



## Call for Papers

- Within the framework of The Women & Memory Forum’s interest in issues of cultural research in gender and women’s studies, and in keeping with the Organization’s mission of the production of alternative knowledge about women in the Arab world which would support justice, equal opportunities, and reshaping power relations within various social structures, WMF—in cooperation with The Danish Egyptian Dialogue Institute and KVINFO The Danish Centre for Information on Gender, Equality, & Ethnicity will organize a conference on **“Feminism and Islamic Perspectives: New Horizons of Knowledge and Reform,”** with participants from Egypt, the Arab world, and Europe. The conference will take place in **Cairo, 17-18 March, 2012.**
- Though the term “Islamic feminism” has been circulating since the beginning of the 1990s initially to describe and analyze the phenomenon of Iranian women activists after the Islamic revolution in Iran who sought to obtain rights in the public and private spheres from within the Shi’ite juristic tradition, the notion of arguing for women’s rights within the Islamic framework included a number of pioneering women activists and writers in the Arab region since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, their early output may have lacked enough theorizing and systematic analytical methodologies. In the last twenty years, the concept has developed to the application of feminist consciousness on understanding the gap between the original message of Islam and the translation of its values into equal opportunities and partnership on the ground, as well as taking into consideration equal human dignity for both Muslim women and men. More specifically, the idea of ‘indigenous’ or ‘organic’ form of feminism meant using feminist tools of analysis to sift through the Islamic sciences—from the

perspective of committed Muslim women. Doors of *ijtihad* are to be open in order to facilitate to them producing an Islamic knowledge that revives and emphasizes gender justice, equality, and partnership—a knowledge alternative to the processes of exclusion and sense of superiority we find in some discourses of the *'ulama* and their manner of deduction. Despite the scholarly efficiency of these classical *'ulama* and their efforts in adhering to the *shari'ah*, they were products of their eras and cultures, naturally not interested in establishing equal status for men and women. It is time for the Islamic body of knowledge to conceptualize and express this justice and equality in status, capabilities, and opportunities.

- The main incentive behind Islamic feminist research today is the interweaving of women's perspectives and a faith position that subscribes to the Islamic doctrine and basic message, towards the activation of its 'just' and 'fair' principles and the production of gender-sensitive knowledge within an Islamic frame of reference. Besides critiquing patriarchal discrimination, the ultimate aim is reform and reconstruction.

### **Suggested Topics**

1. Islamic feminism, Arab revolutions, and democratization: What was the nature of the relationship between the previous ruling regimes and women's issues, and what is the impact of the current changing political scene on a true inclusion of women in society? In the context of the liberation of Arab peoples from political authoritarianism and patriarchy, how can Islamic feminist research become a project for resisting all forms of authoritarianism, exclusion, and monopolizing knowledge? How do we enhance women's participation in Islamic research and the production of knowledge in jurisprudence and hermeneutics? Why are women scholars and specialists absent in *fiqhi* assemblies, *fatwa* councils, local and international Islamic organizations? What are the reasons of their marginalization from influential positions of leadership in official religious institutions?

2. Islamic feminist research as an intellectual project and alternative discourse: What are the specific areas of research which ought to be developed and encouraged at this stage? Is the need more in the field of theorizing and defining the 'identity' and domain of Islamic Feminism as an inter-disciplinary specialization, a critical theory, and an ontological position? Do we focus more on outlining methodologies and strategies or practice and application? Specifically, how would this research agenda be applied to various fields of Islamic studies and hermeneutics?
3. Islamic feminist research in the Arab world and beyond: Is Islamic feminism only a project for the Muslim minorities in European societies? What is the role of these minorities in constructing a new Islamic outlook on gender roles/hierarchy in Muslim life? Why is the current production of scholarly research in this field scarce in Arabic compared to the accumulated scholarship and research developments so far in other languages and in academic circles and centers outside the Arab region, throughout the wider *ummah*? What is the importance of the Arabic heritage and language in the renewal of Islamic thought and discourses? How do we develop and build on what has been achieved so far in Arab research?
4. Social, cultural, and political realities: How can Islamic feminist knowledge meet the needs of women in Muslim societies? What is the specific role of this trend on the ground and its practical impact on social reform, cultural practices, and laws? How will it contribute to the obtaining of Muslim women's rights, within the private and public spheres, in the light of state laws whether in Muslim countries or others? Is the production of knowledge enough if it is with no official sanction or power to be adopted and applied?
5. Outreach, interactive relations, and dialogue: Can the Islamic feminist trend interact with feminisms in other religions in search for commonalities in faith-based, emancipative values and in rejection of discrimination in the name of religion? What are the facets of cooperation with varying feminist movements within a single society? What is the role of Islamic feminism in fostering dialogue between South and North, between Muslim/Arab societies and European societies.

6. Issues for Ijtihad: Re-interpretations in the legacy of *tafsir, fiqh, hadith* – Re-thinking the traditions in light of the main principles and the *maqasid* – Concepts for re-consideration: the *qiwamah*, wife's *ta'ah*, *nushuz*, *darajah*, the one and single self (*nafs*), the cooperative *wilayah* of men and women believers (*al-Tawbah* 71), God's 'hearing' of men's and women's queries and implorations (*Al 'Imran* 195), equality in *taklif, furud, 'ibadat*, punishment and reward, the Qur'anic perspective on patriarchal authority, the implications of *Tawhid* versus hierarchy among humans, the Qur'anic address to men and to women, notions in marriage and divorce, women and *iftda'*, women as judges.

**An abstract, not more than 500 words, of a new, unpublished research is to be sent to the below email address no later than November 15, 2011. WMF intends to publish a volume that compiles the papers submitted in their final form one month after the end of the conference, with honorarium. The conference will cover airfare costs and provide accommodation for participants from outside Egypt.**

**The Women and Memory Forum**

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