

Gender, Race, Religion, Faith? Rethinking Intersectionality in German Feminisms

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Appears in *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 22.1 2014

Intersectional approaches have become widely accepted as integral to contemporary European feminist scholarship. A number of international conferences, special issues of academic journals, and more than fifteen books in the German context alone between 2007-2013 focused on intersectionality. These recent works often laud the arrival of intersectionality to European feminist scholarship, whether as framework, theory, or methodology. Some scholars criticize this trend, particularly because many recent works both downplay race and exclude engagement with the theorizing and activism of immigrant women and women of color. Parallel to these developments, a significant body of work on gender and Islam in Europe has emerged. Yet discussions of intersectionality have been hesitant to engage faith and religion, other than to occasionally list religion as one in a list of relevant differences. Intersectional analyses that provide frameworks for European Muslim women's movements have been particularly absent.

The "Aktionsbündnis muslimischer Frauen" [Action Coalition of Muslim Women] [AMF] exemplify a small but growing group of Muslim women who express an affiliation with Islam that not only exists comfortably alongside their activism for gender justice, but grounds it: (further see Kubilay, 2011):¹

¹ While many articulate their goals as gender justice (*Geschlechtergerechtigkeit*) or women's rights, they do not always identify as feminists, in part because Muslim women are often seen as objects, rather than actors, of mainstream feminist activism.

As an organization of Muslim women we see one of our missions not only to represent the prohibition [Verbot] of violence against fellow human beings, rooted in secular humanism, but also the command [Gebot] to gender justice, and to bring the strict rejection of violence against women and children back to the consciousness of society. (AMF,2009a)

In this article I argue that engagement with groups like the AMF requires intersectional frameworks that recognize gendered racializations of Islam, as well as acknowledge affective identification with faith or religious communities. The work of the AMF here inspires a set of questions and tentative considerations towards conceptualizing faith and religion within intersectional frameworks. How can intersectional frameworks conceptualize the activities, life practices, writings, and subjectivities of women who articulate their democratic activities for gender justice - not despite religious affiliation, but rather, because (or partially because) of it? In turn, how can intersectionality be conceptualized in such a way as to address matters of faith and religion without deemphasizing the continuing importance of race?

I first introduce the AMF, then address the ongoing importance of race in intersectional frameworks. I then outline several areas in which it is particularly important to incorporate faith and religion into intersectional analysis frameworks suggested by the work of the AMF. I intend here, then, not to focus on how the identities of their members are intersectional, nor to suggest that their work is theorizing intersectional identities, but rather, to think through what challenges to intersectional frameworks are posed by their work and their complex subjectivities. Inclusion of faith and religion within intersectional frameworks is thus not a discussion of what Islam “is,” but how it is lived and “made” in ever-changing ways.

A note on my use of the words religion and faith: with “religion” I refer specifically to organized institutions that produce particular norms and forms of belonging. “Faith” I use here not in any theological sense, but to refer to an affective attachment to a religious community or religious tradition, one that overdetermines one’s sense of self, community, and relationship to the world. Faith may express attachment to a religious community or institution, but it may also exist independently of such attachment.

The Action Coalition of Muslim Women (AMF)

Muslim women outside of Europe, particularly in the Middle East and South Asia, often frame their work for gender justice in a critique of the Eurocentrism of enlightenment ideals and forms of liberal democracy. Their positioning vis-à-vis conceptions of European democracy are often explicitly inflected by postcolonial histories in which the rhetoric of modernization and democratization often served as legitimization for colonialism (see, for example, Abu-Lughod, 2002; Ahmed, 2003; Mir-Hosseini, 2003; Sunder, 2003). However, like many European Muslim feminists, the AMF deliberately locates its work in a tradition of European democracy and European democratic values, insisting on participating in European public spheres. Consider, for example, this quote from their founding documents:

The basis of our activities are the Basic Law, human rights, as well as the principles, grounded in Islam, of human dignity, responsible action before God and people, as well as the living together of all people in peace and justice.

(AMF,n.d.)

The AMF provides a platform for Muslim women to give voice to their interests in the public sphere with a specific interest in participating in European democratic processes. Claiming over

400 members (AMF,2013), the group is a member of UN Women Germany, as well as a member of the Deutscher Frauenrat [National Council of German Women’s Organizations], a recognized NGO that functions as an umbrella organization for women’s groups in Germany. While the Deutscher Frauenrat is federally funded, the AMF does not currently receive external funding other than a free website (AMF,n.d.). The AMF has a blog, but Facebook provides the primary vehicle for the AMF’s dissemination of information. Much independently created content, such as reports on meetings with politicians, reports on interventions in public debates, relevant talks and relevant panels is available solely on Facebook.

While the AMF is publicly active in a variety of ways, their relationship to the Deutsche Islam Konferenz [German Islam Conference; hereafter DIK] provided one of the most direct relationships to the state. The DIK is a working group formed by the German government, consisting of representatives of the government, of various Muslim organizations, and Muslim individuals. Their mandate is not to create policy, but to create a dialogue between Muslims and the State, resulting in general recommendations for policymakers, published reports on relevant issues such as media representation and domestic violence, and a number of conferences. The organizations included in the DIK are largely umbrella organizations of religious communities, with the exception of the Turkish Community of Germany, a secular umbrella organization of groups advocating for the rights of Turkish minorities in Germany. The inclusion of “individuals” unaffiliated with participating organizations in the first two phases was intended to address the reality that the majority of Muslims in Germany are not affiliated with any organized mosque or group; the third phase, starting in 2014, has been reorganized to exclude these “individual” members altogether.

The unique mode of the AMF's participation in the DIK indicates the importance of an intersectional framework that incorporates questions of faith and religion to understanding the barriers faced by Muslim women in participating in the German public sphere. In the first phase of the DIK, Muslim women heavily criticized the participant list. Despite explicit prioritization of gender issues, the only invited "Muslim" women were Seyran Ateş and Necla Kelek, women who have identified as nonreligious but who have frequently claimed the right to represent religious women (further see Weber, 2013, pp. 137–151). Around the same time, ongoing discussion forums were initiated between members of various Muslim women's organizations (none of whom were represented in the DIK) and members of federal ministries independently of the workings of the DIK. In 2009, a number of Muslim women participating in these meetings officially registered the organization, though they had been meeting as the AMF for two years (AMF,2009b).

When the DIK was re-formed in its second phase in 2010, with gender issues remaining one of the priorities for discussion, neither the AMF nor any other Muslim women's organization was invited into the DIK as a group. Instead, Tuba Işık, then AMF member and now the co-chair, served as an individual. All DIK documentation referring to her biography solely listed her academic credentials, never alluding to the AMF. Nevertheless, both she and the AMF considered her role to represent the interests of the AMF (AMF,2013; Işık-Yiğit, 2010).

The lack of women's organizations speaks to the inability of the state to imagine Muslim women as able to organize for political discussions of gender justice, and to imagine women with explicit faith identifications as viable partners. The DIK thus contributes to a set of discursive conditions that allow Muslim women to emerge into the German public as victims of

intimate and familial violence, while prohibiting public subjectivities as participants in European democracy, or as victims of racialized violence. The DIK is unique, in that here, a Muslim woman *is* recognized as an academic expert – yet the potential for organizations for gender justice remain “unimaginable.”²

Race and Intersectionality

Intersectional frameworks incorporating religion and faith must insist on the fundamental importance of anti-racist activism to conceptions of intersectionality. I wish to call attention here as well to some problematic ways in which contemporary theorizations of intersectionality sometimes de-emphasize race through a brief excursion into the transnational emergence of intersectionality as a framework. In the US in the 1970s and 80s, the Combahee River Collective, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Audre Lorde all pointed to the ways in which women experience gender differently depending on their positions in structures of power inflected by racialized and class differences. Kimberlé Crenshaw first deployed the term “intersectionality” to “denote the various ways in which race and gender interact” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244). Crenshaw draws on postmodern theory to argue that a reliance on identity politics leads to the repression of intra-group differences, in turn preventing inter-group alliances (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). Though Crenshaw used the metaphor of a crossroads or intersection, which many scholars have criticized as relying on separate “categories” viewed in isolation, Crenshaw

² This is unlikely to change in the 3rd phase of the DIK beginning in 2014. The current minister of the interior decided to avoid the contentious debates of the first two phases by eliminating the “individuals.” As a result, the partners engaged in discussions about the role of Islam in Germany in the future are now all representatives of the largest organized German Muslim groups. Women’s issues, Islamophobia, and employment issues have been taken off the table, while a new focus on religious experience and welfare [Wohlfahrt] has been announced (“Wohlfahrt und Seelsorge,” 2014).

explicitly challenged the tendency to see any individual category for analysis as “separable” or “exclusive” from another (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244).

Twenty years later, intersectionality is considered a fundamental approach to contemporary gender studies in the United States, and the language of intersectionality, integrative analysis or matrix of oppressions is institutionalized in many gender studies program mission statements. Over time, intersectionality has even acquired the status of an intellectual field. For example, in the US context, *Signs* published a 2013 issue entitled “Intersectionality: Theorizing Power, Empowering Theory,” with the intention of providing a critical assessment of the field of intersectionality.

Critics of the concept often are concerned about a lack of clearly defined intersectional methodology. But as the editors of the *Signs* special issue suggest, intersectionality is most useful as an “analytic sensibility” rather than a strictly defined methodology:

What makes an analysis intersectional [...] is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power. This framing – conceiving of categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power – emphasizes what intersectionality does rather than what intersectionality is. (Cho et al., 2013, p. 785).

Two major concerns emerge in their discussion. Firstly, intersectionality as a critical concept exists in the same fields of power that it analyzes and interrogates. As women’s and gender studies are institutionalized, and as intersectionality is established as a valuable framework

within a number of disciplines, it becomes subject to academic and disciplinary conventions that could in turn reify existing forms of power and exclusion (Cho et al., 2013, p. 791; 793). Secondly, the criticism of the role of “identity” and identity politics in recent intersectional analyses can be deeply problematic. Early theorizations of intersectionality often focused on processes, political inequalities, and structural inequalities rather than any simplified notion of essential identities. Crenshaw’s article, for example, points out that anti-essentialist critique is a defining element of many women of color feminisms, which note how the category of women has been reduced to the category of white women (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1296). Furthermore, an cynicism about all identities itself derives from a position of privilege (Chun et al., 2013, p. 937; Verloo, 2013, p. 906), one that denies the importance of strategic identities for political activism.

Intersectionality and German Feminisms

The notion of intersectionality didn’t merely recently “arrive” or “travel” to the European context, though this language sometimes appears in European discussions of intersectionality. At least since the 1980s, women of color and of migrant heritage in Germany challenged white feminists’ refusal to reflect on the location of their knowledge, and its imbrication in racist and colonial histories (Yekani et al., 2008, p. 40). These activists developed complex intersectional analyses and theories without necessarily naming them as such.

The ideas of intersectionality, if not the term itself, were present already in German feminist thought from at least 1984 on. When Audre Lorde taught a poetry seminar at the Free University of Berlin, she created a space in which encounters among Black German women galvanized a movement. One participant, May Opitz (who later renamed herself May Ayim as

an act of reclaiming her Ghanaian heritage), was inspired to write a thesis, parts of which were incorporated into the co-written book *Showing Our Colors*. This first comprehensive social history of black people in Germany, written by black feminists, and including interviews with Black women, explicitly engages the intersection of race and gender throughout (Opitz et al., 1992a, 1992b). Lorde's foreword to *Showing Our Colors* points to the intersectional thought that plays such a key role in theorizing by feminists of color at this time:

Who are they, these German women of the Diaspora? Beyond the details of our particular oppressions – although certainly not outside the reference of those details... where do our paths intersect as women of color? And where do our paths diverge? Most important, what can we learn from our connected differences that will be useful to us both, Afro-German and Afro-American.

(Lorde, 1991, p. 67)

This language of connected differences informed the conception of *Showing Our Colors*, the emergence of the Afro-German movement,³ and the theorizing of Ayim and others. Ika Hügel Marshall's book *Invisible Woman*, the first Afro-German autobiography, also explicitly addresses the exclusion of thinking about race from feminist activism (Hügel-Marshall, 2001, pp. 98–101). Alliances with women of immigrant heritage, Jewish women, and anti-racist white women produced further scholarship attending to gender as a category constituted by and constitutive of other categories such as ethnicity, class and race (Gümen, 1996, 1999; Hügel, 1993; Konuk et al., 1999). Work calling for attention to the diverse ways in which gender, race, class and nation

³ Activists responded to racist terms in German by self-identifying as Afro-German and black German, terms largely used interchangeably.

are mutually constituted was largely marginalized by mainstream feminist academic discourse (Lutz, 1993; Rodríguez, 2003).

Throughout the 1990s, much scholarly work that did examine gender within an intersectional framework drew on black and postcolonial feminist academic work emerging from the US and UK, but also responded to the writings of antiracist activists in Germany (Erel et al., 2007, p. 240), particularly *Showing Our Colors*. The space from which this theorizing emerged was also a queer space – not only because many of the antiracist activists were lesbians, but also because they worked with an anti-essentialist notion of identity that enabled complex coalitions with women who have a range of racialized experiences, thereby “queering ethnicity” (El-Tayeb, 2011, pp 66-68). Yet many current narratives of German feminism suggest that the stability of the category of woman was first challenged by deconstruction and American postcolonial theory: “The making instable of the category of ‘woman’ is thematized, but the sociopolitical and historical moment in which this debate was carried out in feminism, remains effaced” (Rodríguez, 1999a). Feminist poststructuralist scholars championed abstracted theorizing that challenged essentialized identities, but the theorizing of women of color was seen as outside of the realm of theory.⁴

In the late 2000s, as the term intersectionality became a new buzzword in both European scholarship and EU political agendas (Davis, 2008), earlier calls for theorizing intersectional positionalities (Gümen, 2003; Varela, 2003) and immigrant intellectual agency (Rodríguez, 1999b) were often ignored; and the history of intersectionality as a concept rooted

⁴ This move is partially repeated in a recent article discussing intersectionality in the European context, which argues that the use of intersectionality both prohibits opposition and de-legitimizes poststructuralist ontology (Carbin and Edenheim, 2013, p. 245).

in antiracist work often disappeared (Erel et al., 2007, pp. 240 – 241). For example, one prominent feminist scholar, Ute Gerhard, states in a 2006 interview that race has been primarily theorized in relationship to the history of national socialism, until the “cultural turn” in feminist work picked up on postcolonial theory. This framing erases the decades long history of scholars of color in Germany (Möser, 2013, p. 53).

Gerhard’s words also imagine intersectionality as a US term that simply “traveled” to Europe. In the same vein, Gudrun Axeli-Knapp’s genealogy of the term argues that questions of race and ethnicity were not raised in German feminisms until the young generation of scholars influenced by postcolonial theory did so in the 2000s. US based scholar Jasbir Puar also expresses concern about the “travel” of the concept of intersectionality, fearing that a European feminist urge to “catch up” with US theory has resulted in new essentialisms and an inability to allow intersectional frames to evolve to accommodate contemporary developments. She considers intersectionality as emerging separately from activist movements in Europe (Puar, 2011), and relying on a notion of separable, stable components whose stability can enable state surveillance and control. Drawing on Deleuzian theory, Puar seeks a conception that can attend to ever-shifting, interwoven forces and flows that work against linearity and coherence (Puar, 2007, p. 212).

While Puar provides an important critique of some uses of intersectional frameworks, her description simplifies many sophisticated elaborations of intersectionality – including Crenshaw’s, who suggests “a methodology that will ultimately disrupt the tendencies to see race and gender as exclusive or separable” (Crenshaw, 1991, pp. 1245–1246). From its early elaborations, “Intersectionality” has been productively instable (Yekani et al., 2008, p. 31).

Puar recognizes this danger herself, when she insists that her “[...] concern is not about the formative, generative, and necessary intervention of Crenshaw's work, but of both the changed geopolitics of reception as well as a tendency towards reification” (Puar, 2011). Yet her point holds only by partially erasing theorizing arising from anti-racist movements in the past. Puar’s criticism of intersectional frameworks thus runs the risk of replicating the colonization of knowledge present in German scholarship that denied or devalued theoretical work and activist alliances created by scholars of color (Rodríguez et al., 2010, p. 56). Indeed, Fatima El-Tayeb, draws on histories of intersectional analysis, queer of color theory and theories of creolization in ways that deeply challenge Puar’s argument – by showing that intersectional approaches have enabled key anti-essentialist alliances among women of color that address the interrelations of class, gender, race and sexuality (El-Tayeb, 2011, p. xix; 48–49).

Especially troubling, Gail Lewis describes how discussions of differing notions of race in Europe and North America at a 2009 conference on intersectionality in Europe silenced participants’ lived experiences of racism. Lewis insists that scholars attend to how antiracist and academic feminist spaces continue to be structured in the violence of colonized knowledges:

[T]his [the toxicity of race] has to be faced in all its feltness and livedness so that its structural, relational, and experiential constitutive power might be undone.

This has been a call to feminists of color and white feminists to take account of the social and affective relations of encounter and engagement when we meet.

(Lewis, 2013, p. 888)

In order to consider the roles of religion and faith in intersectional frameworks, then, it is first key to acknowledge, following Umut Erel, Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, Jin Haritaworn, and

Christian Klesse, that intersectionality only has analytical value if it is part of an anti-racist and postcolonial socio-critical framework that accounts for the ways in which racist histories structure knowledge (Erel et al., 2007, p. 245).

An adequate intersectional framework for understanding the conditions under which Muslim women, including members of the AMF, are recognized as subjects in a European public must thus attend carefully to new forms of race and racialization. The lingering insistence that Islam can only produce gender inequality is expressed in the name of religion or culture, but it relies on the structures of race and racism: Islam is seen as a premodern, unchanging and unchangeable culture; cultures in which Islam is a dominant religion are assumed to be *inevitably* both different from and inferior to “European” cultures, and unable to participate in democracy and human rights (Weber, 2011). El-Tayeb shows how the supposed “colorblindness” of contemporary Europe relies on a convergence of race and religion that produces racialized populations as having “origins” outside of Europe (El-Tayeb, 2011, p. xvii; further see Lentin, 2008; Weber, 2013). This form of “knowledge” about Islam structures the everyday lives of Muslim women as well as their emergence into public subjectivities. I therefore caution against the inclusion of religion as one of a depoliticized listing of infinite differences (a listing that can happen if one takes the “sections” or categories of intersectionality too literally) (Erel et al., 2007, p. 245), which often implies that all differences are equal, or that race can somehow be ignored when other differences are added to the list (Lykke, 2011, p. 216). Religious difference in Germany is deeply embedded in forms of racialization.

Intersectionality retains analytic usefulness for feminist German studies, particularly if we 1) insist on recognizing the importance of histories of racism and colonialism in knowledge production, 2) hold open a fluid understanding of intersectionality, recognizing a number of historically specific, mutually constitutive, interacting processes that create differences embedded in relations of power, differences that must occasionally be *named without stabilizing* in order to make meaning in intellectual inquiry and activist work, and 3) insist on recognition of the wide ranging scholarly work and activism of women of color in Germany. These imperatives are addressed when working from an understanding of intersectionality as a framework for the analysis of mutually constituted dimensions of societal inequality. Intersectionality is an “ongoing multilevel process from which agency cannot be erased” (Ferree, 2009, p. 85); it cannot be reduced to a methodology or removed from the activist context from which the concept emerged; nor should the activists who developed this understanding of social inequality be excluded from the intellectual history of the concept. In what follows, I wish to consider several possible areas of consideration opened up by a framework that includes notions of faith and religion in intersectionality.

Secularism and Critique

The imbrication of the university in the history of secularism and critique provides a complex challenge to analysis of Muslim work for gender justice. Consider the importance of Marx’ distinction between criticism and critique in the history of German studies, in which criticism highlights the illusory nature of religion while critique seeks to reveal the conditions that enable religious consciousness, and that religious consciousness can be seen to express (Brown, 2009,

p. 12). Critique in this tradition relies on its own ability to be the opposite of religious mystifications - precisely by explaining and supplanting them (Brown, 2009, p. 13).

Gayatri Spivak's comments on secularism provide some useful starting points here. She argues for a practice of secularism rather than merely "being secular" (Spivak, 2012, p. 394). Her argument relies on a decoupling of secularism from Judaeo-Christian traditions, pointing to Kant's legacy, whose "real effort at tolerance [...] shows us [that] tolerance allows you to de-transcendentalize all other religions but the religion-culture language that governs your own idiom" (Spivak, 2012, p. 394). To promote a practice of secularism, then, is also to "mis-read" Kant (Spivak, 2012, pp. 19–20), to locate secularism in a time and place, to subject secularism - and indeed, reason itself- to critique. I would add, this also requires scholars to consider what histories of colonialism and racism enable a narrative of secularism that grants Europeans privileged access. In Spivak's reading of secular democracy, secularism has been rendered specifically Judeo-Christian even as it is presented as universal.

The AMF challenges a heritage of German secularism that excludes Muslim Germans from participation in democratic activism, not only by drawing on a sense of belonging to Islam as an organizing principle for creating an activist coalition based on supporting human rights, but also by acknowledging their experiences as specifically Muslim women as partially enabling positions from which they can recognize the racism and xenophobia at work in anti-Islam discourses and actions. Their first official action issued a public statement in response to the racially motivated murder of Marwa el-Sherbini, who was stabbed in a Dresden court by the man convicted of xenophobic speech targeting el-Sherbini (AMF,2009b; further see Weber, 2013, pp. 104–112):

It is, on first glance, nothing new that a woman with a headscarf is verbally attacked because of her beliefs, for experiences of discrimination have already become the normality for many Muslim women. This time the victim, however, in contrast to the majority of cases, did not silently take the insult. Marwa demonstrated self-confidence and was aware of her democratic rights. [...] Marwa trusted the German constitution and the German judicial system, just as most Muslim women do in this country: women, who despite increasing experiences of discrimination in the working world and in public space continue to trust German justice, and repeatedly express their loyalty to the constitution. It is this constitution that guarantees the dignity and equality of every human, regardless of heritage, religion and gender. (AMF,2009c)

Here the AMF articulates a vision of secular democracy marked by the inclusion of an equal guarantee of basic rights for Muslim women, while simultaneously pointing to forms of exclusion from democratic society in the name of secularism, particularly in cases where a sense of belonging to Islam is expressed in religious clothing such as the headscarf. As Spivak suggests, “the separation of Church and State and the separation of the public and the private- are too race- and class-specific and indeed gender-specific to hold up a just world” (Spivak, 2012, p. 396).

Intersectionality, Islam and Agency

Liberal conceptions of agency further make it difficult to adequately address faith in intersectionality, and as Saba Mahmood has pointed out, this is reinforced by feminism’s dual imperative to intellectual analysis and political action (Mahmood, 2005, p. 10). There is a

lingering desire to romanticize resistance as the only form of agency, complicating discussions of forms of agency that inhere in the apparent relinquishing of individual autonomy. It is useful here to consider Judith Butler's understanding of agency, as that which emerges in the (perhaps small) "failures" to reproduce norms in the iterative performances of those norms. Agency lies in a paradox – that the subject only comes into existence through the existence of norms, and yet agency exists through the potential transformation of those norms (Butler, 2004, pp. 3–4). As Mahmood points out, that transformation can be, but is not necessarily, progressive.

In the European case, women who openly identify as Muslim exist within a set of norms in which that identification is seen to prohibit resistance of oppressive situations. Muslim men, alternatively, are seen as oppressors – and yet, the AMF's reduced participation in the DIK suggests, more viable subjects of the state. The forms of agency enacted by AMF members involve negotiating sets of both religious and secular norms. They express religious identity, even if that action may – or may not – serve certain gender norms, yet also claim rights under a constitution that is often used to exclude them. Furthermore, the presumption of an inability to act as democratic subjects or political subjects ignores the ways in which some women may take Islamic dress precisely in order to express their autonomy – from a society that seeks to exclude them from educational and work opportunities, *as well as*, potentially, from their families. Indeed, for some taking hijab is an aspect of an educated subjectivity (Nökel, 2002); for others, a claim to individual rights granted by the constitution (Weber, 2004). These are complex enactments of autonomy and agency that may function in the name of a community, or as the expression of an individual relationship to a god, but also as an insistence on constitutional rights.

Thus, the call by many scholars to carefully theorize the actions of pious women in a way that will avoid a submission/resistance binary (Jouili and Amir-Moazami, 2006; Mahmood, 2005) must be reconsidered carefully in the European context. Yes, agency may absolutely act in complicity with sexist norms of the status quo. However, Muslim agency may also be *enabling* of the democratic participatory subject, even contributing to transformative resistance as they claim rights under anti-discrimination clauses and rely partially on the interpretation of “Muslim values” to articulate human rights agendas. As Sirma Bilge has recently suggested in the French context, “What is therefore needed is a way to keep the intersectional analysis embedded in postcolonial readings [I add: and anti-racist], while at the same time dissociating the interpretation of veiled women’s agency from the doxa of resistance” (Bilge, 2010, p. 19). Thus, there is a range of possible faith inspired positionings, from a feeling of community belonging that enables gender justice, to a sense of autonomous choice that enables individual feminist interpretations of religious texts that in turn support gender justice agendas. When the AMF fights for individual rights to religious expression, it does so in the name of gender justice. Islam is invoked primarily to argue for compatibility with enlightenment traditions of democracy and human rights.

Framing Gender Justice

The DIK’s focus on women’s rights as an explicitly named top priority during the first phase ultimately contributed to continued partial exclusion of women with religious Muslim identities from the public sphere. Reliance on Seyran Ateş and Azade Seyhan as “experts” on Muslim women’s issues in the DIK, despite their emphasis on the rejection of Islam and many Muslim religious practices, led to their dominance in the public press in stories addressing issues

specific to Muslim and immigrant women in Germany, both nationally and internationally. Their interviews invariably reinforced a sense of Islam as immutably violent and antithetical to feminist goals of equality, with a particular emphasis on headscarf issues and domestic violence; their narratives furthermore prohibit an imagination of Muslim women as participants in the present (further see El-Tayeb, 2013, pp. 314–316; Weber, 2013, pp. 137–151). They thus reinforced racializing narratives of Islam as unchanging and inferior to Christianity, while participating in the exclusion of religious women from feminist discussions. The AMF interrupts this exclusion by reframing activism for gender justice at the complex intersection of fighting reductive constructions of Muslim womanhood (and the political, social, and economic exclusions that are a consequence of these constructions), while also challenging violence against Muslim women.

An April 2014 report on AMF participation in UN initiatives for women in “Muslim countries” via Facebook expressed this dilemma:

[...]it would be important, in our view, to work against the dominant image in this country of oppressed women without rights in Muslim influenced countries, which is reproduced, among other [places], in the well-meaning thematization and visual representation of the poor conditions in those societies. Thus a question that concerns us is how to intensify attention to the desolate situation for women in underdeveloped countries and war areas without representing them primarily as victims, but rather, with their potentialities.

AMF’s identification with Islam and the existence of racialized tropes of the Orientalized other mutually produce a paradoxical subject position vis-à-vis the state, which excludes them even

as it calls them to be “safe” subjects by limiting their expressed affiliation with Islam to private spaces. By incorporating faith and religion into intersectional frameworks, one can more adequately recognize the mechanisms by which women are excluded from social mobility, education, employment, political participation, and knowledge production – both nationally and internationally.

Queering Muslim Feminism

Intersectional frameworks incorporating faith may reveal ongoing heteronormativity in some struggles for gender justice. Above, I pointed out the ways in which Muslim women are imagined primarily as victims, and men as oppressors in much dominant culture. This formulation relies on an ongoing insistence on binary understandings of gender, and heteronormative presumptions about sexual and intimate relationships. Queer and trans issues are notably absent from the AMF discussion on both their website and Facebook page. In contrast, there are a number of other activist groups advocating for the interests of queer Muslims and immigrants. Suspect, Reach Out, and GLADT in particular received significant press attention in 2010, when Judith Butler rejected the Berlin Christopher Street Day award due to concerns about racist tendencies in the mainstream gay rights movement. Given that mainstream gay rights movements have often supported Islamophobic discourses through their simplified treatment of homophobic violence in “Muslim” culture (El-Tayeb, 2012; Haritaworn et al., 2008), Muslim women’s movements and Muslim queer movements struggle with similar issues, in that white queer and feminist individuals and groups have claimed the privilege to interpret the experiences of Muslim queers and women. Unfortunately, at this point significant public manifestations of such alliances have not occurred. Further intersectional analysis might

consider to what extent attachment to Islam and to the German national community inform this missing alliance. Does a discursive context that continuously suggests that Muslim women must choose between faith and gender equality prohibit such alliances? Is this a consequence of the fact that gender equality was stressed, but trans and queer rights were not, during the formative moments of the AMF as a response to the DIK?

Incorporation of faith and religion into intersectional analytical frameworks provides a fruitful strategy for considering action for and progress towards gender justice in Germany today. In terms of contribution to forms of marginalization, gender, faith and racialization often play overlapping roles. Attention to faith will allow scholars to reconsider how our disciplinary positionings inform our work, and how scholarly conventions may participate in existing forms of power and exclusion. It will further enable more serious engagement with Muslim feminisms, perhaps ones that can work against scenes such as this one:

“For Saliha and the common cause” – Alice Schwarzer signed her book and suggested that we try to create an ongoing discussion. We even have a photo together – arm in arm, a total PR gag. So that at the next lecture, she won’t only have the lucky necklaces from her Algerian friend and from Mecca to report as evidence for her tolerance, but also a “modern headscarf wearing woman” who even calls herself a feminist. For with me, she recognized “immediately” that I don’t belong to “an Islamist organization.” (Kubilay, 2011)

Kubilay expresses her dismay that a woman claims “interpretive sovereignty” over the experience of Islam, even as she uses her encounters with Muslim women as evidence of her

solidarity with them. It's a useful reminder, I think, that analyses of the gendered experiences of Islam must not only take faith seriously, but can only do so with careful, ongoing attention to the forms of power present in the construction of knowledge.

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