. **25** And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Appendix 2:

Genesis, 3: 6-19

6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat. **7** And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves girdles. **8** And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden toward the cool of the day; and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. **9** And the LORD God called unto the man, and said unto him: 'Where art thou?' **10** And he said: 'I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.' **11** And He said: 'Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?' **12** And the man said: 'The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.' **13** And the LORD God said unto the woman: 'What is this thou hast done?' And the woman said: 'The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.' **14** And the LORD God said unto the serpent: 'Because thou hast done this, cursed art thou from among all cattle, and from among all beasts of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. **15** And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; they shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise their heel.' **16** Unto the woman He said: 'I will greatly multiply thy pain and thy travail; in pain thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.' **17** And unto Adam He said: 'Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying: Thou shalt not eat of it; cursed is the ground for thy sake; in toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. **18** Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. **19** In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.'

Appendix 3: Jewish verbatim responses

PARTICIPANT 5: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Jewish

2. Your denomination:

Liberal

3. Are you religious?

Yes, I am also a clergy person.

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes, I observe the Sabbath and Holidays, attend synagogue where, in my role as Cantor, I conduct services and read from the Torah, keep Kosher and other traditions.

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes, I do.

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

I find it hard to accept how, within certain streams of Judaism, they try to restrict the role of women on the basis of religious law. To me this is a distortion of our faith. I also know that it is only in this age that our religion is evolving to better understand and expand the role of women. But it is a slow and oft times frustrating process.

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

*I believe that religious institutions are **one** representation of God on earth, but not the only.*

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Of course. But there is always a gap between the ideal and the reality. Our challenge is to bring the reality closer to the ideal.

9. What do you think what is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

God is a concept beyond gender. It is the limitation of our languages which necessitates relating to God in a gender specific way.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

Male pronouns are used, in my opinion, because up until the last century most liturgy and commentary was written by men.

Comments to the texts:

1. Deuteronomy 22: 13-21

The best way for me to answer is to explain how I approach a text. I understand sacred text to have many layers. If we look at the "simple" meaning we can see that the laws related here deal with issues of virginity, honesty and consequences. There are many players involved: the husband, the wife, the parents of the wife, the elders and the community. We also have to take into account the historical context and times and the laws of other communities at this time – was this a reaction to those communities (as in the case of limiting sacrifice)? As well there is the question of punishment – fines or a death sentence? While as a modern woman I may find the idea of testing a women's virginity as a sign of worthiness repulsive, if I want to understand Torah I have to engage the text and try to understand the many layers that are here. Only then can I begin to understand the multiple messages and incorporate them into my understanding of my tradition.

2. Blessings recited by all practicing Jews every morning. First formulated by Rabbi Judah in the second century:

Again, how do I approach this text? The wording may be problematic for a modern person. However, we have to look at the time and context of when it is written. Modern reaction to this text (which I accept) is to rewrite many of these blessings in the positive: – not "who did not make me...." But rather "who made me a member of the people of Israel", "who made me in his image", "who made me free", "who gave me wisdom". This is an good example of the development of liturgy which retains the format but brings a response which addresses modern understanding and sensibilities.

3. A Feminist Psalm

I find it very difficult to connect to this text. It seems reactive to liturgy which has used male imagery as the dominant definition of God but is disconnected from patterns of prayer . Almost as if the writer substituted feminine pronouns for male ones in an attempt to achieve a different, female concept of God. I feel very close to traditional liturgy and find this kind of "psalm" forced. I find the English stilted and not "prayer-like". Also, I relate more naturally to prayer in Hebrew.

PARTICIPANT 11: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Jewish

2. Your denomination:

Liberal

3. Are you religious?

No

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes.

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

Not as I practice it.

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

No

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Yes

9. What do you think what is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Beyond gender

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

Not all temples use male pronouns. Mine uses both.

Comments to the texts:

1. Deuteronomy 22: 13-21

Reaction: I think this is indicative of the times, when women were viewed more as property and marriage was more of a business arrangement. I think modern religion could discuss how things have changed since those time. In some parts of the world, these types of practices still occur.

2. Blessings recited by all practicing Jews every morning. First formulated by Rabbi Judah in the second century:

I don't think that all practicing Jews say this blessing. I think there are some parts of the faith that are more enlightened. Given the way women were treated, it's not surprising one felt blessed to be a man.

3. A Feminist Psalm

This is quite a bit more modern and celebrates women. It's great that religion has evolved. There is still a long way to go.

PARTICIPANT 14: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

I consider myself Jewish, but I attend a Unitarian Universalist Church (that has a lot of Jewish members)

2. Your denomination:

More liberal than orthodox

3. Are you religious?

No

4. Do you practise your religion?

I practice some of the rituals, but I wouldn't say I practice the religion

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Absolutely

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

There are things that the orthodox accept that I would find hard to accept.

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

No

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Yes, sometimes I think the values of the inherent worth of every person are violated by actual people

9. What do you think what is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

I don't believe in God

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

Because the texts were written by a bunch of old men.

Comments to the texts:

1. Deutoronomy 22: 13-21

The first text I found very disturbing. I guess I wasn't aware that stoning was something that the Jewish texts endorsed for even fornication (sex before marriage), although i would have been less surprised if it had been for adultery (sex outside of marriage). I would find it very disturbing to meet people who still subscribed to this as an appropriate punishment.

2. Blessings recited by all practicing Jews every morning. First formulated by Rabbi Judah in the second century:

The second text I found even more disturbing. I bristled at the notion of thanking God for not being made a "gentile" as I very much oppose any notion that people of a certain religion have a

monopoly on what's good and what's right. It bothered me even more that men are supposed to thank God for not being made a woman. What do women thank God for? Not being a dog?

3. A Feminist Psalm

I liked the third text, not surprisingly, since I am a feminist.

PARTICIPANT 8: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Jewish

2. Do you consider yourself orthodox or liberal/reformist?

Post-denominational - my practices and understanding of Judaism come from the entire spectrum of Jewish learning and practice

3. Are you religious?

Yes

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes, today I do - I am 60 years old - when I was a child, women were not counted in the minyan, the quorum for prayer - things have changed since then in many denominations and communities within Judaism - today, women are definitely seen as partners and equals to men in religious life

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

No - when there is something that sounds sexist or exclusionary, I know that I can change the words and/or the meaning of the prayer or the practice - Judaism has had a system throughout its history to adapt to contemporary thought and culture in order to meet the needs of its adherents

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

No - I think religious institutions are sometimes a useful tool to create communities of support as people explore their spiritual and religious life, their connection to Gd and their connection to their faith communities - however, there are many ways to explore these issues without belonging to a synagogue - some people express their Judaism through social action, political action, ethical behavior - although I believe that Gd wants us to be involved in the world by taking care of others less fortunate (making sure that people have enough to eat, shelter, an education) and also by taking care of our earth (not polluting, taking care of the animals and plant life, being responsible guardians of the earth), I do not think you have to belong to a religious institution in order to do Gd's work - in fact, I do not think that you have to believe in Gd to do Gd's work - the younger generation of Jews are finding many ways to express their Judaism and stay connected

through social networking, the internet, arts and culture, ecology, and social action, not necessarily through organized religion or religious institutions

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Yes, just as I see contradictions between social values and the way they are put into practice in the greater society - people are people, with their contradictions, prejudices, stereotypical thought patterns, ego, and power-searching - if you have these contradictions and prejudices in your thought patterns, they will be played out in all aspects of one's life - having said that, I also have great hope that the more we are conscious of our prejudices and acts of inequality, the less we will act on them - I hope for equality and respect for others in all aspects of life: for women and men, for all genders, for people of all races and all religions

9. What do you think what is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Beyond gender - Gd is not corporeal and is a larger concept than the human mind can comprehend - however, in order to understand and relate to Gd, people have given Gd masculine and feminine aspects - in Judaism, there are images of Gd as an old man, as a young warrior, as a laboring woman, as a bride, as a queen, as a king - there are many images to choose from, depending on a person's need in the moment - I choose one image for healing, another for judgment and forgiveness, another for supporting someone through grief - along with the Biblical image of the transcendent Gd as masculine, there is a mystical conception of Gd as feminine: the Shekhina, the Indwelling Presence of Gd, the immanent Gd who is available to us at all times

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

*It is a limitation of our language, especially in Hebrew which is a gendered language - some Jewish prayerbooks have now been written in Hebrew and in English to address this issue of gendered language and also to address the issues of the "hierarchy" of Gd and the exclusivity of Israel - I myself do not use *any* pronouns to talk about Gd, but instead I use many different names of Gd when I write, when I teach, when I pray*

My response to the Biblical and liturgical pieces you sent:

1. Deuteronomy 22:13-21

The Torah (Jewish Bible) was written at a certain time in history and was trying to address the issues of its day - many of the pieces that we now see as sexist were in fact social advances in its time to protect women - in addition to the written Torah, we have the oral Torah, rabbinic commentary throughout the ages which addressed different parts of the Torah to bring them into a more modern understanding - this continues today, with "responsa" from the rabbis which answer contemporary questions about behavior that could not have been imagined in Torah times, such as issues around medical ethics

2. Blessings recited by all practicing Jews every morning. First formulated by Rabbi Judah in the second century:

Three blessings a person should utter every day: Blessed be He who did not make me a gentile, who did not make me an ignoramus, and who did not make me a woman. (T. Berakhot 7:18)

About the three blessings you cite - these do not show up in most Jewish prayerbooks anymore, only in Orthodox prayerbooks - in many Orthodox communities in the USA, the words of the Hebrew are not changed, but the understanding of what the prayers refer to has changed in response to feminist ideals or in reaction to the idea of "the chosen people" - this is not a new practice in Judaism -

I learned recently in a class I am taking on Jewish history, that the particular prayer "who has not made me a woman" was addressed in Italy during the Renaissance:

From the preface in the book, Cultures of the Jews, volume 1: Mediterranean Origins (edited by David Biale) -- pp xxiv, xxv - on morning blessings for women:

"An example of such subversion and of the complex relations between rabbinic and non-rabbinic culture for the same period as our silver casket are two prayer books copied by one of the leading rabbis of the day, Abraham Farissol. The first was commissioned by a man for his wife in Ferrara in 1478, and the second was ordered by a married woman in Mantua in 1480. In both cases, the morning blessings - when men traditionally thank Gd for 'not making me a woman' and women thank Gd for making them "according to His will" - contain a radical revision: the prayer thanks Gd "for making me a woman and not a man." Whose decision was it in the first case to change the blessings: the man who commissioned the work, or his wife? How did the woman in the second case decide to make this revision, and did she have the approval of her husband? We know nothing about the negotiations between the wealthy patrons and the learned rabbi who copied the books. Did Farissol resist the revision or, alternatively, did he perhaps suggest it? What more do these objects tell us about attitudes toward Jewish women in Renaissance Italy among the wealthy classes and among the rabbis? And, what meaning - if any - ought we assign to the fact that someone at a later point erased the names of the patrons from the title pages of the books?"*

"Both the silver casket [a small silver box to keep keys to the linen chest which had images of women lighting candles, separating challah, and nude in the mikveh] and these prayer books were objects intended for use by women. Introducing gender into the study of Jewish history is one way of including alternative voices and extending the scope of our inquiry from high or learned culture to the culture of everyday life. These objects suggest a cultural matrix for Italian Jewish women in the Renaissance that may have differed significantly from that of men of the time, but also from that of Jewish women in other periods and places. The woman who commissioned the prayer book was clearly educated enough to read Hebrew, as was the woman who owned the casket. Such details allow us to reconstruct at least some aspects of Jewish women's lives and thus to portray Jewish culture as much more diverse and heterogenous than one might conclude from a study of rabbis or other learned men. Another example is the rich body of literature, written in Yiddish, that provided women with private prayers (techines) about issues, such as the three cardinal commandments or conception and childbirth, specifically germane to their lives."

** The manuscripts are, respectively, 1478=J TSA MIC. 8255 (ms. JMC 16) 5b and 1480=JNUL 8*5492, 7a. See David Ruderman, *The World of a Renaissance Jew: The Life and Thought of Abraham Ben Mordecai Farissol* (Cincinnati, 1981), appendix, and Shalom Sabar, "Bride, Heroine and Courtesan," 68. I thank Sabar for drawing the text from the Jewish Theological Seminary Library to my attention. My student Yoel Kahn will be publishing his own study of these*

manuscripts in a work on the history of the morning blessings. Based on his examination of the manuscripts, he has concluded that the one from 1478 was written by Farissol, whereas the new version of the words in the one from 1480 was written in a different hand.

3. A Feminist Psalm

Feminist psalm? Do you mean Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb's writing? she is amazing - I learned about the many aspects of Gd and the many feminine names of Gd from her in the 1980's - it opened a whole new way of thinking about and relating to Gd for me - very enriching

PARTICIPANT 13: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Judaism

2. Your denomination?

Liberal. Reformist, leaning toward Jewish Renewal movement.

3. Are you religious?

According to my definition, yes.

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes, often.

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

In my spiritual community, yes, but not in comparison to other extreme factions (Orthodox, Conservative, to name a few).

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

The separation of the sexes is difficult to accept (again in extreme factions). Stories within the Old Testament are troubling, but I can't decide if they're actual or metaphorical---in which case I wouldn't have such difficulty with it.

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

I suppose, though I'm not sure that there is any legitimate earthly representative of G-d. As an active member of my synagogue, it is always troubling to witness the inevitable politics that occur when it should all be about spirituality.....

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Yes, people regularly interpret things for their own comfort or benefit, which can lead to contradictions.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Beyond gender, a compilation of all genders, all-encompassing.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

Probably due to the male-dominated societal treatment since the beginning of time. Adam was created first. Deference to males, etc.

Comments to the texts:

1. Deuteronomy 22: 13-21

It is most disturbing that sexual relations were known as 'hating her'. Virginity is still quite critical in some cultures today, though I do not believe that it is paramount. The imbalance of gender equity constantly astounds me: if the man wasn't a virgin there were no consequences. And to kill a woman who is not a virgin violates the ten commandments, so it is contradictory.

2. Blessings recited by all practicing Jews every morning. First formulated by Rabbi Judah in the second century:

When this was written in the 2nd Century, those were their main focus: religion, intellect and power. It is not relevant in today's society, but I do relate to the tradition of uttering the same words that our forefathers and foremothers said.

3. A Feminist Psalm

This is a very powerful piece. It embodies the strength of women and our ability to give birth to not only children/life, but also song, holiness and praise. On the other hand, it is somewhat exclusionary of men, which is the antithesis of the other chauvinistic prayers.

PARTICIPANT 9: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Jewish

2. Your denomination:

Liberal

3. Are you religious?

Yes

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

No

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

Yes (As much as any)

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Yes

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Beyond

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

Artifact of culture

Comments to the texts:

1. Deuteronomy 22: 13-21

This is the text of the Torah. There are many literary devices employed, and reasons for this passage to be included. I will never understand them all.

2. Blessings recited by all practicing Jews every morning. First formulated by Rabbi Judah in the second century:

Rabbi Judah was a pretty funny guy.

3. A Feminist Psalm

This is an inspiring piece of artwork by Lynn Gottlieb, completed in the style of many poets before her. Feminism is important to her.

PARTICIPANT 4: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

I am Jewish, but that's my ethnicity, not my religion

2. Your denomination?

atheist

3. Are you religious?

no

4. Do you practise your religion?

no

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

yes

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

I find it hard to accept everything about all religions, period. I don't believe in religion.

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

There is no god. Religious institutions exist only to perpetuate the myth and appropriate power.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Religion is just one more way for men to control women.

9. What do you think what is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

There is no god.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

Religion is just one more way for men to control women.

Reactions to the three texts:

1. Deuteronomy 22: 13-21

Woman as property

2. Blessings recited by all practicing Jews every morning. First formulated by Rabbi Judah in the second century:

I'm glad I didn't live in those days. It was sensible to be thankful for not being a woman then, as it might be now in some fundamentalist Muslim countries.

3. A Feminist Psalm

Get over it. Don't make more nonsense, but with a feminist slant - eradicate the need for such misguided stuff altogether.

PARTICIPANT 7: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

JUDIASM

2. Your denomination?

LIBERAL/REFORM

3. Are you religious?

SPIRITUAL YES, WITH SOME RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

4. Do you practise your religion?

YES

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

YES

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

THE TRADITIONAL VIEW OF WOMEN IN ORTHODOX JUDIASM WITH THE SEPERATION OF MEN AND WOMEN FOR PRAYER

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

NO ABSOLUTELY NOT. RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS ARE ABOUT POWER AND CONTROL OF PEOPLE. SPIRITUALITY IS A DIRECT RELATIONSHIP OF AN INDIVIDUAL WITH WHATEVER POWER THEY FEEL OUTSIDE OF THEMSELVES OR OTHER HUMAN BEINGS. THAT SAID, RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS ARE IMPORTANT FOR SOCIAL IDENTITY FORMATION.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

YES. AGAIN, IT IS ABOUT POWER AND CONTROL AND GENDER ISSUES ARE A PART OF THAT.

9. What do you think what is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

BEYOND GENDER.I AM NOT SURE THERE IS A : "GOD" THOUGH I DO BELIEVE IN A SPIRITUAL FORCE BEYOND HUMAN BEINGS.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

BECAUSE RELIGION IS ABOUT POWER AND CONTROL AND MEN IN WESTERN RELIGIONS HAVE BEEN THE ONES IN POWER. THEY MODELED GOD AFTER THEIR OWN DESIRES FOR ULTIMATE POWER AND CONTROL. WOMEN DON'T CRAVE THAT TO THE SAME DEGREE.

Comments to the texts:

I found the texts interesting, and the last was of course the one I could “agree” with. The others reflect the times they were written in, so I don’t know that I can “agree” or not, as we are no longer living in those times.

PARTICIPANT 3: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Ashkenazi Judaism

2. Your denomination?

Orthodox

3. Are you religious?

Yes

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

No

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

Not being able to officiate over religious meals held in my own house because of having male guests.

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

Not in the plural.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Yes.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Beyond gender.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

Because male is the neuter form in Hebrew.

Comments to the texts:

1. Deuteronomy 22: 13-21

An archaic practice based on a concept of woman as chattel

2. Blessings recited by all practicing Jews every morning. First formulated by Rabbi Judah in the second century:

I've never seen the middle one, and the last one I don't mind, as long as I can say the equivalent about me.

3. A Feminist Psalm

I thought psalms were about praising the Divine rather than praising people.

PARTICIPANT 15:

> Date: Wed, 11 Nov 2009 15:17:42 -0500
> To: lejlamazit@hotmail.com
>
> *The reason you are having trouble finding Jewish women to answer your
> questions is that they are the wrong questions. Judaism is a studying
> and interpretive religion. I can't answer your straight questions
> because they miss the point of gender issue in Judaism. I am
> reconstructionist. We are egalitarian, and my fellow female friends
> regularly struggle with spirituality from our texts- but so do my male
> friends. Our texts as literal are out of time and touch with many of
> our current beliefs. Reconstructionism attempts to interpret the
> intended teachings within the values of our time (whatever that time).*
>
> *Your biblical text sent me straight to my bible. Of course reading it
> out of context it is bothersome. But reading it within the chapter
> and context of the theme at that point it is not as troublesome,
> thought out of touch with some of my current values.*
>
> *The three prayers you assert that should be said daily, I have never
> heard in my life. I do not react as a woman; I react as an
> experienced Jew that fears someone does not fully understand my
> religion nor its most common modern practices where I live.*
>
> *If you are interested, look at www.kolot.org for gender studies and
> prayers and interpretations that help me find meaning as a woman in
> Judaism.*
>
> *Good luck with your thesis.*

On Nov 13, 2009, at 5:05 AM, Lejla Mezit wrote:

Hi -,

thank you very much for your response! I will take it as a piece of constructive criticism and of course use the web-site you recommended. It is possible that I do not understand your religion

fully, as a matter of fact I don't think that I understand mine (Islam) either. Even though some of my questions might sound out of date and context, in my elaboration of Judaism and women I am taking the context into consideration. Sorry, if I hurt your religious feelings, it really was not my intention!

All the best

Lejla

Hi Lejla,

Let me assure you that my feelings have not been hurt at all! Having married into Arna's family, you might imagine that like her, I am a strongly opinionated woman. I commend you the project you have undertaken, and believe that it would be difficult to address appropriately any religion for which we are not familiar. For example, I have a friend that is a practicing Catholic. She has sent four children to Catholic school and attends church regularly. Everything I read and study makes it hard for me to imagine her being comfortable as a woman with the strict beliefs of Catholicism. Yet, when you talk with her, she replies that she and almost all her female friends interpret and ignore much of the offensive liturgy and rules to their modern life. From the outside you would think these women accept the mores of the public image and the Pope's proclamations of Catholicism. Yet, in practice, there is a thriving female community that considers themselves religious and follows a modern level of practice that is not reported publicly or in writing by anyone. Perhaps that is the reality of modern religion for many women, irrespective of any official texts.

PARTICIPANT 12: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Jewish

2. Your denomination?

Reformed-liberal

3. Are you religious?

No

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes-in the traditional sense.

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes, when referring to Judaism in the liberal sense.

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

No

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

Legitimate yes, but not a necessity to find spiritual enlightenment.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

No

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Female for the most part, but beyond a gender generally.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

The religious scriptures were written in a time period when gender was only one way. There was no female equality during that time.

Comments to the texts:

1. Deuteronomy 22: 13-21

I am not sure how you want me to react to a passage written in a time period when women were nothing more than property. The above passage means nothing today to today's modern women. It has no place in today's society for a man or a woman.

2. Blessings recited by all practicing Jews every morning. First formulated by Rabbi Judah in the second century:

-

3. A Feminist Psalm

Now, this is much better. Women should be praised, revered as well. Today's woman has come a long way to rival men. There should be nothing less than equality between men and women.

PARTICIPANT 6: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Jewish.

2. Your denomination?

I am a conservative Jew.

3. Are you religious?

yes.

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes but not strictly.

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes.

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

Yes--but conservative Judaism is striving for egalitarianism.

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

No.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Yes--often there is a pervasive sexism esp. with orthodox Jews.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

beyond gender

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

Carry over from paternalistic tradition--not just Judaism but much of world culture.

Comments to the texts:

1. Deuteronomy 22: 13-21:

The biblical text is clearly an ancient text where the woman is viewed, not as a person, but as property without any rights or feelings. I don't think modern Jews view these texts literally or of much relevance in the modern world.

2. Blessings recited by all practicing Jews every morning. First formulated by Rabbi Judah in the second century:

Conservative Jews do not say those morning blessings anymore--They say instead, Blessed art thou

Who made me in His Image. Masculine pronoun toward God used but still better.

3. A Feminist Psalm:

Feminist psalm is fine and a nice change.

PARTICIPANT 2: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

The Jewish religious tradition.

2. Your denomination?

Liberal/reformist

3. Are you religious?

I'm involved in the life of my congregation but don't consider myself religious.

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes, I do observe holidays and teach Hebrew.

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes.

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

The idea of ritual impurity due to menstruation; the unwillingness of some Jews to count women as part of a minyan or accept their testimony in a court of Jewish law; the idea that only a man can instigate a religious divorce.

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

Absolutely not.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Very much so. It's always about power – who has it, who can keep it.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Including both genders.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

Because these texts were written by men.

Comments to the texts:

1. Deuteronomy 22: 13-21:

Outmoded -- as we know now that there is not necessarily visible evidence when the hymen is broken, nor is intercourse the only way the hymen can be perforated.

2. The Morning Blessings:

They mean exactly what they say – not thanking God for the yoke of the time bound Mitzvot, which apply only to men, which is how the traditionalists try to explain away the blessing about not being made a woman.

3. A Feminist Psalm

Indifferent – It doesn't speak to me any more than traditional psalms do.

PARTICIPANT 10: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Jewish - Dati Leumi

2. Your denomination?

Orthodox

3. Are you religious?

Yes

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes (I believe in differences between men and women – and have no problem with it)

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

That the codex of modesty is only demanded by women

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

No

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

As I wrote – I believe in the difference between women and men – and see it as equal in value but different in being.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Beyond gender

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

Because it was written by men.

Comments to the texts:

1. Deuteronomy 22: 13-21

To make comments on texts out of context in meaning and time I find it quite hard to justify answers.

But you asked for my comments – in previous times this kind of punishment was understandable – moral and codes change over time - in any religion, country or social class.

So certainly it does not apply any more!

2. The Morning Blessings:

Great text – I am blessing G-d NOT making me to a man! ...and feel quite comfortable with it!

Nothing to get excited about – my self esteem is not touched by it.

3. A Feminist Psalm

I never heard this one....it is nice.

PARTICIPANT 1:

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Jewish

2. Your denomination?

Liberal

3. Are you religious?

Yes.

4. Do you practise your religion?

I prefer the term “religious tradition,” to “religion.” I feel my choices of practice primarily come from a connection to my family and community, as a way of being engaged with the community and preserving our traditions.

I do not participate in religious practices out of a belief that there is a direct reward from God for doing them, although I feel that some practices, like fasting and prayer, can have benefits to help one’s spiritual centering.

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Definitely. I participate in a progressive Jewish community which is connected with both the Jewish Reconstructionist and Egalitarian-Conservative movements. We have women teachers, Rabbis and Hazzaniot (prayer leaders/cantors). English-language texts in the most recent prayer books are translated without gender. This is not possible in the Hebrew language, which has no neuter form, but the understanding is that God is without gender is implied in Hebrew, as one of the Thirteen Principles of the prayer “Yigdal” is that “God is without body”.

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

I cannot accept many of preclusions of women in Jewish Orthodoxy, and I feel sad for women who live in communities where they are not given equality. However, many have interpretations for their practices which are meaningful for them, and I respect their right to interpret the religious texts and practice in their own way, just as I do not believe in imposing my own belief system on people of other religions and cultures.

That said, I do not consider Jewish Orthodoxy “my” religion, any more than Islam or Christianity. However I do consider Orthodox Jews to be of my extended cultural family, that we do share beliefs and practices, although we may not interpret them the same way, or practice them in exactly the same way. Similarly, I have relatives by marriage who are Muslim, and there are many practices in both cultures that are similar and that we share. I do not have a problem celebrating Bajram with them, just as they attend our Pesakh Seder celebration.

The Biblical texts, as well as their later interpretations (Talmud, etc., which we call “Oral Law”) are, by nature, difficult for women. As I believe they are created by humans (written by males in particular) they are based in history and culture of a particular place and time. I have to understand that and respect it, because it is the historical foundation of our tradition, but I do not have to accept interpretations that say that because something was a common practice over 2000 years ago it must continue today. New readings of the texts, based on what we know about language and culture, and reinterpretations, “Oral Law”, continues to this day, and new interpretations are also as sacred to us as ancient texts. In the Reconstructionist movement, we say “The Past has a Vote but not a Veto.”

It is this process of questioning and reinterpreting that has kept Judaism vital for millennia, and Judaism accepts that in many cases custom and tradition as practiced in local communities is as valid in establishing religious practice as Halakhah based on scholarly discourse.

7. Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

No. No more than that every person is a child of God on earth and that we all have equal obligation to protect our world and its creatures. No human is big enough or powerful enough to do it all or understand it all. Scholarly interpretation is a foundation of Judaism, but we have no “pope” or single church that is closer to God or has a monopoly on holiness or a singular right to interpret or discuss.

Having a particular cultural orientation (or “religion,” if you will) helps one accomplish, perhaps, a tiny, “do-able” part of the task by helping to create priorities and a focus. There is a saying in Judaism, “You are not obligated to complete the task, but neither are you permitted to desist from it.”

I believe that different spiritual traditions are complementary. There was a beautiful Hindu story I learned at a child, and has stayed with me all my life: Several blind people had encountered an elephant, and all were trying to explain what they thought it was. One felt the side of the elephant and thought that the elephant was like a wall. One felt the breath of the elephant and said it was an animal. One felt the leg, and said it was like a tree. One felt the tail, and said it was like a rope, and so on. It wasn’t until they all put their ideas together, that they could get the big picture of the elephant.

I don’t believe you have to accept all parts of all religions – or all parts of one’s own religion -- to get the “big picture” of reality, or God. But all of these little snapshots are tools to help you understand.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Of course. There are contradictions because values are put into practice by people. And because values have been tied in to cultural, political and economic systems, and languages themselves, that for centuries have fostered inequality. I don't think you can separate religion out of that mix.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

For me, beyond gender. But again, it's like the elephant story. If God is the over-arching "Was-is-will be" (which is the holiest name of God "the Tetragrammaton" in Judaism), it is too big to be understood by most of us humans without some sort of anthropomorphism. So naturally, our human understanding of God has evolved with words such as "Creator," "Ruler," "Preserver," "Parent". And because we (because of our cultures) see different aspects of, say "parent" in gender terms, so humans might see "Motherness" and "Fatherhood" or "maleness" or "femaleness" in their concept of God.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

That's how Semitic languages evolved. And from literal translations into the European languages into which they were translated (and I should say "calcified"). I was always taught that the use of male pronouns and gender in Hebrew represented both male and female – as you know, there is no neuter in Hebrew.

Male pronouns are NOT used in the English-language translations of liturgy and texts in my community.

Comments to the texts:

1. Deuteronomy 22: 13-21

This is history. This is where we came from. Judaism accepts that the world is broken and that injustice needs to be corrected. Just because this was common practice 4,000 years ago it is not a commandment for us today. Otherwise, we would also practice slavery, polygamy, etc.

2. The Morning Blessings:

This text is not valid or chanted in most Jewish communities here today. "All" is incorrect. Here is the morning daily blessing in Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist practice -- as well as among some Orthodox -- is given in the most inclusive positive sense.

"Blessed is the one who made me a Jew, who made me a free person, and who made me according to your will."

(And this, many of us understand to include the acceptance and thankfulness of not only one's own gender, but one's own sexual orientation, as well).

(By the way, the very same morning prayer has a very lovely blessing to God for giving the rooster the understanding of the difference between day and night!)

I find it both offensive that some Orthodox consider their practice to be the only "correct" and "religious" interpretation of Judaism.

3. A Feminist Psalm

Thanks, this is a beautiful poem, and refers to the traditional concept of the Shekhinah, the “female” aspect of God, and I understand “mother” and “sister” references, but I think maybe the “woman of the people” line is a bit over the anthropomorphic edge for my own personal taste. Almost a Christological reference.....

Appendix 3: Christian verbatim responses

PARTICIPANT 18: (my translation from Bosnian)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Born Catholic

2. Your denomination:

Catholic

3. Are you religious?

Yes.

4. Do you practise your religion?

No.

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes.

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

No.

7. Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

No.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

No.

9. What do you think is the gender of God?

Beyond gender.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

Because, historically speaking, the monotheistic religious institutions have been dominated by men and it was also men who transmitted the Word of God.

Comments to the texts:

1. 1 Corinthians 11:2-10 (New International Version)

In any case, I think that both genders are equal in front of God but I agree with the hierarchy of the sexes without the conditionality (woman from and for man). That I cannot accept as God's words but human.

2. Tertullian on Women and Fallen Angels, Vol. VI, Chapter 1

This sounds to me as a human attempt to "discipline" the female nature through intimidation and imposition of guilt.

3. The Feminist Version of the Lord's Prayer:

This is not familiar at all, could not pray like this, because I perceive this kind of prayer as an attempt to personify God. It does not sound like a feminist prayer either because I believe that God has no gender or encompasses both genders.

PARTICIPANT 19: (my translation from Bosnian)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Christian

2. Your denomination:

Catholic

3. Are you religious?

Yes.

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes.

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

No

7. Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

Most of them present religion to people according to their best knowledge and belief. Without them many would not have the possibility to be acquainted with religion. But people working in these institutions are all humans with their human limitations.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

In my religion I don't feel inequalities.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

God is beyond gender, we are all the same in front of him.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

We also address a child when we don't know the gender as he, not as she, not as it either. We also address human being in general (man) as he. I find it a general linguistic rule.

Comments to the texts:

1. 1 Corinthians 11:2-10 (New International Version)

I never heard this section in the church. It's foreign to me. The idea is not promoted by the priests I meet.

2. Tertullian on Women and Fallen Angels, Vol. VI, Chapter 1

Same as above. It's a personal opinion of one man, human, with whom I don't agree.

3. The Feminist Version of the Lord's Prayer

Why would it be feministic prayer? I think this stands for men and women.

Dear Lejla,

I would like to give my opinion about the last prayer:

God has the role of father and mother. In a normal family mother and father are equal and the child has a different role. Parents complement each other. God did not create men and women to be the same but to complement each other. In my opinion it is not good to take from God the role of the father. God's love for and patience towards us is infinite, which is a maternal trait. But he also guides us and puts restrictions, which is typical for fathers. We ascribe huge power to God and trust him when life becomes difficult, because the role of the father fits better here. Only because of that I think that it makes more sense to name God Father than Mother, although he has both roles. In Catholicism there is a female divine figure, Mary, who, in a way, establishes a balance between the male and the female side. (my translation from Slovenian)

PARTICIPANT 20: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Christian

2. Your denomination:

Catholic.

3. Are you religious?

YES

4. Do you practice your religion?

YES

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

YES, STRICTLY FAITH ISSUES BUT NOT IN CATHOLIC CHURCH HIERARCHY

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

NO

7. **Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?**

YES

8. **Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?**

SOMETIMES

9. **What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?**

BEYOND GENDER

10. **If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?**

HISTORICAL MALE DOMINANCE

Comments to the texts:

1. **1 Corinthians 11:2-10 (New International Version)**

St. Paul is sometimes difficult to read if you are a woman. I do not like to think about these words literally and I do not like that kind of thinking. But I understand that Paul was traditionally educated man and his letters were addressed to mostly Hebrew communities where traditional values were highly priced. No social-gender revolution.

2. **Tertullian on Women and Fallen Angels, Vol. VI, Chapter 1**

Men were and still are often weak and they were/are afraid of their weakness therefore they have found a sinner – a woman. So, I do not agree with Tertulian. But I sincerely hope that no contemporary scholar thinks that way.

3. **The Feminist Version of the Lord's Prayer**

Unusual because I am used to male form but I would accept a female form. My perception of God is beyond gender and that is all that counts.

PARTICIPANT 8: (my translation from Bosnian)

1. **To which religious tradition do you belong?**

Christian

2. **Your denomination:**

Eastern Orthodox

3. **Are you religious?**

Yes.

4. **Do you practise your religion?**

Yes.

5. **Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?**

Yes

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

No.

7. Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

Most of them.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

No.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Male.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

-

Comments to the texts:

1. 1 Corinthians 11:2-10 (New International Version)

I comfort myself with the fact that the Scripture was written long ago and under totally different circumstances. After all, times were different which means that the woman was »less« worth. In my opinion men and women are equal. Let us be realistic – there is no task that a woman could not carry out at least as successfully as a man, if not even better. Personally, I have not experienced discrimination, at least not to such an extent as to be insulting. It is noticeable with the older generation (parents) that they still have a little more »primitive« view of my role in terms of household chores. But, I myself am not like that. So, I think (I hope) that it will get better by each coming generation.

2. Tertullian on Women and Fallen Angels, Vol. VI, Chapter 1

Like the first text, this was written at the beginning of our written thinking. If we analyse this paragraph deeper, it seems totally absurd to me to judge a whole population because of one member. Such texts are completely pointless.

3. The Feminist Version of the Lord's Prayer

We have been taught since a very young age that God is male, so that this sounds like some sort of »mockery«, I do not know how else to name it. Just like I never think why chair (stolica-femininum) is of female gender, I neither think about the fact that God is of male gender. I am aware of the differences between men and women which have always existed and still exist. And, the Scripture points this out, but I respect religion to such because it fulfills me, gives me hope for something more. If I told you that I believe in and respect every single word of the Scripture, that would not be true, but I try and accept most of it.

PARTICIPANT 10: (my translation from Bosnian)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Christian.

2. Your denomination:

Eastern orthodox

3. Are you religious?

Yes.

4. Do you practise your religion?

If I have to.

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes.

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

Yes, we are not allowed to enter the church during menstruation.

7. Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

Yes.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Yes.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Male.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

-

Comments to the texts:

1. 1 Corinthians 11:2-10 (New International Version)

Women have never been equal to men in the Christian world and that will never change, so why waste words. It is not correct, but that is just the way it is.

2. Tertullian on Women and Fallen Angels, Vol. VI, Chapter 1

The story about Adam and Eve can be interpreted in several ways. This is one of the interpretations accepted by the Christian world.

3. The Feminist Version of the Lord's Prayer

This prayer, of course, seems better because I look upon it from a female angle. We can look positively upon this because it includes only our gender, just like men can look positively upon the two previous texts. As far as I am concerned, everybody is responsible for things happening in their lives.

PARTICIPANT 11: (my translation from Bosnian)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Christian.

2. Your denomination:

Eastern Orthodox

3. Are you religious?

Yes

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes, to an extent which fits me. (I go to church when I feel the need for that, I respect the customs I know, I don't pray to God in the form of prayer, I don't fast,)

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

Yes, women cannot go farther than the first pillars in a church when menstruating.

7. Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

No, but this issue I am not concerned with this issue. I have my own views and I act according to them.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

I have the feeling that women enjoy more equality in the eastern orthodox religion than in some other religions. In difference from Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox priests are allowed to get married (no celibacy) which puts women in a better position even though her role is linked to the house.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

I do not know, never thought about that because I do not imagine God as a person or somebody with a gender, but as something undefined, something without shape.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

Because it was written as such during a time in which men had a more important role than women. In the time of emancipation and a better and equal position of women in society, these things change.

Comments to the texts:

1. 1 Corinthians 11:2-10 (New International Version)

Well, I don't have an intelligent comment to this. In my opinion, these are strange and incomprehensible things I don't want to bother about. It is interesting that somebody thinks in this way or even practices these things. Why should I cover my head with anything while praying to God? Is not God the One that loves everybody who loves and respects Him? I don't know, this kind of thinking is not close to me and I don't respect this or any similar rule.

2. Tertullian on Women and Fallen Angels, Vol. VI, Chapter 1

Silliness! This guy went completely crazy. I have no serious comment to this.

3. The Feminist Version of the Lord's Prayer

Well, as I said, I don't pray to God, I don't pray to anybody. When I feel the need for guidance or protection I light a candle in the church and wish that my grandmothers (for whom I believe to be

angels and to be protecting me from the heaven) to protect me. That is why these verses don't feel close. Neither side should be exaggerated, neither the male nor the female one. Religion and things people believe in in order to get through difficult times and temptations in life is something personal and should not be determined by anybody. It is my business what I believe in, what I am ready to do for that and I don't feel any need to explain to anybody why I think this way and why am I as I am.

PARTICIPANT 9: (my translation from Bosnian)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Christian

2. Your denomination:

Eastern Orthodox

3. Are you religious?

Yes.

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes.

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes.

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

No.

7. Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

No.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Not in Eastern Orthodox religion.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Beyond gender.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

Because the noun God is of the male gender. And, because religion emerged in a time when women were a little more worth than animals so that it was simply imposed on us to address Him in the male gender.

Comments to the texts:

1. 1 Corinthians 11:2-10 (New International Version)

The Testaments were not written by God but by people, i. e. men, who used this position to more easily explain the inferior position of women and to control women more easily. At the first sight I get irritated by such things but then I realise that God “does not think” this way, because if He did, we would not enjoy the privilege of giving birth to human beings.

2. Tertullian on Women and Fallen Angels, Vol. VI, Chapter 1

It is not our fault that they cannot resist us and that we know how to use that! They might be the head but we are the neck which turns the head as we wish. This proves that we are at least equal. Anyway, He “up there”, however we may call Him, arranged things in such a way that we cannot do without each other. We are equally significant to this world.

3. The Feminist Version of the Lord’s Prayer

I could pray like this, it does not bother me, but I use to speak from the heart when I address God. I do not use any pre-written prayers. This prayer is like all the others, and I do not like any of them, no matter which gender is used. They all seem to me like poems learnt by heart. We never think about their meaning but just say them because that is the way it should be. I don’t like that.

PARTICIPANT 1: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong? (Hvilken religion tilhører du?)

Kristendom,

2. Your denomination:

Luteransk

3. Are you religious? (Er du religiøs?)

Ja.

4. Do you practise your religion? (Praktiserer du din religion?)

Ja. Noe. Er sjelden i kirken, men bruker bønn.

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion? (Føler du deg, som kvinne, likestilt med menn i din religion?)

Ja.

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion? (Finnes det noe i din religion som du synes er vanskelig for en kvinne å akseptere?)

Nei, men vet jo at Bibelen kan tolkes forskjellig og at enkelte tekster der kan tolkes med et negativt kvinnesyn, for eksempel Skapelsesberetningen, men JEG opplever ikke dette.

- 7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth? (Syns du at religiøse institusjoner og/eller lærde er legitime representanter av Gud på jorda?)**

Nei, i mange tilfeller ikke. Mennesker kan ikke representere Gud.

- 8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people? (Ser du noen motsetninger mellom teori og praksis når det gjelder likestillingen mellom kvinner og menn i din religion?)**

Ja, bla. ang. kvinnelige prester.

- 9. What do you think what is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender? (Hva syns du: Hvilket kjønn er Gud? Maskulin, feminin, neutral eller utenfor slike kategorier?)**

Utenfor kategorier, mer som en god åndelighet. Styrke og energi. Men billedlig og for å konkretisere tolkninger kan det være godt å personifisere Gud lik en Far some er trygg og god.

- 10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions? (Hvis Gud ikke er maskulin, hvorfor bruker man maskuline pronomen når man snakker om Gud i de monoteistiske religionene, for eksempel, Hans Folk eller lignende?)**

Tror nettopp at dette er en tolkning. I ulike kulturer står det mannlige/maskuline for styrke og dete igjen trygghet. Hovedsakelig er det vel fordi opp gjennom historien har det vært menn ved makten. Det er også tradisjon for mannlige ledere innenfor kristendommen og da også at profetene er menn, Jesus er mann og Det Nye Testamente er skrevet av mannlige disipler bla. Dette er tekster skrevet i en tid med mannsdominanse.

Kommentar til tekstene:

1. Tertullianus om kvinner:

Ønsker man å finne syndere kan man finne det overalt, i mange tekster og kulturer. Dette er menneskeskapte holdninger. For meg har dette ingenting med min tolkning av hva en religion skal innebære. Det er slike holdninger som kan gjøre det vanskelig å identifisere seg med en religion og enkelte religiøse personer. Kultur preger religion og motsatt.

2. Paulus' første brev til Korinterne, 11, 2 – 11, 10

Dette er tekst som er skrevet i en tid da kvinnene hadde en annen status i kulturen. Jeg tror ikke at norske kvinner og menn ville tolket den testen bokstavlig. Det er kun enkelte kristne samfunn som gjør det. Så slike holdninger opplever jeg ikke som kristen kvinne. Heldigvis.

3. Feministisk versjon av Fader Vår:

Noen vil kanskje oppleve dette som blasfemi. Jeg gjør ikke det. Gud er for meg noe guddommelig og hellig, over mennesket. Det er visdom, trygghet, styrke og hjelp uavhengig av kjønn. Jeg mener at dette kun er et tolkningsspørsmål.

Bibelen og religiøse tekster bør tolkes med godhet. Godhet for livet, naturen og mennesker rundt oss. Religion bør ikke brukes til å dømme andre og gjøre livet vanskelig. Religion kan lett bli til noe vi mennesker gjør til regler for andre. Hver og en bør konsentrere seg om selv å vise godhet og gjøre det gode. Det ville gjort verden til et bedre sted å leve også i "religionens navn".

(PS: Veldig interessante spørsmål! Lykke til!)

PARTICIPANT 2: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong? (Hvilken religion tilhører du?)

Kristendom

2. Your denomination:

Norsk Luthersk

3. Are you religious? (Er du religiøs?)

Nei

4. Do you practise your religion? (Praktiserer du din religion?)

Ja

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion? (Føler du deg, som kvinne, likestilt med menn i din religion?)

Ja

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion? (Finnes det noe i din religion som du synes er vanskelig for en kvinne å akseptere?)

Nei

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth? (Syns du at religiøse institusjoner og/eller lærde er legitime representanter av Gud på jorda?)

Dessverre ikke

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people? (Ser du noen motsetninger mellom teori og praksis når det gjelder likestillingen mellom kvinner og menn i din religion?)

Nei

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender? (Hva synes du: Hvilket kjønn er Gud? Maskulin, feminin, neutral eller utenfor slike kategorier?)

Utenfor slike kategorier. Men dette betyr ingenting for min tro, han kan godt være mann for det passer med vår tanke om han og hun gjør ikke det!

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions? (Hvis Gud ikke er maskulin, hvorfor bruker man maskuline pronomen når man snakker om Gud i de monoteistiske religionene, for eksempel, Hans Folk eller lignende?)

Fordi det er skrevet in en tid da mannen var det naturlige overhodet. Det var patriatisk samfunn. Hadde det vært i et matriatisk samfunn, så??? Vet vi ikke – kanskje Jesus da hadde vært kvinne. Det betyr ingenting om han var mann eller om han hadde vært kvinne. Det er andre ting i min tro som er VIKTIG.

Kommentar til tekstene:

1. Tertullianus om kvinner:

Dette er riktig. Samtidig er den gamle pakt utfylt og det er den nye pakt vi lever i nå. Jesus sa til kvinnen som hadde drevet hor: "Heller ikke jeg fordømmer deg – gå bort og synd ikke mer." Jesus var en revolusjonær i sin tid ovenfor kvinnene. Det siste vi hører om er at det er kvinnene som snakker med engelen og de er de som er de første til å fortelle at Jesus er stått opp! Det er de som først får oppdraget etter at han døde!

2. Paulus' første brev til Korinterne, 11, 2 – 11, 10

Dette er skrevet av Paulus som var fanget av sin samtid. Det er veldig viktig å se dette i sammenheng med hva Jesus sa og hva han gjorde da han levde. Han reiste opp kvinnen – han sa aldri noe i nærheten av dette. Tanken er god i dette skriftsstedet og det hjelper oss ti å forstå. Men vi som kjønn skal ikke ta dette bokstavig.

3. Feministisk versjon av Fader Vår

Ingen kommentar annet enn at vi skal ha Fader Vår slik som Jesus lærte oss det.

PARTICIPANT 3: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong? (Hvilken religion tilhører du?)

Kristendom

2. Your denomination:

Den Norske kirke

3. Are you religious? (Er du religiøs?)

Ja.

4. Do you practise your religion? (Praktiserer du din religion?)

Ja

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion? (Føler du deg, som kvinne, likestilt med menn i din religion?)

Ja

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion? (Finnes det noe i din religion som du synes er vanskelig for en kvinne å akseptere?)

Nei

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth? (Syns du at religiøse institusjoner og/eller lærde er legitime representanter av Gud på jorda?)

Ja

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people? (Ser du noen motsetninger mellom teori og praksis når det gjelder likestillingen mellom kvinner og menn i din religion?)

Nei

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender? (Hva synes du: Hvilket kjønn er Gud? Maskulin, feminin, neutral eller utenfor slike kategorier?)

Maskulin

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions? (Hvis Gud ikke er maskulin, hvorfor bruker man maskuline pronomen når man snakker om Gud i de monoteistiske religionene, for eksempel, Hans Folk eller lignende?)

-

Kommentar til tekstene:

1. Tertullianus om kvinner:

Total uaktuelt i dag!

2. Paulus' første brev til Korinterne, 11, 2 – 11, 10

I dag godtar jeg ikke denne uttalelsen. Vi har likestilling. Og det praktiseres i vår kirke. Husk at dette er skrevet for mange hundre år siden – og med et helt annet syn på mann/kvinne.

3. Feministisk versjon av *Fader Vår*

Jeg har alltid sett på Gud som maskulin, men har ingen problemer med å godta "Our mother who is..."

PARTICIPANT 4: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong? (Hvilken religion tilhører du?)

Kristendom, den norske kirke

2. Your denomination:

Luthersk

3. Are you religious? (Er du religiøs?)

Ja.

4. Do you practise your religion? (Praktiserer du din religion?)

Ja

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion? (Føler du deg, som kvinne, likestilt med menn i din religion?)

Ja, slik det nå fungerer i de sammehengene jeg er med i.

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion? (Finnes det noe i din religion som du synes er vanskelig for en kvinne å akseptere?)

I kristen tradisjon var det tidligere vanlig å tolke noen bibelavsnitt dit hen at kvinnen skulle være mannen underdanig. En del lederstillinger skulle derfor forbeholdes mannen: som menighets leder, prest, biskop. Her har vært ulike syn og tolkninger; i dag ser de fleste innen vår kirke (Statskirken) på kvinne og mann som likestilte, de kan ha samme stilling og oppgave. Jeg deler den holdningen, kan ikke akseptere at kvinnen skal være underordnet.

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth? (Syns du at religiøse institusjoner og/eller lærde er legitime representanter av Gud på jorda?)

Ikke ufeilbarlige, men de kan formidle Guds Ord, veiledning, kraft, trøst osv. Menighet/medlemmer har ansvar for å si fra om institusjonene gjør noe som er mot Guds Ord.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people? (Ser du noen motsetninger mellom teori og praksis når det gjelder likestillingen mellom kvinner og menn i din religion?)

Ikke i den sammenhengen jeg er med i. I noen organisasjoner kan ikke kvinner ha lederstillinger eller være med i "øverste" styret.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender? (Hva synes du: Hvilket kjønn er Gud? Maskulin, feminin, neutral eller utenfor slike kategorier?)

Jeg tenker på Gud som en god Far, med også feminine sider: stor omsorg. Egentlig er han vel utenfor slike kategorier men vi trenger "kjente begreper" å knytte ham til.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions? (Hvis Gud ikke er maskulin, hvorfor bruker man maskuline pronomen når man snakker om Gud i de monoteistiske religionene, for eksempel, Hans Folk eller lignende?)

Jeg tenker det kan ha noe med det å gjøre at det fra gammelt av var menn som var ledere, stod for det som var mest verd, de som hadde ansvar for slekten osv.

Kommentar til tekstene:

1. Tertullianus om kvinner:

Dette er tanker det ikke finnes støtte for i Bibelen. Når det gjelder skyld er den likelig fordelt mellom kjønnene. Hvert menneske har ansvar for seg selv og har tilbud om tilgivelse Joh. 3, 16 – 17.

2. Paulus' første brev til Korinterne, 11, 2 – 11, 10

Mener dette har med dens tid holdninger å gjøre. Paulus har sitt tankegods fra sin tid og gir råd inn i datidens miljø.

3. Feministisk versjon av Fader Vår

Å bruke "Our Mother" om Gud virker veldig fremmed for meg. "Within us" synes jeg gjør Gud mindre "in heaven" gir uttrykk for noe "høyere" enn oss; han er nær oss og med oss, men samtidig noe betryggende større enn oss.

PARTICIPANT 5: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong? (Hvilken religion tilhører du?)

Kristendom, Den norske kirke

2. Your denomination:

Luthersk

3. Are you religious? (Er du religiøs?)

Jeg tror på Gud.

4. Do you practise your religion? (Praktiserer du din religion?)

Går ikke ofte i kirke, men ber.

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion? (Føler du deg, som kvinne, likestilt med menn i din religion?)

Ja

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion? (Finnes det noe i din religion som du synes er vanskelig for en kvinne å akseptere?)

Nei, vi er likestilte, føler jeg.

- 7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth? (Syns du at religiøse institusjoner og/eller lærde er legitime representanter av Gud på jorda?)**

De prøver på en måte, det er vanskelig å si. Det jeg føler teller, ikke kirke og institusjoner.

- 8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people? (Ser du noen motsetninger mellom teori og praksis når det gjelder likestillingen mellom kvinner og menn i din religion?)**

Ja, litt.

- 9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender? (Hva syns du: Hvilket kjønn er Gud? Maskulin, feminin, neutral eller utenfor slike kategorier?)**

Feminint, har godt humør, en glad kvinne, tror jeg.

- 10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions? (Hvis Gud ikke er maskulin, hvorfor bruker man maskuline pronomen når man snakker om Gud i de monoteistiske religionene, for eksempel, Hans Folk eller lignende?)**

Menn skrev alt og påvirket det fordi menn er veldig dominerende. Vi er ikke helt like men hvorfor må Gud alltid være "han"? En kvinne kan klare det like bra.

Kommentar til tekstene:

1. Tertullianus om kvinner:

Det er tull å snakke sånn om et kjønn. Har ikke noe med virkeligheten å gjøre. Det forstår jeg ikke, den hele historien om Eva. Vi kan ikke lese Bibelen bokstavelig, hver tolker det på hver sin måte.

2. Paulus' første brev til Korinterne, 11, 2 – 11, 10

Hva har det med Kristendommen å gjøre? Det har ikke noe å gjøre med det jeg tror på. Hvorfor skall kvinner være dårligere enn menn? Det er fordi menn skrev dette. Helt forferdelig!

3. Feministisk versjon av Fader Vår

Fin, veldig fin, mye sant. Men, når de forandrer salmer (rocker dem opp) det liker jeg ikke, så modern er jeg ikke. Kunne be til en kvinnelig Gud.

PARTICIPANT 6: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong? (Hvilken religion tilhører du?)

Kristendom, Den norske kirke

2. Your denomination:

Luthersk

3. Are you religious? (Er du religiøs?)

Ja, jobber i kirken.

4. Do you practise your religion? (Praktiserer du din religion?)

Ja

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion? (Føler du deg, som kvinne, likestilt med menn i din religion?)

Ja

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion? (Finnes det noe i din religion som du synes er vanskelig for en kvinne å akseptere?)

Egentlig ikke

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth? (Syns du at religiøse institusjoner og/eller lærde er legitime representanter av Gud på jorda?)

Ikke alltid

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people? (Ser du noen motsetninger mellom teori og praksis når det gjelder likestillingen mellom kvinner og menn i din religion?)

Utøving av religionen har vært mannsdominert. I prinsippet er det ikke forskjell på kvinner og menn i Luthersk kirke, men noen ganger blir menn hørt mer enn kvinner.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender? (Hva synes du: Hvilket kjønn er Gud? Maskulin, feminin, neutral eller utenfor slike kategorier?)

Maskulin. Men samtidig er han utenfor slike kategorier. Vi er alle skapt i Guds bilde.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions? (Hvis Gud ikke er maskulin, hvorfor bruker man maskuline pronomen når man snakker om Gud i de monoteistiske religionene, for eksempel, Hans Folk eller lignende?)

Fordi Gud fremstilles i Bibelen som mann, men Bibelen sier: "Her er ikke forskjell på mann eller kvinne, trelle eller fri." Vi har alle et kjønn, men det påvirker ikke vår verdi overfor Gud. Samtidig må det sies at enkelte kristne menigheter har et syn der mannen er overhode. Dette finner vi i Paulus Brev til Efeserne 5, 25. En god del av Paulus sine Tekster er preget av datidens syn både på kvinner og slaver. Det helt gjennomgående og revolusjonerende i kristendommen er lik verdi av alle, både kvinner og menn.

Kommentar til tekstene:

1. Tertullianus om kvinner:

Dette har per i dag ingenting med kristendommens syn på kvinner å gjøre. Mannen var jo meget svak som lot seg lokke av kvinnen. Denne teksten sier mer om samfunnets kvinnesyn enn det synet kristendommen har på kvinnen.

2. Paulus' første brev til Korinterne, 11, 2 – 11, 10

Dette er og en tekst der den tids samfunns etikk gjøres gjeldende. Leses det videre i vers 11-12 ser en likestillingsprinsippet lyse gjennom. Mannen og kvinnen skal underordne seg etter hverandre. Kjærlighetsbudet er det langt overskyggende: "Du skal elske din neste som deg selv." Evangeliet etter Matteus 22, 34-39.

3. Feministisk versjon av *Fader Vår*

Som tidligere sagt er vi født med forskjellige kjønn. Noen gjør Gud til mor fordi noen har hatt et dårlig forhold til sin far. Noen har og hatt dårlig forhold til sin mor, så å gjøre Gud til mor hjelper ikke. Jeg ser ingen grunn til å gjøre Gud verken til kvinne eller kjønnsløs. Gud er og skal være som en kjærlig far som forbarmer seg over sine barn. Våre livserfaringer kan ikke forandre Gud. Jeg vet at Gud er kjærlighet og at jeg kan få komme til ham med alt jeg har både godt og vondt og at han tar imor meg og tilgir meg for Jesu Kristi skyld. Da har kjønnnet ingen betydning.

PARTICIPANT 7: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong? (Hvilken religion tilhører du?)

Kristendommen (Norsk Luthersk)

2. Your denomination:

Luthersk

3. Are you religious? (Er du religiøs?)

Ja

4. Do you practise your religion? (Praktiserer du din religion?)

Ja

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion? (Føler du deg, som kvinne, likestilt med menn i din religion?)

Ja

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion? (Finnes det noe i din religion som du synes er vanskelig for en kvinne å akseptere?)

Nei

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth? (Syns du at religiøse institusjoner og/eller lærde er legitime representanter av Gud på jorda?)

Ja, den kristne kirke

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people? (Ser du noen motsetninger mellom teori og praksis når det gjelder likestillingen mellom kvinner og menn i din religion?)

Nei

9. **What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender? (Hva syns du: Hvilket kjønn er Gud? Maskulin, feminin, neutral eller utenfor slike kategorier?)**

Maskulin

10. **If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions? (Hvis Gud ikke er maskulin, hvorfor bruker man maskuline pronomen når man snakker om Gud i de monoteistiske religionene, for eksempel, Hans Folk eller lignende?)**

-

Kommentar til tekstene:

1. Tertullianus om kvinner:

Dette er et syn på kvinnen som vi som kristne ikke kan godta. Jesus sonet alle menneskers synd, vi stiller likt innfor Gud. Alle har syndet og fattes Guds ære.

2. Paulus' første brev til Korinterne, 11, 2 – 11, 10

Dette var lover og regler på Paulus tid. Jeg tror at kvinnen er like mye verd som mannen.

3. Feministisk versjon av Fader Vår

Fader Vår er en bønn Jesus selv har lært oss å be. Det er slik vi skal be.

PARTICIPANT 17: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong? (Hvilken religion tilhører du?)

Kristendommen

2. Your denomination:

Luthersk

3. Are you religious? (Er du religiøs?)

50/50

4. Do you practise your religion? (Praktiserer du din religion?)

Nei

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion? (Føler du deg, som kvinne, likestilt med menn i din religion?)

Ja

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion? (Finnes det noe i din religion som du syns er vanskelig for en kvinne å akseptere?)

Nei

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth? (Syns du at religiøse institusjoner og/eller lærde er legitime representanter av Gud på jorda?)

Har aldri tenkt over det. Men jeg mener at hvis vi tror så trenger vi ikke nødvendigvis et sted å gå til. Hele jorden er brukbar.

- 8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people? (Ser du noen motsetninger mellom teori og praksis når det gjelder likestillingen mellom kvinner og menn i din religion?)**

NEI – men må innrømme at jeg har aldri undersøkt dette.

- 9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender? (Hva syns du: Hvilket kjønn er Gud? Maskulin, feminin, neutral eller utenfor slike kategorier?)**

Hvis, så maskulin – siden alle omtaler Gud som "han".

- 10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions? (Hvis Gud ikke er maskulin, hvorfor bruker man maskuline pronomen når man snakker om Gud i de monoteistiske religionene, for eksempel, Hans Folk eller lignende?)**

-

Kommentar til tekstene:

1. Tertullianus om kvinner:

Det er lærde ord! Men jeg ser på livet som et slags demokrati hvor alle har rett til fritt valg, men som vi også må stå for.

2. Paulus' første brev til Korinterne, 11, 2 – 11, 10

Jeg blir provosert – det er min første tanke. Kan ikke forstå at en person skal ha så mye makt over andre og dømmes slik når man ikke følger opp. Hvis dette virkelig ble skrevet må jeg enda mer tenke på om jeg er religiøs.

3. Feministisk versjon av Fader Vår

Liker den bedre enn Fader Vår, mykere, mindre herskertone. Fader Vår er mer testosteron, Our Mother mer østrogen.

PARTICIPANT 13: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong? (Hvilken religion tilhører du?)

- *Christian Lutheranism/Protestantism*

2. Your denomination:

- *Lutheranism/Protestantism*

3. Are you religious? (Er du religiøs?)

- *Yes, I am.*

4. Do you practise your religion? (Praktiserer du din religion?)

- *Yes, but I guess it depends on how one defines what it means to "practice". I do believe, pray and attend church service once in a while.*

- 5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion? (Føler du deg, som kvinne, likestilt med menn i din religion?)**
- *Yes.*
 - *Still, the history of Christianity, as well as the general history of the world, is stained by dubious and women degrading views. In many areas, geographically and culturally, women are still looked down upon and of less value than men. I believe in seeing the difference between the true intentions of Christ and the many ways of the practitioners of Christianity. The love of Christ is unchanging whereas human beings are constantly and continuously influenced by their time, surroundings and culture.*
- 6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion? (Finnes det noe i din religion som du synes er vanskelig for en kvinne å akseptere?)**
- *Some practices of the religion, yes, but as above mentioned, I believe in seeing the difference between Christ himself and the practice of Christianity. Thus, I have a problem with aspects of the latter. In my situation in Norway I have no problems practicing my religion at equal terms with men, but I realize that other Christian women might be in situations more complicated and conservative than myself. E.g. too much of the "obey your husband"-stuff doesn't work for me. The husband and wife are, in my view, to cooperate and to obey each other equally.*
- 7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth? (Syns du at religiøse institusjoner og/eller lærde er legitime representanter av Gud på jorda?)**
- *Not really, no. I believe in thinking for oneself. The institutions can be good guiders in some ways, but it is vital to be aware that institutions are made and influenced by the human beings that constitute them and they can be badly wrong. The institutions can be very strong and hard to stand up against. I believe this to be a greater problem in e.g. Catholic Christianity than in Lutheran Protestantism.*
 - *Martin Luther's ideas about 'faith alone, grace alone and scripture alone' (see e.g. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_solas) are vital in my religious views. The Lutheran ideas give room for people to have a personal relationship to God.*
- 8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people? (Ser du noen motsetninger mellom teori og praksis når det gjelder likestillingen mellom kvinner og menn i din religion?)**
- *Some people are still negative towards female priests, bishops etc, but I hope and believe that these conservative ideas are of a dying kind.*
 - *Other than that, I cannot come up with much that relates to my situation.*
- 9. What do you think what is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender? (Hva synes du: Hvilket kjønn er Gud? Maskulin, feminin, neutral eller utenfor slike kategorier?)**
- *Beyond gender*
- 10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions? (Hvis Gud ikke er maskulin, hvorfor bruker man maskuline pronomen når man snakker om Gud i de monoteistiske religionene, for eksempel, Hans Folk eller lignende?)**

The religious texts are written in societies where men were the rulers in most areas of society – it is not strange to me that the male pronouns were chosen to describe God in cultures where men were seen to be god-like compared to women. The male pronouns are also the most common in non-religious text that are actually meant to be gender neutral. Thus, I see this more as a cultural problem rather than a religious problem. I feel free to think of God in my own way even if He/She/It is normally described as male.

Kommentar til tekstene:

1. Tertullianus om kvinner:

Så vidt jeg vet er denne teksten ikke en del av Bibelen. Den bærer preg av å ha blitt skrevet for nesten 2000 år siden (Tertullian, ca. 160 – ca. 220 A.D.) i et konservativt og mannsdominert samfunn. Jeg opplever ordlyden og ideen i denne fristilte teksten som provoserende. Likevel er den ikke problematisk i religiøs sammenheng. Om man i det hele tatt skal ta teksten seriøst i dag, er det mest naturlige å vise til at poenget med Syndefloden, Jesu fødsel, død og oppstandelse, og den kristne dåpen, er å vaske bort menneskenes (både menn og kvinners) synder og skyld i hva enn man tidligere kunne beskyldte dem for.

Dette utdraget fra Tertullianus' tekst har derfor ingen religiøs relevans i seg selv. Derimot er det et kjempegodt eksempel på et mannssamfunns maktkamp der undertrykkelse av kvinner blir uttrykt gjennom religion. Å anklage kvinner kollektivt for å ha drept Guds sønn gir en gylden mulighet til å straffe kvinner og holde dem nede. Lignende argumenter har blitt benyttet i antisemittisk sammenheng – “jødene drepte Jesus – derfor må jødene straffes”. Det er en like dårlig ide og tåpelig beskyldning enten den rettes mot kvinner eller jøder.

2. Paulus' første brev til Korinterne, 11, 2 – 11, 10

Apostelen Paulus er et eksempel på et menneske som forsøker å gi en menighet råd om hvordan de skal oppføre seg. Paulus var ikke Gud, men kommer med tidsriktige tips om hvordan menighetene kan praktisere sin religion. Overskriften for kapitlet “Ha meg til forbilde slik jeg har Kristus til forbilde!” mener jeg er problematisk – hvorfor skal man ha Paulus som forbilde? Det er jo Kristus som er av betydning.

Paulus modifierer seg selv i fortsettelsen av dette brevet til Korinterne:

11 Men i Herren er ikke kvinnen uavhengig av mannen, og mannen er ikke uavhengig av kvinnen. 12 For som kvinnen ble til av mannen, blir mannen født av kvinnen, men alt er fra Gud.

Etter mitt syn er rådene som kommer frem hos Paulus preget av hvordan man for ca 2000 år siden viste respekt. Dette forandrer seg med tiden, og jeg tror ikke det kan ha noen betydning for Gud om man har hodeplagg eller ikke, hår eller ikke hår, svart, blondt eller blått hår.

3. Feministisk versjon av Fader Vår:

I think it is perfectly fine to use female pronouns in a prayer to God. In this feminist version of The Lord's prayer, though, more than the pronouns have been changed. It is a nice text, but it doesn't strike me as a typical prayer, like the original one. I think a more gender neutral version of the original one would be more of my taste for this purpose.

If God is above gender specificity, then a typical feminist version of the prayer wouldn't be more suited than a typical male one. Still, I believe that one may use one's imagination as one wish and for that reason it doesn't really matter that much if the pronouns are the one or the other gender.

PARTICIPANT 12: (verbatim)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong? (Hvilken religion tilhører du?)

Kristendommen

2. Your denomination:

Lutheranism

3. Are you religious? (Er du religiøs?)

Ja

4. Do you practise your religion? (Praktiserer du din religion?)

Personlig praktiserer jeg min religion ved bønn og deltakelse i kirke ved dåp, bryllup, høytidsfeiring osv.

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion? (Føler du deg, som kvinne, likestilt med menn i din religion?)

Vi lever i et samfunn hvor kristendommen er den dominerende religionen. Vi har statskirke. Det er usikkert for meg hva som er minst likestilt, vår kirke eller samfunnet for øvrig. Gjennom min egen opplevelse og kunnskap om min religion ser jeg meg selv som likestilt menn, men opplever ikke at kirken og den norske kulturen gjennomfører likestilling på en så god måte som den burde.

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion? (Finnes det noe i din religion som du synes er vanskelig for en kvinne å akseptere?)

Jeg ser at Bibelen, dersom den skal tolkes ikke-kontekstuel, og den tradisjonelle teologien opprettholder kjønnsroller som er definerende både for kvinner og menn. Dette mener jeg ikke er bra slik samfunnet og kulturen er i dag. Imidlertid mener jeg at bibelvitenskapen (som ikke er det samme som teologi) gir oss muligheter til å lese Bibelen med nye "briller", og åpner for en tolkning og trosopplevelse som ikke er kvinnediskriminerende.

7. Do you think that religious institutions are the legitimate representatives of God on earth? (Syns du at religiøse institusjoner er legitime representanter av Gud på jorda?)

Nei!

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people? (Ser du noen motsetninger mellom teori og praksis når det gjelder likestillingen mellom kvinner og menn i din religion?)

Jeg ser at tradisjonelle kjønnsroller som jeg mener kan være definerende, og dermed hemmende for livsutfoldelsen, fortsatt lever i den kristne kulturen, selv om det tales varmt om likestilling for alle. Imidlertid tror jeg at samfunnsutvikling tar tid, og at vi er på rett vei.

9. What do you think what is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender? (Hva syns du: Hvilket kjønn er Gud? Maskulin, feminin, neutral eller utenfor slike kategorier?)

Utenfor slike kategorier.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions? (Hvis Gud ikke er maskulin, hvorfor bruker man maskuline pronomen når man snakker om Gud i de monoteistiske religionene, for eksempel, Hans Folk eller lignende?)

Jeg tror at Gud omtalt i Bibelen refereres til som "han" både på grunn av den greske og den hebraiske språklige tradisjonen, men også på grunn av den gamle kulturens kjønnsroller og kulturelle forståelse. Jeg mener at det ikke trenger å bety noe for vårt forhold til Gud og det hellige for oss i dag, og at fremstillinger av Gud med "moderlige" trekk også kan være vel så representative. På den andre side: At Gud i det hele tatt fremstilles og defineres med jordiske, menneskelige trekk som vilje, meninger og personlighet er for meg i seg selv problematisk. Jeg opplever Gud som overordnet og utenfor vår definerbare verden og virkelighet, og at det å "fange" Gud i "kvinnelige", "mannlige" og menneskelige definisjoner er å redusere Gud til mindre enn Gud er.

Kommentar til tekstene:

1. Tertullianus om kvinner:

Selv om Tertullian regnes for å være en stor teolog i sin tid og en av dem som sto for kanoniseringen av Bibelen, mener jeg ikke at dette er noe som er representativt for dagens kristne. Dette strider totalt mot Kristi lære, og han har tydelige kvinnefiendtlige og feiloppfattet forståelse av kvinner, både i bibelvitenskapelig og menneskelig forstand. Jeg mener her at Tertullian tar feil, og at dette ikke betyr noe for min oppfattelse av Gud og religion og kjønn.

2. Paulus' første brev til Korinterne, 11, 2 – 11, 10

Korint var en menighet som i følge bibelvitene trengte struktur og rammer for sin opprettelse og opprettholdelse. Den tids kultur og samfunnsorganisering er noe som er så langt fra vår egen at det er lite nyttig å se på dette som autoritært. Det er også vanskelig å sette seg inn i behovet for denne organiseringen og oppfatningen. De kategorier som denne gruppen som dette brevet er skrevet til manøvrerte seg innenfor, er ikke de samme som vi har i dag i vårt samfunn, og kan derfor ikke overføres.

Mye i brevene til Paulus handler om struktur og regler for god organisering. Dette handler mer om kulturelle og samfunnsrelaterte utfordringer, og sier dermed lite om dagens menneskers forhold til Gud og det hellige. Når skrifter som disse brukes til å formidle noe om hvordan Gud er for oss i dag, brukes de feil, og er ikke representative. Dette er et brev som sier noe om Paulus og noe om Korint. For at det skal bety noe for meg, må det forstås kontekstuellt. Dette har ingenting å fortelle om dagens kjønnsroller og kjønnsforståelse. Det er trist (og kan kanskje kalles "synd") der slike tekster blir brukt til å undertrykke kvinner.

3. Feministisk versjon av Fader Vår:

Jeg synes begge disse bønnene er fine og jeg opplever ingenting ved bønneren "Our Mother" som støtende eller feil for meg. "Fadervår" er referert fra Jesus, og blir nok uansett alltid den bønneren som står mitt hjerte nærmest uansett.

For meg synes det viktig for kristendommens videre utvikling å fjerne Gud fra menneskelige forståelser og definisjoner, og ikke bare fremstille Gud mindre "mann", men også mindre "menneskelig". Med det mener jeg at vi som kristne har en tendens til å redusere Gud til noe menneskelig og forståelig, og ikke er nok ydmyke for at Gud er overordnet dette, og større og mer enn det vi kan gripe og begripe.

Imidlertid tror jeg at dersom Gud skal omtales med kjønn også bør omtales som kvinne med tanke på utviklingen av likestilling mellom kjønnene i religiøs kontekst.

Appendix 4: Muslim verbatim responses

PARTICIPANT 8 (my translation from Bosnian)

11.To which religious tradition do you belong?

Islam

12.Your denomination?

Sunni

13.Are you religious?

Yes

14.Do you practise your religion?

Yes

15.Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes

16.Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

No

17.Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

Yes, I think they are, but you can look for answers on your own, as well. There are the four schools of law, madhab, you can choose one and follow its regulations.

18.Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Yes, I do. If you practise Islam correctly there are no contradictions. However, there are some countries, like in Africa for example, where tradition is practiced but it is seen as Islamic even though it is not.

19.What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Beyond gender.

20.If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

The male gender is used as default in Arabic.

Comments on the Texts:

1. Hadith:

The Prophet would never have insulted women, so there must have been something which led him to say what he said, a context we are not familiar with. He must have been observing these women prior to making this statement. This probably refers only to a particular group of women, not to women in general. Because, women and men are equal in Islam.

2. Qur'an 4: 34

Something we cannot find in this ayah is that the blow must be only symbolic, a weak blow, without any physical traces. I am a Muslim and I accept everything that stands in the Qur'an. I am not bothered by anything that is written there. I am against violence. The steps mentioned here refer to women who stop practicing Islam. It is gradual, first you admonish, if she does not listen, you have the right to hit her.

3. Sufi Poem: Jamilah

I do not mind the female imagery used here. God is beyond gender, never mind, male or female. I have always read it as a love poem, in fact. Now that you have explained that, it does not bother me at all that female vocabulary is used.

PARTICIPANT 9 (my translation from Bosnian)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Islam

2. Your denomination?

Sunni

3. Are you religious?

Yes

4. Do you practise your religion?

Partly.

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

No, not always.

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

Yes, polygamy.

7. Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

No.

- 8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?**

Yes, e. g. female circumcision.

- 9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?**

Not sure between male and beyond gender.

- 10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?**

Translated and interpreted by men in a time when the female gender was considered inferior, even impure.

Comments on the Texts:

1. Hadith:

When I read this hadith for the first time I was in a way disappointed, because I used to believe that women and men are equal in Islam. When I analyse the hadith deeper, though, I conclude that some things might be true, because women, indeed, cannot pray and fast during the period. The idea that they can lead intelligent and reasonable men astray is strange. I wonder how a woman, whose intelligence is weak, can lead a man astray if he is so pure, intelligent and reasonable? That is contradictory. This hadith does not cause positive reactions.

2. Qur'an 4: 34

Admonishing, separation is ok. Beating can be interpreted in different ways. I don't think that it is acceptable and I believe that it has nothing to do with Islam, in fact. It all comes to that, that the man has to educate and tutor the woman, and that she has to be subjugated and obedient.

3. Sufi Poem: Jamilah

It sounds beautiful at first sight. I would say it is a nice love song. Since the poet is a man, it is logical in a way that he addresses the beloved in female terms. It is in a way natural that men are attracted by women, so it was probably easier for the poet to use a woman as a personification of Allah. It is somehow strange since I have never heard somebody addressing Allah in the female gender, but it does not bother me.

PARTICIPANT 10 (my translation from Bosnian)

- 1. To which religious tradition do you belong?**

Islam

- 2. Your denomination?**

Sunni

- 3. Are you religious?**

Yes

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

No

7. Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

God does not need any representatives. There are enough signs for those who look.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

I do not know of any contradictions in religious regulations. I think that contradictions appear when we begin to change religion and adapt it to ourselves. In the process of adaptation we cause contradictions because we are not consistent enough.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

I would not like to answer questions when I do not know the answer.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

I have never thought that much about the separation between he and she. I have always been equal and the issue of gender inequality has never bothered me. But, here, I think that it is because of the fact that the noun God is of male gender.

Comments on the Texts:

1. Hadith:

Yes, if each woman looks upon herself and analyses herself honestly she will see that the above mentioned is really true. After having analysed myself in some situations I realised that I am not the same person during my menses and the period after that. I have observed that for a while and even though it is weird it is true. All the stupid things, nervousness, irritability attack exactly during these days. I was wondering why and how and after a while when I read this hadith I realised that God tried to make it easier for us on those days – after all we were created from a crooked rib.

2. Qur'an 4: 34

Our Lord is really merciful, thank God that He said first admonish, then punish and then hit. If men should, God forbid, decide it would all be reduced to hit first and that would be it. God, indeed, knows that we are powerless and weak in certain things so he made it easier for us: first talk, admonish and if nothing helps than you can hit as well. He did not say hit and divorce as it has become usual today, all marriages end after three seconds without proper discussions and warnings. If we would only study the Qur'an more!

3. Sufi Poem: Jamilah

Nice choice of poetry. When men sing of God they use female forms, and when women talk about God they use the male forms. This is the best answer to the question regarding the gender of God from the questionnaire.

PARTICIPANT 11: (my translation from Bosnian)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Islam

2. Your denomination?

Sunni

3. Are you religious?

Yes

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

No

7. Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

No

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Yes.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Beyond gender

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

I do not know.

Comments to the Texts:

1. Hadith:

I do not know why you picked this hadith, but I am proud to be a Muslim, a mother and a woman in Islam. Besides there are many ahadith addressing women as mothers, women as martyrs during the life of the Prophet etc.

2. Qur'an 4: 34

Many women deserve to be admonished due to their behaviour but with some women this does not bring any results. Only Allah knows why he revealed this ayah. Apart from that, as far as I

know according to a hadith “The best among you are those who treat their women in the best manner.”

3. Sufi Poem: *Jamilah*

I am not a poetic soul. I believe that apart from the love to God we are to a great extent also moved by brotherly love and the love between men and women described in these verses.

PARTICIPANT 12: (my translation from Bosnian)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Islam

2. Your denomination:

Sunni

3. Do you practise your religion?

Yes

4. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes

5. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

No

6. Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

If “representative” in this question implies somebody who practices correctly and carries out God’s orders I think that the religious institutions and scholars try to follow God’s instructions the way He prescribed them. Since they are also human and are prone to make mistake,s we can say that in their actions there can be mistakes which do not reflect properly God’s instructions.

7. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

No

8. What do you think what is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Beyond Gender

9. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

This has nothing to do with gender but with the language used. Usually, there is no proper linguistic term to address God.

Since the word “God” grammatically belongs to the male nouns, we have to use male pronouns for it. This has nothing to do with the natural gender and is, in my view, a linguistic exception. Basically, I believe that God has no shape. Neither is He limited by

space or gender, nor does He have an outer appearance similar to humans. That is why He is God.

Comments to the texts:

1. Hadith:

I think that the text of this hadith is in complete accordance with the truth and the reality of modern women. For me it is only confirming what is happening in real life and I have no negative opinion in this regard. It is a fact that women living in today's materialistic societies often cause negative relationships or even conflicts with their husbands due to their ingratitude, e. g. She has ten pairs of shoes but, unfortunately, her husband has not bought the trendy ones. Regarding the weakness in intelligence, it is known that a woman needs a year to come back to „normal“ after child birth. During this year she feels a bit „disoriented“ and she saves the information she receives in her short term memory rather than in her long term memory. Besides, the way women feel during menstruation etc. I think that men are more aware of the events around them since they are exempted from the previously mentioned phenomena.

2. Qur'an 4: 34

This is just a gradual way of showing a woman that something she is doing is not OK or correct. I think that for every intelligent and sensible woman the first step, i. e. admonishment, will be enough, and that nothing more will be needed. It is a well-known fact that today women's inadequate behaviour in society is cause to various diseases and immorality. If the correct way of communicating with women (as suggested in the ayah) had been applied, it would never have come so far.

3. Sufi Poem: Jamilah

A Sufi poem talking about the love for God, about the longing for His look and face, and about the love a Sufi person feels for his or her Lord.

PARTICIPANT 15: (my translation from Bosnian)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Islam

2. Your denomination?

Sunni

3. Are you religious?

Yes

4. Do you practise your religion?

Basic things

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

No, I feel privileged because women in my religion are protected from many things through certain regulations.

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

Absolutely nothing. I accept religion as we received it from our Lord. Only as such can religion be pure and correct and everything else only spoils and destroys its essence. I believe that everything that has been prescribed was given to people for a reason as has been proven by science lately. It is just that we people take the freedom to change things which do not fit our goals and habits.

7. Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

All those representing any group of people are chosen by these people. I think that some things can be done in a better way but also in a much worse way. Anyway, we should not be bothered too much by others regardless of their position but focus on our development and prosperity and the prosperity of those close to us. If we did that I think our representatives and leaders would appear in a more positive light.

Thus, these people are our representatives and equal to us in front of God. They also bear a greater burden because they will be held responsible for their way of leading others. Those chosen by people cannot represent God. God's last Messenger was Muhammad p.b.u.h.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Yes, of course. All things on earth can be distorted and abused and so can religion as well. I think that this has nothing to do with the religion itself and the its values and rules. It is humans who use things in a wrong way presenting them differently. Today religion has become a means for many. People use it for wrong purposes. They put under the labels of Islam, Christianity and Judaism things that no sensible person could ever link to these religions. Today religion is seen as the greatest enemy of democracy which is absurd, because anybody who studies this ideology will conclude that it has emerged from religion. Anyway, in today's modern society it is hard to accept that many have not reached the truth yet. I think that people should inform themselves more through reading and studying of books than through watching tv-programs which are in fact designed propaganda.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

HAHAHA, I had to laugh upon hearing this question. I think that God is like He says He is. He has 99 names known to humans. Those who are lucky find out the 100th name. Why discuss a gender the existence of which is unknown? I think that the human mind cannot comprehend and reach Divinity. We cannot comprehend and reach ourselves. I believe that everybody has been surprised by his or her own actions sometimes. Why then search beyond ourselves when there are so many things in us which we need to reach and discover first.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

Believe me that I was expecting such a question. You see, we are all souls. Souls are equal. Our souls are in our bodies which are divided into gender. With our bodies we should treat all the other bodies in the best possible way while at the same time taking care of our own bodies as well – and all that in order to preserve our souls. Our Lord is the Lord of all people and all worlds, He is... (here the study participant listed the 99 names of Allah).

There is so much depth in each name that even if we tried to become only one of them we would give up because after all we are created and we are only servants of Allah, and He, Allah, described Himself in a surah called El-Ikhlâs which goes as follows:

Say: "He is the One God:

God the Eternal, the Uncaused Cause of All Being.

He begets not and neither is He begotten;

And there is nothing that could be compared with him.”

Why then questions who lead us to compare our Lord with us, men and women, human souls, when there is nobody like Him.

Comments to the Texts:

1. Hadith:

It is a well known fact in our religion that women and men are built differently. They are different. However, rights of every person are known and should be respected. Due to the differing natures of the two genders they are approached differently. According to that, all decisions are made in a just manner and Allah will not treat anybody unjustly. Women are lofty beings in Islam based on their motherhood only. They are rewarded by Allah. It has been said that a woman who gives birth to a child deserves the reward of the hajj and the umrah and her struggle on this path equals the struggle of a martyr on Allah's path. It is harder for women to struggle against the wishes and passions of the nafs (nafs – ego, psyche, self). That is what religion claims, but due to this fact each woman has been promised the Paradise by Allah if she fasts during Ramadan, prays five times a day and shows obedience to her husband, as stated in a hadith. However, we should not stick to this obedience as obedience of woman to husband only. Allah said that the spouses have the same obligations towards each other. Thus, if a woman shows obedience, i. e. tries to create a harmonious marriage with her husband and fulfills the previously mentioned conditions her reward will be Jannah (Paradise). There is no such reward for the fulfillment of just a couple of demands mentioned for men. In Islam, women's good deeds are more valued than the ones performed by men but this is rarely mentioned. The above mentioned hadith shows very clearly that it is much easier for a woman to deserve Jannah.

Islam, as any other way of life, is not so easy as to be defined by a couple ahadith (sentences/wisdoms). Probably, if we picked only a few rules out of anything we would have to seriously question the justice and correctness of these rules. And, of course, everything looks completely differently when interconnected into a total system of values wherein these ahadith/these wisdoms assume a completely different form.

2. Qur'an 4: 34

About this ayah I will say and point out a few things which I have learnt from a bit more educated people. The disobedience of a wife referred to here is grave and such a wife causes actually serious harm to her husband. In such situations a husband is advised to talk to his wife first. After that he is advised to separate from her in bed in order to make them think about their actions. And after all of that, if the wife still shows disobedience, he should hit her. However, our language is different from the Arabic, and often it is not possible to translate literally. Because of that some changes have occurred here. As far as I know the word used here in Arabic refers to something children play with, i. e. that the husband should hit his wife with things children play with. Furthermore, the husband acts gradually.

3. Sufi Poem: Jamilah

Personally, I do not like this poem. I do not see anything negative in it because everything that spreads love and care is good. It speaks about the honour of a woman, loved and respected by a man...whose desire gets bigger because she is hidden and unknown to him. Such things are rare

today and respect towards women even rarer. I think it is a cute little poem but in a way too simple for my taste. I prefer deeper poetry with stronger metaphors.

PARTICIPANT 17: (my translation from Bosnian)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Islam

2. Your denomination?

Sunni

3. Are you religious?

Yes

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

No

7. Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

Yes

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Yes, very much

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Beyond gender, cannot think of God in terms of gender

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

Probably tradition. Higher beings are considered to be male. I am a little afraid to think about the gender of God.

Comments on the Texts:

1. Hadith:

I was a bit shocked by this hadith, even though I had heard that the Prophet saw more women than men in the Hell. I have now to think about giving more to charity. I feel less worthy in my marriage after having read this hadith. I hope I will learn something from this hadith, because obviously we women need more...it seems that men are a little bit above women in Islam, after all. I was shocked, because we know that the Prophet treated women in a much nicer way. This hadith affected me, really.

2. Qur'an 4: 34

I have not heard this ayah before. Allah knows best, Allah determines everything, of course. Personally, I do not approve of violence against women. This ayah does not advocate violence, but the practice differs from theory. Problems should be solved in peaceful manner, hitting and violence do not help. Muslim men abuse this ayah. I am not bothered by the fact that men ought to educate women if they are "proper men". Today, there are only few of such men.

3. Sufi Poem: Jamilah

I always read it as a love poem, and was very surprised that it was a supplication. The female gender used for God does not bother me, on the contrary, I quite like it. Gender is irrelevant in reference to God.

PARTICIPANT 18: (my translation from Bosnian)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Islam

2. Your denomination?

Sunni

3. Are you religious?

Yes

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

No

7. Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

No. The Qur'an is the only authority and we are described as equal there.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Yes. It depends on how much you believe in God.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Beyond gender

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

I really don't know. For me God is of no gender. We could use female pronouns as well, doesn't matter to me.

Comments on the Texts:

1. Hadith:

I don't like it, because I don't think it is true. I doubt the authenticity of this hadith.

2. Qur'an 4: 34

I think that something has been interpreted in a wrong way. It is strange that the word "hit" was used here. From my perspective hitting a woman is unacceptable. Admonishing is fine.

3. Sufi Poem: *Jamilah*

Jamilah is a female name. It sounds nice and acceptable, but I still could not say that Allah is female.

PARTICIPANT 19: (my translation from Bosnian)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Islam

2. Your denomination?

Sunni

3. Are you religious?

Yes

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

No

7. Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

Yes, they have more knowledge.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Yes

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Beyond gender.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

Never thought about that, it never bothered me. That is just the way it is.

Comments on the Texts:

1. Hadith:

I cannot agree with this hadith, because I think that there are also men whose faith is weak and who treat their wives badly and can lead them astray. There are women who are more stable, cleverer, practise religion more sincerely. I simply don't agree with this. We cannot generalise things.

2. Qur'an 4: 34

I don't think that hitting would have any effect on a woman who does not change her behaviour after being advised to. God should judge, not husbands, because God knows her best and knows the reasons why she is behaving in that way, it might have physical or any other reasons. The translation "hit" does not bother me, though. I would not forbid hitting and don't feel sorry for women.

3. Sufi Poem: *Jamilah*

As long as positive terms are used I don't mind. If the tone was negative I would react differently perhaps.

PARTICIPANT 13: (my translation from Bosnian)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Islam

2. Your denomination?

Sunni

3. Are you religious?

Yes

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes in theory, not always in practice.

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

No. It is only hard to accept some traditions that people wrongly associate with Islam (complete covering of women, female circumcision, forbidding women to vote, depriving women of education etc.)

7. Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

No. I think that the only real representatives of God on earth were his Messengers and they are not with us anymore. Scholars only mediate religious knowledge which can bring us closer to God but they do not represent God because they are chosen by humans and not by God.

Institutions are a necessity in today's society. They can have positive effects (help religious communities to reach their goals in a legal way) but they can also have negative

sides (institutionalisation of faith, abuse of religion, interpretations of religious texts only in ways acceptable for the institution).

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Yes, there are many examples for that. In Islam men and women are equal but in most Muslim societies men have greater rights (the role of the woman is minimalised in public life).

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

I think that God has no gender because He is not a creature but the Creator of all creatures. According to that He is unique and has no characteristics of the creatures like mortality, gender etc.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

I think there are two reasons for that:

- *Linguistic explanation: the grammatical gender of the noun “god” is male*
- *Cultural explanation: In most cultures the man has always been a symbol for power, strength, protection, management and the woman a symbol for motherhood, care for home and family etc. Since God is the one who creates, manages, makes decisions etc. it has been more suitable to use “male” language for God.*

Comments to the Texts

1. Hadith:

At the first sight it seems that men are better than women since fewer men will end up in Hell due to their higher intellect and stronger faith. I think, though, that only those who know Islam and Arabic well can comment on this hadith properly. I am not familiar with the context of this hadith (e. g. who were these women addressed by the Prophet etc.) and do not believe that it refers to all women in general. There are numerous ahadith which describe women equal to men.

2. Qur’an 4: 34

I am not quite sure that “hit” is the correct translation of the Arabic term. Besides, there are two steps before the “hitting”. I think that for intelligent women the first step will be enough. The problem emerges when some ignorant Muslims interpret this as an authorisation to beat their wives and this becomes their first reaction to wife’s “disobedience”.

3. Sufi Poem: Jamilah

I never thought that the poet is addressing Allah in this poem and I find it strange that he is doing it in such a way. I really do not know much about sufism and that is why it is difficult for me to understand and comment on this poem. For me not only the use of a female name for God is strange but also the use of expressions like „a strand of hair“.

PARTICIPANT 14: (my translation from Bosnian)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

Islam

2. Your denomination:

Sunni

3. Are you religious?

Yes

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes in theory, not in practice.

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

No.

7. Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

No, they have never been that and I am convinced that God never intended them to be.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Yes.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Beyond gender

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

It was the most comprehensible and acceptable way of addressing God for humans to perceive.

Comments to the Texts

1. Hadith:

Since the Prophet explained all the points he mentioned in this hadith I have no additional comment to make. The hadith itself explains everything. I as a woman have never felt bad, insulted or discriminated because of any of these things because I believe in the universal balance in the whole existence. If God wanted women to have certain qualities then these qualities have their place and role in that balance and she possesses other characteristics which compensate for her weaknesses (personally, I do not see them as weaknesses)

2. Qur'an 4: 34

- *The word daraba has more than one meaning and it is not sure at all that "hit" is the correct translation. This word has 9 different meanings in Arabic. It would be much more acceptable to imply many of the other meanings in this case even*

though it was interpreted and translated as “hit” by many traditional mufassirun (interpreters of religious texts).

- *Solving a problem gradually and using all possible solutions before physical punishment is considered. Discussion, communications, advice, separation in bed, in some other ayat involvement of other family members and requiring advice from them is mentioned, and then finally the possible blow. Since the Prophet p.b.u.h imposed constraints on this possible blow which at the end becomes completely symbolical and due to the fact that he never hit his wives or slaves (on the contrary, he advised others not to do it) I think that such a step could be considered only in very rare cases and that it is mostly symbolic. I used to think earlier, despite my deep conviction of God’s wisdom, that it was a little strange that such an act is allowed in the Revelation. However, in my life I have met some women, just a few of them, who I believe deserve some sort of physical admonishment for their unfair and incorrect behaviour and their arrogance. Other methods just would not do.*

3. Sufi Poem: Jamilah

I think that the original text of this poem, in which Allah was addressed with one of his attributes Jamil, was changed and the feminine form Jamilah was used. The singer is male and it would be strange to sing to another man. 98% of people who have heard this song believe that this is a simple love song dedicated to a woman. That is why I am a bit confused... I never thought that the poet is actually addressing God in the female gender. But, if he did, it would not be a problem, because God has no gender anyway. We have to address him as male since there is no neuter form in Arabic and there is no other linguistic possibility. I used to address God as huwa („he“) in 37 years and it would be certainly strange for me to use female forms. Moreover, I am not sure if this would be linguistically correct and in concordance with the shariah because God addressed Himself in that way and it is a rule that He is such as He described Himself..

PARTICIPANT 20: (my translation from Bosnian)

1. To which religious tradition do you belong?

ISLAM

2. Your denomination?

Sunni

3. Are you religious:

Yes.

4. Do you practise your religion?

Yes

5. Do you, as a woman, feel equal to the men adhering to your religion?

Yes

6. Is there anything that you find hard to accept, as a woman, in your religion?

Sometimes, I think that men have much more freedom regarding some of their whims and irresponsible actions even though I know that they will be held responsible for that on the Day of Judgement.

7. Do you think that religious institutions and/or scholars are the legitimate representatives of God on earth?

Not all.

8. Do you see any contradictions between religious values, concerning equality between women and men, and the way they are put into practice by people?

Yes, very much.

9. What do you think is the gender of God? Male? Female? Neuter? Beyond gender?

Beyond gender.

10. If God is not male why are, in your opinion, male pronouns used when talking about the Divine in monotheistic religions?

Because the authority and the power He possesses are more likely to be seen as male than as female characteristics.

Comments to the Texts:

4. Hadith:

I have personally often witnessed how some women manipulate men using their goodness and aversion to quarreling. Even outside the context of marriage, e.g. at the workplace, it is much easier to work with a group of men than women. Women are inclined to be selfish, to talk against each other and interfere in other people's affairs. Such behaviour is transferred to marriage, too. They constantly complain and make relations between other women in the family difficult (sister-in-law, mother-in-law).

As regards the testimony, sometimes I feel that this is unfair towards women, but as I am getting more mature, I realise that I myself would not like to give testimony in a significant case, I think that this would be too stressful for me and it seems to me that I am not able to remember facts that well due to other obligations. Besides, it seems to me that women, due to their emotionality, can hardly reduce events to pure facts and that they easily can interpret certain events wrongly and give them inappropriate meanings.

As far as the weakness in religion is concerned, this is totally clear to me. It is a general rule in Islam that those people who are mostly dedicated to religion and who fulfill their religious duties fully should be given significant positions. As soon as a man starts omitting prayers, for example, his ability to judge correctly diminishes, he is under the influence of negative energy. This causes his reliability to decrease. Since women are exempted from some religious duties (prayer, fasting etc.) in certain periods, their faith becomes weaker and it is harder for them to fight negative influences. I have also noticed that women who do not practise religion often criticise religion without being able to realise that they are not competent enough to do so. Thus they prove the above mentioned weakness in religion and judgment.

5. Qur'an 4: 34

Since women sometimes really do behave irrationally, this methodology of "getting back to the right path" presented in this Qur'anic ayah seems absolutely appropriate. However, even though Muslim scholars claim that „disobedience“ here refers to obvious sinful behaviour of a wife which could possibly lead to adultery and damage the marriage, and that the physical punishment should only be symbolic and must never injure the woman, some men may use this ayah to justify their wish for control of their wives and for their daily abuse of them. It is questionable whether a husband might use this ayah to, for instance, discipline his wife because

she would not bring him a glass of water when he demanded it. Has she been „disobedient“ in terms of this ayah?

6. Sufi Poem: Jamilah

Personally, I am not fond of sufi poetry. I do not like the allusion to the love for God by means of physical attraction and the desire men feel for women.

PARTICIPANT 7: (verbatim)

1. Was ist Ihr Glaubensbekenntnis?

Islam

2. Ihre Konfession?

Sunnitisch

3. Sind Sie religiös?

ja

4. Praktizieren Sie Ihre Religion?

Ja, ich versuche mein Leben nach dem Islam zu gestalten.

5. Fühlen Sie sich den Männern in Ihrer Religion gleichgestellt?

Ja, fühle sogar, dass der Islam den Frauen eine besondere Stellung gibt.

6. Gibt es etwas in Ihrer Religion, das Sie als Frau schwierig zu akzeptieren finden?

Nein, aber es gibt in allen geschichtlichen Passagen Frauenunterdrückung so wie heute, aber dies hat keine Begründung durch den Islam.

7. Meinen Sie, dass die religiösen Institutionen und Gelehrte legitime Stellvertreter Gottes auf Erden sind?

Stellvertreter nicht; ich brauche keine Vermittlung, aber sie können ein guter Ort sein, um Möglichkeiten für das Praktizieren der Religion zu schaffen (z. B. Moschee, Zentren usw.)

8. Sehen Sie irgendwelche Widersprüche zwischen Theorie und Praxis bezüglich der Stellung der Frau in Ihrer Religion? Wenn ja, welche z. B.?

So wie in allen Gesellschaften gibt und gab es Ungerechtigkeiten gegenüber Frauen, aber es gibt auch genug Beispiele, wo Theorie und Praxis übereinstimmen, vor allem bei der Jugend!

9. Welches Geschlecht würden Sie Gott zuschreiben? Männliches, weibliches, sachliches oder außerhalb der Kategorie des Geschlechts?

Außerhalb der Kategorie des Geschlechts.

10. Wenn Gott nicht männlich ist, warum werden dann, Ihrer Meinung nach, in den monotheistischen Religionen männliche Pronomen in Verbindung mit Gott benutzt, zum Beispiel, Seine Gebote, Sein Volk, Seine Gnade etc?

Weil das auch gesellschaftlich bedingt ist! In der Gesellschaft wurde Religion vor allem von Männern gelebt, diskutiert etc. Es gibt aber auch andere Kulturkreise/Sprachen, wo Gott nicht männlich ist.

Kommentare zu den Texten:

1. Hadith:

Der Prophet (Frieden und Segen seien auf ihn) erklärt genau, was hier Mangel heißt. Es gibt genug Überlieferungen, die den Wert und die Gleichberechtigung der Frauen zeigen. Auch in der Geschichte zeigt sich das: Aisha, Khadija r.a.

2. Qur`an 4: 34

Über dieses Wort „daraba“ könnte man einen ganzen Vortrag halten; der Prophet saws (peace be upon him) hat nie seine Frauen geschlagen.

3. Das Sufi Gedicht: *Jamilah*

Es war anders für mich, aber nicht wegen der weiblichen Form, sondern wegen der Anrede: „Siehst du denn nicht?“ – so etwas klingt als Frage an Allah swt (the Most Glorious, the Most High), für mich sehr ungewohnt. Die Weibliche Form klingt schon sehr neu und man denkt nicht sofort an Allah swt.

PARTICIPANT 6: (verbatim)

1. Was ist Ihr Glaubensbekenntnis?

Islam

2. Ihre Konfession?

Sunnitisch

3. Sind Sie religiös?

ja

4. Praktizieren Sie Ihre Religion?

Ja..

5. Fühlen Sie sich den Männern in Ihrer Religion gleichgestellt?

Ja, absolut. Manchmal fühle ich mich sogar fast schon bevorzugt.

6. Gibt es etwas in Ihrer Religion, das Sie als Frau schwierig zu akzeptieren finden?

In der Religion nicht, bei den Menschen, welche meinen, die Religion zu leben schon manchmal.

7. Meinen Sie, dass die religiösen Institutionen und Gelehrte legitime Stellvertreter Gottes auf Erden sind?

NEIN

8. Sehen Sie irgendwelche Widersprüche zwischen Theorie und Praxis bezüglich der Stellung der Frau in Ihrer Religion ? Wenn ja, welche z. B.?

Ja

9. Welches Geschlecht würden Sie Gott zuschreiben? Männliches, weibliches, sachliches oder außerhalb der Kategorie des Geschlechts?

Kein Geschlecht.

10. Wenn Gott nicht männlich ist, warum werden dann, Ihrer Meinung nach, in den monotheistischen Religionen männliche Pronomen in Verbindung mit Gott benutzt, zum Beispiel, *Seine* Gebote, *Sein* Volk, *Seine* Gnade etc?

Kommentare zu den Texten:

1. Hadith: -

2. Qur`an 4: 34

Wie schon bei Punkt eins muss ich leider auf die hinterfragungswürdige Übersetzung hinweisen. Denn an der Stelle von „schlagen“ steht im Arabischen „darb“, „daraba“ und dieses Wort wird auch an anderen Stellen im Qur`an verwendet, doch nie als „schlagen“ übersetzt, denn es hat noch viele andere Bedeutungen, welche auch an dieser Stelle (4: 34) logischer erscheinen.

3. Das Sufi Gedicht: *Jamilah*

Ich denke, es ist ganz klar, dass weibliche Formulierungen befremdend klingen, schlicht daher, dass wir in unserer Umgangssprache beinahe ausschließlich maskuline Bezeichnungen verwenden. Da das Thema „Gendergerechte Formulierungen“ eine aktuelle Thematik ist und sich die Gesellschaft auch erst an die neuen Klänge wie „Schüler und Schülerinnen“, „Leser und Leserinnen“ gewöhnen muss, denke ich, dass es auch nur eine Sache der Gewöhnung in diesem Zusammenhang ist, wobei die Diskussion ohnehin sinnlos/fraglich ist, da Allah beyond Gender ist.

PARTICIPANT 4: (verbatim)

1. Was ist Ihr Glaubensbekenntnis?

Islam

2. Ihre Konfession?

Sunnitisch

3. Sind Sie religiös?

ja

4. Praktizieren Sie Ihre Religion?

Ja..

5. Fühlen Sie sich den Männern in Ihrer Religion gleichgestellt?

Ja, wenn man seine Rechte kennt, kann man diese besser einfordern.

6. Gibt es etwas in Ihrer Religion, das Sie als Frau schwierig zu akzeptieren finden?

Dass manche Männer einiges falsch verstehen.

7. Meinen Sie, dass die religiösen Institutionen und Gelehrte legitime Stellvertreter Gottes auf Erden sind?

Sie bemühen sich.

8. Sehen Sie irgendwelche Widersprüche zwischen Theorie und Praxis bezüglich der Stellung der Frau in Ihrer Religion? Wenn ja, welche z. B.?

Gar nicht, im Gegenteil - ergänzt sich.

9. Welches Geschlecht würden Sie Gott zuschreiben? Männliches, weibliches, sachliches oder außerhalb der Kategorie des Geschlechts?

Kein Geschlecht.

10. Wenn Gott nicht männlich ist, warum werden dann, Ihrer Meinung nach, in den monotheistischen Religionen männliche Pronomen in Verbindung mit Gott benutzt, zum Beispiel, Seine Gebote, Sein Volk, Seine Gnade etc?

Sprache! Kann man nicht wortwörtlich übersetzen.

Kommentare zu den Texten:

1. Hadith:

- *Nicht sahih (authentic) sagen die meisten*
- *Kann mir nicht vorstellen, dass der Prophet so etwas sagt oder abwertend meint.*

2. Qur`an 4: 34

- *Schlagt sie ist eine falsche Übersetzung*
- *Hat mehrere Bedeutungen*
- *Prophet hat seine Frauen nie geschlagen – bedeutet „verlassen“*

3. Das Sufi Gedicht: Jamilah

- *Weibliche Eigenschaften: kein Problem, ungewohnt*
- *Kann mir vorstellen, für Allah weibliche Formen zu benutzen*
- *Sprache ist in diesem Fall nur ein Hilfsmittel. Nicht eins zu eins übersetzen.*

PARTICIPANT 5: (verbatim)

1. Was ist Ihr Glaubensbekenntnis?

Islam

2. Ihre Konfession?

Sunnitisch

3. Sind Sie religiös?

ja

4. Praktizieren Sie Ihre Religion?

Ja..

5. Fühlen Sie sich den Männern in Ihrer Religion gleichgestellt?

Ja, sogar besser als Männer behandelt.

6. Gibt es etwas in Ihrer Religion, das Sie als Frau schwierig zu akzeptieren finden?

Nein.

7. Meinen Sie, dass die religiösen Institutionen und Gelehrte legitime Stellvertreter Gottes auf Erden sind?

Nein.

8. Sehen Sie irgendwelche Widersprüche zwischen Theorie und Praxis bezüglich der Stellung der Frau in Ihrer Religion ? Wenn ja, welche z. B.?

Nein.

- 9. Welches Geschlecht würden Sie Gott zuschreiben? Männliches, weibliches, sachliches oder außerhalb der Kategorie des Geschlechts?**

Gott hat kein Geschlecht.

- 10. Wenn Gott nicht männlich ist, warum werden dann, Ihrer Meinung nach, in den monotheistischen Religionen männliche Pronomen in Verbindung mit Gott benutzt, zum Beispiel, Seine Gebote, Sein Volk, Seine Gnade etc?**

Weil Männer die Religion für Männersache erklärt haben und Frauen ausgeschlossen haben.

Kommentare zu den Texten:

1. Hadith:

Man müsste den genaueren arabischen Text zu diesem Hadith lesen und anhand dessen eine Übersetzung/Interpretation anstreben. Daher möchte ich jetzt keine Aussage tätigen.

2. Qur`an 4: 34

Zu diesem Vers gibt es verschiedene Interpretationen, da das arabische Wort „darb“, „daraba“ nicht nur schlagen heißt, sondern auch im Zusammenhang mit „trennen, scheiden, einen Weg einschlagen“ verwendet werden kann. Eine passende und für mich logische Übersetzung ist, dass ein Mann seiner Frau gut zureden soll, wenn das nicht hilft, dass er sie für eine Zeit in Ruhe lassen soll und wenn es zwischen den beiden noch immer Probleme geben sollte, dass sie sich TRENNEN sollen, ABER NICHT SCHLAGEN.

Das Schlagen ist insofern unlogisch, da hier Methoden zur Versöhnung angeboten werden. Der Mann soll 1. Seiner Frau gut zureden, 2. Einen Abstand von ihr halten. Warum soll es durch das Schlagen besser werden? Daher halte ich diese Übersetzung des Verses für nicht korrekt.

3. Das Sufi Gedicht: *Jamilah*

Da wir nicht wissen und uns auch nicht vorstellen können/sollen/dürfen, welches Geschlecht/ob Allah ein Geschlecht hat, finde ich es nicht angebracht, Allah in der Sprache der Poesie mit Metaphern der weiblichen Form gleichzusetzen. Allah swt sollte mit keinen Namen oder Pronomen umschrieben oder mit ihnen gleichgesetzt werden.

PARTICIPANT 3: (verbatim)

- 1. Was ist Ihr Glaubensbekenntnis?**

Islam

- 2. Ihre Konfession?**

Sunnitisch

- 3. Sind Sie religiös?**

ja

- 4. Praktizieren Sie Ihre Religion?**

Ja.

- 5. Fühlen Sie sich den Männern in Ihrer Religion gleichgestellt?**

Yes!

6. Gibt es etwas in Ihrer Religion, das Sie als Frau schwierig zu akzeptieren finden?

Kulturelle Einflüsse.

7. Meinen Sie, dass die religiösen Institutionen und Gelehrte legitime Stellvertreter Gottes auf Erden sind?

Institutionen nicht – Menschen machen Fehler und somit kann es sowas nicht geben.

8. Sehen Sie irgendwelche Widersprüche zwischen Theorie und Praxis bezüglich der Stellung der Frau in Ihrer Religion? Wenn ja, welche z. B.?

Ja! Die Realität ist eine andere!

9. Welches Geschlecht würden Sie Gott zuschreiben? Männliches, weibliches, sachliches oder außerhalb der Kategorie des Geschlechts?

Außerhalb der Kategorie des Geschlechts.

10. Wenn Gott nicht männlich ist, warum werden dann, Ihrer Meinung nach, in den monotheistischen Religionen männliche Pronomen in Verbindung mit Gott benutzt, zum Beispiel, Seine Gebote, Sein Volk, Seine Gnade etc?

Die arabische Sprache ist eine komplexe Sprache, aus diesem Grund ist es schwer überhaupt eine Übersetzung möglich zu machen. Da es aber Übersetzungen gibt, weisen diese Pronomen den nächsten Bezug auf. Es hat nichts mit „männlich“ und „weiblich“ zu tun.

Kommentare zu den Texten:

1. Hadith:

Ich glaub nicht, dass dieser Hadith anerkannt wird, und wenn, dann nur von extremen „Gruppierungen.“

2. Qur`an 4: 34

Falsche Übersetzung!

3. Das Sufi Gedicht: Jamilah

Es ist dumm, Allah ein Geschlecht zuordnen zu wollen! Allah ist Allah und hat im Arabischen weder ein Geschlecht, noch eine Mehrzahl.

PARTICIPANT 2: (verbatim)

1. Was ist Ihr Glaubensbekenntnis?

Islam

2. Ihre Konfession?

Sunnitisch

3. Sind Sie religiös?

ja

4. Praktizieren Sie Ihre Religion?

Ja.

5. Fühlen Sie sich den Männern in Ihrer Religion gleichgestellt?

Ja.

- 6. Gibt es etwas in Ihrer Religion, das Sie als Frau schwierig zu akzeptieren finden?**

Nein.

- 7. Meinen Sie, dass die religiösen Institutionen und Gelehrte legitime Stellvertreter Gottes auf Erden sind?**

Nein.

- 8. Sehen Sie irgendwelche Widersprüche zwischen Theorie und Praxis bezüglich der Stellung der Frau in Ihrer Religion ? Wenn ja, welche z. B.?**

Ja.

- 9. Welches Geschlecht würden Sie Gott zuschreiben? Männliches, weibliches, sachliches oder außerhalb der Kategorie des Geschlechts?**

Außerhalb der Kategorie des Geschlechts.

- 10. Wenn Gott nicht männlich ist, warum werden dann, Ihrer Meinung nach, in den monotheistischen Religionen männliche Pronomen in Verbindung mit Gott benutzt, zum Beispiel, Seine Gebote, Sein Volk, Seine Gnade etc?**

Weil Sprache keine anderen Geschlechterunterschiede kennt.

Kommentare zu den Texten:

1. Hadith:

Ich glaube nicht, dass dies sahih (authentic) ist.

2. Qur`an 4: 34

Falsche Übersetzung, da der Prophet nie jemanden geschlagen hat und er war unser Vorbild.

3. Das Sufi Gedicht: Jamilah

Wenn ich weiß, dass Allah gemeint ist, dann stört es mich nicht und klingt auch nicht fremd für mich.

PARTICIPANT 1: (verbatim)

- 1. Was ist Ihr Glaubensbekenntnis?**

Islam

- 2. Ihre Konfession?**

Sunnitisch

- 3. Sind Sie religiös?**

ja

- 4. Praktizieren Sie Ihre Religion?**

Habe begonnen, zu intensivieren.

- 5. Fühlen Sie sich den Männern in Ihrer Religion gleichgestellt?**

Ja, sowohl Männer als auch Frauen sind im Islam gleich wert.

6. Gibt es etwas in Ihrer Religion, das Sie als Frau schwierig zu akzeptieren finden?

Derzeit nicht. Allah swt erleichtert es den Frauen z. B. Erbrecht etc.

7. Meinen Sie, dass die religiösen Institutionen und Gelehrte legitime Stellvertreter Gottes auf Erden sind?

Keine Stellvertreter. Sie versuchen es jedoch, das Leben der Muslime z. B. in Österreich islamisch zu leben, leichter zu leben.

8. Sehen Sie irgendwelche Widersprüche zwischen Theorie und Praxis bezüglich der Stellung der Frau in Ihrer Religion ? Wenn ja, welche z. B.?

Ja, der reine Islam wird nicht immer so rein wie in der Theorie ausgeübt.

9. Welches Geschlecht würden Sie Gott zuschreiben? Männliches, weibliches, sachliches oder außerhalb der Kategorie des Geschlechts?

Außerhalb der Kategorie des Geschlechts.

10. Wenn Gott nicht männlich ist, warum werden dann, Ihrer Meinung nach, in den monotheistischen Religionen männliche Pronomen in Verbindung mit Gott benutzt, zum Beispiel, Seine Gebote, Sein Volk, Seine Gnade etc?

Die arabische Sprache ist so dynamisch und schwer zu übersetzen. Denn im Koran wird Gott kein Geschlecht zugeteilt. Dass ist der Nachteil der Übersetzung, da der Koran nicht wörtlich übersetzt werden kann.

Kommentare zu den Texten:

1. Hadith:

Kenne ich nicht, somit kann ich keine Stellung nehmen.

2. Qur`an 4: 34

Der Mann soll sanft mit seiner Frau umgehen und umgekehrt. Hadith: „Der beste unter Männern ist der, der zu seinen Frauen gut ist.“

Hier komme ich wieder auf die Schwierigkeit der Übersetzung des Korans aus dem Arabischen, da die Sprache mehrere Deutungen hat. Somit finde ich es in den Übersetzungen nicht sinngemäß, wenn das Wort aus dem Arabischen mit „schlagen“ ins Deutsche übersetzt wird.

Deutung: Wenn der Mann auf Widersetzlichkeit der Frau anstößt, soll er in erster Linie mit ihr reden. Wenn sie nicht will, sie dann in Ruhe lassen. Wenn das auch nicht hilft, sie dann verlassen/loslassen.

Weiter steht in der Sure 2, dass Männer wie Gewand für Frauen sind und umgekehrt. Gewand hat somit mehrere Bedeutungen, somit auch die Ehepartner einander gegenüber.

Allah swt bestraft die Männer, die verbal ihre Frauen verletzen. Physische Gewalt ist ein anderes Thema, welches nicht mit dem Islam zu vereinbaren ist.

3. Das Sufi Gedicht: Jamilah

Der Koran schreibt Allah swt kein Geschlecht zu. Weiter sollen sich die Gläubigen, Allah swt nicht in einer Gestalt vorstellen. Bei der Übersetzung von Koranversen besteht die beschriebene Schwierigkeit, originaltreu zu übersetzen. Ich bin nicht einverstanden, wenn Allah swt ein Geschlecht zugeordnet wird.

PARTICIPANT 16: (verbatim)

11. Was ist Ihr Glaubensbekenntnis?

Islam

12. Ihre Konfession?

Sunnitisch

13. Sind Sie religiös?

ja

14. Praktizieren Sie Ihre Religion?

ja

15. Fühlen Sie sich den Männern in Ihrer Religion gleichgestellt?

Ja, was die islamische Theorie betrifft. Nein, was die Realität in islamischen Gesellschaften und den meisten Gemeinschaften betrifft.

16. Gibt es etwas in Ihrer Religion, das Sie als Frau schwierig zu akzeptieren finden?

In den Quellen nichts. In der Realität sehr vieles: z. B. die Passivität der meisten Musliminnen, die mangelnde Bildung, mangelnde gesellschaftliche, intellektuelle, politische, wirtschaftliche ..etc. Partizipation sowie die Einschränkung und Abwertung der Rolle der Frau vielerorts .

17. Meinen Sie, dass die religiösen Institutionen legitime Stellvertreter Gottes auf Erden sind?

Nein.

18. Sehen Sie irgendwelche Widersprüche zwischen Theorie und Praxis bezüglich der Stellung der Frau in Ihrer Religion ? Wenn ja, welche z. B.?

Ja! Siehe oben.

19. Welches Geschlecht würden Sie Gott zuschreiben? Männliches, weibliches, sachliches oder außerhalb der Kategorie des Geschlechts?

Außerhalb der Kategorie des Geschlechts.

20. Wenn Gott nicht männlich ist, warum werden dann, Ihrer Meinung nach, in den monotheistischen Religionen männliche Pronomen in Verbindung mit Gott benutzt, zum Beispiel, Seine Gebote, Sein Volk, Seine Gnade etc?

Ich denke, dass dies in erster Linie auf die Übersetzung zurück zu führen ist.

In der arabischen Hochsprache gibt es, meines Wissens, ein "Hauptform", die sowohl Männliches als auch Weibliches oder Sächliches beschreiben kann und eine Sonderform, die man nur verwendet um auszudrücken, dass nur rein Weibliches gemeint wird- also wenn hervorzuheben ist, dass das Beschriebene rein weiblich ist, obwohl es theoretisch auch männlich sein könnte.

Die Hauptform als "männlich" zu bezeichnen, scheint daher nicht ganz zutreffend, da Wörter, die aus biologischen Gründen nur weiblich sein können, grundsätzlich nur in der Hauptform verwendet werden: z.B. "hamil" (und nicht "hamilah"- das wäre die abgewandelte rein weibliche Form) für "Schwanger", oder "ha'idh"(und nicht ha'idha) menstruierend usw.

Die Namen und Attribute Allahs sind der allgemeineren Hauptform zuzuordnen . In der Übersetzung wird dafür oft ein männlicher Begriff verwendet, wenn es für diese Form kein Equivalent in der anderen Sprache gibt.

Hoffe, meine Ausführungen als nicht- Sprachwissenschaftlerin sind halbwegs verständlich ;)

Kommentare zu den Texten:

4. Hadith:

Ich habe zur Zeit kein Hadith- Nachschlagewerk zur Hand und kann mich daher kaum zum Kontext dieser Aussage des Propheten a.s. äußern. Ich bin mir aber ziemlich sicher, dass man aus dieser Aussage keinesfalls auf eine Minderwertigkeit des weiblichen Geschlechts oder Ähnliches rückschließen kann.

Grundsätzlich halte ich es für problematisch , sich als Laie ohne Einbezug hadithwissenschaftl. Fachkenntnisse und Methoden und ohne Kenntnis des dazugehörigen Kontextes eine Textstelle aus den Quellen des Islam auszulegen. Gerade der “Offenbarungsgrund” oder die Situation in der eine Aussage getätigt wurde, liefern ja oft den Hinweis zu deren Relevanz und zeigen zum Beispiel, ob sie nur in speziellen Situationen oder allgemein gültig sind. Dies festzulegen obliegt den Hadith- bzw. Qur'an- Wissenschaftlern, die nach Studium aller anderen ähnlichen Textstellen durch wissenschaftliche Verfahren der Hadithinterpretation unter Berücksichtigung orts-, zeit-, und kulturbedingter Umstände Interpretationsmöglichkeiten offenzulegen haben.

Gerade was Frauen- spezifische Themen betrifft, ist es allerdings eine traurige Tatsache , dass sich in der Geschichte der Islamwissenschaften hauptsächlich nur Werke von männlichen Autoren durchgesetzt haben. Kulturbedingte patriarchale Denksysteme taten oft ihr Übriges, um sehr frauenfeindliche Meinungen unter MuslimInnen zu verbreiten.

Daher halte ich es für eine der wichtigsten Herausforderungen der Zukunft, Intepretationen von Gelehrten, die vor Jahrhunderten getätigt wurden auf ihre zeit- und kulturübergreifende Relevanz hin zu überprüfen und genderfaire Forschung im Rahmen der Islamwissenschaften zu intensivieren.

5. Qur'an 4: 34:

In dieser Übersetzung fließt schon eine (recht enge) Interpretation mit ein.

Das arabische Wort “Daraba”, das hier mit “Schlagen” übersetzt wurde hat nämlich verschiedene Bedeutungen.- allein im Qur'an nimmt es – je nach Kontext- verschiedene Bedeutungen ein.

Eine Bedeutung dieses Wortes, die hier, meines Erachtens mehr Sinn als “Schlagen” ergeben würde, ist “verlassen” bzw. “von etwas trennen”

Dies abgesehen davon, dass ich diesen Vers- im arabischen Originaltext- als betont frauenfreundlich wahrnehme. Im ersten Teil des Verses, der hier nicht angeführt ist, steht beispielsweise, dass in der Ehe der Mann für das Wohl der Frau zu sorgen hat sowie dass er allein die finanzielle Verantwortung für die Familie trägt.

6. Das Sufi Gedicht: Jamilah

Diese Interpretation dieses Textes macht einen befremdlichen Eindruck auf mich- und zwar aus dem Grund, dass für Gott Worte und Vergleiche verwendet werden, die mir aus Qur'an und Hadith nicht bekannt vorkommen.

In der Aqidah, der Lehre von den Glaubensinhalten, die (im Vergleich zu Fiqh beispielsweise) zu den wenigen unveränderlichen Wissenschaften des Islams gehören, und über die ein breiter wissenschaftlicher Konsens herrscht, gilt meines Wissens, der folgende Grundsatz:

„ Über Allah darf nur gesagt werden, was Er selbst über sich mitteilt“

Was die weiblichen Pronomen betrifft, so sehe ich das als rein sprachliches Problem an, das sich im Arabischen gar nicht stellt. So ist das für mich mit ein Grund lieber das arabische Wort für Gott "Allah" (das übrigens auch arabische Christen benützen) zu verwenden, da es im Gegensatz zu "Gott" weder dem männlichen noch dem weiblichen Geschlecht zuzuordnen ist und damit meinem Gottesbild besser entspricht.

Auch die anderen Namen und Attribute Allahs kann man in arabischen Ursprung nicht an einem Geschlecht festmachen.