

The Making of Muslim Youths

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The workshop examined the central, and complex, place of the “young generation” in the politics and culture of Muslim societies and communities. Due to a combination of the shifting moral politics at home and the process of globalization, youth cultures are developing in novel, yet little understood ways.

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 make it untenable to render youths homogenous as an analytical category, it is equally true that the young do share a certain important habitus, which both the young themselves as well as the political and moral authority recognize.

The workshop, which dealt with cases from the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, was divided into the overlapping and related themes: youths and cultural politics, and Muslim youths in Europe. In the first session Mounia Bennani concentrated on how youth has been constituted as an object of study. She argued that “youth” is not a coherent and uniform unit. Furthermore, when the young are constituted as “a problem,” they are relegated to playing behind-the-scenes roles. In another paper dealing with issues of youth and authority, Linda Herrera, through an examination of the new mandatory Values and Morals (al-Qiyam wa al-Akhlaq) course in Egyptian schools, considered how curriculum development is increasingly becoming a multinational undertaking. Despite its claims to instill liberal democratic virtues such as “tolerance” and “active citizenship,” the curriculum often reflects highly anti-democratic processes and practices.

Turning to music and youth identities, Pierre Hecker analyzed the appropriations of Metal music and culture in urban Turkish society (see his article on page 8). Despite being widely tolerated by the Turkish authorities, several incidents incited “moral panics” about Satanism

The ISIM, in collaboration with the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), organized a workshop, “The making of Muslim Youths: Youth Cultures & Politics in Muslim Societies and Communities.” The workshop took place 18 to 19 February at Leiden University and was convened by Asef Bayat.

entering Turkish society through the gates of Metal music. The national media presented the emergence of Satanism as part of a wider process of “Westernization,” particularly cultural globalization. Also relating to Turkey, Ayse Saktanber’s paper (read by Asef Bayat) dealt with elite students of the

Middle East Technical University (METU). While these students are assumed to reflect western/universal values and norms, they are also influenced by religious trends.

Asef Bayat challenged the assumption that youths are necessarily agents of political transformation. Invoking the case of Iran, he argued that although youths did develop a social movement, a “youth” movement, it was not necessarily a force for political change. The youth movement, rather, has been about claiming “youthfulness.” Iran’s youth movement was expressed, during the 1990s, in strong collective identities, often in defiance of moral-political authority, as displayed in fashion, underground music, and reinterpretation of religion and religious rituals, what Bayat conceptualized as “subversive accommodation.” Pascal Menoret, bringing the issues to the case of Saudi Arabia, suggested that political Islam has emerged in Saudi public and social life as a counterculture. A counterculture is measured by its capability for deconstructing the dominant culture, or for criticizing it from inside more than from outside. Reform rather than revolution, is defined by its efficiency more than by any symbolic inversion, rebellion or subversion. Youth Islam is, in a way, the self-consciousness of a larger counter-culture that is deconstructing and criticizing the dominant culture from inside. Turning to Morocco, Sonia Hegasy presented the results of a quantitative survey on royal authority in Morocco. She argued that Mohammed VI is making attempts to establish himself as the cultural representative of globalized Moroccan youth. Young women in particular favour the opening up of the monarchy and its new political

iconography. With regard to Nigeria, Hameed Agberemi examined the radicalization of the youths in Nigeria and how the public space is contested on the university campus by Islamists.

The second half of the workshop focused on Muslim minorities in Europe. Nikola Tietze, drawing on research of young Muslims in France, showed that youth constantly re-negotiate ways of action in French society. She discussed the various forms of Muslim religiosity that can become vehicles for demanding respect within a set of social and political relations that is perceived as effectively marginalizing youths of Muslim origin. On the case of the UK, Mohammed Amer spoke about the religious families of Pakistani background where the Bollywood movies and other media are part of the household in East London. He challenged the assumption that UK born South Asians, mostly Muslims, have a confused identity. The final two presentations dealt with the popular culture of Muslim youth in the Dutch context. Martijn de Koning focused on different fields of negotiating: the internet, between the

Lebanese high-school students celebrate Valentine’s Day at a Beirut café, 14 February 2001



PHOTO BY JAMAL SAIDI, © REUTERS, 2001

researcher and researched, between men and women, among Muslims in general and between Muslims and non-Muslims. He argued that identity politics should be taken to mean the negotiations about the definition and interpretation of ideas, practices, and experiences that constitute a certain identity. In her paper, Miriam Gazzah dealt with the cultural politics of Moroccan youth in the Netherlands, based on two musical genres, namely Moroccan popular folk music ("shaabi") and Maroc-hop (see her article on page 6). She concluded that both these musical forms permit young Moroccans in the Netherlands to express specific identities in local contexts. She pointed to the importance of the concept of multiple identities and that Dutch society has not (yet) recognized these multiple identities of young Moroccans and it keeps referring them as Muslims, although Moroccan youth may give priority to very different identities.

Shahnaz Rouge summed the workshop discussions, highlighting the relationship between the researcher and the researched and questioning concepts such as "Muslim" and "youth." She pointed out that it is important to keep asking ourselves why are we interested in youth, how do we see "youth," "habitus," and "space," and how do gender and class factor into these categories?

ISIM, in cooperation with IIAS and the African Studies Centre at Leiden University, and CODESRIA, will organize a follow-up workshop in 2006. This will be a larger workshop to be held in Dakar, Senegal. The workshop will be open to direct application from interested young scholars on a competitive basis.

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PARTICIPANTS

- **Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi**
"Young Moroccans and Religion"
- **Linda Herrera**
"The Making of Moral Youths: The Politics of Schooling in Egypt"
- **Pierre Hecker**
"Taking a Trip to the Turkish Metal Underground: Appropriation of a Global Youth Culture in a Changing Muslim Society"
- **Ayse Saktanber**
"Negotiating Muslim Identity and Youthfulness: The Cultural Dilemma of Muslim Youth in Turkey"
- **Asef Bayat**
"Subversive Accommodation: Cultural Politics of Muslim Youths in Iran"
- **Pascal Menoret**
"Political Islam and Youth Culture in Saudi Arabia"
- **Sonia Hegasy**
"Young Authority: Youth and the State Power in Morocco"
- **Hameed Agberemi**
"Campus Islamisms in Southwestern Nigeria: Contests over Public Space"
- **Nikola Tietze**
"Young Muslims in France: Youthfulness, Religiosity and Recognition"
- **Mohammed Amer**
"Imported in-Laws, Bollywood and Islam: Faces of Identity among Muslim Youth in London"
- **Miriam Gazzah**
"Rap and Rage: Cultural Politics of Moroccan Youths in the Netherlands"
- **Martijn de Koning**
"For Me and Allah: Identity Politics of Young Moroccan-Dutch Muslims"
- **Shahnaz Rouse**
Conclusion and Sum-up

Islam in Africa

The major point of deliberation of the workshop concerned the ways in which Islam is represented as both a religion and culture in (inter)national, regional, local, and gendered public spheres. Three invited speakers presented case studies. Gerard van de Bruinhorst (Ph.D. fellow ISIM, Leiden) presented a case study on hajj-linked rituals in Tanzania where, increasingly, more importance is paid in Swahili discourse to the standing-supplication (*wuquf*) on the plain of Arafat rather than to the day of Sacrifice (Eid ul-Adha). For instance, a political demonstration of Tanzanian Muslims held on 4 March 2001 in the capital Dar es Salaam was modeled on the Arafat rituals, performed at exactly the same time in Saudi Arabia. Muslim dissatisfaction with the national government, which is perceived as being Christian, was expressed through the powerful religious metaphor of the sanctity of human life. Van de Bruinhorst concluded that policy makers should be aware of the polyvocal nature of religious rituals in order to prevent political clashes.

Dorothea Schulz (Free University, Berlin/visiting fellow ISIM) presented a case study on Islam's "female face" in Mali. Islam as a publicly articulated moral idiom has a growing appeal among Malian Muslim women. An increasing number participate in neighbourhood groups in order to study the Qur'an and receive instruction in the "proper" performance of rituals. While the increased public prominence of female preachers challenges conventional understandings of female religious practice, but it has not increased their political influence in the national arena. Females use their appearance in the public arena to stress the importance of personal piety and the individual responsibility in moral reform. Their public interventions should not be seen as merely a move

The ISIM workshop on "Islam as Religion in African Public Spheres" (held on 16 June 2005 in Utrecht, The Netherlands) explored how both the nation state and transnational trends change the nature of religion in new public spheres in Africa. The media through which these changes occur include ritual, telecommunications, education, and law. The workshop was organized by Abdulkader Tayob (ISIM Chair at Radboud University Nijmegen) in collaboration with Karin Willemse (Erasmus University Rotterdam) and José van Santen (Leiden University).

towards greater public representation, but rather as a manifestation of more complicated, at times even paradoxical, societal dynamics.

Abdulkader Tayob examined the meaning of religion in South Africa by means of a challenging study of the Constitutional Court's interpretation of religious values and practices in three landmark cases since 1994. The first case dealt with the selling of liquor on Sunday, the second with corporal punishment in Christian schools, and the last case with the smoking of marijuana

by Rastafarians. The court judgements revealed an emerging approach to religion in general in South Africa in which the distinction between the public and private practice of religion has become blurred. This has also affected the state's view on Muslim Personal Law as illustrated by the recent official recognition of Muslim marriages. Given the absence of representative official Muslim institutions in South Africa issues of sharia remain the subject of civil rather than religious debate.

During the closing discussion, chaired by Van Santen, Tayob concluded that contrary to what many Muslims believe, Islam is a particularistic religious tradition comparable to, for example, Christianity. As such, religion can be used as an analytical category and therefore a cautious distinction can be made between the religious and the non-religious. As a consequence it is more appropriate to speak about public spheres (in the plural) because some spheres are more religious, others more political, whereas these spheres sometimes coincide, as the cases dealt with in this workshop illustrate.

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