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About

Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. gender forum also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

Opinions expressed in articles published in *gender forum* are those of individual authors and not necessarily endorsed by the editors of gender forum.

Submissions

Target articles should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition) and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length. Please make sure to number your paragraphs and include a bio-blurb and an abstract of roughly 300 words. Files should be sent as email attachments in Word format. Please send your manuscripts to gender-forum@uni-koeln.de.

We always welcome reviews on recent releases in Gender Studies! Submitted reviews should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition), have numbered paragraphs, and should be between 750 and 1,000 words in length. Please note that the reviewed releases ought to be no older than 24 months. In most cases, we are able to secure a review copy for contributors.

Article Publishing

The journal aims to provide rapid publication of research through a continuous publication model. All submissions are subject to peer review. Articles should not be under review by any other journal when submitted to *Gender forum*.

There are no submission or page charges, and no colour charges.

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Editorial

By Christian David Zeitz, University of Cologne, Germany

1 Given the new normal of fascist-oid populisms and all too familiar neoliberalism, 'the Muslim woman' is produced as a performative battleground of ideological and normative contradictions; as a commodity product with a rearranged voice, not an *arrangeur* of voicings. The AfD (Alternative for Germany) – with its gendered Islamophobic rhetoric materialized in election posters that mobilize the image of burqa-clad women to warn against the supposed *Islamization* of German – rose to 13% in the 2017 German parliamentary elections. Austria recently banned face-veils to make a stand against the oppression of Muslim women, relying on an all too common, ethnosexist[1] 'saving-brown-women-from-brown-men' discourse (Spivak 49; Abu-Lughod 784), whilst neglecting the symbolic violence undergirding standardized body politics. In a more alarming and far reaching manner, a recent ruling by the European Court of Justice which grants employers the right to ban *all religious symbols* in professional settings is not only to be read as an attack on religious embodied practices and identity formations under the sign of religious neutrality, but also as a juridical precarization of Muslim headdress-wearing women, refusing to meet the coercions of mandatory assimilation (El Aabedy). Sadly enough, *we* have not yet moved beyond the over-significance of the veil in debates about Islam, women and gender, which makes the veil police and the no-veil police strange bedfellows. And sadly enough, such a move seems far from possible, so long as commentators like the self-declared Muslim feminist Seyran Ateş insist that veils gender and sexualize, whilst excluding embodied performances of hair-dos, make-up and the latest fashions from this line of reasoning (see Yeğenoğlu 63). What the aforementioned legislations and attitudes foreclose is what Sara Ahmed terms "a future response to an other *whom I may yet approach*", an approach that does not intend to *outlaw* identities that *I* personally and affectively cannot (imagine) to live (*Strange* 146, Ahmed's emphasis). The *may-yet* temporality of this approach helps to imagine encounters beyond the mediated histories of prejudiced sentiment – ranging from pity to disgust – and the fantasy of knowing *what is best* for the other.

2 At the same time, Shephard Fairey's *We the People* star-spangled banner hijabs were strongly present at the Women's Marches and *IamMuslimToo* demonstrations and

[1] *Ethnosexism* is a term used by Gabriele Dietze to describe forms of sexism where gendered and ethnic/ethnicized discrimination converge. Ethnosexist figurations like the *sexually oppressed veiled Muslim woman,* the *sexually aggressive (young) Muslim male* and the construction of Muslim cultures as marked by inherently regressive sexual and gender politics are at the heart of anti-migration and anti-refugee rhetoric (3-7).

multinationals like NIKE and H&M suddenly published ads for hijabs or at least featuring hijab-wearing women. In Germany, the Bundesverwaltungsamt (federal administrative office) started a large-scale advertising campaign in the streets and on social media, which appears to encourage young women wearing headscarves *to apply for a job as their true selves* (*Bewirb dich wie du bist*). As positive and inclusivity-fostering as these initiatives are, Banu Gökarıksel is right to point out that

> The current political moment of a global political turn to the right calls for going beyond easy tokenisms and for questioning the simple folding in of Muslims into existing nationalist narratives about the U.S. (Gökarıksel and Smith, forthcoming). Instead, more radical intersectional feminisms that grapple with inequalities across multiple axes of difference are needed. (par. 6)

In this sense, the need to identify (gendered) anti-Muslim and other racialized discriminations cannot stop at critiques of Trump, the AfD and other openly Islamophobic and racist right-wing figures and movements. What need to be targeted are the everyday effects of structural and institutional racisms in supposedly postracist Western societies: in universities, in admission processes, in the business world, at airports, in sports, etc. What makes the recent wave of positive and optimistic representations so contradictory is that their very celebratory optimisms harbour the risk of "willed oblivion" to existing, widespread anti-Muslim racism as an ongoing structural problem (Ahmed, *Living* 259). Just as there are more shades to Muslim female subjectivities than the type-identity of the *eternally oppressed veiled Muslim woman*, there are also more shades than the type-identity of the *young, successful and patriotically flag-raising Western-Muslim woman*. The latter is not only a normativization, but also, ironically, held back and prevented by stately and juridical regimes that regulate which bodies and identities are acceptable and which are not. We might want to ask ourselves how a European Muslim hijab-wearing woman is supposed to feel European, if EU law entitles potential employers to render her precarious, Other and ultimately *un-European*? Thus, in the face of deeply entrenched stately sanctioned anti-Muslim ethnosexism, satisfaction *with how liberal and open we actually are* is not a satisfying option. Rather, Sara Ahmed's appeal to *kill joy* and be "willing to cause unhappiness" about multifarious gendered-racialized-embodied inequalities and complicities is all too relevant (*Living* 258).

3 Over-negativity, over-positivity/over-optimism and the never-ending over-inscription of Muslim women and their bodies from both sides of the right-wing conservative-nationalist and liberal to left spectrum mark these contradictory times. The contradiction of overly negative and positive (and all too easily neoliberal) representations leave minimal space, in the 'Western' public imagination, for complexity, nuance and negotiation and restrict a

plurality of Muslim female voices and subjectivities to the tropes of the oppressed Muslim woman *who does not belong* and the neoliberal Muslim female citizen-subject *who has the potential to belong*, as long as she is willing to be incorporated into narratives of the happy multicultural nation and play her part in the growth of GNPs. Although it cannot be denied that the influx in positive representations of Muslim women in the West is unprecedented and constitutes a resistive potentiality to anti-Muslim racisms, the imperative that critical scholarship in the humanities go beyond and counter binary, simplistic and homogenizing representational regimes of Muslim women cannot be postponed.

4 To extrapolate an observation by Sadia Abbas, in the current political climate, Muslim women are often configured as "the pretexts for working out a series of tensions in contemporary thought" (188): in the examples listed above they either work as pretexts for justifying exclusionary nationalism, normalizing whiteness, condemning multiculturalism, constructing the superior Western Self, etc. or as tokenistic pretexts for constructing, in the vaguest sense, the nation or society as diversity-friendly, anti-racist and inclusive of certain Others, whose difference is ontologized and reconstructed rather than revealed to be constructed against the ideals of Euro-American White normative cultures. The age-old 'who speaks (for whom)' question so relevant in feminist, postcolonial and critical ethnic and racial studies remains critical. Especially in a time when visibly Muslim women publicly embody either gendered figurations of anti-Muslim racism or are made into poster girls of supposedly happy multicultural societies. In both narratives, the Muslim woman as a critical subject or an acknowledgement of a heterogeneity of voices and an ontological openness of whatsoever ascribed identity positions is lost in an over-inscription of type-like and classifiable Muslim female identity. In her contribution to the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*' special forum on "Trump's Presidency and Middle East Women's Studies", Amaney A. Jamal critically analyses the current mobilization and mainstreaming of visibly Muslim women as a strategy of speaking on behalf and controlling voices of critique and dissent:

> Muslim women find themselves once again at the forefronts of conflict and understanding, and tolerance and hate, while baring their vulnerabilities to the world and relying on the goodwill of others to support them. That this in itself is a recurring century-old problem for Muslim women in both the 'Muslim' and 'Western' world, is somber confirmation that Muslim women are still spoken for, even while their own voices are louder than ever. Let's switch off the mute button (par. 4).

This special issue of *gender forum* is intended to contribute to Jamal's call for *switching off the mute button* through investigating cultural productions by Muslim women in which *their own voices are louder than ever*. The issue's cover, designed by emerging Palestinian-

Canadian artist Shahd Faraj[2], encapsulates the discussed hegemonic muffling of a sheer heterogeneity of Muslim women, whose daily varied negotiations of identities, politics, knowledges, agencies and resistances defy categorizing and homogenizing identitarianisms and representational regimes. In Faraj's artwork, which draws on a diverse iconography of Muslim women's faces, the silencing of the displayed women through anonymous hands reaching over their mouths works as a critique of strategic denials of non-sanctioned Muslim women's voices in mainstream representations. Mapped on the women's bodies, however, are lips, hinting at the materiality, corpo-reality and tonality of resistive and agential voicings.

5 In "Muslim Feminist Agency and Arab American Literature: A Case Study of Mohja Kahf's *the girl in the tangerine scarf*", Martina Koegeler-Abdi discusses how Kahf's negotiation of religious and feminist empowerment opens spaces for Muslim feminist agencies in the canon of Arab American literature. Koegeler-Abdi calls attention to an artistic conflict specific to (Muslim) Arab American women's writing, namely the conflict of meeting marketing requirements through self-Orientalization and simultaneously feeling obliged to defy Orientalist stereotypes of 'the Muslim woman' as passive victim in need of saving. Kahf extends her critique of this conflict to an intersectional feminist commentary on how Muslim feminist writers in the US are situated at the cutting edge of Western Orientalisms and Muslim conservative dismissals of feminism as a Westernizing contamination and complicity with intra-communal patriarchal formations. To challenge this double siege of Muslim Arab American feminist literary production, Kahf proposes an activist and literary double critique of both these hegemonies. Overall, Koegeler-Abdi does not only reveal how Kahf's double critiques are a recurrent feature of her own creative writing, but also how her novel's linkage of literary activism and Muslim feminist religious scholarship ultimately paves the way for more differentiated understandings of women's agency, inclusive of Muslim feminist religious subjectivities and agencies.

6 Leila Moayeri Pazargadi's article "Re/calling Scheherazad: Voicing Agency in Mohja Kahf's Poetry" examines Kahf's collection of spoken word poetry entitled *Emails from Scheherazad*. According to Pazargadi, the Syrian American poet's reclamation of orality, inherent to Scheherazad's storytelling, becomes a strategy for voicing agency and agitating against the silencing of Muslim women. The trope of the storyteller helps Kahf to wrest attention to assumed taboo topics for Muslim women like violence, desire and passion. Pazargadi approaches Kahf's poetry from an autobiographical studies perspective and suggests reading the poems in light of their personal and anecdotal contexts, whilst also being

[2] We would like to thank Shahd Faraj (www.shahdfaraj.com) for granting us permission to display her artwork as this issue's cover.

attentive to the ways in which the autobiographical 'I', in the poems and life writing in general, can potentially encompass a broad range of voices, focal points and hybridized identity and genre negotiations. Kahf's creative, autobiographical performances of hybridity are to be read as political-ethical statements for the humanization of American Muslims. Finally, the autobiographical poetics of storytelling in *Emails from Scheherazad* become crystallized in the reclamation of subjective stories as counter-discourses to Islamophobic criticism. Pazargadi's article contributes both to putting into dialogue Middle Eastern literary studies and autobiographical studies and to establishing American Muslim literary studies within the ever-expanding field of ethnic American literary studies.

7 In "'Can I […] claim to revive these stifled voices?': Writing, Researching and Performing Postcolonial Womanhood in Assia Djebar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* and *So Vast the Prison*", Hannah Kershaw offers a Muslim feminist reading of Algerian author Djebar's novels *Fantasia* and *So Vast the Prison* in translation. Assia Djebar's novels chart the patriarchal double colonization of Muslim women in Algeria through French colonial authorities and certain native everyday practices. *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* recounts the personal histories of violent colonial encounters and anti-colonial rebellion during the occupation. At the same time, it counters masculinist historiography through the inclusion of stories of women's participation in nationalist resistance efforts. Moving on to *So Vast the Prison*, Kershaw shifts her focus to the novel's gaze relations: it is argued that Djebar's female characters' appropriation of the male gaze and their critical engagement with gender relations is achieved through embodied and visually mediated rather than linguistic modes of critical inquiry. In her novels, Kershaw concludes, Djebar highlights and restores women's active and creative roles in the building of a/the nation and its histories and thereby de-essentializes the static figuration of the 'postcolonial Muslim woman' as nothing more than an effect of national interests and male-centred historiography.

8 The issue's final essay, Julia Watson's "Parsua Bashi's Nylon Road: Visual Witnessing and the Critique of Neoliberalism in Iranian Women's Graphic Memoir", is not only the first critical reading in English of Parsua Bashi's graphic memoir *Nylon Road*, but also re-shifts the issue's focus to questions of diaspora, memory and subjectivity. Woven into a dialogical autobiographical process, the narrating 'I', Parsua, is in constant conversation with her eleven former selves, confronting each other over competing and reversed attitudes to Iranian fundamentalism, Western secularism and neoliberal late capitalism in Bashi's country of migration, Switzerland, and sympathies for Soviet-style socialism among 1970s Iranian intellectuals. *Nylon Road*'s visually and politically conflicting vantage points and

subject positions remain in dialogical relation, resulting in varied historically and socially contextualized representations and examinations of multiple life-worlds in Iran and 'the West'/Switzerland. Watson points to the multi-leveled exercise of critique at play in Bashi's work, which does not stop at the level of post-revolutionary Iranian fundamentalism and its normative control of women's bodies. On the contrary, Bashi critique also targets the normative and exclusionary body and gender politics of Western neoliberalism and consumer capitalism as well as Socialist states. Eventually, this multiplicity of visually and socio-politically clashing and reversed positionalities and their dialogical encounters is key to Bashi's feminist, global, and postcolonial critical reflection on the Islamic Revolution, its aftermath and Western neoliberalism and neo-colonialism.

8 In line with the issue's overall interest in and contribution to transnational Muslim literary studies, it closes with Anja Wieden's critical review of Güner Yasemin Balci's novel *Das Mädchen und der Gotteskrieger* (*The Girl and the Jihadist*, Wieden's translation), published by S. Fischer.

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