



**University of
Zurich^{UZH}**

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



International Workshop

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

June 24–26, 2021

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.

Program

The times in the program are indicated in CEST. The respective hours in other time zones are 8–10:10am PDT, 10–12:10am CDT, 11am–1:10pm EDT, 8–10:10 pm TJT

Please register via helena.rust@aoi.uzh.ch before June 23.

Thursday, June 24

- 5:00–5:20pm Welcome and introductory remarks
Bettina Dennerlein and Helena Rust (University of Zurich)
- 5:20–5:40 **Aymon Kreil** (Ghent University): Piecing Together the Laws of Harmony: Islam and Psychology in an Egyptian Counselling Center
- 5:40–6:00 **Omar Kasmani** (Free University of Berlin): Critical Thin: Sufi Hauntings and Post-migrant Be/longing in Berlin
- 6:00–6:10 *Break*
- 6:10–6:30 **Lucia Direnberger** (CNRS Paris): Gendering the Soviet modernity. Women's agency and othering process in Tajik SSR
- 6:30–6:50 **Deniz Yüksel** (University of Zurich): Narratives of change – the family in Turkish textbooks
- 6:50–7:10 **Arash Guitoo** (University of Kiel): How Queer was Premodern Iran and how Modern is the Iranian Modernity?

Friday, June 25

- 5:00–5:20pm **Helena Rust** (University of Zurich): Evolution as theory of aesthetics? The uses of sexual selection in Arabic sexology
- 5:20–5:40 **Bettina Dennerlein** (University of Zurich): Competing foundationalisms. Configuring sexual difference in modern Islamic discourse
- 5:40–6:00 **Sherine Hafez** (University of California, Riverside): Engaging Critical Post-humanism: Rethinking Subjectivity and Muslim Subjects
- 6:00–6:10 *Break*

- 6:10–6:30 **Farha Ghannam** (Swarthmore College) Embodied Signs: Performativity, Materiality, and Gender in Urban Egypt
- 6:30–6:50 **Sarah Farag** (University of Zurich): Gender critique, alternative masculinities and nationalism in Egypt
- 6:50–7:10 **Hanan Hammad** (Texas Christian University): Single Motherhood and the Democratization of the Egyptian Society from Below

Saturday, June 26

5:00–6:20 pm **General Discussion**

6:20–6:30 *Break*

6:30–7:10 **Discussion of possible joint publication and further exchange**