

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON AFRICAN MUSLIM FEMINISM

Islam and Feminism/Islamic Feminism/Muslim Feminism - African Perspectives

FEZ, 8-10 May 2017

In this workshop, scholars will present work on Muslim feminist practice, theory and policy around the African continent, aiming at an inclusive view by drawing on scholarship on South, East, West and North Africa. The workshop will engage with current debates on Muslim feminism in Africa, and themes include interfaith dialogue, strategies for incorporating difference, the environment, religious authority and autobiography. During the course of the workshop, participants plan to revise their papers toward a publication that is intended to reach a broad audience both on the continent and beyond. The first part of the workshop will consist of a morning of public presentations followed by two closed sessions during which we plan to discuss and revise papers.

PROGRAMME

Monday May 8th

12.30: Arrival and welcome: Moha Ennaji, Maha Marouan, Gabeba Baderoon, Fatima Sadiqi

1:00 PM – Lunch

2:30 – 4:15: Feminist responses to shifts in state policy – gender, language, law and ethnicity in Northern Nigeria, Ghana and Morocco

Fatima Sadiqi – What's New in Moroccan Muslim Feminist Discourses?

Adryan Wallace – Islam, Strategies of Incorporating Difference: A Comparative Study of Muslim Feminisms in Northern Nigeria & Northern Ghana

4:15 – 4:30: Tea/Coffee break

4:30 – 5:30: Fiction and the place of Islam in Africa

Shirin Edwin: Islam, Geopolitical and Global (Ex) Changes: African Muslim Women and Interfaith Dialogues and Anxieties about Africa's Global Place

5:30 – 6:00 :General discussion about publication schedule and deadlines

Tuesday May 9th

9:30 – 11:30 Subtle contests over Muslim gender identities by NGOs and the state

Nada Mustafa – Universality vs. cultural specificity of women's human rights in a Muslim country governed by an Islamist regime

Moha Ennaji – Secular and Islamic Feminists in Morocco

Souad Slaoui – Islamist Activists in Post-Arab Spring Phase: Status, Challenges and Future Prospects

11:30 AM: Tea/Coffee break

12:00 – 1:00 :Fiction and the place of Islam in Africa

Gabeba Baderoon: Islam, South African Muslim Women's Fiction and Autobiography as World-making

1:00 – 2:30: lunch

2:30 PM – 4:30: Navigating religious authority through Muslim women's lived experience and presence in mosques

Sa'diyya Shaikh – Islam, "Gender/Sexual Ethics and Mosques

Maha Marouan – Islam, African Muslim Feminist Discourse and Moroccan Women's Lived Religion

4:30 – 4:45: PM: Tea/Coffee break

4:45 – 5:45: Plenary session for closing thoughts and final discussion of the publication plans.

Paper titles:

1. Fatima Sadiqi (Morocco) –What's New in Moroccan Muslim Feminist Discourses?
2. Adryan Wallace (US) – Islam, Strategies of Incorporating Difference: A Comparative Study of Muslim Feminisms in Northern Nigeria & Northern Ghana
3. Sa'ddiya Shaikh (South Africa) – Islam, Gender/Sexual Ethics and Mosques
4. Shirin Edwin (US)– Islam, Geopolitical and Global (Ex) Changes: African Muslim Women and Interfaith Dialogues and Anxieties about Africa's Global Place
5. Nada Mustafa Ali (US/Sudan) – Debates on Universality vs. Cultural Specificity: Women's Human Rights in a Muslim Country with an Islamist

government

6. Moha Ennaji (Morocco)– Secular and Islamic Feminists in Morocco

7. Souad Slaoui (Morocco) – Islamist Activists in Post-Arab Spring Phase: Status, Challenges and Future Prospects

8. Gabeba Baderoon (US/South Africa) – Islam, South African Muslim Women's Fiction and Autobiography as World-making

Abstracts for African Muslim Feminism Workshop

Fatima Sadiqi

What's New in Moroccan Muslim Feminist Discourses?

The central idea of this presentation revolves around the challenges that the recent dramatic change in the political fate of Berber/Amazigh (a historically women-related language) from a marginalized to an official language, poses for the existing feminist discourses in Morocco, a pre-dominantly Muslim country. Mainly discarded as a "non-modern" and "rural" language, Berber is entering the sphere of authority in the name of modernity: an unprecedented and unique event in the history of Morocco and North Africa. This fact raises a number of serious questions: Why is Berber women's agency at the center of the Berber movement's narrative? What are the sources of authority that this agency had to face? Why is this agency absent in the current feminist discourses? Why does the spectacular twist in the fate of Berber contrast with the absence of Berber women's ancestral experiential knowledge (orality, rituality, and art) in the Moroccan feminist discourses? To what extent does this twist reveal the ancestral cultural roots of Moroccan feminist discourses that not only transcends the coming of Islam to Morocco in the eighth century, the harem concept, urbanization, and postcolonial modernity, but does not reject them? How does this help understand the fundamental antagonistic nature of the "secular vs Islamic" feminist categories and the impossibility of their co-habitation at the discursive level? What is the future of the Moroccan Islamic feminism in the aftermath of the failure of the Islamist ideology? How does the Berber dimension problematize the current feminist discourses and forces an alternative: a democratic larger-than-Islam framework for Moroccan feminist discourses? In what ways is this alternative reinforced by today's re-emergence of Berber women tokens in youth culture (linguistic means of expression, visual art, work on memory) as empowerment tools that problematize material empowerment on which secular and Islamic feminist discourses are based? How are these dynamics made more complex and interesting by the Moroccan overall socio-political context, which is increasingly impacted by the recent uprisings in the region?

Adryan Wallace

Strategies of Incorporating Difference: A Comparative Study of Muslim Feminisms in Northern Nigeria & Northern Ghana

Muslim women are critical political actors in the promotion of substantive economic, political, and social inclusion through individual and collective actions. The relationships among, feminism, Islam, and politics have multiple configurations,

which vary by regional, national, and local contexts. Therefore centering the diverse experiences of Muslim women engaging with Sharia law and secular political systems will help illuminate the interplay among these broader concepts. The different perspectives and experiences of Muslim women from African countries are often homogenized and treated as marginal instead of foregrounding feminist theory. In order to reverse this trend, the proposed paper is a comparative study of the ways in which Muslim women in Kano, Nigeria and Tamale, Ghana are using their civil society organizations to advance the divergent interests of women in development and public policy. The Hausa in particular are a central part of this study because they are the largest predominately Muslim ethnolinguistic group in West Africa. Additionally, Kano is a Sharia state in contrast to Tamale, where Muslim women are not living under Sharia law. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach to include ethnography, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, content analysis of policies and white papers, and oral history this work explores how women are using their development work to also advocate for economic inclusion and to place a range of issues to address gender inequality on the legislative agenda. There are few studies that analyze myriad of ways in which African Muslim women are conceptualizing and treating difference through addressing internal levels of privilege among women. This work attempts to fill that gap in the literature by 1) illustrating the diverse definitions of gender equality advanced by women's groups, 2) analyzing the strategies employed by organizations to provide comprehensive substantive representation for multiple constituencies of women and 3) exploring the different relationships these civil society organizations have with the state. Finally the importance of connecting feminist theory to practice is underscored.

Sa'diyya Shaikh

Islam, Gender/Sexual Ethics, and Mosques

My paper presents an Islamic feminist exploration of gender politics in mosques (masajid) in South Africa. I provide an overview of the ways in which the mosque functions as a center of communal religious identity in Cape Town, South Africa. I then focus on some of the gendered contestations that have taken place since 1994, the arrival of democracy in South Africa, and the delivery of a Friday Khutbah by a woman, Prof Amina Wadud at the Claremont Main Road Mosque (CMRM). I focus on ways in which the leadership and community of the CMRM have addressed gender justice as one significant element of a broader commitment to social justice as a congregation, and mark some of the achievements of this mosque, as well as some of the limitations. I also examine the emerging contestations of sexual diversity and inclusivity of mosques also entered into Muslim communal debates in South Africa after a new masjid called the Open Mosque (2014) was formed, while reflecting on the ways in which the LGBTIQ Muslim group, The Inner Circle (TIC) functions in Cape Town as an inclusive community and mosque. In reflecting on the ways in which the debates unfolded in the media, and within the Muslim community, I provide an Islamic feminist response to some of the discriminatory practices and attitudes within the South African Muslim community (which are echoed in Muslim communities elsewhere in the world). I present my reflections on the ethical and spiritual imperatives and responsibilities for developing gender and sexuality inclusive communities and masjid for contemporary Muslims. The paper is written from the perspective of my multiple locations as scholar, activist, and congregant of the CMRM, and as an ally of the TIC.

Shirin Edwin

Geopolitical and Global (Ex) Changes: African Muslim Women and Interfaith Dialogues and Anxieties about Africa's Global Place

This paper centralizes textual representations of African Muslim women's dialogic interfaith exchanges and anxieties with other religions and cultures (Christianity and Western cultures) in recent African literary fiction. Interfaith dialogues, interactions and anxieties foreground the African Muslim woman's ability to challenge and recast the relationship between geopolitical (regionally and politically specific) interfaith issues and their so-called global scope when circulated as Islamophobia, religious extremism and religious intolerance with nefarious consequences for the entire planet. It urges a consideration of two things: Muslims in Africa as central and not as incidental to discussions of what has so far been called the "Muslim world;" and Africa's global place. Academic scholarship on Muslims and the consequent political policies and legislations in Euro-American societies have largely been articulated by focusing on Muslims in a relatively small regional area, namely the Middle East and the Arab world. To this end, my paper urges consideration of about 500 million Muslims on the African continent, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, the second largest population of Muslims after the Indian sub-continent. I find literary fiction providing a constructive response to the lopsided approach in the current production of academic knowledge and the political policies that flow from it on religious intolerance, extremism and the more disturbing, Islamophobia. I conceptualize the African Muslim woman as a figure who bridges the chasm in scholarship and policies on Muslims by emphasizing her initiatives of interfaith dialogues and exchanges. These initiatives also challenge us to articulate more tolerant and inclusive policies and legislations.

Nada Mustapha Ali

"Gold Poured Off of her Hair": Interrogating Sudan's Decolonial, Opposition Discourses from a Feminist Perspective

This paper uses a feminist and a gender-sensitive perspective to interrogate the discourses of mostly male political activists organized in movements protesting social, cultural, political, and economic exclusion and dehumanization of communities in Sudan's marginalized (and currently war-affected) areas. These discourses challenge gender inequality by emphasizing the egalitarianism in some of the marginalized areas of Sudan. They also challenge dominant constructions of female beauty by proposing alternative, decolonial aesthetics. The paper asks whether this position arises from a commitment to gender equality, or whether it reflects the use of women's bodies to mark difference from a regime that subordinates women.

The paper, which is based on ethnographic research in and outside Sudan, that included interviews with over 100 male and female political activists, highlights strategies that women from war-affected parts of Sudan have used in recent years to challenge the dominant aesthetics and to advocate for peace and social justice. I also discuss strategies other women's organizations and institutions have used to reorder a restricted public space. Finally, I ask whether the critique of dominant aesthetics and constructions of the ideal female body in this decolonial discourse open-up possibilities for coalition-building between decolonial movements on one hand, and movements that seek to transform gender relations in and beyond Sudan on the other hand.

Moha Ennaji
Secular and Islamic Feminists in Morocco

This paper contextualizes secular and religious debates over the feminist movement and the status of women in Morocco and their challenges in relation to the contemporary political history of the country. As an attempt to find a balance between the perspectives of the more conservative Islamic feminists and progressive women's groups, the new family code was established and significantly improved the legal status of women. To fully understand the significance of Moroccan women's activism, it is essential to relate it to the rise of Islamism in the region and to the role of human rights organizations which treat women's rights as human rights. The role of women's non-governmental Organizations (NGO's) in the struggle against gender inequalities is remarkable. It highlights their efforts to consolidate democracy and social justice and to challenge traditional thinking and practices of governance. The paper shows that while secular women's organizations struggle for a liberal societal project, Islamic women's associations work within the framework of Islam and aim for the Islamization of the country. Secular activists participate in interreligious/interfaith dialogues and networks by reaching out to Islamist organizations and at times using their discourse to attain the masses, as we shall examine in the following section.

Souad Slaoui
Islamist Activists in Post-Arab Spring Phase: Status, Challenges and Future Prospects

Various types of Islamist activists gained visibility and legitimacy after the Arab Spring. They self-identify as post-Islamist activists and position themselves within the post-Arab Spring movements. Ideologically, these new Islamist activists are favourable to being part of universal movements that call for gender justice and the discourses of liberal democracy. Towards this end, this paper highlights the redefinition of liberal feminism in the light of the transformations that political Islam is undergoing in Morocco. Focus will be put on the relation between religion, the state and politics and the way public space is regulated. Thus, I argue that the low representation of women in the government limits their influence over governance and policy making within different institutions.

Gabeba Baderoon
"Making new worlds: fiction and autobiography by Muslim South African Women"

Muslim women writers from South Africa have used fiction, memoir, poetry and drama to craft complex new visions of the world in the post-apartheid period and these visions have inspired a radical expansion of notions of national belonging. Such works are redefining the terrain of national identity and belonging beyond the conventional frames of South African politics, which is marked by a compulsively inward political focus centred around the legacy of apartheid, by attending to the ordinary, the bodily, the pleasurable, the spiritual and even the realm of fantasy as well as broader continental and transnational frames. By focusing on experiences rendered invisible by marginalization, shame, sexual trauma, and the complicated tangle of ethnic and religious affiliations that lie beneath the familiar categories of race in South Africa, these texts use fiction and memoir as a space of radical

openness, critique and inventiveness. In this paper I show that recent writing by Muslim South African women charts an ambitious politics of refusal and pleasure.

Maha Marouan (US) – Islam, African Muslim Feminist Discourse and Moroccan Women's Lived Religion

African Muslim Feminist Discourse and Women's Lived Religion.

As an African Diaspora specialist and as an African Muslim feminist, I am constantly pondering over the following: What is Africanness? Who is an African? What is the meaning of African feminism? And what does it mean to be an African Muslim Feminist? There are no easy answers to these questions because Africanness, Feminism, Islam are all unstable categories, always implicated in identity formation, social relations and power structure, and they cut across other categories by which identity is framed: gender, race, class, ethnicity, citizenship and notions of belonging. Thus, addressing Muslim feminism within an African context is a challenging task, especially when one considers Feminism's longstanding ties to colonialism, racism and imperialism and the depiction of Islam as an oppressive religion. For this workshop, I will engage with African Muslim feminism by addressing the multiple meanings of Muslim women's lived religious experiences, challenging traditional feminist settings where lived religion is read in negative terms and as a form of ideological constraint.