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Review of Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Mulki Al-Sharmani and Jana Rumminger, *Men in Charge? Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition*, London: Oneworld Publications 2015, 286 pp., ISBN 978-1-78074-716-3

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Publication date

19-02-2017

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Document Version

Published version

Citation for this work (American Psychological Association 7th edition)

GARCIA RODRIGUEZ, D. (2017). *Review of Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Mulki Al-Sharmani and Jana Rumminger, Men in Charge? Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition, London: Oneworld Publications 2015, 286 pp., ISBN 978-1-78074-716-3* (Version 1). University of Sussex.

<https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uos.23492693.v1>

Published in

Religion and Gender

Link to external publisher version

<https://doi.org/10.18352/rg.10230>

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Review of Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Mulki Al-Sharmani and Jana Rumminger, *Men in Charge? Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition*, London: Oneworld Publications 2015, 286 pp., ISBN 978-1-78074-716-3

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In *Men in Charge? Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition*, Musawah, a global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family, put together scholars from distinct disciplines to explore the reasons behind the discrimination against women in Muslim legal tradition through the concepts of *qiwamah* and *wilayah*. The first refers to the husband's authority over his wife and his financial responsibility towards her (p. 1), while the latter refers to the right and duty of males to exercise guardianship over female members (ibid). Through ten different chapters, the editors aim to challenge male authority and gender discrimination from within Muslim legal tradition.

The first chapter explores the emergence of ideas on gender equality as a challenge to Muslim legal tradition during the 20th century. By starting out analysing the verse 4:34, Mir-Hosseini explains how understandings of gender rights and justice have developed in Muslim legal doctrine. Taking as a point of departure the notion that the Quranic spirit is that of 'the equality of all human beings' (p. 27), three texts are analysed considering the Quranic verses which are relevant to proving the possibilities of egalitarian constructions of gender rights in the Quran. While giving voice to progressive figures on Muslim legal tradition, the author is well aware of the obstacles that patriarchal and authoritarian structures constitute for its development.

In Chapter 2, Abou-Bakr focuses on the different ways of interpreting the concept of *qiwamah* in the Quranic verse 4:34 that have been developed over the course of ten centuries through discursive analysis, exploring also the current strategies provided by Muslim feminists to understand the term. Abou-Bakr identifies four strategies to construct patriarchal interpretations on *qiwamah*: 1) its conceptualisation, 2) separation from the context of previous verses, 3) generalisations from financial commands to a standard principle to regulate married couples, in relation to the husband's responsibility to financially support his wife and 4) the creation of unfounded meanings. The chapter provides evidence to prove that specific interpretations of Quranic verses have been utilised to perpetuate gender roles and male supremacy over women.

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Religion and Gender | ISSN: 1878-5417 | www.religionandgender.org | Uopen Journals

It is, consequently, critical to work on progressive exegesis of the Quranic verses when pursuing the goal of achieving gender equality, and that is exactly what contemporary reformists have been working on through the contextualisation of the religious texts.

In Chapter 3, Lamrabet presents what can be perceived as a summary of the main concepts to be used when speaking about women and gender equality in Islam. If I had to choose a single chapter representing the debates on *istikhlaf* (generally defined as the mission assigned to Muslims to perpetuate humanity), *wilayah* and *qiwamah*, it would be this one, since Lamrabet effectively explores these concepts to demonstrate that the 'spiritual message of Islam regarding men and women is one in which justice and equality are inseparable' (p. 67). She proves this statement by dividing the Quranic verses in three types: verses with universal aims, which are 'those advocating universal values such as justice, equality, fairness and respect for human dignity' (p. 68); temporary verses that are limited in their application to the background of the revelation, and can be understood as obsolete today (*ibid*); and verses that need reinterpretation in new social circumstances, an example being those dealing with women's issues. Lamrabet provides the reader with a more progressive analysis on the concepts of *istikhlaf*, *wilayah* and *qiwamah* when comparing them to the traditional definitions included in the book's introduction. While she explores them from a gender equality critical perspective, the introductory conceptualisations of *wilayah* and *qiwamah* present their general meanings in relation to the institutionalisation of gender inequality.

Chapter 4 explores the reasons why prophetic reports have traditionally been ignored in feminist Islamic movements. Chaudhry mentions the circumstances of Prophet Muhammad's life as a reason for this, since he can be seen as the embodiment of patriarchy in certain aspects. It is noteworthy, however, that the author highlights the Prophet's small acts of resistance to develop counter-patriarchal influences. Chaudhry focuses on prophetic reports regarding woman's consent in her own marriage, orphans and polygamy through an exegetical exercise that aims to find 'an anchor for gender-egalitarian Islamic law in prophetic practice' (p. 103). This is an important chapter, since it presents the possibility of developing counter-patriarchal discourses which are built from within the traditional *ahadith*, leading to the possibility of women's empowerment through progressive exegesis.

In Chapter 5, Shaikh brings Sufi perspectives 'to re-examine critically the formulation of the *fiqh* canon' (p. 107). Hanna and Green (2004: 330) explain that Sufism finds direct communion with God through love. In this manner, through focusing on the mystical side of Islam, the mainstream legal perspectives on gender relations can be challenged. A problem I find is that Sufism is not seen by orthodox Islam as the main source of regulation, and, therefore, Sufi narratives on gender equality are difficult to be extrapolated to more general Islamic discourses. Chapter 6 focuses on the role of *qiwamah* and *wilayah* in Muslim family laws in Arab states, mainly Morocco and United Arab Emirates. If the chapter could have added anything, it would have been to include countries in other regions to enrich the discussion with their particularities and, maybe, distinct patterns would have been revealed. The next chapter develops a case study on Egyptian NGOs working to reform the personal status law, and explores how activists try to link Islamic law with international human rights law. The relevance of this chapter resides in highlighting the role of law as a

force against women's rights. Both chapters 6 and 7 provide an understanding of the influence of *qiwamah* and *wilayah* in people's everyday life, completed by chapter 8, which explores how both Muslim women in Western Europe and religious actors make sense of the oppositions emerging from their daily experiences when compared to the norms emerging from *fiqh*.

Chapter 9 provides the most intimate experience of the concepts of *qiwamah* and *wilayah* by giving voice to women themselves with the goal of building more progressive legislations. It is an easy-to-read chapter when compared to the deep theoretical discussions found previously, and one of the most balanced since it combines a methodological introduction, which makes the aim of the work clear for the reader, with the real stories of women challenging discrimination. The authors present a compelling account of the unfairness these women face through sections focusing on polygamy, divorce, and sexual relations among others, revealing in this manner how important Musawah's task of producing research is for the goal of improving their conditions.

Amina Wadud's final body chapter is divided in two parts. The first one examines Islam among African-Americans, while the second explores the ideas she has developed based on the principle of *tawhid* (monotheism). Wahid, one of the most important feminist scholars of Islam today, proposes a model in which women and men are equal in relation to God and defines patriarchy as 'un-Islamic.' This closing chapter constitutes a plea for the development of a context in which the concept of *qiwamah* is overcome and gender justice is a reality.

Men in Charge? is an important work, a critical study of *wilayah* and *qiwamah*, which might transform the minds of those who still believe that women's obedience to their husbands, instead of their submission to God, is a central pillar of Islam. This task is even more powerful considering that women themselves are in charge of this new hermeneutic production. Readers interested in Islam, law and gender will be rewarded with a deeply researched work, which challenges patriarchal ideas on men authority over women. Considering the dominance of the patriarchal interpretations of the Islamic sources, *Men in Charge?* questions conservative conceptions portraying women as passive subjects in need of the male protection. It unreads patriarchal interpretations of Islam to prove that these perspectives are not an inherent Islamic element. As might be expected with such a specific research topic, readers might feel that the volume becomes repetitive at times. However, it constitutes a critical addition to the body of literature on Islamic law and gender by providing ideas that demonstrate the harmony between gender equality and Islam.