

PROGRAM

WORKSHOP

Reconsidering “Islamic Feminism”: Deconstruction or the Quest of Authenticity?

BERLIN, 26-28 APRIL 2007 & 2 MAY 2007

Convenors: Professor **Gudrun Krämer** (Freie Universität Berlin), Dr. **Raja Rhouni** (Université Muhammad V; currently a fellow of EUME) and **Katrin Simon** (Freie Universität Berlin)

Depending on how we refer to the phenomenon, as “Islamic feminism,” “gender jihad/ijtihad”, or even “*Islamic gender critique*”, there is a growing global movement of women and men who are re-reading the foundational and canonical Islamic texts from a gender perspective which does not essentialize “Islam”. This movement is part of a “new” critical Islamic scholarship engaged in re-dynamizing Islamic thought within the framework of a double critique of modernity and Islamic orthodoxies. The centrality of the gender issue to the larger question of whether or not “Islam” fits into European norms of secularity puts “Islamic feminism” at the centre of attention well beyond Muslim majority societies.

We envision the workshop to be a space for intellectual exchange and co-operation among more established and younger scholars on issues related to the theoretical and practical aspects of “Islamic feminism”.

Three focal points define this workshop: we are convinced that any re-consideration of “Islamic gender norms” has to include men as well as women. For this reason, both female and male scholars are invited to discuss the issues at stake. Similarly, we envision this workshop to cover as many of the diverse backgrounds Muslims are currently living in as possible. Last not least, we believe that discussions should involve intellectuals as well as activists, or scholars-cum-activists, as their different perspectives are able to complement each other.

By this, we hope to achieve a more realistic view of the possibilities and limitations of “Islamic feminism”. It is to be seen whether this term, used in the singular, makes any sense at all. One of the issues to be discussed during the workshop is whether we can speak of ONE movement (as we think we do): where are the overlaps, where is the minimal consensus, but also where are the frictions and the tensions among thinkers and activists of diverse backgrounds?

The workshop consists of three thematic sessions (all closed to the general public to allow for a free exchange among the participants), centred around the issues of Islamic feminist hermeneutics, its translation into practice, and its local and transnational



dimensions. Each of these sessions features four presentations. The first takes the form of an introduction of about 30 minutes, followed by three shorter presentations of 20 minutes each, and a discussion among the whole group of participants. Every speaker will be asked to hand in a statement of about half a page to identify his or her main interest, specifying one item s/he is particularly concerned with. These statements will be circulated among all participants in advance. A keynote speech, a film showing, a panel discussion and a literary evening one week later are targeted at a broader audience.

1. Islamic Feminist Hermeneutics: Which Methodologies and Approaches for Which Purposes?

This session will address the following questions: Is “Islamic feminist hermeneutics” another form of ideologizing the Qur’an? How do we approach the Qur’an and hadith from a gender perspective: as texts or discourses situated in time and space and involving divine and human communication? What are the methodologies, approaches or tools of analysis used in subverting androcentrism in Islamic religious and legal thought? Finally, what is the aim of “Islamic feminism”: a reform of women’s rights and gender issues more generally, or the subversion of literalist approaches to the foundational texts, or all of these?

2. How is Hermeneutics Translated into Practice, or When Does “ijtihad” Become “jihad”?

The issues this session will address deal with strategies to implement “Islamic feminist” thought with respect to legal issues (the Moroccan Mudawwana is a case in point), and religious instruction and propagation (da‘wa). What are the risks involved in an “Islamic feminist” methodology that seeks to uncover “true Islam”: is it just another kind of authenticity discourse or “strategic essentialism”? Another issue to be discussed are the possibilities for “Islamic feminism” (or “Islamic gender critique”) to move from its present focus on women’s rights to gendered issues at large.

3. Islamic Feminism Between Regionalism and Transnationalism

“Islamic feminism” is truly transnational to the extent that its representatives especially in the academia are highly mobile, carrying different approaches and experiences from one setting to another. Still, Islamic feminist theory and practice have to consider regional particularities, including the various cultural contexts they are placed in. How then to find a way to avoid internal conflict and division weakening the movement as a whole, especially when in one context positions are claimed that in another context appear anachronistic or even utterly unacceptable? How to deal with frictions inside the movement? Must we think of different “Islamic feminisms,” for instance regarding women living in



Muslim majority societies on the one side, and those with a minority status in non-Muslim societies on the other one? Or is this a false dichotomy?

4. Film *Islam Unveiled*

As part of the workshop, the documentary *Islam Unveiled*, a Hardcash production by journalist Samira Ahmed, will be screened for a larger public at the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften. For her film Samira Ahmed traveled from her home in Britain to the Middle East, Asia, Malaysia and Africa interviewing a wide variety of men and women - spiritual leaders, educators, and activists - in order to explore the different views of women in different “Muslim societies” on questions such as: Are the harsh laws relating to women an inherent part of “Islam”? How do Muslim women make sense of the veil? After the film there will be the possibility of a discussion with the author.

5. Public Panel Discussion

In order to convey some of the issues that will be dealt with in the three closed sessions to a broader audience, and as sequence to the film *Islam Unveiled*, a public panel discussion will be held, with four presentations of ten minutes each, in order to discuss the prospects and limitations of “Islamic feminism”. One major idea would obviously be to focus on the relevance of this issue to the larger programme ‘Europe in the Middle East – the Middle East in Europe,’ which attempts to explore the complex ‘historical legacies’ of Europe in the Middle East and of the Middle East in Europe.

6. Literary Evening on May 2, 2007

One week after the workshop the questions of the workshop will be taken up in a literary evening with readings by Hilal Sezgin (Barnstedt) and Alawiyya Sobh (Beirut) and a following discussion by the two authors.

The workshop is funded by the **Fritz Thyssen Stiftung** and the **Hauptstadtkulturfonds**.



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BERLIN, 26-28 APRIL 2007

Schedule

26/04 Thursday evening: 19.30 h – 21.00 h

Keynote Speech

(Venue: Mschatta-Saal, Museum für Islamische Kunst, Bodestr. 1-3, 10178 Berlin)

Keynote Speaker: **Amina Wadud** (Visiting Scholar, Starr King School for the Ministry, Berkeley), *Islamic Feminisms: Authority and Authenticity*

Welcome: **Claus-Peter Haase** (Museum für Islamische Kunst)

Introduction: **Gudrun Krämer** (Freie Universität Berlin)

Followed by a reception

27/04 Friday morning: 9.30 h – 12.30 h

(Venue: Villa Jaffé, Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Wallotstr. 10)

Introduction: **Raja Rhouni** (Fellow of Europe in the Middle East - The Middle East in Europe), **Katrin Simon** (Freie Universität Berlin)

Session 1: Islamic Feminist Hermeneutics: Which Methodologies and Approaches for Which Purposes?

Chair: **Raja Rhouni**

Omaima Abou Bakr (Qatar University): *Towards an Islamic View of Gender: Qur'anic Paradigms and Feminist Consciousness*

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (Humanistic University, Utrecht): *Turning a Patriarchal Text into a Feminist One: The Absent Issues in the Debate*

Kecia Ali (Boston University): *Woman's Body, God's Word: Sex, Gender, and Discourse in the Qur'an*

Sa'diyya Shaikh (University of Cape Town, South Africa): *Cultivating Feminist Trajectories in Islamic Ethics*

Lunch

**27/04 Friday afternoon: 14.30 h – 18.00 h**

(Venue: Villa Jaffé, Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Wallotstr. 10)

Session 2: How is Hermeneutics Translated into Practice, or When Does “ijtihad” Become “jihad”?

Chair: **Katrin Simon**

Rabeya Müller (Zentrum für Islamische Frauenforschung, Cologne): *Gender Justice – Feminism and Islam*

Souad Eddouada (Ibn Tofail University, Morocco): *Implementing Islamic Feminism. The Case of Moroccan Family Code Reform*

Muhammad Umar (Arizona State University, Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg 2006/7): *Gender Issues in Islamic Discourses in Nigeria*

Norani Othman (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia): *Creating and Promoting Islamic Feminism in Malaysia: Approaches and Methodologies of Interpretation for Reform and Renewal*

Afterwards: Dinner

28/04. Saturday morning: 9.30 h – 13.30 h

(Venue: Villa Jaffé, Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Wallotstr. 10)

9.30 – 10.30:

Breakfast at the Villa Jaffé

10.30 – 13.30:

Session 3: Islamic Feminism Between Regionalism and Transnationalism

Chair: **Gudrun Krämer**

Samira Ahmed (Channel 4 News, London): *Reporting Feminism and Fundamentalism*

Hamideh Mohagheghi (Hanover): *Women, Universal Justice and Regional Traditions*

Hoda Salah (Frankfurt): *Islamic Feminism between Regionalism and Transnationalism*

Abdennur Prado (Islamic Council of Spain): *Islamic Feminism and Global Citizenship*



28/04 Saturday afternoon and evening

Venue: Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Leibniz-Saal, Eingang Markgrafenstr. 38, 10117 Berlin

17.30 – 19.30 **FILM: *Islam Unveiled*** (by Samira Ahmed / a Hardcash Production)

Afterwards: Discussion with the Author / Moderation: Ziba Mir-Hosseini

20.00 – 21.30 **Public Panel Discussion: "*Islamic Feminism*": *Prospects and Limitations***

Chair: **Gudrun Krämer** (Freie Universität Berlin)

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (Humanistic University, Utrecht)

Ziba Mir-Hosseini (London)

Norani Othman (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia)

Sa'diyya Shaikh (University of Cape Town, South Africa)

02/05 Wednesday evening

Venue: Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Einstein-Saal, Jägerstraße 22/23, 10117 Berlin

Reading / Lesung at 18.00 h

Hilal Sezgin (Barnstedt, D)

Alawiyya Sobh (Beirut)

Lesung in Arabisch und Deutsch. Die Übersetzungen von Alawiyya Sobh liest Leila Chammaa.

Panel Discussion at 20.00

Images of Women and Islam

Hilal Sezgin und Alawiyya Sobh

Chair: **Shereen Abou El Naga** (Cairo University)

March 27, 2007



Europe in the Middle East - the Middle East in Europe is a five-year **research program** of the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung and the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. This research program seeks to rethink key concepts and premises that link and divide Europe and the Middle East. It draws on the expertise of scholars in and outside of Germany and is embedded in university and extra-university research institutions in Berlin. The program builds upon the previous work of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin's Working Group Modernity and Islam and is funded by the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung.

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Europe in the Middle East - the Middle East in Europe is also the **annual theme** of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities for the year 2007/8. The annual theme aims at conveying scholarly debates to a broader public. It is supported by the Berlin universities and other academic and cultural institutions in Berlin and Brandenburg. The choice of 'Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe' as the theme of the year 2007/8 is related to the research program of the same name.

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