God's Own Gender?

Daniel Gerster and Michael Krüggeler (Eds)

RELIGION IN DER GESELLSCHAFT

herausgegeben von

Matthias Koenig, Volkhard Krech, Martin Laube,
Detlef Pollack, Hartmann Tyrell, Gerhard Wegner,
Monika Wohlrab-Sahr

Band 44

ERGON VERLAG

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www.ergon-verlag.de

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Protectors, Statesmen, Terrorists? Gender and Masculinities in Muslim Texts and Contexts

Miriam Kurz[1]

To provide an overview over the relation of Islam and masculinity is not an easy task. Both Islam and masculinity are hot topics in current public debates, often discussed in connection with the trope of 'crisis', and both are often essentialized and constructed as clearly distinguishable entities. The 'Muslim man', the symbiosis of both, has also received critical attention from the media, politicians, populists, and security forces. Muslim men have been increasingly problematized and "securitised"[2] in Europe and North America since 9/11 and subsequent terror attacks, and more recently with the media-covered atrocities of the so-called Islamic State. Muslim men have been targeted by state-sponsored anti-radicalization and prevention programs in Europe and criminalized by right-wing and conservative politicians and groups and certain kinds of feminists in the wake of the refugee 'crisis' in Europe.

In contrast to the simplifications of public discourse, both Islam and masculinity are complex, plural and dynamic phenomena. Many renowned scholars devoted themselves to conceptualizing Islam.[3] While this is not the place to elaborate on this extensive body of literature, I would just like to stress the obvious: that Islam has given rise to plural traditions, movements, forms of devotional practice, and legal opinions, and that the latter have always been linked to specific places and specific times. There is no timeless manifestation of Islam; and current trends labelled 'Salafi' which call for a return to the 'pure' and 'original' Islam of the time of the prophet Muhammad are themselves modern ways of relating to the tradition, formulated in the present and promoted, for example, by contemporary communication technologies.[4]

Masculinity, on the other hand, is a plural phenomenon too. This can be reflected in the use of the plural form 'masculinities', as suggested by the

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[1] I am thankful to Schirin Amir-Moazami for her fruitful comments on an earlier version of this paper as well as to the editors of this volume for their careful copy-editing. A note on transliteration and dating: Transliteration of Arabic terms follows the guidelines of the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES). All dates mentioned in this contribution refer to the Gregorian calendar, not the Islamic (Hijri) calendar.

[2] Isakjee 2012.

[3] See e.g. Ahmed 2016; Asad 1986; Bowen 2012; el-Zein 1977; Hodgson 1974, 1977a, 1977b.

[4] Cf. e.g. Salvatore 1999.

Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell.[5] Masculinities are socially con-
structed and dynamic. They change and evolve over time as well as from
context to context. Masculinities are constructed not only in distinction from
women, but significantly vis-à-vis other (groups of) men,[6] and masculinity as
a category of analysis intersects with other categories of social distinction.
The historian Mrinalini Sinha has put this very accurately:

> [M]asculinity itself is understood as constituted by, as well as constitutive of, a wide
> set of social relations. Masculinity, seen thus, traverses multiple axes of race, caste,
> class, sexuality, religion, and ethnicity. Masculinity, that is to say, cannot be confined
> solely within its supposedly 'proper' domain of male-female relations.[7]

Intersecting categories of difference such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation
and religious affiliation can render the masculinities of subjects and groups
visible,[8] while white, heterosexual, middle-class masculinities often remain
unmarked and unquestioned – "fraglos gegeben", as sociologist Michael
Meuser puts it in German.[9] For this reason, it is crucial to take the racializing
logic of public discourse on Muslims in Europe into account, as will be
discussed below.

In the first part of my contribution, I will give an overview of gender-rele-
vant Qur'anic terms and how they have been understood in Muslim legal
discourse. I will discuss conceptions of gender and masculinities insofar as
they have been the object of research with regard to Muslim legal and exeget-
ical discourse. In the second part of this article, I will cursorily survey
academic studies on Muslim masculinities and highlight the gendered dimen-
sion of public discourse on Islam and Muslims in European contexts. I
suggest that an understanding of the mechanisms of racialization and sexual-
ization which underlie much of the discursive production of the 'Muslim man'
in European public discourses should inform any discussion and analysis of
Muslim masculinities in Europe.

1. Gender and Masculinities in Muslim Theological Literature

1.1 Gender-Relevant Terms in the Qur'an

The Qur'an addresses people both in gendered and non-gendered ways.
While we do not find terms for the abstract concepts of 'gender' and/or 'sex'
in the Qur'an, we encounter terms for gendered beings and terms relating to

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5 See Connell 1987, 2000.
6 See Bourdieu 2001; Connell 2000, 2005; Meuser 2008; Sinha 1999.
7 Sinha 1999, 446.
8 On ethnicity, see Huxel 2008a, 2008b.
9 See Meuser 1998, 296; cf. also id. 2003, 170.

humans regardless of their gender.[10] Historian and women's studies scholar Margot Badran distinguishes two groups of terms: One group she identifies consists of terms referring to biological difference, and the second group of terms refers to "culturally constructed categories" of gender.[11] She observes that gender terms in the latter sense (group two) appear more frequently than terms indicating biological difference (group one), although the meaning of the terms in the two groups is sometimes inversed,[12] which makes the categorization appear less stringent. The sex-related Qur'anic terms are *al-dhakar* (male) and *al-unthā* (female), both indicating biological sex. According to Badran, they usually appear in one of two contexts: either with respect to procreation, or when emphasis is placed on the fact that both sexes, male and female, are equal before God, regardless of their biological difference.[13]

The most common terms indicating "culturally constructed categories"[14] of gender in the Qur'an are *rajul* (man), and *imraʾa* (woman). The form *marʾ*, which is the male form of *imraʾa*, is rarely used for the male gender in comparison to *rajul*. Both *rajul* and *imraʾa* are more frequently used in their plural forms in the Qur'an: *rijāl* and *nisāʾ* (for the female plural the form *niswa* also rarely appears). Badran remarks that *imraʾa* mostly connotes wife.[15] Most frequent among terms specifying gender are, according to Badran, terms that specify the social relationship among people, such as father, daughter, son, sister, etc. Besides these terms indicating family relationships, we are also confronted with terms like boy and young woman, which reveal additional information, such as the age of a person.[16]

The Qur'anic terms referring to humans generally, both men and women, are *insān* (human being; humankind), *nās* (people, humans), *bashar* (human being; humankind), *ahl* (people), and expressions like *man* (who, whoever). Within the academic discipline of *uṣūl al-fiqh*,[17] there is a consensus that terms of a general nature like *man* and *nās* refer to men and women alike.[18] While the aforementioned terms grammatically take the masculine form, they are gender-inclusive in meaning and should thus be translated as 'human(s)' and 'humankind' (and not as 'man' and 'mankind,' as Badran criticizes has

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[10] See Badran 2002, 288.
[11] Ibid., 289.
[12] See ibid.
[13] See ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] See ibid.
[16] See ibid.
[17] *Uṣūl al-fiqh* is a scholarly discipline concerned with identifying the sources of law and principles of extracting legal norms from the Qur'anic text. Thus, *uṣūl al-fiqh* is concerned with the methodology of jurisprudence, see Calder 2012.
[18] See Katz 2017, n.p.

often been the case).[19] The rule here, according to Badran, is that grammatically masculine terms in the plural or dual form[20] can comprise women as well, while the singular form of a masculine term is gender-specific, indicating a male person.[21] According to the scholar of Islamic law and gender Marion H. Katz, there is some discussion among legal scholars as to whether grammatically masculine plural forms include women or not.[22] Yet she considers this discussion relevant only on a theoretical level, asserting that in practice, there has been a consensus among most scholars as to which rights and duties apply to women and men alike and which rights and duties are specifically male ones.[23] Generally speaking, Badran asserts that both the notion of the, "fundamental equality of all human beings"[24] and the notion of humans as beings with biological difference are conveyed in the Qur'an.[25] According to her, beyond regulations of how a husband has to provide for his wife, the Qur'an gives no prescriptions for gender roles.[26]

1.2 Constructions of Gender and Masculinity in Muslim Legal Discourse

I will now turn to contemporary analyses of gender[27] constructions in Muslim legal discourse and in exegetical literature (exegesis of the Qur'an), a genre called *tafsīr*.[28] The works engaging with these subjects are feminist analyses

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[19] See Badran 2002, 291.

[20] Arabic has a separate grammatical form, the dual, for things that come in pairs, i.e. for talking about *two* things or *two* persons. The dual form is thus grammatically distinct from singular and plural forms.

[21] See Badran 2002, 291.

[22] Discussions refer to Q 33:35, a verse where the female plural is repeated separately after the male plural forms in order to emphasize that both men and women are addressed. For the discussion of the arguments see Katz 2017, n.p.

[23] The rights and duties specifically applying to men being the congregational Friday prayer, military engagement and the option of having sexual relations with slaves, see ibid.

[24] Badran 2002, 292.

[25] See ibid.

[26] See ibid., 289.

[27] In the following, I use the term 'gender' as an analytical category. With regard to the source material discussed here, i.e. the legal and theological texts, it is difficult to uphold a clear distinction between 'sex' and 'gender' throughout the text, as both are closely intertwined in the sources under consideration. Often, authors depart from the biological sex of persons and link sex causally to gendered characteristics, capabilities, roles and certain ways of behaviour. As the example of sex change also suggests, a central preoccupation from a Muslim legal perspective is that gender identity and biological sex are to be (brought) in line. On a discussion of the sex/gender distinction and the critique it has received, cf. Mikkola 2017.

[28] *Tafsīr* (Arabic) means 'interpretation' and denotes a genre of literature as well as the process of interpretation. Mostly though not exclusively, *tafsīr* refers to the interpretation of the Qur'an, cf. e.g. Rippin 2012.

of legal and *tafsīr* literature written by female scholars, and include Muslim feminist perspectives.[29] I will focus on their interpretations of constructions of gender and masculinity, the way they address issues of hierarchy, gender roles, and male and female qualities.

When it comes to Islamic legal discourse, Katz finds that the latter "posits a strict and fundamental male-female gender binary".[30] Legal texts formulate rights and duties of subjects in terms of male and female. As legal rulings depend on the sex of subjects, it is a major concern from the perspective of Islamic law to distinguish people based on their sex (in a binary, heteronormative framework). The importance attributed to the unambiguous distinction between male and female by legal scholars is noticeable in the concept of *tashabbuh*, which means imitation of the 'opposite' sex. The prohibition of *tashabbuh* in legal texts was mostly aimed at practices of cross-dressing but could apply generally to any kind of social practice conceived as gender-specific, "such as modes of walking and speaking".[31] As practices of *tashabbuh* challenge the clear distinguishability between persons of male and female sex, it is problematized in Muslim legal discourse. Another challenge to the application of law based on the male-female binary order have been intersex persons, which are subsumed in the legal tradition under the category of *al-khunthā*. As Katz notes, persons whose sex could not be unambiguously determined were an object of discussion and concern in classical legal texts. For jurists, it was of central interest to identify a person's sex in cases of ambiguity. According to Katz, jurists subscribed to the premise that every person has a true sex, even if in some cases the latter might not be identifiable by humans, while studies investigating medieval Islamicate medical discourse on sex differences suggest that the medical discourse differed from legal discourse in that it featured the idea of a sex continuum instead of a strict male-female binary.[32]

Still, in terms of legal rights and duties, gender intersected with other lines of difference and markers of a person's status in pre-modern texts.[33] Factors of age, religion, social class, and the status as a free person vs. slave matter(ed) beyond gender. For example, "[t]he full legal capacity of women contrasted with the partial legal capacity of slaves".[34] The Islamic studies scholar Kecia Ali argues that, "[s]laves and women were overlapping categories of legally inferior persons constructed against one another and in

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29 Cf. Abou-Bakr 2013; Bauer 2006, 2009; Carter 2003; Geissinger 2008; Katz 2017; Klausing 2014; Mir-Hosseini 2003; Mubarak 2014.

30 Katz 2017, n.p.

31 Ibid.

32 Cf. Gadelrab 2011; Ragab 2015.

33 See Katz 2017, n.p.

34 Ibid.

relation to one another".[35] She understands both "enslavement and femaleness as legal disabilities"[36] and as entangled in legal discourse. In this connection, she also puts forward a "vital relationship […] between slave ownership and marriage as legal institutions".[37] Both of these legal institutions seem thus to play a role in the production of masculinities, and could provide fertile ground for further exploration. Looking from a meta-perspective on Islamic law, Katz finds that the male, adult and free subject is usually set as the norm in the legal tradition, which coincides with the Western legal tradition.[38] Questions of gender in texts of substantive law are mostly discussed when women or intersex subjects are the matter of concern. The male subject is treated as the universal norm,[39] preventing a closer investigation of gender aspects with regard to men.[40]

Yet, there are legal aspects in regard to which men's gendered dimensions appear. A constitutive element of masculinity from a legal perspective can be considered a man's ability to reproduce and have sexual intercourse with his wife. Legal scholars deem it a valid reason for divorce on a woman's behalf if her husband is not able to consummate the marriage.[41] Besides potency, provision constitutes a marker of masculinity from the perspective of Islamic law, which implies that a 'full' man should also be an economically capable subject. In addition, Katz remarks that, "classical fiqh [...] reserved certain forms of authority for males",[42] referring to the Qur'anic concept of *qiwāma*.[43] This means that from a legal perspective, men are endowed with authority that distinguishes them from women and can thus be considered a marker of masculinity as well. This has also been discussed in detail in literature concerned with the interpretation of the Qur'an (*tafsīr*),[44] a genre I will address in the following.

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35 Ali 2010, 8.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 See Katz 2017, n.p.
39 See Meuser 1998, 2003.
40 See Katz 2017, n.p.
41 See Mashhour 2005, 575; Katz 2017, n.p.
42 See Katz 2017, n.p. *Fiqh* means Islamic jurisprudence. In the words of El Shamsy, "[t]he term fiqh refers commonly to religious knowledge, especially knowledge of Islamic law derived through legal reasoning […]". The root letters f-q-h convey the meaning of deep understanding, insight, and discernment and the root is linked to religious knowledge or understanding in the Qur'an (9:122), see El Shamsy 2015, n.p.
43 For the term *qiwāma*, see footnote 46 below.
44 For an explanation of the term and genre of *tafsīr*, see footnote 28 above.

1.3 Constructions of Gender and Masculinity in Muslim Exegetical Discourse

Turning to exegetical discourse with regard to gender constructions, the literary scholar Omaima Abou-Bakr's feminist reading provides a representatively select examination of *tafsīr* scholars' (i.e. Qur'an exegetes') understandings of gender-relevant verses in the Qur'an, "addressing men *as domestic beings*, as husbands, fathers, and legal guardians in relation to women".[45] Her analysis mainly relies on two verses: Q 4:34 from *sūrat al-nisāʾ*, where the hierarchy in the marital relationship is addressed, stating that men are women's protectors and providers (*al-rijālu qawwāmūna ʿala l-nisāʾi*), and measures against disobedient women are suggested, and Q 2:228 from *sūrat al-baqara*, where the procedure for divorce is discussed and it is stated that men are a degree above women (*wa-li-l-rijāli ʿalayhinna darajatun*).[46] Abou-Bakr compares modern and classical[47] *tafsīr* works by male authors with regard to these two verses. She finds that classical male exegetes (i.e. authors of *tafsīr* literature)[48] devoted considerable attention to men's responsibilities towards women and to divine commands directed at men to treat their women relatives fairly. These scholars construct an ideal image of a man in the domestic sphere as mild and humble, patient and conciliatory.[49] Abou-Bakr labels the construction of the ideal husband or father in the exegetical works of this time span "benevolent or condescending patri-

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[45] Abou-Bakr 2013, 94, original emphasis.

[46] In Q 4:34, *qawwāmūna* is a noun in the plural form referring to men (*al-rijāl*): Men stand above women, or as Badran renders it, men are the protectors of/providers for women (see Badran 2002, 290), while *qiwāma* is a related noun denoting the principle of male governance over their wives. Both the terms *qawwāmūn/qiwāma* and *daraja* (degree) and the related verses have sparked much discussion and controversy, see e.g. Cheema 2013, Mubarak 2004, and Val 2013. As Kathrin Klausing finds, early exegetes accepted as an unquestioned given the privileged status of men (*faḍl*) which was linked with their *qiwāma* and *daraja* over women and which did not require any explanation. Starting with exegetes al-Samarqandi (d. 985) and al-Razi (d. 1210), what Klausing labels "the first scientific attempt to explain" a verse was made, seeking to explain the different nature of man and woman and thus making sense of the difference in the distribution of *qiwāma*; see Klausing 2014, 223. The same reasoning is typical of modern exegetes who have devoted attention to basing the differences between men and woman in scientific explanations. Authors like Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905) and Rashid Rida (d. 1935), for example, explain why the husband has a higher status and authority over his wife with reference to the natural sciences.

[47] Roughly speaking, the classical Islamic period comprises the time span between the 8th and 13th century CE and thus coincides with the medieval period in Western terms. The terms 'medieval' and 'classical' carry different connotations, which is why I stick to the term 'classical' in this context.

[48] She refers to Ibn Abbas (d. 688), al-Tabari (d. 923), and al-Zamakhshari (d. 1144), see Abou-Bakr 2013, 94.

[49] See ibid., 94/95.

archy".[50] The authority men have over women (the aforementioned *qiwāma* or *daraja*) is justified by the surplus in moral and lenient conduct men are expected to display vis-à-vis women and by the focus on men's duties. This is one pattern of masculinity she identifies in *tafsīr* literature within the realm of male-female relations.

As a representative example of modern *tafsīr*, Abou-Bakr takes the 19th- and early 20th-century religious scholar and reformer Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905). Comparing his *tafsīr* to those of the classical authors mentioned before, Abou-Bakr notices a shift in focus from the responsibilities of men towards the responsibilities of women. She shows that Abduh's view of ideal masculinity is based on biological essentialism, assuming that men are by nature (*fiṭra*) superior to women and thus assume leading status: In Abduh's view, men are created perfectly, their intellectual capability exceeds women's, and thus they are naturally destined to be leaders (*riʾāsa fiṭriyya*).[51] Abou-Bakr suggests that Abduh places the biological superiority of men even above Qurʾanic rulings, e.g. when he says that even if Islamic juristic rulings allowed women to lead prayers and other things, *fiṭra* would demand that men perform these tasks rather than women. For Abduh, it follows from the 'fact' that men are created perfectly that men are also more beautiful than women. A sign of their beauty and thus proof of their preferable creation as compared to women lies in their "beards and moustaches".[52] Men with beards and moustaches conform to the manly ideal, while men who are bald or do not have much hair are deemed less manly. Masculinity is measured in terms of body hair here, exceeding the physical qualification of a person as a man through male genitals and the ability to procreate.[53]

The recourse to biologically based arguments (the differences in the 'nature' of men and women) in constructing and legitimizing gender difference is

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[50] Abou-Bakr 2013, 97.

[51] Ibid., 98/99. Abou-Bakr translates *riʾāsa fiṭriyya* as innate presidency or innate head-ship. The idea of *riʾāsa fiṭriyya*, i.e. that men are biologically entitled to headship in society through a number of qualities that distinguish them from women, is developed in his *Tafsīr al-manār* from 1907, see Abou-Bakr 2013, 98.

[52] Abduh 1990, 69, cited in Abou-Bakr 2013, 99.

[53] Ahmed Ragab researched constructions of sex differences in medical discourse from Islamicate contexts, taking into consideration authors between the 8th and 11th centuries. His work does not explore social constructions of gender, but provides a basis for further inquiry into how medical conceptions of sex differences fed into gender constructions. As to the biologically based conceptions of masculinity and femininity of his medieval authors, Ragab concludes that the markers of sex difference were the following: "For all these authors, the chief signs of masculinity and femininity were largely the same: hair distribution (being possibly the most important feature), voice, menstruation or lack thereof, shapes of joints and muscles, urine, pulse, fertility, sexuality and sexual preferences, and the shape and function of genital organs". See Ragab 2015, 452.

typical of late 19th-century modernist scholars[54] and alludes to Abduh's situatedness within a modern discourse of state, society, modernity and progress which is tied up with conceptions of gender. The ideal attributes of mildness and patience which can be found in the classical texts studied by Abou-Bakr are replaced here by physical beauty, strength, intellectual superiority, and biologically based authority. Mildness, patience, and endurance become female qualities for modern exegetes like Abduh.[55]

Abou-Bakr concludes that "two different patriarchal constructions of maleness"[56] pervade the writings of the classical *tafsīr* authors she examined and the writings of the modernist scholar Muhammad Abduh: one of conditioned masculinity, the other of unconditioned masculinity. It should be noted that in both discursive formations of masculinity examined by Abou-Bakr, classical and modern, masculinity is constructed through a distinction from women.

In contrast, the Qur'an scholar Karen Bauer does not attest to a major shift in gender constructions and the perception of male and female nature between classical and modern *tafsīr* authors.[57] She questions whether early authors held different (i.e. more women-friendly) views when it comes to male authority and the intellectual ability of men versus women. The Islamic studies scholar Kathrin Klausing presumes in accordance with Bauer that pre-modern authors took gender-based hierarchy in marriage and male supremacy as natural and did thus not feel compelled to comment on the reasons for these.[58] The concern with equality and equal treatment is, as Bauer remarks, a modern concern.[59] In classical *tafsīr* discourse, just treatment of men and women did not imply equal treatment.[60] Bauer assumes that pre-modern exegetes, "never questioned that the text grants certain rights and responsibilities to men alone; they held the view that, on the whole, the male character is innately suited to particular duties and privileges".[61] This might explain why early commentaries do not question the privileged position of men. In contrast, for later and particularly for modern authors it becomes important to justify their views and to justify differences in rights and status between men and women, which led authors to start commenting on male and female

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54 See Katz 2017, n.p. Arguing with the 'nature' of women's vs. men's psyche and biologically based differences in their intellectual abilities is typical not only of Islamic modernist thinkers but symptomatic of Western scientific discourses in the late 19th century and also served to justify social hierarchies between men and women. Cf. e.g. Shields 2007.
55 See Abou-Bakr 2013, 99.
56 Ibid.
57 See Bauer 2006, 130.
58 See Klausing 2014, 222.
59 See Bauer 2009, 637; cf. also Mir-Hosseini 2003.
60 See Bauer 2009, 637.
61 Ibid.

nature.[62] From al-Samarqandi (d. 985) on, as Klausing shows, exegetes sought to explain Qur'anic passages suggesting a privileged status of men with a difference in nature between men and women.[63] Higher rationality is quite commonly stated to be a male quality in premodern *tafsīr* after al-Samarqandi.[64] In modern *tafsīr*, scholars attribute higher emotionality instead of inferior rationality or intellectual capability to women,[65] thus men are constructed as more rational and less emotional vis-à-vis women. Pre-modern exegetes, according to Bauer, held the conviction that the husband should provide financially for his wife and family and the wife in return should be obedient.[66] Klausing also found a man's function as provider for the family to be a constitutive and central element of masculinity in both pre-modern as well as modern exegetes' views.[67] This suggests that the image of the man as the providing head of the family and endowed with authority underlies the constructions of masculinity of both pre-modern and modern *tafsīr* discourse. This is, as shown above, in accordance with legal discourse.[68]

What is specific to modern *tafsīr* authors is that they idealize a gendered role distribution between wife and husband.[69] In modern *tafsīr* discourse, influenced by the colonial context, the wake of nationalism and Victorian conceptions of gender, women became tied up with their reproductive role and femininity was primarily defined within the framework of the family (and the nation), i.e. being wife and mother, being responsible for household and bearing and raising children, while pre-modern scholars rarely held women responsible for household work.[70] Femininity beyond this interpretive lens is not discussed by modern scholars.[71] While in classical *tafsīr* works, men are considered as domestic beings among other aspects of their identities, Abduh, for example, does not root masculine identity or qualities within the domestic realm. With him and modern exegetes more broadly, as Abou-Bakr argues,

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[62] See Bauer 2006, 133; Klausing 2014, 222.
[63] See Klausing 2014, 223. Klausing's study of gender role concepts in 21 Arabic *tafsīr* works does not provide a systematic analysis of constructions of masculinity, but it allows some glimpses. It comprises commentaries from the earliest Islamic period to the present and from different schools of law and different theological positions. In her analysis, Klausing focuses on the interpretation of five verses from two suras which are relevant to constructions of femininity and which she found the most fruitful regarding discussions on gender roles among *tafsīr* scholars, see ibid., 16. In all of these verses, the relation between men and women, marriage, and divorce are addressed.
[64] See Klausing 2014, 225; Bauer 2006, 132.
[65] See Klausing 2014, 225.
[66] See Bauer 2009, 641/642.
[67] See Klausing 2014, 227.
[68] Cf. section 1.2 in this article.
[69] See Klausing 2014, 228.
[70] See Katz 2017, n.p.
[71] See Klausing 2014, 228.

the distinction between female, domestic responsibilities and male, public responsibilities becomes sharper: "Modern exegetes, on the other hand, remove the requirement of domestic or family responsibilities for men, attributing it to women only, and guard manhood with the timeless natural-ness of *fitra*".[72] In other words, for modern exegetes like Abduh, manhood is grounded in a man's biological nature and is not dependent on the fulfilment of further criteria.

Despite these differences between early and modern exegetes concerning their way of argumentation, the use of scientific explanations, and the way they envision gendered labour distribution, there is historical continuity in the principal gender constructions of male *tafsīr* authors according to Klausing and Bauer.

While the prophet Muhammad as an ideal husband had already been a trope (among others) in 9th and 10th century Abbasid literature on love and marriage,[73] some contemporary Muslim scholars devoted attention exclu-sively to the prophet Muhammad as a gendered role-model for Muslim men and husbands.[74] Their works cover the prophet's relation with and behaviour towards his wives and establish ethical norms of conduct for Muslim husbands on this basis. The prophet's conjugal performance is presented as exemplary for Muslim men. These writings explicitly render men the object of discussion as gendered beings and use Islamic sources to demand a certain ethical behaviour of men. The Islamic studies scholar Kecia Ali highlights character traits of the prophet such as gentleness, compassion and supportive-ness towards his wives and postulates these character traits from a feminist standpoint as virtues that Muslim husbands should adopt in their conduct with their wives.[75] Ali's views resonate with the 20th-century Lebanese writer Nazira Zayn al-Din's (1908-1976) take on men and masculinity.[76] Zayn al-Din harshly criticizes men's behaviours of her time, together with ideals of masculinity based on strength, power, and aggression. She rejects the idea

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[72] Abou-Bakr 2013, 100.

[73] Cf. Myrne 2014.

[74] Cf. Ali 2004; Al-Shammari n.d. Alongside the prophet's ethical example, the Middle Eastern studies scholar Ruth Roded analyzes aspects of the discourse on the prophet Muhammad's virility, covering both Western discursive attacks on it as well as Muslim responses and bringing different constructions of his virility to the fore, see Roded 2006. The Islamic studies scholar Amanullah De Sondy investigates male prophets in the Qur'an as a source for constructions of masculinity in Islamic contexts, cf. De Sondy 2011, partly 2014. Yet, De Sondy speaks of 'hegemonic masculinity' and subscribes to a widely lamented 'crisis of masculinity' without critically questioning the assumptions and concepts behind the terms. He fails to let his readers know how he understands the terms and to which authors he refers, which is particularly prob-lematic as both are contested concepts.

[75] See Ali 2004.

[76] As discussed in Abou-Bakr 2013.

that men are intellectually more capable and rational than women by nature.[77] Instead, and similar to Ali, she envisions an education of male character oriented after prophetic examples. The ideal of masculinity she outlines is "inspired by the ethics and characters of the prophets, especially Jesus Christ and Muhammad"[78] and entails humbleness, peacefulness, piety, and wisdom as male virtues,[79] while she criticizes codes of masculinity around force, aggression, strength and physical power. With reference to prophetic examples, she asks men to prefer inner values over outer strength. She propagates the same standards and ideals in character and behaviour for both men and women, and does not subscribe to a gendered notion of virtues and gendered judgement of performance. As Abou-Bakr cites her:

> What is considered a flaw in a man should also be a flaw in a woman, and what is considered a flaw in a woman should also be the same in a man; what is considered virtuous in a man should also be virtuous in a woman, and what is virtuous in a woman should also be the same in a man.[80]

2. Contemporary Western Academic and Public Discourse on Muslim Masculinities

2.1 Scholarship on Muslim Masculinities and its Pitfalls

Looking at constructions of masculinity in Muslim contexts, it is not only of relevance to examine normative sources like the Qur'an and exegetical and legal discourse, but also other literature from Muslim contexts, as well as gender identity constructions of Muslims in the contemporary world from an anthropological or sociological perspective. In the following part of this article, I will concern myself with the study of Muslim masculinities in these areas and highlight some problematic trends in the study of Muslim constructions of masculinity in the European context, including a critical discussion of the social and political context in which these gender constructions are located.

Compared to the extensive literature on women in Islam, the study of masculinities in Muslim contexts is a rather recent field of study. The first collection of papers gathered under the theme of Middle Eastern constructions of masculinity was published in 2000 by the artist and writer Mai Ghoussoub and Turkey specialist Emma Sinclair-Webb under the title *Imag-*

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77 See Abou-Bakr 2013, 103.
78 Ibid.
79 See ibid., 103/104.
80 Zayn al-Din 1928, 95, cited in Abou-Bakr 2013, 104.

ined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Middle East.[81] It comprises contributions by academic scholars and journalists that vary greatly in their approach, methodology, and the material they draw on. Some contributions examine institutions and practices like military service and circumcision from sociological or anthropological perspectives, while others explore constructions of masculinity in film and literature. Alongside Muslim, Arab and Turkish constructions of masculinity and identity, the book also includes discussions of Israeli/Jewish constructions of masculinity. Another collection with the title *Islamic Masculinities* edited by the literary and masculinity studies scholar Lahoucine Ouzgane[82] also covers a wide range of sites of constructions of masculinity from male infertility in Egypt, the construction of 'stranger-masculinities' within the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the prophet Muhammad's virility,[83] male, Muslim, homosexual identity constructions,[84] and more. Migration scholars Lydia Potts and Jan Kühnemund edited a mixed-method collection in the German language on constructions of masculinities and gender within the context of migration and Islam in Germany.[85] Contributions range between analyses of discursive constructions of Muslim*[86] masculinities,[87] explorations of identity constructions based on qualitative interviews, and contributions on risk and resources in the socialization of 'migrant youth' and Muslim men's stances on violence.

In academic scholarship, homosexuality and homoerotic relations in Islamicate contexts have represented a focus of inquiry. Alongside edited volumes on the topics of *Islam and Homosexuality*,[88] *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature*,[89] *Islamic Homosexualities*[90] and *Sexuality and Eroticism among Males in Moslem Societies*,[91] there are explorations of *Arab Concepts of Homosexuality*,[92] of the Andalus scholar Ibn Hazm's juridical opinions on male and female homosexuality[93] and of the contemporary legal scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi's stance towards homosexuality as a threat to "Muslim

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[81] Ghoussoub/Sinclair-Webb (eds) 2000.
[82] Ouzgane (ed.) 2006.
[83] See Roded 2006.
[84] See Siraj 2006.
[85] Potts/Kühnemund (eds) 2008.
[86] I use Muslim* here to indicate that the Muslimness of the subjects under study (if not of the whole sample, at least of a considerable part) is not explicit but implicit. To which extent the men studied would self-identify as Muslims cannot be assessed.
[87] E.g. Scheibelhofer 2008a.
[88] Habib (ed.) 2010, vol. 1/2.
[89] Wright/Rowson (eds) 1997.
[90] Murray/Roscoe (eds) 1997.
[91] Schmitt/Sofer (eds) 1992.
[92] Salti 1997.
[93] Adang 2003.

masculinity".[94] The sociologist Asifa Siraj is among the gender studies scholars who has researched the gender and identity constructions of gay and lesbian Muslims in present-day Britain.[95] Female homosexuality in particular is addressed by the writer and gender studies scholar Samar Habib, cultural studies scholar Sahar Amer, and Asifa Siraj.[96]

It seems striking that homosexuality, homoerotic relations, and gay men's (and, to a lesser degree, also lesbian women's) identity constructions in Islamicate contexts receive considerable scholarly attention. This might be due to the higher visibility of homosexual masculinities as, from a heteronormative point of view, forms of 'deviant' and therefore marked masculinities, but it is also symptomatic of an orientalist legacy.[97] The Western scholarly obsession with Muslim (homo-)sexualities is grounded in the assumption that sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular are suppressed in Islamicate societies, an assumption which is historically closely intertwined with orientalist knowledge production. Both the intellectual historian Joseph Massad and Arabic and Islamic studies scholar Thomas Bauer show that the discursivization of homosexuality (conceptualized in 'scientific' terms as clearly identifiable illness) and its concurrent suppression mainly started with the colonial intervention in Muslim majority societies.[98]

Especially in the UK context, some scholars from disciplines like anthropology, social geography and sociology have conducted research on Muslim masculinities.[99] For the German context, the existing scholarship is meagre, particularly with regard to ethnographic approaches.[100] In Scheibelhofer's analyses of the constructions of masculinity among his young, male, Austrian-Turkish interlocutors, religion does not feature as an analytical category, neither with regard to public discourses on Islam that they are confronted with, nor with regard to the (potential) religious dimension of their identities. Scheibelhofer mainly focuses on the ethnic and migrant dimension of his interlocutors' identifications. The role of Islam in the young men's identity constructions and their self-positioning vis-à-vis public discourses on Muslim masculinities could be explored in a more systematic way.

This is also the case for much of the scholarship on Muslim* masculinities in Germany, which has thus far been conducted within sociology, migration studies, or educational science, mostly using qualitative interviews only, and

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94 Kugle/Hunt 2012.
95 See Siraj 2006; 2016.
96 Habib 2007; Amer 2009; Siraj 2016.
97 See Boone 2015.
98 Cf. Massad 2007; Bauer 2013.
99 Cf. Archer 2001; Farooq 2011; Farooq/Parker 2009; Hopkins 2006; 2008; Hoque 2015; Isakjee 2012; Siraj 2006; 2014.
100 On the German context, cf. Kurz 2017; for Austria, cf. Scheibelhofer 2008b; 2010a; 2014.

mostly not investigating the Muslimness of the male interlocutors or the Muslim aspects of their (gender) identity constructions.[101] The overlap of ethnic and religious difference, or migrant identities and Muslim identities (which exists in all of the above-mentioned works, although not always for the whole sample), are thereby overlooked. A religious perspective, as Siraj remarks more generally, is rarely adopted.[102]

In Western academic anthologies on men and masculinities, Muslim and other minority masculinities are rarely taken into account.[103] This does not reflect the diversity of Western societies that these publications focus on regionally, but illustrates prevailing implicit norms of a white, secular, middle-class, heterosexual male subject and a blind spot of many scholars in the field. 'Other' masculinities in terms of ethnicity, race, religion and sexual orientation are treated separately. The political scientist and anthropologist Paul Amar observes that masculinity studies have been governed by a focus on stigmatized sub-groups of society:

> While generic *manliness* or virility and the public or general figure of civilized mankind was attributed, by law and practice, to property-owning middle- or upper-class white men, *masculinity* was often interpellated as a figure of sexual excess or developmental atavism – marked by class/criminality or race/coloniality (Bederman 1995, Carver 1996). Masculinity studies, until today, remains haunted by the needs to problematize deviant, working-class, youth, colonized and racialized masculinities and to provide pragmatic interventions and public policy fixes.[104]

Looking at the way in which Muslim men in the German and UK context have been studied, the problematizing focus from the unmarked, hegemonic standpoint Amar criticizes is obvious. The contemporary study of Muslim masculinities has a frequent focus on patriarchy, criminality, and violence, portraying Muslim men (or Turkish, Arab, or 'migrant' men) as deviating from the norm of the white, middle-class, secular man who is supposedly committed to gender equality.[105] Among the academic output on Muslim masculinities in the German context, there is a number of studies which focus

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[101] See e.g. Bukow et al. 2003; Haeger 2008; Huxel 2008a; 2008b; Spies 2010; Spindler 2006; 2010; Toprak 2005; Tunç 2008.
[102] See Siraj 2014, 101.
[103] Cf. also Bagheri 2012; Tunc 2008, 106. Among the publications dealing with men and masculinities that do not take Muslim masculinities into account are the following: BauSteineMänner (eds) 2001; Bereswill/Meuser/Scholz (eds) 2009; Bereswill/Neuber (eds) 2011; Bereswill/Scheiwe/Wolde (eds) 2006; Bosse/King (eds) 2000; Ervø/Johansson (eds) 2003; Fenske/Schuhen (eds) 2012; Meuser 2009; Meuser/Scholz 2012; Mühling/Rost (eds) 2007; Prömper/Jansen/Ruffing (eds) 2012; Scholz 2012; and Walter (ed.) 2002. Wippermann/Calmbach/Wippermann 2009 conducted a representative quantitative survey in Germany combined with qualitative approaches, where ethnicity and religion are not addressed in their category building and analysis.
[104] Amar 2011, 45.
[105] On academic and public discourse in Britain, see Hopkins 2006, 338.

on violence and criminality and therefore to a certain extent reinforce the dominant view linking young Muslim men with violence and aggressiveness, even when they critically dismantle dominant discourses and stereotypes.[106] Among these are the works by educational scientist Ahmet Toprak on Turkish men in Germany in the context of domestic violence (in family and marriage) and by Ahmet Toprak and psychologist Katja Nowacki on Muslim boys who were sentenced for violent assaults on others and who took part in anti-aggression training, as well as the work of sociologist Tina Spies who investigated the identity constructions of three young men in Germany with a Turkish or Kurdish-Turkish migration history, also in the context of violence and criminality.[107] In addition, migration scholar Susanne Spindler focuses on the masculinities of young 'migrant' men (many of them with a Turkish or Kurdish heritage) in German juvenile detention centres, with a special interest in body- and violence-based expressions of masculinity.[108]

2.2   The Racialized, Securitized and Sexualized Image of 'the Muslim Man' in Public European Discourse

The challenges and conditions which European contexts with their secular discourses and Christian underpinnings pose to practicing Muslims, be they descendants of Arabic immigrants or ethnically German converts, in their daily life and in their constructions of identity and positioning need to be addressed critically.[109] Muslims who are visible as such[110] and people who are associated with 'Muslimness' in European contexts due to their skin colour or some kind of 'Middle Eastern' appearance, for example, but who might not actually be Muslims or who might not primarily identify as such, generally have to navigate stigmatization, discrimination, and anti-Muslim racism,[111] and these phenomena play out in gendered ways.[112] With regard to both Muslim men and women, sexuality features as a central battlefield for anti-Muslim racism.[113] The trope of the sexually oppressed Muslim woman is

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[106]   Such as Spies 2010.

[107]   Cf. Toprak 2005; Toprak/Nowacki 2012; Spies 2010.

[108]   Cf. Spindler 2006; 2010; Bukow et al. 2003.

[109]   For a critical discussion of the constant problematization of Islam and Muslims in European public discourses, cf. Amir-Moazami 2015; for the particular challenges ethnically German converts to Islam in contemporary Germany face in family, school and work contexts and in encounters with the state, cf. Özyürek 2015.

[110]   E.g. through practices of dress such as headscarves, long garments, certain beard styles, or by becoming visible as Muslims through asking for halal food options at schools and the opportunity to pray at work.

[111]   Cf. e.g. Bayraklı/Hafez (eds) 2017; Shooman 2014; Taras 2012.

[112]   Cf. e.g. Jaffe-Walter 2016.

[113]   See Messerschmidt 2016; Keskinkılıç n.d.

complemented by the trope of the sexually dangerous and aggressive Muslim man.[114] The image of 'the Muslim man' which is constructed in much public discourse, but also (as shown above) perpetuated in academic discourse on Islam and Muslims in Europe, shall be discussed here in particular. Muslim men's identities are securitized in government-initiated radicalization prevention programmes,[115] and Muslim men are hyper-sexualized and racialized in public discourse, as the heated debates after the assaults in Cologne (New Year's Eve 2015/2016) show particularly clearly.[116]

The media discussions around the Cologne assaults attest to the racialization of Muslims, and particularly male Muslims, in European secular contexts. Sexism, violence, and difference are ethnicized in much of the Cologne discourse, i.e. they are attributed exclusively and causally to a particular ethnicity.[117] Men belonging to marginalized groups of society are the targets of sexualized racism, or "ethnosexism".[118] Arab or Muslim men's (supposed) gender constructions and sexism are linked causally to their ethnicity, race or religion, while white men's sexism or gender constructions are not attributed to their ethnicity, race, religion or atheism.[119] This can also be observed with regard to the recent '#MeToo' campaign and the debates around US-film producer Harvey Weinstein and sexual harassment in Hollywood circles in autumn 2017. In seeking an answer to the asymmetry of ethnosexism, political scientist Ozan Keskinkılıç turns to the work of Greg Noble, suggesting that the figure of the Muslim is the "manifestation of evil":

> 'This imagining of evil moves from the idea of a specific act being evil, to the perpetrator being evil, to a cultural community being evil. Such moves constitute a kind of 'permission' to indulge in affectively charged social acts that target those identified as social demons.' (Noble 2012: 220/221) Hence, the evil is projected onto all subjects who appear to be Muslim.[120]

Keskinkılıç shows how Muslim men have figured as 'sexual danger' in German anti-Muslim discourse both before and after Cologne.[121] In this discourse, 'truth' about the Muslim/Arab/migrant man is produced in the

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[114] Cf. Dietze 2016.
[115] See Isakjee 2012.
[116] See Dietze 2016; Keskinkılıç n.d.; Scheibelhofer 2016.
[117] See Messerschmidt 2016.
[118] Dietze 2016, 4.
[119] Similarly, Louise Archer shows for educational discourses in Great Britain that white boys' underachievement at school as compared to girls is explained differently from the underachievement of boys belonging to ethnic minorities. For white males, explanations refer to differences in social status/class or the high performance of women, but, "the problems facing ethnic minority males have been located inherently within their 'race' and culture, and the young men themselves have been positioned as part of 'the problem'", Archer 2001, 80.
[120] Keskinkılıç n.d., 69.
[121] For the Cologne discourse, see also Dietze 2016, 11.

Foucauldian sense: He is constructed as an object of knowledge and inserted into a system of power which subjectifies him as problematic from the perspective of sexual politics.[122] Keskinkılıç identifies the sexual motif as a central trope in anti-Muslim discourse with a colonial and orientalist legacy: the preoccupation with protecting the white woman from the dangerous and hypervirile sexuality of the Arab/Muslim/black man.[123] The trope of the sexual danger posed to the nation's (white) women (next to the trope of the radical or radicalized Muslim man as a security threat to the nation) is one that Arab, North-African, or in another sense Muslim* looking men in Germany (and certainly other European contexts) are confronted with and have to navigate in their daily life. Thus the German and European context imposes particular discursive conditions on Muslim men which are distinct from Muslim majority contexts and need to be critically taken into account when doing research on Muslim masculinities in Europe.

In a case-study analysis of the discourse on Turkish men in Germany, Paul Scheibelhofer illustrates another facet of public discourse on Muslim* men and masculinities: the "discursive production of the 'Turkish-Muslim man'"[124] who is associated with patriarchy and religious fundamentalism. Scheibelhofer emphasizes the fact that hegemonic masculinity[125] in the German and Austrian contexts is maintained in dominant societal discourses through attributing 'archaic masculinity' to migrant men,[126] whereby the latter are marked as 'Other', and white, non-Muslim men and their masculinities are constructed as enlightened, progressive, and unproblematic. Sexism, patriarchy and violence among white men are thereby concealed.

Through ongoing reiterations of these tropes in public discourse, such articulations of Muslim* masculinities shape dominant views in society and thus work as performatives by producing realities through their pronouncement. They come to life in the social experience of Muslims and non-Muslims and acquire measurable effects.

> Social constructions of masculinities are given life by their articulation. Through repetition they can achieve a remarkable durability (Dunn 2001, 292). These 'widely held shared beliefs' or 'commonsense' understandings (Dwyer 1998, 53) are constantly yet subtly reinforced by television representations, newspaper and magazine images and other institutions (Said 1997; Dwyer 1998; Dunn 2001), and so influence what Alexander calls the 'dominant imagination' (1998, 440).[127]

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[122] See Dietze 2016, 12.
[123] See Keskinkılıç n.d., 66.
[124] Scheibelhofer 2008a.
[125] Or hegemonic masculinities in the plural, as Meuser and Scholz argue, see Meuser/ Scholz 2005, 216.
[126] See Scheibelhofer 2010b.
[127] Hopkins 2006, 337.

Thus, Muslim constructions of masculinity cannot be considered and studied in isolation from the particularities of the discursive context they are located in, and scholarship on Muslim masculinities in Europe has to be sensitive towards the workings of securitized and sexualized racism.

3. Conclusion

In this article, I have provided a broad overview of a number of fields, texts and contexts which can be of interest with regard to Islam and constructions of masculinity. From a discussion of Qur'anic sex and gender terms, to constructions of gender and masculinity in Muslim legal and exegetical discourse, to contemporary studies of European Muslim* masculinities and public discourse on European Muslim* men, I have tried to address different Islam-related sites where constructions of gender and masculinity have been or can be studied.

As the historian Mrinalini Sinha and others have remarked, there is potential to extend the study of masculinities to the field of male-male relations.[128] This could be fruitful with regard to further analysis of Muslim legal and *tafsīr* discourse, for example. Through the works of Omaima Abou-Bakr, Karen Bauer, and Kathrin Klausing, we get a partial idea of *tafsīr* authors' conceptions of masculinity. It would be interesting to explore these beyond marriage and family. As Klausing rightly suggests, the reception history of *tafsīr* works deserves scholarly attention[129] and could shed more light on gender constructions at different times. As to the realm of male-female relations, legal practice (i.e. the examination of historical documents of law cases, court decisions, divorces) would also be worth looking at.

With regard to the study of Muslim masculinities in Europe, I would like to highlight two points. First, we need to be careful not to essentialize Muslim masculinities, but to question to what extent men's being Muslim affects their gender identity constructions, and to recognize the entanglement and intersection of religion, race, ethnicity and nationality. Second, the sensitive political, social and discursive context, with the high visibility and marked-ness of Muslims in public discourse and public spheres, their racialization and sexualization (along with Muslim men's securitization), demand an increased awareness of the danger of reproducing stigma or dominant views of normality in academic scholarship. This is particularly important given the dominant, stereotyped image of Muslim* men as hyper-masculine, misogynist, aggressive, violent and a sexual danger, or at least Europe's suspicious

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[128] See Sinha 1999.
[129] See Klausing 2014, 246/247.

Other. In this connection (and similarly to what Sinha proposes),[130] it would be of scholarly interest to engage in a critical investigation of the relationship between white European and supposedly peaceful masculinities and racialized, securitized, and sexualized Muslim masculinities in European contexts.

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[130] See Sinha 1999, 435/436.

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