

## **The Body: A Critical Engagement with the Corporeal Turn**

Workshop held at the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies

### *Date:*

Thursday, June 21 – Saturday, June 23, 2012

### *Organisers:*

Schirin Amir-Moazami (Prof. for Islam in Europe, Institute for Islamic Studies)  
Ruth Streicher (PhD candidate Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies)

### *Participants:*

doctoral students of the BGSMS  
doctoral students and fellows from associated institutions

### *Speakers/Mentors:*

Prof. Paul Amar  
Prof. Allaine Cerwonka  
Prof. Sadia Abbas (tbc)

### *Format:*

Besides the input lectures, the workshop will mainly consist of the discussion of key readings in relation to participants' projects. Once the participants are set, we will try to group presentations according to broader topics.

### *Readings:*

A reader will be provided beforehand. Readings will consist of both the key texts suggested by the workshop organizers and mentors as well as the texts proposed by PhD students.

### *Requirements:*

Participants are asked to suggest one or two texts for discussion and should give a short input connecting the text(s) to their project. Since the workshop is based on the discussion of texts, a proper preparation of the key readings is a basic requirement for participation.

### *Credit Points:*

2 CP

### *Application:*

The deadline for application is May 6 (via e-mail to [r.streicher@fu-berlin.de](mailto:r.streicher@fu-berlin.de) briefly indicating the title of your project and your interest in the workshop; if possible, please already include a suggestion for a text).

### *Contact:*

For any queries or questions, please don't hesitate to contact us via e-mail at:  
[schirin.amir-moazami@fu-berlin.de](mailto:schirin.amir-moazami@fu-berlin.de)  
[r.streicher@fu-berlin.de](mailto:r.streicher@fu-berlin.de)

### *Workshop Outline:*

Over the past decades the body has turned into an increasingly central category of analysis in various disciplines within the Social and Human Sciences. Advocates of this “corporeal turn” have demanded to acknowledge the body as a privileged site of study. An exclusionary focus on the body as an object of analysis, however, risks to replicate the idea of the body as a fixed, stable and unchanging entity. Works departing from such focus therefore tend to reproduce the body/mind split of Cartesian dualism, thereby decisively limiting the analytical potential of “embodied” approaches.

Rather than calling for such an exclusive focus on the body, this workshop is designed to ask about the analytical use of focusing the body *in context*. On the one hand, we want to provide space for a critical and collaborative engagement with some of the major notions and discussions that have (re-)emerged as part of the “corporeal turn”. Beyond this, however, we are interested in different ways of applying such notions in the context of our projects. In this way, we hope to gauge in as how much thinking through and from the body can be used as a productive change of perspective and holds analytical potential for our works.

A promising point of departure for such an exercise is a basic conceptual shift that allows for thinking the body as a process: not as something that *is* or something that the self *possesses* but instead as something that is *constantly in the making*. Such a perspective has provided the basis for a number of productive approaches across disciplines. On the one hand, authors have looked at how bodies are made through regulatory practices. Works in this vein have, for instance, explored how ideas of the body have been shaped in conjunction with the emergence of practices of government, how bodily boundaries and markers are produced as well as how regulatory practices are generative of desires and affects.

On the other hand, authors have challenged conventional notions of subjectivity by conceiving of the body as a vehicle for thought and action and pointing to the productivity of bodily practices. To name a few examples, scholars have highlighted the generative potential of embodied religious rituals or practices of bodily display in consumer culture. Both related strands of debate provide numerous tools with which to grasp the body as a process in the making, and can help to open up the analytical view for nuanced empirical explorations of how social ideas and processes are asserted materially and/or symbolically.

### *Workshop Format:*

To shed light on some of these discussions in an exploratory way and connect them to our own projects, the format of the workshop involves three basic features:

1. In order to get acquainted with some of the most relevant literature, we will read and discuss key texts in social anthropology, sociology and/or philosophy, ranging from

preliminary attempts to challenge classical notions of the body as related to an autonomous subject to more radical constructivist approaches according to which the body is conceived of as an effect of discursive orders (e.g. Mauss, Douglas, Merleau-Ponty, Butler and Foucault).

2. On the basis of their own preferences and foci, participants may select one or two readings and relate these to their own projects in a short workshop presentation. Here we might want to look at both texts which address and conceptualize the body head on as well as those in which the body is of relevance as a theoretical background for empirically guided research.
3. The reading sessions will be paired with lectures of senior scholars who have conducted relevant research on the body through historical philosophical inquiries (Allaine Cerwonka), by framing their empirical analysis of the contemporary Muslim world on the basis of theoretical discussions on the body, violence and sovereignty (Paul Amar), or by critically engaging with the debate about the embodied agency of Muslim women (Sadia Abbas, tbc).

*Draft Programme:*

	<b>Thursday, June 21</b>	<b>Friday, June 22</b>	<b>Saturday, June 23</b>
Topic	The Body in the History of Ideas	State, Violence and the Body	Embodiment and Bodily Practices
Morning Session		<i>Input by Paul Amar: Embodying the Gendered Politics of the Egyptian Security State</i> Discussion of Readings and Student Projects	<i>Input Lecture by Sadia Abbas (tbc): The Muslim Woman and the Pretext of Embodied Agency</i> Discussion of Readings and Student Projects
		<i>Lunch Break</i>	<i>Lunch Break</i>
Afternoon Session	<i>Input by Allaine Cerwonka: Mapping the Human: Science and Representations of the Body</i>	Discussion of Readings Student Projects	Wrap up and Conclusion
	<i>Welcome Dinner for all Participants and Guest Lecturers</i>		