

in ihrer Heimat Marokko bekannt werden und Gehör finden.

Literatur

Fatima Mernissi; Mary Jo Lakeland. The veil and the male elite: a feminist interpretation of women's rights in Islam. Oxford, 1992

Claudia Schöning-Kalender; Ayla Neusel, Mechtild M. Jansen, (Hg.). Feminismus, Islam, Nation.

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Islamic Feminism as an Effort towards Renewal and Modernization

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The events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent reactions have moved the Islamic faith – and especially Islamic extremism into the public limelight and made it an on-going topic of discussion. While the opinions of politically active Muslims (Islamists) or extremists have increasingly become media topics, liberal Muslims are presented in much less detail. Islamic feminism may be considered one form of liberal Islam. It is characterized by the following aspects:

Characteristics of Islamic Feminism

1. The platform of Islamic feminism is, for the most part, modern Arabic literature. Often, the heroine of the story is a woman who does not accept the religious and traditional social conventions and rebels against them. She opposes these standards in search of true freedom and the fulfilment of love.

2. Islamic feminists try to find their identity as oriental women within Islam. As a rule, they deliberately reject Western standards and ethics but do not accept the patriarchal opinions of their own culture either. Their search for identity is also expressed in poetry, e.g. in the poem "I" by Nasik Malaika from Iraq. One of the lines of the poem reads: "Who am I? Self asks."

3. Islamic feminists refuse to define Islam as a violent religion. They differentiate between the terms "Islamistic" and "Muslim". For them, "Islamistic" means a violent and political form of Islam expressed by violence, terrorism and fundamentalism. A Muslim, on the other hand, is a person born into a Muslim family who lives the Islamic faith according to his insights.

4. Islamic feminists look for the female element in Islam and emphasize the new and better way of life Mohammad granted his wives. Their arguments are mostly based on tradition and the descrip-

tion of Muhammad's life with his wives during his later years when he was living with them in Medina.

5. Islamic feminists study the Qu'ran and try to interpret it in a modern version for the present age.

6. Islamic feminists are proud to be both strong and Muslim women. They teach that Islam grants women the right to move about outside their homes without restrictions and to make decisions independent of the will of the family.

How powerful is the Feministic Interpretation of Islam to assert itself?

When we look at the idealized feministic view of Islam with regard to the status of women and compare it to every day life in a Muslim country, it can be safely assumed that this feministic-intellectual interpretation mostly takes place within the minds of its adherents but hardly affects the concrete life situations of legally discriminated women in Islam nor offers practical solutions. The voice of the feminists is too weak to be heard and too intellectual to be understood by the masses. In addition, it is a view held not by men but by women whose voices are hardly heard in official Muslim theology even if they are professors or "hocas" leading women in ritual prayer.

Conservative Muslims will hardly accept this view and its consequences. There seem to be two basic reasons for this: On the one hand, no critical self-analysis exists within the official Islamic faith and it is not open for a critical discussion of traditional life-styles justified by religion.

by religion. This results in withdrawal and an insistence on tradition and the inheritance and history of Islam. Such a view makes it difficult or even impossible for traditional Muslims to pick up the changes of modern life and its new way of thinking and to bring Islam into accord with the present.

A second reason for the lack of openness of conservative Muslims towards feministic ideas is the low status of women. Conservative Muslims will never consider women equal partners for theological and social discussions. This is based both on cultural-historical and religious grounds. Rather, conservative Muslims consider the representatives of the modern feministic interpretation of Islam a danger to the old order. They do not seek the discussion with these women but ignore their literature or put them on the index of forbidden writings. That is why provocative feministic writings, e.g. the books by Moroccan famous women's rights activist Fatima Mernissi, will be known and gain a hearing in the West rather than in her homeland of Morocco.

Bibliography

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