

**ЛЮДОВИК-МОХАМЕД ЗАХЕД.
ГОМОСЕКСУАЛЬНОСТЬ, ТРАНС-ИДЕНТИЧНОСТЬ
И ИСЛАМ: ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ СВЯЩЕННОГО
ПИСАНИЯ. ПРОТИВОСТОЯНИЕ
ПОЛИТИКЕ ГЕНДЕРА И СЕКСУАЛЬНОСТИ. —
АМСТЕРДАМ: ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО
АМСТЕРДАМСКОГО
УНИВЕРСИТЕТА, 2020**

Лоранс Янссен Лок
laurance.janssenlok@gmail.com

Данная статья представляет собой рецензию на книгу Людовика-Мохамеда Захеда «Гомосексуальность, транс-идентичность и ислам: исследование Священного Писания. Противостояние политике гендера и сексуальности», которая была опубликована в 2020 г. Книга Захеда продолжает академическую дискуссию, начатую серией работ, преимущественно изданных в последние 10–15 лет, которые исследуют тему гомосексуальности и гомосексуальной идентичности в исламе. В своей книге Захед проводит анализ религиозных источников (Корана и хадисов), классической литературы (суфийской и шиитской поэзии), а также дебатов в современном французском обществе, чтобы представить широкую картину разнообразия идей о сексуальности и сексуальной идентичности в исламе; Захед также отстаивает мнение, что формирование менее толерантного отношения к гомосексуальности в ортодоксальном исламе развивалось в тесной связи с европейским колониализмом и постколониальными отношениями. Благодаря своему опыту в мусульманских сообществах квир и геев во Франции, Захед высказывает взгляды и идеи относительно гендерных аспектов, имеющих место на низовом уровне. Данная публикация будет интересна широкому кругу читателей, заинтересованных в ознакомлении с темой.

Выпускница магистратуры
Лейденского университета
(Нидерланды)
Лоранс Янссен Лок

**ZAHED, L.-M. (2020). HOMOSEXUALITY,
TRANSIDENTITY, AND ISLAM:
A STUDY OF SCRIPTURE. CONFRONTING
THE POLITICS OF GENDER
AND SEXUALITY. AMSTERDAM:
AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS**

**Laurance
Janssen Lok**

laurance.janssenlok@gmail.com

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24848/islm1g.11.1.06>

The book under review is authored by Ludovic-Mohammed Zahed (b. 1977), a French scholar of social psychology and the founder of Homosexuels musulmans de France, an association for gay and queer Muslims in France.

**Laurance
Janssen Lok**

*MA graduate from
Leiden University
(the Netherlands)*

With his work Zahed, who identifies as a feminist, gay Muslim and holds a position of an imam in an inclusive mosque in Paris, seeks to contribute to the expanding body of academic work that engages with issues of gender and sexuality in Islam. As his sources of inspiration, he names Islamic feminist scholars Fatima Mernissi (e.g. 1987; 2003) and Amina Wadud (1999; 2008), as well as a prominent scholar on sexual diversity in Islam, Scott Siraj Kugle (2010; 2013). If Islamic feminist studies have already evolved into an established field that has its roots in the 1980s, topics of homosexuality and non-binary gender identity in Islam have begun attracting scholarly interest only relatively recently. Particularly in the last decade, there has been a visible growth in the number of published works that have engaged with these topics from theological, sociological, and historical perspectives (e.g., Roscoe & Murray, 1997; El-Rouayheb, 2009; Habib, 2010; Shah, 2018). Challenging the premise that homophobia and misogyny are in compliance with Islamic ethical values, Zadeh's book clearly draws on the arguments developed in these trailblazing works.

Zahed envisions his book not only as a contribution to the academic body of knowledge but also as a symbol of revolt specifically against the established status quo in French academia. The latter, he believes, lags behind its English speaking-counterpart when it comes to sensitive topics related to sexuality and gender in religious minority groups. Zahed, who was born in Algeria but raised in France, argues that “unresolved postcolonial conflicts and Islamophobic discrimination remains a decades-old factor [in French society]” (p. 13). His *Homosexuality, Transidentity, and Islam* (which first appeared in French; Zahed, 2017) continues Zahed's previous line of research. His earlier books include *Le Coran et la*

chair ('The Qur'an and the Flesh', 2012) as well as *LGBT musulman-es: du Placard aux Lumières: Face aux obscurantismes et aux homonationalismes* ('LGBT Muslims: Out of Closet to the Light: Facing Obscurantism and Homonationalism', 2016).

Homosexuality, Transidentity, and Islam was translated into English by scholar Adi S. Bharat, who also wrote an afterword to this work. Bharat equally identifies as a gay man but confesses that, given his experiences, he was unable to maintain his Muslim identity. A foreword by Jan Jaap de Ruiter, a Dutch scholar at the University of Tilburg, further contextualises this publication's contribution to the academic discourse.

In total, the book comprises eleven chapters in addition to the for- and afterwords and the author's conclusion. The first four chapters stand somewhat separately from the rest of the book. Here Zahed turns to Islamic sources to analyse aspects of the doctrine from the perspectives of gay, lesbian and transgender Muslims. He begins his study with scrutiny of several Qur'anic verses that deal with questions of gender and sexuality (Chapter 1). Zahed points out that the Qur'an does not speak directly about homosexuality; yet by reading the scripture carefully, one can assume that people with different sexual preferences are God's creations, like anyone else. Zahed then turns to the contested notion of 'sodomy' as it appears in the Qur'an and argues that the word refers only to criminals who raped men, and that it does not signify men who engaged in non-heterosexual practices (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 focuses on the Prophet's opinions regarding homosexuality. Here, Zahed posits that the Prophet did not express clear standpoints on homosexuality, and most of the *ḥadīths* that condemn non-heterosexual practices do not have a reliable chain of transmission – which means they reflect positions that emerged after the Prophet's death. The author summarises most of his statements in Chapter 4 and briefly discusses the opinion of different Islamic schools of law on 'sodomites'.

In trying to reconcile faith with the permissibility of same-sex attraction, in the first part of the book, Zahed goes back to the root of mainstream ideas on sexuality and aspires to show that the stigmatisation of homosexuality is not in accordance with the original Qur'anic teaching. By and large, his review of sources does not provide any novel arguments that have not yet been covered in previous academic scholarship on homosexuality and gender in Islam (e.g., Kugle, 2010). Certainly, the advantage of the book is that Zahed's writing style and examples are easily accessible to people without previous knowledge of Islamic sources; however, some of his arguments do not have a sound evidence basis and appear as the author's personal, emotionally coloured opinions. For instance, describing Abu Hurayra (d. 680), one of the Prophet's companions, Zahed pictures him as "likely a repressed gay man without desire for women, who became clearly homophobic and misogynistic and produced so-called *ḥadīths* that condemned, at random, dogs, women, and gay people" (p. 50).

Of a different kind is the second part of the book that comprises Chapters 5–11. It delves into questions of how notions around gender and sexuality have evolved throughout the centuries. Rather than being in-depth studies, these chapters are relatively concise and provide a broad overview of different aspects from history, literature, and present-day life of Muslims, both in Europe and elsewhere.

Chapters 5–7 look at the transmission of ideas about homosexuality from Christian Europe into the Islamic World, or to be precise, its Arabic-speaking part. According to Zahed, the idea of homosexuality being an illness that requires medical treatment entered the Islamic discourses only in the nineteenth century, following the European colonial expansion. It is within the context of biomedical and psychiatric discourses in mid-nineteenth-century

Europe that homosexuality was increasingly framed as a form of sexual identity, and consequently a deviation – the process that Foucault elaborated on in his *History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1980). Prior to the encounter with European perceptions on homosexuality, Zahed argues, in the Arabic-speaking world such practices were part of everyday life and not marked as something prohibited. Somewhat expectedly, he proves his position by referring to examples from Sufi literature and its metaphorical allusions to male-to-male affection. In Zahed's opinion, such a relatively neutral, if not approving, stance on homosexuality in Muslim societies changed by the twentieth century, as European ideas received widespread dissemination and were internalised by colonial Muslim subjects.¹

Chapters 8–9 continue this discussion by focusing on the emergence of gender identities. Here Zahed posits that the very notion of 'homosexuality' (and later 'transsexuality') as part of identity constitutes a European phenomenon. Before being subjected to European colonialism, the Arab world did not draw strict demarcation lines between homo- and heterosexual practices, let alone define a distinct homosexual identity. A man could be attracted to another man and engage in sexual intercourse with him without necessarily identifying himself as a gay man. In order to understand the history of homosexuality in Islam, Zahed argues, it is necessary to introduce the distinction between active and passive roles in male homosexual practices. The passive role, he argues, was assumed predominantly by slave boys who were commonly gendered as unmasculine – a phenomenon that was largely regarded as normal in Muslim societies prior to the nineteenth century.² The stigmatisation of such practices arguably occurred only under the influence of Christian missionaries.

The final two chapters, 10 and 11, introduce cases from present-day France, as Zahed depicts challenges that French queer and gay Muslims face in trying to reconcile their religious and gender identities. He draws on his extensive fieldwork material collected as a result of participant observation. This material has much potential to provide original insights, and one wishes the author was more explicit about how exactly the data was collected and analysed. Zahed posits that for many Muslims who do not fit into conventional structures, maintaining an alternative identity is coupled with social ostracism. On the one hand, they are oftentimes excluded from family networks and religious minority communities in Europe that reject 'non-traditional' gender identities and sexual practices. On the other hand, gay Muslims frequently choose to distance themselves from existing French LGBTQ+ networks, given the latter's embeddedness in ideologically coloured debates. Zahed uses the term "homonationalism", first introduced by Puar (2007), to assert that alternative gender and sexual identities are currently used "to justify or combat imperialism, at the expense of gender and sexual minorities, without actually being concerned for their well-being or rights" (p. 89). As identity categories linked to gender and sexuality become highly contested both in Arabic and French, gay and queer Muslims search for ways to create safe spaces to manifest themselves.

On its own, *Homosexuality, Transidentity, and Islam* is a welcome addition to the growing body of scholarship that examines sexuality in the context of Islamic doctrine and history. Zahed gives voice to alternative, grass-root perceptions and ideas regarding notions of gender. Although the publication sometimes lacks academic precision and objectivity, it synthesises a broad range of sources, from theological disputes to literary canons and present-day media publications. The book is certainly of interest to a broad audience of readers interested in the topic.

1. One can find similar ideas also in Leezenberg, 2017.

2. For more details, see Murray, 2007; Roscoe & Murray, 1997.

REFERENCES

- El-Rouayheb, K. (2009). *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Habib, S. (2010). *Islam and Homosexuality*. Santa Barbara: Praeger.
- Kugle, S. S. al-H. (2010). *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims*. London: Oneworld Publications.
- Kugle, S. S. al-H. (2013). *Living Out Islam : Voices of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims*. New York: New York University Press.
- Leezenberg, M. (2017). *De minaret van Bagdad: seks en politiek in de islam*. Amsterdam: Prometheus.
- Mernissi, F. (1987). *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mernissi, F. (2003). The meaning of Spatial Boundaries. In Lewis, R. and Mills, S.(eds), *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (pp. 489–502). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Murray, S. O. (2007). Homosexuality in the Ottoman Empire. *Historical Reflections/ Réflexions Historiques*, 33(1), 101–116.
- Puar, J. K. (2007). *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Roscoe, W. and Murray, S. (1997). *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*. New York: New York University Press.
- Shah, S. (2018). *The Making of a Gay Muslim: Religion, Sexuality and Identity in Malaysia and Britain*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wadud, A. (1999). *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wadud, A. (2008). Foreword: Engaging Tawhid in Islam and Feminisms. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 10(4), 435–438.
- Zahed, L.-M. (2012). *Le Coran et la chair*. Paris: Max Milo.
- Zahed, L.-M. (2016). *LGBT musulman-es: du Placard aux Lumières: Face aux obscurantismes et aux homonationalismes*. 2nd edition. Marseille: CALEM.
- Zahed, L.-M. (2017). *Homosexualité & Transidentité en Islam: Étude systématique et systemique des textes arabo-islamiques*. Createspace Independent Publishing Platform.