

Islam and the “Carriers” of European National Identities

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On 24–25 February 2006 in Frankfurt-Oder, Barbara Thériault and Frank Peter convened a workshop on Islam, European Societies, and the “Carriers” of National Identities. The workshop, co-organized by the CCEAE (Centre canadien d'études allemandes et européennes) at Université de Montréal and ISIM, dealt with the incorporation of Islam in different national contexts. This workshop suggested a new perspective on the transformations triggered by the presence of Muslims in European societies by recasting attention to those who deal with the incorporation of Islam in Europe: the “carriers” of national identities.

Today, the dominant approaches in studies of the incorporation of Islam typically centre on the importance of national traditions, primarily church-state relations and citizenship laws, to account for the nature of debates and practices related to the incorporation of Muslims. Alluding to Max Weber's sociology, the concept of “carrier” was introduced in order to initiate a more systematic and comparative study of the reworking of national identities by specific groups and configurations of actors, both Muslim and non Muslim, such as civil servants, religious specialists, or social scientists. These configurations of actors distinguish the countries surveyed at the workshop. While these actors might contribute to changes in the understanding of national

identities, the papers have shown that this is not necessarily their intention. As such, not only the intentions underlying their actions, but their consequences as well, were underscored by the participants—an aspect the term “carrier” expresses more sharply than that of “agent.” Building and supplementing on the literature on the incorporation of Islam, participants of the workshop thus took a fresh look at this growing body of literature from the vantage point of particular types of actors, those who could be referred to as “border crossers” or those who contribute—knowingly or unwittingly—to the incorporation of Islam and thus often challenge the borders of national identities.

Among the different actor constellations who impact processes of institutionalization of Islam in Europe, Tina Jensen analyzed the ambiguous role played by converts in Denmark. Surveying mosques in the same country, Lene Kühle also pointed to the importance of municipal authorities in the process of Muslim institution building while challenging the use of the category “religion” for analyzing contemporary “Islam” in Denmark. In the case of Germany, Barbara Thériault drew attention to the role of civil servants and conservative forces in incorporating Islam. Studying a conflict around the construction of a mosque in Germany, Jörg Hüttermann pointed to the prevailing importance of “rules of hospitality” in his analysis of the actions taken by parties in favour or against the religious building. Concentrating on the figure of intellectuals of Islamic background and social scientists in general, Schirin Amir-Moazami, Ruth

Mas, and Frank Peter examined discursive constructions of Islam in France and Germany while Nadia Fadil critically engaged in her study on Muslim believers in Belgium with the private/public dichotomy as a technique of liberal governance.

To be sure, the stress on “carriers,” both Muslim and non-Muslim, does not exhaust our understanding of the incorporation of Islam and changing national identities. However, it introduces a shift of perspective, which puts in the hot seat particular constellations of actors and how they negotiate, in their daily work and intellectual production, the tensions between the universal and the particular. They do so, as was stressed by Till van Rahden and Denise Helly, from distinctive positions of power within specific national and/or religious traditions. Such an analysis also opens up a new perspective for understanding the ongoing debates set off by the new Muslim presence as has been exemplarily illustrated by Martijn de Koning in his enquiry on the diverging meanings conferred on the concept of tolerance in the Netherlands. Concepts such as tolerance, Thijl Sunier compellingly argued in the case of the construction of religious buildings in Amsterdam, should not be taken for granted. They reflect on past and ongoing struggles for the appropriation of space within the history of different national states.

Considering the incorporation of Islam from the standpoint of particular “carriers” has both opened up a new perspective and raised an array of new issues, which will be hopefully discussed at an upcoming workshop.

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LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

- **Schirin Amir-Moazami**, Humboldt University / University of Frankfurt-Oder
Feminism, Islam and Liberal Public Spheres in Europe: A Case Study on Secular-Feminist Intellectuals in France and Germany
- **Ruth Mas**, University of Colorado-Boulder
The Franco-Maghrebi Subject: Culture and the Decentering of the Quran
- **Nadia Fadil**, University of Leuven
Observing Transgressive Religious Practices: The Performance of the Public and the Private
- **Barbara Thériault**, University of Montreal
The “Carriers of Diversity” within Police Forces in Germany: Contemporary Manifestations of Religion?
- **Frank Peter**, ISIM / Free University of Berlin
Immigrant Youths, Education, and the Incorporation of Islam in France
- **Tina Jensen**, University of Copenhagen
Danish Muslims: Mediators as Tricksters or Catalysts of National Identity?
- **Jörg Hüttermann**, Institut für interdisziplinäre Konflikt- und Gewaltforschung (IKG), Bielefeld
Neighbourhood Conflict as a Ritual of Incorporation: Case-Based Remarks on a Conflict about a Minaret-Building
- **Thijl Sunier**, University of Amsterdam
No White Sugarbread in Our Neighbourhood! Religion and the Politics of Space in Amsterdam
- **Lene Kühle**, University of Aarhus
Organizing the Mosque as a Religious Community
- **Martijn de Koning**, ISIM / Free University of Amsterdam
“Dreaming in Dutch”: Conflicts and Tolerance in Dutch Society

LIST OF DISCUSSANTS

- **Till van Rahden**, University of Cologne
- **Denise Helly**, INRS, Montreal

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

- **Scott Kugle**, ISIM
Restraint of Violence in Modern Islamic History: The Intellectual Legacy and Ethical Challenge of Abul Kalam Azad
- **Benjamin Soares**, Africa Studies Centre, Leiden
Muslim Public Intellectuals in Contemporary West Africa
- **Roel Meijer**, ISIM / Radboud University Nijmegen
Intellectuals and Politics in Iraq: The Association of Muslim Scholars and its Ideological Justification of the Sunni Resistance
- **Recep Senturk**, Centre for Islamic Research (ISAM), Istanbul
Intellectual Dependency: Muslim Intellectuals in Search for Human Rights?
- **Samuli Schielke**, ISIM
The Making of Popular Religion: Nationalism, Islamic Reform, and The Construction of Mawlid Festivals as an Other of Modern Egypt (1880-1950)
- **Patrick Desplat**, Johannes Gutenberg-University, Mainz
On the Confessions of a British Spy and “New” Readings of Tawhid - Contemporary Interpretations in Islam and their Contextualization in Ethiopia
- **Farzin Vahdat**, Harvard University, Cambridge
Critical Theory and the Islamic Encounter with Modernity
- **Richard Martin**, Emory University, Atlanta
Enlightenment in Islam: Denied, Rejected, Forgotten, Remembered
- **Annemarike Stremmelaar**, Leiden University
The Islamic Ethic and the Spirit of Modernity: The Protestantisation of Islam according to Islamist Intellectuals in Turkey
- **Michael Feener**, University of California, Riverside
Cross-Cultural Contexts of Modern Muslim Intellectualism: Reflections on a History of Islamic Legal Thought in Indonesia
- **Michiel Leezenberg**, University of Amsterdam
Laying Down the Law: State, Religion, and Gendered Violence in Iraq
- **Abdulkader Tayob**, ISIM / Radboud University Nijmegen
Religion in Modern Islamic Thought and Practice