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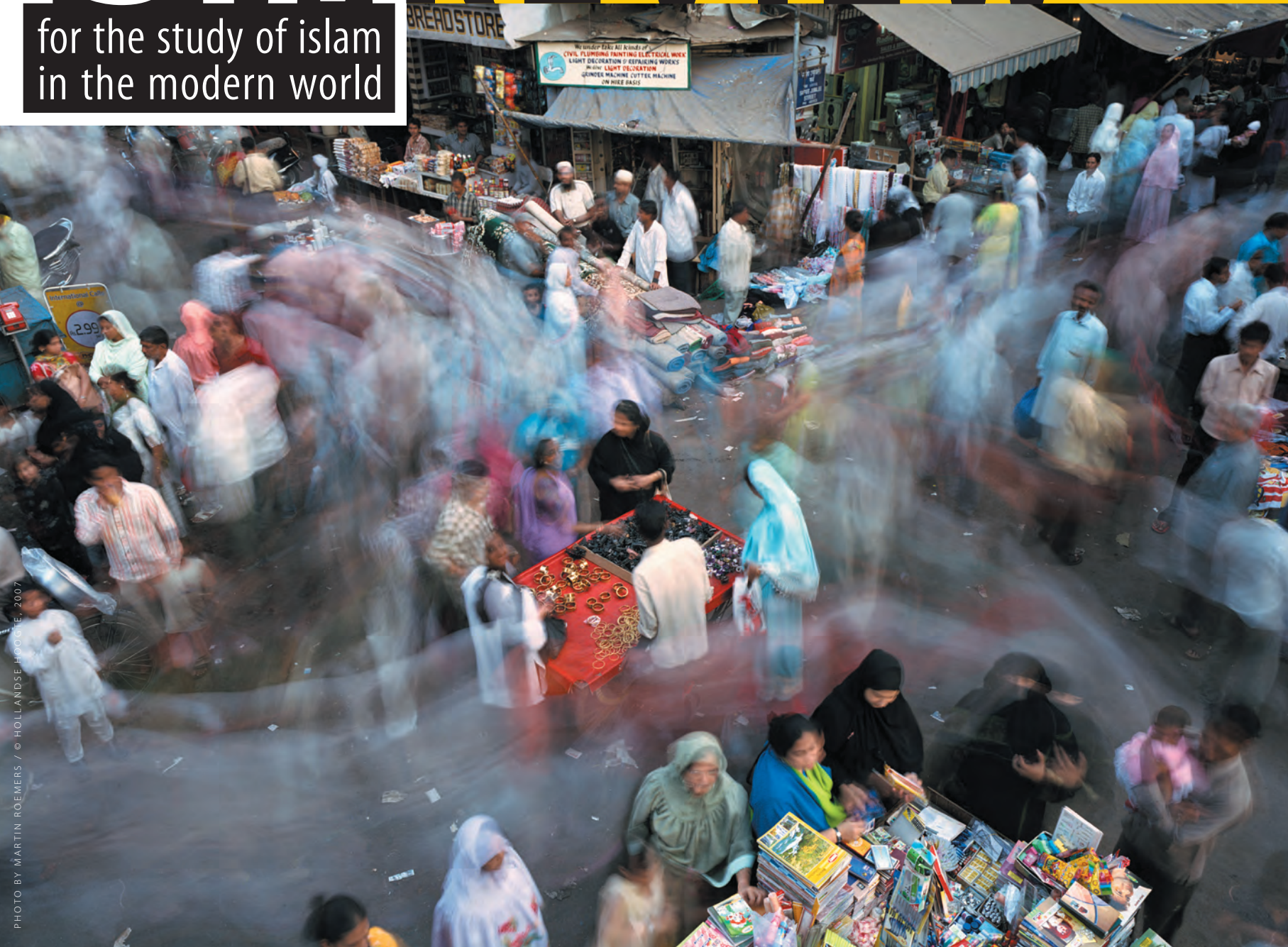
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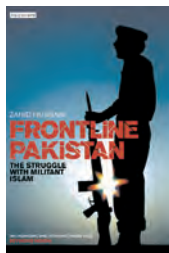
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**ISIM**for the study of islam  
in the modern world**REVIEW**Mumbai, India,  
2007

# Connections

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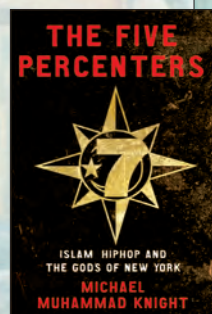
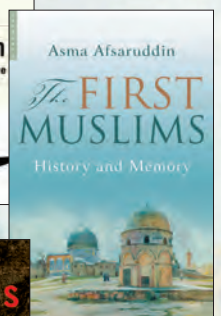
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MATHIJS PELKMANS

Market expansion and technological innovations have aided (or forced) the global movement of ideas, people, and commodities. But the directions, contents, and consequences of these movements continue to defy simplistic categorizations: they broaden horizons and have synergetic qualities, while also producing frictions and reinforcing attempts to fortify boundaries. Desire and disillusion, hope and fear are propelled side by side in a globally interconnected world. Connectedness also produces disconnectedness, as illustrated by the pictures on the back cover. Driven by hopes of a better life and enticed by images of the modern, migrants risk everything to reach desired destinations in Europe, only to find themselves stuck in refugee camps on the Canary Islands, waiting to be "returned" to square one. Their faces show exhaustion and despair, reflecting their encounter with an entrenched Europe as much as the arduous journey. What, then, does global connectedness mean for the less fortunate, what paths do people, ideas, and goods follow, and what forces try to curtail these flows? By looking at the mechanisms that govern connectedness we highlight its unevenness and unforeseen consequences.

Demonstrating that you are "connected" is often crucial for establishing authority, even among groups that are usually portrayed as local or "traditional." The female marabouts in Dakar described by Gemmeke (p. 36) boost their authority not only by demonstrating links to the divine, but also by stressing their credentials of international travel and a clientele which extends beyond national boundaries. As Howell (p. 22) shows, urban Sufi groups in Indonesia de-emphasize links with the past, instead using the language of "modern-style general education" to attract middle and upper class Indonesian cosmopolitans. While this desire to connect to the modern can be detected in many cases, the models to which people aspire are no longer singularly located in "the West." Muslim businessmen in India look to the cities of the Arab Gulf for models of a "Muslim modernity" (Osella and Osella, p. 8). In post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, following a 70-year separation from the rest of the Muslim world, residents are rediscovering Islam through the Orientalized images of Moroccan Muslims featured in Brazilian soap operas. Ironically, these images enable Kyrgyzstani watchers to overcome Soviet stereotypes and conceive of a modern Islam (McBrien, p. 16). Such perceptual shifts regarding the locus of the modern may reflect the waning desirability of Europe, certainly for Muslims.

The title of Arjun Appadurai's recent book *Fear of Small Numbers* (2006) poignantly captures this trend. He links the new xenophobic sentiments in Europe to "the anxiety of incompleteness" (p. 8), a fear produced by the effects of global transformations yet projected

onto minority groups. European fears concerning Muslims—fear that migrants will flood the continent even though their labour is direly needed (Albahari, p. 30); fear that an increased Muslim presence will undermine freedom of expression (Caeiro and Frank, p. 26); and recent Dutch fears that dual citizenship breeds disloyalty to the nation—show the way connectedness breeds obsessions with purity and homogeneity. Remarkably, these anxieties are based on the behaviour of small, and often low-key, groups of people, as Moors shows in her analysis of the "burka" debate in the Netherlands (p. 5). This suggests that these fears are equally propelled by the looming threat of an uncontrollable flux as they are informed by a lack of concrete interaction with "otherness." Focusing on the UK, Tarlo shows that the media spectacle surrounding a face-veil controversy actually conceals the variety of opinions of British Muslims on veiling, thereby fostering the idea of British—Muslim incompatibility and bolstering politicians' arguments on anti-immigration policies. Fear of difference, particularly of religious difference, is clearly mocked in the title "The Islamists are Coming!" (Noor and Zöller, p. 15). Despite the cynical title, the authors optimistically conclude that more face-to-face contact would lessen the misunderstandings and miscommunications that feed these anxieties. By reflecting on the desires and worries that promote, discourage, and channel movement, the articles in this issue contribute to the ongoing discussion of how Muslim societies and communities continue to shape themselves in an increasingly interconnected world.

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The International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) conducts and promotes interdisciplinary research on social, political, cultural, and intellectual trends and movements in contemporary Muslim societies and communities. ISIM was established in 1998 by the University of Amsterdam, Leiden University, Utrecht University, and Radboud University Nijmegen in response to a need for further research on contemporary developments of great social, political, and cultural importance in the Muslim world from social science and humanities perspectives. ISIM's research approaches are expressly interdisciplinary and comparative, covering a large geographic range which includes North Africa, the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, South and South East Asia, and Muslim communities in the West. Broad in scope, ISIM brings together all areas of disciplinary expertise in anthropology, sociology, religious studies, political science, and cultural studies.

# "Burka" in Parliament and on the Catwalk

A few days before parliamentary elections were held in the Netherlands last November, the minister of immigration and integration, Rita Verdonk, stated the Cabinet's intention to ban the *burka* from all public space.<sup>1</sup> In the course of the last years the term *burka* has been added to the Dutch vocabulary, as happened previously with terms such as *fatwa* and *jihād*. It has not only become a common sense notion in public debate but has also made its appearance in official discourse and state documents.

Up until 2005 the Dutch media mainly used the term *burka* to refer to a particular style of Afghan women's dress that covers women from head to toe and has a mesh in front of the eyes. In 2003, when a school banned students wearing face-veils from its premises, the word *burka* was occasionally used, but other terms such as *niqab* or face-veil were still more common. This changed when Geert Wilders, a populist, right-wing member of parliament, who sees the Netherlands as threatened by a "tsunami of Islamization," proposed a resolution requesting the Cabinet to take steps "to prohibit the public use of the *burka* in the Netherlands."<sup>2</sup> Since then the term *burka* has not only come up time and again in the media but also in parliamentary discourse and official documents. This raises the question of why the term *burka* has been chosen when Dutch equivalents of face-veil or face-covering could have easily been used. Why has this term gained such rapid and widespread acceptance?

Rather than a coincidental use of a foreign term, it seems that *burka* has become the preferred term among politicians as well as the general public because it resonates with a particularly sensitive recent history, that is the rise of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and its demise, in which, incidentally, the Dutch military has become involved. Not only has the Taliban come to represent the most repressive regime for women ever, the *burka* has been turned into the visual symbol of women's oppression par excellence. The very term has come to stand for the banning of women from schools, health care services, and employment, with harsh punishments meted out to those infringing its rules.<sup>3</sup>

Turning to the Dutch streets, it is not only evident that the number of women wearing a face-veil is exceedingly small (estimates are between 50 and 100 women in the entire country),<sup>4</sup> but also that, in contrast to what one may expect from these debates, those who cover their faces generally do so with a thin piece of cloth that covers the lower part of the face and leaves the eyes visible. This is far more similar to some Arab styles of covering the face than to the so-called Afghan-style *burka*. In fact, if one were to encounter a woman wearing the latter type of *burka*, this is far more likely to be a journalist or researcher checking the reactions of the public—a style of reporting that has become a genre in itself—than someone wearing it out of religious conviction. Yet, in spite of discussions in the Dutch press about which term should be used and recognition that the term *burka* is problematic, it is this term (in its now favoured Dutch spelling *boerka*) that has become normalized.

The most often heard arguments for banning the *burka* from public space are an odd mix of references to security issues, women's oppression, and women's refusal to integrate into Dutch society. These arguments are contradictory in themselves. The refusal to integrate (in itself a questionable argument) may well be considered a form of agency rather than oppression.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the fact that the women concerned often wear a face-veil against the wishes of their family makes it even more problematic to argue that banning the *burka* is necessary to liberate women. Yet, the term *burka* in itself, evoking images of the Taliban regime and its op-

**In Europe, face veils have become the ultimate symbols of Muslim "otherness." The (presently stalled) attempts of the Dutch government to introduce a *burka*-ban highlight how misguided arguments about women's emancipation and national security are used to push a strongly assimilationist agenda. Ironically, while politicians hold on to a singly negative view of face-veils, trends in the fashion industry show that the boundaries between religion, fashion, and everyday social life are far more flexible than the political gaze is able to capture.**

pressive policies against women works to conceal such contradictions.

Whereas politicians, such as Wilders, work to fixate the meaning of the *burka*, new developments in the field of fashion design, production and marketing make it ever more difficult to assume that items of dress have a unitary and fixed meaning. If in the early 1990s Turkey was one of the first countries where Islamic fashion shows were held, more recently such fashion shows of upscale, colourful and even

flamboyant yet Islamic styles of dress have drawn wide media attention in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Iran. Moreover, such imagery has gained a global presence through its widespread dissemination through the Internet. In the case of Iran, women push the boundaries of state regulations about dress and appearance by wearing more revealing clothing. At the same time, the organizers of fashion shows, including state institutions respond to this trend by developing styles of dress that intend to appeal to Iran's female population as fashionable, yet simultaneously conform to their notions of Islamic modesty.

Such a new presence of fashionable yet Islamic styles of dress is one more indication that the centres of fashion are becoming increasingly diverse. Moreover, such developments are not limited to the catwalks of Muslim majority countries. Fashion magazines such as *Marie Claire* with its December photo shoot of fashion in Dubai, have started to include reports on and pictures of Islamic fashion, while some would also point to the incorporation of "Islamic elements" in the long-established fashion capitals of London, Paris, and Milan. During the presentation of the new 2007/8 collection, Louise Goldin, for instance, sent a model down the catwalk wearing an outfit that covered everything except the eyes, and models in Milan were wearing Prada turbans.

Neo-con websites have been quick to condemn this as a dangerous flirt with, in their words, "jihad chic" or "Islamofascism."<sup>6</sup> Such attempts to fix meaning, like those of the Dutch politicians mentioned before, seem first and foremost a defensive reaction to the increasingly common blurring of boundaries between fashion and religion. In a visual comment on such attempts at closure in the Netherlands, artist and fashion designer Aziz Bekkaoui in his *Times Burka Square* employs glossy billboards with elegant, playful women modelling black face veils in combination with slight adaptations of famous advertising slogans, such as "Because I'm more than worth it."<sup>7</sup> This is not to say then that fashion in itself equals emancipation; on the contrary, some Muslim women are also critical of Islamic fashion because of the pressures all fashion exerts. At the minimum, though, the imagery conveyed through fashion should unsettle the fixed notions about women and face veils as summarized in "the *burka* of the Taliban."

ANNELIES MOORS

## Notes

1. The elections resulted in a change of government and the new minister of integration shelved this idea.
2. Tabled on 21 December 2005 and supported by a parliamentary majority of right-wing parties as well as by the Christian Democrats. It is registered as parliamentary document 29754 no. 41.
3. See Saba Mahmood and Charles Hirschkind, 2002, "Feminism, the Taliban, and the Politics of Counter-Insurgency," *Anthropological Quarterly* 75, 2: 339-54 and Lila Abu-Lughod, 2003, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," *American Anthropologist* 104, 3: 783-90.
4. That is 1 in every 10,000 Muslim residents of the Netherlands.
5. The irony is that quite a few of these women are Dutch converts.
6. See, for instance [www.debbieschlüssel.com](http://www.debbieschlüssel.com), [www.atlsshugs.com](http://www.atlsshugs.com) or [www.jihadwatch.org](http://www.jihadwatch.org) (all accessed 19 March 2007).
7. This plays on L'Oréal's original and famous slogan "Because I'm worth it."

Annelies Moors is an anthropologist and holds the ISIM Chair at the University of Amsterdam.

# Cosmopolitanism on Pakistan's Frontier

MAGNUS MARSDEN

Khowar-speaking Muslims in the remote and mountainous Chitral region of northern Pakistan have been profoundly affected by movements of both local and global Islamic activism over the past thirty years. These have included the rise and fall of the Taliban regime in neighbouring Afghanistan, only a three hour drive from the region's administrative headquarters, together with the effects of violent conflict involving the region's majority Sunni and Shia Ismaili sectarian communities. It would be easy to imagine, therefore, that Muslim life in this geo-politically strategic setting has become increasingly "talibanized" in recent years. Yet over the past ten years my fieldwork has taken me to polo tournaments played out on high mountain passes, and to night-time male-only public musical programmes at which delighted crowds have cheered local musical performers. Above all, in village homes, orchards and teashops, I have taken part in hours of conversation with my Chitrali friends, all of whom spend their days and nights in

**Cosmopolitanism is usually associated with educated, affluent, and highly mobile citizens. But why would the "open-endedness" of cultural vision not apply to less fortunate global citizens? This contribution follows the experiences of an Ismaili man from Tajikistan who temporarily joined the Taliban in Pakistan. His trickster-like abilities to artfully instrumentalize relationships with a variety of groups provide important insights into the workings of actually existing cosmopolitanism.**

Recognizing the reflective and intellectual processes that interactions between Central and South Asian Muslims in village settings stimulate, offers an important contrast to the work of political scientists that focuses on the emergence of "transnational" or "global" Islam in the region. Analytically, this body of work partly reflects an ongoing scholarly tendency to associate "working class" labour migrants, or mobile "village Muslims," with the

emergence of new, yet nevertheless, bounded types of "transnational" religious or diasporic identities. As a result, the ways in which non-elite people embody an "open-endedness" of cultural vision, understand the spaces through which they move, and experience the types of forces that connect these are rarely explored.<sup>2</sup> The term "cosmopolitanism" is often used so broadly that its analytical value is rendered questionable. Pollock's argument that cultural versatility and vernacular identities are interrelated and not opposing dimensions of cosmopolitan appreciations of diversity, however, provides a sharper focus for its ethnographic exploration. Exploring the ways in which diversely constituted transregional settings are connected and experienced by mobile Muslims who acquire and transmit different types of knowledge and establish relationships with people from backgrounds very different than their own, furnishes the possibilities for new insights into exploring personal and collective forms of Muslim self-understanding that thrive in the muddy waters between "local" and "global" Islam.<sup>3</sup>

In the northern Chitrali village where I stayed there were no official refugee camps: the "incomers" from Afghanistan and Tajikistan to the village lived, rather, either in rented rooms in the village bazaar, or in the homes of Chitrali villagers for whom they worked as agricultural labourers. The presence of these refugees in the village was and continues to be a focus of much discussion amongst Chitralis. The "incomers" are widely accused of having introduced "simple" Chitralis to a range of moral vices, including heroin addiction and violent revenge feuds. Yet all the Chitralis I know also talk about the cultural and familial networks that connect their lives to a wide range of ethno-linguistic communities living in neighbouring regions of both Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Some Chitralis visit their Afghan friends who used to live in Chitral as refugees but, since 2001, have mostly returned to their "homeland." During the course of their travels Chitralis may also visit the holy city of Mazar-e-Sharif, and seek employment opportunities in Kabul's lucrative construction industry. Simultaneously, one-time Afghan refugees travel to Chitral in order to meet long lost Chitrali friends and to sell cheaply Afghan-bought luxury vehicles at inflated Pakistani prices. The pushes and pulls of affect, profit, and religion, thus form a focus for the ways in which the region's mountain moderns engage with the possibilities and constraints of their rapidly changing world.

## Sulton's story

Sulton, for example, came to Chitral from the southern Gorno-Badakhshan region of Tajikistan in December 1999, two years after the cessation of full scale military conflict there, but during a period of great economic hardship and political uncertainty. His mother tongue is an Iranian-Pamiri language Shughni, but he also speaks Tajiki Farsi, Russian, and now also Khowar and Dari, or Afghan Farsi. On his arrival in Chitral, a member of the family with whom I stay found him on a cold winter's night outside one of the village's places of Ismaili worship. Like the Khowar-speaking Chitrali family with whom we both stayed, Sulton was a Shia Ismaili Muslim. During his first months in Chitral, Sulton frequently told the family, themselves descendants of influential pirs, that it was his search for Is-

continual exploration of the arts of conversation, interpersonal debate, and public verbal exposition. They are people who think, react, and question when they are called upon to change their ways or conform to new standards of spirituality and behaviour. Their reactions to the demands of so-called Islamisers from within and beyond their region are not necessarily dismissive or hostile. What they do believe, however, is that a man or woman wishing to live well and in tune with divine will must cultivate their mental faculties, exercising critical thought, and emotional intelligence on an everyday basis.

The vibrancy of everyday Muslim life in the region is not confined, however, solely to debates between Muslims who hold contrasting conceptions of Muslim virtuosity. Nor have collective forms of Chitrali Muslim self-understanding been "ethnified" in any simple sense. The region, rather, has and continues to be home to Muslims from a very

diverse range of ethnic, linguistic and, indeed, national backgrounds: both refugees from Afghanistan and, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan, have lived in the intimate setting of Chitral's villages and small towns over the past thirty five years.

Chitral is part of an expansive transregional space within which interactions between Muslims who have very different memories and direct experiences of both Soviet and British colonialism are a recurrent feature of everyday life. Known primarily today because of the ongoing search for al-Qaida militants, the "war-on-terror," and heroin cultivation, few appreciate the degree to which Northern Pakistan, Northeast Afghanistan, and Southern Tajikistan, is an interconnected region that is remarkably diverse in relation to its size and sparsely populated terrain. Interactions between both Sunni and Ismaili Muslims from Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and northern Pakistan often form a focus of discussion for the region's people in relationship to their past and current experiences of mobility in this politically sensitive space. As is the case in other transregional "Islamic ecumenes,"<sup>1</sup> such practices of mobility are central to the ways in which the region's Muslims reflect upon the differentiating effects of British and Soviet colonialism, as well as the nature and consequences for everyday life of ongoing forms of political and religious transformation, most notably those emerging from "sectarian" conflict, and the so-called "war on terror."

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maili religious knowledge that had motivated him to embark on his journey to Chitral: Ismailis in Tajikistan, he said, had little knowledge about Ismaili doctrine as a result of the anti-religion policies of the Soviet Union, and he wanted to return home with a certificate of Ismaili education.

Sulton's stay in Chitral would not result in him acquiring any abstract sense of affiliation to a shared Ismaili communal identity, however. Sulton spent most of his days collecting water, threshing wheat, chopping wood, and even planting roses; yet his stay in the village was eventful. He was known as being "hot headed" by the villagers. On one occasion, for instance, he gave a village boy, Aftab, who had a reputation for being something of a loafer—largely as a result of his public attempts to meet girls, but also because of his fondness for shamelessly smoking hashish in the village lanes—a sound beating over a disagreement concerning the division of the village's scant water supplies. Sulton soon also fell out with the Ismaili family with whom he stayed: he accused them of putting him to work while teaching him nothing about religion. One evening, he fought with the family's younger brother, saying: "I have come to Pakistan to go back with something and not to be treated like your slave." He left the home, now pursued by the village police who were threatening to charge him with assault, and never returned.

On 8 September 2001, I met Sulton again; this time on the polo ground in the region's administrative headquarters, Markaz. Sulton had now radically transformed his personal appearance: when first in Chitral, like most other men from Tajikistan, he wore Western-style trousers and was clean-shaven; now he appeared bearded and dressed in shalwar kamiz. He also pointed in the direction of the group of men who had accompanied him to the ground: bearded and donning black turbans, they were, he told me, Afghan Taliban based in the city of Jalalabad; he had been working for them as a driver since he left Chitral the previous year.

If Sulton had not embraced any abstract commitment to Ismaili religious knowledge or community during his stay in Chitral, nor had he been unthinkingly talibanized by his experiences with the Taliban in Afghanistan either. Sitting underneath the cool shade of the famous Chinese Plane tree where Chitrali polo players rest their horses at half time, Sulton whispered to me that he had not become a Sunni, nor renounced his Ismaili faith. Rather, in the company of his newly found Taliban companions, he merely pretended to be a Sunni. "They don't know I'm an Ismaili, don't tell them," he told me. The dissimulation of adherence to Ismaili doctrine and practice, *taqiya*, is a marked feature of historic and present-day Ismaili experience. What is distinctive about Sulton's case, however, is that it involved an Ismaili from Tajikistan joining the Taliban, a Sunni and predominantly ethnically Pashtun movement, widely known for its deeply hostile and violent attitudes to Shia Muslims. Pretending to be a hardline Sunni in such circumstances is not a simple task, especially for a post-Soviet Ismaili: Sunni and Shia Ismailis pray in very different ways, and Sulton told me that he used to stand at the back of gatherings and imitated his Taliban bosses as best he could. I noticed these men leaning on their plush new Toyota Hilux, gazing at Sulton and myself chatting, and decided that this was not the place to linger. Instead, I returned to the polo ground and watched the equally captivating spectacle of a game between the Chitral Police and the Chitral Scouts descending into a physical brawl involving players and their uniformed supporters alike, an event that led to curfew being imposed the following day.

After September 11 I lost touch with Sulton, but often wondered what had happened to my Tajik-Ismaili friend. In March 2002 I was informed that Sulton had returned to the region. He was now said to be working in the house of a man from a one-time noble (*adamzada*) background, known as a lord (*lal*) across the region, and who owned, by Chitrali standards, a substantial amount of land in a relatively remote village to the north of the region. This *lal* was a Sunni, although he was also known throughout Chitral for expressing near blasphemous statements. He also had a well-earned reputation for being Chitral's most prolific hashish producer, and it was now rumoured that his smuggling activities had



PHOTO BY MAGNUS MARSDEN, 2000

diversified to include apricot schnapps—the production of which my former Talib friend, Sulton, was said to be investing his talents in to great effect.

The next time I met Sulton was with the aforementioned lord on a snowy afternoon in December 2005. We arranged to meet at dusk on the polo ground, where Sulton told me he felt he had become the proverbial "prisoner of the mountains": if he returned to Tajikistan he would almost certainly be arrested by Tajikistan's security forces, who were suspicious of all people who had fled to Pakistan or Afghanistan during the civil war, and even more of those who had still to return; yet, if he travelled to "down Pakistan" he feared that he would be picked up by the Pakistan police, and perhaps even sent to Guantanamo Bay. Sulton then pulled out a bottle of apricot schnapps, previously hidden down his trouser leg, and presented it to me as a gift, before bidding farewell.

## Actually existing cosmopolitanism

Sulton's story highlights a type of everyday behaviour that anthropologists have long recognized as characteristic of life along frontiers. Far from being buffeted passively around by distant international events, he embarks upon complex courses of action in response to changing geo-political circumstances. His trickster-like ability to artfully instrumentalize the relationships he purposefully builds with Chitrali Ismailis, smugglers, and the Sunni Taliban is an important reminder of the social and moral fluidity of even the most apparently bounded forms of collective religious identity. Yet Sulton's story is also shot through with a sense of self that is constantly reconstructed in a world defined by its political fragmentation. He claims that his mobility is motivated by a search for the purity of Ismaili religion, but that this search can also be dangerous, leading him to sources of moral contamination.

The anthropologist Enseng Ho has described the history of the Yemeni Hadrami diaspora in relationship to a "landscape of places that closed or opened" to different categories of persons in relationship to "internal divisions" and "external rivalries."<sup>4</sup> Sulton's Chitral odyssey illustrates the types of work deployed by persons who move through such shifting moral landscapes divided by colonially imposed boundaries and invested with shifting political, religious, and emotional significance both by the region's people and the wider world. A wily trickster and a sophisticated mountain cosmopolitan, Sulton strategically deploys his knowledge of this complex region of the world in order both to create and dissolve the shifting range of relationships upon which his survival currently depends. In the course of doing so he offers us insights into the making and working of actually existing cosmopolitanism.

## Notes

1. Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (University of California Press, 2006), 100.
2. Werbner, "Global Pathways: Working class cosmopolitans and the creation of transnational ethnic worlds," *Social Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1999): 17–35.
3. Pollock, "Cosmopolitan and vernacular in history," in *Cosmopolitanism*, ed. C. Breckenridge, S. Pollock, H. Bhabha, and D. Chakrabarty (Duke University Press, 2002).
4. Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, 314.

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**Chitralis and Afghans from the Panjshir valley on the annual spring picnic day**

# Muslim Entrepreneurs between India & the Gulf

FILIPPO OSELLA &  
CAROLINE OSELLA

Kerala- and Gulf-based businessmen are at the forefront of India's post-liberalization economy. They are sharp innovators who have adopted the business and labour practices of global capitalism in both Kerala and the Gulf. Embodying the dream of success of all Kerala Muslims, these entrepreneurs enjoy a very public presence. Ostensibly concerned with the "upliftment" of the whole community, they are involved in community associations, orphanages, schools, trade organizations, and everyday politics. Their orientation towards "modernization" of social practices—in education, in particular—is intimately enmeshed with, on the one hand, an effort to produce a "Muslim modernity" (where the main referent points are the Gulf and, more recently, Malaysia, and Indonesia), and, on the other, the pursuit of particular business interests.

The role of Kerala middle class elites in the development of reform movements and political organizations is neither an unusual nor recent phenomenon. As among their Hindu counterparts, early twentieth century orientations towards socio-religious reform, modernization, and progress found support especially amongst the educated Muslim middle-classes. We see many "community leaders"—wealthy and typically Anglophile traders/businessmen—enthusiastically embracing colonial-driven modernization and building "modern" schools with the blessings of the colonial administration and the support of a growing reformist ulama.

But the conditions for modernist transformation amongst Muslims were significantly different from other communities. Muslim reformism had to deal with the aftermath of the 1921 Mappila rebellion, which confirmed to many the anti-Islamic nature of British rule. In reaction, rural Muslims distanced themselves from modern education, privileging Arabi-Malayalam over English, and even over written Malayalam. Islamic reformist ulama, on the contrary, took on the banner of modern education and social reform, building schools where science was taught alongside religious subjects. For the traditionalist ulama—in whose practices and orientations the majority of Kerala Muslims recognize themselves—generalized opposition to Islamic reformism was extended to a rejection of all forms of education promoted by the latter. In other words, outside the limited sphere of the educated urban middle classes and reformist ulama—for whom modern education increasingly stood for the whole project of modernization and reform—attempts to introduce "English" education were viewed with suspicion, or rejected outright.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Hindu middle classes had little problems in convincing their caste fellows of the links between western education, socio-religious reform, and progress. Middle class Muslims had by contrast to walk a far rockier path to establish ideological and political hegemony over the community. Almost sixty years on, in a state proud of its people's full literacy, education remains the yardstick by which Muslim progress is measured and imagined. It is by presenting themselves as enlightened educationalists and by promoting modern education that contemporary entrepreneurs inscribe their specific business interests and practices in the rhetoric of the "common good," thereby legitimizing their claims to leadership within the wider community.

## Contextualising Kerala Muslim businessmen

Kerala Muslim businessmen are neither reminiscent of the big-scale Indian entrepreneurs nor even of their close Tamil neighbours. Unlike the latter, they by no means all come from "good families"; but what we focus most on is relations with the community. While Tamil Hindu businessmen seem concerned with personal salvation and indulge in

**In recent years the role of wealthy entrepreneurs in Muslim political, religious, and social life has been largely neglected. The authors reverse this trend by considering the practices and orientations of some Kerala Muslim businessmen, who unite the pursuit of particular business interests with efforts to produce a Muslim modernity.**

pursuit of Vedanta or holy-men, Kerala's entrepreneurs have a strongly congregationalist focus and a sharp sense of duty towards the wider Muslim community, towards contemporary re-imaginings of the *dar ul Islam*. They feel themselves morally accountable to the wider community, responsible for its development, and guided by a vision

of the steps that need to be taken.

Contemporary Tamil leaders are abandoning traditional dynastic business and re-structuring enterprises through Japanese or American business plans and management techniques. Their Kerala counterparts follow a similar path—they are enthusiastic supporters of the sharp labour practices of global capitalism—but they turn their back on the wholesale adoption of American styles, instead searching for Islamic business models. This brings them into dialogue with contemporary global Islam in its reformist and modernist trends. It is their attempts to craft identities as "modern Muslims" which most strongly flavours these men's lives. Their preoccupations with how to shift the Muslim community away from practices or lifestyles considered "backward" and towards modern Islam is what marks out the parameters of their life-goals. This brings them far closer to Malay entrepreneurs or to some Arab businessmen who are, indeed, often their patrons or partners.

While many Muslim businessmen have no direct political involvement, they all exercise considerable influence in the community's political and social life. They might be chided—or admired—for being behind-the-scene "king makers" who keep politicians in their pockets to forward their own business interests, but they are also praised for caring about ordinary Muslims. We are not talking here about members of an ill-defined Muslim middle class, but about a relatively small group of extremely wealthy men who have a prominent public presence and are recognized as community leaders.

Many Gulf-based entrepreneurs present their lives as rags to riches tales, where "traditional" Muslim skills of the bazaar—such as risk taking, hard work, familiarity with the politics of *wasta* (Arabic: favours, contacts)—are combined with the adoption of modern business techniques to achieve success. They thrive in the Gulf because they have an affinity to Arabs, but they also benefit from close links with local politicians who support their investments in Kerala. These men's rags to riches tales mark them out as iconic figures for all Muslims, an image they are keen to cultivate. But they are not distant heroes: any Muslim will know someone—a friend or relative—who works for them and has a story to tell. And here a degree of accountability creeps in. These men are subject to wide public criticisms. As we might expect, the established middle classes commonly discount such men on the grounds that they are nouveaux riche with no family history. They are also sometimes portrayed simply as having extended the slippery rules of business beyond the usual rule-bending so taken for granted by all business people. And those who are employed by them might have different—and negative—experiences of their apparent enlightened benevolence.

Kerala-based businessmen are of course even more visible and prominent in local public life than their Gulf-based counterparts. While the latter make major donations and initiate grand projects, the Kerala-based men are often those who implement the grand projects on the ground, working continually in the public sphere to shape projects of change and reform. These local entrepreneurs assert continuity between their families' past involvement in the bazaar economy and their present wealth. But there is also rupture: foreseeing the decline of bazaar-based trade, they moved into entirely novel businesses where they introduced new—and extremely controversial for Kerala—labour and production practices.

## Business interests and community "upliftment"

The relationship between private interests and public good, the advancement of business while apparently working for the "upliftment" of the whole community, unfolds in these entrepreneurs' efforts to link the need for education to reform and future progress of Kerala Muslims. And they do not just talk about education: they promote and build schools, colleges, and universities in both Kerala and the Gulf through various private trusts or charitable organizations. If necessary, funds are raised by appealing to the sensitivities of specific Muslim audiences in both Gulf and Kerala. Potential Arab donors are presented with the chance of bestowing benevolent generosity to support "backward" Muslims' development and participating in the renaissance of Islamic culture and values. Kerala Muslims, especially Gulf migrants, are offered the chance of doing good for the community, and also, as many of these educational institutions charge hefty fees, with a very attractive investment opportunity.

Migration and Gulf business-led investment has brought the development, as among all other communities, of private services which are Muslim-owned and Muslim-run, and which then come to be perceived as specifically Muslim and to attract a Muslim clientele. There is an often-expressed argument that such investment is necessary in order to encourage Muslims towards development. This in turn has also been reinforced by political events: locally, the emergence of strong and successful Hindu and Christian organizations which have built a whole string of community-owned services; nationally, the rise of Hindu nationalism; and internationally, widespread Islamophobia, all contributing to a sense of being a "community under siege" which needs to stick together and be self-reliant. Muslims, it is argued, need to build networks of professionals, skilled workers, and businessmen to strengthen the community and to provide economic and political leadership.

This long-term project, fostered by many wealthy businessmen, has a much wider objective—that of participating in a worldwide renaissance of Islamic moral values and culture. An Islamic renaissance, it is popularly argued, would not just rid Kerala of the social problems brought to bear on Muslim lives by globalization, but also set the basis for counteracting "American imperialism." While a pan-Islamic orientation is not new, it has been significantly strengthened over the last 30 years. Gulf migration brought thousands of Malayali Muslims close to what they consider the heartland of Islam and has exposed them to life in Muslim-majority countries. This has renewed a sense of participation to the wider dar-ul-Islam—which is, of course, open to very different interpretations and experiences on the opposite shores of the Indian Ocean—while also enabling them to tap into the business opportunities it opens up.

Amongst Kerala Muslims the Gulf stands for the successful blending of Islam with cutting edge technologies and modern business practices. Regardless of individual migrants' experiences, Dubai's skyscrapers, Kuwait's sprawling oil refineries, or Riyadh's opulent neighbourhoods stand for a world wherein Muslims are both wealthy and self-confident; a stark contrast to the circumstances of the many Muslims in India. The Gulf demonstrates that scientific or technological knowledge need not be in contradiction to Islam, but can be mastered to generate wealth for the well being of Muslims and to strengthen Islam. Gulf-based Malayali businessmen have been successful not just because they have been lucky to be in the right place at the right time, but because they manage to combine an inclination for risk taking in business with an affinity for the politics of Arab *wasta*, with modern forms of management learnt in the Gulf. Their experiences suggest that entering and succeeding in the global labour market requires more than "traditional"



PHOTO BY FILIPPO & CAROLINE OSELLA

business acumen: it demands scientific skills and familiarity with new technologies such as those taught in emerging Muslim schools and colleges.

In the practices of Kerala Muslim businessmen and entrepreneurs we see some tensions between old and new business styles. But "know-who" has not been abandoned for "know how." Because of the layering of services and the complexity of contemporary business, where flexibility and sub-sub-contracting are the norm, contacts are undoubtedly important and "know-how" is often inseparable from "know-who." In networking across the Gulf, Malayali Muslims have a great advantage, because of both Arabic language facility and their long-time contacts and familiarity with the region. And entrepreneurship can stand at the core of a Muslim identity and of contemporary reformulations of Muslim morality. Here it allows—indeed it encourages—ideas of a productive interplay between business and morality, where material progress and religious reform become intertwined indexes of modernity.

**Gulf migrant families arriving at Kozhikode (Calicut) airport**

Muslim entrepreneurs are deeply rooted in the public sphere and are committed to action within it. Religious obligations are taken as examples of Islam's preoccupation with social responsibility, while reformists try to re-shape obligations into more engaged forms. When successful Muslims plan what needs to be done for the common good in their own community, education becomes the core focus of charitable and activist energies. They believe in the possibility of a win-win situation: the uplift of the entire Muslim community and access to a flexible and qualified workforce shaped into global standards. But the Muslim community is outstripped every time by the achievements of Kerala's Christians and Hindus. The Christian community and its educational institutions are felt to offer both top class education and necessary training in rational and systematic lifestyles. But any simple emulation of such institutions is, for contemporary community leaders, no longer feasible. The early twentieth century Muslim elite were, like the Hindu elites of the time, happy to adopt practices drawn from both colonial and local Christian modern. Today, Kerala's intimate and longstanding links to the Arab Gulf provide a direct example of the existence of another modern—a properly Islamic modern, a modern stripped of what are perceived as the excesses of Western modernity.

Ultimately, then, public sphere activity focused on education has a dual effect. It satisfies the moral and communitarian requirements of Muslim elites; but we take as an equally motivating factor the aim of producing the sort of workforce that these men feel they need: a workforce of young men who are flexible, educated, and equally competent in English and Arabic speaking environments. And yet, just as in the early part of the twentieth century, middle class elite hegemonic projects might prove to be elusive. Islamist organizations have been extremely vociferous in their critique of the globalization process to which these contemporary entrepreneurs have associated themselves. This far-reaching moral critique of public and private life—which increasingly targets the not-so-Islamic behaviour of many Arab Muslims—has led some Islamist organizations to declare full support to the left parties during the recent assembly elections, contributing to the defeat of many candidates closely connected to leading entrepreneurs.

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# Shiite Aid Organizations in Tajikistan

BRUNO DE CORDIER

Rasht is a relatively remote part of Tajikistan, with a physical geography dominated by the Western Pamirs. The area consists of several districts with a joint territory of 18,000 square kilometres and an official population of 360,000, most of whom are Hanafi Sunni Muslims. During the Tajik civil war (1992–1997), much of the Rasht region was controlled by commanders affiliated to the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). It was cut off from the rest of the country until mid-2001 because

of irregular militia activity along the roads that link it to the capital. The economy, based on agriculture and fruit farming, has received a major boost over the last few years by the reopening of transport links and the remittances from seasonal labour migrants, primarily to Russia.

The ties with Russia that already existed in the Soviet era further intensified due to the economic crisis in Tajikistan and labour shortages in some parts of Russia since 1999. According to State Migration Agency statistics, the Rasht area had some twenty-five thousand registered emigrants during the first quarter of 2006—the actual number is likely to be much higher. As the functioning local markets and the range of goods for sale show, the influx of money generated abroad creates new purchasing power, stimulating the appearance of banks, money transfer services, and mobile phone coverage in district centres where there were no basic financial services and communications until two or three years ago.

## From community mobilization ...

Between 1992 and 2001, much of Rasht's population survived on humanitarian aid provided by various UN, Western, and Muslim aid organizations. Those still active today have gradually switched to long-term development and community mobilization programmes. One example is the Aga Khan Development Network and its Mountain Societies Development Support Programme (MSDSP). The MSDSP started in 1993 in Kuhistan-i-Badakhshan, a province in Tajikistan with a substantial percentage of Ismaili Shiites.<sup>1</sup> The MSDSP served as a framework to switch from relief activities to agricultural and infrastructure development. By providing training, technical assets, and grants and micro-credits, it aimed to assist individual farmers to cope with the collapse of the Soviet state farms, the privatization of land, and to promote self-reliance and diversification.

As the MSDSP expanded and its focus on individual citizens showed to be of limited success, community mobilization became increasingly important. Since 1998, the main mobilization channels are the so-called Village Organizations (VO), a concept used by the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in Pakistan's Northern Areas and Chitral district since 1982. The VO group representatives of each of the village's households receive training and ad hoc technical support from MSDSP. Each VO has a number of working groups on specific issues such as finance and accounting, animal husbandry, or irrigation.

The VO's task is to identify needs and mobilize resources for local initiatives that are to contribute to raising living standards in the village or neighbourhood. Until 2004, the VO also served as a conduit for micro-credits yet this service is now provided by the AKDN-affiliated First Micro-Finance Bank. To promote social cohesion and self-reliance,

**In the global periphery and (post-)conflict areas, faith-based aid organizations play an important role as providers of social services. The activities of the Aga Khan Development Network and the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation in the former Soviet republic of Tajikistan reflect different backgrounds and approaches used by Muslim aid organizations. They also outline how these organizations obtained a foothold and gained legitimacy in environments that do not share their confessional background.**

the VO approach tries to instrumentalize existing kinship ties and informal authorities, for example village elders, clan heads, village mullahs, professionals, and key figures in the local formal and informal economy.

According to MSDSP project statistics, as of late 2006 the VO programme in the Rasht valley area operates in 389 villages with over 47,000 beneficiaries in total. About 180 projects have been realized or approved, eighty per cent of which involved the upgrading of irrigation

channels, roads, and bridges. Two trends can be observed more recently. First, some of the older Village Organizations identified other partners besides MSDSP in order to diversify their sponsorship base. Second, besides infrastructure there seems to be an increasing trend to invest in income generation projects for vulnerable groups, like the construction of a safflower mill, the distribution of chickens to poor, female-headed households, or the layout of an orchard.

## ... to charity work

The Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation (IKRF) represents an entirely different approach. The IKRF started to work in Tajikistan during the war in mid-1995. Though officially a foundation and not a state institution, the IKRF is one of the main channels for social welfare in Iran as well as the Iranian government's main conduit for international humanitarian aid. It has five field offices in Tajikistan and plans for two more. According to its statistics, the IKRF assists 6,000 needy households in the country, totalling some 35,000 beneficiaries. The foundation's key target group are widows and orphans—a focal group in Islamic charity—and poor female-headed households. The latter are indeed a relatively substantial group in Rasht and other parts of Tajikistan due to the civil war and, more recently, labour migration.

The IKRF's field office in Garm is one of three in the Rasht valley and covers the districts of Garm, Tajikabad, and Jirgital. It has four employees and has a much more discrete profile than the MSDSP with which, as far as we know, it has no operational contacts. Its activities in the area reflect the IKRF programme in Tajikistan and have no community mobilization or training approach. Initially, it provided humanitarian assistance to one hundred families of war widows, gradually expanding

to the present five hundred. The beneficiaries receive bi-monthly food and household packages, usually until a son reaches majority age. Part of the food and household products which are distributed by the IKRF is purchased from local markets, part is imported from Iran. The IKRF Garm branch provides similar assistance to some sixty pensioners as well as a number of stipends to children from poor households who attend school in Garm.

Another IKRF activity is the repair of houses of widows and poor families. At the time of research, this was planned for 30 dwellings in the Garm branch area. One of the IKRF's more peculiar activities is the provision of marriage trousseaus and household sets to girls from needy families who plan to marry. According to its data, the IKRF assisted 250 newlyweds in Tajikistan this way and planned to assist another 750 in late 2006 and 2007. The IKRF also organizes activities like *iftar* (fast breaking) meals during Ramadan and offers help to widows and pensioners with administrative formalities. To ensure that the funds reach

[H]umanitarian needs ... resulted in a certain indifference towards the origin or "denomination" of aid ...

targeted groups, the foundation's local staff study the social and financial situation of applicants.

## Beyond sectarianism

That both the Aga Khan Development Network and the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation are called "Shiite organizations" means that they have been founded by, and are linked to, a Shiite establishment. In the case of the AKDN, this establishment is the Ismaili Imamate and, as such, the wider Ismaili Shiite community which has the peculiarity of being a non-territorial diaspora. For the IKRF, in contrast, it is Iran's official-clerical establishment and as such, a state and its interests. This does not mean that the bulk of their staff and beneficiaries are Shiite or that they have an agenda of spreading the Ismaili or Imami (Twelver) brands of Shiite Islam among non-Shiite populations. There are actually no indicators or anecdotal evidence that either one of the organizations is involved in such activities in Rasht. In terms of staffing, the vast majority of both organization's staff and cadres are from the Rasht area and, as such, of Sunni background.

As far as the Rasht goes, the AKDN-MSDSP and the IKRF clearly have different beneficiary niches. On the whole, their impact in terms of direct employment and income generation is limited as compared to the importance of labour migration and remittances thereof. Nonetheless, they are important in the public field, given the gap left by the collapse of the Soviet welfare state and the technical-financial incapability of the present state to take over its role, especially in more remote areas. Programmes like MSDSP's community mobilization are also instrumental in breaking off the culture of dependence and help cope with stark social changes ranging from the demise of the Soviet state farm system to the increase in female-headed households due to civil war and migration. More "classical" charity like that offered by the IKRF has a certain niche and added value among extremely marginalized parts of society and focuses more on short-term needs. Yet, both beneficiary groups overlap since part of the IKRF's beneficiaries are members of MSDSP-supported Village Organizations.

The Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation, being linked to and funded by Iranian government-affiliated actors (even though it is registered as a non-governmental organization) pretty much operates on its own, is not integrated in the wider development community, and fits into a wider interest consolidation movement by the Iranian government in Tajikistan. This also includes the import of Iranian goods and the co-funding and implementation of a number of transport and hydroelectric projects. As the IKRF cadres interviewed stressed, the IKRF considers itself pan-Islamic and non-sectarian and illustrated this by pointing to activities among other needy non-Shiite Muslims, like in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

By contrast, the Aga Khan Development Network and MSDSP co-operate with a number of international donors like the Canadian International Development Agency and the UK's Department for International Development. Their expansion into non-Shiite areas (and non-Ismaili in particular) like Rasht also reflects a rationale. The AKDN is generally a vehicle for social advancement and economic power for the Ismaili minority in Tajikistan as it is in other countries where it operates. A project coordinator working on conflict prevention found that Ismailis form a large part of the staff of AKDN and MSDSP as compared to their overall share in the population, which is normal since they are related to the Ismaili leadership and were active in Ismaili areas first. Their expansion into non-Ismaili areas over a number of years is strategically motivated: first, all Ismaili areas in the country are already covered and have little room for expansion; second, if the AKDN would be perceived to privilege only one community it might cause sectarian tensions where there are none; and third, being non-exclusive is also important to its international donors.

## Legitimacy in a non-Shiite context

The AKDN-MSDSP and the IKRF are the only Muslim aid organizations that have operated in the Rasht valley since the civil war. The fact that they are of Shiite rather than Sunni background like the near-totality of the population raises the question of how their presence is perceived and how they gained legitimacy with both the authorities and the population for long-term activities. When both the MSDSP and the IKRF started to work in Rasht in the late nineties, this was still a conflict area largely under UTO control. Major obstacles were the numerous checkpoints set up by governmental and opposition militias and the suspi-

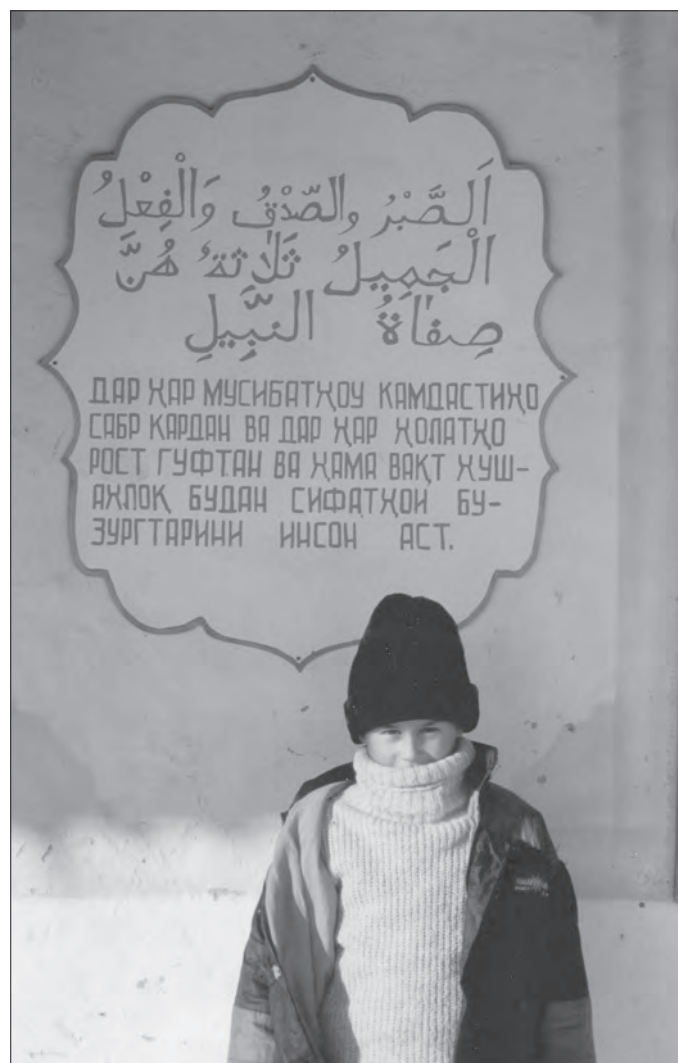


PHOTO BY BRUNO DE CORDIER, 2001

Boy near village mosque in Andarak, Tajikistan

cions and arbitrariness of individual commanders. Much of the access and legitimacy building in UTO territory went through ad hoc arrangements with commanders, often on the basis of personal networks. One example mentioned during the research is that of an UTO commander from Tajikabad who was sympathetic to the "Ismaili" MSDSP because of his spouse's Ismaili origins.

The post-conflict Tajikistan's secular regime, for its part, seems more comfortable with Shiite aid organizations for these are unlikely to propagate militant forms of Sunni Islam—adhered to by part of the UTO at the time—among Rasht's predominantly Sunni population. What about the grassroots level? Two factors seem to determine the perception of Shiite aid organizations in Rasht: first, the acute humanitarian needs, caused by the collapse of the Soviet economy, political instability, and economic blockade, which resulted in a certain indifference towards the origin or "denomination" of aid (an attitude needing to be understood in light of the striking absence at the time of Sunni humanitarian actors, in particular, of those from the Gulf); second, due to the suppression of religious practice and clerics among Sunnis, Shiites, as well as Ismailis in the Soviet Union, there is no strong sectarian consciousness among the population. So despite the ambivalent attitudes towards religion, aid, and development in former Soviet environments and the non-Shiite background of their beneficiaries, the described organizations have gained legitimacy by partly filling the void left by a dysfunctional state and by appealing to a non-sectarian Muslim philanthropic discourse.

## Notes

1. Ismaili Shiites form 2.8 percent of Tajikistan's population of some 7 million. Most live in the province of Kuhistan-i-Badakhshan and in the capital of Dushanbe.

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# Global Players & Local Agency in Rural Morocco

BERTRAM TURNER

In large parts of the contemporary Islamic world, the local population is increasingly facing competition between different transnational actors for implementing their respective agendas. These agendas are often framed as legitimising legal templates and claim universal validity. In these competitive processes it is particularly the development organizations which vulgarize ideals of the western way of life and political-legal notions such as development, democratization, good governance, sustainability and environmental protection. These organisations increasingly encounter, however, the repercussions of acts by transnationally active Islamic movements propagating a return to the roots of Islam in everyday life. The socio-legal consequences of the competition between transnational actors for control over local contexts have rarely been addressed and theorized, however. Legal anthropology is challenged, on the one hand, to develop a theoretical framework to address the issue of an increasing competition between transnational actors and, on the other, to analyse how discrepancies between different and contradictory approaches initiate and inform local discourses on violence, conflict, resistance, and local identity. The analysis of a concrete constellation in rural South West Morocco exemplifies the relevance of the matter.<sup>1</sup>

The thesis in this article is that focusing on the competition between global players for local control reveals that competition accelerates the scalar dynamics in transnational-state-local interaction. It is argued that the rising degree of legal cross-referencing serves to boost the legal agency of local actors. The article suggests a concept of "empowered legal agency" achieved by an emphasis on socio-legal identity and local culture.

## The local setting and its transnational interveners

Before referring to the concrete example, I shall briefly outline the situation in the rural Souss in Morocco and the intervening global players. The Souss is the area of the unique forestal ecosystem of the Argan forest and simultaneously an intensively used agrarian region.

**In Morocco, as elsewhere, Western development initiatives face increasing competition from transnationally active Islamic movements, thereby complicating the dynamics of transnational-state-local interaction. The author analyses these dynamics by focusing on the dilemmas that arose when, in his research site, a pious Muslim won a sum of money in the "Ramadan lottery" and was engulfed by contradictory transnational advice. Ironically, this competition between global players boosted the legal agency of local actors.**

The majority of the Souss people are farmers and peasants and are organized in village communities. The village legal arena contains, under the umbrella of state law, various constitutive legal components including habitual and various Islamic legal elements. In 1998 a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve was established while, over recent years, agrarian production for the world market has continuously been expanding. This combination attracts many transnational development agencies and

donor organizations, which propagate a sustainable development approach, environmental protection and the formation of civil society structures. A strongly antagonistic approach to intervening in local affairs arrived with the Salafiyya, the transnational Islamic movement, in 1999. The Salafis propagate an adjustment of all spheres of life towards their own idea of the one and only correct Islamic lifestyle, which entails a rigid perception of the basic religious principles. The thing that both types of global players, the secular and the religious, have in common is that they can rely on very few experts on the ground. Development agents running projects tend to be based at regional centres. They instruct and advise local personnel and act as consultants. Development agencies recruit most of their local employees among the young unemployed intellectuals from the region with university diplomas. The Salafiyya is headed by a few religious leaders who transmit Salafi ideology via Islamic schools in the towns. They send missionaries to the countryside for the mobilization of local adherents and assist with the formation of local supporters. The Salafiyya organized a regional charity network of local Salafi cells, while development agencies worked towards self-help, organizing production cooperatives and sustainable forms of resource management.

Differences between the competing actors become particularly obvious when looking at their attitudes towards each other and their implicit mutual interpretation. Officially, development agencies are indifferent towards the religious sphere in Morocco, in general, and towards Islamic activism in the region in particular. The Salafiyya, in contrast, address the issue of development impacts and openly criticize effects they interpret as negative. They condemn western influence and warn against the destructive forces of transnational legal treaties and development cooperation. The Salafis characterize their intervention as integrated within a general discourse on growing tensions between western lifestyle and Islam. Thus, they contribute to an already ongoing debate in rural Morocco about the benefits and disadvantages of concepts of sustainable development in the kind of resource exploitation propagated by western development agencies. In contrast, when asked about their opinion on the increase of Islamic activism and the Salafi criticisms of the pagan neoliberal development agenda, the local Moroccan development brokers representing the German GTZ and Oxfam Canada denied even recognizing the existence of an Islamic opposition to their agenda. How the competitors act in a local context is accurately shown by the following ethnographic example.

Reception for French eco-experts



PHOTO BY BERTRAM TURNER, 2002

## The Ramadan lottery and contradictory transnational advice

In the "Ramadan lottery" in autumn 2005, a villager won a small sum of money. This became a big issue in the community. The man, a pious Muslim, was searching for advice on what to do with this money and raised the issue in the village cafe. A public debate was immediately sparked. According to local religious ideas, the money is impure because it comes from a lottery that is *haram*. For this reason, it would not make sense to invest the sum, because one must not benefit from haram money. This religious attitude has had a strong impact on local practice. The local grocer who had granted a credit to the man announced he would accept money for the redemption of the debt without hesitation, because that would not mean "investment." This solution would have been approved by the majority of the villagers. The argument was, firstly, that the interpretation of the grocer was convincing and, secondly, that it is good behaviour and fosters the traditional system of the local economy to pay a debt earlier than necessary once in a while.

The local model of economic cooperation enjoys a longstanding tradition and is perceived as an expression of local solidarity. Customary regulation has contributed much to the economic development of a local moral economy since the 1980s, which has been developed within the cash crop sector. The local credit system allowed for the reinvention and financial hedging of sharecropping arrangements. Thus, sharecropping basically relies on a local legal arrangement that includes the informal credit system because the state legal order considers it an outmoded form of production, and Islamic law also expresses reservations regarding sharecropping. The local peasants prefer to raise credit during the period between sowings and harvest by a local grocer they trust. The grocers customarily only charge very low interest rates and are more interested in committing the debtors to their enterprise.

A local development broker completely disregarded all existing reservations and proposed to the winning villager that he use his money for granting micro-credits to others, which would be a "good deed." At the same time, the money would generate capital surplus, with which one could even increase the number of good deeds. Once fed in the circle of benefits, the money would be cleaned and no longer remain haram.

The man caused a great deal of consternation by putting forward this proposal. Micro-credits, previously introduced by external actors, had a poor reputation. They had been introduced as an instrument against rural poverty, and in order to strengthen self-help, and were widely promoted by development actors. The micro-credits were tied to specific small-scale economic enterprises as stipulated by the creditors—but the system was not under the control of its initiators for long. Alongside Moroccan organizations granting micro-credits on behalf of the transnational creditors, some black sheep appeared making credits available under extortionate conditions and for highly risky economic activities. The debtors realized too late what was happening and felt they were in serious trouble. Because of this, none of the villagers was prepared to act publicly against the prohibition on making a profit by exploiting the needs of members of the community.

The development expert's further suggestions merely provoked the shaking of heads. He proposed investing the money in fencing the man's plot in the forest with cacti lines, a favourite project of the environmental protectors. This is, however, against local law, because even plots where the holder is exercising exclusive exploitation rights must remain openly accessible, because pasture is a common right.

The Salafis, in turn, proposed transforming the haram money into halal money by way of the winner surrendering it to them as a charity donation (*sadaqa*). This was cause for common amusement. A *sadaqa* donation is defined as a voluntary pious donation to people in need. The act of giving *sadaqa* protects the giver against possessiveness and purifies his soul and his property and is agreeable to God. Accordingly, there is no need for an intermediary. But there was still a more concrete reason for the public reaction. In the village there is a Salafi grocer, not the lottery winner's creditor, who is well known as an expert in "ritual transformative transactions." The line of argument that he and his co-adherents put forward was not generally convincing, because they were perceived as pretending to transform all haram money into halal simply by investing it in the movements'

charity work. When making such investments, the grocer never shied away from cheating people, as he argued that they earned their money in a haram way and were, therefore, unable to give a *sadaqa*, which the grocer then offered to organize for them. Thus, the Salafis more or less embezzled haram money and invested it in the Salafiyya's charity network in the previous owner's stead, in order to provide the involuntary and deceived giver—and themselves—with spiritual remuneration. At the same time the grocer benefited from the donation itself because of the "financial reflux" from the recipients of charity. However, *sadaqa* brings spiritual benefits for the giver only if the donation is consciously made with good intent. As a result, few trusted this Salafi grocer, and his clientele was made up exclusively of his brothers in belief. In this particular case, when the Salafi grocer offered the same service to the lottery winner, the latter preferred to redeem the larger part of his debt and to remain loyal to his own grocer.

The implicit effect of these debates was that the villagers experienced a growing external challenge to their local model of distributive obligations, which is based on ties of solidarity within the village and on mutuality between people living together. The Salafis criticized the local credit system, while misusing it at the same time. This was because the powerful local social work and mutual aid structures, including redistributive rules, are deeply rooted in local religiosity and are connected with local religious rituals; and for this reason, the Islamic activists explicitly refused to contribute to it. The Salafiyya accepted only those distributive rules, which were in accordance with Islamic law such as *zakat*. An additional argument the Salafis employed was to contend that the local model of mutual material support simply balances out the lack of state assistance for social security. The development agents, on the other hand, emphasized that transnational financial support should be kept apart from local distributive obligations. They explicitly claimed that micro-credits and extra money for environmental protection measures should remain exempt from these obligations. Furthermore, the development agencies overrode the conventional economic circles of good exchange and mutual support based on social and territorial proximity. How to profit from the investments all transnational actors are offering without causing losses to the local economy and undoing local social cohesion remains a matter of considerable debate.

The example reveals that the local legal arena where rules are negotiated is providing an indispensable frame of reference for local identity interacting with and sometimes integrating or absorbing external impulses. The competitive nature of transnational intervention posed a challenge for local cohesion that was new in terms of both its quality and its intensity. Local people acted as members of village-NGOs, production cooperatives, or religious movements in order to access external resources. This provoked serious misunderstandings regarding the judicial competence and intervention potentialities of these new institutions in local areas of conflict.

The most pressing and challenging task in the discursive process turned out to be the re-evaluation of criteria of local identity and local belonging—which in turn had consequences for the local configuration of economic power-relations. The informal village councils intensively discussed the implications of the various legal repertoires for local identity formation. The ability of local actors to canalize transnational interventionism and to create sufficient room to play transnational actors off against each other has finally led to a social process that can be described as "empowering legal agency." This reaction must not necessarily be interpreted as "taming globalization." But identity and social belonging prove to be resilient, as well as indispensable, as the basis for maintaining trust and legal security in the face of external challenges.

### Note

1. For more details see Bertram Turner, "Competing Global Players in Rural Morocco: Upgrading Legal Arenas," in "Dynamics of Plural Legal Orders," ed. F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann, special issue, *Journal of Legal Pluralism* 53/54 (2006): 101–39.

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# The Islamists Are Coming!

Exchange of dialogue between the Western and Muslim worlds has been going on for decades, and has intensified in the wake of the attacks on the United States of America on September 11, 2001. Yet one of the factors that has hindered this dialogue process is the apparent fear of "radical" Islam, a label attached to grassroots Islamist movements and parties that struggle for an Islamic state, if not an Islamic society. Consequently many of the dialogues that have taken place have tended to be inter-elite affairs, bringing together Western elites and their Muslim counterparts who often share similar educational backgrounds, cultural affinities, and political viewpoints. Accordingly, many of these dialogues have, thus far, tended to take place in the absence of those who might be labelled as "real" Islamists.

Yet it has to be noted that, in many Muslim countries today, it is not possible to avoid or ignore the reality on the ground, where political Islam is often seen as a legitimate and popular force that appeals to the masses. The numbers alone testify to the relevance of such groups and movements. The Pan-Malaysian Islamic party (PAS), for instance, counts among its numbers around one million members and active supporters; the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM) has a quarter of a million supporters; the Justice and Prosperity party of Indonesia (PKS) which began as a campus-based student movement not only contributed to the fall of President Suharto but is now installed in power as one of the key coalition partners in the government of Indonesia.

It was the desire to reach out and engage with such grassroots Islamist movements that prompted a change of approach by the German government recently, with the Task Force for Germany's Dialogue with the Muslim World (of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs) working with the Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) of Berlin to host a two week lecture and study tour by Islamists from Malaysia and Indonesia. In a landmark project going against the grain, the Task Force was willing to invite Islamists from Malaysia's PAS and ABIM and Indonesia's PKS to Germany to engage in a series of important dialogues with the German public, meeting local German political parties, funding agencies, foundations, journalists, academics, and students.

## Open disagreement

One of the conditions of the dialogue tour was that all discussions would be frank and open, with no taboos or restrictions on subjects discussed. In several of the discussions this rule was put to the test, as the firmly held positions of both sides left no room for agreement or compromise. A discussion on the issue of freedom of religion, for instance, witnessed the Islamists of Malaysia and Indonesia insisting that freedom to convert to Islam did not entail the freedom to *leave* Islam; while representatives of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung were unable to accept the rationale behind this position. In such cases, it became clear where the lines of difference and disagreement lay, and it was equally important to have these differences stated openly, albeit in a civil manner. Other thorny issues discussed included the meaning of "secularism" and whether the Islamists were able to accept the notion of a secular state that plays the role of honest broker between the different faith communities of a multireligious nation-state.

Having said this, it is noteworthy that the Islamists of Malaysia and Indonesia—particularly the representatives of PAS, ABIM and PKS—were more interested in questions of political-economic structural reform than anything else. During discussions held at the offices of the SPD and the Frederik Ebert Stiftung, for instance, much time was spent discussing the future of the welfare state in Germany and Europe. The Islamists of PAS and PKS were particularly keen to understand the evolution of the welfare state system in Germany, and whether the economic changes brought about by the unification and economic integration of the EU meant that the welfare state was doomed. In some ways these concerns reflected the Islamists' own seriousness when dealing

**In an effort to counter the unfruitful labelling practices that have characterized dialogue between Western and Muslim Worlds, the German government in cooperation with the Zentrum Moderner Orient invited Southeast Asian Islamists to Berlin to engage in a more fruitful exchange of viewpoints. The authors point out that although the discussions did not necessary lead to agreement, the encounters did create room for nuance and understanding.**

with questions of economic structural reform, and demonstrated their readiness to assume political power.

## Pleasant surprises

All in all, many of the discussions were enlightening for those who took part. The meeting with the organizers of the Berlin demonstrations against the invasion of Iraq, for example, was instructive in the sense that it showed

how solidarity between peoples and nations could be generated despite cultural and religious differences. During the discussion with the organizers of the demonstrations, the Islamists were interested to learn that most of those who took part in them were ordinary Germans of non-Muslim background, including a significant representation of German Jews and Christians. Such examples provided a healthy model to contrast with the usual tide of anti-Semitic and anti-Western discourse so prevalent among many Islamist movements in the Muslim world today.

The Islamists were also pleasantly surprised by the positive reaction from the German public who seemed open to the idea of listening to the Islamists speak for themselves, even if they did not necessarily agree with everything that was said. As Dzulkefly Ahmad of PAS noted: "Before arriving in Berlin we were somewhat sceptical about the reception we would receive. We assumed that there would be much anti-Muslim hysteria and that as Islamists we would be dismissed as 'conservatives' or 'fanatics.' But I have to say that we were very impressed by the level of understanding of the German students and general public, and how they took us seriously and listened to what we had to say, even if we did not agree on everything. This has made us change our earlier viewpoint and assessment of Europe and has given us a new perspective on life in the West."

## A new realism?

To what extent this project will have a lasting impact on the Malaysian and Indonesian Islamists' view of the West is uncertain, though the follow-up process has already begun with the Malaysian Islamic Party requesting the German government to send the German academic Dieter Senghass to Malaysia for a series of public lectures and seminars to be hosted by PAS. Much of the credit has to go to the Task Force for Germany's Dialogue with the Muslim World for taking up the ZMO's project and supporting it wholeheartedly; for this venture has opened up new avenues for the inter-religious dialogue process to proceed in the near future, and marks a new level of realism on the part of the governments of Western Europe who appreciate that political Islam is a factor to be taken seriously, albeit with reservations.

**FARISH A. NOOR &  
KATHARINA ZÖLLER**

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# Brazilian TV & Muslimness in Kyrgyzstan

JULIE MCBRIEN

Delfuza, Zeba, and Mukadas, sisters living in a small town in Kyrgyzstan, were gathered around the television talking while commercials played. Suddenly one sister hushed the others and drew their attention to the images on the screen. The pictures were of beautifully dressed Muslim women, swirling strands of DNA, and images from Brazil and Morocco. It was a promotional trailer for the new Brazilian soap opera *Clone*. When I asked the girls what the new serial was about, they replied they were not sure, but mentioned that it had something to do with Brazilians and Muslims. While the images of the Moroccan Muslims had grabbed their attention, the girls said nothing about the rather unique central topic of the soap opera: human cloning. The sisters were not the only ones. For many viewers around the world, it was the lavishly presented, and highly romanticized, Muslim “Other” that made the soap opera so popular. Indeed, one observer noted that Armenia had gone “Arabic over wildly popular soap opera.”<sup>1</sup> Another reported that, “‘El Clon’ is leaving Latin America wide-eyed and drop-jawed for all things Arab.”<sup>2</sup>

The sisters’ reactions to the trailer run in January 2004 indicated that the responses of residents in the town of Bazaar-Korgon (30,000 inhabitants) would be similar. It’s not difficult to understand why. While the Soviet Union had long since ended and with it the militant control of religion, its secularist legacies—which had vilified pious Muslim behaviour and turned Muslim identity into little more than an ethno-national marker—continued.<sup>3</sup> This precluded any meaningful debate over the constitution of Muslimness well into the post-Soviet period. Moreover, with nearly all international television broadcast coming via Moscow and access to the Internet and satellite dishes severely limited, the amount of media from other parts of the Muslim world was highly curbed. However, the end of the 1990s saw a relatively free religious environment in Kyrgyzstan and the concomitant development of space for religious practice and discussion. It was within this environment that *Clone* was aired.

As the months went on, and *Clone* rose to tremendous popularity in the community, public discussion showed that what had most piqued viewers’ interest was the programme’s portrayal of Muslims. Residents said the soap was so fascinating because it was the first serial they had seen with (non-Central Asian) Muslims as leading characters. In short, they explained, watching the soap opera was a chance for them to see how

Muslims really lived. *Clone* became a part of the community’s daily discussions over the nature of Islam and Muslimness. Whether this took place between family members, friends, colleagues, or acquaintances, or as part of the internal dialogue of individual residents, *Clone* became a source of information, agitation, and encouragement in local Kyrgyzstan circles.

In contrasting the “two worlds” of Brazil and Morocco, *Clone*’s creators objectified the places, lifestyles, and communities of the soap opera presenting them as fundamentally different from one another. Moreover, through text and visual imagery, they rendered a highly orientalized portrayal of Muslims and Muslim life especially regarding issues of gender and female sequestering. As has already been widely established in the anthropological literature on media, viewers actively engage in the production of meaning of a given media text or image, productively

**Soap operas draw at least part of their success from their clever use of platitudes that may or may not be taken seriously by viewers. In this article, the author focuses on *Clone*, a Brazilian show in which Muslims are depicted in classic, and blunt, stereotypical fashion. While travelling from its intended audience in Brazil to unanticipated, but equally excited, audiences in Kyrgyzstan the soap opera obtained interesting new meanings. Ironically, the stereotypical images contributed positively to local debates on what it means to be Muslim.**

utilizing its material.<sup>4</sup> Their interpretations, opinions, and usages of media are often highly divergent from those imagined or intended by the producers. It is with these considerations in mind, and within the wider context of post-Soviet Muslim life in Central Asia, that we can understand how, despite such orientalized portrayals, the material gathered from viewing *Clone* widened community perceptions about “other” Muslims, was utilized in individ-

ual self construction, and served as a resource in community debates concerning what Islam “truly” was and, thus, what the responsibilities of community members as Muslims should be.

## Understanding the soap and its imagery

*Clone* was produced by the Brazilian media giant TV Globo and aired in Brazil in 2001. The programme was then syndicated and shown around the world. As previously noted, the seemingly unique theme of this soap opera was its use of a cloned human being as one of the central characters in the tale. The main story-line revolved around the love affair of a Brazilian man, Lucas, and a Brazilian born woman of Moroccan descent, Jade [*zha-dee*]. The couple, who met in Morocco after Jade moved there to live with her mother’s family, began their love affair in the 1980s. The affair, alas, was ill-fated and Jade was married off by her family to Said. Lucas married as well and thus began their long separation. The soap opera followed the lives of these two lovers as they managed to steal away for a night alone every few years.

All in all, the visual representations of Morocco were of an a-temporal place of extreme beauty and sensuality that was fundamentally different from “modern” Brazil. The episodes which dealt primarily with Moroccans focused precisely on the subjects where variance with “modern” life was perceived to be the greatest. These instalments largely revolved around issues related to gender: seclusion of women, patriarchal society, polygamy, and dress. However, *Clone* did not simply demonize the Muslim other. Through complex techniques of mirroring typical of the Orientalizing discourses described by Said, the portrayal simultaneously romanticized certain “un-lost” portions of the other’s culture.<sup>5</sup> Though Muslims were depicted as backward and lacking the virtues of modernity, the portrayal was a beautiful one that valorized certain aspects of the (perceived) Moroccan culture.

## Internal dialogues—discussing *Clone*

Just after her marriage in 2000, Shahista, a resident of Bazaar-Korgon, said she and her husband came “closer to religion.” A few years later, at age 26, Shahista slowly began to transform her mode of dress and veiling, covering more and more of her body. Shahista was an avid fan of *Clone*, as were nearly all the members of her immediate and extended families.

Shahista said that she learned something new from *Clone* every time she watched it for, as she explained, the characters in the programme dealt with the same kinds of problems she faced. Though Shahista lived in a nearly all Muslim society, more covered forms of veiling like she had come to wear (*hijab*) were not widespread. She was sometimes stared at when walking in public and would often overhear harsh comments on her mode of dress while shopping at the bazaar. When she watched *Clone* Shahista said she could relate to the feeling of difference that the veiled Moroccans in Brazil encountered. Beyond that she said she found validation for her form of dress through them. For Shahista seeing beautiful young women veiling in the most fashionable ways confirmed her idea that veiling was not a part of an antiquated religion as the critics in her town intimated.

[W]atching the soap opera was a chance for them to see how Muslims really lived.



Still from <http://oclone.on.neobee.net/>, a fansite of *Clone*

Shahista was not the only one who relished the fashionable side of *Clone*. New stores took the names of beloved characters and some dresses were dubbed "Jade." Girls in Bazaar-Korgon who were considering veiling said they dreamed of having a collection of scarves and clothes like Jade's or Latifah's. Through these characters, girls in Bazaar-Korgon saw that Islam and veiling were not at war with fashion. Indeed, interestingly, even those girls who had not previously considered veiling said that they would now experiment with the veil because of the influence of *Clone*.

Gulmira, a 20 year-old university student said that although she called herself a Muslim she was simply "not doing anything with her religion." Gulmira was also an avid *Clone* watcher. She recounted that sometimes, after viewing *Clone*, she tried on her mother's headscarves. However, Gulmira did not tie them like her mother did—at the nape of the neck. Rather she experimented with the various ways Jade and Latifah wore their scarves—styles which all fully covered their hair and neck. Gulmira said "I did it because I wanted to know how it would feel and whether, if I someday wanted to wear my scarf like this, it would suit the shape of my face." Gulmira said she had never seriously considered becoming a more devout Muslim and, in light of her friends' practices and her respect for them, she sometimes wondered whether she should even identify herself as one. *Clone* did not directly help her with her questions, but she remarked that because of the soap opera she no longer believed that the veil was always ugly and only for the old. It could be a beautiful and fashionable form of dress, she explained, albeit one that was worn by Muslims more "devout" than herself.

### Is that how Muslims really do it?

In Bazaar-Korgon there is a sense that during the 70 years of socialism, Muslims in Central Asia lost the knowledge (and practice) of true Islam and proper Muslim behaviour. As a result, many residents of the town perceived themselves as least among equals in the global Muslim community. This feeling of inferiority was often revealed when residents discussed *Clone*. One of the most repeated phrases I heard when viewing or discussing the programme with others was the epiphanic statement "Oh, so that's how Muslims *really* do it." Many residents thusly attributed educational value to the soap opera and commented on how much they were learning from it.

Though they often uttered this phrase, it was always followed by a critical discussion of certain aspects of the programme. Thus, though residents often depicted *Clone* as a course on "Islam for beginners" it is better understood as a programme that widened their exposure to

alternative ways of living and interpreting Islam and then, through critical reflection, a resource they drew from when constructing their own views about Islam and Muslimness.

Ziyod, Shahista's husband and a 26 years old bazaar merchant, had also become "closer to religion." Ziyod watched *Clone* but said that he did not always agree with it. He explained that some episodes showed the Moroccans doing things that Muslims should not be doing, like dancing or publicly kissing at wedding ceremonies. He explained that both of these practices were un-Islamic. Despite this, he said, he still enjoyed the programme.

Kadir, a local school teacher age 50, watched *Clone* nightly but he found fault with some of the actions of the Moroccan characters. On one occasion, Kadir contrasted various customs shown in the programme with those kept in Kyrgyzstan—such as practices which establish a girl's virginity at marriage—concluding that the former were unnecessary components of proper Muslimness. The important thing in a Muslim's life, he said, is that one has faith and behaves decently to others.

While Ziyod's and Kadir's interpretations and applications of scenes from *Clone* differed—one drew on *Clone* to narrow appropriate Muslim behaviour while the other employed the soap to widen it—both utilized the soap as a resource in renegotiating, and then asserting, their inter-

pretations of Islam and Muslimness. Shahista however, had a different reaction. She chose not to make normative claims about the actions of the Moroccan Muslims. She said "In *Clone* they do some Muslim things differently. I don't know if they are wrong, or if the Muslims there are just a different type of Muslim. Before, I thought there were only Muslims and Christians. Now I am learning that there are many types of Muslims."

Shahista's realization that there were many types of Muslims and many ways of doing things is the new reality residents of Bazaar-Korgon are facing. While Soviet era notions of proper Muslimness still abound, the lack of Soviet authorizing structures, the rather weak contemporary Kyrgyzstani state, and a relatively open society has provided fertile ground for a proliferation of religious views and practices which have confronted formally stable, widespread notions about Islam. In this environment the material gathered from viewing *Clone* became a resource, and in many cases an emancipating resource, in these individual and collective debates of meaning.

The orientalized portrayal of Muslims in *Clone* is an example of the kind of ill-informed stereotypes that still abound concerning "Muslims and modernity" in contemporary media. The uses of its contents by Muslims in Bazaar-Korgon nonetheless reveals that not only can popular culture be a site for resistance, it can also be a tool for viewers in creative processes of alternative societal, and self, formation. In reconstructing social life after the collapse of socialism, Muslims of Bazaar-Korgon are engaged in forming alternative modernities that include "religion." It is intriguing that from among the tools and resources they draw from are some of the most archaic projections and images that secular modernity can provide.

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### Notes

1. Marianna Grigoryan, "Armenia goes Arabic over wildly popular soap opera," *Armenian Diaspora.com* 10 November 2004.
2. Kimi Eisele, "Arab affinities—sci-fi soap opera 'Clone' sweeps Latin America," *Pacific News Service* 1 November 2004.
3. See Julie McBrien, "Listening to the Wedding Speaker: Discussing Religion and Culture in Southern Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey* 25, no. 3 (2006): 341–358.
4. E.g., Purnima Mankekar, "National Texts and Gendered Lives: an Ethnography of Television Viewers in a Northern Indian City," *American Ethnologist* 20, no. 3 (1993): 543–563. There are always limits to individual and collective agency. For an example concerning television see Lisa Rofel, "Yearnings: Televisual Love and Melodramatic Politics in Contemporary China," *American Ethnologist* 21, no. 4 (1994): 700–722.
5. Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin Books, 1978).

# Meeting, Mating, and Cheating Online in Iran

PARDIS MAHDAVI

Over the past two years, Iran has seen a major technological revolution to accompany its sexual and social revolution.<sup>1</sup> Today, Farsi is the third (some say fourth) most used language in the blogosphere<sup>2</sup> and young Iranians increasingly use the internet and cyberspace to explore relationships and engage in forms of cultural consumption prohibited by the regime. In 2004 and 2005 I conducted fieldwork in Tehran among (mostly) middle or upper middle class educated young adults. I used ethnographic methods such as participant observation (in internet cafés and in cyberspaces such as chat rooms), in-depth interviews, and group discussions, to describe Iranian young people's uses of the internet in three major ways: 1) as a place for cultural consumption and production prohibited by the government (including news, movies, music, etc.); 2) to create a blogosphere or Weblogistan as a venue for exchanging information and creating a space for the emerging youth sexual culture, and perhaps most importantly; 3) as an unregulated means of meeting, mating, and cheating with potential partners online. In the context of a modernizing Iran, it is important to explore the emergence of this new "cyber-sexual culture," its identity formation, cultural consumption patterns, and sexual and social trends amongst urban Iranian young adults.

The question underlying the study was: how do young adults understand and enact their erotic and sexual lives within the laws and restrictions of the Islamic Republic? Many of the young people in Iran see themselves as "children of the revolution" born to a nation in the midst of political upheaval. Interestingly, the Islamic Republic's free education policies have created a highly literate and politically charged youth with voting rights (age 16 currently) who are ready and willing to express their dissent.<sup>3</sup>

## Sexual revolution and internet usage

Many young people in Iran describe changes in sexual and social behaviour and discourse as a "sexual revolution" (*enqelab-e-jensi*). According to informants throughout the study, because the current Islamic regime seeks to exercise its power through legislation on moral issues, young people argue that they are undermining the regime by attacking the fabric of morality through which the regime seeks to govern. Many of these young adults feel that by consuming goods prohibited by the regime, and engaging in activities deemed immoral by the regime (i.e. wearing "revealing" Islamic dress, downloading Western music online, dancing, drinking, or premarital sex), they are undermining the power of the Islamists and enacting a quiet revolution.

For many young Iranians, a large part of this quiet revolution is taking place online and in cyberspace. Currently, the government does censor a number of internet sites (about 35%), particularly sites that touch upon "red line issues" as defined by the government. These issues include, but are not limited to: pornography, politically infused blogs, websites talking about women's rights, and certain types of Western media. Sites where users are able to maintain anonymity (meaning sites that do not require the user to

**Urban young Iranians have recently begun to use the blogosphere and cyberspace to construct new sexual and social discourses. This article describes how Iranian youth link indigenous discourses of sexuality to other discourses of sexuality and how they understand their practices as political and social statements. For these youths, the internet provides important avenues to circumvent restrictions on cultural consumption and production while allowing them to engage in "safe" sexual encounters. As such, it fuels the creation of social movements that may pose new challenges to the regime.**

type in an identifying ISP number or accurate user name) are also highly regulated, as are sites such as "Orkut" or "Friendster" which facilitate youth encounters. However, young Iranians are highly skilled at constructing websites and blogs that do touch upon "red line issues," but which are nevertheless hidden from the DCI Smart Filtering system that the IRI authorities use to find and block sites.<sup>4</sup> Young people have become adept at hacking into sites that have been banned, and creating alternative sites for expressing their views—engaging in online "globalized" youth cultures, and meeting and chatting with other young people—which are not "screenable" by the authorities.

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## Sites, blogs, and cosmopolitanism

A large part of the sexual revolution is about participating in an imagined "cosmopolitan" and "globalized" culture and consuming certain types of goods restricted by the government. The goods most demanded by all of the young people I spoke with were information and cultural products coming from the West—though increasingly young people are producing music, films etc. that are banned by the government and then sold online (such as the music of the popular underground rock band O-Hum)—which fulfill a desire to be part of an online "globalized" youth culture. This ideal of an imagined "foreign-ness" is incorporated into the ideal of being cosmopolitan and "modern." The sexual culture in Tehran is influenced by global images, tales, and texts. Cheap CDs, pirated movies, and internet cafes give young people from a range of economic backgrounds access to the global sexual culture.

The blogs and websites of young Iranians living abroad also play a role in this process. Many informants relied on stories and adventures from their "online friends," "web pals," or popular Iranian bloggers (such as the famed Iranian blogger Hoder who now lives in Canada and whose travel blog can be found at [www.hoder.com](http://www.hoder.com)) who travel the world and keep a "travel blog" for models of the West they seek to emulate. Indeed, young Iranians who travel or live abroad take pictures of their lives, surroundings, and any other novelties they experience. One popular Iranian blogger who now lives in New York City would go to night

clubs in New York in between trips to Iran, taking pictures of the line outside clubs, bouncers, walking through the doors, walking onto the dance floors, and even the bathrooms in order to help create the party scene as she lives it outside of Iran. Her site is quite popular amongst young women in Tehran who use the pictures to get ideas about fashion, and live vicariously through the lives of their friends on the other side of the water (*oon-taraf-e-ab*).

In addition to providing a connection to globalizing youth culture and

the party scene, blogs created by Iranian youth also serve as a space for young people to voice their opinions, ask their questions, and vent their frustrations about the changes taking place in their social and sexual lives. They also provide a space in which to discuss problems faced by Iranian youth in a modernizing Iran. One recent blog created by a woman who called herself Asemoun (the sky) focused on the question of hymen reconstructions with a forum for discussing where and how

"By meeting the person online  
first . . . we can be sure that  
taking the risk of a first date will  
actually be worth it."

to get them, and what potential moral or social problems may arise from choosing to undergo the procedure. This suggests that blogs are also turning into important sources of information in a country where sex education before marriage is highly restricted.

## Meeting, mating, ... and cheating online

Since hetero-sociality is heavily regulated in Iran, and an unmarried man and woman may be punished for simply being in the company of one another (let alone having a sexual relationship), internet meeting and mating takes on new significance. Out of the 80 young adults interviewed, more than half indicated that they had at one time or another engaged in some sort of heterosexual relationship through the internet.

For some of these young adults, the interaction took the form of a courtship whereby young men and women would meet through a site such as "Orkut" and begin exchanging emails for a period of time leading up to a face-to-face encounter. At least 5 of the young people I interviewed noted that they had met their current boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, or wife through an online site. They recalled exchanging photographs, poetry, and engaging in instant messaging or chatting before meeting their partner for the first time. Many said that this form of encounter felt "safer" and allowed the young people to get to know their partners before taking the risk of being seen on a date with them. "Going on a date is risky in Iran. I know it's hard for you to conceptualize that, but for us it's a reality," said Gohar, a 20 year old university student. "By meeting the person online first, and getting to know him that way, we can be sure that taking the risk of a first date will actually be worth it," she added. Several other young women indicated the same feeling about online dating as a way to make the risk of an actual encounter "worth it."

Other young people described their use of the internet as a place to safely engage in cybersex. Many of my informants noted that cybersex was safer than sex because it was not as easy to be caught while engaging in anonymous sexual exchange, which did not involve being in the presence of a member of the opposite sex. "My parents don't let me go out that much," explained Roya, a 19 year old beautician. "But I still like to be a part of what my friends are doing, so I just do it online," she said referring to her friends' engagement in sexual relations. "I love to chat online, and I love to have romantic encounters with boys on the internet. Half of them probably send me wrong pictures, but I don't care, I just imagine what they look like while we are exchanging hot sentiments," she added. Several young men added that cybersex was a socially safe way to learn about sex without the embarrassment of having to be in the physical presence of a girl (note that hetero-sociality is not allowed and so many young men do not know how to interact with young women or how to court them, thus the difficulty and potential awkwardness of the first encounter can be a source of extreme anxiety). "I love chatting online and having sexual relations with a cyber-girlfriend because I'm not as shy or awkward," described Hooman, a 22 year old medical student. "It's hard for me with girls. I get shy and I don't know what to do with them, so this way I can work on my sexual style, my sexual courtship before the real thing," he explained. "Plus, this way, my reputation stays intact. No one knows about my cyber-girlfriend, not my parents or my friends, so no one can give me a hard time about it," he added quickly.

Still others (especially married women) with whom I spoke, noted that the internet provided a "safer" way of cheating on their husbands. Some women described cybersex as an outlet for their sexual frustrations. Others said that it was a way to pass the long hours of the days and weeks when their husbands were away. And many noted

that "cyber-cheating," as they called it, was not "real" cheating, and the anonymity of the internet made it so that their husbands would never find out, and their online partners could never find them or blackmail them.

Because reputations and respect are important in the Iranian context where gossip is often rampant, many people rely on the anonymity and privacy of the internet, one of the few spheres in which they can enjoy any privacy to facilitate what the regime and society view as immoral encounters. Because the regime seeks to legislate on people's bodies, their sexualities, and intimacy, and because they have the right to enter private homes at any time and arrest all "moral offenders," young people have delved more deeply into the "safer" space of the internet as a venue to seek out intimacy.

Urban young Iranians thus use the internet as a way to further their social and sexual revolution, indulge their consumptive desires, be part of a globalizing youth culture, and to carve out a private sphere for themselves. It is true that purchasing illegal goods or engaging in cyber-sex may not be seen as an obvious form of resistance; nevertheless, it must be looked at as situated resistance. Many key informants reminded me that because wearing an *Adidas* shirt (purchased online) or being in an internet café and chatting online with a cyber-lover could get them arrested, this shirt was more than a label, and cybersex was more than a passing amusement; these behaviours challenge the social and moral order of the Islamic Republic, and are part of a social movement of resistance currently enacted among many of today's young urban Iranians.

## Notes

1. For a discussion of the sexual revolution in Iran, see: P. Mahdavi, "Passionate Uprisings: Young people, sexuality and politics in post-revolutionary Iran," in *Culture, Health and Sexuality* (2007).
2. Yahyanejad and Anvari, presentation at Iran: Future Prospects (IFP) Conference 2005, Stanford University, October 2006.
3. K. Basmenji, *Tehran Blues: Youth Culture in Iran* (Tehran: Saqi Books, 2006).
4. Yahyanejad and Anvari, op.cit.

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Image not available online

PHOTO BY MORTEZA NIKOUBAZL / © REUTERS, 2006

**A computer shopkeeper posts a notice telling women to observe the hijab, Tehran, 27 April 2006**

# Hymen Repair on the Arabic Internet

BJÖRN BENTLAGE  
& THOMAS EICH

Hymen repair is a surgical practice in which the remains of a purportedly formerly intact hymen are tied together. The operation was first developed primarily for customers with Muslim backgrounds, whose hymen had been torn and who were about to get married. In countries of pre-dominantly Muslim populations (among others), the dilation of the hymen of an unmarried woman is widely regarded as proof of her having had premarital sex, and these women sometimes fear serious consequences once their state is discovered.

## Opposing views

Hymen repair operations are offered in Middle Eastern countries, as well as in Europe and North America, where they are used primarily by Middle Eastern women who are about to get married. However, in the US, women from South American origins, as well as from conservative Christian milieus where virgin marriages are increasingly valued, are reportedly making use of this operation in rising numbers.<sup>1</sup>

The issue of the permissibility of hymen repair operations was discussed for the first time in the 1987 meeting of the Islamic Organization of Medical Sciences (IOMS) in Kuwait. The Egyptian medical doctor, Kamal Fahmi, submitted a short study describing several medical practice situations in which doctors might be asked for a hymen repair operation. In response to Fahmi's incentive, two further studies by religious scholars were submitted. The first by Muhammad Nai'm Yasin argued for the permissibility of the operation, while the second by Izz al-Din al-Tamimi argued against it. Both scholars recognized that there are causes for hymen dilation other than illicit sexual intercourse (*zina*), which Middle Eastern society generally assumes must have taken place. Consequently, girls and women suffer from communal sanctions regardless of the cause of the dilation—a problem for which hymen repair could be a possible solution. Both considered the protection of innocent girls from sanctions to be a form of *sitr*, a legal principle calling to refrain from exposing somebody's weaknesses or faults unless necessary.

**The permissibility of hymen repair surgery is a controversial topic in Islamic contexts, as the opposing views of doctors convening at the 1987 meeting of the Islamic Organization of Medical Sciences testified. One would expect to find an even more diverse plethora of voices on the Internet, but the authors show that notwithstanding the image of the net as a decentralized medium that spurs pluralism, in practice it functions as a filter in which only a few dominant voices are heard in tremendous duplication.**

poses harsh punishments for false accusations of *zina*. Thus, in his view, to conclude from a dilated hymen that a girl or woman has had illicit sex is against the regulations and spirit of Sharia. Contemporary Muslim societies have gone astray, accordingly, because they make judgments and punish without the required proof. Hymen reconstruction is actually a means to protect women and girls from false accusation and has an educational influence on society. Although only a temporary measure which

would cease to be of any use in an ideal Muslim society, hymen repair can currently help to achieve general goals of Sharia, among which is sexual equality. Yasin discusses the positive and negative effects of hymen reconstructions in various scenarios, deeming it permissible and even advisory in cases where girls did not commit *zina* or committed *zina* just once. Only for those women commonly known as prostitutes or accused of *zina* by four eyewitnesses, can hymen reconstruction be forbidden.

During the discussion that followed the presentation of all three papers at the IOMS conference, Yasin's paper was severely criticized whereas Tamimi's presentation received only minor attention. One argument stood out rhetorically in this legal discussion, because it introduced personal and public opinion into a debate of abstract legal rules: would the doctor want to marry a girl that had hymen repair without him knowing? This argument is based on a hadith laying out the general moral principle to not do to others what one does not want done to oneself. Though already touched upon in Tamimi's paper, it was only during the discussion that it gained a prominent role and incited a rather emotional outburst. The final recommendations issued at the end of the meeting stated that any alteration of the human body aiming at deceit should be forbidden.

## The internet filter

In order to assess the subsequent importance of these texts, we analyzed the public debate on hymen repair on the internet. The plan at the outset was simple: we looked for reference to, or traces of the IOMS texts in the internet discussion about hymen repair. To get a sample of this discussion, we made queries with popular search machines.<sup>2</sup> We limited our close reading to the first twenty hits on Google, and later compared these to the top ten of Yahoo!, looking for overt citations, unmarked quotes, or paraphrases and lines of argument. The outcome was surprising: out of Google's top twenty hits for hymen repair, only three texts were independent and unrelated to the IOMS texts. The rest were either copying, quoting and/or paraphrasing these texts, or drawing heavily from pages that did so. For the first ten hits of the Yahoo! query, only a single page proved unrelated. As to the degree of relations, the web-pages were mostly paraphrases and citations not otherwise indicated or in any other way discernible—the only exception being an online version of a published book with regular footnotes. Seven of the web-pages were mere copies of texts found on other pages listed in our search result.

Fahmi's medical study is the most widely used text. Although the many references to Fahmi formally makes his treatise the central text in this discussion, one has to keep in mind that it does not state an opinion—it is mainly laying out medical facts and the options doctors have in dealing with hymen repair. Opinions, or rather rulings according to the Sharia, are the domain of Yasin's and Tamimi's texts.

Tamimi clearly dominates the online discussion with four pages related to his arguments, among those one finds the important *islamonline*, which is copied and pasted in three other pages. *Islamonline* is also the only page referring to Yasin's arguments, though it rebukes them outright. The text found on *rafed.net* is a shiite legal discussion quoting Fahmi's

## Notes

1. See, for example, Sandy Kobrin, "Restoring Virginity Becomes Risky Business," *Women's eNews*, 22 May 2005, <http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/2304/context/archive> (accessed 10 April 2006).
2. Queries performed on 19/01/2006 with Google and Yahoo! for *ghasha' al-bakara*, "hymen," occurring together with any of the following equivalents of "repair": *ratq*, *taslih*, *i'ada*, *islah*.
3. 23 July 2006, [http://www.alexia.com/site/ds/top\\_sites?ts\\_mode=lang&lang=ar](http://www.alexia.com/site/ds/top_sites?ts_mode=lang&lang=ar). At the time of our initial search, *islamonline* marginally outranked *arb3*.
4. Thomas Eich, *Islam und Bioethik: Eine kritische Analyse der modernen Diskussion im islamischen Recht*, (Wiesbaden, 2005), 74.
5. [http://www.ems.org.eg/who\\_conf/Backgrounddocuments/MedicalEthicsAr.pdf](http://www.ems.org.eg/who_conf/Backgrounddocuments/MedicalEthicsAr.pdf), p52f.
6. Peter Kandela, "Egypt's trade in hymen repair," *The Lancet* 347 (1996): 1615.

Tamimi weighs this benefit of hymen repair, namely, the protection of innocent women from sanctions, against the negative aspects of the operation. First, he considers hymen reconstruction to be a potential fraud against the future husband. Although this is not explicitly stated by Tamimi, Yasin's and *rafed.net*'s papers (below) make clear that the problem at hand is ultimately framed as a matter of legal contracts and transactions, with hymen repair harming an implicit or even explicit condition of the marriage contract. Secondly, Tamimi argues that hymen reconstruction would lead to an increase of *zina* now freed from the fear of societal sanctions. Similarly he sees a slippery slope leading to abortions based on the same arguments. Tamimi concludes that the expected negative outcomes exceed the benefit, and that hymen reconstruction is not permissible. The harm of false accusations against girls and women, as a matter of principle, could not be remedied by causing harm to someone else.

Yasin takes a different approach. He explains that Sharia accepts only two kinds of proof for *zina*, either confession or four eyewitnesses, and that it im-

text, but, despite similarities to the view expressed by Tamimi, presents an independent view in its own right.

Given the variety of texts and sites within the search results that contain professionally edited texts, as well as chat-like discussion boards, the overall dominance of Tamimi's view and obvious neglect of Yasin's, are even more surprising. The search results include professional psychological counselling by the Arab Socio-Mental Health Network, a site with a regional focus on the Yemenite Hadramaut region, and a bunch of multi-topical sites dedicated to women, youth, newlyweds and couples planning to marry, etc., which often contain discussion boards in which hymen repair is an issue.

To characterize an internet debate, the content of pages and sites alone does not suffice. Just as with printed publications, it is important to know how many people may have read a given text. For books, newspapers, and magazines, this is indicated by circulation, and the number of copies sold, etc. For internet texts things are not quite so easy because the absolute number of users visiting a site or page is usually not readily available. But there are some other relevant data one might use: the number of links referring to a page (back links), sample-based statistics on the users visiting a site (reach), the number of pages the average user views on a site (page views), and a ranking of websites based on the latter two values (page rank). All of these are so called "off-page" criteria, (i.e. information transcending the actual content of a page, which in turn is labelled "on-page"). In looking at off-page criteria we can, for instance, rule out the possibility that the IOMS texts were influential because of the popularity of the site hosting them: islamset is a mediocre site at best, standing out only by a high number of back links. While islamonline's popularity and importance will hardly surprise, arb3.com's ranking does: arb3.com, the site for newly-weds and couples planning to marry, currently ranks twentieth of all Arabic sites according to Alexa (a provider for the analysis of internet sites) making it currently even more popular than islamonline. This already makes clear that off-page criteria are necessary for understanding the structure of a debate.<sup>3</sup>

For our purposes, off-page criteria and other meta-information illustrate how the online-presence of small but specialized organizations can shape public discussion: the IOMS usually publishes the conference pro-

ceedings comprising the scholarly studies, their public discussion, and the final recommendations in print shortly after the meetings. However, these printed publications used primarily to receive attention in highly specialized circles. This situation changed when the IOMS registered their internet site islamset.com in 2000 and put many parts of their publications online. Therefore, the material we analyzed comprises documentation of an off-line debate (the three studies and their discussion at the IOMS-meeting in 1987) as well as online discussions, which interestingly came to an almost identical result: the refutation or in most cases the outright neglect of Yasin's ideas. It seems highly unlikely to us that this result is pre-ordained by the positions held by Yasin and Tamimi in the "off-line world." Admittedly, Tamimi was the Mufti of Jordan. However, Yasin was dean of the Sharia Faculty at the University of Kuwait for many years and was able to exert considerably influence in other issues of medical fiqh on the national Jordanian level as has been shown elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that Tamimi's study is much more influential in the public debate than Yasin's, because it represents the predominant view of most public opinion makers. In Egypt, for instance, the IOMS recommendations based on Al-Tamimi's arguments made their way into the doctors' syndicate's ethical guidelines concerning hymen repair.<sup>5</sup> But despite this common notion, hymen repair is also often thought of as a usual way to cover up for pre-marital sex, with prices for the operation being circulated in the media. Therefore, we hypothesize that, first, the demand for hymen repair operations will not decline during the next years, because the broader patriarchal societal discourse forming their background is not questioned in these debates at all. We would further expect that hymen repair will stay an illegal and consequently clandestine operation with all its negative side-effects.<sup>6</sup>

In conclusion, the clear dominance of Tamimi's view on hymen repair, the central role of two IOMS texts in the internet debate, and the neglect of Yasin's considerations, suggest, at least for the topic at hand, that the thesis of the internet as a decentralized medium that spurs pluralism, has to be reconsidered at least in part. A more detailed analysis of the off-page criteria could further illuminate the structure of this debate just as we hope to gain new insights from comparisons with other public debates on the internet.

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# Repackaging Sufism in Urban Indonesia

JULIA DAY HOWELL

A brochure for a newly upgraded adult Islamic studies centre, Padepokan Thaha, in central Jakarta's swank Senopati district appealed to its anticipated clientele in 2005 by imaginatively speaking in their voice, revealing the likely concerns that the centre could address. Reading the brochure, we listen in, as it were, on the kinds of ruminations that have led prospective students to pick up the brochure. "What's wrong with me?" The brochure's character frets. "I pray five times a day with real sincerity, I read all kinds of things about how to find spiritual gratification in prayer...but I still have trouble getting into that deep, focused feeling (*khusyuk*)... I want to enjoy life [even] in the midst of social conditions that are wracked by crises, I want to be able to be happy under all conditions." As we

read on, we find that the prospective students are the sort of people who actually have a good deal of material security and strong bases for social respect as well. Thus the brochure's hypothetical reader confesses that his (or her) worries come "despite my everyday needs being fulfilled." "I have a high level of education... [and] I'm also respected in society."<sup>1</sup> These are the kinds of people who *ought* to be happy and secure if any good Muslim could. So what's missing?

What's missing, according to the brochure, is nothing less than the mystical experience of God's presence, which is accessible with the assistance of Padepokan Thaha. Padepokan Thaha offers that assistance through its Programme for Guidance of the Self towards "Tawajjuh" (*Program Pembinaan Diri Menuju Tawajjuh*). "Tawajjuh," the brochure explains, is "coming face to face with [one's] True Self" and "knowing the Creator" through *ma'rifatullah* [the highest stage of esoteric spiritual knowing in this rendering of Islam's Sufi heritage]. Initiation into the relevant spiritual practices is provided by the spiritual director of the foundation, KH Rachmat Hidayat, who also offers regular weekly classes at the centre on themes from the Quran and Hadith, such as might be found in many other well-appointed and formalized city *pengajian* (religious instruction classes). Kyai Rachmat himself has initiation from a Sufi

master whose spiritual genealogy (*silsilah*) reaches back through the legendary Javanese Muslim saint Sunan Kudus, to the Prophet Muhammad via his nephew 'Ali.

We can see from this that Padepokan Thaha is catering for Jakarta urbanities' niggling spiritual hunger by renovating what was once thought to be a dying remnant of rural, peasant society: Sufism (*tasawwuf*). That is, Padepokan Thaha offers (among other things) tutelage in esoteric practices that have been carried by Sufi orders (I. *tarekat*; Ar., *tariqa*) and in the metaphysics associated with the mystical experiences that may unfold from those practices. However, Kyai Rachmat denies that he himself is affiliated with a *tariqa* and both he and the directors of the foundation that runs Padepokan Thaha vigorously reject any idea that his teaching activities constitute a *tariqa*. Rather, as the foundation's full name indicates, it is styled as a *majelis ta'lim*, an Islam study group. This addresses the phobia many Muslim modernists (that is, in Indonesia, people aligned culturally or organizationally with the

**Contrary to the common view that Sufism is somehow incompatible with "the modern," emerging new forms of Sufism signify the creative adaptation of Islam to the religious sensibilities and social demands of modern life. This article focuses on the Padepokan Thaha, a thriving Islamic studies centre in Indonesia, whose integration of esoteric spiritual knowledge with modern-style education suits the modern sensibilities of affluent and educated Muslim cosmopolitans in Indonesia.**

Muhammadiyah and similar organizations) have of the supposedly archaic and authoritarian *tariqa*.

## Catering to urban professionals

Indeed as an institution Padepokan Thaha is a thoroughly modern operation. It is a formally constituted charitable foundation, with officers charged with specific administrative duties, and proper accounting for its funds. The

approach to teaching is also well suited to the interests and preferred learning styles of well-educated, globally "connected" urbanities. This is signalled in the brochure we have already sampled: the Tawajjuh Programme is delivered by "teachers and facilitators" (*pengajar and fasilitator*). Kiai Rachmat is simply listed as the first of these, although his primacy and special role is acknowledged in his title "Pengasuh" (lit., one charged with the care of others). Significantly, he is not identified by the terms *shaykh* or *murshid*, which are more resonant of the authority and hierarchy in the old-time *tariqa*.

The modern feel of this *majlis ta'lim* is also evident in the brochure's description of the Tawajjuh Programme's instructional methods (*metode*), namely: "discussion/dialogue (sharing)" (*diskusi/dialog [sharing]*), "lecture" (*kuliah*), and practice (*pengamalan*). "Practice" is briefly explained as performing certain devotional rituals (*ibadat*), making clear the programme is built on a firm religious base, but also alluding to notions of self-development and learning through one's own experience that are central to modern-style general education. To make it clear to prospective participants that the discussions and lectures will use best-practice, university-style educational methods, the brochure also explains that the facilitator and participants will be "on the same level" (*sejajar*) in "discussions," and after lectures there will be a question and answer period. It is hardly coincidental that so many English language loan words are used in the brochure: they signify Padepokan Thaha's positive engagement with an international world of business, management and teaching practices, such as patrons employ in their professional lives.

The efforts of Padepokan Thaha's directors to accommodate modern urban life-styles and the interests of specifically cosmopolitan urbanities is evident in the range of its programmes, their regular scheduling to accommodate the leisure-time planning of busy urbanities, and the content of the programmes. Monthly schedules are printed showing the topic, times (weekday evenings), and session leaders for its five regular programmes, which, in addition to the Tawajjuh Programme (a residential course done only once by any given student), include "Routine Religious Study" ("Pengajian Rutin"), "Book and Film Discussion" nights, "Quran Reading Study," and the "Post Tawajjuh Programme" for initiates. While the Quran Reading programme and the "Pengajian Rutin" cover core skills and topics common to other *majelis ta'lim*, albeit with some differences in choices of texts and commentary, the book and film discussion nights cater to the distinctively broad range of "spiritual" interests of Padepokan Thaha's cosmopolitan clientele. This is evident from book club choices like Achmad Chodjim's best-selling study of the legendary (and some would say heretical) Javanese Sufi saint Shaykh Siti Jenar, followed by Farry Aprianto's book *Enrich Your Everyday Life*, and Eknath Easwaran's *Conquest of Mind*. Film choices like "Little Buddha" and "The Passion" also show that Padepokan Thaha programme planners are trying to help students make sense of popular culture representations of other religions in a way that is consistent with the universalism of Kiai Rachmat's Unity of Being (*wahdat al wujud*) metaphysics.<sup>2</sup>

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COURTESY OF PADEPOKAN THAHA

To judge from the packed audience hall at Padepokan Thaha and the traffic jams caused in the street out front by patrons' late-model sedans and four-wheel-drives on evenings when the regular *pengajians* and special lectures are on, this new-style centre for Sufi studies has indeed accurately identified a social need and suitably catered for it. The centre is flourishing. Other "Padepokan" functioning under the guidance of Kiai Rachmat and with the same institutional structure and core programmes have also opened elsewhere in Jakarta (Padepokan Esa in Bintaro) and in other parts of Indonesia (in Bogor, Bandung, Batam, Pekanbaru, Surabaya, and Bali). Padepokan Thaha directors put the number of people in Jakarta who regularly attend functions at around 4,000.

## Adaptations to modern life

The "Padepokan" associated with Kiai Rachmat are not unusual in teaching some form of Sufism in upmarket quarters of the major Indonesian cities, except, perhaps, in offering initiations through the same city-based charitable foundation that supports Islamic learning in an organizationally formalized setting. Most institutionally modern foundations and businesses offering *tasawwuf* studies as part of a broader programme of Islamic studies for adults in Indonesia do not have practicums, much less initiations; but they nonetheless commonly acknowledge the value of cultivating deep devotional feeling in one's prayers and the virtues of ethical reflection associated with various Sufi disciplines. Such modern Islamic study providers may also help their students locate appropriate individual instructors and workshops, and some have offered excursions to rural *tarekat* with introductions to spiritual directors there. There are also independent groups with more of a practice orientation to Sufism. The variety and articulation of new institutions through which middle-class and elite Indonesian urbanites are now accessing "Sufi" teachings is described in my chapter in the forthcoming volume *Sufism and the "Modern" in Islam*.<sup>3</sup>

The other case studies in that volume (which span the Muslim world from Africa to Asia, as well as Muslim migrant communities and universalist movements in Western societies) provide us with a useful cross-cultural perspective on contemporary adaptations of Sufism in Indonesia. Viewed in this broader context, it appears that Indonesian Muslims are hardly alone in working changes in the *tariqa*. Rather, we can see the many new forms Sufism is taking there as part of a global panorama of creative adaptation of Islam to the religious sensibilities and social demands of modern life.

Surveying this global panorama, it is evident that in the global housecleaning and rebuilding of contemporary Islam that we have witnessed over the twentieth century, Sufism has not been thrown out; instead, like other strands of the Islamic heritage, it has been selectively reconfigured. In Egypt and West Africa, Muslims enthusiastically patronize conventional *tariqa* but turn them to novel social purposes like interest articulation in new democratic polities. Elsewhere, in Turkey, Muslims affiliated with the Gümüşhanevi branch of the Naqshbandis find no good

at all in initiations and esoteric knowledge, but want to save the Sufi orders (the *tariqa*) as vehicles for teaching ethical formation and carrying out social service activities. Hamka, a leading twentieth century Indonesian Muslim intellectual, considered that all that could be done without the *tariqa*, which should be given up to disencumber modern Muslims from dysfunctional traditional attitudes (in his phrase, keeping "*tasawuf* without *tarekat*"). Other Muslim scholars in India and the Middle East, fired by Salafist zeal for ridding the faith of all heretical inventions, have gone even further than Hamka, rejecting even the word *tasawuf* as a heretical invention; yet the Salafis have been prepared to approve particular Sufi practices (purification of the heart [*tazkiya*] and remembrance of God [*dhikr*]) identified by words found in the Quran.

Just as Sufism around the world now encompasses a range of institutional forms, spiritual practices and social engagement, and all that in diverse combinations, so too do we find in Sufism today a considerable variety of stances towards Islamic law. In the Muslim world over the course of the twentieth century, spreading religious literacy and Sufi engagement with the Islamic reform movements have generally made for increased emphasis on the core obligations of the faith, but universalist Sufi movements like the International Sufi Movement, sprung from the Chishti order after its founder Hazrat Inayat Khan moved to the West, cutting "Sufism" loose entirely from Islamic law and an Islamic identity.

What patterns can we detect in all this variation? For one thing, Sufi tradition is being carried forward into the twenty-first century, but we can no longer identify it exclusively with the institutional complex of the conventional *tariqa*. While that survives, and such *tariqa* are even vigorously assuming new functions in many parts of the world, here and there its structure is being modified to suit modern sensibilities (as exemplified by Padepokan Thaha). It is also being disassembled, as it were, with its scholarly teaching functions assumed by the likes of universities and religious booksellers, its facilitation of group devotions taken up by impresarios of *dhikr akbar* led by celebrity preachers at major urban mosques, and its ethical formation and social work agendas assuming scripturalist-reformist organizations and a few stripped-down, no-mystical-nonsense Neo-Sufi orders. The search for mystical union is probably not well catered for outside the *tariqa*, and perhaps not so much even in many of those. In any case, it probably represents only a small niche-market. But if the growth of this market in the West in the last few decades is anything to go by, the Padepokan Thaha's of the Muslim world will have a secure place in the future amongst Muslim cosmopolitans.

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**Discussion evening at Padepokan Thaha, Jakarta 2006**

## Notes

1. For further details on Padepokan Thaha, see, Julia Day Howell, "Urban Heirs of Ibn al-'Arabi and the Defence of Religious Pluralism in Contemporary Indonesia," *Australian Religious Studies Review* 18 no. 2 (2005): 197-209. See also [www.thaha.net](http://www.thaha.net).
2. Op. cit. Howell 2005:202.
3. "Modernity and Islamic Spirituality in Indonesia's New Sufi Networks," in *Sufism and the "Modern" in Islam*, ed. by Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell (London: IB Tauris, in press).

# Hidden Features of the Face Veil Controversy

EMMA TARLO

Over the past few years a new range of Arabic words—*hijab*, *jilbab*, *niqab*—have become common currency in the British media, accompanied by images of Muslim women with various degrees of covering and culminating, in October 2006, in a veritable orgy of images of fully veiled women in response to Jack Straw's newspaper article in the *Lancashire Telegraph*.<sup>1</sup> Jack Straw, the ex-home secretary, and prominent Labour MP for Blackburn, (a constituency in the North of England with a large Muslim population), had written that he felt uncomfortable talking to women in face veils; that for the past year he had been asking them if they would not mind lifting their veils when they came to meet him in his office; and that he perceived the veil to be a statement of separation and difference that makes the possibility of good inter-community relations more difficult. The following day he added that he considered facial expressions an important element of communication and that whilst he would not like to be prescriptive, and opposed the French ban on hijab, he nonetheless "would rather" British Muslim women did not wear burqas or niqabs.

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## The media spectacle

Straw's comments were taken by the British media as a cue for unleashing their growing stock of sensationalist photos of British Muslim women looking at their most alien, swathed in all encompassing burqas or reduced and magnified to a pair of eyes peeping through the slit of a black niqab. Ever since September 11, which had the effect of transforming all Muslims into potential objects of public paranoia, press photographers have been chasing fully veiled women, thrusting their extendable zoom lenses into deliberately hidden faces. The revelation in July 2005 that four British Muslims were prepared to kill fellow citizens "in the name of Islam" served to increase the value of such images which are used in the press as a visual shorthand for a whole variety of problems nowadays classified as "Muslim," whether these be arranged marriages, the growth of religious extremism, anxieties about faith schools, and concerns about social segregation.

Of course the West's fascination with the veiled woman is far from new. It has a long and well documented history and has left in its wake a much analyzed trail of Orientalist paintings, literary fantasies, ethnographic portraits, and exotic post cards, most of which suggest the mysterious and erotic qualities of veiled women. This desire to look *behind* and *beyond* the veil has found contemporary expression in the gigantesque proportions of the photographs in our newspapers—whole pages devoted to a woman's eyes and lashes framed in black. There are obvious hints of the old curiosity, eroticism, and desire in these images but the form, context, and interpretation are radically different. Today's covered woman wears not sensuous gauzes

**Face veil controversies have become a common feature of public debates across Europe. Analysing a controversy unintentionally ignited by British Labour Party politician Jack Straw, the author shows that the characteristics of fervent debate do not only reproduce familiar stereotypes, but also obliterate the discussion about veiling within Muslim communities in Britain. What is left unseen is that reservations about the veil are not about British versus Muslim values but about different perspectives of British citizens.**

and embroidered silks but austere plain black accompanied by reminders of her Western identity—a pair of trainers, a carton of iced coffee, a Union Jack mug. She represents not Eastern promise in a timeless far off place but the apparent refusal of British Muslims to abide by "Western norms" in the here and now.

No less dramatic than recent images were the headlines. Overnight Straw's hesitant and context-specific reflections were transformed by every paper

from the *Guardian* to the *Sun* into the generalized command "Take off the Veil!" Columns immediately filled not so much with debate on the issues raised as with a familiar set of identities and positions: the outraged liberal, the offended and defiant Muslim, the knowing feminist, and the self-satisfied racist. Some papers framed the issue in the format of a "Muslim problem page" in which a diverse range of stories involving Muslims were cobbled together and where even violent anti-Muslim attacks somehow featured as further evidence that "they" were causing trouble. Others filled with personal declarations by Muslim women about why they choose to cover and fears that Straw's comments would serve as a justification for racism—fears which soon appeared justified when a group of white youths tried to pull the veil off a woman in Liverpool. If the key themes of the Sunday papers were multicultural angst, the frustration and demands of Muslims, and feminist frustration; by Monday the focus had switched to security (news that a British terrorist had escaped under a burqa); by Tuesday, it was talk of bans (should other institutions follow Imperial College's lead in prohibiting students from wearing face veils?); and by the following Saturday, it was concerns about education and employment law (was it right that a teaching assistant had been sacked for wearing niqab in the classroom?). Suddenly the small minority practice of face veiling had become a carrier for the nation's ills.

## Debate about the niqab among Muslims

But it is worth considering what is omitted from this barrage of media representations. By framing the debate as a sensationalist polemic between "us" (the reasonable Brits) and "them" ("trouble-making Muslims" or "victimized Muslims"), the media not only failed to engage adequately with the issues raised by Straw, but also failed to acknowledge that the niqab and burqa have long been a matter of considerable debate amongst Muslims themselves, both in Britain and elsewhere in the world. A brief glimpse into this internal debate about niqab might enable us to disentangle the recent controversy from the politically charged media hype that surrounds it.

Firstly, there is the perspective of the small minority of British Muslim women who cover their faces in public. Not surprisingly, they were largely defensive, emphasizing that they wear the niqab as a matter of choice and that this should be respected in a society that claims "freedom" as a basic value and human right. In my own conversations with *niqabis* in London about why they cover—conversations that took place prior to the Straw controversy—the issue of personal freedom was sometimes raised, but on the whole, women were far more pre-occupied with issues of modesty and religious devotion. They felt the niqab was not a religious obligation, but that it represented an extra step in their own personal

spiritual development. It acted as a constant material reminder of their relationship with God and as a physical screen by which they were protected both from the male gaze and from other unnecessary interactions and distractions. As one woman put it in response to my question as to whether she felt the niqab created a barrier between herself and others: "Yes. In a way that is the reason why we are wearing it. It is to avoid any type of contact with men. Wearing it has also made me more restrained and less extrovert which is good because that is what I wanted."

Women recognized that the niqab could attract negative attention but many saw this as one of the sacrifices that strict religious devotion entailed. It was a test of the strength of their faith. Most were familiar with verbal insults such as "ninja" and "Bin Laden's sister," which they attributed to the ignorance of those who "know nothing about Islam." At the same time they felt that the niqab and *jilbab* (full length outer garment) to some extent "protected" them from insults, physically screening them both from verbal abuse and from what many perceived to be the increasingly immoral culture of the British streets.

The screening effects of niqab were counterbalanced for these women by the strong feelings of community and solidarity they felt with their "niqabi sisters." Niqab wearing was an act, which attracted like-minded people who shared the same set of values and who, they felt, elicited greater respect from men. Many argued that it was the "courage" of other *niqabis* that had inspired them to adopt it, even though this often went against the wishes of other family members.

These women were far more flexible in their clothing practices and attitudes than they looked. For example, one woman who was doing a teacher training course uncovered her face at college because she felt the niqab might make the teacher "feel uncomfortable" and because she felt the visibility of the mouth was important in a language course. Exposing her face in the classroom was a pragmatic decision she had taken without any prompting from the college. Similarly, when discussing the case of Shebina Begum, the Luton pupil, who had taken her school to court for not allowing her to wear a jilbab, I was surprised to find a group of niqab-wearing women arguing in defence of the school, saying that it was up to pupils to accept the uniform rules, and that the girl in question could always wear the jilbab when she left the building at the end of the day. As one woman put it, "We can't unscramble the world to get what we want. It is up to us to find a way of fitting in whilst not compromising our beliefs." She gave the example of her daughter who did not want to take off the niqab (in spite of her parents' suggestion that this might be a good idea) but felt awkward at the prospect of wearing it to college, and had therefore chosen an Open University degree course that she could follow from home. This way, women acknowledged the constraints that the niqab placed upon them but they also showed ways of navigating around them. Contrary to common perceptions of women wearing niqab, the women concerned were not particularly interested in politics. Their views were conservative rather than radical; their motivations, predominantly moral and religious. They shared more in common with Christian nuns than "Islamic terrorists" or "extremists."

However, as mentioned earlier, niqab-wearers are a minority within a minority and their views represent only a small proportion of British Muslim opinion. Whilst most Muslims interviewed in the press last week felt duty bound to rise to the "defence" of niqab, the reality is that many British Muslims are highly ambivalent about face veiling, particularly when practiced in a Western context. Many have told me they consider niqab-wearing an archaic practice that has no place in the modern world. They object on political and feminist grounds, often expressing both irritation and pity towards veiled women.

British Muslim objections to niqab can be summarized as material, social, religious, associative, interactive, and political though these categories are not mutually exclusive. Material and social objections focus on the notion that the niqab creates a physical barrier which makes communication difficult, and recognition impossible. This, it is argued, has the effect of denying women their individuality, barring them from participation in mainstream society, and preventing them from obtaining jobs, which in turn makes them dependent on men and is regressive. There is also fear that the niqab encourages the formation of ghettos by "stimulating prejudice" in others, which only serves to re-enforce alienation and social exclusion. This links to the question of the image of niqab which many Muslims feel is justifiably associated with extremism which, they argue, reflects badly on the whole community. Some felt the niqab de-humanized women, reducing them to "alien" or "ghost-like" cloth forms. One participant in a particularly heated online

debate objected that, as a Muslim man, he was having to constantly fight off the assumption made "by Westerners" that it was he and men like him who "forced" women into veils—something he found particularly galling given his personal opposition to niqab. Religious objections revolved not only around the common assertion that the niqab is unnecessary, but also that it actually works against Islam by acting as "an obstacle to *da'wah*," scaring unbelievers away from the faith rather than drawing them towards it. There are also gender-based objections concerning how the niqab affects relations between men and women. Whilst many women stress that there is no equivalent burden placed on men, some men complain that the niqab is fundamentally insulting for it suggests men are incapable of self-control. These objections are voiced with passion in a number of contexts from casual conversations to chat rooms and discussion forums on Islamic websites.

## Using the veil politically

This pre-existing internal Muslim debate provides an interesting counter-point to the largely monolithic "Muslim perspective" found in the British newspapers where, with the exception of a few prominent Muslim figures renowned for their liberal views, the main perspective expressed was one of "stunned outrage" at Jack Straw's comments. What



PHOTO BY EMMA TARLO, 2006

these debates reveal is that many of Straw's concerns were in fact under discussion amongst British Muslims before he made his opinion public. Viewed in this light his reservations about the niqab are not about British versus Muslim values at all but about the different perspectives of British citizens, a category to which many Muslims belong. Meanwhile his assertions that the niqab makes others feel uncomfortable, is a statement of separation and difference and a physical barrier to communication can hardly be interpreted as revelatory.

None of this, however, alleviates the fact in the current political climate there is a very real risk of Straw's comments (soon supported by Tony Blair) being exploited both by the far right and by radical religious extremists and there is evidence of this process occurring on both sides. In view of this inevitability, was it inappropriate for a politician of his stature to raise the issue, or does the onus lie more with the British media for stifling reflection on an issue of public concern by simply feeding the current national appetite for sensationalist polemics about Muslims and Islam?

## Note

1. This article is a revised version of the text that appeared at the website of the Ferguson Centre for African and Asian Studies, <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/ferguson-centre/discussion.htm>. The website aims to stimulate discussions on current public issues and problems.

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# Ham, Mozart, & Limits to Freedom of Expression

ALEXANDRE CAEIRO  
& FRANK PETER

In September 2006 a distressed French high school teacher Robert Redeker wrote, in a leading newspaper, a virulent article about the “Islamic Threat” to the “Free World” (presumably Europe and North America). There the author maintained that Muhammad was a “merciless war lord, a plunderer, Jew-massacrer, and polygamous man,” and the Quran a book of “unparalleled violence” insidiously shaping the mindset of all Muslims.<sup>1</sup>

## The anxiety

The invective led to the swift prohibition of the newspaper in Tunisia and Egypt and attracted immediate criticism on *Al-Jazeera*. The unfortunate French teacher later received death threats, forcing him to quit his job and change domicile. The unoriginal link postulated by the author between Islam and violence thus seemed to constitute a self-fulfilling prophecy. In the following debate, the newspaper editors condemned—as they should have—the threats, and justified publishing the article on grounds that it contributed to “an in-depth understanding of current realities.” The initial shock on hearing about the threats was followed by collective outrage, and passions ran high in the Republic. A cartoon, appeared in *Le Monde*, perhaps best expressed the angst of large sections of French society: in a depressing and sombre modern city populated by menacing women covered in black, a white Frenchman gesticulates anxiously to a friend about to eat a sandwich: “What? Ham? Are you crazy or what?” (See image, published in *Le Monde*, dated 5 October 2006).

Pork may not be quite as important to contemporary (white) French identity as the cartoon suggests, but the feeling of ever diminishing freedoms in order to pre-empt Muslim anger certainly is. Although this particular example was set in France, debates across Europe increasingly share the psychological and emotional anxiety underlying the Redeker affair—an anxiety linked to the social uncertainty brought about by those globalization trends which have left culture as the last remaining domain wherein “fantasies of purity, authenticity, borders, and security can be enacted.”<sup>2</sup>

## The holistic threat

Voices across the continent—of politicians, intellectuals, artists, and Churchmen—are rising to demand an urgent reconsideration of Europe’s position regarding Islam and Muslims. They refer to a series of recent events which have been widely interpreted as evidence of a fundamental and holistic threat posed by Muslims to European freedoms—including the violence unleashed by the publication of the Danish cartoons, the protests against Pope Benedict XVI’s lecture in Regensburg last year, and the Berlin cancellation (contemporaneous to the French affair) of a staging of Mozart’s *Idomeneo* in September. Together these events are glossed under the topical issues of freedom of expression, possibilities of criticism of Islam, and self-censorship, contributing largely, as the formula goes, to the social, and therefore very real, construction of a clash of civilizations.

The aforementioned events are important and the threats posed to the well-being and life of those targeted cannot be tolerated under any circumstance. This makes it all the more necessary to think about

**Focusing on two recent controversies—the cancellation of Mozart’s *Idomeneo* in Berlin and the death threats against a French teacher for criticizing Islam—this article revisits the flawed construction of a clash between Islam and freedom of expression, and seeks to show how the debates are connected to a problematic vision of Europe which necessarily excludes Muslims.**

the nature of this threat. Looking at the writings of those who call our attention to this threat, one finds that it is less its precise origin (a speculation about possible Muslim reactions; a tiny group of cyber jihadists; a handful of Muslim activists) than its scope which are emphasized, leading some observers to compare the present situation with that of the 1930s when appeasement

policies paved the way for a global tragedy.

The appeasement analogy needs to be recognized as a discursive stratagem that participates in the construction of a global and decontextualized Islamic threat. It gives added resonance to those calls for showing “strength” and “resisting”<sup>3</sup>—the kind of emotional language and politics of fear that are mobilized today in order to defend the legacy of the “Enlightenment.” Whenever conflicts do erupt, they seem to take on a heightened symbolism or, to put it differently, an “excessive religiosity.”<sup>4</sup> This is unhelpful, as it ultimately serves only to delegitimize those voices which point to the mostly local and circumscribed character of conflicts about Islam in Europe, as well as to the sheer variety of Islamic ways of life—a variety which escapes easy categorization or predictions on future developments.

## Block thinking

The recent cancellation of Hans Neuenfels’s production of *Idomeneo*—a staging of a Mozart opera which controversially included a display of the decapitated heads of Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, and Poseidon—provides an instructive case. The controversy was sparked by an act of miscommunication between the security agencies, Berlin authorities, and the Opera’s director. The fact that the Deutsche Oper grossly “misunderstood” the security threat was symptomatically dismissed in the following debates, with commentators focusing instead on the act of “self-censorship” to which it supposedly led. Clearly, however, both the causes of the affair and the course of the ensuing discussion were the result of “block-thinking”: fusing “a varied reality into a single indissoluble unity,”<sup>5</sup> the perception of German Muslims is now primarily determined by terrorist violence occurring outside of Germany. The possibility that Muslims in Germany might blow up a public building in reaction to a perceived insult to the Prophet Muhammad suddenly acquired great political significance, notwithstanding its unprecedented and, according to German security agencies, rather unlikely nature.

There is an urgent need to debate why this type of unwarranted assumptions about European Muslims has become so widespread. Block thinking is seriously putting at risk the capacity to discern differences inside Muslim communities and, ultimately, to speak and engage with Muslims. It is rendering the political management of religious diversity in Europe a mere rhetorical device: one cannot seriously claim to work for the “integration” of Muslims or expect to engage in meaningful dialogue when one’s basic view on Islam is so laden; it would be more accurate to speak of a process of forceful assimilation as the sole policy aim. Once one starts reasoning with reference to entities as broad and vague as “Islam” or “Europe,” one disconnects from the world one lives in.

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Both the French and German examples mentioned here highlight a number of structural features of debates about Islam in/and Europe. They include a distortion of the social and political realities of Europe, an unashamed anti-intellectualism that seeks to stifle debate, and a problematic vision of the place of Muslims in the Old Continent.

When the Deutsche Oper reversed its decision and decided to stage *Idomeneo* in December, the event was conspicuously attended by Germany's elite. Although they had opposed the cancellation of the opera, representatives of two of the main Muslim federations in Germany (Islamrat and Zentralrat der Muslime) did not attend the performance, but neither did several leaders of Christian churches as to do so would—in the words of the president of Germany's Central Council of Catholics—express a "lack of self-esteem," rather than an act of tolerance.<sup>6</sup> While this view may not be shared by all German Christians, it demonstrates that these debates are largely internal to Europe. They point less to an Islamic threat than to the often unacknowledged but nevertheless constant need to renegotiate secular and political arrangements in democratic contexts.

The attempt to construe, as matter of principle, Muslim dissent illegitimate was particularly clear in the French case. There, in a high-profile petition "in favour" of Redeker, a number of prominent intellectuals made surreptitious links between the death threats and various other forms of Muslim protest against "provocations" to what were simply characterized as "foreign sensitivities."<sup>7</sup> The mobilization of deceptive self-evidences (such as the myth of an absolute right to free speech, when in practice it is regulated by a multitude of social, legal, and political considerations) is required in order to project a vision where Muslims as such can only be foreign and external to Europe.

While Muslims in both countries condemned the death threats and criticized the cancellation of the opera due to security concerns, the media construction of these debates as civilizational clashes necessarily marginalizes these voices—independently of their actual media presence, which, more often than not, is limited. Setting the terms of the debates in this way evacuates in turn any question about the functioning of media institutions and their role in the dissemination of Islamophobia (for example through the publication of Redeker's diatribe) and allows intellectuals to discursively enact the exclusion of Muslims from Europe in guise of "defending the continent." The politics of intolerance that is articulated here works through the current deadlock of integration policies, where an increasing gap has opened up between social and political visions bent on promoting illiberal attitudes and actions (concerning the headscarf, transnational marriages, even the use of foreign languages) in the name of a culturally homogenous nation-state on one hand, and the legal and constitutional order, which often obstructs these projects, on the other.

Brushing over differences in the policies of incorporation of Islam in Europe—policies that, incidentally, can hardly be described as "soft"—these writers misleadingly depict past approaches towards Islam in Europe as the result of "cowardice" or lacking political determination. The caricature of Islam, which is so central to these writings, is thus paired by an equally distorted presentation of Europe's modes of engagement with Islam and European Muslims in the past decades. While this type of binary thinking is insufficient for understanding positions towards Islam, it is a necessary means for establishing as proper intellectuals a group of writers whose media fortune both enables and is enabled by the current orientation of policies towards Islam in Europe.

Such intellectuals typically construct a world where criticism of Islam becomes an act of heroism—as if these are lone voices railing against the odds.<sup>8</sup> Such claims are surprising, not least because today in Europe on the topic of Islam and Muslims one can precisely say almost everything—and, more often than not, turn it to one's advantage. In France, Claude Imbert, a prominent intellectual and member of the very official Haut conseil à l'intégration, recently declared himself to be "a little islamophobe" since "Islam, not Islamism, carries a certain debility"—a sentiment he perhaps not incorrectly asserted to be shared by many of his contemporaries. The fact that his intellectual reputation



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was left untarnished speaks eloquently of the banalization of Islamophobia in France. Elsewhere, the case of the late Oriana Fallaci—whose pamphlets became bestsellers in French, German, and other European languages—is only the most notorious case of what has become a proliferating literary genre.<sup>9</sup> The content of such books is sometimes so excessive as to render the call for reasonable debate ludicrous; their success—as gauged for example by market sales, prizes, and other intellectual distinctions—rendering hollow ideas of a European "political correctness" in the face of Islam. Given the ubiquity of radical critics of Islam in media and public debates—and the regular exclusion of alternative voices of experts, not to mention those of Muslims themselves—one should inquire instead about the ways through which Islamophobic discourses contribute, along with the death threats, the libel cases, as well as the assaults on Muslim persons and institutions, to a vicious circle of violence not-always-symbolic, thus partly producing the hostility which they seek to denounce.

It seems more fruitful in this context to reflect about what the constant reference to self-inflicted restrictions tells us about the power distribution between Muslims and other Europeans. It is of course ironic that only those who have free access to public media bother to engage in long debates on "self-censorship." What is most problematic here is not the inequality itself, but the fact that it has effectively led to a situation where debates on Islam all too often turn into a monologue and any real or imagined demand by Muslims is automatically considered a threat or an act of censorship. Whether interaction in the public sphere should function along these lines or can be understood in such terms is a question which begs an urgent answer.

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**Cartoon by Plantu published in *Le Monde*, 5 October 2006**

## Notes

1. Robert Redeker, "Face aux intimidations islamistes, que doit faire le monde libre?" *Le Figaro*, 19 September 2006.
2. Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers* (Duke University Press, 2006), 23.
3. See, among numerous examples: "Kein Ton zurück!" *Die Zeit*, 28 September 2006; "Nur Mut!" *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 September 2006; "Une fatwa au pays de Voltaire," *Liberation*, 21 November 2006.
4. We take this formula from Tayob, "Reading Religion and the Religious in Modern Islam," *ISIM Review*, no. 15 (2005): 57.
5. Dilip Gaonkar and Charles Taylor, "Block Thinking and Internal Criticism," *Public Culture* 18, no. 3 (2006): 453–455.
6. "Duch die Sicherheitsschleuse in die Oper," *Der Tagesspiegel*, 19 December 2006.
7. "Un appel en faveur de Robert Redeker," *Le Monde*, 2 October 2006.
8. See also Annelies Moors, "Submission," *ISIM Review*, no. 15 (2005): 8–9.
9. In *The Rage and the Pride*, Fallaci famously describes Muslims in Europe as "Terrorists, thieves, rapists. Ex-convicts, prostitutes, beggars. Drug-dealers, contagiously ill."

# Danish Muslims Catalysts of National Identity?

TINA GUDRUN JENSEN

New Muslim converts represent new configurations of national and religious identity.<sup>1</sup> They can be seen as border crossers and cultural mediators between Muslim and non-Muslim identities. This, in turn, gives rise to an important question: to what extent can these converts be perceived as figures with the potential to transform official identity models, and as carriers of new forms of national identity? Answers to this question are explored through a focus provided by what Gerd Baumann calls “grammars of identity,” models for identity-making based on patterns of relations between “us” and “them.”<sup>2</sup>

In Denmark, the notion of equality in the sense of “sameness” is vital for an understanding of the ways the relationship between “us” and “them” is addressed in the public debate. Implicit in the notion of “sameness” is agreement and consensus, indicating uneasiness with what is “different”; a reluctance to acknowledge “difference”; and a tendency to suppress disagreement.<sup>3</sup> In the public debate on immigrants of Muslim background, two grammars of identity appear to be prevalent. First, an Orientalizing grammar indicating distance and opposition, which is found in the public discourse that provides a framework of polarization between “Danish values” and “Islam,” and, thus, between

“us Danes” and “them Muslims.” The second prevalent grammar is that of “encompassment,” or hierarchical subsumption, a concept which is related to the idea of assimilation: “They” (the immigrants) should become like us in order to be perceived as “real” Danes.

The dominant discourse partly expresses the idea of Danish culture as permeated by Lutheran-Protestantism, which explains why it is perceived as “un-Danish” to be Muslim, and, at the same time, partly the idea that it is “un-Danish” to exhibit your religiosity in public. But despite the apparent reluctance to exhibit personal religious convictions,

the Evangelical-Lutheran church is forming the Danish national church and as such is supported by the state. The irony consists in the fact that while secularism is used in the debate against Islam, this takes place in a context in which there are strong ties between state and church.

## Positions on “Danishness” and “Muslimness”

During the last four decades, between 2,100 and 2,800 Danes have converted to Islam. The majority of Danish converts grew up in urban milieus and is young (between the ages of twenty and thirty), but otherwise they make out a heterogeneous group, cutting across different social backgrounds, age groups, and genders.

Mediated by the prevalent grammars of identity in the relationship between a Danish “us” and a Muslim “them,” ethnic Danes who convert to Islam are generally seen as having become “the other” (the immi-

**In the Danish public debate a familiar pattern of polarization has emerged. Danes who become Muslim by conversion need to respond to prevalent identity grammars that contrast Danish and Muslim identities. In carving a space as Danish Muslims, converts create new and hybrid identities that favour openness and equality in the public domain. Yet although these new Muslims embody the potential to transform identity models, the controversial nature of conversion means that their societal impact remains uncertain.**

grant), a national traitor, or simply a contradictory person. Converts partly incorporate this polarization between being “Danish” and “Muslim,” but they also challenge it by presenting themselves as “Danish Muslim.” First and foremost, this polarization is present in conversion narratives, and in converts’ displays of religiosity. In narrating their conversion, converts speak about how they are suddenly perceived as too “different” to be Danish by their non-Muslim family. The family’s common stere-

otypical conjecture about the incompatibility between Muslim identity and Danish identity, or Muslim identity as “not Danish,” has a clear effect on the way that converts perceive themselves as having become “different.” This is expressed in the general tendency to refer to the group as “us Muslims” in opposition to “the Danes.” Furthermore, converts who formulate their conversion as a “rupture,” speak of Danish culture and society as something they exclude themselves from by designating themselves as “immigrants” (*indvandrere*). Others, however, emphasize a sense of continuity with their Danish identity, pointing out that they do not identify with the culture of immigrants just because they have become Muslim. Yet, “rupture” and “continuity” do not represent fixed choices, but positions, that converts tend to waver between during their conversion processes. This wavering first and foremost mirrors different degrees of acting on and submitting to the external categorization of them as “Muslim,” which includes an incompatibility between Danish and Muslim identities.

In converts’ verbal and ritual expressions, the polarized and discriminatory construction of a Danish “self” and a Muslim “other” is often questioned. This indicates a potential to reinterpret and negotiate identities, which reflects a subversion of stereotypic and discriminatory constructions.<sup>4</sup>

## Transformation of national identity?

Converts to Islam are often described as “mediators,” “bridge-builders,” and “cultural translators” between the majority and the minority society.<sup>5</sup> Roald has thus maintained that converts in Scandinavia play an important part in the representation of Islam and Muslims in the media, and in the organization of unions. Converts have thus been relegated a certain agency due to their symbolic capital in the form of language and education. Thomas Gerholm has furthermore pointed to the difficulty of being a cultural mediator, especially in relation to the problem of neutrality implied in this role, of being “in the middle,” translating between two dimensions.

In my own findings, I have seen converts in the role of “mediators” at different levels in Danish public life. At one level, converts volunteer at the local authorities as interpreters between immigrant clients and social workers, by which they tend to play an important part in the translation of cultures and social practices related to being a Danish citizen. This, however, takes place at a highly informal level. Converts have less success in the political field. Indeed, the Danish public perceives those converts who appear in the political debate as somewhat bizarre human beings. Converts are in most cases excluded from the political field as Muslims generally are. Simultaneously, some representatives in the Muslim field criticize them for attempting to participate in the political process at all.

[W]hen “they” converge to  
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Image  
not  
available  
online

PHOTO BY LARS HELSINGHOF / © REUTERS, 2006

discussions and reciprocal prejudices on one's own and others' "culture." People perform mock relationships by addressing each other in raw and seemingly offensive, but also playful, tones of voice, which exemplify a parody and a simultaneous subversion of racial meanings. At the same time, there is a latent Orientalized desire in these interactions, in which "the Arab" becomes an object of imitation.<sup>7</sup> These new Danish Muslims hint at the mixed relations that develop where people of so-called different ethnic backgrounds hang out with each other. In the urban spaces of Denmark—in the streets, super markets, and social housing estates, as well as, in places dominated by immigrants of Muslim background such as mosques and sport centres where Eid celebrations take place—young Danes of different ethnic backgrounds "pop up" together. To the outside spectator, they are an image of dis-socialization of the objective reality. But they are also an image of coeality, sharing time and space. They constitute alternative public spaces, or liminal spaces, in which transformation of meaning, negotiation, and creation of identity takes place. By constituting alternative and liminal spaces they make connection between issues, which in the public debate are constructed as having no relation to each other (e.g. being "Danish" and "Muslim"). In contrast to the official public sphere as authoritative and representative, these public spaces make out "fun spaces,"<sup>8</sup> autonomous social spaces that incite a privileged form of knowledge or cultural practice that break down boundaries and challenge fixed definitions of collective identities and subjectivities.

In the interactions among so-called "new Muslims," we witness new communities, life-styles, and fractures that contradict the prevalent grammar of identity based on distance, separation, and exclusion. Whereas the grammars of identity put into play in the Danish everyday discourse on the relationship between "us" and "them" veer between "Orientalization" (through the discourse of polarization) and "encompassment" (through the discourse of assimilation), the alternative spaces indicate a grammar of "segmentation." In the latter instance, the discourse involves fission yet equality and neutralization of conflict. Here, the notion of otherness is still present, though as a matter of context. In this respect, the grammars in relation to a Danish model of identity seem to be changing. The question remains: at which level does this pertain to? If converts can be perceived as figures with the potential to transform official identity models,

and as carriers of new forms of national identity, it is perhaps not so much vis-a-vis their identity as sole "cultural mediators." In fact, converts seem to have more success in forming new Muslim organizations and thus new Muslim identities, than in influencing the authoritative and representative public spheres. Conversely, second-generations immigrants' success in performing a mediating role relies heavily on the fact that they have acquired a certain capital, in the form of language and education, this is vital for succeeding in Danish society. This also shows the limits of hybridity: whereas "they" are allowed to mix with "us" on our premises, "we" should not mix with them. In this way, "Encompassment" through assimilation persists. While "hybridity" indicates a potential to overthrow cultural truths, the challenge is to point out whether it transcends ephemeral creativity. When considering the question of transformation of identities and the power of social agency, it is vital to distinguish between spaces and spheres that are private and public, as well as the various meanings of the "public" according to interests, ability, and power.

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**Prayers at  
the Town  
Hall Square,  
Copenhagen,  
1 February 2006**

This leads, however, to another subtle identity implied in the role of being a mediator: The trickster as an ambiguous figure, sometimes good, sometimes bad, a dangerous being—but also a figure of transformation. The conversion to a minority religion has often been perceived as a means of cultural critique, a revolt against the national community, and thus "a dissent that unsettles the boundaries by which selfhood, citizenship, nationhood, and community are defined, exposing these as permeable borders."<sup>6</sup> It is a factor that not only represents a tendency to erase racial identity, but also to nullify the community that breeds this racial identity. This perspective, then, indicates another role often associated with the mediator—the role of creating new and hybrid identities.

## Convergence and hybridity

The last decade has witnessed an appearance of new Muslim organizations. The founders and participants are primarily second-generation immigrants of different ethnic backgrounds, and converts to Islam. What they share is their conscious choice for Islam, in the sense of conversion and religious awakening respectively. Both groups can be seen as representing a break with their respective families' biographies and religiosities, and in the case of born (-again) Muslims, from a national/traditional Islam to a Danish and global Islam. Furthermore, they all share the same age group: young, between 20 and 30 years of age, and either students or academics. In other words, they are the elite of the new Danish Muslims, representing new identities in relation to being both "Danish" and "Muslim." These new organizations arrange study classes on Islam, debate evenings, and in various ways try to forge an impact on the public debate. This phenomenon can be seen especially amongst the so-called second-generation immigrants who act as commentators to current debates (e.g., the cartoon-affair), thereby performing a role of mediation in which they strive for the art of being "in-the middle," often with more success than converts. This, however, also stands as an ironic example that there are limits to where "hybridity" works; when "they" converge to "our" domain, it is perceived as successful integration; whereas in the opposite case, it is seen as problematic.

The everyday-interactions between Danes of different ethnic backgrounds that take place at these new organizations are often rife with

## Notes

1. Fieldwork was conducted in 2004 and 2005 as part of a postdoctoral research project on "Conversion to Islam in Denmark," financed by the Danish Research Council for Culture and Communication.
2. Gerd Baumann, "Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach," in *Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach*, ed. Gerd Baumann and André Gingrich (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004).
3. Anne Knudsen, *Her går det godt, send flere penge*, (København: Gyldendal, 1996).
4. Les Back, *New Ethnicities and Urban Culture* (London: UCL press, 1996).
5. Anne Sofie Roald, *New Muslims in the European Context: The Experience of Scandinavian Converts* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Tomas Gerholm, "Three European Intellectuals as Converts to Islam: Cultural Mediators or Social Critics?" in *The New Islamic Presence in Western Europe*, ed. Gerholm and Lithman (London: Mansell, 1990), 263–77.
6. Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 16.
7. Omar Shah, "Muslimsk ungdom, tradition og modernitet," in *Islam, Kristendom og det moderne*, ed. Rasmussen and Larsen (København: Tiderne Skifter, 2004), 25–56.
8. Pnina Werbner, "Fun Spaces: On Identity and Social Empowerment among British Pakistanis," *Theory, Culture and Society* 13, no. 4 (1996): 53–79.

# Religious Symbols Made in Italy

MAURIZIO ALBAHARI

During the last Italian electoral campaign, in March 2006, then Prime Minister Berlusconi declared that “we do not want Italy to become a multiethnic, multicultural country; we are proud of our culture and of our tradition.”<sup>1</sup> This article addresses the context, implications and social counterparts of such increasingly heard statements. Italy is currently the country with the highest rate of migrant population increase after the U.S. It has a *regolare* (documented) migrant population of at least 3 million (5.2 percent of the total population), including both EU and non-EU citizens. Of this, “Muslims” constitute 33.2 percent, while “Christians” (Catholic, Orthodox, and other) 49.1 percent.<sup>2</sup>

## Migration and the nation

With one of the lowest birth rates in the world, Italy will face a severe crisis in its pension system unless it manages to attract significant numbers of migrant workers.<sup>3</sup> And while thousands of potential workers have to risk their lives to arrive in Italy—given the paucity of legal channels of migration and asylum—Italian entrepreneurs constantly argue with the national government because the regionally al-

lotted quotas of migrant workers are inadequate to satisfy their demand of cheap labour. Thus, a focus on empirical data and everyday encounters shows a very ambiguous picture. On the one hand, this picture is not necessarily as gloomy as the decontextualized “cultural war” analyses and normative statements à la Berlusconi would suggest. At the same time, class solidarity and critical citizenship wither vis-à-vis national construction and identitarian, cultural, and religious concerns. And migrants, increasingly “becoming” “Muslims” (that is, talked about, represented, and perhaps seeing themselves as such) conveniently function as racialized, gendered, surveyed, and exploitable subjects and workers.

## Locating national controversies

When right-wing Italian politicians abstractly use the improbable rhetoric of the Crusades or draw arbitrary connections between the Ottomans’ brief conquest of Otranto in southeastern Italy (1480–1) and contemporary migration influxes, they encounter very scarce popular resistance. More disturbingly, in the last few years Italy has started witnessing pervasive controversies stemming from the concern with religion and migration. But are Muslim communities or representatives the igniters and active protagonists of these controversies? In November 2006, when Swedish IKEA and other Italian and multinational corporations announced that *presepi* (nativity sets) would be taken off the shelves due to low sales, centre-right political representatives organized a short-lived boycott and denounced the episode as one more example of relativism “paving the way to Islamic extremism.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, 2004 saw the explosion (and rapid eclipse) of a presepe controversy involving Italian schoolteachers and parents (rather than migrant or “Muslim” ones) concerned with the display of religious symbols in a specific public school in northern Italy. The issue was assigned a primary role in the national media, arguably because of the emotional and commercial appeal of interreligious controversies in the first place. The

**While Italian pundits and politicians purport a world of cultural-religious friction, systematic monitoring of the Italian mediascape and extensive ethnographic fieldwork illuminate a far more complex picture. Ambiguous everyday encounters coexist with structural inequality and exclusionary discourses. The periodic controversies dominating the popular media—over religious symbols, migration, and “Islam”—chart moral (and even theologically laden) political visions that function to inculcate new mechanisms of social control and boundary making in Italy.**

problem was championed by the 9 December 2004 TV talk show *Porta a Porta*. With the controversy posed as an attack to the presepe tradition by Muslims, self-anointed secular “defenders” of presepe could emerge in the show, advocating the “rights of Italians” and the incontestability of the traditionally unchallenged display of nativity sets in public schools. They performed the familiar discourse of the preservation vis-à-vis newcomers of identity, culture, and tradition, embodied in public presepe. On the other hand, eminent Cardinal Ersilio Tonini,

paradoxically known for his moderately conservative standpoints, severely attacked his fellow TV guests. He chastised these national government politicians for destroying the country’s future with their radically anti-Islamic viewpoints and statements. Later during the 2004 Christmas season I visited a poster session on migration in a socially engaged parish in Bari, southern Italy. A banner hanging over dozens of fair-trade nativity sets from around the world provided a “Catholic” counterpoint to the self-proclaimed “secularist” anti-immigration and anti-Islamic arguments of the public defenders of presepe: “Christmas is the holiday of an immigrant. Jesus too would be an immigrant today, with his family. There is a deep connection between the holy family and the innocent families of all times enduring trials and suffering.”

Similarly, it is well known that the Catholic crucifix is customarily displayed in Italian public spaces such as schools and tribunals. Yet, the fact that “even among those who are extremely open to immigrants and to other religions the rate of consent to the presence of the Christian symbol is 78%”<sup>5</sup> does not imply that these people automatically agree on the “meaning” of the crucifix prior to its representation, legal enforcement, and cultural understanding. Every “meaning,” including that of *presepe* and of the crucifix, must be investigated, dissected, and analyzed as a socially located and enforced one.<sup>6</sup> Historically, the crucifix is the ultimately open-ended object of vibrant theological debate and two millennia of varied religious practice. At present, redundant statements on its display, ultimate meaning, and essential nature increasingly reduce it to a limited symbol. In short, it is now conscripted as an icon of “Italian liberal-democratic and Republican values,” “national identity,” “universal compassion,” “the West,” and, ironically, “secular tolerance.” As such, it is deployed, most often by non-religious pundits and politicians, in marked contrast to migration and, in particular, the alleged patriarchy, intolerance, and illiberalism ascribed to Islam. In this usage, the crucifix evidently contradicts contemporary Catholic social teachings and becomes an exclusionary tool directed against “atheists,” “minorities,” “Jews,” “Muslims,” and others—migrants and Italians alike.

## Making “others” and “selves”

Shallow controversies, rather than pluralistic and constructive debates, monopolize news-making and public intellectuals’ knowledge production for a short time, until their commercial and ideological expiration. The media present such controversies as matters directly impacting Italians’ physicality, rights, identity, and religious and cultural traditions, now to be “defended.” Television talk shows, in particular, function as arenas for starlets, opinion-makers, and politicians vying for visibility. Here, skirmishes on issues of immigration and religion among a half-dozen guests, such as in the above-mentioned presepe case, become proxies for “public debates,” through which a national public and the Muslim disruptive exception are simultaneously produced. And yet, often local governments at the regional, provincial, and municipal levels are establishing their own policies and understandings of migration and Muslim practice, with “cul-

[Through] television  
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are simultaneously  
produced.

tural" exchanges, contingent agreements on specific practical problems, and discursive and pragmatic contrasts vis-à-vis national discourses and policies of immigration. Non-governmental organizations participating in the management of migration show a variety of political referents and agendas. Similarly, in Italian Catholic venues I have encountered extreme variation of opinions and convictions about migration and "Islam," not reflected in sketchy cultural clash arguments. At a conference, for example, Father Mimmo reminded his audience of lay secondary school teachers that "there is goodness inherent in Islam" and that John Paul II once kissed a copy of the Quran.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, another priest, the director of an extremely efficient Caritas facility of primary assistance and sheltering of migrants, told me in an interview that Muslim guests are not allowed to pray in any room of the facility. In fact, he said, that would entitle them potentially later to claim that space of prayer as Islamic.

Despite such doses of scepticism, "first-hand," socially embedded relationships with Muslims have the potential to work as a framework against which knowledge produced about Muslims through the mass media and other desocialized discourses may be appraised and verified. And diverse socio-cultural relations do happen, between persons who might or might not be interested in abstract "interreligious dialogue," but who nevertheless pragmatically interact in the workplace, the parish, the classroom, or the neighbourhood. For many other Italians instead, especially in non-metropolitan and remote areas, the knowledge of "Muslims" acquired through the media constitutes the background informing potential future relationships with Muslim individuals or groups, as the "veil" example below suggests.

Ms. Beba, the director of a Caritas parish centre in Lecce matching job offers with migrant availability, admitted that local elderly people (or relatives on their behalf) sometimes ask explicitly for Christian domestic caregivers, because they would feel embarrassed about "passeggiare [going for a walk] and being seen with somebody with a veil on their head." This example is indicative of the bundled characteristics that are being naturally and superficially associated with Islam and that make it "known" to many Italians through the mass media: the veil is one of them, arguably also as a consequence of widely publicized French debates on the subject. The example also suggests the lack of significance of these characteristics: as elsewhere in other regions of southern Europe, many older Catholic women in Lecce cover their head with black or coloured foulards, in church as in everyday life outside the house. Finally, this example illustrates the essentially social and relational nature of the concern about the appropriateness of "religious" symbols and practices. It is not that clients are uncomfortable with veiled women per se. Rather, they are "ashamed" to be seen with veiled women during the social ritual of *passeggiata* [promenade], taking for granted a collective stigma on the veil that, while pervading dominant discourses, might or might not be empirically accurate.

## Drawing and resisting conclusions

Both "migration" and "religion" (read: "Islam") are often politically and analytically tackled as challenges to the nation-state and the EU. In this view they challenge sovereignty, church-state separation, and amicable relationships and the postulated cultural, religious, identitarian, and demographic balance of Italy, the EU and, in general, of secular liberal democracies. Interesting research questions emerge when such essentially governmental concerns centred on "challenge" are turned inside out. Thus, how is the liberal-democratic, secular, Western national body constructed vis-à-vis "religious" migrants? How is national and supranational sovereignty performed and reinforced vis-à-vis migrants' transgression? In this perspective, then, controversies over "religious symbols," male and female genital modification, *dhabiha* (ritual slaughter), mosque building, and the public display of Catholic crucifixes should prompt analyses of underlying ethnocentric concerns, imperial gazes, and governmental stakes.

In particular, if what is crucial for governments at various levels is not "homogeneity versus difference as such" but the authority and prerogative to define crucial homogeneities and differences,<sup>8</sup> then "religion" is not the object of impossible exclusion, but rather of governmental intervention. Entering and often engendering morally charged controversies on the meaning of the crucifix, the religious normativity of the veil, the appropriateness of the Prophet's depiction and other such complex issues, secular governmental actors increasingly produce a pervasive "knowledge" about such tropes and about the (Muslim) people, beliefs, and religious practices supposedly igniting related problems. Support-

Usama Bin Laden and George W. Bush Christmas figurines displayed in a Naples shop

Image not available online

PHOTO BY MARIO LAPORTA / © REUTERS, 2002

ing a pervasive moral construction and evaluation of "difference," they also draw boundaries defining "the nation," "the public," "Italian civilization," and "Judeo-Christian Europe." Normative, ethical, and even theological arguments are increasingly articulated and disseminated by "secular" governmental actors. In contrast, I contend, social scientists should focus not on the retrieval of the supposed "meaning" or nature of certain "religious" symbols and tropes. Rather, they should engage the social, cultural, and political implications that such controversies and governmental knowledge production have in constituting and reproducing dominant ideas about the liberal-democratic individual, the resulting national community, the feminized migrant, the religious fundamentalist, and so forth. For it seems that these controversies increasingly function as virtual "monuments," admonitions, and warnings on what the nation, civilization, Christendom, and Europe should be. In particular, the ongoing quest for a solution to what being European (or Italian, German, etc.) means is not only an unsolved problem, but ideally an unsolvable one as well. Any final solution would result in further institutionalization of an exclusionary, ethnocentric, and necessarily undemocratic regime of citizenship and membership.

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## Notes

1. *Il Corriere della Sera*, 28 March 2006.
2. Caritas/Migrantes, *Immigrazione Dossier Statistico 2006: XVI Rapporto sull'immigrazione* (Rome: IDOS, 2006).
3. See Kitty Calavita, "Italy and the New Immigration: economic realities, political fictions, and policy failures," in *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective*, ed. W. A. Cornelius et al., 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 345–80.
4. MP Luca Volontè, *La Repubblica*, 30 November 2006.
5. Italo De Sandre, "Pratica, credenza e istituzionalizzazione delle religioni," in *Un Singolare Pluralismo: Indagine sul pluralismo morale e religioso degli italiani*, ed. F. Garelli, G. Guizzardi, and E. Pace (Bologna, Italy: Il Mulino, 2003), 115.
6. See Talal Asad, "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz," *Man* (n.s.) 18 (1983): 237–59.
7. Tutti diversamente stranieri Conference, Modugno, 17 December 2004.
8. Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 267.

# Being a Pious French Muslim Woman

JEANETTE S. JOUILI

There has been much recent discussion about the challenges that French *laïcité* poses to the integration of Islam. According to the notion of French *laïcité*, a particularly strict version of secularity, public spheres are defined in a more normative way than in other European societies; equally, the demand on the individual to conform to those norms is also much stronger. It requires, among other things, to respect the “obligation of restraint,” which means to refrain from displaying any signs of religious or other particularistic allegiance.<sup>1</sup>

From this follows that the Islamic code of modesty that pious Muslim women adopt—most visibly embodied through the headscarf—implicitly denotes a questioning of the definition of the *laïque* public sphere and therefore significantly endangers their successful participation in these places. Another matter which, though less likely to attract public attention, also involves a physical commitment to one's faith is the

performance of *salat*, the prayer ritual performed routinely by pious Muslims.

In this context, upholding one's religious practice cannot be taken for granted and pious women generally have to consider whether or not, and how, to introduce these practices. Practically, this means to reflect on the degree of visibility, which might be accompanied by either a claim for expressing one's religiosity or by an accommodative stance in regard to the demand for restraint in public.

While Islamic rituals and bodily (hence visible) practices are first and foremost ethical self-disciplines crucial for fashioning the pious self,<sup>2</sup> in a secular context they are generally understood as “symbols,” by which these acts become “texts” to be deciphered by others. In a context of migration and minority, they are potentially deciphered with negative connotations. None epitomizes this better than the *hijab*. Pious women are highly aware that they have to engage with this negative reading by the majority society. This is where identity politics comes into play.

## Struggling for recognition

One of the central considerations for many pious Muslims in France is the question of gaining recognition from the majority society both as pious and modern Muslim women. This struggle for recognition is regularly framed in terms of claiming rights, i.e. the right to live as a practicing Muslim in the French society. It is by referring to

rights that many women frequently issue statements like the following: “We have to demand our rights. We should go to work with our veils, if we are qualified. We have to show that we exist.”

Not only does the much-discussed question of the headscarf, but also the less-debated question of praying, gives rise to such demands. And as much as the *hijab* has done, *salat* has the potential to give rise to a struggle over the definition of secular space. The following account given by one woman about the situation at university clearly reflects the tensions which arise from these claims; tensions which can be played out in an almost theatrical fashion: “We used to pray under

**In secular France visible religious practice is socially discouraged within public spheres.**

**For pious Muslims, in particular pious Muslim women, who actively participate in these spheres, piety cannot be lived out without encountering certain problems.**

**The negotiations that these women engage in, favouring at times visibility, at times invisibility, not only allow the living of virtuous lives under often difficult circumstances, but more importantly are part of a process by which ethical Muslim selves are constituted in secular, non-Islamic contexts.**

the staircase, outside the building. But to bother us, the secretaries walked their dogs there to dirty the place. My brother told me that they prayed in a room in the cave of his university. But when the janitors found out, they closed the room. The students decided to pray in the hall in front of everyone. Finally, the administrators preferred to reopen the room. There are a lot of stories like that.”

Religious practices such as *salat* and *hijab*, which render oneself visible within public spheres, mark and claim

ones presence—something which is one of the more general objectives of contemporary Islamic movements.<sup>3</sup> The search for recognition through visibility—a visibility which is also articulated in terms of “Islamic self-confidence”—equally reflects the desire of Islamic revival movements to reject the inferior image of Muslims and to claim, with the same act, pride for a consciously appropriated identity. Therefore, from a “public deficit,” the Islamic identity becomes a “subcultural advantage.”<sup>4</sup> This hints at a typical feature of the struggle for recognition by minority and stigmatized groups: visibility is considered a source of power whereas its opposite, invisibility, becomes a sign of oppression.<sup>5</sup>

The struggle for recognition is however not always articulated through the principle of public visibility and can, at times, be articulated in quite different terms, as for example by referring to *da'wa*. While this term is also used by the women in its classical meaning, that is “calling” to the righteous path of Islam, here it denotes the struggle of representing “Islam” positively to the non-Muslim other, thereby countering its negative image. Since this “representative” *da'wa* is now perceived to be the precondition for the (social, political, and spiritual) well-being of the Muslim umma in the West it has thereby been elevated to the status of religious obligation.

While this form of *da'wa* can equally be practiced in different domains of social interaction and everyday politics, pious Muslim women often feel that they have a particular role to play in counteracting the negative images of Islam, which prevail in French majority society. One of the most effective means to counter these images is, according to these women, to participate actively and successfully in society—especially by pursuing a professional career and thereby embodying the image of a “modern” Muslim woman.

However, the wearing of *hijab* as well as the punctual performance of the ritual prayer is difficult to accomplish in the workplace. Not only because, in the French understanding, the *hijab* constitutes an illegitimate intrusion of a private practice into the public sphere, but also because of the general public perception of these practices in France. In this perception, the headscarf, as the successive debates of the “headscarf affairs” have shown, is almost unanimously dismissed as a symbol of female oppression. Correspondingly, praying regularly (i.e. visibly) is considered either as a sign of lack of integration or of holding radical views.<sup>6</sup>

In this context, pious women face two seemingly irreconcilable Islamic duties: the honouring of (socially stigmatized) religious obligations and the promotion of *da'wa* in the sense of well representing Islam. And while both duties are inscribed into the overall goal of constructing a morally strong and flourishing community, they are grounded on completely different logics: Islamic dress and prayer are considered to be part of the Sharia, the clearly defined norms at the level of *'ibadat* and *mu'amalat* that function as crucial self-practices for the constitution and consolidation of the pious subject one aspires

The search for  
recognition through  
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the desire ... to  
reject the inferior  
image of Muslims  
and [claim] pride  
for a consciously  
appropriated  
identity.



PHOTO BY MEHDI FEDOUACH / © AFP 2003

leading a pious life. As a woman who teaches in an Islamic organization explained: "If I claim my rights but do not also ask for Allah's help, my approach is wrong. If I put ... my hope in human beings instead of in Allah, my approach is wrong. Of course, you have to claim your rights, although this is pretty hopeless these days, but I do not lose hope in Allah's help in this situation."

Without actually doubting the usefulness of claiming rights, many women regularly insist on the importance of attributing the first "agency" to the divine rather than to the human. This idea needs to prevail in the believer's conscience and should never be forgotten whenever claims, such as the right to wear the headscarf at work or the right for a prayer space, are articulated in opposition to the wishes of the majority society. By placing one's "hopes in Allah" rather than "in men," the idea of an autonomous subject, determining alone its acts, is clearly rejected.

Closely linked to confidence in God is the duty of patience (*sabr*) in the face of hardship. When talking about the difficulties they faced in regard to the headscarf, either by not finding employment because of the veil or by being obliged not to veil (whether out of considerations of *da'wa* or out of necessity), many pious women refer concretely to *sabr*. One woman, for example, who unveils for work and for whom this act is not unproblematic, addresses the idea of trust in God and *sabr*: "Insha'allah, times will change. I have confidence in Allah and one day, we will be accepted with our headscarf. We have to be patient right now." The statements of these pious women invoke somehow a divine intervention at the same time as they insist on the necessity of resisting and combating actively pressures and prejudices in regard to the headscarf. While the latter appears to be affirming agency, the former appears to abandon the concept altogether. To better apprehend the apparent contradiction, Asad's reflections on the concept of agency are helpful. He shows that notions like suffering and endurance are not synonymous with "passivity," but that, in certain traditions, they may "create a space for moral action."<sup>8</sup> That is to say, they render certain modalities of engagement with the world possible and constitute a form of agency, albeit one that is different from the dominant secular, progressive understanding.

Paris, 21  
December 2003

to be.<sup>7</sup> *Da'wa* addressed at the non-Muslim majority society—through women's successful social participation—has to take into account definitions of modernity, progressiveness, or female emancipation dominant in the majority society. Therefore, both duties potentially require the performance of a different kind of public self.

Evidently, these two types of "Islamic" duties built on different logics are difficult to combine and require a continual, self-reflexive negotiation. When the importance of *da'wa* is stressed, strategies, which render the accomplishment of these religious obligations less visible, become for some women a viable option. This becomes particularly clear in regard to the issue of veiling. Many pious Muslim women who do not veil, do so for especially this reason (while they uphold at the same time strict norms for their dress style: clothes covering arms and legs and hiding one's forms); some will unveil only during work. Others will wear a "discrete" headgear, a hat, or a "bandana" (a practice which has however become increasingly difficult in the aftermath of the 2004 law banning "conspicuous" religious symbols from public schools). When discussing these different choices inspired by the idea of *da'wa*, the women always express an awareness that their choices have to be justified (and justifiable) towards God, considered to be the ultimate judge. Accordingly, those women frequently reflect, in a self-critical fashion, on whether the idea of representing Islam bears with it the risk of a too easy legitimization of conforming oneself to social pressures from the secular society.

## Enduring rejection

The different choices regarding visibility reflect aspirations such as recognition, participation, and justice; aspirations which are usually considered to be constitutive of agency. However, these women also take into account other considerations that seem to be antithetical to the former. Apart from claiming rights and recognition, pious Muslim women also frequently appeal to God as the just and supreme agent in whom one should place all of one's trust. An outright "claim of rights" would in this sense even be counterproductive for the ultimate goal of

## Between visibility and invisibility: a pious negotiation

The choices pious women make in regard to their Islamic practice within French secular public spheres differ significantly (the concrete social consequences of their choices vary even more). These different choices are the result of the individual and subjective evaluations and interpretations of the different ethical requirements the women are faced with. Accordingly, *da'wa* is understood as representing Islam or as the cultivation and practice of Islamic virtues, such as placing trust in God and endurance of hardships; requirements which have to be pursued in regard to the overall goal of leading a God-pleasing life.

By analyzing how these particular pious negotiations in the context of French secularity result in concrete choices of visibility and invisibility, it becomes evident how much the constitution of Muslim subjectivities depends on concrete social conditions (here strict secularity and minority condition) out of which new moral requirements ensue. The pious negotiation undertaken by pious Muslim women should be considered one of the contextual practices shaping ethical Muslim selves in a secular, non-Islamic environment.

## Notes

1. While this obligation legally only affects civil servants and pupils in public schools, in practice, it is required by everyone who participates in the (semi-) public spheres of social life, most notably at the work place.
2. See Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton University Press, 2005).
3. Nilüfer Göle, ed., *Islam in Public: Turkey, Iran, and Europe* (Istanbul, 2006), 7.
4. Ibid.
5. Mariam Fraser, "Classing Queer: Politics in Competition," *Theory, Culture and Society* 16 (1999): 119.
6. John Bowen, "Muslims and Citizens: France's Headscarf Controversy," *Boston Review*, February/March 2004: 31–35.
7. See Mahmood, op. cit.
8. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford University Press, 2003), 91.

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PHOTO BY NIEK BIEGMAN, 19 APRIL 2003



The first time I stumbled upon a Sufi ritual, some forty years ago in Cairo, I did not realize I had discovered the tip of an iceberg. It was unclear to me what was happening, in any case. My studies of Arabic, Turkish, and Islam at the University of Leiden had not prepared me for popular mysticism.

There may have been a dozen men in that alley moving to music with a pulsating rhythm. They gave me tea and some explanation. I was taken by the music, and hoped I would be lucky enough to hear it again.

Over time, I found Sufis all over the country, all around the year. The mystical orders, the *turuq* (sing. *tariqa*), boast a membership of some six million, and they manifest themselves at hundreds of saints' festivals (mawlid) great and small.<sup>1</sup> When there is no such festival, the "dervishes" still perform their rituals once or twice a week at their *saha*, called *tekke* or *semahane* in the Balkans, or at someone's home. Most Sufi orders function at a modest social level. This may be the reason why they are unknown to most foreign residents and ignored or despised by the Egyptian elites. The Islamists hate both their doctrine and their practices. The *turuq*, which are proportionally as numerous in a

**The Rifa'i tariqa in Macedonia was founded in the early nineteenth century as a predominantly Turkish order. Following waves of emigration, the brotherhood only continued to exist because of the massive interest of the Roma, who now dominate its ranks. In word and image, this article aims to capture the tumultuous history and dynamic rituals that characterize Sufism in Macedonia.**

# Loving in

NIEK BIEGMAN

PHOTO BY NIEK BIEGMAN, 31 MAY 2003



number of other Islamic countries as they are in Egypt, form an often under-estimated barrier against fundamentalism.

The broad current of Sufism presents a large variety in ritual from region to region and from order to order, but there are a number of common characteristics. Apart from the ubiquitous cult of the saints, and whether in Macedonia, Egypt, or elsewhere, Sufis share one main objective: the love of God, the supreme Friend or Beloved, and ultimately, union with Him. The principal technique for establishing a closer relationship with God is *dhikr* (generally pronounced as *zikr*), or "remembrance." It consists of repeating some of God's "most beautiful names" and related formulas (called *esma*, i.e., "names," in the Balkans) with sincerity and concentration. This can be done either alone or in a group and, depending on each order's custom, sitting, standing, or dancing, with or without music. This is the basis of the Sufi ritual, which can be augmented with litanies (*awrad*) and hymns (*ilahis*) and carried out with varying degrees of visible passion.

In the course of a prolonged stay in Skopje, Macedonia, between 2002 and 2004, I befriended Erol Baba, a Rifa'i shaykh of Turkish origin and his dervishes. The Rifa'i tariqa in Macedonia had experienced a tumultuous history. Established around 1820 as a predominantly Turkish order, its numbers declined substantially during the Turkish emigration that started in 1912 and peaked

in the 1950s. Had it not been for the Roma's sudden, massive interest in the tariqa, the Macedonian Rifa'iyya might have disappeared altogether. By the time I arrived Erol Baba's dervishes were mostly Roma, and their numbers were steadily increasing. The Skopje region counted no less than thirteen or fourteen *semahanas*, notably in the Roma township of Shutka, and ten in other parts of the country. Erol Baba authorized their establishment and remained their shaykh, but rarely intruded upon their daily activities. According to his estimate, each *semahana* could count up to fifty dervishes. This means there might be over a thousand Rifa'is in Macedonia, possibly as many as there ever were.

In the Balkans and Egypt, and no doubt elsewhere as well, the followers of the Rifa'iyya have always been drawn from the lower and lower middle classes. The tariqa's unbridled practices hold little appeal for the Muslim bourgeoisie. Even so, the Rifa'is are respected by the other *turuq* including the very disciplined Halvetis of Struga, who follow Sunni doctrine but pursue the same objective as diligently as the Rifa'is. Erol Baba was deeply aware of his status as one of the few prominent ethnic Turks remaining in the capital. He too had



PHOTO BY NIEK BIEGMAN, 21 JUNE 2003

# God Macedonia

## Notes

1. About popular Sufism in Egypt, see Nicolaas Biegman, *Egypt: Moulids, Saints, Sufis* (SDU / Kegan Paul, 1990).
2. A CD with zikr and ilahis of the Skopje Rifa'is has been released by Pan Records, Leiden.

Nicolaas (Niek) Biegman is a former Dutch diplomat and author of a number of photo books, latest among which is *God's Lovers, a Sufi community in Macedonia* (London: Kegan Paul, 2007). The photos on these pages are among more than fifty contained in this book. Email: nbiegman@lycos.com

considered leaving for Turkey, but had decided not to do so. He appeared not to mind that the vast majority of his dervishes were Roma now. Ethnicity is not an issue in the tariqa, he used to say.

The Skopje dervishes sing their hymns in Turkish, Serbian/Bosnian, and Romany. The *esma* are recited in Arabic.<sup>2</sup> The Rifa'iyya is one of the rare Sufi orders that include groups practicing *ijrah* or *darb silah*: the piercing of the body with iron pins of various sizes "when (God's) love seizes them." In Skopje this is done from time to time. But even without the piercing these zikrs are impressive and often deafening, brimming with movement and feeling. The *esma* and *ilahis* are recited, sung, and shouted at full voice, accompanied on hand-held percussion instruments. At the end the dervishes stand up for a special prayer directed towards the tomb of Haznadar Baba, the founder of the tekke.

The pictures I include here could never have been taken without the full support of Shaykh Erol, who imposed no restrictions on me during dozens of sessions and gave me valuable information, during the last year of his life in particular. Since his death in 2005 his son Murtezen has been in charge of the tekke and its dervishes. Erol Baba has now joined the ranks of the saints. He has a tomb in the tekke and appears to the dervishes in their dreams. He tells them that he is doing fine, and that he can see them though they cannot see him. His help is solicited by visitors.



PHOTO BY NIEK BIEGMAN, 31 MAY 2003

# Women Reconfiguring Esoteric Economies

AMBER GEMMEKE

Meissa Ndiaye and Coumba Keita, two female marabouts, live in the northern suburbs of Dakar. For their practice they use Quranic verses in amulets and *eaux bénites* [potions], and employ Arabic geomancy (*ramalu*), astrology, and numerology. They conduct divination sessions (of the *khatt ar-raml* type), perform interpretation of dreams (*istikhara*), and arrange prayer sessions (*khalwah*). The women have a large clientele of both men and women. Meissa and Coumba's success is a surprising exception: Islamic esoteric knowledge is a domain dominated by men. Marabout women are considered a rare exception at best and a contradiction in terms at worst.<sup>1</sup> This paper discusses the ways in which women can gain, nonetheless, authority in this domain and—in doing so—answers to the call for research on women's activities within West African Islam.

## Meissa

Meissa is Wolof. She is a small, slim lady of about fifty-five years old. She lives in a villa containing seven bedrooms, an office, and a salon with several of her brother's and sister's children and some of their children. Her only daughter is married elsewhere. Meissa offers *khatt ar-raml* divination sessions, *khalwah* and *istikhara* sessions, and prepares amulets and potions in which she combines Quranic verses with ground plants.

On the day that Meissa tells me about her arrival in Dakar, she sits on the floor of her office, working during the entire interview. She folds pages with *turabu* and green powder into small bundles that she wraps in white cotton.<sup>2</sup> Meissa explained that she had learned this technique from her father, a marabout. In most marabout families, Meissa said, girls receive less education than their brothers. In her family, however, things were different:

"My father taught me the Quran until I was about fifteen years and then, until I was thirty years, I learned the mystical secrets of the Quran. I left Dokhoba when I was about forty years old and had divorced my husband.<sup>3</sup> My father told me to go to Dakar, because Dakar is where money can be found. He blessed me and gave me a big silver ring with a *turabu* that I always wear. He also gave me one of his jinni. Because of this ring and because of my inherited jinn, all that I do for clients works. I first lived in Yarakh [a suburb of Dakar] with a family member of mine. The difference between the first days that I worked as a marabout and now, fifteen years later, is enormous. In the beginning, I had no clients at all. But the first people that came brought along other people, and that is how my clientele grew. It is like a chain reaction. After a while, I had many clients, especially in Cambéréne, so the caliph of the Layenne brotherhood gave me a piece of land [to construct the villa on]."

Besides her activities in Dakar, Meissa says she travels internationally: she visits clients in the Gambia and in Mauritania. Furthermore, Meissa's clients who immigrated to Europe and the United States regularly call her for consultation.

## Coumba

Coumba is a Bamana, Dakar-born woman of forty-four years old. With her light skin, her round face, and curvaceous body, she is an attractive woman. Coumba started to work as a marabout after she had had visions of Seydina Issa Laye.<sup>4</sup> She said:

**This article examines the ways in which women construct expert status and gain authority as marabouts among a largely sceptical suburban population. The experiences of two female marabouts in suburban Dakar highlight how expertise is negotiated, legitimated, and publicly recognized. The author suggests that the women's success can be explained by migration and urbanization: the suburban environment, filled with migrants looking for their livelihood in an insecure place, creates opportunities for women to engage actively in esoteric Islamic practices.**

through a group of students that wanted to immigrate to Spain. That worked."

Like Meissa, Coumba is popular: whenever I visited her, up to five clients, both men and women, would be waiting for her in her living room. She also has several clients who migrated to Europe and the United States, who continue to call her for advice.

## Being a successful female marabout

The situations of Meissa and Coumba differ considerably, but they also show striking parallels. The most apparent difference is how they acquired knowledge: lessons in a teacher-student setting versus dreams and visions. However, their physical and verbal presence (dress, attitude), their start in suburban Dakar, the way they built up their clientele, and their affiliation with the Layenne brotherhood are all remarkably alike. The differences between Meissa and Coumba show that there is room for variation to legitimate Islamic knowledge for women in Dakar. The similarities, discussed below, illustrate how Meissa and Coumba adapt themselves to the same dominant, male, discourse.

Meissa and Coumba both frequently wear a white scarf around their head and a *grand boubou*. They speak in remarkably soft voices and often wear glasses. This dress and use of voice and gestures underline their wisdom and self-control, as well as their attachment to Islamic values. Most other middle aged Dakaraises take fashion seriously and wear vibrant colours, sometimes in tight-fitting *taille basses* outfits or synthetic fabric, and headscarves in a turban-type way. Meissa's and Coumba's attitude certainly adds to their image as charismatic, stable, wise and mature ladies, who do not have time to keep up with the trivial fashions of the day. Rather, their dress imitates the style of the leading ladies of the Islamic brotherhoods in Senegal.

While Meissa and Coumba thus emphasize an "Islamic" femininity in dress and posture, they downplay other aspects of femininity. Menstruation is an important factor in this de-feminization. Meissa and Coumba explained that their "secret" for using the Quran is their lack of menstruation, thus indicating purity, and, as this state is generally associated with older women, wisdom. Meissa indicated: "The problem with women is their impurity. How can a woman do *khalwah*, which sometimes lasts a month, when she dirties herself? But in my case, the time that my only child was born was the only time I saw blood." Coumba similarly explained how it was possible to retain her purity even though she gave birth to children while working as a marabout: "Before I got pregnant with the first child of my second husband, I bled for forty days. I went to a doctor. He said that I had all my bleeding in one period, and that after these forty days I would never menstruate again." Meissa and Coumba thus explained how they, as women, *can* use the Quran in a pure way at all times.

Besides dress, behaviour, and an overt claim to continual purity, another remarkable resemblance between Meissa and Coumba is the



PHOTO BY AMBER GEMMEKE, 2006

**Meissa's villa  
in Cambéréne,  
a Dakarais  
outskirt**

two women's affiliation with the Layenne brotherhood. Both Meissa and Coumba were born as members of the Tijaniyya brotherhood, but changed to the Layenne brotherhood at the start of their career as marabouts. The visible proof of Meissa's and Coumba's affiliation with the Layenne is apparent in both of their homes. An enormous portrait of Seydina Issa Laye is painted on the outer wall of Meissa's house. On the inner wall of the patio, a smaller copy of the same portrait is painted. As another visible sign of support, besides the portraits of her Layenne tutor, Meissa frequently draws attention to her father's huge silver ring.

Coumba, for her part, has placed pictures of Seydina Issa Laye in every room of her house. In the hallway, a composition photo of Seydina Issa Laye and Coumba decorates the entrance. In her office a portrait of Issa and a calendar portraying all the important figures within the Layenne brotherhood are placed. In the living room, a huge portrait of Seydina Issa Laye hangs over the sofa. Coumba explains her abundant use of these portraits, and, in fact, her work as a marabout, by the visions she had of Seydina Issa Laye and the Virgin Mary. She told me she had, when she was thirty-three years old, a vision in which Mary put her hand in the right hand of Jesus. The next night, she dreamt of Seydina Issa Laye who said: "It is me, Jesus, but in Issa's form." Coumba said she recognized Seydina Issa Laye because he looked exactly like his picture, which is widely distributed in Senegal. The following night, Seydina Issa Laye told her in another dream to go back to Senegal and work as a marabout. Still today, Coumba says, Issa tells her in dreams how she can best treat her clients.

Coumba is not unique in having had visions of Seydina Issa Laye. Followers of various backgrounds, especially women, have converted to the Layenne order after having seen Issa in dreams or visions. Coumba, however, seems to be unique in attributing her knowledge of esoteric Islamic knowledge to visions of Issa. None of the male marabouts I met in suburban Dakar laid such (visible) emphasis on the support of the leaders of their brotherhood or on the support of their fathers. Apparently, marabout women use male authoritarian figures to legitimate their work.

## Gendered authority

Yet another resemblance in the two women's behaviour is apparent. Meissa and Coumba clearly have different strategies in attracting a clientele than their male colleagues. Most male marabouts I met in suburban Dakar talk openly about the downsides of their profession. One openly admitted he is not very good in his work, others told me that they go regularly to other marabouts for advice on how to help their clients, and some marabouts say they would rather have had a French education and start a business instead of working according to family

traditions. The two women are not that open. Meissa is very reluctant to give any answers and Coumba often tells incredible stories in which she frequently contradicts herself. In my experience, this elusiveness can be related to the relative isolation in which these women work. Meissa and Coumba built up their clientele individually. They both started to work as a marabout after they had divorced and moved to suburban Dakar. To attract clients, they could not rely on a family network, as their male colleagues do. Instead, they used other weapons: inapproachability and self-glorification. Meissa referred to the Prophet Mohammed by emphasizing that she started to work as a marabout at the age of forty years. Coumba refers even more abundantly to influential people and events. Perhaps her lack of a marabout family inspired her to do so. Coumba is certainly not unique in telling fantastic stories—for example that she traded gold and diamonds in Central Africa or that her youngest son is born with Quranic verses on his leg. "Words louder than actions," to paraphrase Villalón (1995), form an unalienable part of the profession of a marabout.

As a result of their exceptional position, Meissa and Coumba face specific problems in legitimating their work. They not only need to convince their sceptical clients that they are powerful, well educated, gifted, pious, and reliable—challenges every marabout faces in suburban Dakar—but also that they, as women, possess qualities associated with men. This paper showed the careful image building with which Meissa and Coumba negotiate their position towards their different clients. The women claim authority, visually and verbally, mainly by dressing like leading female religious figures, by stressing their ritual and moral purity, their cosmopolitan travels, and by emphasizing their relationship with male authoritative figures.

Interestingly, once female marabouts have established a reputation, their exceptional position actually seems to work in their favour. Once female marabouts are successful, they are far more remarkable than most of their male colleagues, and thus ensured of a clientele. As an inhabitant of a Dakarais suburb said: "A successful female marabout must have both an exceptionally strong character as well as strong powers."

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## Notes

1. Among others Geert Mommersteeg, *Het domein van de marabout: koranleraren en religieus- magische specialisten in Djenné, Mali* (Amsterdam, 1996), and Donal Cruise O'Brien, *The Mourides of Senegal: the Political and Economic organization of an Islamic Brotherhood* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).
2. *Turabu*: quadrants with Arabic texts and numbers, based upon classic Arabic geomancy.
3. The idea that the Prophet Mohammed started to preach at the age of forty is commonly held in Senegal.
4. Seydina Issa Laye is the son of the founder of the Layenne brotherhood, Seydina Limamou Laye. Limamou, born Libasse Thiaw, was a forty-year old fisherman when he declared he was the reincarnation of the Prophet Mohammed, in 1883. After his death in 1909, his son Issa succeeded him until he died in 1949. Layenne believe that Issa is the reincarnation of Jesus Christ.

# Post-Apartheid Sufi Resurgence

ARMEN CASSIEM

As the reality of apartheid finally crumbled in South Africa in 1994, many prominent Sufi shaykhs visited the country in an attempt to recruit new disciples into their particular Sufi brotherhoods. Among others, these included: Shaykh Nazim al-Haqqani and Shaykh Hisham Kabbani of the Naqshbandi Order, the late Shaykh Alawi al-Maliki of the Alawi Order, and Shaykh Hasan Cisse of the Tijani Order (who was officially received by President Thabo Mbeki). During their visits, the Shaykhs appointed local followers to be representatives of their Sufi brotherhood in Southern Africa. The Shaykhs spoke at local mosques where big crowds turned up to join in prayer and listen to their messages. The large numbers in attendance were indicative of the growing appeal of Sufism in the 1990s to the Muslim community of South Africa.

The warmth with which these Shaykhs were received can be partly explained by the historical trajectory of Islam in South Africa. For centuries since the mid-1600s, when the first Muslims arrived at the Cape from the Malay Archipelago and surrounding area as prisoners and political exiles, the public practice of Islam had been forbidden and violation was punishable by death. Covert Sufi rituals provided an important substitute at a time when Islam could not be publicly practised. Though these restrictions had long since been lifted, and normative Islam had become the dominant expression of Islam, the collective memory of these historical roots had produced the popular idea that the “founding fathers” of Islam in South Africa had been highly trained in Islamic mysticism and this, in turn, had instilled a favourable attitude toward Sufism among many present-day South African Muslims.

More importantly still the local Sufi leaders who had held a rather peripheral position in the Muslim community during apartheid, found themselves directly juxtaposed to the incumbent ulama. The authority

of these ulama had been in decline for some decades. Reasons for this included their rather ambivalent—critics would say collaborationist—positions towards apartheid. Many imams had favoured the preservation of Islamic institutions over the need to stand up for justice, arguing that the apartheid regime had not outlawed Islam and that mosques had been allowed to function—had this not been the case, they insist, they would have been first to resist the regime, even at the cost of death.<sup>1</sup> Another issue that had recently shaken their credibility in the eyes of many Muslims was that most of the current imams had obtained their training in the finer points of Islamic jurisprudence and theology in the Middle East. Rightly or wrongly, this contributed to them being seen by the community to be either Salafi or Wahhabi

orientated. Moreover, many Muslims saw this allegation confirmed in what they felt to be a neglect of the spiritual needs of the local community by the graduates of Middle Eastern religious institutes. Ironically, in this atmosphere the foreign Sufi Shaykhs who visited South Africa were seen as more credible than the local Muslim ulama.

## Ulama response to Sufi resurgence

The Sufi resurgence has been particularly prevalent in the Western Cape Province, which is where the majority of the Muslim community in South Africa live. While Muslims make up only 1.5 percent of the nationwide population of 45 million, in the Western Cape Province they

**The Sufi tradition in South Africa—with roots going back to the seventeenth century—regained momentum in the 1990s. Capitalizing on the reduced authority of the ulama, the new Sufi leaders could claim to represent a normative South African version of Islam. Moreover, their focus on the grassroots has increased their visibility in many townships and allowed them to provide spiritual solutions to everyday social issues.**

form around 10 percent of its population. Muslims in South Africa are mostly concentrated in urban areas and constitute a cosmopolitan group consisting of a variety of ethnicities, language groups, and social classes. The Group Areas Act of 1950 also displaced large numbers of non-whites, including Muslims, to racially segregated neighbourhoods where Muslims established mosques and madrasas.

While the above shows that Islam is a more “visible” religion in these areas than crude statistics would indicate,<sup>2</sup> the fact that 47 percent of the Muslims live in and around Cape Town bespeaks the discursive and ideological power that religious bodies there can potentially exert over the entire Muslim community of South Africa. The most influential Islamic institution is the Muslim Judicial Council (hereinafter MJC) of Cape Town. It was established in 1945 by a few Middle Eastern and locally trained theologians in order to deal with legal jurisprudential matters.<sup>3</sup> Most imams of the almost 150 mosques in the Western Cape Province align themselves to the MJC. The majority of these imams are not associated with a Sufi order, but they often demonstrate a relaxed attitude to Sufism. This can, for example, be seen in the fact that the two Cape Town Muslim community radio stations, the Voice of the Cape and Radio 786,<sup>4</sup> regularly air programmes on Sufism that are hosted by local Sufi personalities, such as Professor Yusuf da Costa, and local shaykhs of the Naqshbandi and Darqawiyah brotherhoods.

The incumbent imams are well acquainted with the appeal Sufism exercises in Cape Town. Their complacent attitude over the past few years stands in stark contrast to their previous attitudes towards Sufi practices during the 1960s and later when members of the MJC came out strongly against certain ideas expressed by the Sufis. In one such incident, leaders of the MJC called Sufism a “Barelwi Menace” and in another, Sufi practices were labelled superficial and the behaviour of certain disciples unacceptable.<sup>5</sup> In 2001 a well-known imam aligned to the MJC accused the Naqshbandi-Haqqanis of being “shaykh-” and “grave-worshippers.” The pro-Sufis, led by Professor da Costa, in turn accused him of being “small minded,” “intolerant,” and not least of all, a “Wahhabi.” The “Sufi-Wahhabi” debate, as these disputes were later known, played itself out in columns of widely read Cape newspapers with letters being written back and forth by the two groups and their respective supporters accusing each other of being outside the fold of Islam.

Nevertheless, this debate was more than an ideological struggle in which each camp tried to vilify the ideas of the other. It was also about winning over the loyalties and the hearts of the Cape Muslim community and an attempt to be seen as the legitimate authority and representative of South African Muslims at the Cape. Predictably, the Sufi camp tried to popularize the idea that they represented the old familiar good (Sufism) versus the foreign evil (Wahhabism). These two traditions were portrayed as incompatible and mutually opposed interpretations of Islam. The pro-Sufi group accused the Wahhabi group, as they had labelled them, of embarking on a “campaign of misinformation” that projects a “wrong perception of Islam.” These blunt attacks had benefitted the pro-Sufis; and as long as the “other” could be depicted as anti-Sufi, the Wahhabi cloak would fit their opponent just fine. In so doing, the pro-Sufi group had hoped to win the loyalties of a Muslim community that was aware of the recent appeal Sufism had because of its Islamic roots. Also, no organization perceived as sympathetic to Wahhabi ideas could ever hope to enjoy majority support from the local Muslim community.

[T]he Naqshbandi-Haqqanis took their Sufi ritual sessions on a “road show” to the community.

## The Naqshbandi-Haqqani brotherhood in Cape Town

Discursive struggles about the authenticity of Sufism, centred on historically evolved ideas about foreignness and authenticity, are important to understand the Sufi resurgence in this South African context; they also visibly and audibly underline the renewed importance of Sufi brotherhoods. It is equally vital to look into the everyday practices of specific brotherhoods. The Naqshbandi-Haqqani Order in Cape Town is an apt example of how the Sufi success is sustained through its activities.

In 1998, Professor da Costa, a retired Geography Didactics university lecturer from the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, was both initiated and made khalifa (vicegerent) of the Naqshbandi brotherhood in Southern Africa by Shaykh Hisham Kabbani when he visited Cape Town.<sup>6</sup> Unlike other Sufi shaykhs who withdrew from communal activity, he has continued to be active through his teaching, his writings, community radio appearances, and talks in mosques at Friday congregational prayers on matters relating to spirituality and the superiority of the divine law. The roles of the shaykh and of his appointed vicegerents are central to the brotherhood. Some scholars even go so far as to assert that the shaykh is the brotherhood, his disciples being seen as more attached to him, than to the teachings of the brotherhood. Speaking of Shaykh Nazim al-Haqqani, Professor da Costa mentions that when he is in his company, he feels humble and constantly reminded of Allah. Partly due to the Shaykh's spiritual magnetism, da Costa and some of his local disciples travel at least once a year to Shaykh Nazim's *zawiya* (ritual lodge) in Lefke, Cyprus, where they attend talks given by the Shaykh. Even though this is where Professor da Costa was instructed to work amongst the poor people in South Africa, he concedes that there is no structural links between the local Naqshbandi-Haqqani branch and Naqshbandi-Haqqani International. Shaykh Nazim gives him, like his vicegerents elsewhere, leverage in aspects relating to local politics and organization.

In August 2005, the Naqshbandi-Haqqani claimed to have over 300 registered disciples. These disciples, known as "the workers," a term that could also denote their subservient relationship to Professor da Costa, constitute the brotherhood's sub-structures. These "workers" are responsible for tasks ranging from fund-raising, erecting structures in informal and impoverished townships that would serve as madrasas, and to also leading the Sufi rituals with the *ijaza* (permission) granted to them by Shaykh Nazim al-Haqqani. The brotherhood's sub-structure is dominated by middle-class professionals in the fields of education, law, and finance. This membership provides the brotherhood with a strong and professional social base.

### Rituals on the move

As is the case with Sufi orders elsewhere, the *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) plays a central role. It leads them from the world of separation and externality to that of union and interiority, ultimately becoming unified with Allah. However, unlike Naqshbandi-Haqqanis in other parts of the world, the Naqshbandi-Haqqanis in Cape Town do not hold their *dhikr* in a *zawiya*. In 2002 Shaykh Nazim al-Haqqani instructed Professor da Costa to work amongst the poor people. To obtain financial resources they sold their *zawiya*, located in a middle class residential suburb, and used the money for the upgrading and construction of informal religious facilities in predominantly black working-class areas around Cape Town. Thus, instead of attracting the community to the *dhikr* at their Sufi centre, the Naqshbandi-Haqqanis took their Sufi ritual sessions on a "road show" to the community.

Two female-only *dhikr* groups and the organization An-Nisa ("the women" translated from Arabic) cater for the needs of women in the order. The ladies *dhikr* groups hold their sessions at mosques on Saturday afternoons. An-Nisa's primary objective is to empower women through various spiritual and educational programmes. It holds quarterly workshops on current issues affecting women. These range from the rights of women in marriage, to abortion, breast cancer, and HIV/



PHOTO BY ARMEN CASSIEM, 2006

AIDS. As such, the Naqshbandi-Haqqanis in South Africa provide room for active female agency within the brotherhood. This has never been commonplace, but is slowly becoming acceptable.

The past decade has also witnessed an increase of *da'wah*-related work in the black townships amongst which is the establishment of Sufi centres in Cape Town. In 2004, the Naqshbandi-Haqqanis were invited to upgrade an existing shack into a facility that would serve as a mosque and madrasa to Muslims in Khayelitsha (a township south of Cape Town that houses more than half a million black residents). Since then they have established a few similar structures in the area, serving as a base for their *da'wah* activities. Such activities, as well as their willingness to address a variety of social problems, have been the source of their apparent success among black South Africans.

From at least the latter half of the previous century, the Muslim Judicial Council has tried to establish an ideological hegemony amongst Muslims. Their interpretation of Islam was based more on their invocation of the Arabic texts and jurisprudence, rather than on providing and teaching an Islam that also included elements of spirituality. The post-Apartheid era has seen an influx of international Sufi personalities, which has shifted the place of Sufism from the periphery to be juxtaposed alongside, even surpassing at times, the authority of the mosque imams. In the South-African context, neo-Sufism entails certainly more than a personal quest for the divine. It is also an ideological phenomenon that is challenging the very establishment of the national Muslim religious leadership. In the words of Professor da Costa: "Sufism and its Sufi shaykhs are providing the local Muslims with a spiritual freshness that the local religious leadership has ... not been able to provide the people with."

## Naqshbandi disciples, Cape Town

### Notes

1. See F. Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997).
2. A. K. Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth Movement* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1995).
3. See MJC's website: <http://www.mjc.org.za/aboutus.htm>.
4. The Voice of the Cape is managed by the MJC and started broadcasting in Ramadan of 1996. Radio 786, managed by another Muslim organization, started broadcasting a few years later.
5. F. De Jong, and B. Radtke, *Islamic Mysticism Contested. Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 386–415.
6. M. Haron, "Dawah Movements and Sufi Tariqah: Competing for Spiritual Space in Contemporary South(ern) Africa," *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 2005: 261–85.

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# Ritual Weapons

## Islamist Purity Practices in Cairo

RICHARD GAUVAIN

My interest in the purity practices of Cairo's "Islamist" community was first sparked in June 2005, during a conversation with Amr, a young bank employee from one of Cairo's poorer southern suburbs.<sup>1</sup> Amr told me that before listening to his cassette sermons he often liked to perform a minor ritual ablution (*wudu'*). At the time, this seemed rather strange. According to Sunni purity law (*fiqh al-taharah*), Muslims should only perform *wudu'* if they wish to pray (or touch their Qurans or perform Hajj) but have incurred a minor ritual impurity (*hadath*)—a state precipitated through any number of morally neutral, biologi-

**Sunni purity law outlines conditions under which a minor ritual ablution (*wudu'*) before prayer, should be performed. Though these conditions are usually understood to be biologically inevitable acts, Islamists in Cairo have reinterpreted the ritual into one that stresses moral purity. The author explains this innovation by exploring the mindset of the Islamists, who perceive themselves to live in a morally corrupt society and under attack from a variety of enemies. Ritual ablution thereby becomes a tool through which the Islamists can maintain moral superiority and draw boundaries between themselves and their opponents.**

customers the entire truth about our product, we wouldn't be able to sell if we did!"

If they know that purification from deceit is not legally necessary, why do some Islamists choose to do this anyway? The following reason suggests itself. With government spies skulking on the peripheries of their groups, a certain amount of deception—to police, even to family and friends—is often advisable for Islamists. Yet, as several lamented, while such constant deception is not a sin *per se*, it is morally and psychologically draining. It is in light of such feelings that their need

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cally inevitable acts, such as falling asleep or visiting the toilet. When I pointed this out to Amr, he admitted knowing that his extra purification was not legally obligatory, but added that he liked to perform *wudu'* whenever he felt the need "to get close to God." By the same logic, he explained, whenever certain emotional and/or moral states, such as sexual desire, made him feel like he was "straying away from God," he would perform *wudu'* to close the gap.

Intrigued by Amr's somewhat unorthodox approach, during the following twelve months I conducted interviews with 32 male Islamists on matters of ritual (and moral) purity. Generally speaking, most were like Amr: middle-class professionals living in and around Cairo's busy suburbs.<sup>2</sup> This paper briefly summarizes my findings and makes some tentative observations on the reasons behind the Islamists' purity practices. Methodologically, I begin with the assumption that some of these practices uphold key aspects of the Islamists' ideology. In so doing, however, these actors merge the categories of ritual and moral purity in a fashion that the early Sunni jurists would not have anticipated. Further, unlike those of the jurists, who generally disconnected ritual practice from all social factors, the Islamists' purity practices clearly reflect profound anxieties regarding their three main opponents: the corrupt Egyptian state, sexually aggressive females, and villainous Jews.

### "Dirty lies"

Some Islamists perform *wudu'* if they have knowingly deceived others. Of those I interviewed, 15 admitted that they sometimes repeated their *wudu'* after lying. Two brothers who work as salesmen for a large company were particularly diligent in this regard. While correctly noting that deceit is not a legal form of *hadath*, and that it is not mandatory for them to perform *wudu'* after deceiving someone, they went on to explain (with no shortage of humour) that the nature of their work nevertheless compels them to do this: "it's part of our job not to tell

to repeat *wudu'* after lying should be understood. Echoing Amr, my interviewees explained to me that through *wudu'*, they endeavour to shrug off the corrupt and defiling political reality that suffocates them and move closer to God. At the same time, I would add, the same practice consolidates their commitment to their own (ritually and morally pure) group.

### "Filthy looks"

Cairenes in general attribute a great deal of importance to matters of sexual ethics and gender. A different survey shows that, after becoming sexually aroused, most Cairene Muslims repeat their *wudu'* for prayer. This is significant: by attributing danger to sexual arousal in a ritual context—directly connecting *hadath* with lust (*shahwah*)—Cairenes signal their wish that traditional gender norms and values not be forgotten. Not surprisingly, such concerns are even more prevalent in the highly gender conscious domains of Islamist discourse and practice. Indeed, while most Cairenes believe that their own lust may affect their readiness for prayer, to the Islamists, other people's lust appears to be a greater source of worry. Representing the extreme, nine of my interviewees admitted to repeating their ablutions when looked at by a woman they suspected to be permissive (*haiga*). Because most live and work in areas where foreign women rarely go, they conceded that defiling encounters like this are unusual. When they do happen, however, they acknowledged that a foreign (and specifically Western) woman—deemed more likely to dress and behave provocatively than an Egyptian woman—is likely to be involved. In fact, virtually all the Islamists (and not merely this purity-minded minority) agreed that Western women are known to be sexually promiscuous and thus to be avoided at all costs.

Once again, the idea that a promiscuous gaze can defile a Muslim runs counter to anything one finds in the Islamic legal texts. (It may be, of course, that the Islamist purifies himself because of the lust *he* experiences at the sight of such women; yet, this was not what was said.) As in the previous example, the Islamists' unusual application of ritual purity ideas directly reflects a social theme that is of fundamental importance to them. Wary of the power sexual desire holds over most people, in Islamist communities, unmarried or unrelated males and females occupy very different social spheres. When they do meet, a chaperone (*mahrim*) must be present. For my interviewees, the need for renewed ritual purification after being looked at by a "dirty woman" (*weskha*) stems from their conviction that only gender segregation, and not (Western-style) integration, brings societal harmony and moral decency.

## "Rotten Jews"

While foreign females present perhaps the most significant threat to a male Islamist's purity (and peace of mind), several of my respondents claimed that they would also perform wudu' if they came into physical contact with a Jew. Indeed, as unlikely as it would be while walking down a Cairene high street to find oneself hailed by someone identifiably Jewish, 21 of the Islamists agreed that, were this to occur and physical contact be made, they would repeat their purifications before prayers. One young man captured the general feeling: "Jews may not be impure like blood or excrement, but they are morally filthy and we know that they don't look after themselves [in terms of personal hygiene]. They cannot be trusted and they hate Muslims. If I touched one, I would probably perform wudu' just in case I lost my purity (*ehyati fi halit low faqadt taharti*)."

For this individual, that Jews may not be substantively impure (*najis*) is irrelevant. The combination of moral filthiness and poor standards of hygiene render them ritually defiling. Here, once again, the Islamists challenge standard Muslim readings of the law: the overwhelming majority of the Sunni jurists reject the idea that any human being, regardless of religion, race or gender, is in essence defiling. The notion that a Jewish person—a member of the *ahl al-kitab* who has his own stringent purity laws—is capable of polluting a Muslim seems to be particularly unusual and recent.<sup>3</sup>

Not surprisingly, current political circumstances help considerably to explain the Islamists' suspicions regarding the Jew's ritual purity status. In their view, Israel (with the support of the West) has already inflicted a series of emasculating blows to the pride of the Muslim *Umma* and is constantly seeking an opening for further attack. In the standard Islamic account, enmity between the two peoples stretches back to the beginning of Islam, when the Jews ravished Muslim women and persecuted the Prophet and he, in retaliation, expelled them from Medina. In light of the Israeli invasion of Sinai (1967) and ongoing treatment of the Palestinians, the Egyptian Islamists are convinced that a second expulsion of the Jews is now necessary. Emerging from Islamist discussions as a cartoon-villain, the Jew is thoroughly deceitful and promiscuous—doubly impure according to the logic of purity at work here—and intent on the destruction of Muslims in all places and at all times. The preoccupation of Islamists with such matters has been well documented. Here, it remains only to note that certain Islamists move beyond the confines of the Sunni Islamic legal code to articulate their fears of Jews in terms of ritual purity.

## Final observations

Cairo's Islamists perceive themselves as under attack from a variety of enemies. As the cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas notes, when a community perceives itself to be under attack, the physical body is often treated as a canvass upon which "the powers and dangers credited to social structure" may be reproduced.<sup>4</sup> Given Douglas' insight, it should not come as a complete surprise that some Islamists think in these ways. Indeed, in a politically corrupt environment, one in which men and women are increasingly likely to mix (in schools, cinemas, work places, even mosques), and where Israel is allowed to continue trampling on Muslim honour, it makes perfect sense to many of these men that a lie, a lascivious look, and contact with the enemy should be so dangerous as to require some form of physical "purification."

Key to their reading of purity is the Islamists' peculiar and poetic vision of wudu'. In these circles, the minor ablution is far more than a mere gateway allowing Muslims to move back and forth between the states of readiness and unreadiness for prayer; rather, it is the first step in a journey made five times daily towards God. The symbolism of the ritual wash is especially potent: my interviewees invariably emphasizing how, as the water slid from their bodies, their sins were also transported away. If a Muslim performs wudu' properly, they agreed, he feels at peace and ready to meet his God. As numerous Hadith illustrate, the spiritual and symbolic richness of Islam's purifications was well understood by the early Muslims (who made the same observations).<sup>5</sup> By granting wudu' the power to expunge sins, however, Egypt's modern Islamists expand the legal category of *hadath* to include the moral sins of lying and promiscuity therein. In so doing, they transform the nature of Sunni Islam's ritual purity system, rendering it a ritual mechanism for defence (and potentially attack). This sets an interesting, though conceivably problematic precedent.<sup>6</sup>



PHOTO BY RICHARD GAUVAIN, 2006

In most other respects, the ritual purity practices of Egypt's Islamists are no different from those of other Muslims in the city. Outside the ritual sphere, however, ideas of purity and impurity seem to occur far more often during the conversations of Egypt's Islamists than those of average Egyptians. Time and again, "dirty politicians," "polluting behaviour," and "filthy Jews" are contrasted with the "pure hearts," "pure women," and "pure believers" of the Islamist community. Residing in a heretical state, surrounded by symbols of the perverse Western/Jewish culture, Amr and his friends feel as if they occupy a community within a community. Their purity practices and beliefs bolster and protect Cairo's Islamists against their numerous enemies.

## Performing Wudu'

### Notes

1. The term "Islamist" is open to a variety of interpretations. Here, I follow Muhammad Hafez's general definition: "Islamists are individuals, groups, organizations, and parties that see in Islam a guiding political doctrine that justifies and motivates collective action on behalf of the doctrine," M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 4.
2. I spoke to doctors, engineers, computer scientists, teachers, two students, and two un-employed.
3. In contrast, the Quran describes the polytheist as "impure" (*najisun*) (9:28), a verse which only the Shia interpret literally.
4. M. Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (London: Penguin, 1970), 93.
5. See e.g. Malik, *Al-Muwatta'*, trans. Aisha Abdurrahman Bewley (London: Kegan Paul, 1989), "Taharah" 6:31. Not surprisingly, this idea is most developed within Sufi tradition.
6. Occasionally made by some early figures, the connection between ritual purity and sin was systematically rejected by the Sunni jurists, see R. Gauvain, "Ritual Rewards: A Consideration of Three Recent Approaches to Sunni Purity Law" *Islamic Law and Society* 12, no. 3 (2005): 384–86.

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# Egyptian Public Intellectuals and their "Wests"

ROBERT WOLTERING

Western (European and North-American) constructions of the West tend to identify human rights, democracy, and freedom as key Western values. Were we to take these premises to be the characteristics of the West, we would find that the West is highly appreciated throughout the Arab and wider Muslim world: recent opinion polls have shown that the majority of respondents from Morocco to Indonesia also value human rights, prefer democracy to dictatorship, and favour freedom over repression.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that there is something spurious in the above postulation. The mistake lies not so much in the opinion polls, as much as it lies in the premise: while Western publics may generally identify the West with human rights and other lofty ideals, "non-Western" publics may hold different opinions. To further investigate this difference of opinion we could again turn to opinion polls, yet for a more thorough understanding of the ideological meaning of the West in the country of my particular interest—Egypt—I will zoom in on the public debate as shaped by popular intellectuals of various ideological trends.

The intellectual landscape in the Arab world today resists a straightforward categorization. The long established lack of political and press freedoms smothers the display of intellectual debates which otherwise could be monitored freely. A conventional division employed both within and outside the Arab world is between "Islamist" and "secular" discourses. Others have opted for a more comprehensive categorization comprising Islamic, Marxist/leftwing, nationalist, and liberal intellectual trends.<sup>2</sup> In this contribution I discuss three recent publications of authors belonging to various trends. Galal Amin, Muhammad Imara,

**Gradually, the term "occidentalism" is gaining ground. Since the end of the Cold War and the consequent loss of a West that could be defined in terms of (and against) its Communist nemesis in the East, the process of imaging the West is steadily acquiring students. This article reviews how popular writers in Egypt imagine the West, showing that while their views on the West are shaped differently by particular ideologies, they converge in condemning the policies emerging from the West.**

and Rida Hilal are all prolific authors of carefully published books, and have been regular contributors to the country's major newspapers for at least a decade. While the economist Galal Amin and the jurist Muhammad Imara continue to be quite productive, the journalist Rida Hilal has not been heard of since he mysteriously disappeared in August 2003. The three publications fall loosely within certain broad trends: "left-wing nationalist," "Islamic,"

and "liberal" respectively. The following exposé highlights a number of common strategies in Arab appreciations and representations of Europe and the West. I argue that the way in which the West is portrayed is to a large extent determined by ideology, and that none of the three ideological trends hold the West to be unequivocally identifiable with the aforementioned lofty ideals.

## Galal Amin: unabated Western imperialism

In 2002 the first Arab Human Development Report was published. This UNDP-sponsored report, drafted by a team of prominent Arab scholars and intellectuals, described with great candour the major problems in the contemporary Arab world. While the report was praised by many, some vehemently opposed the report for serving Western interests. Rather than elaborating on what was wrong with the Arab world, the authors had better focused on the oppressive role of external actors. One of the more prominent Arab intellectuals to attack the Report was the Egyptian economist Galal Amin of the American University in Cairo. To Amin, the Report almost constituted treason, since it played perfectly in the hands of the West. Amin was not alone in this assessment.

Various nationalist and leftist newspapers and intellectuals criticized the report for the same reason. In one of Amin's recent publications we can see how strongly he feels about the importance of the West, and how he identifies it as an imperialist entity. In "The Era of Arab- and Muslim-bashing: We and the World after September 11,"<sup>3</sup> Amin argues that the Arab and Muslim world is suffering from a global smear campaign. For instance, the "events" of September 11 are thought by many to have been organized by Muslims, while in reality this was not the case. Amin does not elaborate as to who was behind the attacks if not Al-Qaeda, though he hints at the likelihood of an "inside-job." His main aim however, lies in alerting Arabs and Muslims to the smear campaign against them and "reminding them of the justness of their case."<sup>4</sup> In The Era of Muslim-bashing, Amin rejects everything that does not fit the image of a noble, well-to-do Arab world. To him, the images of plun-



PHOTO BY DENNIS JANSSEN, 2007

der in Baghdad that followed the American invasion must have been part of the greater ploy to defame Arabs, for the footage of looting Iraqis fitted the profile of the “barbaric Arab” all too well. The image of the West as presented by Amin remains rather vague, which is perhaps necessary if it is to be blamed for the wide range of wrongs in the world that Amin perceives. Perhaps unsurprisingly, since he is an economist, the West is defined by Amin primarily in economic terms: capitalism and imperialism are the hallmarks of the West. The end of the Cold War has left the world with a new situation, Amin argues, in which capitalism has re-emerged in its original, crude form. While during the Cold War capitalism was diluted, our present era is characterized by the kind of capitalism that was prevalent when Karl Marx lived.<sup>5</sup> Amin is far from alone in levelling his critique against the West in economic terms. With the demise of the Soviet Union and the communist alternative to liberal capitalism it would seem that capitalism is no longer ideologically challenged and that, thus, anti-Westernism is a mainly culturally informed antagonism. But Amin and other leftwing Egyptians show the continued relevance of ideologically informed economic criticisms of the “capitalist West.”

## Muhammad Imara: incompatible civilizations

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to so-called “moderate Islamists” or “Islamic reformers,” sometimes also referred to as Islamists of “the middle way,” as distinguished from “fundamentalists.”<sup>6</sup> It has been suggested that this trend has emerged from within Islamic fundamentalism, and that contrary to their radical progenitor, the Islamists of the middle way are willing and able to compete in a liberal democratic setting. Although some have challenged the description, Muhammad Imara is one of those Islamic thinkers commonly categorized as “moderate Islamist” (in Arabic the word used is *mu’tadil*, meaning “balanced” rather than “moderate”). Through his various weekly columns and appearances on television, he is an important contributor to Arab public opinion. In a recent publication he focuses on the relations between Islam and the West.<sup>7</sup> Imara takes it as a matter of fact that the relations between the two have always been at best problematic, and at worst, bloody. Much like some Western authors who present Islam as a civilization that, since its inception, has opposed the West (or Europe, Christianity, or the “Judeo-Christian civilization”), Imara portrays the West as a civilization that has never really changed in its position towards the Orient (or Islam, or the Arabs). The West, according to Imara, has always been imperialist: it oppressed “the Orient and the Oriental peoples for ten centuries, from Alexander the Great ... to the seventh century [Byzantine emperor] Herakleios.”<sup>8</sup> All this only ended, Imara explains, when Islam came on the scene and liberated the Orient from Western oppression. From that moment on, the West had been at odds with Islam. This historical narrative serves two purposes. Firstly, it provides the reader with an image of the West as imperialist per se. The West is imperialist simply because imperialism is what Western civilization happens to produce. Secondly, and partly as a consequence of the first lesson, there is nothing Muslims can do to alter the bad image that the West has of Islam. The West has exercised its oppression over the Orient before Islam emerged, which is seen as proof that the West will be aggressive towards the Orient regardless of Islam. This point is made elsewhere in the book, when Imara again stresses that the West campaigned against Islam long before 2001, and that clearly September 11 cannot be seen as the justification for Western attacks upon Islam. Imara’s portrayal of the West is different from that of Amin in that Imara focuses more on the idea of a religious conflict, in which the West stands opposed to Islam as a revolutionary religion and as an alternative to Western secular political systems. Though Imara does have economic grievances against the West, he stresses the cultural and civilizational differences between the Western and the Islamic worlds. In this sense his discourse echoes Huntington’s theory of a “clash of civilizations” as well as Bernard Lewis’s representation of East-West relations as characterized by perennial conflict.

## Rida Hilal: the West’s double speak

While “the West” has conventionally denoted Europe and North America, ever since the end of World War II it is the United States that has commonly been viewed as its primary component. The liberal intellectual Rida Hilal goes further and tends not to speak of the West or Westernization, but of America and Americanization. In his recent book *Americanization and Islamization*,<sup>9</sup> Hilal calls for a marriage of

Islam and democracy to take the place of the current situation in which rigid Salafi Islamization is coupled with American consumerism. Interestingly, Hilal contrasts the current process of Americanization with the pre-World War II process of Europeanization. He argues that whereas the Arab world today is taking but the foam of America, leaving aside its true riches, i.e. its values, the previous age of Europeanization was much more constructive: “Egyptians took from the Europeans the rule of law, constitutionalism, parliament, journalism, theatre, and cinema.”<sup>10</sup> The result was that Egypt could vie with the most progressive of the world’s nations, and Cairo could face up to Paris or London. This so-called renaissance-period, Hilal argues, was eventually frustrated both by British imperialism and by the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. This nostalgia for pre-revolutionary Egypt, when Cairo was known by many as “Paris along the Nile,” is common to many liberals in Egypt. A common understanding, not limited to liberals, is that Europe or the West in general contains certain highly commendable qualities with regard to governance and personal freedoms, but that Westerners betray these qualities in their foreign policy towards the Arab and Muslim world. Hilal claims that for a solution to “the Middle Eastern crisis” to be reached it is merely necessary “that America should honour the American values, most prominently the value of democracy.”<sup>11</sup> This is reminiscent of the way in which Arab nationalists from before WWII attacked European colonialism without rejecting the project of cultural and political Europeanization. As Hourani wrote of this disposition: “while the nationalists condemned British or French policy, the conclusion they drew was not that England or France were intrinsically bad but that they were being untrue to themselves.”<sup>12</sup>

## Policies emerging from the “real West”

The study of occidentalism in Egypt yields images of the West as diverse as the various competing ideological trends among the Egyptian intelligentsia. There appears to be little agreement on the meaning of the West, especially when compared to the often-lamented uniformity and consistency of Western images of the “Orient.” The three authors disagree in particular about the background to detrimental Western foreign policy. While Amin views unwelcome policies as the logical outcome of a malicious economic philosophy dominant in the West, Imara sees the West acting according to a supposed deeply-rooted anti-Islamic nature. Hilal, however, believes the West is acting in a manner unbecoming of its “real” values, and evokes the notion of an ideal, universally desired West.

There are, however, also striking convergences in these occidentalisms. In all three accounts, the West is perceived to be of paramount importance for Egypt and the wider Arab world. While only Hilal seeks the solution to the region’s problems in an assertion of the “true West,” all three authors agree that the main source of the region’s problems lies in policies adopted by the “real West.” This distinction between the ideal and the actual may also help us to understand the discrepancy between Western self-identifications and the image of the West elsewhere in the world.

## Notes

1. E.g. Mark Tessler and Eleanor Gao, “Gauging Arab Support for Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 3 (2005); Pew Research Center, *Views of a Changing World* (Washington, 2003).
2. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual Thought* (London, Pluto Press, 2004).
3. Galal Amin, *‘Asr al-tashhir bi-l-‘arab wa-l-muslimin: nahnu wa al-‘alam ba’d 11 sabtambar 2001* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2004).
4. Ibid., 6.
5. Ibid., 10.
6. E.g. Raymond Baker, *Islam without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).
7. Muhammad Imara, *Al-islam wa al-gharb. Ayna al-khat’a? .. wa ayna al-sawab? ..* (Cairo: Maktaba al-shuruq al-duwaliyya, 2004).
8. Ibid., 65–66.
9. Rida Hilal, *Al-Amraka wa al-Aslama: Ma’zaq ‘Arab al-Yaum* (Cairo: Dar Masr al-Mahrusa, 2004).
10. Ibid., 33–34.
11. Ibid., 15.
12. Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 298.

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# A Question of Concern? A Rhetoric of Crisis

SANA A MAKHLOUF

It is perhaps not surprising that the chorus of voices bemoaning recent developments among Muslim peoples has been growing in strength. What is surprising, however, is how many of these concerns have been conflated and expressed in a single question, repeated like a magic mantra: “what went wrong?” Indeed, the same question seems to have been asked for so long by observers of Islam and the Middle East that its validity is not often seriously doubted. Thus, when Bernard Lewis published his *What Went Wrong with Islam?* shortly after the events of September 2001, few people wondered about the adequacy of the question to assess the causes of these events. Rather, where there was opposition and criticism, it referred to the answers Lewis proposed, never to the question itself. In a sense, one might say, the “historical events” themselves arose only in order to confirm the validity of the question.

## Introducing the question

Intrigued by the power of conviction that carries this way of thinking, and wondering how the problems of Muslims and “Islam” are really served by it, I suggest that we turn the tables round to ask (and ask with urgency): what really happens when the question “What went wrong

with Islam?” is asked? Wherein lies the attraction of the simple (and simplistic) line of thinking that runs: something is not right, but it used to be right, so something must have gone wrong, yet if something went wrong, what was it?

A further look at the (long) history of the question and at those who ask it reveals that this expression of concern is not solely found in Western (and Westernized) eyes, but is equally central to both the Islamic Renaissance, heralded in the works of the late nineteenth century Arab reformers, and to the rhetoric of contemporary Islamists.

One of the first times the question “what went wrong with Islam?” was asked was in the semi-biographical novel, *Ummu 'l-Qura: Proceedings of the first Conference on Islamic Renaissance 1316 H* (1899), by 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1855–1902). Al Kawakibi was a young Syrian journalist who joined the circle of the architects of Salafism led by Muhammad 'Abduh and Muhammad Rashid Rida, after secretly moving to Cairo in 1899. The novel, written and narrated under the pseudonym of al-Sayyid al-Furati, was presented to Khedive Abbas II, who approved its publication and extended his patronage to al-Kawakibi.<sup>1</sup> Though better known for his influential work, *Taba' al-istibdad* [The Nature of Despotism], it is *Ummu 'l-Qurra* that can be seen as one of the earliest examples of what would later emerge as a particular and recognizable type of discourse: the rhetoric of an Islamism that feeds (symbiotically) on the question of “what went wrong?”

Al-Furati records the secret meetings of the Society of Mecca, which uses the hajj season as a cover for its clandestine activities. He leads representatives of Muslim communities, *Ikhwan al-tawhid*, in discussions around the most pertinent question of their day: “What went wrong with Muslims?” Though it is striking to which extent the organization mirrored the “Western” model of conferences, with the

**The morally laden question “What went wrong with Islam” is usually associated with Bernard Lewis and has gained seeming relevance in the wake of 9/11. Interestingly however, the question has a fairly long tradition in the Muslim world as well. This article dissects the question’s rhetorical qualities through a discussion of its invocation by late nineteenth century Arab reformers. The analysis reveals that, both then and now, asking the question functions to preclude further inquiries, to silence disagreeing voices, and to strategically boost the agendas of the questioner.**

appointment of a chair, secretary, committees, etc., the Ikhwan never doubt the religious and cultural authenticity of their enterprise.

They embark on this endeavour with a sense of history in the making. The moment is now ripe, al-Kawakibi claims, to change the tide in favour of the Muslim nations. He heralds the rise of a “vanguard of free and noble men” which will wake the ummah from its slumber.<sup>2</sup> His Ikhwan profess allegiance to the forthcoming *jihad* and vow secrecy to the brotherhood. Their war cry, “Zealous

guardianship of religion over compassion for Muslims,”<sup>3</sup> indicates the beginning of a rift that will henceforth ever widen: the rift between loyalty for Islam and loyalty to Muslims.

## Looking in from the outside

Each speaker offers in turn his analysis of what ails the ummah, trying to locate within its traditional structures the sources of the infection. Curiously, none stops to question the validity of the diagnosis itself: the lowliness of the Muslims is all too evident. They all agree that the decline started “more than a 1000 years ago” when the Arab Umayyad dynasty lost its powers to “non-Arab elements.” However, after Western nations had reversed their fortunes (through their “successful” Reformation and Enlightenment) and gained the upper hand over the Muslims, the latter’s decline has become discernable. Thus, the regression that supposedly had begun long ago and had made its way largely unnoticed could now be identified precisely because of being able to be seen from the “outside.” And the question of “what went wrong?” could be asked, and more importantly, answered by those who were willing and daring to step “out.” By so doing these concerned activists would leave behind their “inherited means of comprehension” and do for Islam what “Luther and Voltaire had done for the West.”<sup>4</sup>

The extent to which this vision from “the outside” is taken to be the model for the comprehension of Islam’s ailments and for the choice of their remedies, appears clearly when Al-Kawakibi reports a meeting between the Mufti of Kazan and a newly converted Russian Muslim Orientalist. Their cross-cultural dialogue shows that Orientalism can serve not only to expose the inadequacy of the traditional ulama but also to celebrate, by contrast, the virtues of the original Islam as rediscovered by the scientific tools of western scholarship. Al-Kawakibi is totally unfazed by the irony that a non-Arab West would be partner to an Arab-centred Muslim awakening.

The combined efforts of the Ikhwan and the Orientalists centres on one “urgent” finding: what must be resisted by all means is the claim of the Ottomans to be the legitimate representatives of the Caliphate and sovereigns over the Arabian Peninsula. In order to remove them from their position at the head of the umma a formulation is needed to effectively keep them out of the fold of Islam. According to al-Kawakibi and his circle, such a formulation must be both theological and political at the same time. The Ikhwan find the required justification of their aims in the reformist Wahhabi theology, which excludes Muslims who do not adhere to their particular doctrine from the faith altogether and grants legitimacy to the fight against them. Accordingly, the Ikhwan hold that it is only the Arab *muwahiddun* (i.e. the Wahhabis), from the “heartland” of Islam, who preserve the religion from the corrupting forces that had assailed the rest of the Muslim world and which have allowed it to return again to a benighted state of *jahiliya* (ignorance).<sup>5</sup> These Arabs, with their “salafi” orientation, Arabic language proficiency, “pure racial stock,” “tribal solidarity,” “aversion to frivolous intellectualism,” and rejection of

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"exotic forms of Islam like Sufism," represent the "most authentic" version of Islam, *al-Islamiyyah*. "The religion has originated from amongst them and in their tongue," al-Kawakibi argues, "they are its people, carriers, protectors, and its defenders, [...] we should not feel reluctant to give in to their superior understanding of their religion" and join them in thwarting the threat to the "heart" of Islamdom.<sup>6</sup>

## Best jihad: Silencing the tradition

Whatever the particular form this "threat" to the heart of Islam, be it foreign Islam (non-Arab Muslims), false Islam (Sufism), or dead Islam (traditional ulama), they are all identified by the same name-tag, namely, as "causes of what went wrong" and therefore, as figures of "resistance to modernization."<sup>7</sup> Consequently, the main culprits are the representatives of "traditional" (pre-modern) Islam, irrespective of their particular origin. Moreover, the term "traditional" was not so much the result of an in-depth analysis of religion as a foil for political action. Correspondingly, the causes for "backwardness" and, thus, the targets of reform, were located in the traditional institutions and repositories of knowledge that had for centuries informed and shaped the pluralistic diversity of the Islamic self. Namely, they targeted the ulama and jurists, keepers of the "outward" knowledge of the law, and the sufis, keepers of the "inward" knowledge of the heart. All of these had to be changed, silenced, or sacrificed in the relentless march toward reform.

In response to the inner evils of Islam so perceived, the Ikhwan al-Tawhid commit themselves to jihad against the enemies of true Islam hoping, thereby, to regain the former glory and power of their "pure" Arabian heritage. Accordingly, they declare that the *best* jihad for the times consists in humiliating the "hypocrite" ulama.<sup>8</sup>

In cooperation with the institutions provided by the nation state, the Ikhwan propose to use all rhetorical, political, and educational means to wage the battle against the existing institutions of the ulama and sufi tariqas and help to monitor their activities and public functions. One of their recommendations is to place "dissenting" ulama "under quarantine," if they were to teach, give fatwa or counsel outside of the official line. Reformed ulamas would then help educate the commoners in the basics of *tawhid* and zealously guard public morality. Sufis would be persuaded to return to orthodoxy and guide their disciples to gainful employment. Reformed orders would provide social networks to serve the community and carry on roles of civic philanthropy like running orphanages and social services.

Under the auspices of Khedive Abbas II, identified as the best candidate for leading the reawakened ummah, the Society of Ummu'l-Qurra—a modern elite composed of intellectuals, politicians, activists—would help establish Arab dominance over a Muslim Reformation free of *shirk* (idolatry) and *bid'a* (innovation) based on a return to the unadulterated sources: the Quran, and a "cleansed" corpus of authenticated hadith. The doors of *ijtihad*, now declared open, would yield rationally controlled pragmatic rulings that could be easily codified. Only this time around, *ijtihad* would not be left to the specialized *faqih*s but rather handed over to the intellectuals to reinterpret and reformulate Islamic normativity while at the same time dismantling the classical representations of Islamic law.

Many of these recommendations materialized within a short span after the publication of the novel. Khedive Abbas, under the influence of Lord Cromer, the British Resident, appointed Muhammad 'Abduh in 1899 to the position of Mufti, the highest judicial post of Egypt. The "architect of Salafism," and al-Kawakibi's mentor, was now in charge of reforming—along western lines—the administration and curricula of al-Azhar, shaping generations of intellectual scholars of Islam. Amongst his "innovative" fatwas stands out one on the permissibility of accepting interest paid on loans, necessary to advance capitalism and Western commercial dominance in the Muslim world. During the last years of his life al-Kawakibi travelled near and far to spread the message of Islamiya and nationhood. And, fulfilling their share of the best jihad, the 'Abduh circle routinely targeted the ulamas and sufis, lampooning and engraving them in the popular memory as the culprits for "what had gone wrong."

Al-Kawakibi's writings quickly became staple food for the Egyptian-influenced awakening and dissemination of Islamism in the Islamic world. Although 'Abduh's reform circle has not found much favour with present-day Islamists, the common genealogy and rampant suspicion of traditional Islam can even be heard through their vociferous antagonism to the reformist agenda as well as their variants of "what went wrong."

## More concerns

The question of "what went wrong?" clearly serves to determine the direction of the reform and to empower those who ask it. But who are those who are qualified to pass judgement on others? Who analyzes their diagnosis, puts it to the test, verifies it, and against which criteria? What vested interest do the askers have in the answer? So many more questions could be asked. They are rarely asked, though. Seemingly, the rhetorical power and dynamics of "What went wrong?," for instance with Islam, is particularly effective at precluding further questions. For al-Kawakibi and his intellectual descendents, both sympathetic and antagonistic to his ideas, such ruminations are redundant. For him and for them the qualification required for asking the question lies in the very act of asking it. Nothing more is needed.

His young men are propelled forward through the seeming rationality of the question. Estranged from their own tradition—"the problem is that our religion is not our ancestor's original religion"<sup>9</sup>—they find comfort in mirroring each other as "concerned" modern Muslims, looking at their tradition from the outside. The question helps them construct an echo-chamber where they can hear each other and confirm themselves in their shared (and quite often ambivalent) world-views, mission, goals, and common enemies.

For over a century traditional Islam is sealed and not allowed to speak for itself. To say something about it, one has to stand outside of it.

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## Notes

1. First published in Port Said in 1899 by Muhammad Rashid Rida, a revised version appeared in Rida's (and 'Abduh's) mouthpiece *al-Manar*. Citations will be from the reprint edition of Mohamed Tahhan, ed., *Al-A'mal al-kamilah lil-Kawakibi* [The Complete Works of al-Kawakibi] (Beirut, 1995).
2. Ibid., 283.
3. Ibid., 380.
4. Ibid., 373–74.
5. A concept utilized by Sayyid Qutb, ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood, half a century later in order to justify breaking away from the mainstream umma.
6. Ibid., 280–81.
7. Ibid., 360–74.
8. Ibid., 308.
9. Ibid., 310.

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IIAS NEWSLETTER

# Before and Beyond the Clash of Civilizations

MOHAMMAD NAFISSI

Although China and the “Sinic civilization” may pose the greatest challenge to Western hegemony, the Clash thesis would not have achieved its tremendous resonance without the spectre of a perceived Islamic threat. However serious some of the analytical flaws of *The Clash of Civilization*, its author cannot be faulted for hiding the original source of the central concept and title of his influential book. Not only does Huntington refer to Bernard Lewis’s “The Roots of Muslim Rage,”<sup>1</sup> but also quotes its telling conclusion: “It should now be clear that we are facing a mood and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations—that perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both.”<sup>2</sup> In the years since Lewis wrote these lines and elaborated on them in several best-selling books of his own on Islam and the Middle East, the public perception of the two authors has become increasingly entwined, especially as the twin ideological gurus of the Bush administration’s Middle East policy. In this brief discussion I show that the two authors make diametrically opposite theoretical and political uses of their common understanding of Islam and thereby produce sharply contrasting variants of the clash thesis. Thus understood, each may serve as a platform for the critical evaluation of the other and the development of a more defensible account of Islam in the contemporary world. To clear the ground for such a move, however, we need to first reconsider their shared conception of Islam.

Put in simple comparative terms, for Lewis Islamdom’s fundamental historical problem has been that Islam was not Christianity. To make matters worse, for over a thousand years this original and ultimate failure was preached and indeed experienced as a blessing. But now, Lewis asserts, “it may be that the Muslims, having contracted a Christian illness, will consider a Christian remedy, that is to say, the separation of religion and the state.” This would entail addressing the challenges overcome by Reformation and Enlightenment, albeit “in their own way.” But, Lewis despairs, “there is little sign” that Muslims are so interested.<sup>3</sup> He thus considers it more reasonable if all parties faced the fact that the real choice in the Middle East is between a fundamentalism that attributes “all evil to the abandonment of the divine heritage of Islam ... [and] secular democracy, best embodied in the Turkish Republic founded by Kemal Atatürk.”<sup>4</sup> Lewis does not claim “that the movement nowadays called Fundamentalism is ... the only Islamic tradition” or that “Islam as such” should be blamed for the decline of Muslim states.<sup>5</sup> He does, however, cancel the significance of the diversity of claimants to Islam by asserting the overriding continuity of hegemonic Islam and the “great institution of caliphate” until the Kemalist revolution.<sup>6</sup> There is thus, in his view, a clear causal connection between militant fundamentalism’s current ascendancy and its authenticity. Under Islam “the state was the church and church was the state and God was head of both.”<sup>7</sup> This theocratic legacy and ideal evidently clashes with modernity. Put in Huntington’s pithy formulation: “the underlying problem for the west is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam.”<sup>8</sup>

## The clash of the clashists

Beyond this central point, however, Lewis and Huntington part ways. Whereas Huntington’s version of the Clash requires the sustainability of such an “anti-western” trajectory and thus distinguishes “westernization” from “modernization,” for Lewis the two are identical manifestations of a universal civilization whose incompatibility with Islam ensures that Muslim societies fall “further back in the lengthening line of eager and more successful Westernizers, notably in East Asia.”<sup>9</sup> This reinforces Lewis’s com-

**Although Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington are often lumped together as the twin ideological gurus of the Bush administration, they make diametrically opposite theoretical and political uses of their common understanding of Islam. In this contribution Nafissi analyzes these sharply contrasting “clash theses” to critically evaluate the other and to sketch an agenda on the basis of which a more defensible account of Islam in the contemporary world could be based.**

mitment to support “freedom seekers” in the Middle East to the point of risking “the hazards of regime change”<sup>10</sup> to complete the Kemalist Westernization. In contrast, for Huntington, Kemalism engenders “torn countries” doomed to failure. Echoing Lewis’s old nemesis, Edward Said and his third worldist associates, Huntington finds that “Western belief in the universality of Western culture suffers three problems: it is false ... immoral, and ... dangerous ... Imperialism

is the necessary logical consequence of universalism.”<sup>11</sup> This underpins the “most important” element of his general policy blueprint for Western states: “Western intervention in the affairs of other civilizations is probably the single most dangerous source of instability and potential global conflict.”<sup>12</sup>

It may now be clearer why both of these otherwise opposed agendas are dependent on Islam’s theocratic continuity. The spread of a universalist Islam committed to a “neutral” public space in which it may compete or co-operate with other religious and ideological agendas, including other varieties of Islam, undermines the viability of an international “multicultural” order built around Huntington’s competitive “mono-cultural” civilizations. It would also extend the choices facing the Middle East beyond Lewis’s favoured Kemalism and feared fundamentalism.

## The deleted re-formations

In line with the Islamic orthodoxy’s official discourse, Lewis’s seamless theocratic anti-Judeo-Christian-modern account of Islam, ignores at least four major re-formations: first, Mohammad’s resolution of the Judeo-Christian limbo; second, the proto democratic fusion of state-community in the era of the rightly-guided caliphs; third, the rise of dynastic caliphate and separation of the state-community; fourth, the still unfolding and contested reformation triggered by Western modernity.<sup>13</sup> Together, these intra-Islamic re-formations fuel the current confluences and clashes within Islamdom as much as between “Islam” and the “West.”

Rather than an alternative to Judaism and Christianity, Islam claimed to restore them to their original purity. In this “final” re-formation of the Abrahamic tradition, Mohammad anticipated Protestantism in some areas and went beyond it in others. The fusion of temporal and spiritual authority in Islam’s sacred age realized the millenarian Jewish longing for the age when Israelites were united under a single prophet-king. Judaism, as Weber observed, “never in theory rejected the state and its coercion but, on the contrary, expected in the Messiah their own masterful political ruler.”<sup>14</sup> Mohammad, however, fulfilled this expectation by extending, in line with Christian universalism, Yahweh’s immediate constituency to humanity as a whole. This infusion of mundane politics with sacred energy and mission paralleled Puritanism’s transformation of economic relations. By promising worldly achievement as well as other-worldly salvation, Islam, too, invites Muslims (and non-Muslims) to judge the record of its dominion and set right what may seem wrong and, in the process, change or abandon the actually existing Islam.

The primary authority for reformism necessarily lies in Islam’s sacred age. Lewis underlines the political character of that age, but ignores that it had two distinct, essentially theocratic and democratic phases, each respectively associated with the rule of Mohammad and his first four successors. Dependent on direct revelation and the “seal of prophets,” Mohammad’s theocracy was unique and irreproducible. In contrast, its nascent democratic successor represented a “human” order and was therefore in principle sustainable or reproducible. Ironically, however, the participatory polity of the early caliphs soon became historically unsustainable; first, because it lacked the institutional mechanisms for channelling its own

political vitality and multiple sources of conflict; and, secondly, because it nevertheless succeeded in turning itself into an expansive empire, and no empire has yet been run along democratic lines. If Christianity had to adapt itself to an initially impenetrable empire, Islam was thus compelled to accommodate the empire of its own making and consequently reverted to a new variant of the same historical trajectory.

After the rule of the “rightly guided” caliphs, all the notable branches of Islam were consolidated in response to the question posed by the Umayyad’s forcible seizure and transformation of caliphate into a hereditary institution: how to reconcile the separation of the sword and the word with their self-appointed role as the trustees of the sacred era’s unity of the sword and the word. The Sharia and the politico-theological agenda that shaped it proved the winning solution following the victory of Ibn Hanbal, the “seal of the jurists,” over the rationalist theologians in Islam’s third century. By sanctifying and drawing on the prophet’s largely fabricated words and deeds (tradition/sunna), the “traditionist” scholars that developed the Sharia created a new divine source on par with the Quran which enabled them to (a) extend and resolve Quran’s limited and ambiguous legal content and (b) trump all living claimants to Islam with the legacy of the dead prophet and (c) guarantee their own role as guardians of what became a well-guarded but mummified Islam. Ideologically thus armed, the men of the word in effect struck a “second best” bargain with the wielders of the sword that both recognized the separation of political and religious realms and masked it in line with the legacy of the sacred era. Accordingly, the caliphs, whilst retaining the title of “commander of the faithful,” had very little to do with matters of faith, and the Sharia whilst projecting a comprehensive and binding reach, in fact stopped short of regulating the political sphere.

It is the uncritical (or politically driven) adoption of the normative quasi-totalitarian layer of the orthodoxy’s complex agenda that allows Lewis to imagine a Sharia anchored in “what we in the West would call constitutional law and political philosophy,”<sup>15</sup> when a glance at any actual version of Sharia confirms that “it said virtually nothing about ‘constitutional’ or administrative law.”<sup>16</sup> The same applies to his similarly plausible but equally misleading claim about the continuity of the caliphate between the rightly-guided Abu Bakr and the Ottoman Abd al-Majid.<sup>17</sup> As Lewis fails to note, the caliphate was punctured by the rise of Umayyads, subsequently marginalized by various Sultanates, and abolished by the Mongols. The Ottomans eventually reclaimed the title, but, as Hamid Enayat explains, only in the late eighteenth century and “in order to equip ... [the Ottoman ruler] with a spiritual authority” commensurate with that of “Empress of Russia as patroness of orthodox Christianity.”<sup>18</sup>

## Islam and modernity

Because generally unacknowledged or unpursued, the historically unavoidable unravelling of Mohammad’s political reform of the Abrahamic tradition could not be accompanied by the legitimate rationalization of the patrimonial state or the reactivation of the self-paralyzed religious establishment. Thus Islam’s emerging multi-actor society could not be consolidated. This in turn helps explain the transformation of Islam from being at birth “remarkably modern”<sup>19</sup> to entering the modern world belatedly, in greatest need of renewal and pregnant with several latent, theocratic, democratic, and “privatized” reform agendas with no authoritative midwife(s) in place to nurture and deliver an evolved “rightly-guided” polity that could flourish in the new context.

Contrary to its materialist and “anti-orientalist” critics, Lewis’s “orientalism” is not to be faulted with asking Muslims to ask themselves “What went wrong?” or with stressing the need for an Islamic reformation and yet despairing of the difficulties of achieving it, thereby turning to the seemingly straighter secular-democratic path. His chief failure as an historian, political advisor, and self-proclaimed democrat lies in his obliterating the cause of democratic reform. He does so, first, by promoting orthodox Islam’s normative claim to theocratic continuity and thus buttressing the fundamentalists’ case for theocracy, and, secondly, by ignoring the reformist tendencies that have variously questioned this claim. Lewis thus buries or reburies all those Muslims, from the eponymous founders of the orthodox Sunni schools of law and the Shia Imams, to Sayyid Jamal, Abduh, Naini, Iqbal, and their contemporary followers in the democratic or democratically evolving Islamist organizations, that have also asked “what went wrong?” Lewis even avoids the point in his own lifetime when the hegemony of an Islam at once “enlightened” and “authentic” seemed assured in view of the evolutionary renewal of Islam’s aborted democratic and rationalist tendencies. Consider the following observation:

“The most remarkable phenomenon of the modern history is ... the enormous rapidity with which the world of Islam is spiritually moving towards the West. There is nothing wrong in this movement, for European culture ... is only a further development of some of the most important phases of the culture of Islam.”<sup>20</sup>

This is Iqbal speaking in 1928. To understand the rising fundamentalist tide that has now submerged his Islamic world, the questions Huntington raises about Kemalism and the imperialist face of Western universalism are essential. However, he does not pursue them beyond the limits set by the clash thesis, and Lewis’s theocratic view of Islam. Lewis himself looks the wrong way, not only by writing off the costs of Ataturk’s authoritarianism, but also by underestimating his hero’s exceptional achievement and assuming that it could be replicated by the likes of an Ahmad Chalabi in Iraq or elsewhere, arriving at the forefront of invading armies. As the only pro-Western Muslim leader to have defeated Western armies, Ataturk achieved the authority to institutionalize secularism to a degree that it was able to survive its major design faults and the Islamist threat. In the process, each side has been compelled to recognize the staying power or merits of the other as well as release their own democratic tendencies.

Similarly, by conveniently adopting the official discourses of Kemalism and Khomeinism, Lewis bypasses both the contributions of Kemalism and imperialism to the rise of Iranian fundamentalism, and the instructive parallels between the evolving legacies of Ataturk and Khomeini. The fundamentalist ascendancy in the revolution that Khomeini made his own would have been inconceivable without the CIA-engineered coup that removed the democratically elected coalition of liberal nationalists and Islamists, and paved the path for the last Shah’s suicidal variant of Kemalism. Yet, as a religious example of Huntington’s “torn” states, the Islamic republic has survived its own contradictory and crisis-prone foundations in part thanks to its competitive, if highly restricted, electoral politics. Kemalism and Khomeinism thus meet not only as polarized alternatives of their fundamentalist advocates, but also as overlapping trajectories in emerging religious-secular democratic fields. This is not to equate Turkey’s evolutionary developments with that of the still theocratically gridlocked Iran or to suggest that the latter will necessarily be reformed without a major upheaval. But it should be clear that Iran’s theocracy or Turkey’s military-led shadow state, let alone the altogether more regressive autocracies in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, will not be hurried off the historical stage by Huntington’s “international multiculturalism” or the more familiar versions of conservative realism now back in vogue following the Iraq disaster.

Under the double banner of “the Middle East is not ready for and Islam is not interested in democracy,” the rejuvenated realists are asking the Middle Easterners to choose between anti-western theocracies and pro-western autocracies also reliant on unreformed Islam for some residual legitimacy. The barbaric pluralism on display in Iraq, unleashed as well as reinforced and created by the occupation, however, can only be overcome by a democratic state capable of enforcing the joint Quranic and liberal injunction that “in religion there should be no compulsion.” Such states will not arise by Western leaders or Middle Eastern elites (and counter elites) preaching democracy and practising autocracy; but nor will they emerge if all started preaching and practising autocracy. The democratic (re-)fusion of the state and society in the Muslim world would be advanced not only through the evolutionary recovery of Islam’s democratic and rationalist heritage in its ongoing reformation, but also by the reform of the US dominated regional/international regime that has altogether retarded the progress of such a project in the name of democracy and rationalism.

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## Notes

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# Clifford Geertz: A Memory

PETER VAN DER VEER

Clifford Geertz (1926–2006) was one of the most influential anthropologists of his generation. His influence extended far beyond anthropological circles, mainly into the broad field of the humanities. I met him for the first time when he came to the Netherlands in May 1994 for the Erasmus Ascension Conference on The Limits of Pluralism: Neo-absolutisms and Relativism, a conference seemingly set up to show the hidden connections between the weakening of the Enlightened West by postmodernism and relativism and the growth of anti-Western obscurantist fundamentalism. For such a purpose it was clearly appropriate to invite the British anthropologist Ernest Gellner, who gave the opening keynote lecture in the Aula of the University of Amsterdam. Afterwards, the invitees left for Oosterbeek where a closed symposium was held, in which Geertz was one of the speakers. Gellner had with his usual polemical flourish stated his case for objective truth and universal morality against the relativists, and Geertz rose to the occasion with a brilliant dissection of Gellner's arguments. I cannot keep myself from quoting the beginning of Geertz's lecture, because it shows its spirit:

"I find it peculiarly difficult to respond to Ernest Gellner's most recent animadversions upon the various developments in social theory that he calls, insofar I can see amidst the splutter of it all, in a wholly indiscriminate and arbitrary way, "postmodernist," not because they are telling, but because they are cast in such an arrogant, corrosive, and self-congratulatory tone: the last honest man resisting fools, sophists, nihilists, aesthetes, Middle Americans, snake-oil salesmen, and careerists. Polemics is a more delicate art than the inflamed and righteous sometimes take it to be, and when faced, as we are in Professor Gellner's *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, with such a degraded form of it, the temptation, to which I have perhaps yielded more than I should have done, to respond in kind, and thus reproduce what one most deeply objects to—mere invective paraded as argument—is very strong."

Geertz's lecture could hardly be followed by the uninitiated, because his delivery was characteristically bad, mumbled into his beard and without connecting to his listeners. It was a response to a book by Gellner (mentioned above) in which he had attacked Islamic Fundamentalism as well as Postmodernism. The latter was exemplified by

the group of mostly young American anthropologists that had produced the volume *Writing Culture* in 1986, in which, following Stephen Greenblatt and Hayden White, attention was given to the narrative structure of ethnographies, to the problem of producing coherence without creating "master-narratives," to power and the authority of texts. Gellner had identified Clifford Geertz as the Godfather behind this "postmodernist" movement, as evidenced in Geertz's famous "Anti-Anti Relativism" lecture for the American Anthropological Association Meetings of 1984. Although Geertz in private conversations always emphasized that academics got so worked up about things because usually for them there was so little at stake, in his response to Gellner he really seemed to think that something was at stake. Certainly there were academic issues involved. Ernest Gellner had made his reputation in Anthropology on the basis of his *Saints of the Atlas*, a study of Sufi

**On 30 October 2006, Clifford Geertz died at the age of 80. Known among social scientists primarily for his coining of the term "thick description" and his related understanding of culture as "webs of significance," Geertz also contributed significantly to the study of Islam. In this contribution, Peter van der Veer draws upon personal experiences to contextualize the legacy of this eminent anthropologist.**

saints in Morocco, a typical example of British functionalism, and Geertz had led a team of researchers also in Morocco, some of whom had published in *Writing Culture*. Moreover, there was a direct attack on Gellner in *Writing Culture* by Talal Asad who had demolished Gellner's concept of language and translation. But, beyond academic issues, there was Geertz's defence of a

more fragmented, almost hesitant interpretive intellectual style in a political context, that is perhaps best exemplified by Bernard Lewis's writing of the causes of "Muslim Rage" and by Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*. Geertz was inclined towards an interest in cultural difference, in the details of how people construct their worldview, in local knowledge without immediately judging differences in terms of superiority or inferiority. His voice did have an audience in the circles of the *New York Review of Books* and among fellow academics such as the historian Robert Darnton and the literary scholar Stephen Greenblatt, but his influence on political currents remained marginal as compared to that of Huntington and Lewis.

Geertz went to Antioch College after he served in the Second World War through the G.I. Bill that made free college education available for former soldiers. He then studied Anthropology at Harvard with Clyde Kluckhohn in an intellectual setting dominated by Talcott Parsons. It was also at Harvard that he struck up a lifelong friendship with the sociologist Robert Bellah. Geertz went to do fieldwork in Indonesia and produced books like *The Religion of Java*, *Peddlers and Princes*, and *Agrarian Involution*, the most-cited books on Indonesia for many years. He thus belongs to the generation that developed the study of Indonesia after the Dutch had left as colonial rulers and Dutch social scientists returned to their narrow focus on Little Holland. With his first wife Hil-dred he worked on Bali which was the home turf of Dutch philologists like Hooykaas, with whom he had a furious polemic that boiled down to the difference between textual knowledge and local knowledge. Later Geertz went to Morocco and wrote a little book comparing Islam in Morocco and Indonesia, *Islam Observed*. Islam is the main religion of Java and of Morocco and Geertz's interpretations of Islam have been quite influential in the anthropological study of Islam.

Broadly speaking, one can say that Geertz was a typical product of American anthropology, deeply influenced by the German philosophical thought about Culture that was brought to the USA by Franz Boas, inherent in the sociology of Max Weber, and so important for Talcott Parsons, Edward Shils and later generations of American social scientists. Obviously, he modernized this approach by bringing the term "symbol" into play, but he did not have much interest in abstract arguments about semiotics or symbology. His strength was rather in broad comparative analysis that tried to formulate an interpretive approach to politics and culture. At the University of Chicago he was for a decade in the 1960s a member of the Committee for the Comparative Study of New Nations that tried to understand the cultural basis of the new nation-states in a world that had been decolonized by American power. Nevertheless, Geertz is not known for his analysis of the nature of imperial power, of either the Dutch or of the Americans. He did have an interesting intervention in the study of state power in *Negara*, but his analysis of the pre-colonial Balinese state as a theatre-state has been criticized precisely for its emphasis on power as culture which is both its greatest strength and its greatest weakness.

As an undergraduate, Geertz was trained as a "man of letters" in literature and philosophy, and despite his tendency to come up with "the worldview of the santri" or "the system of symbols," he is best known for his vivid, almost literary descriptions of the Balinese cockfight or the

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Javanese Slametan and for his philosophical probing in the nature of cultural difference. He had a great love for ethnography as a genre, but like most anthropologists he could not go on doing one fieldwork after the other and began writing more general essays on religion, culture, rituals, and the like.

In 1970 Geertz was appointed Professor at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton and became the founder of its School of Social Science. His intellectual perspective can be readily found when one looks at later appointments at that school, the economist Albert Hirschman, the political philosopher Michael Walzer, and the feminist historian Joan Scott, though he never managed to appoint the sociologist Robert Bellah or, facing strong opposition from the scientists dominating the Institute, the student of science, Bruno Latour. Every year Geertz and his colleagues had to select a new contingent of fellows to come to the School of Social Science at the Institute, and this gave Geertz a unique opportunity to stay abreast of new developments in the social sciences and, thus, to influence new generations. As I mentioned, I met Geertz at the Erasmus Ascension Symposium in 1994, where I was also one of the speakers, and he invited me to come the next year to the Institute. During that year I came to know him as a friendly man who seemed to be shy or, at least, devoid of great social skills. He was deeply private, and as a good anthropologist preferred to observe rather than participate. There was a striking difference between the eloquence of his writing and the reticence of his speaking. It was not that he did not have strong views or lacked confidence in them—on the contrary—but he had a way of delivering them as if he was holding an internal dialogue. His great essayistic skills allowed him to influence a wide variety of intellectuals by showing the possibilities of anthropological interpretation for their subjects. His humanistic view of anthropology, and of human affairs in general, will be remembered with respect for a long time to come.

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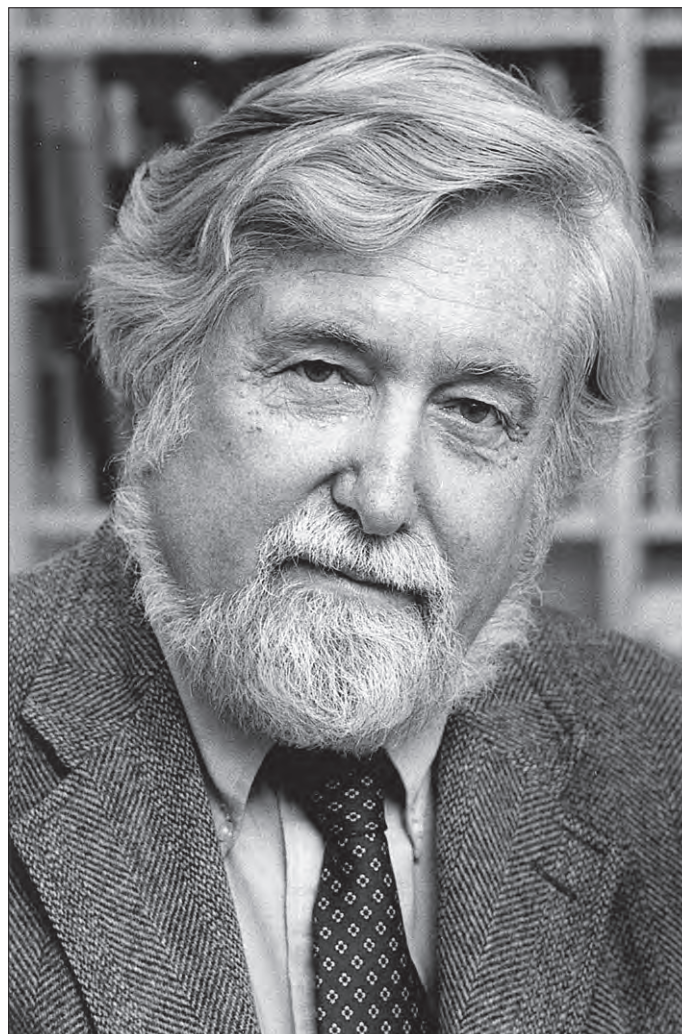


PHOTO BY RANDALL HAGADORN / COURTESY OF I.A.S., PRINCETON

Clifford Geertz

## ISIM/Conference

# Reflections on Muslim Intellectual History

On 10 November 2006, ISIM organized a conference to honour Abdulkader Tayob's research and teaching activities as ISIM Chair at the Radboud University Nijmegen from 2002 to 2006. The conference brought together prominent scholars working on intellectual trends in the Muslim world.

In his own paper, Abdulkader Tayob reflected on the meaning of religion in Islamic states. By comparing the works of Ali Abd al-Raziq and Muhammed Rashid Rida, he illustrated how Muslim intellectuals have rethought the relation between religion and politics in modernity. This was followed by a presentation of Abdou Filali-Ansary (Aga Khan University), who argued that too narrow a focus on specific founding moments of Islam forms an obstacle for a serious rethinking of the faith and its implications for our time. He urged Muslims to take history seriously because this is vital in redefining and revitalizing Islam. Michiel Leezenberg (University of Amsterdam) presented a paper on the nineteenth century reception of Ibn Rushd and Ibn Khaldun. He argued that the rediscovery of both intellectuals should not be seen as a mere copying of colonial powers. In the nineteenth century, a new public sphere emerged in which academic works became part of a corpus of Arabic literature and thus a part of the Arabic heritage. Changes in language and relations between intellectuals show the gradual emergence of a public sphere along national lines.

Mona Abaza (American University in Cairo) discussed changes in the tanwir (enlightenment) discourse in Egypt, noting that tanwir is being appropriated by a multitude of actors, among whom are included the state and Islamists. Although the term was initially promoted to sell the idea of democracy, the overuse of tanwir has completely emptied the term of content. Muhammad Khalil Masud (Council of Islamic Ideol-

ogy in Pakistan), in his presentation, focused on debates surrounding the hudud ordinance in contemporary Pakistan which show that traditional thought can produce its own locally contextualized "modernity." In this debate, the arguments of Javer Ahmad Ghamidi, a prominent writer and media personality whose criticisms of hudud ordinances are particularly effective because he has the same traditionalist background as the proponents. Moving to the Indonesian context, Martin van Bruinessen (ISIM/Utrecht University) compared two prominent intellectuals of liberal Muslim thought. Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid, notwithstanding their different background, both emphasised the importance of religious freedom including minorities and defended cultural Islam. Their heritage is still present in the various NGO's despite the conservative turn in Islam in Indonesia.

The discussion by Roel Meijer (ISIM/Radboud University Nijmegen) shifted the discussion in a rather different direction. Focusing on the Saudi jihadist and self-made intellectual and Yusuf al-Ayiri, Meijer showed that action-oriented philosophies may have more currency among certain population groups than the more ephemeral ideas of most philosophers, and this is an aspect that rarely addressed in studies of al-Qaida. In the concluding presentation, Asef Bayat (ISIM/Leiden University) reflected on the notion of post-Islamism and the ways this concept applies to intellectual trends in Iran. Although parallels were detected between Iran and other areas of the Muslim world, the significant diversity precludes an all-fitting forecast as to the direction in which Muslim societies are moving.

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LOUBNA EL-MORABET

# The India That Does Not Shine

THOMAS BLOM HANSEN

India's Muslim community rarely receives much attention in the media, either in its own country or in the larger world. When it does, the context is invariably that of victimization at the hands of aggressive Hindu nationalism—Gujarat in 2002, Mumbai (Bombay) in 1992–3—or, more frequently, as a threat to India's internal stability and security. The bombings of the "Friendship Express" that runs between Delhi and Lahore on 19 February, and the even more horrific serial blasts on Mumbai suburban trains on 11 July 2006, are recent examples of events that have solidified anti-Muslim sentiments in India. Officials normally accuse specific extremist organizations based in Kashmir, or the secret Pakistani intelligence services ISI, of being behind these acts, but among ordinary people in India Muslims are widely seen as "anti-national," clannish, and hostile to India as a nation. These attitudes have deep historical roots in the nineteenth century and in the conflicts that led to the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. They have also been systematically cultivated by the Hindu nationalist movement in India to the point that such attitudes, today, constitute a sort of common sense among large sections of the population. While suspicions and apprehensions regarding Muslims have long existed among India's Hindu communities, blaming all of India's problems on its minorities—as has become standard and unobtrusive practice in both public and private arenas—was never common until recently. After 9/11, by way of contrast, the term "terrorist" has been seamlessly imported into the already vicious anti-Muslim rhetoric currently circulating in India.

For scholars and activists working with Muslims in India, it has long been known that the 140 million Muslims in the country—immensely diverse in terms of language, religious orientation, and social class—were among India's poorest and most marginalized citizens. It was also well known that decades of anti-Muslim rhetoric, everyday discrimination, and neglect by the government had brought about a situation of cultural introversion, economic marginality, and a huge deficit in education and social advancement compared to most other citizens of the country.

## The Sachar report

Now, with the publication of the so-called Sachar report (named after the chairman of the specially-appointed "Prime Minister's High Level Committee," Justice Rajender Sachar) all of this has become official knowledge.<sup>1</sup> The report was ordered by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in order to shed comprehensive light on the living conditions and general situation of the Muslim community in India. The political motivations were clear: a large and disaffected Muslim minority—the biggest minority in the world—constitutes a significant security challenge but also a significant pool of votes which the Congress party used to be able to bank on but has lost since the 1980s. However, there are more than political tactics involved here. The rapid transformation of India's economy demands new forms of intensive governance, better infra structure, and a more efficient utilization of the enormous reserves of skills and manpower in the country. Muslims are generally not part of the ongoing economic boom or even its derived effects, such as the service- and security-related industries, which recruit very few Muslims. Political and social life in India has always been deeply segmented, but now the new economic boom threatens to disentangle India's Muslims from its mainstream economy. The report states quite clearly that it was motivated by a need to collect and systematize existing knowledge about the Muslims in India in order for the government

**The 140 million Muslims in India receive very little media attention. The resulting lack of knowledge has assisted Hindu nationalists in cultivating stereotypical depictions, but has hindered policies aimed at the incorporation of Muslims into Indian society. This article analyzes a recent government report about Muslims in India and shows that the oft-commented upon introversion of Muslims is not an innate propensity of Muslims, but a reaction to decades of exclusion from broader social life.**

to be able to calibrate future initiatives to (re-)incorporate Muslims into Indian society, and in order to qualify a debate on minorities that "largely revolved around perceptions and rhetoric."<sup>2</sup>

The work of the Sachar committee is both remarkable and deeply disturbing in its documentation of decades of systematic neglect, non-action, and open exclusion of Muslims from virtually every facet of life in the country. In the preface to the report, the committee

admits difficulties in collecting data and corroborated knowledge, but also states that its methodology included a large number of visits to different states in India and meetings with many local leaders, business people, intellectuals, and social activists in these states. This process of consultation received an overwhelming response from Muslims across the country. It is indeed remarkable that the first chapter of the report is entirely devoted to a compilation of the views and perceptions recorded in these meetings. The report does not judge the validity or veracity of these perceptions, but argues very sensibly that they "are not built in a vacuum," and that such perceptions form an essential part of the reality that the government has to deal with.

## Laying demographic anxieties to rest

In a country that has been saturated by longstanding right-wing stereotypes of Muslims as a "pampered minority" that is against birth control and wants to dominate Indian society, the chapter in the report on demographic trends is indeed sobering reading. While it is true that overall fertility among Muslims is slightly above average compared to other groups in Indian society, it has been declining over the past decade. It also varies enormously within India and, in many states, the birth rate among Muslims is lower than among Hindus. There is a well-established correlation between fertility and the education level of women. As such, the generally low level of education among Muslims, and especially Muslim women, goes a long way toward explaining the birth rate differences. Other factors are that Muslims generally live longer than Hindus, and that the survival rate among Muslim children is significantly higher than among other communities at similar socio-economic levels. Muslims are less frequent users of contraception and the report reiterates what researchers and activists have known for a long time: there exists a longstanding suspicion of government clinics among Muslims, and there are relatively fewer of these clinics in Muslim localities. The lack of female doctors is one reason for this lack of trust. Another is the perception that the government wants to sterilize Muslims. This notion originated in the forced sterilization drives during the state of emergency in 1975–77 where mostly poor people, among them many Muslims, were targeted. Subsequent "demographic anxieties" propagated by right-wing Hindu nationalists keep such fears alive. The report states very clearly that even at the present birth rate, Muslims would at the most constitute 19 percent of the population in 2050.

## Education and living conditions

The most damning evidence of governmental neglect and discrimination at all levels of Indian society is presented in the chapters on education and economic standing. Muslims have fallen behind on every educational parameter since Independence in spite of being more urbanized than most communities: literacy levels are far below the average level and are not improving, the school dropout rate is the highest among all groups, and the average years of school attendance among Muslims is the lowest in the country. There is evidence of systematic

under-investment in government schools and education in areas with large numbers of Muslims, and the discrimination, or lack of encouragement, of those in the educational system is evident. The relative number of young people who graduate is falling as compared to every other group, and the higher one goes in the system of higher education the fewer Muslims one is likely to find. Among graduate students at India's leading colleges, only one in fifty is a Muslim—a figure much lower than any other group, including the former untouchable communities.

One of the reasons commonly given for the high drop-out rates and lack of higher education among Muslims is that there is little incentive because a very small number of Muslims ever manage to get a job in the public sector, the bureaucracy, or the large and rapidly expanding formal sector of the economy, which includes service, technology and industry. The report does indeed confirm that the majority of Muslims are either self employed or employed in small and informal businesses and enterprises. Many of these are in the traditional artisan occupations of Muslims (weaving, carpentry, metal work, mechanics, etc.) and in petty trade. These businesses are small, low-investment and as a whole outside, if not wholly excluded from, the new economy in India. The chapter on bank and credit in the report bears this out and shows that Muslims are less involved in borrowing and streams of credit than any other community in the country. My own experience from working in Muslim areas in Mumbai and Aurangabad confirms that a majority of employees work for Muslim-owned businesses, borrow through informal credit systems, and that the many Muslims no longer even consider applying for jobs in Hindu owned companies. Those owned by other minority groups—Christian, Parsi, Sikh, and so on—are generally seen as more open to Muslim employees. This overall “economic introversion” in the Muslim community creates low expectations of formal employment among younger generations, which in turn adds to the already low level of visibility of Muslims in the public sector. Except for a few states, where Muslims make up around a quarter of the population and where there is a consistent tradition of left-leaning secularism (West Bengal and Kerala), one rarely finds employment rates of Muslims in the public sector exceeding ten percent. In most other regions, the figure is below five percent, and there Muslims tend to be occupied in lower positions such as clerks, peons, or in menial maintenance jobs. The higher the prestige and visibility of a sector (foreign service, top cadres like the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), police services, banks, and the armed forces) the lower the percentage of Muslims; indeed, it is not uncommon for them to constitute less than two percent of the workforce.

The feeling of being outside the state and the mainstream economy means that very few young Muslims appear in the qualifying exams for the civil service and even fewer actually apply for government jobs. A longstanding friend of mine, Asif Ali Khan, is involved in an organization in Mumbai that assists young Muslims in qualifying and applying for government jobs—from the railways to the municipality, among others. A few weeks ago, he told me: “we have sent thousands of applications on behalf of qualified boys in the past few years and all we have got out of it is jobs for a few handfuls of them. We have more success with private companies, not least security companies that now recruit large numbers of guards and watchmen in the city. We have submitted this evidence of discrimination to the government but [there's been] no reaction so far. Maybe with the Sachar report they will be forced to take some action, at least.”

## Diverse Muslim communities

The report lists many more features of the current predicament of marginality and isolation of Muslims in India. Throughout, Muslims are treated as a single community spelled with a capital C. This reflects a certain concession to a longstanding ideal of unity among Muslims in the country. The evidence demonstrates a certain common experience of marginality but more substantially it shows that Muslims are deeply divided along lines of class, caste, and gender. More controversially, the report takes on the enduring problem of caste or *biraderi* among Muslims and argues that there exists three general status and occupational categories of Muslims: the *ashrafs* (noble) who “are without social disabilities”;<sup>3</sup> the *ajlafs* who are equivalent to what in India is classified as

Image not available online

“Other Backward Classes;” and finally the *arzals* who occupy a position much like the untouchables, or Scheduled castes, in the Hindu social order. The last two categories are eligible for various affirmative action programmes and “reserved” jobs and political representation in India; but these have hitherto only been offered to Hindu communities. Pointing out that caste is a real factor among Muslims and that more than half of all Muslims in India belong to these sections may provoke anger among conservative Muslims. However, the proposal that these Muslim subgroups should also be eligible for reservations and assistance from the government has already provoked a complex set of reactions in India. Predictably, Hindu nationalists find the proposal preposterous and “anti-national” and have denounced Rajender Sachar as “caring for terrorists.” Many leaders and spokespeople of lower caste Hindus and ex-untouchables, for whom these provisions are at the heart of their political consciousness and organization, have been somewhat wary about the prospect of sharing the benefits of affirmative action. The issue of reserving jobs and providing education for Muslims is thus bound to be controversial, and the debate over this already overshadows the full range of compelling evidence and complex recommendations made in the Sachar report.

## Marginal but proud

The Sachar report describes a diverse community which, though marginalized in multiple ways for decades, retains a strong sense of pride, and an unusual resilience. The cultural, economic, and political introversion among Muslims is often described in public debates in India as the essential obstacle for all to overcome, as if these were innate characteristics of Muslims. This report has authoritatively shown that present circumstances are the response of a proud community to decades of systematic exclusion from broader social networks in India. The question, of course, is whether the report's many and well thought-out recommendations can be transformed into viable policies in the broad centrist coalition that governs India at the moment. A related question is whether any of these recommendations—e.g. to create mixed public spaces, mixed neighbourhoods, and mixed schools and education—can ever be implemented. Will such policies address the apprehensions and anger among young Muslim men with few job opportunities, who are routinely harassed by the police, and incarcerated three times more often than anyone else in the country? Whatever happens, this report stands as a powerful “myth buster” that should significantly reduce the blame placed on Indian Muslims for the latter's marginality and poverty.

## Notes

1. Prime Minister's High Level Committee, Government of India, *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community in India: A Report* (New Delhi, November 2006).
2. Ibid., 2.
3. Ibid., 193.

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**Convention  
of displaced  
Indian Muslims,  
Ahmedabad,  
1 February 2007**

PHOTO BY AMIT DAVE / © REUTERS, 2007

# Muslims in Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict

FARZANA HANIFFA

Muslims in Sri Lanka, categorized as a separate ethnic group, are Tamil speaking and have sometimes been claimed by Tamil nationalists to be part of the larger Tamil nation. Though publicly rejected by Muslim leaders at various historical moments, this inclusion in the Tamil nation has been attractive to some Muslims living in the Tamil majority areas of the North and East. Muslim youth of the Eastern Province, for instance, participated with Tamil groups in the early militancy against the state, and Eastern Muslim politicians often joined Tamil political parties to contest elections. This relationship, always difficult, has now deteriorated—with assistance from the state—into a complete polarization between the two communities. Muslims have been targeted, displaced, and dispossessed by armed actors of both the state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and recently by the LTTE breakaway faction—the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Puligal (TMVP).

While there has been some improvement in recognizing Muslim grievances since the beginning of the peace process in 2002, this has not resulted in any substantial policy changes to address such grievances. The peace process has failed to take Muslims' issues sufficiently into account despite Muslim political actors being part of the government. In fact, the preamble to the ceasefire agreement, which set off the 2002–2005 peace process, referred to Muslims as a "group not directly party to the conflict." While civil society and political actors' agitations reversed this understanding to a certain extent, the current regime, with its pursuit of a military solution and a clear majoritarian platform has little interest in Muslim concerns. Today it seems that the meagre gains of those times may already have been lost. This article—through brief descriptions of the expulsion of 1990, the Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS) of 2005, and the siege of Muttur in 2006—will trace the history of Muslim inclusion within the conflict and the peace process.

## The expulsion of 1990

In October 1990, all over the Northern Province, close to 75,000 Muslims were compelled to vacate their homes at gun point, hand over their belongings, and leave.<sup>2</sup> In Jaffna, home to a fairly affluent trader community, the LTTE called all the men to a meeting during which cadres raided their homes. At the meeting, the men were instructed to leave their valuables behind and vacate their homes within two hours. Similar events happened with varying levels of brutality in the five other districts of the Northern Province. The expelled are still haunted by the manner in which they were compelled to leave, of women giving birth on the crowded boats, and of children drowning after falling overboard. Some say that the LTTE sold the abandoned goods at auctions; some say they were given away.

These people lost their homes, possessions, livelihoods, communities, and personal histories in one day. They left behind their belongings, their community, and their sense of citizenship in Sri Lanka. A generation of children, unable to complete their education, lost their futures. Today they live in over-crowded settlements in the impover-

**Regardless of when, precisely, Sri Lanka's protracted conflict began, this conflict is most often cast as one between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils. In this bipolar understanding of the conflict, the Muslim community seems to have no place, even though Muslims constitute close to 40 percent of the population in the conflict-affected Eastern Province and have been expelled from the Northern Province. This article describes the plight of these Muslims and analyzes the discursive and political powers by which Muslims are marginalized.<sup>1</sup>**

ished district of Puttalam. Their lives parallel the hundreds of thousands of Tamils and Sinhalese in the country who were also displaced and saw their lives destroyed. The Muslim experience, however, has its own distinctive features, which are reflective of their "no-place" status in the Sri Lankan polity. The story of their forced exodus is not widely known. Few commentators give the expulsion the attention that it merits as a highly significant historical event that changed the lives of the Muslims of the North and East.

The government has neither established a commission of inquiry nor arranged special administrative provisions for the displaced. A newly established government secretariat for northern Muslims located in Puttalam may handle certain administrative matters for the community, but there has been no attempt to find a long-term solution. Sixteen years after the expulsion they are still living as displaced persons in a district other than their own, amongst those that consider them aliens. Many of the expelled Muslims fear registering themselves as residents of the Puttalam district since they might, thereby, forfeit their right to reclaim their property and resettle in the North.<sup>3</sup> The host community in Puttalam resents the incursion of the refugees whom they say threaten the meagre resources available in the area. The Tamil-speaking Muslims have problems accessing health care and other state amenities due to difference in language. They cannot go back to their places of origin without the consent of the LTTE, the very organization that expelled them as they fall under their *de facto* administrative jurisdiction. The other particularity of the suffering of Muslims in Sri Lanka is that their plight does not have a place in any larger nationalist narrative—either a narrative of a liberation struggle (Tamil nationalism), or in a fight to safeguard the motherland (Sinhala Nationalism). They remain caught in between, and the Muslim political leadership has not been successful in articulating its position in a manner independent of the two nationalisms dominant in the country. This lack of a larger narrative means that many commentators have treated the story of the Muslims as little more than a footnote to the conflict.

The LTTE and Tamil nationalists have different levels of justification for the expulsion—some speak of security issues, others speak of Muslims as traitors to the Tamil-speaking nation. In the first flush of the 2002–2005 peace process, former LTTE political strategist Anton Balasingham stated that the expulsion was a "strategic blunder" on their part and that Muslims were free to return.<sup>4</sup> Tamilcelvam, LTTE political wing leader, offered an official apology to representatives of the Muslim community visiting him, and assured Muslims assistance to resettle when the North was under their administration.<sup>5</sup> Returning Muslims however, reported different levels of harassment by local carders. Today, close to 75,000 people from the North live in displacement in the North Western district of Puttalam with no status, limited state assistance, and barely any voting rights. Given the severe poverty of the area in which they are forced to live, the Muslims have become dependent on politicians, government functionaries, and NGOs for all elementary needs.

To make matters worse, the fact that most Muslim political parties have their primary vote base in the East means that they are not especially sensitive to the particularities of the northern experience. The political process is forcing "solidarity" between the Muslims of the North and the East without taking into account the differences between the regions. For instance, the polarization between Eastern

Sixteen years after  
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PHOTO BY FARZANA HANIFFA, 2006

Tamils and Muslims is intense, while northern Muslims continue to speak of cordial relations with their Tamil neighbours and consider the LTTE rather than the Tamils as a people to be culpable for the expulsion.

## The P-TOMS

The tsunami of 26 December 2004 devastated Sri Lanka's Eastern Province. The Muslims in the area lived in densely crowded communities that have spread closer and closer to the ocean given the restricted availability of land. The tsunami took a devastating toll on these communities: official figures state that 18,000 Muslims, or one percent of the total Muslim population of the Island, perished. Given that a large portion of the affected area was controlled by the LTTE, the government was urged by both local activists and the international community to work with the LTTE in formulating a mechanism to channel tsunami assistance. After many closed-door discussions, the Post Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS) to address reconstruction in the North and East was unveiled. To the Muslims it was an affront. The arrangement to address the devastation of the tsunami, from which the Muslims suffered extensively, had been produced as an agreement between the government and the LTTE without the participation or consultation of Muslims. While a representative of the Muslim parties was to be part of the essentially symbolic apex body, the rest of the tiers of the arrangement were weighted heavily in favour of the LTTE, which was also given veto power over the decision making process. After the 2002 ceasefire, the LTTE cadres had ready access to Muslim areas of the Eastern Province and many incidents of intimidation and extortion were reported. Muslims feared that the P-TOMS would institutionalize this harassment. Another reason that Muslims loathed the P-TOMS was that, given its links to the peace process, many saw it as a precedent for the future exclusion of Muslim parties from the process. Muslim parties felt that this was yet another attempt by the LTTE to undermine their political leadership. By contrast, members of the government felt that the Muslims were not adequately acknowledging the important breakthrough of including Muslims in the apex body. However, Muslims were not happy with the paternalism of a process that "included" them without consultation. Muslim agitation against the P-TOMS compelled the government to address Muslim concerns even after the fact. However, the P-TOMS became irrelevant when the Supreme Court found sections of the agreement unconstitutional and a presidential election augured the end of President Kumaratunge's regime. Moreover, with the current regime's pursuit of a military solution, the little that was gained by Muslims now seems lost.

## Mutur in August 2006

The presidential elections of November 2005 brought to power the UPFA candidate Mahinda Rajapakse on an anti-minority, anti-peace process, and pro-unitary state platform that was formed through the

ian population was still there. Forty-nine people seeking refuge in the school buildings were killed. In the nearby mostly Tamil town of Thopur a shell landed on St. Anthony MV School, killing twelve people. When Mutur town was largely under LTTE control the Muslim community appealed through intermediaries for the Government to end the shelling. The military, however, continued its firing into the town.

After three days of shelling, Mutur Muslims decided to leave the town and were given assurances of safety by the LTTE. On their way to Kantale, they were diverted off the main road (A15) by LTTE cadres, and taken to Kiranthimunai, which is under LTTE control. Here the LTTE picked out individuals alleged to be members of a Muslim armed group working with the government. These men were tied up and the rest were told to move on. The fate of 66 individuals who went missing at Kiranthimunai is still unknown.

## Conclusion

It has long been in the interest of the chief protagonists of the conflict—the Sri Lankan state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam—to propagate an understanding of the conflict in reductive two party terms. While Muslim community agitations in the aftermath of the CFA of 2002 have compelled both parties to take notice of Muslim interests, their consideration of Muslim issues is little more than perfunctory and often for propaganda purposes only. The LTTE's empty invitation to Muslims to return to the North, and the paternalism of Muslim "inclusion" in the P-TOMS are cases in point. The mortar attacks on Mutur while Muslim civilians were still in the town is an indication of the current government's disregard for Muslim civilian lives.

The Rajapakse regime overturned many of the successes of the 2002–2005 peace process. It is unclear what direction the Sri Lankan conflict will take at this point. The regime is pursuing a military solution to the conflict, and its complete disregard for civilian casualties from the minority communities is troubling and does not bode well for the future of Muslims. In pursuing its current policies, the regime is also distancing itself from the international community, and possible pressurizing tactics that civil society groups use via the international community may not, therefore, be effective anymore. Muslim civil society today is compelled to reorganize and strategize how it might best address community concerns in the new dispensation.

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Sri Lanka Freedom Party's (SLFP) partnership with the two Sinhala nationalist parties. Rajapakse won the election mainly since the LTTE prevented the Tamil population of the North and East from voting. Through this symbolic assertion of their separation, the LTTE effectively prevented the election of the pro-peace, federalist United National Party candidate. From the date of the election victory, the peace process speedily deteriorated, with claymore mine attacks and aerial bombardments, as well as suicide bombings in Colombo becoming the norm. One of the most prominent incidents of the military confrontation was the LTTE's attempt to take over the mostly Muslim Eastern Province town of Mutur that borders one side of the Trincomalee natural harbour. On 1 August 2006 the town came under attack as the two parties fought for control, with both sides firing artillery towards the built-up areas of the town while the civil-

**Temporary shelter at a school in Mutur**

## Notes

1. I thank Shreen Saroor and Mirak Raheem for sharing insights and information. This article is one part of our joint ongoing work on the Muslim community's concerns in Sri Lanka.
2. For a detailed description of the expulsion, see S. H. Hasbullah, *Muslim Refugees: The Forgotten People in Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict* (Nuraicholai: Research and Action Forum for Social Development, 2001).
3. Catherine Brun, "Local Citizens or Internally Displaced Persons: Dilemmas of Long Term Displacement in Sri Lanka," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 16, no. 4 (2003): 376.
4. Press conference in Kilinochchi, April 2002.
5. Conversation with Moulawi Sufiyan, member of the Muslim community displaced from Jaffna, and currently politician, and human rights activist.

# Violence and Political Change in Saudi Arabia

JOE STORK

For the past year, I and colleagues from Human Rights Watch have met in various Arab countries with civil society activists, to discuss attacks against civilians as serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law. Our goal is to gauge to what extent such attacks enjoy public support, particularly in opinion-shaping circles that may be sympathetic to the professed objectives of the perpetrator groups. We then explore ways of raising in those circles critical voices against such attacks, as a way of influencing the perpetrator groups to end those policies.

Together with a colleague from our Cairo office, I spent the first week of December 2006 meeting with a range of individuals, for the most part persons out of favour with the government and representing Islamist perspectives.<sup>1</sup> Many had been active in the establishment, in 1993, of the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate (Sharia) Rights (CDLR),

as well as the different public petitions calling for political reforms. Many had spent years in prison for their efforts, lost their jobs, and today remain banned from media appearances and travel.

We stressed that our concern was with attacks that target or indiscriminately harm civilians, and that there is a broad convergence between international human rights and humanitarian law standards and Islamic principles that traditionally govern the use of violence. Under international law, such attacks constitute war crimes when carried out in conditions of armed conflict and crimes against humanity when carried out as organization policy.

Those we met agreed on two points. First, public support for violent opposition groups, or at least reluctance to condemn such violence, is politically motivated by the close relationship between the Saudi government and the United States despite the latter's policies in Iraq and the Palestine-Israel conflict. Second, the Saudi government must end its systematic suppression of basic civil and political rights, especially freedom of expression, to allow peaceful challenges to the status quo. There was also widespread agreement, though not consensus, on a third point: that the state's accommodation of a religious establishment whose intolerance toward non-Muslims and Muslims who do not subscribe to the official Wahhabi interpretation of Islam has nurtured violent dissent, and that any successful political liberalization requires religious reform as well, especially in the education sector.

Official Wahhabi interpretation of Islam has nurtured violent dissent, and that any successful political liberalization requires religious reform as well, especially in the education sector.

## "Only civil society can fight terror"

Virtually all our interlocutors agreed that "behind the violence is oppression, injustice, and occupation," referring to conditions in the Arab world. With regard to Saudi Arabia itself, they stressed as well the "zero framework for civil society and no independent judiciary," in the words of Matruk al-Falih, a political science professor at King Saud University. The state, he and others said, was just as hostile to their peaceful criticisms as to the challenge of the violent groups. "A nine-year prison term for suggesting a constitution!" said Abdullah al-Hamid, a former

**Few societies are more identified with Islamist armed violence than Saudi Arabia—country of origin of Usama bin Laden and 15 of the 9/11 hijackers, as well as more than a thousand insurgents in Iraq, and itself the site of attacks on expatriate housing compounds. The author draws on discussions with Saudi activists and intellectuals to reflect on ambivalent public and elite attitudes toward this violence. The author's interlocutors attribute this "neutrality" to the accommodating relationship between a repressive state and an intolerant religious establishment, and argue that only a vibrant civil society can combat such violence.**

professor of literature and reform activist, referring to jail terms handed down to himself, al-Falih, and another activist.<sup>2</sup> "Proponents of violence point to that and say, see what your peaceful petitions get you. Our main demand is, protect civil society. Only civil society can fight terror."

In the view of a former newspaper editor, "the culture of radicalism here is not new, so what has empowered this murderous violence now?" Most of those we met agreed with his view that "the essence of the [violence] problem is political. Its widening character

derives from the U.S. occupation of Iraq, U.S. policy towards Palestine, and the perceived submission of the Arab regimes to the U.S." A university professor and a student at King Saud University confided that there is virtually no discussion of the violence or other political issues in the university for fear of the consequences of speaking out. To the extent that these things are discussed, the professor said, students do not condone the violence but "they do ask why it is happening."

## Accommodating intolerance

Most also attributed the absence of public opposition to violent attacks that have harmed civilians to a complex and largely accommodating relationship between the state and a religious establishment imbued with zealotry and intolerance toward non-Muslims and Muslims that do not subscribe to the official Wahhabi version of Islam. Religious reform needed to be an integral part of, if not a prerequisite for, political reform.

A lawyer who defends non-violent dissidents, and has himself been jailed for his efforts, said top officials are content to attribute the problem to outside forces and insist that the domestic culture is fine, while "those who see a built-in problem, who pose deep criticism of Wahhabi ideology and its role in the state, who think military suppression is not enough—we have no outlet in the Saudi media. Electronic forums advocate violence but these were not blocked, unlike those of us reformists." Authorities "look the other way" when extremists threaten intellectuals and reformers and only respond when they target the state itself, he claimed, citing an incident the previous week at Al-Yamanah College when militants violently disrupted a theatre production but faced no investigation or prosecution.

Another factor explaining public tolerance for these attacks, according to the former newspaper editor, who has been close to *Sahwa* circles, is "the Wahhabi legacy" of providing religious rulings (*fatawa*) to expedite the conquests of the Al Saud.<sup>3</sup> "How can we [the forces led by the Al Saud] attack this peaceful settlement? With a ruling that says villages that refuse to ally with us are *kafir*. How can we fight the last [Ottoman] Caliph? Get a ruling that declares him to be *kafir*." "These rationalizations go counter to Islamic culture," he claimed, but they have now helped re-define the culture—a culture reproduced in schools and much of the Saudi media.

"The *Sahwa* never approved of the pro-Afghanistan policy of the state," the former editor added, "but they also didn't confront it. Why did some *Sahwa* adherents join those 'Afghans'? One reason was their louder voice, and then there was the fantastic mobilizing impact of September 11 [2001], which exposed the *Sahwa* as ineffectual, with nothing to show for our boycotts and petitions." In his view, the current atmosphere of reform has left the *takfiriyyin* [those who proclaim others to be apostates and therefore subject to killing] more isolated, "but they still have the louder voices. And the issue of killing civilians is never discussed in Saudi Arabia. It is kept under the table."

"People don't support violence or nonviolence, but fight for rights. Those harmed by the state will not criticize those fighting the state, even violently."

## "Neutral" about violence

Although all of those with whom we met asserted a strong opposition to attacks against civilians, several Islamist activists challenged our characterization of particular attacks, claiming the attackers targeted military contractors or secret police and therefore suggesting these attacks were legitimate. The groups responsible, they said, were responding to heavy-handed policies of the Saudi security services and the government's close association with the U.S. One interlocutor claimed that the perpetrators of such attacks see "the U.S. fighting Muslims the world over, not distinguishing between civilians and military. Those allied with the U.S."—i.e., the Saudi government—"are just as responsible."

"Most of us [Islamist activists] don't agree with these attacks, killing innocents, Muslims or Westerners," this person continued. "This is forbidden, unacceptable." But, he claimed, most Saudis are "neutral" regarding attacks on Westerners. He characterized the 12 May 2003 suicide car bombings in Riyadh as "against military consultants"—and therefore not in the same category as the attacks targeting civilians that were our concern.<sup>4</sup> A former university professor at one point closely associated with Shaykh Safar al-Hawali, a prominent cleric with the Sahwa movement, said, "people don't support violence or nonviolence, but fight for rights. Those harmed by the state will not criticize those fighting the state, even violently."

These two individuals also disputed the view that the prevailing political culture in Saudi Arabia, particularly as reflected in the education system, lays at the root of the armed groups' violence and public support for them. "Millions of students have passed through our schools" without becoming armed militants, one said. Criticism of education policies was part of what he claimed many Saudis saw as "a comprehensive liberal campaign against conservative masses." Popular perceptions of this "campaign," he said, "helped make people neutral"—i.e. uncritical—about the use of violence.

## Challenging the system

Two other meetings underscored the critical need for educational and religious reform in addressing public attitudes towards political violence. These were with men I would characterize as Islamic but not Islamist—religious scholars but not adherents of clerical rule or governance oversight. Hassan al-Malki grew up near the border with Yemen and was already a prayer leader there when, at 21, he left to attend Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University. There, he told us, he was shocked by the intolerance, especially against Shia, and he became a critic of this *takfiri* ideology. Al-Malki said that at the time when he was a student the curriculum, in contrast to the growing trend among students and teachers, was moderate, "but the Wahhabis have rewritten it. The educational system now produces 200,000 radicals a year." You can criticize the radicals, he said, but not the system that produces them, and the state tolerates radicalism "as long as it doesn't directly challenge their legitimacy." Al-Malki wrote a critique of Saudi curricula, which coincidentally appeared just after September 2001, and the then-minister of education enlisted him as a consultant on curriculum reform. The minister "liked what I came up with, but it was killed by others in the ministry and I was dismissed." Al-Malki's own books are banned, and the ministry of interior prohibits him from lecturing. Many share his views, he believes, some even among state officials and in the religious establishment. But there is not much critical discussion in the universities, where "discussions head in more extreme directions."

Al-Malki recommended we meet with a younger religious scholar who has suffered a similar fate for criticizing the religious establishment on its own terms. In this man's view, it is easy enough to identify those proponents of an Islamic state who physically attack their critics. It is more difficult to know those who hold similar views but, in his words, "use the cover of religion and the law to get their way." He said his troubles began a year or so before September 2001. He was preparing his MA thesis and teaching at Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh when he spoke at an event on issues of belief, tolerance, and "equality of voices" in Islam. Because "these were considered taboo," the university suspended him from teaching and refused to let him continue to work on his degree. He said he was unable to determine who was actually responsible for his dismissal. "It's easier to come out against the government than to oppose this shadow group," by which he meant the religious establishment embedded in the state. He has since applied to finish his degree, but said that no university



PHOTO BY BILAL QABLAN / © AFP, 2004

**Security services' headquarters partially destroyed by an explosion, Riyadh, 21 April 2004**

would accept him, and the authorities have banned him from working and from speaking in mosques. Those who practice violence are arrested or killed and are forgotten, he said, but those who promote the intolerance that feeds this violence "leave [behind] their teachings and their books."

Abd al-Aziz al-Gassim, a religious scholar and former judge whose involvement with the CDLR in the mid-1990s led to his arrest and dismissal, saw that period as a high point in public interest in human rights issues in the kingdom. "As our confrontation with the authorities cooled down, so did interest in human rights." Suppression of the CDLR was followed in 1995 and 1996 by bombings against U.S. military contractors and soldiers—the onset of opposition armed violence. Prevailing values, he said, include the idea that "you can spill the blood of an innovator without committing a crime." It was no great leap for armed groups to assume "they could decide whom it was permissible to kill." The attacks of 9/11 brought to the fore the issue of the legitimate use of violence, "but the debate showed the weakness of human rights beliefs and standards here." This accounts, in his view, for the high level of support in Saudi Arabia at that time for Bin Laden and Al-Qaida. "Islamic thought hasn't developed legal reasoning for peaceful resistance," he said. "It's either unquestioning obedience, even to a corrupt state, or armed revolt. So we need to treat the crimes of armed groups in a framework that includes political rights, and where the space is wide enough to exercise those rights. We can see here that when there is a positive response to demands for reform, support for armed groups subsides."

## Notes

1. Human Rights Watch issued a public statement on the visit on 18 December: "Saudi Arabia Blocks Promised Access to Prisons," <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2006/12/18/saudia14892.htm>.
2. Al-Falih, al-Hamid, and writer Ali al-Dumaini were detained in March 2004 after refusing to sign a pledge to cease all public criticism of the government. A court sentenced them in May 2005 to six, seven, and nine years respectively. In August 2005, King Abdullah pardoned them but they still are banned from travel and from access to Saudi media.
3. The *Sahwa Islamiyya* (Islamic Awakening) is the term adopted by the Islamist opposition that took shape in universities in the 1970s and 1980s and attained a public profile in the early 1990s under influential Wahhabi shaykhs.
4. One of the three simultaneous Riyadh bombings on 12 May 2003 was against the housing compound of the U.S.-based Vinnell Corporation, which provides military training and other security-related services; the other two attacks killed and maimed dozens of Europeans, South Asians, and Saudis at other residential compounds.

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# Islam and Chiefship in Northern Mozambique

LIAZZAT J. K. BONATE

Links between Islam and the chiefly clans in Mozambique have existed since the eighth century, when Islam made inroads into the northern Mozambican coast and became associated with the Shirazi ruling elites. When the region became entangled in the international slave trade during the nineteenth century, the Shirazi clans secured alliances with the most powerful mainland chiefs through conquest and kinship relations in order to secure access to mainland slaves. This process was accompanied by a massive expansion of Islam into the hinterland. The alliances between the Shirazi at the coast and the mainland chiefdoms resulted in a network of paramount chiefs and subordinate Muslim slave raiders. This network also served as a marker distinguishing between themselves (the *Maca*: Muslims and "civilized") and those to be enslaved (the *Makua* and *Lomwe*: derogatory terms denoting savagery, i.e., "non-Muslims" and "uncivilized").

Some scholars have suggested that kinship ideology in general, and matriliney in particular, came under a great deal of pressure from the expansion of Islam.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless the chiefly network remained matrilineal. Considering that the network was grounded on the Swahili

(Shirazi) regional Islamic tradition, the perseverance of matriliney appears to be a paradox. It can be explained, however, by the fact that Islam was the domain of chiefs, whose legitimacy and authority was embedded in matrilineal ideology of kinship and territorial/land relations of the region.<sup>2</sup>

## Encounters with Sufism

When two new Sufi Orders, the Shadhuliyya Yashrutiyya in 1897 and the Qadiriyya in 1905, arrived at Mozambique Island, the rest of northern Mozambique was still politically unstable, with Muslim chiefs spearheading a generalized resistance against the Portuguese. Crushed at the outset, this resistance went on sporadically until the 1930s.

On launching the Shadhuliyya Yashrutiyya at Mozambique Island, Shaykh Muhammad Ma'arouf bin Shaykh (1853–1905) of the Comoro Islands, gave the first *ijazas* (authorization) of the *khalifa* to two local Muslim chiefs.<sup>3</sup> However, when he left Mozambique, a conflict over the leadership of the

orders ensued between the chiefs and a recent Comorian immigrant. The fact that this Comorian did not establish kinship relationships with Muslim chiefly lineages undermined his religious claims in the eyes of local Muslims.

The Qadiriyya reportedly was brought to Mozambique Island in 1905 by Shaykh 'Issa bin Ahmad al-Ngaziji (also known as al-Msujini) al-Barawi, a disciple of shaykh 'Umar Uways al-Barawi (1847–1909). He travelled to the mainland of Mozambique Island, Cabaceira Pequena, recruiting adepts from among a mixed-race Indian-African group of Muslims, who were descendants of the Gujarati Sunni Indian immigrants and local African women. Despite intermarriage, the Indo-African group remained under Portuguese rule, which kept them separated from the rest of the population.

**Muslim leadership of Northern Mozambique historically has incorporated Islamic authority and chiefship at once. Throughout the colonial period, Muslim chiefs defended their version of Islam against non-local conceptions of Islam, such as Sufism and Wahhabism. After independence the links between chiefship and Islam in northern Mozambique became less visible. This resulted primarily from the policies of the post-colonial government, which saw African chiefship and Islam as two separate spheres. Islam was viewed as an "organized faith" similar to Christianity, while chiefship was understood to represent African "traditional authority."**

The position of Indo-Africans in relation to Africans had been safeguarded by the presence of the Portuguese administration at Mozambique Island, but when the administration moved to the southern settlement of Lourenço Marques (currently, Maputo) in 1896, the group was left without colonial backing. They had to arrange for their economic survival and compete for Islamic authority with the Africans. They controlled the Qadiriyya until 1929, when local chiefly clans, in particular, Sayyid Ba Hasan (also known as Abahassan), a descendant of the local Shirazi rulers, stepped in to take over

the order. He was the son of a Hadrami *sharif* and a relative of numerous important Swahili and Muslim chiefs of northern Mozambique.

The violent transition of the Qadiri leadership from the Afro-Indians to the chiefly clans set in motion the competition between the two groups, which continued up to the end of the colonial era, and impacted the split of the orders into eight *туруq*. Until his death in 1963, Ba Hasan used his family ties, his chiefly status, and Islamic learning to expand the orders throughout Mozambican territory. As a rule, northern Mozambican Muslim chiefs became the leaders of the orders or they appointed their kin for this position.

The integration of chiefs into the colonial system of *indigenato* and the modernization processes which took place between the 1930s and 1970s did not halt the expansion of Islam nor impinge on matriliney prevailing in northern Mozambique. Individual files of the chiefs of the three northern Mozambican Districts collected by the Portuguese between 1954 and 1974 indicate that the majority of the chiefs were Muslims, and had mostly inherited their positions and title from their maternal side, as a rule from a maternal uncle.<sup>4</sup>

## Encounters with the Wahhabis

Muslim chiefly clans of northern Mozambique provided massive support to the liberation movements in the early 1960s, in part because of the harsh anti-Muslim policies of Portugal and in part because the Mozambique liberation movements were under the patronage of TANU (Tanganyika African national Union) that had a wide Muslim support, especially from Sufi shaykhs such as Muhammad Ramiya. Between 1965 and 1967, the Portuguese purged chiefs participating in the liberation movements, many of whom were arrested, murdered, and replaced by non-kin. Simultaneously, the colonial administration undertook a meticulous study of Islam and "traditional authorities." Because Portugal was concerned with the independence movements and identified Muslim chiefs and Sufi Orders as representing a religious leadership for the majority of northern Mozambican Muslim territories, it displayed a public support to them rather than to the Wahhabi group that began emerging in the 1960s. Two Afro-Indians, returning after studying in Saudi Arabia, founded a mostly urban-based Wahhabi group centred at the Anuaril Islamo mosque in Lourenço Marques. The conflict between them and the northern Mozambican tariqa-based and chiefly Muslim leadership soon escalated into direct confrontations, with the Portuguese intervening in favour of the Sufis.

## Muslim leadership and independence (1975–1983)

The socio-political standing of the northern Mozambican Muslim leadership was shaken to the core after independence. In 1977, the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (Frelimo) adopted Marxism and "scientific socialism," and sought to eliminate a wide variety of so-

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cial practices and beliefs which they deemed "obscurantist," "backward" and thus contrary to the modernist norms of revolutionary "scientific" socialism.<sup>5</sup> These practices included the initiation rites, traditional healing, as well as ceremonies of ancestral supplication, all of which crucial for the legitimacy and authority of chiefship.

Religion was identified as another "obscurantist element," and the post-independence Mozambique government banned religious teachings from schools, nationalized religious institutions, and harassed and persecuted religious leaders. With this, Muslim chiefs of northern Mozambique lost yet another one of the pillars of their power, that of Islam.

To make matters worse for the northern Mozambican Muslims, a 1976 government decree outlawed associations, including religious ones. To counter this move the Wahhabi group, led by Abubacar Ismael "Mangira" met on December 23, 1978 in the Anuaril Isslamo mosque in Maputo in order to delineate new strategies, especially because Anuaril Isslamo was an association too. They concluded that an organ representing all Muslims nationwide must be created in the face of the new circumstances. In doing so, the Wahhabis took advantage of the government's ban on associations to establish their position as the legitimate body of Islamic authority and to eliminate their historical rivals once and for all. The nucleus of the would-be national Muslim organization was set up there and then, and it was presented as such to the government when in 1981 the Frelimo decided to reconsider its positions toward Islam and create a national Muslim organization.

A nation-wide Islamic organization, called the Conselho Islâmico de Moçambique (Islamic Council of Mozambique), was established in a meeting between the government and a group of Maputo imams in January 1981, who went on to elect Abubacar Ismael "Mangira" as its co-coordinator and later on its first national Secretary of the Islamic Council.<sup>6</sup> As the northern Mozambican Muslims were not consulted on the creation of the Council, let alone invited to take part in it, its creation signalled a definitive victory of the southern Afro-Indian Wahhabis in their long-term historic struggle over Islamic authority against the northern Mozambican tariqa-based Muslim leadership.

Northern Mozambican Muslim leadership's disenchantment with the post-independence state became aggravated when Frelimo became associated with southern Wahhabis. The Frelimo's favourable stance toward Wahhabis seems to have stemmed from the government's perception that Islam and "traditional authorities" were unrelated; from allegations that "traditional authorities" had collaborated with colonialism and were, therefore, less nationalistic; and from the "modernist" outlook of the Wahhabis, who were well versed in Arabic and armed with university degrees and first-hand experience of Middle Eastern Islamic culture.

Accordingly, in 1983, Maputo Muslims who disagreed with Wahhabis created their own national organization, called the Congresso Islâmico de Moçambique (Islamic Congress of Mozambique), to which most of the pre-colonial associations and confraternities, including Sufi Orders, became affiliated. The Council attempted to de-legitimize the Congress in the eyes of the Frelimo government by denouncing confraternities and associations as incompatible with the spirit of Islam, and linking them to the colonial power and "traditional authority" as opposed to a "true" and "legitimate" Islamic authority of the ulama with "adequate" religious training.<sup>7</sup> This did not result in the elimination of the Congress as the Council expected. From that time on, the two organizations have continuously competed with each other for the Frelimo party and government patronage, as well as for the funding of international Islamic NGOs.

However, the Northern Mozambican Muslim leadership, perceived as both "un-modern" and either completely African "traditionalist" or following an Islam which had "syncretized" with these "traditions," were not able to play any significant roles in the official Islamic public sphere or be considered as unequivocally and legitimately "Islamic."

## Muslim leadership and liberalization (1983–2006)

Rather than relying on the culturally loaded notions of a "chief" of régulo, the Frelimo government has preferred to use the term "traditional authorities" to indicate a group comprised of chiefs and their en-



PHOTO BY LIAZZAT J. K. BONATE, 1999

tourage of subordinate chiefs and healers. Realizing the social importance of this group, Frelimo gradually reinstated "traditional authority." In 1989, the ban on traditional healing was lifted. After the signing of the peace accord in 1992, which ended the civil war with Renamo, the Frelimo recognized that "traditional authority" could powerfully influence voter behaviour in the first democratic election of 1994. From 1991 to 1997, the government, through the Ministry of State Administration, undertook research on "traditional authorities." In 1996 a change in the Constitution placed local authorities under the administrative protection of the state. The 1997 Land Law attributed legal rights within the State Law to "traditional authority" by recognizing the right of "local communities" to use land and benefit by occupation, in accordance with "customary norms and practices." And finally, a government decree fully reinstated the "traditional authority" in Mozambique.

While with these legal reforms the Muslim leadership in northern Mozambique seems to have recovered the "traditional" side of their authority and power, they have not been able to recapture their claim on Islam yet. They are still largely associated with chiefship and African culture rather than Islam. Because of this they are barely able to access benefits or gain socio-political influence through Islamic platforms or organizations. This situation has been the source of their continual frustration and resistance to the alleged racial and cultural discrimination perpetrated by Frelimo allied with southern Wahhabis, Afro-Indians, and Indians.

Many northern Muslim leaders have preferred to perform their religious leadership through traditional patrimonial relationships thus perpetuating the links between Islam and chiefship. These links, historically and culturally grounded in local tradition, still enjoy legitimacy and positive response in rural or peri-urban areas of northern Mozambique.

## Muslim healer's banner, Mozambique Island

### Notes

1. For example, J. F. A. Mbwiliza, *History of Commodity Production in Makuani 1600–1900: Mercantilist Accumulation to Imperialist Domination* (Dar Es Salaam University Press, 1991).
2. For more details, see Bonate, "Matriliny, Islam and Gender," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 2, no. 36 (2006): 139–166.
3. A. P. de Carvalho, "Notas para a história das confrarias Islâmicas na Ilha de Moçambique," *Arquivo* (Maputo: Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique), no. 4, (March 1988): 59–66, p. 61.
4. Fichero dos Regulados, 1954–1974, Cx: 899, 901, 902, in *Fundo de Governo-Geral*, Mozambique Historical Archives.
5. H. West, *Kupilikula: Governance and the Invisible Realm in Mozambique* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), xvi, 151–152.
6. Eric Morier-Genoud, "L'Islam au Mozambique après l'indépendance. Histoire d'une montée en puissance," *L'Afrique Politique*, 2002: 132–33.
7. Letter from Abubacar Mangira to the Prosecutor of the Republic of Mozambique, 31 May 1986. Archives of the Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Justice of Mozambique, Maputo.

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# Interview Jan Pronk

## Structures of Violence in Darfur

KARIN WILLEMSE

Jan Pronk's relationship with Sudan stems from the early 1970s and the 1990s when he was Minister for Development Cooperation in the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup> Appointed by Kofi Anan in June 2004 as Special Representative to the United Nations, he led the UN Peace-keeping mission (UNMIS) in Sudan. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed on 8 January 2005 put an end to almost half a century of civil war in Southern Sudan. UNMIS was also given the task of providing political and logistical support to the African Union in Darfur. The Sudanese Liberation Movement, together with the Justice and Equality Movement, started a war early in 2003, accusing the government of socio-economic and political marginalization of Darfur. The conflict has been portrayed as one between "Black African farmers" and the *Janjawid*, or Muslim "Arab" nomads. The latter are considered to be the perpetrators of the so-called ethnic violence, carried out with the support of the Sudanese government. The Darfur Peace Agreement reached on 5 May 2006, however, was only signed by the Sudanese government and part of a rebel faction of the Sudanese Liberation Movement.<sup>4</sup>

**Jan Pronk addressing a press conference in Khartoum, 21 September 2006**

Image not available online

**On 25 September 2006, Jan Pronk delivered a keynote lecture at the conference "Culture is a Basic Need: Responding to Cultural Emergencies," organized by the Prince Claus Fund. In his speech, he passionately argued that cultural heritage refers not just to cultural property but also to traditions, values, and practices that make a community.<sup>1</sup> Pronk explicitly referred to the annihilation of villages in Darfur when illustrating that destructing cultural heritage also means the destruction of a way of life. Pronk's concern for community structures and for Darfur was discussed in more detail during an interview earlier that day.<sup>2</sup>**

Jan Pronk was scheduled to step down from his post as under-Secretary General on 1 January 2007, when Kofi Anan would end his term. However, on 22 October, the Sudanese government requested Pronk to leave the Sudan within 72 hours as it was of the opinion that, by commenting in his weblog on clashes between the Government troops and rebel factions in Darfur, he had "interfered unwarrantedly 'in matters that do not fall within [his] mandate' and 'acted in a way incompatible with the impartial and international nature of [his] duties or inconsistent with the spirit of [his] assignment'."<sup>5</sup> As the situation in Darfur has not changed much since the interview took place, the views expressed by Pronk in the interview remain relevant.

Asked for an analysis of the current problems in Islamist Sudan Pronk<sup>6</sup> highlighted some similarities between the conflicts in South Sudan and in Darfur. Both civil wars were referred to in the media as "religious" conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims. Pronk, however, denounced the idea that religion is a major factor in the conflicts, stressing instead the multi-dimensional nature of both conflicts, arguing that they were rooted in environmental, economic, and demographic developments. In both

cases nomadic peoples were forced to settle and engage in agriculture, thereby clashing with farming communities over access to land and water. These conflicts were rooted in colonial identity politics, which had the effect of essentializing tribal categories. In Darfur, for example, the colonial government granted sedentary peoples "*dars*," or homelands, while Arab nomads were not allotted any land-rights or positions of power. Moreover, the state borders were colonial constructions that cut right through nomadic peoples' lands. Pronk pointed out that the history of

slavery in Sudan was at the core of the racist attitude of "Arab" peoples towards "African" communities. In short, the nature of the conflicts is highly complex, with religion playing only a minor role in it.

**Q:** *Why is it then, that religion has been prominent in media analyses of the conflict?*

**P:** This is the result of a complete misconception of the reality on the ground. Darfur is an Islamic region with a strong Arabic orientation. Everyone speaks Arabic; even the African groups speak Arabic as their second language. (...) The conflict is of an autochthonous-allochthonous nature. Nomadic tribes are not considered to belong in Darfur, even though they have been there for over 200 years. (...) I consider the religious component to be of little relevance to the conflict, and subordinate to the tribal, economic, and political aspects.

**Q:** *So in fact tribal issues have been part of divide-and-rule politics in the history of Sudan?*

**P:** The history of Sudanese politics since [independence in] 1956, and even before that date, has been characterized by divide-and-rule politics. (...) The attempts by the government at destabilizing the South were part of these same efforts, which capitalize on tribal differences, and that were repeated also in Darfur. Even the peace-agreement signed in Abuja is a continuation of this politics. It is an agreement, which has been signed by only one faction and the least powerful one at that. So yes, divide-and-rule. (...) Now there are as many as twelve different rebel factions! I have warned against a Somaliization of the situation with different warlords operating independently.

**Q:** *Warlords seem to dominate internal conflicts in African countries apart from Sudan, like Somalia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Can one compare these situations?*

**P:** Not really. The last three countries are examples of failing states. Sudan, by contrast, is a strong state where the central government is able to control everything. But even in a strong state total deprivation and neglect can lead to resistance. When the centre does not react with adequate policies, resistance may lead to a spiral of violence that gets out of control. If the resistance movement is not so strong and politically rather shallow like in Darfur, where the intellectuals are not in charge, violence can become a goal in itself. There is hardly any ideology among the leaders: some are simply against Khartoum, which is an anti-ideology (...); others just aim at gaining control over their own area. The resistance movement is as disinter-

ested in its own people—who are living in camps as victims—as the government is.

**Q:** *These movements comprise mainly young men: is there any involvement of women or women's groups?*

**P:** I have always been amazed, and still am, by the lack of self-organization and self-protection in the camps. Also in relation to women who venture outside the camps; men do not come along to protect them. Fear reigns. Now a much more militant generation is coming up, with young men turning against each other, also on a tribal basis (...). The tribal conflict is transferred to the camps itself which is a disastrous development. (...) Youths have no chance to return and some might not even want to. There is no employment, no education. In Darfur we are losing a generation at this moment, which is disastrous. No one cares: neither the resistance movements recruiting them, nor the government. The 40% of affluent Arabs<sup>7</sup> living in the towns, moreover, consider members of these tribal groups as "Untermensch."

**Q:** *In several interviews you stated that when peace is signed, the main perpetrators of violence should be tried by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. Is there also a role for local mechanisms of justice and reconciliation?*

**P:** Yes, for sure. The ICC is important, but I also believe in strengthening traditional systems of justice and of authority (...), in Darfur, and elsewhere, because of the stability these may provide. They can, however, never be the only solution as modernization of the state is also a requirement for stability. This process will undermine tribal systems from the inside; now they are being undermined from outside by the accelerated modernization of the 1990s. Maybe, and this requires further study, we in the West have played a negative role by focusing too much on modernizing the state, on decentralization, good governance via western standards, on democracy, etcetera. This narrow focus has undermined mechanisms of stability provided by tribal systems. Traditional leaders have been pushed aside by appointed leaders in a modernized state.

**Q:** *Because tribes "deliver" in terms of security and justice?*

**P:** Of course! We may raise our eyebrows about the way conflicts are solved by paying blood money,<sup>8</sup> but it does provide a way to contain violence. It has proven its worth for ages and is well thought out: the burden is shared among the members of a tribal group according to their capacity. (...) It prevents acts of revenge because this kind of reconciliation not only concerns the family, but the whole clan or even tribe. All members need to commit themselves to the reconciliation by contributing to the payment. [However], in times of war this system does not function well. Now it is the government that imposes reconciliation on these groups, [which] makes the outcome very unstable. We really should leave this kind of reconciliation up to the tribal systems.

**Q:** *What do you think of the recent turn to religion and human rights as foci for development cooperation?*

**P:** Religion is a very important, but long neglected, aspect of development processes. Neglect of the cultural dimension, of which religion forms part, leads to imbalances. So, if development cooperation policies promote knowledge of and respect for other cultures, a "do-no-harm- policy," then it is valuable. But I would warn against moving beyond that. (...) The cultural dimension determines economic development to a large extent. In this respect I am not a Marxist; there is, of course, a dynamics between both. You can make so many mistakes when working in a different culture. (...) I am a traditional multi-culturalist and I am not averse to cultural relativism: I relate to my own culture where some of its cultural gains, such as certain kinds of freedom, have to be continuously fought for. But beware of exporting these ideas: do not enforce them on others as this has always a destabilizing influence on other societies. Let it please be a bottom-up process. (...) The longer you deal with a certain society, the more surprises you will encounter and the more you realise how little you know. In order to move forward, you have to consider yourself a student, you have to be willing to learn, to understand, and to place yourself in the position of the other (...).

**Q:** *And you can take this perspective even when you negotiate with government officials?*

**P:** Well, sometimes I do understand their viewpoint. My concern is that at this moment the international political climate does not allow for trying to understand the perspective of others. We have now

a uni-polar system, with Americans holding power to the extent that they do not need to take heed of other powers. Europe has insufficiently resisted this development.

**Q:** *Has that been a reason why you did not want to use the notion of "genocide" with respect to Darfur?*

**P:** I have three reasons for this. In the first place, at the request of the General Assembly, Kofi Anan appointed an International Commission of Inquiry in November 2004 that was highly competent and unprejudiced, in order to write a report with just one goal: to inquire if what had happened in Darfur was a genocide. The inquiry showed that this was not the case, although what had happened was equally horrific. And as this constituted the official viewpoint of the UN, I had to propagate the same stance. Secondly, I am very careful with the notion of genocide since it is also a judicial term, which has been codified in the Genocide Treaty. When one proclaims a genocide one has [the obligation] to intervene. The Americans have repeatedly referred to the conflict in Darfur as a genocide. But when what they now refer to as genocide actually took place, they never raised the issue. They even refused to put Darfur on the agenda of the Security Council in 2003 and the first part of 2004, when it all happened. After that there were many killings, burnings, and murders, but nothing that resembled genocide. I consider it a kind of hypocrisy: and hypocrisy is not my style. And thirdly, I refer to the conflict rather as ethnic cleansing or tribal cleansing, than as genocide. The violent character of the conflict is in both cases quite similar, but not everyone is killed because he or she is a Fur [a name of one of the tribes]. I was the first to use the notion of genocide with reference to Srebrenica, but in that case every male Muslim from Srebrenica was killed.

**Q:** *Would you like to have an agreement on a UN Peace keeping force in Darfur by way of farewell?*

**P:** No, I am not in favour of that solution because that will lead to war. (...) In the Security Council I have always stated that a robust force is needed, in the sense of its capability to protect, but not that it should be a UN force. I think that in the current political climate in Sudan sending in a UN force would be counterproductive: it would become part of the problem rather than a solution. [Current president of Sudan] Bashir would consider it a form of re-colonization, as a neo-colonial intervention. He has stated that he would lead a war of jihad against it. Though this is an Islamic notion, the regime in Sudan is a secular regime and it uses this term in order to cover its back against Islamic extremists. I am convinced that President Bashir will not shy away from leading or allowing attacks against a UN force in Darfur. This would make the political situation even more complex than it is now. The extremists in Sudan are not only religious fundamentalists. There is also a strong political notion: being Arab. A third dimension of radical opposition groups is their antagonism towards the West. And finally, there is antagonism towards the regime itself. In the West all these movements are considered to be one and the same. Westerners are inclined to see all opposition in the region as inspired by Islam. By overemphasizing the religious dimension and underestimating political and cultural aspects, Western politicians have made Islamic extremism a more forceful antagonistic movement than otherwise would have been the case.

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## Notes

1. For Pronk's speech, see [http://www.princeclausfund.org/en/what\\_we\\_do/cer/index.shtml](http://www.princeclausfund.org/en/what_we_do/cer/index.shtml).
2. The interview was conducted in Dutch. The text has been authorized by Jan Pronk.
3. Pronk was Minister of Development Cooperation in the periods 1973–1978, 1989–1992, and 1994–1998. From 1980–1986, he was Under-Secretary of the UNCTAD.
4. For further details on both conflicts see [www.janpronk.nl](http://www.janpronk.nl) and, for example, Willemse in *ISIM Review*, no. 15 (Spring 2005): 14–15.
5. Quoted from: [www.janpronk.nl](http://www.janpronk.nl), weblog no. 37, November 2006.
6. In 1978–1980 and 2002–2004 Jan Pronk held the Chair of "Theory and Practice of International Development" at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague. Currently he has returned to this position at the ISS.
7. The term "Arabs" refers here to town-dwellers of Central Sudanese descent also called *jellaba*, and not to Arab nomads, or Bedouin, who are engaged in the armed conflict.

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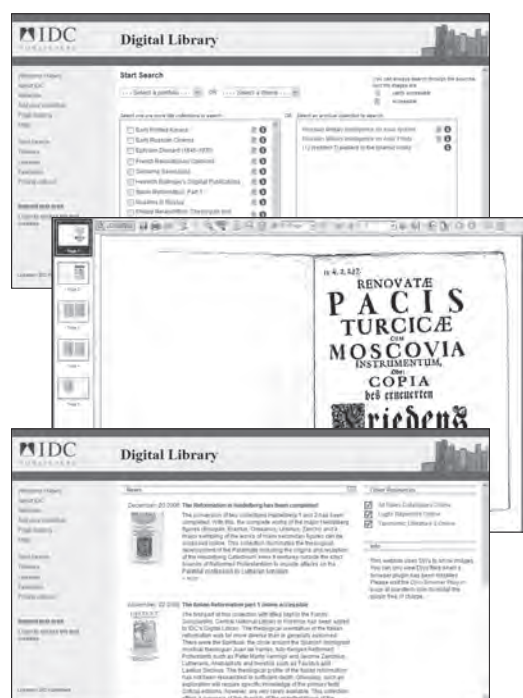
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## Abdolkarim Soroush ISIM Visiting Professor at VU

ISIM is pleased to announce a new cooperation between ISIM and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU). On Thursday 7 December 2006 ISIM and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) organized the Arrival Lecture of Abdolkarim Soroush "Religion of War, Religion of Peace" at the VU. This lecture functioned as the inauguration of Soroush as the "ISIM Visiting Professor at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam." Soroush (Tehran, 1945) is a leading philosopher of Islam, a reformer, and a public intellectual. Soroush's research at ISIM and VU will focus on the philosophy of science, philosophy of religion, Islamic philosophy, and the philosophical system of Rumi.

## ISIM SHORT-TERM FELLOWSHIPS

ISIM invites applications for short-term ISIM Fellowships. These three-months fellowships are available to prospective ISIM Postdoctoral and Ph.D. Fellows, and are intended to develop research projects to be submitted to external funding agencies.

ISIM conducts and promotes interdisciplinary research on contemporary social, political, cultural, and intellectual trends and movements in Muslim societies and communities. ISIM promotes and hosts research projects that are informed by a social science perspective, fit in with the general research profile of ISIM, and preferably are related to the specific research programmes directed by the ISIM Chairs (see [www.isim.nl](http://www.isim.nl)).

ISIM is located in the historic city of Leiden with convenient links to the coast, the airport, and major European cities. Fellows have full access to extensive libraries, research centres, and the facilities of the universities participating in ISIM: the University of Amsterdam, Leiden University, Radboud University Nijmegen, and Utrecht University.

We are looking for candidates who:

- have (recently) obtained an MA or Ph.D. degree (as appropriate) in the social sciences or humanities;
- are strongly motivated and well qualified to develop a research project along the lines described above;

- are committed to contribute actively to the ISIM community of fellows, by participating in ISIM seminars and other activities.

Candidates are requested to send us:

- a completed online application form by 15 May 2007. The form can be found at [www.isim.nl](http://www.isim.nl) under the link "Fellowships";
- a CV including a list of publications, a writing sample and the names and contact details of two referees.

We offer:

- a fellowship for a period of, tentatively, three months on a full-time basis, starting 1 September 2007; a part-time contract can be negotiated;
- an inspiring environment, including academic and strategic feedback on the research proposal to be developed, and on further writings;
- a return ticket to and from Leiden;
- support in the necessary immigration procedures and assistance in finding housing.

For more details on the ISIM Short-Term Fellowships please refer to the ISIM website [www.isim.nl](http://www.isim.nl) under the link "Fellowships," or contact the ISIM secretariat at [fellowships@isim.nl](mailto:fellowships@isim.nl).

## ISIM EVENTS

25 April 2007

### Debate

#### **Islamism and the (Im)Possibilities of a Western Islam**

**Speakers:** Sadik Al-Azm, Fouad Laroui, Marjo Buitelaar, Mouad Zaghdoud, Abdulkader Benali, chaired by Paul Aarts

**Organizers:** VU, ZemZem, and ISIM

**Venue:** Amsterdam

10 May 2007

### ISIM Annual Lecture

#### **Europe and 'the Muslim Question':**

#### **Does Intercultural Dialogue Make Sense?**

**Lecture by** Bhikhu Parekh

**Venue:** Kriterion, Groothandelsgebouw, Rotterdam

**Registration before 8 May 2007 via** [registration@isim.nl](mailto:registration@isim.nl)

11 May 2007

### Book Launch

#### **Women and Muslim Family Laws in Arab States**

**by Lynn Welchman**

ISIM Book Series, vol. 1

**Organizers:** AUP and ISIM

**Venue:** Spui 25, Amsterdam

**Registration before 10 May 2007 via** [spui25@uva.nl](mailto:spui25@uva.nl)

23 May 2007

### Seminar

#### **Islam and Democracy: Islamic Views**

**Speakers:** Sadik Al-Azm, Abdolkarim Soroush, Tariq

Ramadan, Nasr Abu Zayd, chaired by Asef Bayat and Markha Valenta

**Organizers:** VU, ZemZem, and ISIM

**Venue:** Felix Meritis, Amsterdam

3 June 2007

#### **Lecture by Ibrahim Mousawi at the Bazaar Annual Festival**

**Organizers:** IKV Pax Christi, Hivos, Partizan Publik, Groenlinks, and ISIM

**Venue:** Amsterdam

28–29 September 2007

### Seminar

#### **Salafism as a Transnational Movement**

**Convenors:** Roel Meijer and Martijn de Koning

**Organizers:** Radboud University Nijmegen and ISIM

**Venue:** Radboud University Nijmegen

## ISIM PH.D. AND STAFF SEMINARS

**Venue:** Leiden University

– 17 April 2007

#### **Divorce and the Introduction of a New Family Court in Egypt**

**Lecture by** Nadia Sonneveld

– 1 May 2007

**Lecture by** Martin van Bruinessen

– 15 May 2007

**Lecture by** Loubna el-Morabet

– 29 May 2007

#### **Normativity, Creativity and "Fun" in the Muslim Diaspora**

**Lecture by** Jeanette Jouili

– 12 June 2007

#### **Islamic Institutions of Higher Education and Authority**

**Lecture by** Firdaous Oueslati

For more information on these and other events please consult the ISIM website or contact the secretariat at [info@isim.nl](mailto:info@isim.nl).

# Piety, Responsibility and Subjectivity in Africa

MARLOES JANSON &  
DOROTHEA SCHULZ

On 15 December 2006 Marloes Janson (Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin) and Dorothea Schulz (Indiana University) convened a workshop titled "Piety, Responsibility, Subjectivity: Reconfigurations of the Moral Economy of Gender Relations in Contemporary Muslim Africa" at the Snoeck Hurgronje Huis, Leiden. The workshop and the subsequent public event were sponsored by ISIM, in cooperation with the Knowledge Centre Religion and Development and *ZemZem*, Journal for the Middle East, North Africa, and Islam.

The aim of the workshop was to explore the interrelation between current trends towards moral renewal in Muslim Africa on the one hand, and transformations of gender relations on the other. It situated these changes in the context of postcolonial nation-state politics. Recent reconfigurations in the relationship between the state and society in African Muslim communities, along with processes such as the democratization of religious education, the introduction of new media, and the new currency of a legalistic discourse, have fundamentally altered the basis of conventional understandings of gender-specific spheres of action. The claims and concerns formulated by supporters of so-called "reformist" movements can be seen as engagements with these developments, in forms that are inspired by regionally specific traditions, practices, and understandings of religiosity.

These Islamic movements tend to place a special emphasis on personal piety and individual responsibility in moral reform, rather than centring their efforts on challenging state institutions and political elites. Protagonists of these movements, women and men, understand their endeavour as a return to the original teachings of Islam and to traditional gender roles. Yet, perhaps the most far-reaching effect of their interventions is that they redefine, or temporarily invert, prevailing divisions between male and female spheres of moral practice and public action.

The workshop sought to address these reconfigurations of gender relations by bringing together scholars working on Islamic reform and gender in Africa. Rather than reasserting the common bifurcation between North-Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, it emphasized common themes as well as long-standing translocal ties and influences that connect these two regions of Muslim Africa.

In the first panel the focus was on the redrawing of conventional lines between gender-specific domains of action and authority. By means of the biographic narratives of two marabout women from Dakar, Senegal, Amber Gemmeke (Leiden University) explored women's activities in the Islamic esoteric sciences. Interestingly, by "denying" their femininity—both women emphasized that they did not menstruate although they were still young—these two marabout women were able to achieve renown in a field dominated by men. Gemmeke argued that this should be understood in the context of urbanization. An urban environment, inhabited by migrants searching for a livelihood in an insecure place, may create opportunities for women to launch a career in the Islamic esoteric sciences.

Whereas in Gemmeke's paper female authority in a male domain was central, Marloes Janson focused on male participation in a female domain by means of a case study of the Tablighi Jama'at in The Gambia. This transnational Islamic missionary movement originated in South Asia and proliferated widely in The Gambia during the last decade. Although the movement aims at reinscribing a patriarchal gender ideology, at the same time it provides new roles for both women and men that depart from established gender norms. In order to reduce their wives' domestic burden and provide them with more time for missionary work, Gambian Tablighi men actively engage in household work and childcare. Janson's paper showed that this transformation in gender relations is the outcome of a reorientation to a new form of piety as a means of realizing a virtuous life.

The second panel centred on new declarations of piety and ethical disposition. Although in Nigeria (as elsewhere) reformists attempt to return to the "roots" of Islam, Amidu Sanni (Lagos State University) argued that

one should not define them as anti-modern. By taking the "ultra-Salafi" Nigerian movement Jama'at Tadamun al-Muslimin Najriya as starting point, he illustrated that "secular modernity" is nowadays giving way to "religious modernity." Highly educated Muslims in Nigeria seek to demonstrate that one can be religious and "modern" at the same time.

The Egyptian repentant singers, dancers, and actresses studied by Karin van Nieuwkerk (Radboud University Nijmegen) are likewise searching for new ways to express their newly found piety. Tracing the life stories of three "born-again" artists, Van Nieuwkerk illustrated the passage from art to repentance and devotion. This transition has to be seen against the backdrop of a new trend in the religious revival in Egypt, concentrating on individual piety.

The last panel focused on women's ritual participation. Dorothea Schulz explained that since the introduction of a multiparty system and civil liberties in Mali in the 1990s, Muslim women's groups have entered the public arena. The women leading these groups exhort their followers to work on individual ethical improvement through ritual worship and the choice of "decent" attire, and present this process of personal transformation as a means and measurement of societal renewal. By emphasizing the relevance of Islamic ethics to public life, these Muslim women's associations assert that individual morality has important political implications.

Whereas Schulz focused on prayer and dress as markers of Muslim identity in Mali, Gerard van de Bruinhorst (ISIM) stressed the role of Islamic sacrifice in Tanzania. His paper studied the choice of sacrificial animals in relation to women's involvement in the *'aqiqa* (birth ritual) and *'Id al-adha* (the annual festival marking the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca). Whereas in the Islamic authoritative texts women's involvement in these sacrifices is described as marginal, the current reformist trend in Tanzania tries to include women as ritual agents. Although these reformists seem to advocate gender equality, Van de Bruinhorst concluded that their attempts actually result in a decrease of women's ritual agency compared with their roles in "traditional" society. The role of sacrificial animals seems to be emblematic for this development: the "traditional" female sheep gives way to the "Islamic" billy goat.

Finally, Samuli Schielke (University of Mainz) investigated the participation of women in Sufi saints-day festivals (*mulids*) in Egypt. Although there is a strong objection to mixed Sufi gatherings, Schielke argued that the problem is not actually with the presence of women at these Sufi festivals, but the kind of presence they have. This issue is not restricted to gender, but is also related to class distinctions. Despite the reformists' critique on women's participation in these festivals, Schielke's paper showed that they can command respect by displaying middle-class standards of piety in combination with matriarchal leadership and Sufi spirituality, while delegating formal symbols of religious leadership to their male followers.

Marloes Janson was ISIM Postdoctoral Fellow between 2003 and 2005. Currently, she is a researcher at the Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin.

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Dorothea Schulz is Assistant Professor at the Religious Studies Department, Indiana University, Bloomington. She was ISIM Visiting Fellow in 2005.

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# The Making of Muslim Youths II

On 6-7 October 2007 the second of a two-part workshop "The Making of Muslim Youths: New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North" (see *ISIM Review*, no. 16 for a report on the first workshop), was held at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague. Co-organized by Linda Herrera of the ISS and Asef Bayat of ISIM, the workshop joined seventeen scholars from, and working on, issues involving Muslim youth from Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, and the Middle East.

These two workshops have provided a platform for scholars carrying out empirically innovative and theoretically informed research on topics pertaining to the culture and politics of Muslim youth. The emerging attention to Muslim youth derives in part from the current demographic shift, or "youth bulge" in numerous Muslim majority countries. While often referred to as the "builders of the future" by the power elite, the young are also stigmatized and feared as "disruptive" agents who are prone to radicalism and deviation. Although gender, class, and cultural divisions may render untenable a homogenous treatment of youths, or even call into question "youth" as an analytical category, it is equally true that the young undeniably share a certain important habitus, which is recognized by both the young themselves as well as by the political and moral establishment and authority.

To be sure, the presence of a youthful population has caused a remarkable change in the social composition of youth who have assumed a central, if complex, place in the political economy and cultures of these societies. At the same time, youth cultures are developing in novel, yet little understood ways due to a combination of the shifting moral politics at home, the relentless process of cultural and economic globalization, the geopolitics of neo-imperialism, the rise of a civilizational discourse in which "Islam" is positioned in opposition to the "West," sluggish economies, and wide scale unemployment. Young peoples' expressions of interests, aspirations, and socioeconomic capacities appear to be producing a new cultural politics. In other words, the cultural behavior of Muslim youths can be understood as located in the political realm and representing a new arena of contestation for power.

The workshop interrogated the cultural politics of youth from the perspective of the youths themselves, from the viewpoint of political and moral authorities who consider it their role to discipline, control, and formulate policies for the young, and from an understanding of market and media forces where youth are heavily targeted and represented.

The papers were organized around six themes; the first of which was Locating Muslim Youth. Asef Bayat and AbduMaliq Simon conceptualized contemporary notions of youth with particular attention to the relationship between youth and the city in comparative perspective. The session on Youth Cultures and Subcultures joined Sophie Sauvegrain, Suzanne Naafs, and Gusel Sabirova who examined the intersection of the global with the local through inquiries into youth consumption in Syria, representations of young women in popular culture in Indonesia, and women's pietistic movements in Russia, respectively. The third theme, Youth Participation and Generational Shifts with Marloes Janson, Shamshul Baharuddin, and Azam Khattam, focused on issues of new patterns of authority and politics in the Gambia, Malaysia, and Iran. In the session on Multiculturalism and Citizenship, Schirin Amir-Moazami and Moustapha Bayoumi looked at debates around and practices of Muslim minority youth in North American and Europe. In the session on the Politics of Education together with André Mazawi, Linda Herrera and Nabil Al-Tikriti examined how educational policies meant to shape the young are often conditioned by geopolitics and crises of national identity. Finally, the panel on Radicalism and Identity Politics with Noorhaidi Hassan, Mohamed Khan, and Suzanne Hammad critically examined the category "radical" and investigated organization of youth politics.

The organizers are planning to co-edit a volume with the papers from the two workshops.

Linda Herrera is Senior Lecturer of Development Studies at the Institute of Social Studies.  
Email: [herrera@iss.nl](mailto:herrera@iss.nl)

LINDA HERRERA

## ISIM/Project

# "Making a Good Muslim"

ISIM is pleased to announce its cooperation with the Universities of Joensuu and Helsinki's project "Making a Good Muslim: Contested Fields of Religious Normativity in the Age of Global Islam." Throughout the Muslim world, discourses on "being Muslim" are centered on issues of morality and good life. For most Muslims, Islam is about structuring life experiences and social relations in meaningful ways, rather than about politics. In a globalizing world, Islam is a point of reference for an imagined moral community, even when individual practices do not fit agreed upon moral norms. In daily life, however, Islam competes with other sets of values, and different actors compete for moral and religious authority.

In different Muslim communities similar trends of morality and religiosity are reproduced in everyday debates

and interaction. These processes have been widely studied from the perspective of the nation-state and the politically active religious agents. What has remained in the shadow is how people who are not involved in activist or piety movements apply Islam in their everyday life in today's global world. This project aims to analyze, in different contexts, how people who are generally confident in the objective truth of their religion but who are not committed to a devoted activist life, apply Islam in competition with other normative discourses.

The project is based on seven case studies in six locations—Morocco, Finland, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, and Indonesia—and is funded by the Academy of Finland and located at the Universities of Joensuu and Helsinki in Finland, in cooperation with ISIM and Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies.

### RESEARCH TEAM

#### Project leader:

– Prof. M'hammed Sabour, University of Joensuu.

#### Ph.D. students:

– Maija Elo, University of Helsinki;  
– Fadi Kabatilo, University of Joensuu.

#### Postdoctoral researchers:

– Samuli Schielke, University of Helsinki (until 31 December 2007 University of Mainz);  
– Leena Avonius, University of Helsinki;  
– Susanne Dahlgren, Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies;  
– Marko Juntunen, University of Helsinki.

## New Project on Fashion in Europe

A research proposal of Prof. Annelies Moors, ISIM Chair at the University of Amsterdam, on "Islamic Fashion and the Emergence of Islam as a Social Force in Europe" has been selected for funding by NORFACE (2007-2009). Rather than focusing on headscarf issues and "veiling," this research project centres on the public presence of young women wearing styles of dress that are both recognizably Islamic and fashionable, a practice that has become far more widespread in the course of the last decade. Tracing the emergence of Islamic fashion on the streets of Europe this project focuses on young Muslim women's embodied practices and performances, tracing the conditions under which Islamic fashion has emerged in the European public sphere, investigating the various ways in which the tensions between Islam and fashion are negotiated, and analyzing the effects of such emerging embodied practices on young Muslim women.

A focus on Islamic fashion is helpful in understanding the emergence of religion as a social force in Europe. This is so because wearing Islamic fashion is an everyday embodied practice. It

is also, moreover, one that is publicly visible and capable of engendering debates about religion in the public sphere. While Muslim women are an important trope in debates about the (in)compatibility of Islam with European values, wearing Islamic fashion points to Muslim women's engagements with modernity and entails a style of religious belonging that may function as an interface between young women from a wide variety of backgrounds.

Research will be conducted in major cities in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, and Sweden in order to gain insight in how Islamic fashion circulates internationally and to compare between countries with substantial differences in terms of the backgrounds of Muslim migrants and their aesthetics, state policies and public debates on Islam, gender regimes, and youth and fashion cultures.

Principle investigator: Annelies Moors at ISIM/ASSR, University of Amsterdam. Research partners: Goldsmith College, University of London; Roskilde University, Denmark; Stockholm University, Sweden; University of Bremen, Germany.

## New Project on Salafism

The Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) will be funding a new research project from Radboud University Nijmegen and ISIM: "Salafism: Production, Distribution, Consumption, and Transformation of a Transnational Ideology in the Middle East and Europe." The Salafi movements are currently among the most widespread Islamic movements, with a major influence in the Middle East and Europe.

The research programme consists of four closely related research projects, each dealing with a different aspect of Salafi movements:

- an analysis of politically reformist Salafism and the Sahwa movement in Saudi Arabia (by Roel Meijer, postdoc, Radboud University Nijmegen);
- the production, distribution, and the contents of texts from Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Jihadi Salafism (by Joas Wagemakers, Ph.D. candidate, Radboud University Nijmegen);
- the rise of Salafism among Muslim youth in the Netherlands (by Martijn de Koning, postdoc, ISIM); and
- the dissemination and transformation of Salafi ideas in the modern electronic media (Ph.D. candidate, position vacant).

The research projects approach the Salafi movements from the perspective of the study of social movements. Thus, they focus on the manner in which individuals cohere into groups; how they react to their social, economic, and political environment; how movements are built, organized, and expanded; how they create models of emulation;

and how these are, in turn, transferred, adopted, and transformed in different circumstances. Emphasis will not only be put on the organizations or networks; rather, the researchers will also have to look into such questions as: what is the appeal of these movements (especially to youth); how do youths use Salafi movements in order to create ideas of what the correct Islamic beliefs are; and how do they relate to the Salafi movements in the construction of identity.

The research team further consists of Prof. Harald Motzki (Radboud University Nijmegen) and Prof. Martin van Bruinessen (ISIM), who were the main applicant and co-applicant for this project. At ISIM the programme is embedded in the larger research programme "The Production of Islamic Knowledge in Western Europe," and at Radboud University Nijmegen in the research programme "The Dynamics of Islamic Culture" of the Research Institute for Historical, Literary, and Cultural Studies (HLCS).

Radboud University Nijmegen and ISIM invite applications for the vacant position of researcher on Salafi communications in the modern electronic media. For more information see the vacancy announcement on this page.

## Vacancy Ph.D. Position ISIM/Radboud

In the framework of the research project "Salafism: Production, Distribution, Consumption, and Transformation of a Transnational Ideology in the Middle East and Europe" conducted by the research programme "The Dynamics of Islamic Culture" of Radboud University of Nijmegen in cooperation with ISIM, a Ph.D. fellowship is available for research on "The Media and Salafism: The distribution and transformation of Salafism in modern media." The successful candidate will hold a master's degree in Islamic Studies, Political Science, Social Science or Media Science and will be able to analyze Arabic TV programmes and websites and conduct interviews with their makers. Apart from fluency in Arabic and English he/she has to demonstrate a good command of Dutch, German, or French. Experience in media analysis or interview techniques will be an advantage.

Successful applicants become junior members of staff of the Radboud University Nijmegen and ISIM. The appointments are temporary for one year, usually full-time (38 hours a

week) and will be extended in principle for another two and a half years, if progress is satisfactory. The salary is € 1,956 gross per month during the first year, increasing to a maximum of € 2,502 gross per month during the fourth year, and is based upon a full-time employment and in conformity with current salary scales under the collective labour agreement (CAO) for Dutch universities. Those appointed will be provided with office space, a personal computer, and telephone on the ISIM premises in Leiden.

The deadline for applications is 1 June 2007.

Applicants should send their curriculum vitae, list of publications, list of language skills, and copies of certificates of academic qualifications to Prof. Harald Motzki, Radboud University Nijmegen, Department of Arabic and Islam, POB 9103, 6500 HD Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

For further information please contact Martijn de Koning at m.koning@isim.nl.

## Conference Youth and the Global South

On 13-15 October 2006, ISIM together with the African Studies Centre (ASC), the Council for the Development of Social Science in Africa (CODESRIA), and the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), organized a conference entitled "Youth and the Global South: Religion, Politics and the Making of Youth in Africa, Asia and the Middle East." The conference, held in Dakar, Senegal, offered a platform to scholars from the North and South from which they presented their analyses and visions on the

problems currently faced by the new generations growing up in the global South, particularly in Africa. Some 30 papers discussed social, political and cultural themes ranging from youth life styles, violence, religiosity, sub-culture, generational conflict, activism, sexuality, and youth political economy. The event also offered a unique opportunity for young scholars from diverse countries of the global South and the North to develop scholarly networks for exchange of ideas and future collaboration.

# ISIM Book Series

The ISIM Book Series on Contemporary Muslim Societies is a joint initiative of Amsterdam University Press (AUP) and ISIM. The Series seeks to present innovative scholarship on Islam and Muslim societies in different parts of the globe. It aims to expose both the distinctive and comparable aspects of trends and developments in Muslim societies, bringing together expertise in anthropology, sociology, political science, social history, cultural studies, and religious studies.

The editors invite monographs and edited volumes that are both theoretically informed and grounded in empirical research. Proposals will be reviewed by experts in the field, under the direction of an international editorial board.

Titles from Amsterdam University Press in the US and Canada are distributed by the University of Chicago Press.

For more information about the Series, please contact Mathijs Pelkmans at [review@isim.nl](mailto:review@isim.nl). Guidelines for book proposals and manuscripts are available at [www.isim.nl](http://www.isim.nl).

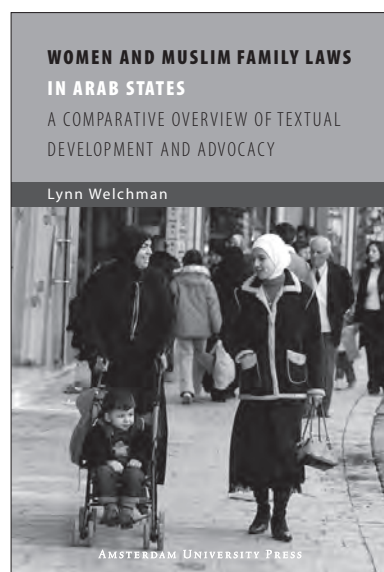
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## First Volume in the ISIM Series ISIM Paper 8



■ Lynn Welchman

### Women and Muslim Family Laws in Arab States

*A Comparative Overview of Textual Development and Advocacy*

Muslim family law—and its principles regarding marriage, divorce, personal maintenance, paternity, and child custody—is one of the most widely applied family law systems in existence today. A number of states have recently codified Muslim family law for the first time or have issued significant amendments or new laws, spurred in many cases by interventions from women's rights groups and other advocacy organizations. *Women and Muslim Family Laws in Arab States* combines an examination of women's rights under Muslim family law in Arab states across the Middle East and North Africa with discussions of the public debates surrounding the issues that have been raised during these processes of codification and amendment. Drawing on original legal texts and explanatory statements as well as extensive secondary literature, Welchman places these discussions in a contemporary global context that internationalizes the domestic and regional particularities of Muslim family law. Accompanied by a full bibliography and an appendix providing trans-

lated extracts of the laws under examination, *Women and Muslim Family Laws* considers laws from the Gulf States to North Africa in order to illustrate the legal, social and political dynamics of the current debates.

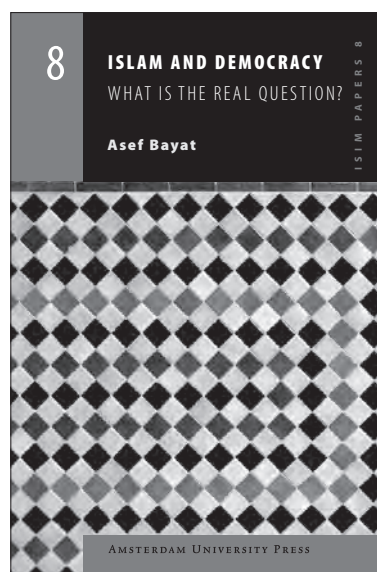
Lynn Welchman is Senior Lecturer in Islamic and Middle Eastern Laws, School of Law at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies), University of London.

"Lynn Welchman gives us a penetrating analysis of the different approaches to the codification of Sharia-based rules and principles in number of Arab states. Her rich and informative account is a must read for both scholars and activists working on women's rights and family law reform in the Muslim world, and Welchman has done them a great service." Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Visiting Global Law Professor, New York University

"This is a superb and unique study of family law reforms in Arab states, a clear and highly instructive clarification of the dynamic interaction of legal, political and social factors with practical initiatives that are shaping the theory and practice of family law in the Middle East. Scholarship of this high quality is indispensable for guiding and inspiring sustainable transformation of the social reality of Muslim women and their families." Professor Abdullahi A. An-Na'im, Emory School of Law, Atlanta, Georgia

May 2007  
ISBN 9789053569740  
paperback  
240 pages  
€ 34.95

All ISIM publications published by AUP can be ordered online through [www.isim.nl](http://www.isim.nl) or [www.aup.nl](http://www.aup.nl) or by email: [orders@aup.nl](mailto:orders@aup.nl).



■ Asef Bayat

### Islam and Democracy: What is the Real Question?

Is Islam compatible with democracy? This text examines one of the most frequently-asked and yet misguided ques-

tions. Democratic ethos should not and cannot be deduced from some essence of religions supposedly inscribed in the scriptures. Rather, they are the outcome of political struggles that push Islam toward democratic or authoritarian directions. Asef Bayat offers a new approach to examine Islam and democracy by discussing how the social struggles of diverse Muslim populations, those with different interests and orientation, render Islam ready to embrace democratic ideas or authoritarian disposition. "Islamism" and "post-Islamism" are discussed as representing two contrasting movements which have taken Islam in different, authoritarian and inclusive, political directions.

Asef Bayat is the ISIM Academic Director, and the ISIM Chair at Leiden University.

March 2007  
ISBN 9789053569832  
paperback  
24 pages  
€ 13.50

## ISIM Review Young Scholar Awards

ISIM invites articles written by graduate students for the 2007 *ISIM Review Young Scholar Awards* competition. Prizes will be awarded to those articles submitted to the competition that are of the highest academic quality and originality.

### Eligibility Criteria

Articles should deal with issues relating to contemporary Muslim societies and communities from within a social science or humanities framework. Of particular interest is research debate that deals with culture, social movements, development, youth, politics, gender, religion, arts, media, education, minorities, migration, public intellectuals, and popular culture. All articles should be based on the author's personal empirical research. Those eligible to submit articles to the

competition are graduate students in the process of completing their MA thesis and those who have completed their thesis no more than nine months before the deadline for submission.

### Prizes

First: € 1,500  
Second: € 1,000  
Third: € 750

The prize-winning articles will be published in the *ISIM Review*.

### Submission

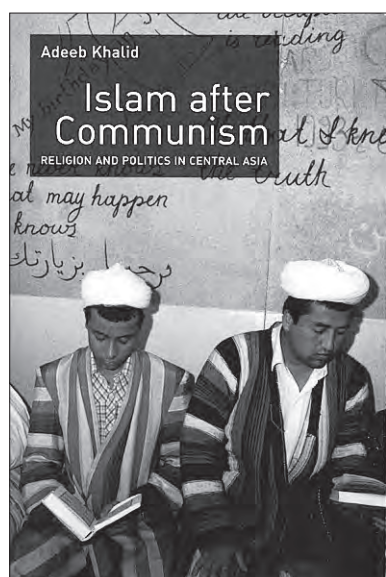
Deadline for submission is 1 June 2007. Submissions should also include the author's curriculum vitae. For details on the submission of articles, please see the ISIM website ([www.isim.nl](http://www.isim.nl)) under the link "Review," or contact the ISIM editorial office at [review@isim.nl](mailto:review@isim.nl).

## **Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia**

By **Adeeb Khalid**

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007

This is one of the first comprehensive accounts of the plight of Muslims in Central Asia living through the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union. Detailing how this particular trajectory is reflected in the cultural and religious orientations of Muslims, the book is an essential read for those interested in the region and those wishing to engage with aspects of Muslim modernity that have so far received scant scholarly attention.

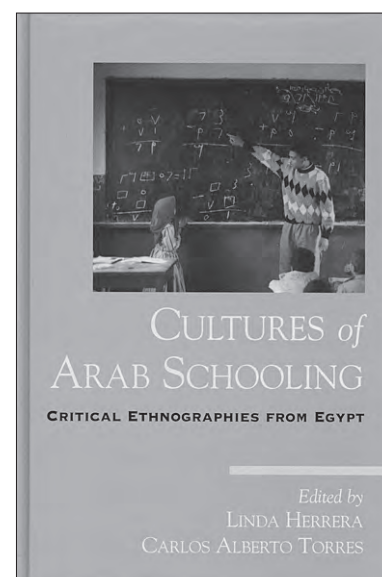


## **Cultures of Arab Schooling: Critical Ethnographies from Egypt**

Edited by **Linda Herrera** and **Carlos Alberto Torres**

New York: State University of New York Press, 2006

While many studies focus on political processes, religious change and the media in the Middle East, educational systems have received remarkably little attention. Drawing on critical social theory and adopting a solid ethnographic approach, this volume manages to shed new light on important societal processes in contemporary Egypt.

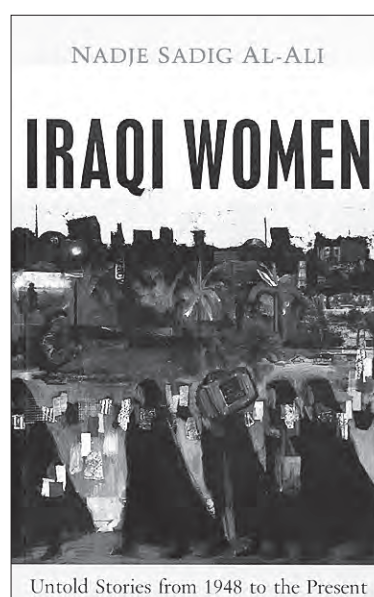


## **Sufis & Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality & Sacred Power in Islam**

By **Scott Kugle**

Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007

In this comprehensive study of Islamic mysticism, Kugle challenges the view that portrays Islam as abstract and disengaged from the body. Looking at a variety of Sufi communities, the author demonstrates the centrality of the body in generating and channeling religious meaning, communal solidarity, and sacred power. By mingling an in-depth study of individual Saints with a comparative approach to Sufism, this book ties philosophy to ethnography and the study of sexuality to theology.



## **Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present**

By **Nudge Sadig Al-Ali**

London: Zed Books, 2007

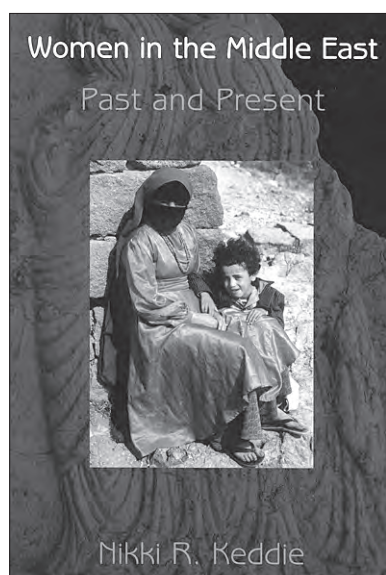
Moving beyond the headlines covering the war in Iraq, Nudge Al-Ali traces the lives of Iraqi women from the mid twentieth century to today. The book describes how women lived within a framework of state oppression, economic deprivation, and war, without losing sight of the intricacies of their everyday lives. The author shows that, far from being passive victims, Iraqi women have been, and continue to be, key political actors. Sadly, US-led calls for liberation may in the long term serve to limit the opportunities of the women of Iraq.

## **Women in the Middle East: Past and Present**

By **Nikki R. Keddie**

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007

Keddie discusses the interaction of a changing Islam with political, cultural, and socioeconomic developments. Like other major religions, Islam incorporated ideas and practices of male superiority but also provoked challenges to them. By tracing women's involvement in the rise of modern nationalist, socialist, and Islamist movements, the author dismisses notions of Middle Eastern women as faceless victims.

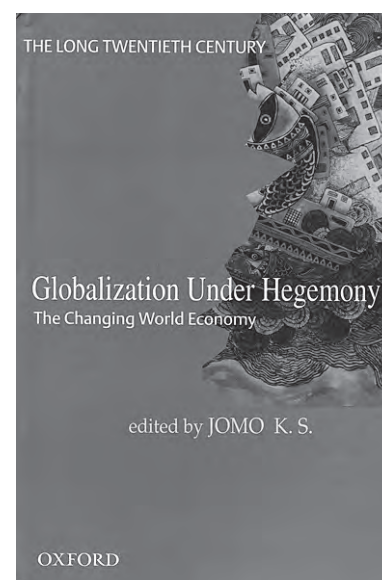


## **Globalization Under Hegemony: The Changing World Economy**

Edited by **Jomo K.S.**

New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006

In nine essays this volume offers important insights into economic processes in the contemporary world. Analyzing historical events and processes in "the long twentieth century," the authors manage to capture significant aspects of globalization, imperialism, and colonialism, and their uneven impact on countries in the North and the South. As such, the volume highlights the continued significance of the state in shaping conditions for achieving economic development.



# Anatolian Civilizations



The collection "Anatolian Civilizations" reflects Erol Albayrak's desire to examine the concept of fashion as transmitted by inhabitants of Anatolia. Albayrak envisions his collection as a passage through time: rooted in the kingdom of Hittites, influenced by ideas of beauty in Urartu, reflecting the sorrow of Troya, and drenched in the passions and mysteries of the Ottomans. These styles are being re-imagined in a "modern" or novel spirit.

"Anatolian Civilizations" is one collection in a series devoted to incorporate details from Ottoman Anatolian culture in contemporary fashion. His newest collection, "Mevlana and Prayer," will be presented in ten Turkish cities and in ten cities abroad, including Rotterdam on 22-23 September 2007.

**Erol Albayrak**



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Disconnected