Caring for the soul: authority, ethics and knowledge practices in British sharia councils

Alexandra Kemmerer

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In Recht im Kontext's Rechtskulturen Colloquium this Monday, 18 June 2012, Rechtskulturen Fellow Julie Billaud will present her paper "Caring for the soul: authority, ethics and knowledge practices in British sharia councils".

In her abstract, she writes:

> *"For the past 10 years, demands for recognition of European Muslims' legal needs have been interpreted as the failure of integration policies or as threats to democratic values, and more specifically to gender equality. This paper seeks to characterize the nature of these demands by studying the gender dynamics, personal motivations and values that guide them. Based on ethnographic research conducted in several British shariah councils in 2009 and 2012, this paper interrogates issues of authority and knowledge claims in Islamic legal practice in contemporary England. Moving away from the methodological individualism that dominates in debates on multiculturalism, this paper offers a contextualised, empirically grounded approach to the complexities of 'identity politics' in post-colonial England. I define shariah councils as 'counter public spaces', where Islam represents the discursive terrain upon which religious actors struggle to define alternative conceptions of justice and morality."*

Julie Billaud has recently written about her field experiences on Verfassungsblog.

Ahmed Fekry Imbrahim (EUME Fellow 2012-13), an expert on Islamic Law and its history, has kindly agreed to serve as commentator. The evening will be moderated by Lucy Chebout. We look forward to a lively debate.

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