



## Call for Papers

### **Female Islamic Authority in Comparative Perspective: Exemplars, Institutions, Practices**

Workshop to be held at the **Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies** (*Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, KITLV) in Leiden, January 8-9, 2015

In cooperation with the Asian Modernities and Traditions (AMT) Research Program, the International Institute of Asian Studies (IIAS) and the Leiden University Centre for the Study of Islam and Society (LUCIS)

*Conveners: David Kloos (KITLV) and Mirjam Künkler (Princeton University/KITLV)*

This interdisciplinary workshop looks at forms of, and changes in, female Islamic authority in comparative perspective, with particular focus on modern Asia. The significant role of women in participating in, and shaping, the scholarly tradition through the centuries is still hardly reflected in either Western scholarly or public perceptions. Nearly all classic accounts of religious authority in Islam proceed from the assumption that this authority is male.<sup>1</sup> The possibility that women might exercise various aspects of religious authority is usually not discussed. Yet, when we dissect religious authority into its various manifestations (leading prayer, preaching, providing religious counselling, issuing fatwas, transmitting hadith, judging in court, shaping the Islamic scholarly tradition), nuances emerge that call the exclusively male character of religious authority in Islam into question.

In recent years, case studies of women exercising any of these roles have been published by scholars working in different fields, including history, sociology, anthropology, politics, and law. Publications have focused on such topics as female teachers, scholars, preachers and judges, women's mosque and study groups, ritual leadership, the role of the state in shaping female religious authority, and Islamic feminism.<sup>2</sup> What is missing is an attempt to

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the literature, indicative of the assumed male gender of Islamic authority, see Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke (eds.), *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies*. Brill Academic Publishing, 2006; Nikki R. Keddie (ed.), *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis. Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500*, Berkeley 1972 [with the exception of the chapter by Fernea & Fernea]; Hamid Dabashi, *Authority in Islam. From the Rise of Muhammad to the Establishment of the Umayyads*, New Brunswick/London 1989; Stephen Humphreys, "A Cultural Elite. The Role and Status of the 'Ulama in Islamic Society," in idem, *Islamic History. A Framework for Inquiry*, rev. ed., Princeton 1991, pp. 187-208; Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam. Custodians of Change*, Princeton 2002; Wael B. Hallaq, *Authority, Continuity, and Change in Islamic Law*, Cambridge/New York 2001.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g. Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach (eds.), *Women, leadership and mosques: Changes in contemporary Islamic authority* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); and a special issue "Muslim women and the challenge of

comparatively analyse the interactive dynamics between women's activities in institutions (mosques, courts, schools and universities, government offices and advisory bodies, etc.), and the various manifestations of female religious authority in society at large. How are the ideas and activities of female Islamic leaders embedded in local contexts? What different social, political, and legal issues do female Islamic leaders concern themselves with? How do different actors, including (male) religious leaders, agents of the state, and the majority of 'ordinary' or non-activist Muslims, respond to, and make use of, female leadership roles? What generalizable patterns can be discerned? And how do these patterns relate to national contexts and the importance of locality?

### **Proceedings**

Draft papers will be due one month prior to the workshop and will be circulated among all paper givers and registered participants. During the workshop, we will dedicate one hour per paper to the presentation and discussion.

### **Publication Plans**

As a result of this conference, we would like to publish selected papers in a special journal issue. The workshop also has the aim of taking stock of the research developments in the field on female religious authority in modern Asia and establishing a research network of those scholars working on the issue in diverse geographic environments and across various time frames. The network can then identify possibilities and occasions for further research collaborations and the development of larger, comparative and inter-disciplinary research projects incorporating the findings developed here.<sup>3</sup>

### **Submission of Abstracts**

Interested parties are asked to submit abstracts of around 300 words (addressing also the source material and methodology used), and biographical information of ~150 words by June 1, 2014 to [Kloos@KITLV.nl](mailto:Kloos@KITLV.nl) and [kuenkler@princeton.edu](mailto:kuenkler@princeton.edu). Subsidies for travel and accommodation will be available.

We invite paper proposals that focus on female religious authority in modern Asia, particularly from the 19th to the 21st century. Please note that this conference will not deal, or at least not specifically, with the phenomenon of Islamic activism. Paper proposals on female ulama, juristic thinkers and jurists are particularly welcome.

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authority," ed. Juliane Hammer and Riem Spielhaus. *The Muslim World* 103, 3 (2013), 287-431.

<sup>3</sup> The conference will follow four other events with related interest, albeit bringing together different constituencies: a conference of graduate students and junior scholars held at the University of Oxford in 2011, on female religious leadership more generally (including leaders of religious movements, thus not only theological and jurisprudential authorities); a conference comparing advocacy for female religious authority in Islam and Catholicism held at the University of Roehampton, London, in September 2012, bringing together scholars and activists; a graduate student conference on female religious leadership in Islam held at UCSB in March 2013; and a workshop on female religious authority in Shi'ism held at Princeton University in March 2014.