



**University of  
Zurich** <sup>UZH</sup>

**Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies – Gender Studies**



**International Workshop**

# **Unsettling Normative Modernities: Gender and the Politics of Re-making Sexual Difference in the MENA**

June 25–27, 2020

# Unsettling Normative Modernities

## Gender and the Politics of Re-Making Sexual Difference in the MENA

**Convenors: Prof. Dr. Bettina Dennerlein, M.A. Helena Rust**

**Venue: Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies, University of Zurich**

In many instances of contemporary public as well as academic debates, the issue of gender inequality linked to religion continues to have high currency. In spite of a growing number of critical inquiries into secularism's historically incorrect claim to liberate women and help their emancipation, more often than not religion is still constructed as secularism's other with respect to gender equality.

The workshop builds on recent comparative studies on secularism as discourse shaped by differently structured and shifting configurations of religion, culture and politics that have opened new ways of inquiry into the role played by gender in processes of change over the last two centuries. Focusing on discourses and politics of modernity, it foregrounds sexual difference as a matrix and a passing point of different forms of social, political and epistemic transformations linked to the emergence of modern statehood in the colonial and post-colonial period. The workshop takes the diverse usages of the ubiquitous term of 'modernity' – differently rendered in Arabic over time and according to the respective ideological leanings of scholars and intellectuals – as analytical lenses to study processes of (re-)making sexual difference cutting across conventional distinctions between movements and strands of thought. We critically engage with the renewed interest in intellectual developments in the MENA region to better understand how politics and discourses of modernity simultaneously draw from competing ideologies as well as from religion and / or from contemporary science in (re-)interpreting and (re-)configuring sexual difference as a core device of social organization both on the symbolic and the structural level.

The workshop will bring together papers from a broad range of disciplines from the humanities and the social sciences such as history, cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, and area studies.