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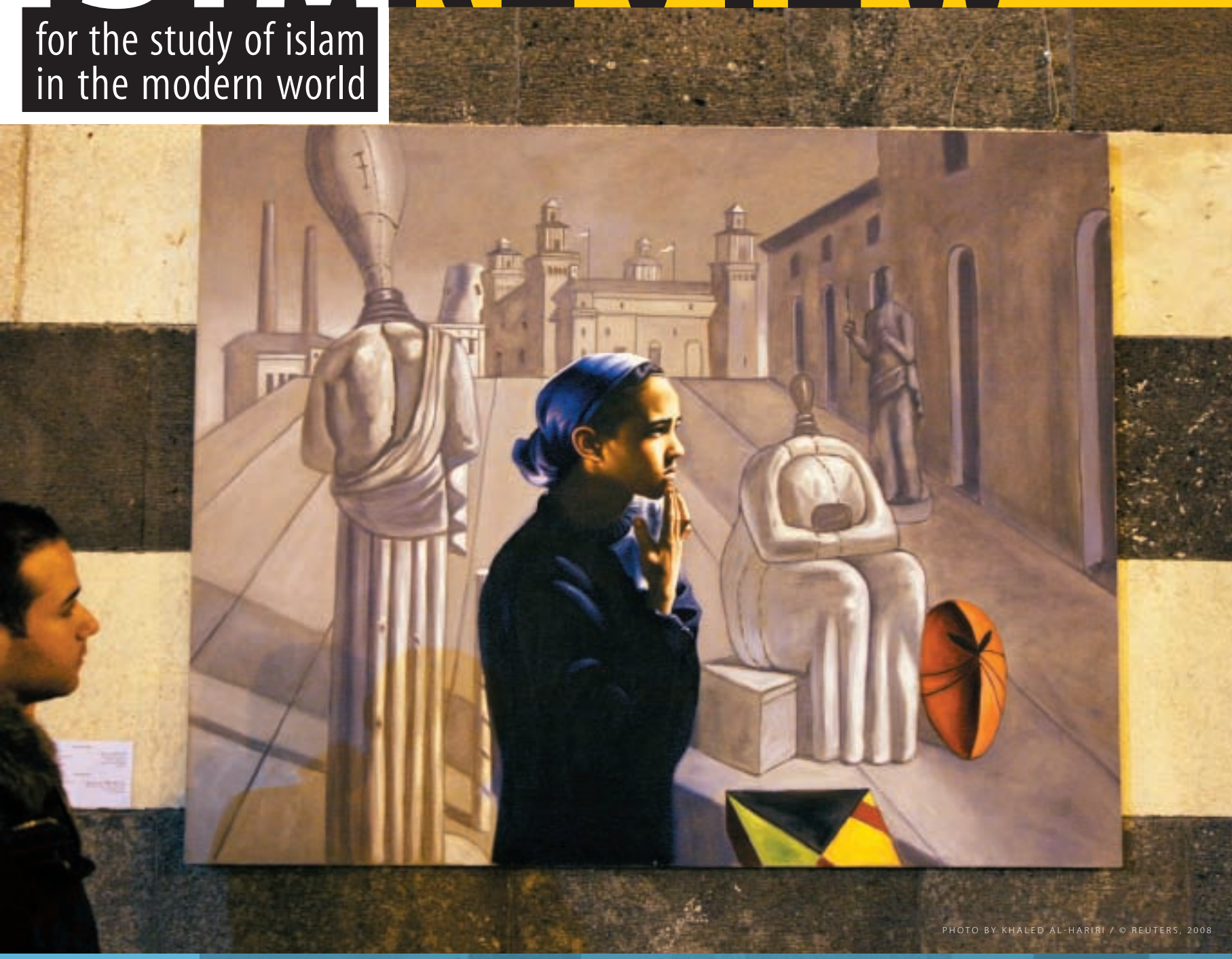

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"The Disquieting Museum" by Ali Hassoun on display in Damascus, 2008

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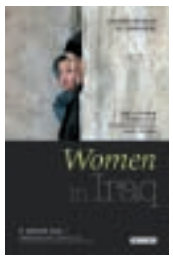

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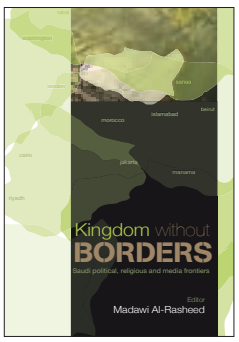

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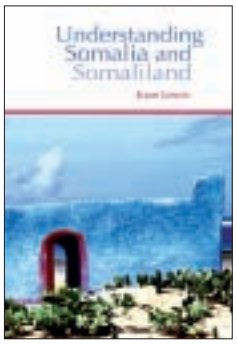

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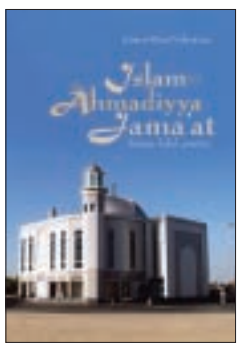

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Postal Address
ISIM, P.O. Box 11089
2301 EB Leiden
The Netherlands
Telephone
+31 (0)71 527 7905
Email
review@isim.nl
Homepage
www.isim.nl

Managing editor
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ANNEMARIKE STREMMELAAR

Imagination is not bound by time or place. Works of art, though conceived and produced in a specific place at a specific moment, travel in time and space. Ali Hassoun, a Lebanese artist trained in Italy, painted "The Disquieting Museum" inspired by "The Disquieting Muses" created almost a century ago by the Greek-Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico. This spring, the former painting was shown at an exhibition of "Arab Artists between Italy and the Mediterranean" aimed at bridging the cultural divide separating the West from the Middle East (cover).

The exhibition is but one example of how art is promoted as a means of overcoming national, cultural, ethnic, and religious differences. Music and visual arts, not bound to verbal communication in a specific language, seem particularly suitable for such a purpose. Thus, the performance of music was and still is an occasion where people of different religions and ethnic backgrounds meet each other (Zubaida, p. 6). Interestingly, government institutions and funding organizations have also discovered this potential of art and accordingly sponsor multicultural projects. While this might be laudable, cosmopolitan experiences should not be reduced to such representations alone.

As Maurizio Albahari argues, existing asymmetries may be recreated when majorities ask minorities to engage in multicultural dialogue, since dialogue can only be thought of once salient differences have been established in the first place (p.12). Moreover, intercultural and cosmopolitan experiences may just as well take place in unadvertised everyday communal life. And what if art gets taken up to prove membership in humanity, and treated as a bridge to humanity's common ground? Raising such questions, Kirsten Scheid argues that people should not be applauded for applying notions of art-making in "unexpected" places (p. 14).

But art is not always understood as multicultural or interreligious; it can also propagate national, ethnic, or religious identity. National governments promote art as a way of creating and reinforcing national awareness. Such a vision of art may coincide with the wish that art may enlighten people and build a civilization, raising the cultural levels of a supposedly "ignorant" population. Increasingly, not only secular, nationalist governments, but also more devout actors promote art in order to raise standards of civilization and morality. Reformist preachers today argue not only that art is not reprehensible, but that it may even be central to religious practice, and a tool for spreading the message of Islam (Winegar, p. 28).

In promoting art as something that can bring people closer to God, these reformist preachers deviate from earlier critical discourses. Such discourses, although not totally forbidding art, put limitations on the creative process, for example, by banning certain forms, performances, or audiences. They also influence the genres that are made (Barendregt, p. 24). Female Muslim performers, in particular, feel compelled to deal with a discourse that considers them immoral and un-Islamic (Gazzah, p. 26).

If art can be seen as something that may rectify a society's problems and edify people, it can also be seen as reflecting a critical stance towards existing governments and societies. Some artists feel the need to document issues of contemporary society in their work, and to offer social or political criticism (Bank, p. 18). Others aim to change existing images of Islam and Muslims, i.e. by making films like *Ayat Ayat Cinta* to show the compassionate face of Islam (Van Heeren, p. 20).

Art can be a powerful catalyst precisely because of its ambivalent nature; it cannot be reduced to one single meaning, but produces multiple meanings at the same time. It is always created in a certain time and place, but can transcend boundaries of language, nation and religion. Art has always incited complaints on the basis of morality, but may also improve ethical standards. It can readily paint utopian visions, as well as bleak pictures. And just as it opens up new possibilities for battling stereotypes, it can also create new ones. This should remind us that art does not just represent how things are in the world but actually contributes to the shaping of our world.

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Everyday Cosmopolitanism

ASEF BAYAT

Perpetrated by the media and policy circles, the language of clash currently dominates interreligious and intercultural relations, overlooking the more common human practices based upon association and cooperation. It is therefore high time to invoke the notion of "everyday cosmopolitanism" both as a scholarly inquiry and an ethical project.

It might sound out of place to speak of, let alone, invoke the idea of cosmopolitanism in the current global conditions that are dominated by the language of "clash" – clash of cultures, civilizations, religions, or ethnicities. The discourse of clash is currently so overwhelming as though it were the central feature of our international, religious, and communal life. The media apart, academia is also inclined to concentrate far more on human "conflict" as a subject of scholarly inquiry than on "cooperation" and "sharing." Precisely because of this prevalent preoccupation with clash, it becomes morally imperative to underline the other, more common but unnoticed and inaudible processes of human conduct, to show how people belonging to different cultural groupings can transcend their immediate selves by intensely interacting in their life-worlds with members of other ethnic or religious collectives. Would we still imagine today's Iraq as the "natural" embodiment of sharp ethnic and religious boundaries (because the "nation" was no more than an artificial and imposed construct), if only we knew how the twentieth century Iraq was replete with instances of individuals, families, and neighbourhoods from Sunni, Shii, Jewish, and Christian communities engaged in interactions and shared lives (see pp. 6-7)? The recent upsurge in the literature on cosmopolitanism (even though highly diverse) points to welcome efforts to rectify the discourse of confrontation and mistrust, by resurrecting the ideal of living together. But how do we perceive "cosmopolitanism"?

Cosmopolitanism refers to both social conditions and an ethical project. In the first place, it signifies certain objective processes, such as globalization and international migration, that compel people of diverse communal, national, or racial affiliations to associate, work, and live together. These processes lead to diminishing cultural homogeneity in favour of diversity, variety, and plurality of cultures, religions, and lifestyles. In this sense Dubai, for instance, represents a cosmopolitan city-state in the sense that it juxtaposes individuals and families of diverse national, cultural, and racial belongings, who live and work next to one another within a small geographical space. Indeed modern urbanity per se can potentially contribute to cosmopolitan habitus by facilitating geographies of coexistence between the members of different religious or ethnic groups. But this may be so not just because people of different religions and cultures naturally come to live and interact with each other; after all neighbours might dislike and distrust one another. Rather because proximity and interaction can supply opportunities for divergent parties to experience trust (as well as mistrust) between them.

Cosmopolitanism has also ethical and normative dimensions; it is a project, something to be cherished. In this sense, cosmopolitanism is deployed to challenge the language of separation and antagonism, to confront cultural superiority and ethnocentrism. It further stands opposed to communalism, where the inward-looking and close-knit ethnic or religious collectives espouse narrow, exclusive, and selfish interests. Cosmopolitanism of this sort also overrides the "multiculturalist" paradigm. Because although multiculturalism calls for equal coexistence of different cultures within a national society, it is still preoccupied with cultural boundaries – an outlook that departs from cosmopolitan life-world where intense interaction, mixing, and sharing tend to blur communal boundaries, generating hybrid and "impure" cultural practices. The initiative of the Palestinian-Italian music group, Radiodervish (see pp. 12-13) to create multilingual songs where lyrics range from Italian, Arabic, to English and French, amplifies such a cosmopolitan project of crossing cultural and linguistic boundaries.

But is this lifestyle not the prerogative of the elites as the critiques often claim? Certainly elites are in a better material position to experience cosmopolitan lifestyles; they are the ones who can easily afford frequent travelling, developing taste for different cuisines and alternative modes of life and cultural products. In addition, unlike the poor, the privileged groups need not to rely on exclusive communalistic networks as a venue to secure social protection – something that tends to reinforce more inward-looking communalism. However, the objective possibility to experience mixing, mingling, and sharing is not the same as the subjective desire to do so. The question is how many of those elite expatriates residing in the metropolises of the global South share cultural life with those of the poor of the host society? In a closer look, the cosmopolitan Dubai turns out to be no more than a "city-state of relatively gated communities" (pp. 10-11) marked by sharp communal and spatial boundaries, with labour camps (of south Asian migrants) and the segregated milieu of "parochial jet-setters," or the "cosmopolitan es" of the Western elite expatriates who remain bounded within the physical safety and cultural purity of their own reclusive collectives.

It is a mistake to limit cosmopolitan exchange solely to the prerogative of the elites. Indeed, there is a serious need to pay scholarly attention to the cosmopolitanism of the ordinary people in their daily lives. Evidence from twentieth century Cairo, Baghdad, or Aleppo suggests how, beyond the elites, the ordinary members of different religious communities – Muslims, Jews, Christians, Shiites, or Sunnis – were engaged in intense inter-communal exchange and shared lives in the localities or at work. In the everyday life, women in particular act as protagonists in initiating cosmopolitan exchanges and association. In mixed neighbourhoods, women generally move easily between houses, chatting, exchanging gossip, and lending or borrowing things from their neighbours. They participate in weddings, funerals, or religious festivals. Children of different confessional affiliations play together in the alleyways while teens befriend and men go on neighbourly visits. All these exemplify what I like to call "everyday cosmopolitanism" of the subaltern.

By everyday cosmopolitanism I mean the idea and practice of transcending self – at the various levels of individual, family, tribe, religion, ethnicity, community, and nation – to associate with agonistic others in everyday life. It describes the ways in which the ordinary members of different ethno-religious and cultural groupings mix, mingle, intensely interact, and share in values and practices – the cultures of food, fashion, language, and symbols – in history and memory. It signifies how such association and sharing affect the meaning of "us" and "them" and its dynamics, which in turn blurs and problematizes the meaning of group boundaries. The "everyday cosmopolitanism" may not go as far as the often abstract and philosophical notions of Stoicist "world citizenship," but engages in the modest and down-to-earth though highly relevant ways in which ordinary men and women from different communal cosmos manage to engage, associate, and live together at the level of the everyday.

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

Jews & Others in Iraq

SAMI ZUBAIDA

The current image of Iraq in the media and public discourse is of a country sharply divided by communal boundaries and conflicts of religion, ethnicity, and community. This image goes right against any notion of "cosmopolitanism." Yet, research into the history of the country in the twentieth century would show that, while communal boundaries and conflicts did exist, these were socially permeable, allowing much close interaction between individuals, families, and neighbourhoods across the boundaries.

The history of the Jewish presence in Iraq is often forgotten, erased by mutually hostile nationalisms, Arabist and Zionist. A consideration of that history and of the embeddedness of the Jews in Iraqi society and culture presents an interesting reminder of the everyday cosmopolitanism that pervaded Iraqi urban (and some rural) society for much of the twentieth century. This everyday cosmopolitanism is here traced in various spheres and fields of general social life as well as professional activities. These relations across communal boundaries were subject to the impacts of the political and ideological episodes of the century: WWII, pan-Arab nationalism and pro-Nazi movements, the Communist movement and Jewish participation, and Zionism and the ultimate foundation of Israel.

Social mingling

With the foundation of the modern Iraqi state (British Mandate 1920; Independence 1932) Christian and Jewish individuals were well placed to participate in the emerging public life in government services, the professions, the arts, journalism, and business. Missionary schools and the Alliance Israelite Universelle established schools in Baghdad and other main cities in the course of the nineteenth century, educating their pupils in European languages and modern curricula. This participation led to the fostering of organic relations between individuals and families from different communities, in business and professional relations, friendships, and social mingling. Even in rural areas, Jewish doctors assumed vital roles in community life and service, and Jewish landlords, acquiring land after the Ottoman reforms of the nineteenth century, assumed paternal relations to their tenants and employees, to the extent of organizing Husseiniya ceremonies in the Shia mourning month of Muharram.

Women were often the most active and curious in social interactions of neighbourhood and female society. In oral accounts and written memoirs, the theme recurs of women moving easily between houses in mixed neighbourhoods, exchanging gossip and cooking recipes, as well as telling and commiserating over the many common matrimonial and domestic problems. They also participated in each other's festivities and occasions, exchanging greetings and items of food on their respective religious festivals of Eid, Purim, and Christmas. Jewish women in Shia neighbourhoods would sometimes join their neighbours on balconies and doorways to watch the mourning processions for the martyrs in Muharram. Women were also more receptive to religious intercession from whatever source to solve personal problems of fertility, health, wealth, and happiness. One such is the shrine of Shaykh Abdel-Qadir al-Gailani in Baghdad, known for its efficacy in solving problems of fertility, which was frequented by Jewish and Christian women.

The barriers of food taboos were transcended among friends . . .

Food constituted an interesting cultural field of interaction between individuals of different communities. The barriers of food taboos were transcended among friends, either by non-observance or by special provisions. From personal recollections, Muslim hosts would insure that their table included fish and vegetables for their Jewish guests who may observe Casher (Kosher) prohibitions, and Shia diners would ignore the taboo on commensality with non-Muslims observed in many Shia communities but ignored in mixed urban contexts. While most of the cuisine of each community represented variations on common themes of Middle East cooking, there were dishes specific to each, such as the Jewish Sabbath dish. In Baghdad this was a special chicken and rice dish cooked slowly overnight, known as *tebit*. Neighbours, attracted by the aromas, had their curiosity satisfied with sample plates being sent between houses, often reciprocated by the recipient's typical food, or some sweets.

Music constituted another sphere of inter-communal mixing. Jews were particularly prominent in the musical arts from the nineteenth century, as instrumentalist, singers, composers, and cafe and cabaret owners. The Iraqi delegation to the Arab Music Congress in Cairo in 1932 consisted of Jewish instrumentalists and one Muslim singer. The first orchestra of Iraqi national broadcasting in 1936 was predominantly Jewish. One of the most famous divas of the middle decades of the century was Salima Murad, a Jewess who converted to Islam to marry another famous singer, Nazim al-Ghazzali. Iraqi Jews in Israel have maintained their devotion to Iraqi music into the second and third generations, and Iraqi Jews in London import those musicians for their weddings and celebrations. I recall an occasion some years ago when a group of Iraqi Jewish musicians from Israel arriving in London to perform at a wedding were invited to the home of another Iraqi Jew for an evening with a prominent Muslim Iraqi musician who then lived in London. They were all friends in Baghdad in the old days, and it was an emotional reunion. They played and sang together well into the night.

Communal boundaries

The picture so far may appear a rosy one of friendly inter-communal interaction and cosmopolitanism. In fact most people, especially the poorer classes, were enveloped in their family and community lives, and the ritual calendar of their religion. Communal identities were never forgotten, and the boundaries may have been lowered for some, but never eliminated. Intermarriage across religious boundaries was strictly taboo, and on the rare occasion on which it occurred (always the non-Muslim partner converting to Islam) was considered a great disaster for the families concerned. Boundaries are not necessarily locations of conflict, but they can become so when politicized, as they were in the course of the twentieth century. Arab nationalism, even when secular, drew heavily upon religious-communal sentiments. In this perspective Jews (and Christians) were associated with hostile colonial powers, and for Jews, the Zionist movement and Israel.

Iraqi politics under the Monarchy (displaced in 1958) consisted of various fronts of accommodation and opposition to a government close to British interests, and to the West in the Cold War. The ideological opposition was divided between the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) and Arab nationalist groups. The Arab nationalists (in various parties, culminating in the Baath) tended to be recruited predominantly (though not exclusively) from Sunni Arabs. The ICP, which had solid popular constituencies, appealed to the whole spectrum of the Iraqi population: Arabs and Kurds, Sunna and Shia, Christians and Jews. Quite apart from its ideology and pro-Soviet allegiance, it was an "Iraqist" and cosmopolitan party. Jews, for the most part, avoided open involvement in politics where they were particularly vulnerable. But many young people, intelligentsia, but also artisans, were attracted by the prospect of participation in a secular, universalist, and liberationist movement. Communist Jews, some of whom attained leadership positions, were to share in the sacrifices and persecutions of their comrades, and the political prisons became another arena of everyday cosmopolitanism.

Arab nationalist and Islamic sentiments and movements assumed markedly anti-Jewish positions and actions during the 1930s and 1940s, reinforced with the foundation of Israel in 1948. The 1936 Arab revolt in Palestine and the continuing confrontations with Jewish settlers there, led Arab nationalists to see all Jews as complicit. The Rashid Ali coup d'état in 1941 was anti-British and pro-Nazi, and though short-lived, presided over an intensification of anti-Jewish aggression, culminating in a "pogrom," known as the Farhud, targeting the Jews of Baghdad and some other cities, during which some 200 Jews were killed

and many injured and raped; a traumatic event in collective Jewish memory. British forces soon re-occupied Baghdad and restored the Monarchy. During this episode many Jews were protected by their Muslim neighbours and friends, especially in the provinces, where a traditional sense of mutual obligations was particularly strong.

At the level of everyday relations ideological antipathies did not always inhibit friendships and associations. Nazi propaganda was prevalent in schools, especially espoused by Palestinian and Syrian teachers. A Jewish informant, who was at school in the late 1930s, relates walking hand in hand with his Muslim classmate in the street, the latter using the other hand to write on the wall with a piece of chalk "kill the Jews"! This same informant was in a political prison in the 1940s, as a communist, when a visiting high level medical inspector astonished the guards by stopping to greet him since they had been at school together.

Iraqi Jews had an ambivalent and shifting attitude to Zionism. Zionist emissaries sent into Iraq with the British forces during WW2 were disappointed with the apathy and even hostility of the local Jews, whom they decried in their reports as not proper Jews, integrated into "oriental" society, immersed in the pastimes and vices of their milieu: sitting around in cafes, drinking Arak, gossip, and gambling. Yet, as the Jews felt the increasing pressure and discrimination in the later 1940s, Israel and Zionism acquired greater attraction. For some, mostly young, the pull was ideological and attraction to the prospect of a western lifestyle and full citizenship. For others it was the push of persecution, loss of jobs, and arbitrary rule. In the end these pressures and attractions culminated in the emigration of the great majority of Jews, some 120,000, mostly to Israel in 1951, in accordance with a secret agreement between Iraqi leaders and the Jewish Agency which allowed Jews to leave without their possessions, on condition that they renounce their Iraqi nationality. A few thousands remained in Iraq, and some enjoyed a period of calm and prosperity in the years of the Qasim regime (1958–63), only to be subjected to further pressure under the Arabist and Baathist regimes of the 1960s, culminating in a wave of persecution and terror following the 1967 Arab defeat, then the Baathist coup of 1968 which brought Saddam and a bloodier regime to power. The bulk of the remaining Jews left as soon as they could after that.

PHOTO BY AWAD AWAD / © AFP, 2003

Jewish man outside Baghdad synagogue

Nation-state formation

Iraq is now seen as the epitome of violent sectarianism. A common assumption is that this state of affairs is in the nature of the country, being an "artificial" creation, forcing together diverse communities who cannot coalesce into a "nation." Most modern nations, however, started as artificial mixes, and it is the process of nation-state formation itself which creates various forms of the "national" at the socio-economic and cultural levels. Iraq was no exception. The account of "everyday cosmopolitanism" given here shows elements of this national formation and the lowering of communal barriers for much of the twentieth century, especially with regard to the ambiguous position of the Jews in relation to this "national." The present situation is the product of the disruptive processes unleashed by the Saddam regime, its extraordinary repressions and disastrous wars, and exacerbated by the American invasion of 2003.

It may be argued that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Iraq was not unambiguously an "Arab country." Quite apart from the sizeable Kurdish population, the "Arab" component participated in a highly hybrid culture with echoes of the Turko-Iranic world. Nowruz, the spring festival of the Iranic world, was widely celebrated in many communities. Iraqi Arabic was, and remains to a certain extent, imbued with Persian and Turkish vocabulary. In the 1970s Saddam Hussein found it necessary to issue an order banning "foreign" words and expressions in Iraqi songs. It was the national state, Arab nationalist for the most part, which made Iraq into an "Arab country" in the course of the twentieth century. This project was also part of the mass national education, then government bureaucracy, all in standard Arabic. Yet, all these policies and processes never fully succeeded in eliminating the pervasive hybridity of Iraqi culture.

At the same time, the national state and its fields spawned orientations, spaces, and institutions for the flourishing of a different kind of cosmopolitanism, that of the intelligentsia and the educated middle classes. In these milieus, communal boundaries were lowered, and common mixing, friendships and partnerships flourished for much of the twentieth century. Yet, it was those cosmopolitan middle classes who fell victim to repeated campaigns of repression and expulsion. First, the Jews, who constituted a considerable tranche of the educated, professional, and business classes, were forced to leave. Then, during the 1970s and 80s, many Shia communities were subject to dis-appropriation and expulsion by the Saddam regime. Waves of political repression and persecution decimated the ranks of the intelligentsia, many killed and others in prison and exile. Repeated wars and devastation, followed by the UN sanctions, led to the impoverishment and humiliation of those classes and heightened pressures which drove many into exile.

The violence and disorder which followed the 2003 invasion included campaigns of assassination and kidnapping targeting professionals, including doctors, scientists, and professors, leading to a mass flight of these classes into exile. Iraq, then, has been largely denuded of the main carriers of everyday, as well as cultural, cosmopolitanism. The raging communal violence has also led to the ethnic cleansing of neighbourhoods, leading to greater homogeneity, and the erection of communal barriers, sometimes physically in the form of walls of separation. Christians, and other religious minorities have been particularly targeted and many driven into exile or internal displacement. What remains of Iraqi cosmopolitanism may now be found in London or Paris, and possibly Amman.

As for the cosmopolitanism of the Middle East more generally, can we see a waning of the ethnic and communal interactions of the earlier twentieth century? Certainly, the convergence of nationalism with Islamism which seems to prevail increasingly in many countries has led to a homogenization of populations and regions, and accelerated migrations of religious minorities to the West, after the almost complete ending of the Jewish presence in the region outside of Israel. What of globalization: does it lead to a new cosmopolitanism, or to added barriers generated by sharpened transnational nativist and religious ideologies?

Sami Zubaida is Emeritus Professor of Politics and Sociology at Birkbeck College, University of London. His book, *Islam, the People and the State: Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East,* will be reissued with a new introduction in 2008 by I.B. Tauris.
Email: S.Zubaida@bbk.ac.uk

Rediscovering **Istanbul's Cosmopolitan Past**

FLORIAN RIEDLER

The image of Istanbul as capital of one of the world's greatest empires is often used to emphasize its cosmopolitanism, a convenient marketing tool in today's global economy. Just as historical monuments are used to remind the tourist of Istanbul's role as the cradle of civilization, the claim to cosmopolitanism employs the notion that, in Ottoman times, many religious and ethnic groups coexisted peacefully in the city. Yet in repackaging Istanbul in this way, certain signs of diversity are championed while others are notably passed over.

In attempts to market their capital, Turkey's political and business elites present Istanbul as cosmopolitan, and welcoming in outsiders as managers of global corporations or simply as tourists. Yet before the 1990s, when the Turkish public began to rediscover and revaluate its rich multicultural history, Istanbul's now much vaunted cosmopolitanism was all but forgotten. Among the many publications to nourish its rediscovery are the memoires of the Turkish-Armenian author Hagop Mıntzuri. His last work, *Istanbul Memories*, presents a firsthand account of the author's life in Istanbul, where he arrived as boy when the city was still the Ottoman capital.[1] It was Mıntzuri's first book to be accepted by a mainstream Turkish publishing house, though it was only published in 1993, some fifteen years after his death. *Istanbul Memories* consists of a series of articles, previously published individually in the 1970's by a small Armenian newspaper based in Istanbul. Only when these articles were translated from Armenian into Turkish, and then gathered in book form, did the public gain access to Mıntzuri's unusual and valuable recollections of the city. While the book serves as a timely reminder of the tragic loss of diversity suffered by Istanbul during the first half of the twentieth century, its recent publication is ample proof of the current desire to resurrect the idea of Istanbul as a historically, and thus somehow intrinsically, cosmopolitan setting.

> …Istanbul's diversity was created by migrants, in Ottoman times as well as today.

To the modern reader, *Istanbul Memories* presents a lively and colourful picture of the Ottoman capital around the year 1900. Mıntzuri moved there, at age twelve, from a village in Eastern Anatolia to work alongside his father, grandfather, and uncles in the bakery the family had leased. They belonged to thousands of poor villagers – among them Albanians, Greeks, Turks, Kurds, and Armenians – who had migrated to the Ottoman capital to earn a living. As seen through the eyes of a boy from the countryside, the city was full of new, strange, and exciting things: the sultan's palaces, trams, cafes and beer-gardens, department stores, and book shops. At the same time, the book portrays the intimate social relationships of the immigrant craftsmen, shop owners, and workers with whom Mıntzuri lived and worked. According to Mıntzuri, regardless of their origins, these workers treated each other with respect and cordiality.

In the nostalgic reminiscences of an old man, the rising ethnic tensions and intercommunal violence that characterized the late Ottoman era of his youth play no part. Mıntzuri could ignore these tensions, because, like other Mediterranean port cities of the day, late Ottoman Istanbul seemed like an unusually peaceful place if one were to consider the violence of the transitions ahead (as Turkey was recreated from the debris of the Ottoman Empire as a national state). Writing in the 1970s, Mıntzuri had seen his once famously diverse capital turn its back on this diversity. This process was drawn out over a period of almost half a century.

While Mıntzuri's nostalgic accounts of Ottoman cosmopolitanism mesh perfectly with recent social and economic trends, the book lays bare certain contradictions between contemporary and past discourses regarding the realities of cosmopolitanism in Istanbul. One of the most pertinent of these contradictions concerns the often troubled relationship between diversity and migration.

Marginalization

During and immediately after the First World War, when it was occupied by the Entente, Istanbul remained a shelter for an Ottoman world soon to be demolished by the emerging forces of national Turkey. Mıntzuri himself survived in Istanbul and was spared the deportation and murder that befell his family and the Armenian community of his village in Anatolia. In his own words, it was these events that first compelled him to write about his home and people.

In the early years of the Turkish Republic, the city went through a process that may only be described as paradoxical. On the one hand, the government settled in Istanbul those non-Muslims it thought would not integrate well into the new Turkish nation, the numbers of Greek, Armenian, and Jewish inhabitants of Istanbul swelling as a result. At the same time, however, a process was set in motion by which the same incomers were gradually rendered socially invisible. During the 1920's and 30's, the new regime followed a policy of cultural homogenization. Language and dress of all its inhabitants were to be uniform, at least in public. Large sectors of the different minority communities agreed to, and even supported this policy. In their view, cultural Turkification was the price they must pay to become equal citizens of the new nation.

The government's promise of equality was not kept, however. Legal discrimination of minorities remained widespread and led to the emigration of many individuals. Eager to sponsor a new Turkish class of entrepreneurs, the state subjected all minority communities to economic marginalization. In 1942, this trend peaked with the so-called Wealth Tax (Varlık Vergisi), which ruined the livelihoods of these communities' businessmen and small craftsmen.[2] Worse was yet to come, the pogrom of 6 and 7 September 1955, against the city's Greek Orthodox community, marked the deathblow of communal diversity in Istanbul. Following conflicts over Cyprus, a mob supported by the government destroyed Greek property and churches. Almost all Istanbul Greeks left the city as a result.

Revaluation of the cosmopolitan past

Among both academics and members of Turkey's general public, this period of Turkish history only began to be reconsidered in the 1990's. A new generation of critical historians began to call into question the official silence surrounding the state's treatment of non-Muslim minorities. For the first time, issues like the Wealth Tax and the anti-Greek pogroms of 1955 were examined from a non-nationalist perspective.

In contrast, Ottoman history offered the example of a seemingly more tolerant treatment of the city's minorities and peaceful co-existence of all its inhabitants. Outside academia, the reawakened interest in Ottoman Istanbul concentrated on the city's belle époque at the turn of the twentieth century. The public was particularly drawn to the Europeanized urban culture of Pera (today's Beyoğlu, a quarter north of the Golden Horn) with its cafés, theatres, casinos, hotels, and embassies. The popular imagination was stoked by tourism and media campaigns involving Istanbul's nineteenth century architecture and black and white photos of its once sophisticated denizens. It was not long before these images became marketable: Beyoğlu's nineteenth-century areas have been renovated and fitted with cafes, restaurants, and a luxury shopping mall. Property prices have risen as a result. In quarters originally fashionable among artists and intellectuals for their multiculturalism, nineteenth century architecture has become an asset on the private property market. Likewise, shopping malls, cafes, res-

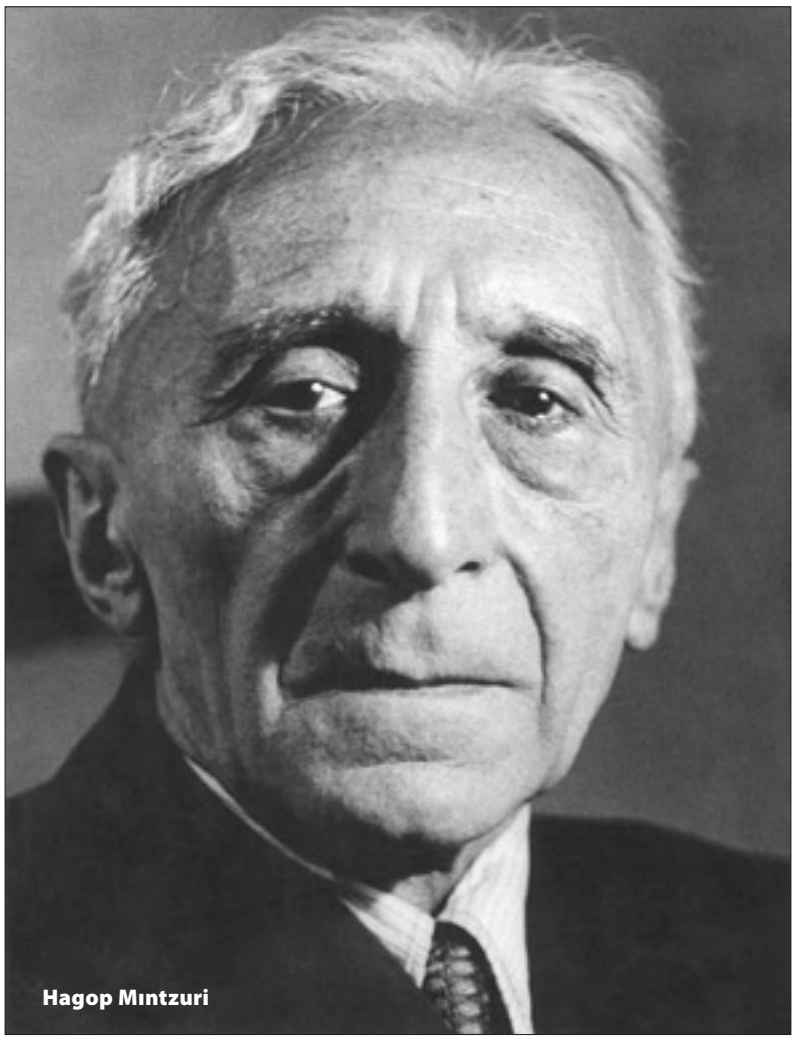
Hagop Mıntzuri

PHOTO BY ARA GÜLER

taurants, and pubs in the inner city entertainment district of Beyoğlu have increasingly used its nineteenth century architecture as a stage for consumerism.[3]

This repacking of Pera/Beyoğlu, as a cosmopolitan locale *par excellence*, is particularly important because of its resonance with contemporary struggles over Turkish identity. To the city's modern middle classes, the area stands as a symbol of urbanity and sophistication, rooted in a history that is European, modern, and "civilized." Equally, this picture accords with a determinedly secularist vision of the city as a whole. A contrasting view became politically relevant in 1994, however, when the Islamist Welfare Party won the local elections for the first time. To these Islamist politicians, Pera/Beyoğlu's Europeanized multiculturalism carries profoundly negative connotations, ones that speak predominantly of cultural alienation and loss of traditions.

The translation and publication of *Istanbul Memories* must be considered in light of the ongoing reappraisal of Istanbul's cosmopolitan past. At first glance, Mıntzuri's nostalgic recollections of turn of the century Istanbul, penned by a member of one of its minority communities, connects very well to the popular imagination today. Old photographs, provided by the publisher, add to its appeal. However, the book has more to offer than the usual clichés on cosmopolitism. For, Mıntzuri's deeply personal eye-witness account of a once multicultural and peaceful Istanbul, prior to the advent of nationalism, is free from the political agenda that so distorted the image of Ottoman cosmopolitanism in later times.

Migrants transforming the city

Mıntzuri does not merely present nostalgic visions of Istanbul's cosmopolitan past. He also points to stories of migration which, though easily forgotten by inhabitants of Istanbul with a dislike of "outsiders," remain very much part of the city's character. *Istanbul Memories* was written by a rural migrant, and thus a social underdog. Given this fact, it is not surprising that the themes of poverty and exclusion are here ubiquitous. On first arriving in Istanbul, the author has to buy new clothes and lose his accent so as not to stand out. He lives in a world very different from belle époque Pera, though no less multicultural and diverse. Indeed, in his account, these two worlds sometimes meet. For instance, when he ventures into Pera or sits side by side with the sons and daughters of rich Armenian traders and Turkish officials at school. Yet, Mıntzuri never belongs to their world; he is always excluded on the basis of class and income. Throughout his life, and particularly during Republican times, Mıntzuri must struggle to make ends meet (though never explicitly stated, this is presumably due to the economic policies of the time). The author's penury, his feelings of alienation and distress after losing his home and family contribute to the intimacy of his work.

Istanbul Memories represents the voice of poor peasants migrating to Istanbul. It recaptures a past that has all but disappeared from the public memory, which retraces migration patterns back no further than the 1950's. Mıntzuri's life story is a reminder that Istanbul's diversity was created by migrants, in Ottoman times as well as today. Despite the popularity of the aforementioned claim to cosmopolitanism, Istanbul's middle classes have not always been as welcoming to outsiders as is now implied. By the 1950s, almost all of Istanbul's non-Turkish communities of Jews, Armenians, and Greeks had left the country under pressure from the nationalist government. They were supplanted by an influx of Anatolian migrants, predominantly from Central Anatolia and the Black Sea coast, among these Alevis and Lazes. Raising its population from one to more than five million in 1980, and thus rendering the city overwhelmingly Turkish and Muslim, these new arrivals struggled to integrate into modern Istanbul. Rather, they were accused of lowering standards of "civilization," and of destroying civic culture and the urban environment with their shantytowns. Migration became a scapegoat for any number of problems, from land speculation to political nepotism. In public memory Anatolian migrants even stand accused of being responsible for the 1955 pogrom.[4] This is not altogether surprising, it is true for example that, among the shock troops that plundered Greek property, beat up its owners, and torched churches, there were many Anatolians, some bussed in for the occasion. Newcomers to the city were the natural political clientele of the Democratic Party, which organized the riots against the Greeks of Istanbul. Nevertheless, the claim that it was only the migrants that were responsible for the pogrom's atrocities is unreasonable; without the help of the local authorities and inhabitants such violence would simply not have been possible.

Ultimately, despite modern claims to cosmopolitanism, the arrival of migrants has rarely been welcomed by Istanbul's established population. The injustice of this attitude is worth noting. For, despite the levels of prejudice, the new waves of Anatolian migrants have managed to establish themselves in Istanbul and, in so doing, have returned to the city much of its historically diverse flavour. Moreover, with the economic opening of Turkey in the 1980's and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, still more immigrant communities have started to settle in the city. During the 1990's, the war against the PKK in Turkey's South East also brought in Kurdish refugees. As their numbers soar, the migrant communities increasingly assert their political, religious, and cultural identities. As these displays meet with the global (consumer) culture associated with new businesses and visiting tourists, a peculiarly modern form of multiculturalism, a hybrid of past and present, is developing.[5] More than a hundred years after Hagop Mıntzuri first arrived in the city, Istanbul's cosmopolitanism has been revived conceptually, through a nostalgic appeal to its Ottoman past, and practically, through the arrival of vast numbers of migrants from other areas in Turkey and beyond. As a result, Mıntzuri's childhood vision of Istanbul, as a diverse and booming metropole, begins once again to ring true.

Florian Riedler is Research Fellow at the Centre for Modern Oriental Studies (ZMO) in Berlin.
Email: FlorianRiedler@gmx.net

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Dubai
What Cosmopolitan City?

MOHAMMAD MASAD

Dubai's phenomenal development is celebrated by some as a model of cosmopolitan living, and downplayed by others as a non-sustainable urbanism rooted in exploitation. Whatever the truth is, the mix of peoples and lifestyles in Dubai is remarkable, as expatriates from all over the world move there to live and work. Yet this cosmopolitanism is tempered by dynamics of segregation and the exclusion of the majority expatriate population from civic life. This article examines these conflicting faces of cosmopolitan living in Dubai.

For much of its recorded history, Dubai has been recognized as a cosmopolitan city. Sixty years ago, the late traveller and photographer Wilfred Thesiger remarked that Dubai's suqs were "crowded with many races," including Arab townsmen, Beduins, slaves, Baluchis, Persians, Indians, Kashgai tribesmen, and Somalis.[1] The Dubai of today is a far cry from that of the mid-twentieth century. The city has been totally transformed into a gigantic metropolis, growing at breathtaking speed and attracting a deluge of guest workers, investors, and tourists from around the world.

The unprecedented growth of Dubai would have been impossible without foreign labour. Reliable numbers are hard to come by, but most sources estimate that expatriates from around the globe now account for more than ninety percent of the city residents, dwarfing the local Emiratis to a small minority. As the city grows, its cosmopolitan nature expands and intensifies reflected in such areas as dress, food, language, religion, and other aspects of lifestyle filtering through everyday life.

However, Dubai often finds itself caught between its carefully crafted and branded image as a city of harmonious living and a global hub of business and tourism, and its reputation as a harshly segregated city living off the indentured labour of exploited Asian workers. These perceptions have generated a lively debate about the nature of the Dubai experiment and attracted both praise and condemnation. For many, Dubai is a success story, regardless of the reasons and costs. The city's openness for example to bold ideas in designing urban spaces is seen by some as an indicator of Dubai's unique place as "the prototype of the 21st century," making it into a designer's paradise.[2] Others however dismiss Dubai as an unsustainable experiment of a vast gated community, rooted in mindless consumption and economic injustice.[3]

Much of the unsympathetic views about Dubai seems to emanate from a preconceived rejection of capitalist consumerism. But to see Dubai through this prism only is problematic and ill-informed. It is a gross simplification to describe Dubai as a gated community. The relative freedom of movement within the city and the millions of visitors and newly-recruited workers constantly streaming into it are hardly signs of a gated city. It would be more accurate to say that Dubai is a generally open city-state of relatively gated communities. Similarly, it is hard to believe that Dubai is a mirage. The city has been around for longer than many western cities; and its growth, regardless of how it is characterized should not render it less real than Monte Carlo, Las Vegas, or Singapore.

The social architecture of Dubai is premised on a sharp division and separation of the main three communities: local Emiratis, western, Arab and subcontinental expatriates, and South Asian workers. These communities are generally differentiated by their civic rights, socio-economic status, residential location, lifestyle priorities, and cultural identities. Some of the spheres of separation are the result of the kinds of jobs people have and how much money they earn; others exist by virtue of the natural gravitation of different groups of people towards communities and localities that reflect their national or cultural identity. Consequently, these groups enjoy different sets of choices and freedoms.

Citizens

At the top of the social pyramid is the national Emirati community, also known as the nationals or the locals. Statistically, this is a shrinking minority, comprising no more than ten percent of Dubai's inhabitants; it is also the only group that enjoys the UAE citizenship with all the rights and privileges that come with it, including substantial governmental subsidies and a distinct preferential treatment. Most Emiratis live in separate or detached houses, usually upscale walled villas, in neighbourhoods where similar Emirati families find living more comfortable; for example certain parts of Jumeira, Um Suqeim, and Garhoud. Though occasionally expatriate families may live nearby, even next door, meaningful interaction between locals and foreigners is extremely limited and often nonexistent. However, the mutual need and routine interaction can promote shared interests and also create mutual respect, understanding, acceptance, and sometimes, even friendship.

Increasing numbers of Emiratis for example are sending their children to private schools where they will have an opportunity for daily interaction with other children and teens from around the world. These young Emiratis are full participants in the kind of multi-cultural experience that is virtually impossible in the regular public schools system, where students are exclusively nationals (occasionally mixed with a limited number of children of Arab expatriates). Other areas of interaction include higher education and private sector employment. Many young Emiratis, including women, attend colleges and universities, some of which are open to all students, with western curricula, and a multi-national staff and faculty teaching in English. Once graduated, many of these Emiratis choose to work in private businesses, where, unlike working in the government sector, they get to intermingle daily with colleagues and customers from around the globe.

These changes in education and employment are increasing the chances of breaking the divide between the national and expatriate communities. To some degree, this trend is the result of the policy of "emiratization," whereby private businesses in some sectors (such as banking and financial services) are encouraged through incentives (or required by law) to hire local citizens in specific jobs. This process is also driven by a growing sense of frustration among many locals that their country is practically being run at many levels by expatriate managers and workers. The sharp increase in the cost of living in Dubai has also pushed a significant number of Emirati families into a position of greater financial need. Thus more nationals are now actively seeking private employment.

But despite these profound changes, the majority of the working nationals are absorbed into government and public sectors, if they do not own or co-own their own businesses. This is understandable, given the work environment in this sector and the governmental policy of comprehensive subsidies for its employees. Very few private employers are willing to pay the kinds of salaries and benefits afforded to locals in the public sector, assuming they are eligible to work there in the first place. While some governmental sectors have been almost completely nationalized, with most employment (save for service jobs and manual labour) in the hands of Emiratis, other ones, such as education, are still heavily dependent on expatriates. If anything, the need for larger influxes of expatriate labour is all the more urgent as the city grows exponentially and the government has a hard time filling in the expanding job market with trained nationals.

Some of the more interesting daily cosmopolitan experiences happen in the old Dubai, namely, Deira and Bur Dubai, home to some of the poorest of the nationals and long-term residents; mostly people who came to the city generations ago from other parts of Arabia, Iran, or South Asia and continued to live in Dubai without necessarily becoming fully naturalized. This area is also a favorite for transient expa-

triates with modest income to live and do business. The old city is spatially delineated from its later extensions and other newer neighbourhoods (such as Garhoud, Jumeira, and Mirdif) where wealthier nationals and comfortable expatriates tend to live. It is also worlds apart from the new Dubai, which is an amalgam of high rises and suburbia with luxury villas and modern apartments, rented or owned by mostly rich and middle class expatriates. Old Dubai is also popular with tourists seeking the experience of the ambience of Dubai as an Oriental city. As a result, this part of Dubai is a thriving cosmopolitan site. There is a much more frequent and genuine interaction among people living there. These localities, for example Ghbeiba and Satwa, have a clear transnational connection evident in the languages spoken, the signs posted, the ethnic restaurants, the many money-exchange and transfer offices, and the games or sports played there.[4]

PHOTO BY MOHAMMAD MASAD, 2008

Shoppers in Dubai's Mall of the Emirates

Expatriates

The bulk of the expatriate population resides in districts outside the old city and in the new Dubai, often described as pretentious, lifeless, and bland cookie-cutter urban spaces. This is partially true, though it tends to romanticize old Dubai and exaggerate the fake urbanism of the new one. The new Dubai communities may have little to show in terms of lively social and cultural activities; but those who live there are real people who come from all over the world, often with families, to make a living. They often live in gated or semi-gated communities, either in small walled compounds or mega developments, and without a clear national or ethnic pattern of residency. The daily interaction of this multi-national and transient population, via neighbourly relations or encounters at clubs, schools, pools, parks, and gyms, contributes to a growing sense of a harmonious cosmopolitan living.

Most recently, those with more invested interest in these communities, such as the long-term expatriate tenants and owners of apartments and townhouses, have started to bind together to improve living conditions for them and their families through initiatives such as recycling programmes, committees tackling pressing issues, beach and desert cleaning campaigns, charity drives, and sports activities. What many of these people have in common, as neighbours, tenants, owners, and parents, is more than just accidentally sharing a space; they also share a growing sense of common interest that opens channels of communication and interaction. Such experiences cannot be dismissed as meaningless.

In addition to social contacts in villa compounds and apartment buildings, other private and public places can be identified as cosmopolitan sites. These include businesses, government offices serving and tending to the needs of expatriates (police stations, immigration and naturalization, municipality), and public places such as shopping malls, clubs, bars, parks, and beaches. Shopping is perhaps the most frequent public activity for many of the Dubai international population. The mix of people, styles, shops, goods, foods, and entertainment facilities and activities in almost all of the city's mega malls is remarkable. While the shopping mall is by definition a shallow and passing experience, in contrast private schools offer the most significant public space for cosmopolitan encounters in Dubai. The bonds of friendship and everyday living created between students (as well as teachers and staff) of these schools is one of the most enduring legacies of cosmopolitan Dubai.

Asian labourers

Asian labourers constitute the largest group of expatriates, but also are the most excluded from the cosmopolitan experience of Dubai. This is the class at the very bottom of the social pyramid and the most invisible and secluded in terms of residence and social life. The bulk of workers live in labour camps, often in squalid living conditions and far away from other residential areas. But this situation is also gradually changing: first, the national and ethnic mix of the labourers themselves is expanding, as Asian workers from more countries, such as China, join the labour force; second, the distance between labour camps and the built up residential and commercial areas is fast disappearing. Now more workers can be seen wandering in shopping malls or walking around residential districts. Living without their families (since they do not earn enough to do that), the workers' everyday life revolves around work and survival, with little emotional solace or escape. This is still largely an excluded class, where workers have little contact with others outside of their coworkers and superiors.

Other groups of urban nomads are mostly in a better position to nurture transnational identities. For them, the feeling of an outsider is never gone, but the lack of strong or irreplaceable affiliations and belonging combined with an extended residency in the city highlight a sense of connection to Dubai and what it has to offer. The securities of work, good life, harmonious living, safe city, and modern facilities cannot be underestimated, and to the extent Dubai can offer these the bond between city and inhabitants can only get stronger.

Transnational utopia?

Dubai is definitely not a utopia, though it has at its disposal an endless capacity to accommodate everything and anything. The temporariness of most of its inhabitants and the lack of equality in terms of citizenship and residency rights are two conditions that deepen the separation and give rise to tension. To make Dubai a truly modern city that cares for all of its residents and its future, the city has to overcome the root causes that continue to tarnish its reputation. Among these, the severe segregation of its communities, the sub-human conditions of Asian labourers, and the lack of civil society are among the most urgent. Sorting out these problems will propel the rise of an urban cosmopolitan existence that is much more humane and sustainable.

Dubai may not be the ultimate cosmopolitan city, but it can rightfully claim to be more cosmopolitan than other cities in the region. In addition to its history of multi-ethnic living and openness, it is certainly not lacking in diversity, resources, boldness, and fame to make cosmopolitan living much more than a touristic promotion or a skin-deep phenomenon. There is recently some movement in this direction, most notably the changes in property ownership laws, enacted five years ago. These changes create the prospect of a long-term or permanent residency, often in the same buildings or projects, of many thousands of people from around the globe who are seeking property investment or a well-paying job with a modern lifestyle in Dubai. Though extending citizenship to non-Emiratis will probably not be on the horizon for a long time (the country has yet to find closure on the problem of the *bidoun*, stateless people who claim to be Emiratis but haven't been considered citizens), progress on advancing civic rights, and creating a more equitable system can significantly change social dynamics. How far these changes can go is difficult to ascertain at the moment, but in the meanwhile, more and more people seem to be willing to think of Dubai as a home city and identify with what it represents.

Mohammad Masad is Assistant Professor at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Zayed University.
Email: Mohammad_Masad@zu.ac.ae

Notes

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3. Mike Davis, "Fear and Money in Dubai," *New Left Review* 41 (Sept.-Oct. 2006); Ian Parker, "The Mirage," *The New Yorker*, 17 Oct. 2005.
4. Yasser Elsheshtawy, "Transitory Sites: Mapping Dubai's 'Forgotten' Urban Public Spaces," *LASTE 206, Tenth LASTE Conference: Hyper-Tradition*, Bangkok, Thailand (2006).

Staging Cosmopolitanism

MAURIZIO ALBAHARI

Intercultural dialogue and cosmopolitanism are increasingly becoming a public policy focus. Art festivals, concerts, and a variety of public events explicitly promoting such agenda have been flourishing in southern European countries of recent immigration. Drawing on the Italian case, the author explores the performing arts' cosmopolitan potential, asking how hierarchies are challenged and recreated when majorities request minorities to engage in cosmopolitan dialogue, on and off stage.

Artistic festivals featuring a diverse array of exhibits, concerts, cuisine, and dances are fortunately a well-attended feature of European public spaces. They are sponsored, under the agenda of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, by NGOs, religious organizations, corporations, counties, and cities, often through EU and UNESCO funds. The European Commission solemnly declared 2008 the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, clearly supporting such programmes. In this sense, dialogue and cosmopolitanism are increasingly becoming a focus of public policy, despite central governments' burgeoning stinginess. In the following paragraphs I analyze the performing arts – means of expression and communication – in their potential to exemplify and promote forms of cosmopolitanism and dialogue. After providing examples of cosmopolitan efforts on Italian stages, I point out some of the potential pitfalls of the practices and rhetorics of staged, engineered dialogue and cosmopolitanism. I am especially critical of the accompanying Euro-centrism and ethno-religious essentialism, while proposing a more experiential and wide-reaching cosmopolitan agenda.

Performing cosmopolitanism

Working and rehearsing toward common goals, artists create friendships, knowledge, and contingent alliances. In this sense, artistic projects do not produce merely art and fruition, but new social relations as well. In addition, the performing arts might explicitly make of multiculturalism, peace, and social justice their own agenda, on and off stage. Astràgali Teatro, for example, is a theatre company founded in 1981 in Lecce, southern Italy, and supported by the Ministry of Culture as an innovative company. Featuring an extremely diverse crew, and touring around the Mediterranean, Astràgali is also a member of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures. Teatro di Nascosto, in Tuscany, draws directly on migrant and refugee experience, and works with Amnesty International and professionally trained refugee actors. In Maschere Nere, a theatre company in Milan, Senegalese, and Italians synthesize respective music and lyrics and perform scripts directly tackling immigration.

A very popular example of multicultural music is *Radiodervish*, an ensemble constituted in 1997 by Nabil Salameh, a native of Palestine, and southern Italian Michele Lobaccaro. Many of the songs are multilingual – featuring Italian, Arabic, English, and French – and have been intended by the ensemble "as small laboratories where passages unveil themselves between East and West and between the symbols and myths of the Mediterranean, a border place that unites in the very moment it separates."[1] *Radiodervish* has recently toured a new poetry and music show, *Amara Terra Mia* (Bitter Land of Mine). Now also on CD, it is meant to narrate the precariousness of contemporary migrant experiences in both the region of origin and destination, and puts forwards an open call to peace and interreligious understanding. In its title and substance, *Amara Terra Mia* references the 1973 song by "Mr Volare" Domenico Modugno, in which the popular singer evoked the bitterness of southern Italian emigrants. *Radiodervish*'s show debuted on 31 March 2006 in Tricase, a small southern Italian town. The spartan scenery was limited to a dozen thin light poles, tenuously evoking migrants' boats in the pitch-dark Mediterranean. Many in the audience appreciated the ensemble's frank approach and its whispered reflections on migration, pain, terror, dialogue, and cosmopolitanism in times of alleged cultural clash. The show received a five-minute standing ovation by an audience initially prone to scepticism.

Radiodervish also performed the night of 24 December 2007, in the public square of Bethlehem, as part of *Rassegna Negroamaro*, an annual travelling festival funded by the District of Lecce in southern Italy, which also sponsored the Italian tour of Palestinian musicians. And *Radiodervish*'s frequent Italian performances with Noa, the American-Israeli singer, are routinely reported as an eminent example of interreligious dialogue and peace building. Whether these performers are truly enjoying their own cosmopolitan experience is of limited interest to us. In any event, what they do and sing on stage is understood as such by institutional sponsors and by many in the audience. In particular, it demystifies in practice pundits' loud belief in conflict as the necessary point of arrival of cultural and religious diversity.

Between cosmopolitanism and ethno-religious labels

Artists, and migrant artists in particular, face distinctive socio-economic and legal challenges, exemplified in the routine struggle with the unforgiving machinery of travel, residence, and work permits. And yet it is obviously their ethnic, religious, and cultural membership that is in the spotlight. Noa becomes "the Jewish artist"; Nabil the "Muslim poet"; and Boban "the Gypsy trumpeter." One of the drawbacks of the uncritical celebration of the performing arts as automatically constituting dialogue and cosmopolitanism is precisely that socio-economic conditions and legal, political, and gender issues tend to disappear under the ethno-cultural or religious label on stage.

More generally, in intercultural practices in the performing arts, as elsewhere, there is often a problem of ascribed identities, and in particular of ascribed single identities reflecting the world division in supposedly mutually exclusive nation-states, belongings, and religions. Complex, cosmopolitan life trajectories are usually reduced to one and only one cultural membership on the basis of name, place of birth, and performed music genre. In this sense, many artists face a double bind: on the one hand, they understandably need to play by the market rules of funding, diversity, roots, and multiculturalism by performing on stage their postulated identity and representing whole ethnicities, continents, and even religions – Latin America, Judaism, the Middle East, and so forth. On the other, they refuse the captivity of simple labels, and emphasize their professional and political memberships as well.

A related problem specific to the performing arts is the exoticism ascribed to both the performers and their art, often defined as "ethnic." The ethnic categorization marks everything that seemingly does not fully belong, or belong anymore, to the mainstream of western European nation-states. Thus, the artist filling the slot of the cultural and ethnic "Other" often experiences asymmetry and inequality with her unmarked peers. Roma musicians from south-eastern Europe, in particular, are acclaimed as showcasing seemingly distant and nowadays lost vitality, passion, and melancholia. They are made to fit a superficial representation of otherness, stereotypically appealing as distant in time and space. But Roma performances – while hyperbolically stemming from weddings, dances, and religious rituals – offer a masterful cultural event quite disengaged from its original social context. They do not offer an exotic peek into Roma everyday life. In short, the artist's life offstage might very well be as anaemic, mainstream, and mundane as that of the audience and of other classically trained musicians. Life off stage might also bear pervasive discrimination, including mobs torching Roma camps.

Thus, multicultural and otherwise "diverse" festivals in Europe can strengthen the somewhat misleading impression of living in fairly inclusive societies. Simplistic emphasis on cultural and ethno-religious membership reinforces the classical liberal view of the public sphere as a genderless and classless arena of unrestricted multicultural encounter. In practice, it is worth examining whether the performance of dialogue and cosmopolitanism obliterates the death, detention, and deportation increasingly faced by many other agents of "diversity" and "cultural difference," such as migrants and asylum seekers, and the religious and socio-economic marginalization faced by others.

Finally, the rhetoric of intercultural and interreligious dialogue as currently phrased by many governments and organizations can take place only because salient differences have been established in the first place. What lies on the southern and eastern side of the Mediterranean – what

PHOTO BY MAURIZIO ALBAHARI, 2008

Radiodervish **at a festival in Melpignano, Italy**

is usually lumped together as "the Balkans" and "the Middle East" – is often stereotypically relegated to a condition of backwardness and archetypical violence. It is worth examining whether by inviting "other" peoples, religions, and areas of the world to participate in dialogue, Italian and EU authorities morally legitimize their position as tolerant members of western civilization exempt from self-examination. In summary, whether existing international and interreligious asymmetries of power and hierarchy are challenged or reinforced needs to be asked for each specific exchange programme, invitation to dialogue, and cosmopolitan policy agenda.

World music? Neighbourhood music

"Intercultural dialogue" increasingly carries the unintended assumption that diversity needs to be artfully managed, convened, and sponsored. Hence, the question needs to be empirically investigated, whether socially and institutionally engineered cosmopolitan practices and discourses, including in the arts, paradoxically obliterate the unadvertised, everyday communal lives of large and small towns where migrants settle?

Radiodervish, *Teatro di Nascosto*, *Astràgali* and other such formations in Europe do not embody anything extraordinary or exceptional. *Radiodervish* members got acquainted as fellow college students in Bari, southern Italy. Even the now celebrated *Orchestra di Piazza Vittorio* – featuring musicians and composers from Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Hungary, India, Italy, Senegal, Tunisia, and the US – is the selected offspring of the everyday diversity of Rome neighbourhoods. It emerged around the desire to raise funds and renovate a Rome theatre venue, rescuing it from its fate as a bingo hall. This does not suggest that the Orchestra was not in need of funding, interpersonal negotiation, rehearsal space, and even intercultural dialogue within itself in order to become an ensemble, rather than a dozen individual musicians on stage. The world fusion music performed by the Orchestra becomes a metaphor of the actual ensemble, where each person, by participating into a larger dialogical project, has to negotiate facets of musicianship, behaviour, and everyday practice – from being on time for rehearsals, to learning a song in Italian, Hindi, or Arabic, to rearranging a traditional Tunisian song. And for some the ensemble even becomes a normative model of symmetrical inclusion for contemporary societies. But the Orchestra exemplifies Rome's diverse music – unexpected harmonies, rearranged tunes emerging from its neighbourhood markets, subway stations, and cafes – as much as it is made to represent multiethnic, multicultural, and world music. If, instead, we perpetuate the understanding of diverse artists as essential representatives and ambassadors of their ethno-religious group of origin, then basic questions need to be asked about these "microphoned" ethnic representatives, civilizational spokespersons, and religious entrepreneurs. Who elected them to such positions? From where does the legitimacy of such unbearable responsibility stem?

Venues of transformation

There is little doubt that political institutions "could gain great insight from the performing arts sector into the value of body language and visual, musical, and other non-verbal forms of expression in addition to discursive communication."[2] Indeed, the flourishing of brochures, newsletters, and other forms of engineered efforts to foster diversity, dialogue, and cosmopolitanism is certainly driven by good intentions, but it needs to be accompanied by experiential and less elitist opportunities – including artistic ones – for diverse social relations.

While stages are amplifiers of carefully prepared scores, choreographies, and scripted agendas, some space is left to improvisation, to the impromptu construction of signs and meanings. Audiences have therefore an active role in the creation of these meanings; they do not merely receive them. Performances are often free, delivered in public spaces such as piazzas, ports, and parks, and are a social event of bodily and emotional participation in an informal and relaxed setting. Thus, diverse performing arts do have the potential to involve in forms of cosmopolitan transnationalism not only artists and migrants, on occasion part of the public, but so-called locals as well, whom we cannot understand as stereotypically stuck and rooted in a spatially bounded culture.[3] While they might not always enjoy the privilege of physical mobility, nor routinely partake in culturally and religiously diverse interactions, they are participating as engaged audiences in inclusively cosmopolitan sensibilities and dynamics, to be potentially cultivated beyond the lure of the ephemeral.

At any rate, we cannot expect the performing arts and their audiences to seamlessly solve the problems of asymmetrical relations of power in our diverse societies. In fact, many artists simply refuse to embrace a primarily social-political role. And yet, we can say that the artistic need for harmony often conveys an "impulse to change things around," to quote Eugenio Barba, the founder of innovatively multicultural *Odin Teatret* in Denmark.[4] But for most artists this impulse does not imply a missionary idea, or the pretentious desire to merely unmask anything or anyone without an accompanying self-analysis.

A self-scrutinizing standpoint is arguably integral to cosmopolitanism. Almost by definition, dialogic and cosmopolitan experience implies something new, rather than merely an exchange involving two individuals – as a false etymology would suggest. Cosmopolitanism, in particular, features a flow of meaning, practices, and unforeseen conflicts and understandings that were not readily available to individual participants in the first place, prior to sincere dialogic and cosmopolitan mutual engagement.[5] Resisting the drive to shape and restore core values, roots, and identities vis-à-vis the alleged threats of immigration, Islam, and anarchy, certain stages could be seen not as places where exceptional "performances are done," but where unexpected meanings might emerge and transformations occur.[6] Venues where cynic late-capitalist obsessions with cost-effectiveness, immigration, civilizational clash, and blind loyalty to mother-fatherlands are routinely turned inside out, and de facto ridiculed in the name of critical, unpretentious, cosmopolitan citizenship.

Maurizio Albahari is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Notre Dame.
Email: malbahar@nd.edu

Notes

1. At http://www.Radiodervish.com.
2. Jude Bloomfield, *Crossing the Rainbow. National Differences and International Convergences in Multicultural Performing Arts in Europe*, IETM (Informal European Theatre Meeting), 2003, 9.
3. Ulf Hannerz, "Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture," in *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, ed. M. Featherstone (London: SAGE Publications, 1990), 237–51.
4. Eugenio Barba, *Beyond the Floating Islands* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), 15.
5. David Bohm, *On Dialogue*, ed. L. Nichol (London: Routledge, 1996).
6. Ferdinando Taviani, "The Odin Story," in Barba, *Beyond the Floating Islands*, 236–74.

What We Do Not Know
Questions for a Study of Contemporary Arab Art

KIRSTEN SCHEID

Contemporary Arab art increasingly attracts attention from both art institutions and scholars. By drawing on a variety of approaches, scholars in this field can put questions to major theoretical paradigms. Lest a scholarly opportunity be lost, we must remind ourselves at this stage what we do not know about contemporary Arab art, particularly in relation to historiography, concepts of artistry, audience cultivation, and the role of institutional support and funding.

All signs suggest an imminent flourishing in the study of contemporary Arab art.[1] In her 1989 review of "zones" of scholarly interest in the Arab world, Lila Abu-Lughod pointed to two quandaries relevant for our topic: the lack of interest in "creative" and "expressive" components of Arab society and the squandering of opportunities for contributing to social theory.[2] Today scholarships are granted by the SSRC and Fulbright for studies of art in Jordan, Tunis, and Iraq. Rich monographs about contemporary Egyptian and Amazigh art worlds and colonial art education, among others, have appeared from prominent American and European presses.[3] This publishing boom accompanies an increased interest in seeing Arabs through the lens of art. Against the horrors of September 11, of the wars on Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon, and of an apparent "civilizational clash," new institutional supports allow Arab and Muslim artists to be exhibited and fêted in diverse venues as never before. Beyond journalistic and curatorial applause for Arabs as art-makers, however, lies an unprecedented opportunity to consider theoretical issues raised by this swell of concern.

Scholars in this field have the potential to revolutionize our understandings of subjectivity, cultural expression, modernism, secularism, among others. When artists wilfully converge on artistic practices with lineages distinct from their own cultural and national ones, what does this indicate about national and transnational subjectivities? What structures inform imagination and subjectivity without binding them to spatial and temporal borders? How does "art" as an allegedly universal category of human production get taken up to prove membership in humanity? Such questions are important to counteract any repetitions of narratives from the repertoire of colonial travellers who revelled in the discovery of "aesthetic impulses" among "heathen Arabs." Treating art as a bridge to humanity's common ground, in contradistinction to other activities by Arabs, threatens to strip the historical and cultural context from a notion of art that developed as part of the formation of Europe after the Renaissance, and especially with industrialism and capitalism.[4]

Is an artist "Arab" or "female" or "resistant" in the same way to different funders?

Lest a culturally specific model be imposed uncritically, and a scholarly opportunity lost, it is important at this stage to remember what we do not know about contemporary Arab art. Naming the unknowns will help us ask why that which gets promoted as "Arab art" is being made, circulated, and lauded, and not simply how. Studies engaging Arab art-making should bring insights from this field back to the field of critical art studies, rather than simply importing notions of art-making and applauding people for applying them in "unexpected" places. Stemming from an attempt to grapple with the limitations of my own work, this essay seeks to contribute to future scholarship by delineating a set of areas whose content is yet unknown.[5] The focus is on visual art but the questions are pertinent to other activities that tend to fall under the rubric of "expressive arts." The gaps in current scholarship can be summarized as having to do with 1) historiography; 2) concepts and forms; 3) audience cultivation; and 4) institutional support and funding.

Strategic histories

Much of the material authenticating past art-making as "Arab" comes from writings by predecessor artists who sought to situate themselves as nationalists or social pioneers. Too frequently, contemporary histories take these as factual starting points. An inclination to promote oneself as distinctive ("the first artist") or to relate to validating models (the tortured, the misunderstood, or the visionary artist), is thus easily and often taken to represent actual conditions of production in the past rather than previous strategies for laying claim to institutional support and social influence. Artists' struggle to create something that could motivate nationalist Arab patrons in the past century involved declaring Arab society as currently art-less, but it also involved declaring "art" as a special activity that could rectify that society's problems. Ignoring the strategic impact of such histories has led to overlooking how meanings of both "Arab" and "artistic" were formulated in tandem by artists who thought of themselves as social pioneers. This oversight has had the ironic effect of forwarding the same claims today – for example, the set of younger artists who are today promoted abroad are often hailed as having overcome an environment that previously "lacked art" or appreciative audiences. The little history that circulates asserts that this description of Arab society is simply true.

A return to history through period publications, sales records, diaries, exhibition registries would foreground the contingencies that produced art-making in certain forms at specific moments and relate artists' concerns to those of their publics. It would help us understand how contemporary artists have found themselves in particular dilemmas with a defined set of tools available to them. One tool was recognizable connections to Ottoman, Hapsburgian, and Persian art realms. When was this tool forgotten at the bottom of the toolkit? Another tool is the vocabulary of art-making. In the early twentieth-century Lebanon, it was the *musawwar* (picturer) who made images in oil or light-rays, until he was gradually replaced by the *fannan* (artist) and *rassam* (usually, painter). Then there is the tool of polylingualism: which elements of art-making have found Arabic terminologies and why? In Beirut today, one does a *barmeh* (turn) at the *vernissage* (opening night) and compliments the artist by exclaiming, "*shu helu hal-strokes* (what beautiful strokes), *yislamu dayyatak* (may He bless your hands)." This was not always the case. The changing usefulness of the artist's various tools tell us about the public debates that have impacted the structural conditions of Arab artists today. Addressing such issues would provide a sound basis for examining critically the genealogies that are and are not activated in today's art world.

Questioning concepts and confronting forms

Good genealogies make for good maps of present relationships. Tracing a term back to its plethora of parentages, through time and space, can reveal in a positive light the deviations of Arab art world paradigms from their putative European ancestors. This means we do not need to

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Advertisement for David Corm & Fils Maison d'Art

push at Arab productions to see them as "art" but can rather push at paradigms to see their historical formation.[6] Does "creativity" mean the same thing in different social settings? Is creativity itself always an important criterion for comprehending contemporary Arab artistry? Communal or individual authenticity? Figure versus abstract? Secular versus religious? If yes, what histories have resulted in their relevance? I say "histories" to avoid positing a single local narrative by which specific art practices must be counted authentic or inauthentic. When posited a priori intellectual paradigms make certain art works uninteresting ("parochial" or "locally irrelevant") or even deformed ("romantic" or "influenced"). Questioning those paradigms enables us to consider how competitions between artists for audiences and funds have resulted in interventions that differ in visually measurable ways, rather than in better or worse ways. How is value ascribed and why does art need to be evaluated at all? Indeed, why is art used to evaluate Arabs' lives, politics, and projects? Rather than seeing debates about art as reflecting realities of communities involved in nation-building and decolonization, we could look for how art became a means to press into "the future" or connect with "the past." Studying art in a way that does not assume intellectual or communal boundaries can have the advantage of highlighting the contests that revolved around notions of art as well as the ambitions and actions that sought to mobilize certain associations embodied by it.

This set of questions points to another that is more focused on the object: why do art forms literally have to look a certain way to gain presence, validity, or impact in different historical and contemporary moments? The fact that much Arab art-making has strong, identifiable relations with non-Arab art worlds, especially former colonial metropoles, provides an opportunity to examine the relationship between understandings of art, their material instantiation, and the establishment of intimacies that cross boundaries at the geographic, class, or historical level. These visual borrowings embarrass a model of art that prizes creativity and authenticity. Yet, that model assumes the existence of fully formed communal identities upon which authenticity can be based. Rather, in what ways can Arab art works be understood as "first-hand" documents of socio-cultural processes?

Audience appreciation or pollution?

One phenomenon art may document first-hand is the matter of audience cultivation. In my own fieldwork, I once found myself arguing with a gallerist to get my name on her mailing list. This alerted me to the role audiences have in coming into existence. Although a few authors have looked at audiences, more research needs to be done. Who likes what, and why? How is "taste" conceived? How is liking connected to buying? When do purchasers call it "art" and not "décor," "wedding gifts," or "self-expression"? Is there overlap between art reception and family formation, hospitality, grief, piety, or prosperity? We need to understand the efforts that audiences take upon themselves to interact with "art," in galleries, books, television studios, doctors' offices, and streets filled with three-metre high acrylic Ayatollahs. One way to address these questions is through art education programmes. For example, the appreciation courses offered by many elite Beiruti schools for students' parents are not secondary to the "look" of art and do differ significantly according to the gender or political outlook of the enrollees. Thinking more about the audience will help us understand how it comes to be seen, in some art discourse, as polluting of creative expression. Viewers' demands for artwork that is affordable, intelligible, non-objectionable, or matches the living-room are said by some self-described "art-lovers" to overwhelm creative production, and yet they could be seen as essential to it. By scrutinizing in tandem audience efforts and those made by artists to reach various publics we may grapple with how these artists conceive and fashion their own and communal identity.

Funding for "Arab" art

The study of Arab art poses most elegantly questions about the relationship between audience formation, identity, and visual forms. Asking them, we can examine a newly visible set of relationships between art as productive of audiences, funding as productive of art, and thus funding as productive of audiences. First, however, we must first know what constraints and opportunities associated with different types of funding have been available to Arab artists. We know there are there differences between banks, ministries, embassies and private patronage, between "local" and "foreign" funders, but how does their impact differ?[7] Is an artist "Arab" or "female" or "resistant" in the same way to different funders? How is a funder "outside" or "inside" an art community? We must look at the relationship between a funder's social agenda – e.g., overcoming social trauma or promoting tolerance – and the notion of art forwarded by their patronage. We should explore how artists realize, if not accept, that some sorts of politics are more likely to be funded. How indeed, does the sparsity of funds create people's experiences of art and understandings of institutional support? After all, funding affects the elements with which art-makers must engage and the circuits through which art objects must travel to produce a valid, impacting presence. It is only logical that changes will result in the art produced when the class, national, and geographical distribution of funding shifts.

In sum, there is an exciting opportunity present in the encounter between Euro-American scholarship and contemporary Arab art. The above are questions that will help us understand not only the politics of art-making but the forms of art themselves. The political interest and institutional support newly available have made it possible to explore in-depth issues that were never considered relevant before. The complex intercultural encounters and political urgencies involved in this art could stimulate the advancement of art theory. But these issues will not be recognized, let alone the opportunities they pose grasped, if we do not consider the conditions of our own disciplinary and historical production as scholars of this field.

Kirsten Scheid is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the American University of Beirut.
Email: ks28@aub.edu.lb

Notes

1. "Arab art" here refers to production and discourse conceived as outside Euro-America and coming into visibility through the political encounters that have produced contrastive "Arab" and "western" labels within a specific Euro-American cultural, political, and disciplinary setting.
2. Lila Abu-Lughod, "Zones of Theory in the Anthropology of the Arab World," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18 (1989): 267–306.
3. For example, Jessica Winegar, *Creative Reckonings* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Cynthia Becker, *Amazigh Arts in Morocco* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006); Hamid Irbouh, *Art in the Service of Colonialism* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2005); Silvia Naef, *A la recherche d'une modernité arabe* (Geneva: Editions Slatkine, 1996); Nada Shabout, *Modern Arab Art* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).
4. See Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Jessica Winegar, "The Humanity Game: Art, Islam, and the War on Terror," *Anthropology Quarterly*, in print.
5. Kirsten Scheid, *Painters, Picture-makers, and Lebanon* (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2005).
6. See Winegar, *Creative Reckonings*, chapter 1.
7. Katarzyna Pieprzak, "Citizens and Subjects in the Bank," *Journal of North African Studies* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 131–154.

The Art of Urban Introspection

KINSEY KATCHKA

This article discusses the work of two Egyptian artists who are inspired by the urban environment as well as by Sufism. Their art reflects two aspects of Cairene life: the frenetic activity and density of communication that characterize cosmopolitan centres, and the more contemplative aspects of Sufism. The author argues that Sufi philosophies and practice mediate between the personal nature of spirituality and the realities of urban life in the present day.

Throughout the world's urban centres, one finds dynamic creative communities where artists create work informed by the visual landscape around them. For many, this means capturing the density of stimuli and challenges of city life in a manner that resonates with the built environment and frenetic energy that constitute urban landscapes, and with the "visual overload of everyday life.[1] In Cairo, a city characterized by overpopulation, economic hardship, and widespread disparity, Islam is visibly and audibly manifested through its mosques, dress, and calls to prayer, and as such contributes to the city's multi-sensorial cacophony.

If Islam contributes to the dense sensory landscape of Cairene life in many respects, the more personal, contemplative aspects of Sufi practice permeate a more private sphere. Sufism, "the Science of the Heart," is widely considered "the inner dimension of Islam."[2] Sufi practice with its distinctly meditative, reflective dimension has, through the centuries, taken form in the pursuit of knowledge and its expression in poetry, text and script, and mystical numerology. Themes of duality, complementarity, tolerance, meditation, and repetition[3]– whether of images, words, or movement, as in mantras and movements of the *dhikr* ceremonies – recurring in Sufi thought and practice often take visual form in the work of artists whose work is influenced by Sufism whether intended or not. Regardless, historically Sufism has had a strong aesthetic component in which the moral dimensions of humanity, morality, and mutual obligation are inscribed.

A synthesis of these two paradoxical realms – the ultra-saturated urban cityscape and the introspective nature of Sufi spirituality – takes clear form in the artwork of Hazem El Mestikawy and Huda Lutfi.

Hazem El Mestikawy

Hazem El Mestikawy lives and works between Cairo and Vienna. The artist's sculptural installations are distinctly architectural forms, carefully and artfully constructed. In many of El Mestikawy's sculptures, each component is designed to fit into another, with no gaps between and no space for approximation. Throughout his body of work, positive and negative space carry equal weight and are mutually constitutive. El Mestikawy uses raw material from the urban environment, thus designing each installation to be practical as well as environmentally sound: the individual components can be packed for easy storage and economy of design, and most of the materials are recycled and recyclable. The artist builds flexibility into the design, and each work can be configured in any number of ways, so that each is characterized by both precision and flexibility. Made of cardboard understructure overlaid with small pieces of torn paper, this technique reinforces and strengthens the work's physical structure. He frequently uses recycled paper from everyday urban life such as newspaper and other discards. When torn apart, any text loses its literal meaning and legibility. Using text this way, El Mestikawy points out, the density of script determines the tonal range of the surface.[4]

His recent sculptural work clearly resonates with Sufi philosophy, most markedly that of mystical numerology and attention to text and script, even though not necessarily intended by the artist. In *9A Letters*, a series of nine sculptures exploring the first letter of nine regionally relevant alphabets (Hieroglyphic, Hieratic, Demotic, Coptic, Old Roman, Old Athens, Kufic, Neskh, and Modern), the artist investigates the multiple facets of script and three-dimensional form along with this mystically significant number. He cites such intensive attention to a single form – in this case, the letter "A" – as an "expression of singular devotion." The notion of scripted knowledge and text takes on new meaning when abstracted and subsumed by the ensemble of nine sculptural components. It becomes infused into the mystical configuration of the whole, and the artist's conceptual framework overrides the letters' function as text. Indeed, the three dimensional form of each individual letter derives from an architectural style concurrent with the use and/or introduction of that alphabet into the Egyptian region, and these deliberate architectural references evoke the changing built environment of this urban setting evolving over millennia. Literal text is subsumed by the artist's conceptual framework. Scripted knowledge, then, is submitted to El Mestikawy's meticulous creative process, thoughtfully synthesized and reinserted into his deeply personal meditation that moves beyond conventional language, definitions, and architectural convention.

Because of the streamlined form and monochromatic surface of the work, each piece looks deceptively simple: though the geometric forms may seem straightforward at a glance, their careful juxtaposition and precise interrelationship belies a precise and profoundly complex process. This treatment of positive and negative space – presence and absence – within each installation suggests the complementarity of masculine and feminine; of the human and divine, all inherent in Sufi philosophy. In *9A Letters*, the history of knowledge and passage of time are deeply embedded, as represented by the varied alphabets; some current, others relegated to relative obscurity, as are the correlate architectural manifestations.

Huda Lutfi

Unlike El Mestikawy, in whose work Sufism is a subtle influence that is more a matter of interpretation than intention, for Huda Lutfi Sufism is a deliberate point of departure. Having already established a long, distinguished, and ongoing career as a cultural historian whose scholarship focuses on medieval Islam and Sufism, Lutfi turned to visual arts in 1992, and her research interests in culture, history, and identity inform her creative work. Viewing the world as "a series of signs to be deciphered and interpreted," she makes paintings, collages, and installations that focus on themes of memory, gender, spirituality, and mediation. Lutfi considers the creative process as "an attempt at seeing, of seeing oneself, the effort to understand oneself."[5] Commenting on her renovation work on her second home in Fayyum, she notes that the intention is "to take you to a special place of feeling and knowing, to some special consciousness, some sense of connection with the uni-

Hazem El Mestikawy, *9A Letters*

NORTH CAROLINA MUSEUM OF ART © HAZEM EL MESTIKAWY, 2005

Huda Lutfi, *Labyrinth of Masha Dolls* (detail)

COURTESY OF THE THIRD LINE, DUBAI © HUDA LUTFI, 2006

verse, some enlightenment or extra awareness," and this applies to her artwork more broadly. This sense of special space and knowing emerges in her artwork, and resonates with El Mestikawy's more overtly architectural sculptures.

Also like El Mestikawy, an element of recycling inheres in Lutfi's work, perhaps most explicitly in her "Found in Cairo" and related "'Alayis (Dolls)" series. For two years she embarked upon "a sort of archaeological venture," carefully collecting objects from the city's varied repositories such as flea markets, junk shops, and antique stores. Lutfi manipulated and assembled those objects in such a way as to induce reflection on common day-to-day experiences. Both series deliberately contest rigid notions of identity by including images or photos of faces which are not strictly defined as "Egyptian" but which have been found in the city's old book stalls and second-hand shops.

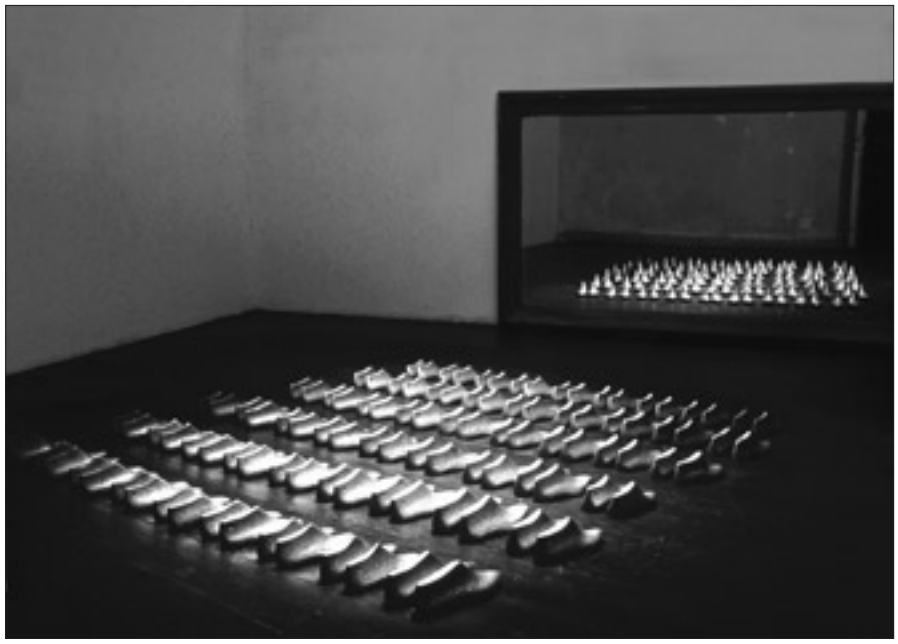
In *Labyrinth of Masha Dolls*, Lutfi assembles tongs found at a vendor of *sheeshah* (water pipes) and related accessories. Normally, one sees plain tongs with no figurative shape or even surface decoration. Here, the functional implement takes on a voluptuous female form, while the chains that attach the tongs to the pipe, in this context, suggest the constraints women face in society, both in Egypt and elsewhere. The voluptuous metal tongs – over 100 of them here – are configured atop a delicate labyrinthine structure and are illuminated by a single light in an otherwise dark room. Rather than placing the installation on a stabilizing platform or table, she constructed a fragile wooden frame that is tenuously assembled, "so if you touch it one place, the whole thing moves and is affected" echoing the degree to which people and society are interconnected, as well as suggesting the fragile infrastructure of life in Cairo. Lutfi draws on the image of a labyrinth because she "wanted something with strong meaning to bring these together. A labyrinth is a fragile structure; a labyrinth is life"; appropriate, Lutfi notes, given that "life seems always to be fragile at [this] moment in Egypt and in the world," politically, economically, and existentially. This is very much attached to the Sufi tradition, which teaches one "not to become too attached to things that can be lost so easily … and therefore if you're not so attached, then you are better able to deal with such situations of loss"; here, the chains constitute a metaphor for attachment.

Also like El Mestikawy, the notion of repetition as meditation is very apparent in Lutfi's "Found in Cairo" and "'Alayis (Dolls)" series, particularly in *The Secret of Repetition* and *Circle of Remembrance*. In these, as well as *Labyrinth,* Lutfi drew on the meditative atmosphere of the nightly Sufi gatherings which Cairenes attend "as if to get away from the noise and colours of Cairo." *The Secret of Repetition* and *Circle of Remembrance* refer to an aspect of Cairo that few people see, the Sufi aspect. Lutfi's intention was to find a way to visually convey "an intangible state of being, of silence or mediation, the moving away from noise and forms to quietness." To do so, she assembled numerous wooden shoe moulds that she found in large numbers at a downtown shoe factory. For *The Secret of Repetition,* each was cleaned, scraped, painted in silver, and inscribed with the old Sufi adage, "I am the companion of the one who remembers me." Assembled en masse, they give the sense of repetition to reinforce the meaning. Lutfi explains that she "use[s] one sentence over and over again so it becomes like a mantra. That ties to Sufism too, the idea of repetition of one or two or three words, so it quiets you down … That's the purpose of the mantra, to make the mind empty and quiet" so one can achieve greater insight.

Urban introspection

In their creative work, Hazem El Mestikawy and Huda Lutfi each evoke a reflective, peaceful domain that stands in stark contrast to the frenetic activity and density of communication that characterize Cairo's public spaces (as well as those of other major cosmopolitan centres), even as the artists' materials and forms create an indelible connection to that space – for El Mestikawy, in his deliberate inspiration by the built environment; for Lutfi, the city as an endless resource of materials and recycled imagery. Sufi philosophies and practice inform their work, and mediate between the deeply personal nature of spirituality and the realities of urban life in the present day.

Huda Lutfi, *The Secret of Repetition*



COURTESY OF THE THIRD LINE, DUBAI © HUDA LUTFI, 2003

Kinsey Katchka is Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the North Carolina Museum of Art and Adjunct Faculty at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.
Email: kkatchka@gmail.com

Notes

1. Nick Mirzoeff, *The Visual Culture Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 8.
2. Ian Netton, *A Popular Dictionary of Islam* (London: Curzon Press, 1992), 246.
3. Unless otherwise noted, the citations and quotations here by the artists are from personal communications between 2006 and 2008, during conversations in Cairo or in ensuing correspondence and telephone calls.
4. Linnea S. Dietrich, "Huda Lutfi: A Contemporary Artist in Egypt," *Woman's Art Journal* 21, no. 2 (2000): 12–15.
5. Ibid.

Veiled Visuality
Video Art in Syria

CHARLOTTE BANK

Although the Syrian art scene is by and large characterized by artists working in traditional techniques like painting and sculpture, young artists are discovering new forms of expression such as video art. Building upon a long tradition of artists offering social criticism, these artists comment in their work on present-day Syrian society. This article analyzes videos of two artists, locating their art in the context of current social and political debate.

Europe is witnessing an increased interest in contemporary art from the Arab world with almost every European country having had its own show of works of young artists from the region. However, Syria has been largely absent from these events. To a large extent, this is due to the conservative character of the Syrian art scene as well as lack of institutional support for contemporary techniques. Nevertheless, young Syrian artists experiment with new artistic techniques and while using an international visual language reflect on the state of contemporary Syrian society.

Syrian artists suffer from a general lack of visibility both inside and outside the country. It is rare to see works of contemporary Syrian artists on international art events and exhibition spaces in Syria showing the works of these artists are largely missing. Due to the lack of an institutional network of organizations supporting contemporary art, financial aspects of art production tend to stand in the foreground in Syria. Artists are forced to produce sellable work, which in Syria mainly means art of a purely decorative character.

Most artists in Syria work in traditional techniques like painting and sculpture; contemporary artistic forms of expression like video, digital photography, and installation are rare. Art academies are highly sceptical of new techniques and offer very limited space for them in their curricula. This lack of training means that artists wishing to work in contemporary techniques are to a large extent left to themselves to experiment and since Syrian artists are only little exposed to international contemporary art, they are left strangely isolated from international visual codes and modes of expression.

COURTESY OF SAMIR BARKAWI, 2005

Still from *Poster* by Samir Barkawi

Video art

Despite these obstacles, a number of young Syrian artists have begun to work in contemporary techniques and seek a presence on the international art scene. This is especially the case with artists working with video and experimental film. One advantage of this medium is its comparative affordability, its easy distribution, and the fact that no large and costly studio space is needed for the production of works. These factors have made video one of the major artistic media in the entire Middle Eastern region over the past ten years.

As is the case with other artists from the Arab world working with experimental film and video, works of Syrian film/video artists are strongly documentary in character, addressing socio-political and socio-cultural issues of contemporary Syrian society. Syria has an impressive intellectual and artistic tradition with writers, caricaturists, and filmmakers offering critical investigations of the rigidity of Syrian society and its paralyzing effects on people's lives. Young artists who engage in social and political projects can place themselves in this tradition of engaged artistic production in their endeavour to pin out the paradoxes, weaknesses, and injustices of contemporary Syrian society.

By focusing on two works of two young artists as representatives of this tendency in contemporary artistic praxis in Syria – one an art video, "Poster" by Samir Barkawi (2004) and the other an experimental documentary, "The Pot" by Diana El-Jeiroudi (2005) – I will attempt to show how contemporary artists in Syria position themselves in current debates and how they seek to influence the future of their society through their work. Both videos investigate the duality of traditional values presented by piety, morals, and family versus contemporary individualism in respect to female existence.

Social criticism

Both Barkawi and El-Jeiroudi represent a minority within the Syrian art scene. But it is exactly this minority that is the most visible on the international art scene. As mentioned above, the restrictive character of the Syrian art scene leads most artists to work in traditional techniques and produce work of a kind that leaves aside all conflicts and secures them opportunities to exhibit their work and their existence. Syrian artists who investigate political and social issues in their work place find themselves in a difficult, even potentially dangerous position. Artists are frequently put under pressure to either change the character of their work or refrain from showing it altogether if it is deemed too controversial. Pressure comes from both official authorities and private event organizers.[1]

Notwithstanding these obstacles, many young artists feel a strong need to address current issues of Syrian society, a society that has witnessed massive changes since Bashar Al-Assad took over as president from his father in 2000, especially in the field of mass communication. This has brought contemporary visual culture to the country together with ideas of individualized lifestyles and raised hopes for change, especially among the young generation. Young Syrians often express feelings of being caught between the expectations and traditions of their parents and own wishes for individual development. Their society leaves little room for individualism in social and political terms, meaning that every attempt of self-assertion needs to take place within the restricted frame of family, state institutions, and religion and makes it a difficult balancing act.

Through addressing issues of importance within their own generation using an international and contemporary artistic language, artists like El-Jeiroudi and Barkawi are seeking to renew the Syrian art scene and place Syria on the map of the international art community.

Modesty and display

Barkawi's short video *Poster* deals with the conflict between contemporary individualism and traditional notions of female modesty. The video shows three girls having fun taking photos of each other. What makes the private photo sessions of these three girls so amusing and slightly absurd is that their heavy veiling prevents us from recognizing who is in the picture. As soon as one girl has finished taking a picture of her two friends, she hands the camera to another girl who takes over

the role of the portraitist. The sound of the girl's high heeled shoes, their giggling laughter, the birds singing in the background form together with the distinctive click of the camera the soundscape of the film and convey an atmosphere of light hearted joy. The situation and the setting of the film seem at first sight idyllic and rather banal, we expect something easy to consume. Only the veils turn the situation into parody.

In less than a minute, Barkawi succeeds in laying bare the contradictions between traditional values and contemporary individualism. The ritual of the girls taking pictures of each other becomes pointless since no two girls are distinguishable from one another. We, the spectators, only see two figures covered by black veils looking completely alike, yet for the girls it seems of great importance that each of them has her picture taken. While they seemingly adhere to tradition, symbolized through their full cover, this does not prevent them from wishing to display themselves. They play with their camera, an object of vanity and self-indulgence, the exact vices traditional religious leaders are polemicizing against, seemingly without any sense of the contradictory character of their behaviour and the absurdity of the situation and thus show a complete lack of reflective thought.

By using a subjective camera angle, letting the spectator identify with the photographer searching for the best focus before pressing the button, Barkawi invites the spectators into the action of the film and asks us to reflect on whether or not a full cover makes sense in contemporary society. *Poster* is successful in asking this question because of its subtlety and freedom from moralizing and dogma. The spectator is invited to smile, laugh, and reflect.

The blessings of motherhood

El-Jeiroudi's *The Pot* looks at women's experiences as child bearers and mothers. El-Jeiroudi's own feminist position is reflected in the provocative title of the film and informs the entire work. Her work is highly critical of traditional notions on motherhood as the fulfilment of female existence. While women's presence on the job market was long encouraged, an increasing emphasis on women's traditional roles as mothers and wives has been observed in official discourse since the 1990s.[2] In a number of videotaped interviews El-Jeiroudi presents a generation of women who were directly affected by this change in attitude. They are women of her own generation, in their twenties and thirties from different backgrounds, caught between their own individual wishes and society's expectations.

The interviews are rare in their openness, especially in a society where women are expected to keep their self-control and not discuss their emotions openly and in public. They voice a variety of views, from the openly regretful example of one women telling of her sadness when leaving her job to the more stoic acceptance of a situation seen as unavoidable and necessary. It is not so much a personal choice in favour of motherhood which leads the women to adopt this role that stands out but rather the pressure from their surroundings. Once they accept these roles, society's perception of them changes; they experience greater respect towards them as persons. For some women, this respect might even represent a sort of redemption for the loss of their individual dreams.

The Pot is in many ways a raw work, spectacular effects are avoided, camera work is kept calm and a style reminiscent of home videos with sharp cuts between the sequences is kept throughout the work, giving it a personal, intimate quality. This style is common in the contemporary wave of experimental video documentary of the Middle East. Technical simplicity is often used to bring the subject of a film closer to the public, to make it accessible through absence of sophistication.

El-Jeiroudi chose to film her interview partners without showing their faces. While this may have been necessary to ensure a climate of confidentiality and privacy at first, she hereby also succeeds in lending the statements a representative character and adding an emotional distance, thus stressing her own critical view on the subject. Intercepted images function as dividers between the interviews and present subtle, ironic comments. An advertisement board displaying a smiling, young woman together with the slogan "always at your disposal" gets an entirely new meaning in the context of El-Jeiroudi's film, as do wedding gowns displayed at store fronts to swing in the wind.

COURTESY OF DIANA EL-JEIROUDI / 2004

Still from Diana El-Jeiroudi's film *The Pot*

The Syrian art scene

The two videos question traditional notions on female existence. By addressing this controversial issue both El-Jeiroudi and Barkawi declare a will to engage in a debate to achieve change in Syrian society. However, their work is hardly ever shown in the country itself. It is one of the great paradoxes of contemporary Syrian artistic production that venues for showing and screening experimental contemporary art and films and videos are so few, both in Damascus and the rest of the country. This means that works like the two videos above, produced with the aim of addressing problems of Syrian society are better known to international audiences than to Syrians. Likewise, the works of Syrian filmmakers, whose highly artistic and much admired work is better known to international festival goers than the Syrian public.[3] Syria has only recently begun to develop an art scene with artists, galleries, an interested and knowledgeable public and critics.

This lack of a genuine art scene is strongly felt by Syrian artists and gallerists alike, many place much hope for improvement in a greater international visibility, both in the West and the more affluent Arab countries in the Gulf region. They hope that foreign interest can increase interest in the works of Syrian artists in the country itself and so facilitate the creation of a larger space for contemporary art in Syrian urban society.

> Artists are forced to produce sellable work …

And while artists engaged in social critique rarely expect to gain interest from financially strong collectors, they hope that more opportunities to produce, display, and sell art in general will also give more space for non-commercial art, art produced with the aim of provoking thought and encourage reflection on current issues among the public. While Syrian art is often criticized for being backward minded and outdated, the works of artists like Diana El-Jeiroudi and Samir Barkawi bear witness to the potential of Syrian art in producing just this kind of thought-provoking work. It is still new for the Syrian public to witness art other than painting and sculpture – video as an artistic medium has only appeared in the past few years. And it is newer still for the Syrian public to regard visual arts as other than decorative.

Syrian artists are producing meaningful work that gains international interest; however only if they are enabled to both produce and exhibit more work, a true contemporary art scene can develop in the country. More institutional support could be one clue to ensure the continuing production of art of high quality in Syria.

Charlotte Bank is currently preparing a Ph.D. thesis at the Free University of Berlin on contemporary art and visual culture in the Arab World.
Email: charlotte_bank@yahoo.de

Notes

1. Samir Barkawi, personal communication. On the resistance of artists to state ideology, see Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago 1999), especially pages 87–142.
2. Sara Lei Sparre, "Educated Women in Syria: Servants of the State, or Nurturers of the Family?" *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 17, no. 1 (2008): 3–20.
3. The paradoxes surrounding Syrian film production are the subject of Rasha Salti, ed., *Insights Into Syrian Cinema: Essays and Conversations with Contemporary Filmmakers* (New York, 2006).

Cruelty, Ghosts, and Verses of Love

KATINKA VAN HEEREN

Islamic novels, films, and songs are becoming increasingly popular in Indonesia. One exceptionally well-liked film is the love story *Ayat Ayat Cinta* released in 2008. Even though to some the film is as trivializing religions as *The Da Vinci Code*, *Ayat Ayat Cinta* puts forward a representation of Islam which is different from both western stereotypes and prevalent representations of Islam in popular Indonesian film and television productions.

In February this year, *Ayat Ayat Cinta* (Verses of Love) was released in Indonesian cinemas. The film, based on a best-selling novel by Indonesian novelist Habiburrahman El Shirazy is a departure from the usual production of horror and teen films of the recently resurging film industry in Indonesia. It seeks to overcome western media stereotypes of Islam and aims to show the compassionate face of the religion. Hanung Bramantyo, the film's director, says he chose to turn the novel into a film because it presents the teachings of Islam in a positive way and where "Muslims are not associated with terrorism and fanaticism, but portrayed as a people who practice tolerance, patience, sincerity and honesty."[1] *Ayat Ayat Cinta* neither portrays Islam as the source of violence, cruelty, and horror – as in many western media – nor as the saviour – as in Indonesian lower class horror films, reality shows, and religious soaps. It shows, in the words of its director "… Muslims who are hip, fashionable and capable of socializing, but at the same time do things in an Islamic way."[2]

> … most of the religious soaps deteriorated into campy horror shows which served Islamic teachings in a mixture of gruesome blood and eaten-by-maggots images.

Ayat Ayat Cinta is basically a love story presented in an Islamic wrapping. The setting is at the famous Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, which is to many Indonesians the centre of Islamic knowledge; the protagonists are devout Muslims or, like the Coptic Maria, at the end, a convert to Islam; and throughout the film the uses and benefits of Islamic teachings in daily life are manifest. The main character is Fahri an Indonesian overseas student at Al-Azhar. He is a handsome, chaste, and serious young man. Besides deepening his understanding of religion one of Fahri's main goals is to find a wife and establish a family in line with Islamic teachings. While he is pursuing his studies in Egypt, four different attractive women fall in love with him, each one of whom tries to win his heart. Fahri eventually marries the veiled Turkish-German girl Aisha breaking the heart of the Coptic girl-next-door Maria. Inconsolable, Maria falls into a coma. But when Fahri is jailed and facing death by hanging after being falsely accused of rape by Noura, another girl who is disappointed not to have been the chosen one, comatose Maria appears to be the only one who can prove his innocence. Aisha begs Fahri to take Maria as a second wife so that he can revive her and have her testify in his favour. After Fahri marries the unconscious Maria she indeed awakes, and without much delay saves her newly wed husband from the death penalty. The three do not live happily ever after though. Suffering from a severe heart-condition Maria soon dies after her marriage. But not before Fahri has taught her how to perform the salat prayer; and just when the three spouses perform *sholat berjamaah (*pray together) Maria peacefully passes away.

A major theme running through the film is how to apply Islamic teachings in the context of modern daily life and contemporary manners of conduct. Fahri, for example, advocates women's rights by reciting from the Quran. But he also takes a second wife, once more in accordance with Islamic teachings. Furthermore, the film addresses concepts of what is Islamically right or wrong in the context of contemporary politics as clearly perceptible in the scene when Fahri defends Aisha's decision to give up her seat in a train for an elderly American woman. While some other passengers condemn Aisha for her kindness to the "enemies of Islam," Fahri defends her by referring to the Sunnah teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

Islam and popular culture

The production of *Ayat Ayat Cinta* is an example of a recent trend in Indonesia of Islamic teachings becoming part of popular culture through films, books, and songs. Soon after its release it became one of the biggest blockbuster hits in Indonesia. In the first few weeks alone more than three million people, including President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and top government officials, crammed cinemas to watch it. Most spectators, including the President were so touched by the film that they shed tears. Many expressed the view that it is the most successful film to combine Islam and popular culture so far. Earlier Islamic films such as Deddy Mizwar's *Kiamat Sudah Dekat* (Judgment Day Is Nigh, 2003) and Garin Nugroho's *Rindu Kami Padamu* (English title: Of Love and Eggs, 2004) had not attracted that many viewers. Communications expert Ade Armando hailed the film, and said its success showed that to be profitable, a film did not have to contain sex and ghosts.[3] Furthermore, President Yudhoyono lauded the film as a piece of art which both represents Indonesian culture and gives a truthful representation of Islam as a religion of harmony, tolerance, and justice. Additionally, a spokesperson for the President called the film an "antithesis" to *Fitna*, a video produced by Dutch Member of Parliament Geert Wilders and released on the Internet in March accusing the Holy Quran of inciting violence.[4] However, not only in western media, but also in Indonesia, Islam had often been featured in the context of cruelty and violence.

In fact, Armando's juxtaposition of the religious *Ayat Ayat Cinta* with lucrative films which contain sex and ghosts points to two issues touching on media representations and Islam. On the one hand, it expresses a view of audio-visual media more generally held by religious groups and leaders, not only in Indonesia, and not only by Muslims. Worldwide, films which feature scantily dressed women, contain images hinting at or showing sex, or show horror or supernatural occurrences, have incited complaints on the basis of religious morality. Likewise, Indonesian religious leaders often have voiced their objections to popular film productions that contain sex and ghosts calling them *film maksiat* (immoral films). On the other hand, Armando's comment also touches on the paradoxical history of representations of Islam in the majority of domestic media. Apart from melodramatic soaps screened for the month of Ramadan which use Islamic paraphernalia (Muslim attire, salat performances, and iconic jargon such as *assalamu'aleikum*, *alhamdullilah*, and *astagafirullah*), Islam in Indonesian mainstream film and television series had mainly appeared in the context of the horror or supernatural genre. These films were the very same to feature the issues that Indonesian leaders find so problematic: ghosts or other supernatural occurrences, and scantily dressed women.

Several Muslim groups have not supported the mixture of horror and Islam shown in Indonesian film. Their objections were first and foremost based on the fear that a belief in supernatural beings and occurrences other than those acknowledged in the Quran would lead people astray from religious teachings. Ironically, it is partly to get programmes through censorship (either from the state or to shun protests in the name of religious morality), that there has been a long-standing emphasis on the combination of horror and Islam in Indonesian audio-visual media.

A mixture of Islam and horror

To begin with, already under Soeharto's New Order, horror films which showed sexy women, violence, evil supernatural beings, and everything else that "God has forbidden," used a deus-ex-machina appearance of a *kyai* (a traditionalist Islamic teacher), or other religious symbol, to restore order at the end of the film. While witches and other evil creatures torture and kill people, and spread fear and bloodshed among a community throughout the film at the end they are defeated by some Islamic authority figure. Sometimes quoting verses from the Quran would do to make the wicked creature perish. At other times, the heroic *kyai* also possesses supernatural powers to fight and defy the evil beings. Filmmakers inserted the Islamic authority figure to ensure that the film would pass the Film Censor Board. The unsolicited result, however, was that the general public of these films perceived the horror genre as identical to film *dakwah* (propagation films).

After the resignation of President Soeharto several horror films were produced that did not use any religious symbols. But by 2002 Islamic religious leaders reappeared in Indonesian audio-visual media, taking on a role in the newly created horror reality shows on television. These programmes supposedly show the live images of supernatural occurrences and ghostly beings. The role of the Islamic religious leaders is not only to restore order, but also to explain how to interpret the supernatural occurrences in the context of Islamic teachings. The producers of horror reality shows used Islam both to add to the programmes' popularity as well as to pre-empt censorship. Islamic features like clothes and expressions were used to sell the television series. The appearance on the show of trustworthy Islamic leaders who emphasized that all what was happening in the programmes was real, and not merely camera tricks, added much to the appeal of the shows. And so the Islamic hero coming to the rescue either to contain supernatural beings or to defeat the evil ones was restored a second time. Yet this time, in the context of pre-empting film censorship, producers did not so much bear in mind censorship from the state, but rather from the street: read fear of Muslim protests. Muslim protests were feared most because some groups like the Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defenders Front) did not shun the use of violence to make their point that they would uphold the morals of the nation.[5] The fear of FPI and other such groups was realistic since there was a history of violence by the groups attacking nightclubs, bars, and cultural centres. Moreover, as the government and police forces only half-heartedly countered these actions, many people were unsure about whether they would be sufficiently protected if they drew the ire of radical Muslims.

In 2004, the lucrative and safe combination of showing supernatural occurrences under the guidance of Islamic leaders was extended to a new television formula called *sinetron religi* (religious soaps). The soaps were based on true stories of people who had experienced the miracles of God which were published in such popular Islamic magazines as *Hidayah* (God's guidance) and *Allah Maha Besar* (God is Great), or which were based on stories such as hadith-lore from Bukhari and Muslim. However, in due course most of the religious soaps deteriorated into campy horror shows which served Islamic teachings in a mixture of gruesome blood and eaten-by-maggots images. In the words of the journalist Taufiqurrahman, the religious soaps were nothing but "regular soap operas with God's name attached to their title [that] carry a formulaic story line in which sinners of all kinds, from corrupt state officials and gamblers to a misbehaving son, will be punished by God with a very painful death, ranging from literally being burnt in hell, eaten by flesh-eating worms, to being swallowed alive by the earth."[6] For a third time Indonesian media featured Islam mainly in the context of gruesome images of cruelty and torture. Until Ramadan 2007 Indonesian television was swamped by all kinds of variations on this formula.

Islamic films and Verses of Love

In comparison to the horror films and religious soap productions *Ayat Ayat Cinta* indeed was an odd one out in the way in which popular film and television productions positioned Islam mainly in the context of horror, the supernatural, violence and torture from hell. This is not to say that any of the horror films, religious soaps, or *Ayat Ayat Cinta* for that matter, was readily seen as Islamic film or television productions.

COURTESY OF HANUNG BRAMANTYO, 2007

Shooting *Ayat Ayat Cinta*

To those with the strictest Islamic backgrounds the medium film itself was perceived as incompatible with Islamic teachings. To other Muslim groups it depended on how the films with Islamic themes were composed. Many Indonesian Islamic groups discarded horror films as dumb entertainment for the lower classes who believed in the supernatural, and who, merely because of their lack in education, regarded horror films as *dakwah*.

The religious soaps were not much discussed as constituting a problematic representation of Islam. Particularly since some stories were based on hadith and nearly all programmes involved the participation of famous Indonesian Islamic leaders, there were few comments about their religious value. However, if any, there were hardly pious Muslims who regretted the end of the increasingly horrific religious soaps after Ramadan 2007. Finally, the romance *Ayat Ayat Cinta* was, as Nauval Yasid wrote, as trivializing an Islamic film as *The Da Vinci Code* was a Roman Catholic one.[7] Moreover, because the film was mainly a melodramatic love story, and, according to some Muslim groups, contained misrepresentations of the correct Islam and its teachings – such as how to socialize with non-Muslims –, some Muslims believed *Ayat Ayat Cinta* to be even more harmful to Islam than the sex and horror *maksiat* films. Nevertheless, despite the heated debate whether or not *Ayat Ayat Cinta* really is Islamic it clearly is a film that tries to convey Islamic teachings, and differs from general representations of Islam found in both domestic and transnational media. Bramantyo believed that it was important to make this film in order to show Indonesians and the West alike that Muslims can be proud of their religion. Hence, *Ayat Ayat Cinta* does not portray Islam in the context of violence, cruelty, and horror as in many media productions from both the West and Indonesia. It shows modern Muslims who are tolerant and strive to adjust themselves to current times while leading their lives an Islamic way.[8] That is just the way Indonesia's President wishes to see it.

Katinka van Heeren is a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Indonesian Languages and Cultures, Leiden University.
Email: Cvanheeren@yahoo.com

Notes

1. See interview with Bramantyo by Nancy Amelia Collins, "Islamic Movie 'Ayat Ayat Cinta' Wows Indonesian Audiences," Voice Of America News, 13 March 2008, at www.voanews.com.
2. "Ayat Ayat Cinta shows gentle Islam face," *Arab Times Kuwait*, 1 April 2008.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. For more on the FPI see also the article by Leena Avonius in this issue (pp. 48-49).
6. M. Taufiqurrahman, "Indonesia: be good God is on television," *Jakarta Post*, 16 July 2005.
7. Nauval Yazid, "'Ayat-ayat Cinta' survives heavy-handed treatment," *Jakarta Post*, 2 March 2008.
8. "Ayat Ayat Cinta shows gentle Islam face."

Indonesian Muslim Fashion
Styles & Designs

EVA F. AMRULLAH

With the growing popularity of Islamic clothing in Indonesia in recent decades, Muslim fashion has become an increasingly hot topic among wearers of Islamic clothing. Indonesian Muslim fashion consists of various styles and trends, influenced by transnational factors yet maintaining a local flavour. This article traces the development of Muslim fashion in Indonesia and explores how Indonesian designers are involved in the production of sophisticated Islamic clothing designs.

Until a few decades ago Islamic clothing was not very common in Indonesia, but more recently it has become a trend, not only amongst those wearing it, but also as a production sector. *Busana Muslima*, the term used for female Muslim dress in Indonesian, denotes any outfit including a head covering. With this trend of wearing Islamic clothing, various styles have emerged making Muslim fashion one of the hottest topics to be discussed by wearers and non-wearers of fashionable Islamic clothing alike. What have been the impulses leading to the growth and dissemination of Muslim fashions in Indonesia? Where do these fashionable styles of Islamic dress come from? And how are Indonesian designers themselves involved in this complicated circuit of the dissemination of Muslim fashions?

Terms used for Islamic styles of dress in Indonesia are sometimes confusing for those more familiar with terms used in the Middle East. *Kerudung* and *jilbab* both refer to women's head coverings. They may be used interchangeably, but *kerudung* usually refers to a long transparent shawl which covers a woman's hair. The *jilbab* is a longer piece of cloth that almost completely covers a woman's body except for her face and hands. The term *cadar* is used for the face-veil.

In specific settings, such as Islamic madrasas and Islamic *pesantren* (boarding schools), Islamic styles of dress, such as head coverings, have a long history, but the public display of head coverings remained limited; in fact, until the 1980s it was mainly worn by those women who had performed Hajj. Also, the wearing of face-veils was by and large limited to the adherents of the Darul Arqam, a Malaysian-based Islamic movement. It was only in the 1980s that face-veils became more visible with the spread of the Tablighi Jamaat whose female adherents mostly wore this style of dress. The face-veil has become more widespread since 2000 with the growth in popularity of some Salafi groups.

There have often been tensions about the issue of veiling. In the early phase of the New Order regime, wearing Islamic clothing was considered a form of resistance to the state authorities. In 1982, the Department of Education and Culture even decided to prevent female students of secondary educational institutions from wearing a head covering at school, on the grounds that this practice was seen as a violation of the basic code of school uniform. By the late 1980s rumours had spread that veiled women were spreading poison – *jilbab beracun*/poison *jilbab* – under the folds of their clothing. It was only in 1991, that the state, in an effort to co-opt the Muslim community, allowed Muslim women again to wear head coverings at schools and government offices.

From the 1990s on there has been an upsurge in wearing fashionable styles of Islamic dress and motivations to wear these styles of dress and their meanings have multiplied. This greater popularity ties in with the more general greater prominence of Islam in Indonesia. This is, for instance, evident in the growth of women's *pengajian* (prayer groups) led by young *da'i*, Islamic teachers. Some of these charismatic religious teachers, such as Abdullah Gymnastiar, Jefry al-Buchori, and Ahmad al-Habsy, wear fashionable Muslim dress and have inspired Muslim women to adopt not only Islamic clothing but the more fashionable types. Some of these young teachers have even been hired as icon figures for Muslim men's clothing by Indonesian Muslim fashion designers.

Yet, wearing Islamic dress is not only a sign of personal piety, but may also reflect individual and communal identities. For some it is part of a lifestyle, while in some settings like in Islamic *pesantren* it has been imposed from above. Since 2001 the Indonesian government also has implemented a programme of regional autonomy, which has resulted in some provinces such as Aceh and Bukulumba (South Sulawesi) adopting or preparing to adopt Shariah law, including the obligation to wear Islamic dress.

. . . wearing Islamic dress is not only a sign of personal piety, but may also reflect individual and communal identities.

PHOTO BY AZMI, 2008

Model wearing a design by Up2date

Influences from abroad

The history of the advent of Islam to Indonesia has significantly influenced the particular styles of dress worn in Indonesia. When ulama and traders from abroad came to Indonesia they not only brought with them ideas and goods, but also the fashion styles from their countries. Styles from Saudi Arabia as well as from Yemen became popular, especially when the men from those countries started to marry Indonesian women. Still the use of the Arabian abaya, a head-to-toe wrap covering the whole body, in early Indonesia was not as popular as the use of shalwar qamiz, a tunic

A design by Toera Imara

PHOTO BY ROMEL LS, 2005

worn over long pants, from the Indian Peninsula. This is because, first, shalwar qamiz resembles local styles such as *baju kurung* from West Sumatra or *kebaya panjang* (long *kebaya*) from Central Java with the difference that shalwar qamiz is combined with pants while the latter two are usually combined with skirts or sarung. Secondly, shalwar qamiz with its combination of tunic and long pants used to be preferred by Indonesian women active in the public sphere who felt they could move more freely by wearing pants. Lastly, for early designers themselves, like Ida Royani and Ida Leman, they feel that it is easier to modify shalwar qamiz than abaya. It has been mainly the very strict and conservative groups that have adopted Arabian styles such as the Tablighi Jamaat and some Salafi groups.

Indonesian women graduates from Middle Eastern Islamic universities, in particular from al-Azhar University in Egypt, also play a significant role in the flow of Muslim fashions to Indonesia. When these female students return home, they bring with them the Islamic dressing styles popular at the time. In the late 1990s, for example, many al-Azhar graduates brought a new type of material for veils which was colourful and transparent. They also introduced ways of tying and arranging the veil that were in style where they had been studying.

Indonesian designers

Starting around the late 1990s and early 2000s, Indonesia witnessed the birth of sophisticated Islamic clothing designs. In 1993, an association of Indonesian fashion designers called APPMI (the Association of Indonesian Fashion Designing Entrepreneurs) was established which paid much attention to Islamic styles of dress and stimulated their development into modern commodities. In 1996, APPMI created a division specializing in Muslim dress which provided a conducive atmosphere for the growth of Muslim fashions' industry in Indonesia. The designers who are active in this division are mostly female. These female designers do not only design clothing for Muslim women but also for men, teenagers, and children. However, Muslim dress especially designed for men in Indonesia is not as popular as Muslim dress for women. Male Muslim dress is usually worn only on special occasions such as in Islamic festivals. One of the most common styles of Muslim dress for men is the *koko* style which resembles male Chinese clothes. The kurta style includes a loose shirt with loose shalwar pants, originally worn in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka. In Indonesia it is mostly worn by male members of the Tablighi Jamaat. The jubba, finally, is an ankle-length garment worn by Indonesians of Arab descent, Salafis, and Indonesians who recently returned from the pilgrimage to Mecca.

With Indonesian Muslim fashion designers becoming active producers in this transnational flow of commodity, they have also been invited to export their styles and to even launch boutiques in other countries like the early example of Anne Rufaidah who exported her designs to Saudi Arabia from 1984 to 1985 and Tuty Adib in Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei. The popularity of Indonesian Muslim fashions has been greatly enhanced through fashion shows held abroad such as those by Anne Rufaidah in Malaysia, Algeria, Dubai, India, and those by Shafira in London and neighbouring countries. In January 2008, Shafira launched its new theme "Unity in Diversity" which aimed to design fashionable clothing suitable for Muslim communities from highly diverse backgrounds. Shafira is also planning to open showrooms in Middle Eastern countries and Southeast Asia.

The media have been crucial in popularizing the work of Indonesian Muslim fashion designers. Muslim women's magazines are full of advertisements promoting Islamic fashion and selling beauty products. The three big magazines focusing on Islamic fashion are *Noor*, *Paras*, and *Alia*, which promote a moderate use of body coverage, such as the use of *kerudung gaul* (street *kerudung*) which consists of a simple veil worn with pants, such as blue jeans, and a tight long-sleeved T-shirt. Two other Islamic magazines that had already emerged earlier are Ummi and Annida. They promote a more body-covering type of Islamic fashion, which mainly consists of a full cloak or a loose tunic with long skirt and a large veil or even unadorned face veil. These journals are strictly against street *kerudung* because it does not cover most parts of a woman's body. Since the turn of the century the Muslim fashion industry has made ample use of websites to propagate its products.

Indonesian designers have also created what has come to be known as *kerudung instan* (instant veil) and *cadar instan* (instant face-veil). They are called instant because they are ready to wear and are designed to fit perfectly so that the wearers do not need accessories such as pins and /or a bandana to tighten their grip. Furthermore, not only have they fashioned new styles, but Indonesian Muslim designers have developed their own fabrics. In 2008, for example, the new trends in Muslim dress use fabrics made of traditional Indonesian *tenun* (traditional weave) while in 2007 batik was very popular. These materials, including also silk, are mostly used for long blouses with pants or skirts and complemented with trendy veils. Even the most conservative styles of Islamic dress, such as the abaya and the face-veil have an "Indonesian touch," as can be seen in typically Indonesian colourful abayas and colourful embroidery and beads on the face-veil.

To sum up, whereas Indonesia has imported styles and designs from abroad, Indonesian designers have turned these into local styles. Whereas it is true that in the past external influences contributed to the introduction of Islamic dress, *busana Muslima* itself is the creation of Indonesian Muslim fashions' designers. They are not only confident of their design skills, but also prefer to use Indonesian cultural products like batik, *tenun*, embroidery, and silk. They have become producers and even propagators of fashionable styles of Muslim dress in these transnational fashion industry circuits.

Eva F. Amrullah is a Ph.D. candidate at the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (RSPAS), Australian National University. She was a fellow at ISIM in 2005.
Email: eva_amrullah@yahoo.com

The Sound of Islam
Southeast Asian Boy Bands

BART BARENDREGT

Since the early 1990s nasyid music has become widely popular among the Islamic youth of Indonesia and Malaysia. Imported from the Middle East, the verbal art attracts proponents particularly in universities, above all among student activists. However, the Middle East is not the sole role model; present-day nasyid music reveals the careful and often delicate mix of religion and pop that is currently so much debated throughout the Islamic world.

The term *nasyid* from the Arabic *nashid* refers to the raising of one's voice and is the generic term for sung poetry traditionally found in such countries as Egypt or Yemen.[1] In modern times *nasyid* has often been linked to the Palestinian Intifadah and the Egyptian Da'wa movement, both of which propagate Islam as a social ideology fighting colonization and the perceived ongoing political and economic oppression by the West. Southeast Asian *nasyid* groups eagerly identify with these traditions from the Islamic heartland and use the verbal art in a similar fashion to comment on the actual situation in the Muslim world, the glory of Allah, and the teachings of His Prophet. Although an art form of long standing, *nasyid* has only become a best seller in Muslim Southeast Asia since Iranian militant cassettes were offered for sale outside mosques in Malaysia in the 1980s. Similar genres were soon imported by Malaysian students who brought cassettes with engaging yet spiritual protest music back home after their studies in countries such as Yemen, Jordan, or Kuwait.

However, the popularity of *nasyid* in Southeast Asian countries can be attributed not simply to its explicit use of religious dogma or militant themes; unquestionably it also touches upon such social issues such as drugs, dropping out of school, and other youth related issues recognizable to younger audiences. Importantly, Southeast Asian *nasyid* has been able to take off with extreme success as the lyrics are sung in the indigenous Malay language, making the contents of the songs more intimate and intelligible to a teenage audience than other religious genres such as *salawat* with their ostentatious use of the Arabic language. Since the mid-1990s *nasyid* has also become popular in Indonesia, achieving great popularity in such cities with large student communities as Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and especially Bandung, where soon scores of *nasyid* ensembles blossomed. As in Malaysia, Indonesian campus life, humming with its student ensembles, inter-university contests, and student activism, was instrumental in promoting *nasyid* music among a generation which was fed up with corrupt politicians and who were insisting on political reforms and a return to old-style moral values through their music and other popular art forms.

Nasyid: the best of East and West?

Whereas proponents of this Campus Islam eagerly trace *nasyid* to its Middle Eastern roots, even as far back as the time of the Prophet Muhammad (some claim that what was supposedly the first *nasyid* song, *tala'a 'l badru 'alaina*, was sung by women who welcomed the Prophet when he arrived in Medina from Mecca), the popularity of Southeast Asian *nasyid* groups can also by explained by another rather more mundane factor: namely the huge success in Asia of such western boy bands as Boyz II Men, Backstreet Boys, or Westlife; bands which all emerged in the same 1990s. As is the case with their western counterparts, an often largely female audience worships *nasyid* singers and the close harmony singing of western boy bands in many instances seems to have served as an additional role model in the musical styling and casual appearance of most of today's *nasyid* groups. Hence *nasyid* music combines the best from the East and West and is very much in tune with a more fashionable and commercial Islamic pop culture which has been branded either Islam Lite, Market Islam, or within the Indonesian context, "15 minute Islam": a combination of life-style politics, youth culture, and yet conveying a very self-assured religious message. It is this "15 minute Islam," with its obvious reference to a Warholian short-lived claim to fame, which reveals the delicacies of re-inventing religion for twenty-first-century public life: how to add enough pop to a religious message to capture the mind of a young and often restless audience while maintaining its spiritual integrity.

The sound of a new Islamic chic

Since the 1980s a new Islamic middle class has been emerging throughout Southeast Asia, most notably in Malaysia and Indonesia, and in the latter country especially the Islamic resurgence has gained real momentum after more freedom was allowed for staging public manifestations of Islam after 1998. The rise of the new Islamic chic and its claim to a publicly visible Islam has shown that religion and capitalism are by no means incompatible. Taking *nasyid* as the soundtrack of this emergent Islamic middle class, it is probably the Malaysian group Raihan which should be regarded as one of the most successful brands in today's *nasyid* industry. Whereas there is a long tradition of Islamic pop music in the Southeast Asian region, both *dangdut* singer Rhoma Irama and the female *qasidah* groups of the 1980s spring to mind, Raihan is the first Muslim pop group to gain truly transnational celebrity status, a fame which even stretches far beyond Southeast Asia.[2] Their 1996 *Puji-Pujian* (Songs of Praise) was Malaysia's best selling album ever, and not long after the group signed a major record deal with Warner, they were doing international tours and cooperated with such renowned artists as Yusuf Islam and lately the UK-based hip hop group Mecca 2 Medina.

Although some seem to take Raihan's popularity as proof of the ongoing Islamization of Malay society, many have praised the group for the casual attitude they have adopted towards Islam. Illustrative of this stance is their experimenting with gospel and hip-hop; Raihan is almost solely reinventing the *nasyid* genre by continually adding new musical flavours to its sound (listen to their 2002 *Gema Alam* album or 2005's *Ameen* for a good introduction to their music). Raihan is also the group which starred in the 2001 movie *Syukur 2001* (Blessings for the Twenty-first Century), a film which was simultaneously released on multiple Asian markets, and was dubbed the world's first-ever Islamic science fiction epic. Islamic pop music is central to much of the film and the main theme, *I'tiraf* (Confession), has since taken its place among the major *nasyid* anthems.[3] Indirectly Raihan's music has many *nasyid* aficionados wondering what an Islamic future should sound like and this question still remains unanswered as the *nasyid* scene is still seeking to expand and makes use of virtually any sort of music around. From all male, female to children's ensembles, ethnic and (pseudo) Chinese *nasyid*, and from poetry, hip hop, to militant and romantic (wedding) *nasyid*, everything has been tried. Simultaneously, this extension of the term *nasyid* has many left asking where religion ends and pop begins.

SNada's campus Islam

The group SNada is the Indonesian answer to Raihan. As do so many of its counterparts, this group has its roots in campus life, and started out against the background of the 1998 mass rallies against the Soeharto regime. The group has since spoken out in support of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), a fundamentalist group which is extremely popular among student activists and urban Islamic youth more generally. SNada (derived from *Senandung Nada dan Dakwah*, literally humming a song while spreading the message of faith) joined with other ensembles to record the cassette-album *Keadilan* (Justice) which was sold for the 2004 elections with the official PKS campaign video. SNada has also shown its political engagement through its other releases, for instance in the album *Air Mata Bosnia* (The Tears of Bosnia). However, SNada is best known for its 2003 hit song *Jagalah Hati*, (Take to the heart) which was written by

the then famed media Muslim preacher Aa Gym (Abdullah Gymnastiar). In the same vein as Raihan, SNada demonstrates a more casual and commercial approach to Islam, having recorded several advertisements (e.g., for the Islamic Banking operations of Bank Mandiri and for travel agencies which organize annual pilgrimages to Mecca).

As have other Indonesian *nasyid* ensembles, SNada has also profited from the lucrative business which has sprung up in *nasyid* ringtones and the many Malay language websites, homepages, and weblogs devoted to *nasyid* music in general. The latter not only reflect the commercial success of the genre up to now, but also its extensive transnational aspirations. The countries of Muslim Southeast Asia are no longer regarded separate markets when it comes to Islamic pop music. It was no coincidence that SNada's 2003 album was called "From Jakarta to Kuala Lumpur" (*Dari Jakarta ke Kuala Lumpur*). *Nasyid*'s new transnationality is reflected in pan-Southeast Asian song contests, and also in the composition of some of the ensembles which consist of multinational members. It somehow shows the awareness of a new geography of the Muslim world in which in many aspects (Muslim entertainment, the use of ICTs and new media, and more generally progressive Muslim thinking) Southeast Asia seems to have become a role model for its Muslim compatriots around the world and the ummah at large.

Discussing the "Sound of Islam"

The market Islam of SNada and Raihan stands in stark contrast to the approaches of such other ensembles as the Indonesian group Izzatul Islam (nicknamed Iziz). Whereas the former ensembles experiment with hip hop and other forms of popular music, the members of Iziz state that the human voice is the sole instrument allowed for religious entertainment, with an exception being made for the frame drum on account of its overt religious associations. Other performers have also wondered how to emphasize religion rather than pop. The Indonesian-born Arab singer Haddad Alwi, for example, has extensively made use of his own roots in Hadrami music adding Arab language and Middle Eastern orchestration to his *nasyid* songs, but other performers explicitly deny the simple relationship between Arab (performing) culture and Islam as a world religion. The group Raihan is even quoted as refraining from employing traditional Arab tunes, instead stressing that its music foremost must be contemporary. One way out of this dilemma has been to claim that not so much *nasyid* or any religious pop music in particular is being performed; the sound they produce is merely world music with a spiritual twist, such as is the case with Malaysian singer Waheeda, the 2003 "*nasyid* sensation."

In short, there is considerable debate about which direction the by now thriving *nasyid* industry should take next. Discussions are not confined to the musical accompaniment, they also focus on the status of female groups or *nasyid* song contests modelled on *American Idols*. In early 2004, the *Forum Nasyid Indonesia* (FNI) organized the first all-Indonesian *nasyid* festival which was broadcast on national television during the fasting month. The festival has led to a fierce debate among *nasyid* enthusiasts, many of them condemning the sheer commercialism of the show and claiming there is only one human being who deserves adoration as an idol, and that is the Prophet Muhammad. Many regretted the absence of *nasyid* performers and true religious experts in the contest jury, with national television companies apparently paying more attention to attitude and outward appearance than spiritual content. Other elements of "15 minute Islam" have similarly come under scrutiny from more orthodox groups. Among such commercial enterprises are religious ring and ring-back tones which are mostly the adapted melodies of *nasyid* songs. Such Indonesian groups as SNada, the Fikr or their Malaysian counterparts Raihan, Brothers, or Rabbani today presumably earn more by selling ring tones than from the regular sale of albums. Taken in conjunction with the rise of such new "poster preachers" as Jefri Al-Buchori and the pop singer turned religious teacher Opick, ring tones and other religious commercialism have prompted many young Muslims to ask if nowadays God is for sale? There is clearly a limit to how pop religion can be.

The future of Islam in a nutshell

The questions of what Islamic music should sound like, the participation of female singers in public, and if God's message should be for sale are just a few points in the ongoing discussion about *nasyid* today. In fact, in a nutshell *nasyid* music deals with most of the challenges with which modern Southeast Asian Muslims see themselves confronted.

PHOTO BY WAN SYAHRIL / © WARNER MUSIC (MALAYSIA), 2005

The popular Malaysian nasyid group Raihan

The use of the Malay language in a tremendously popular genre as *nasyid* has proven not only that young people are in need of a more direct and intimate way of expressing their religious thoughts, it has also added questions about the future of the Islamic world as such. Because of the ongoing popularity of such groups as Raihan and SNada, *nasyid* is slowly globalizing and finding its way into Muslim communities everywhere in the world. Interestingly, it is the Southeast Asian version of *nasyid* which among many is becoming a role model in this process, showing that Muslims are increasingly growing aware that Islam is no longer synonymous with the Arab world. *Nasyid* aficionados from the UK and the Netherlands to Morocco and South Africa increasingly are inspired by their Southeast Asian counterparts, and indirectly getting into touch with other trends and currents within Southeast Asian Islam. Southeast Asian *Nasyid* presents us with a young, urban, and very fast changing version of present-day Islam. It is the everyday Islam of stickers, novels, blogs, and new media which many have recently begun to comment upon. As *nasyid* music illustrates, Islam has increasingly become both ideology and fashion to Muslim youths throughout the world. Whereas the period 2002 to 2005 may have been the heyday of Southeast Asian *nasyid*, at least in terms of output, new *nasyid* music is still being released confronting us with the search for a satisfying compromise between religion and pop in the twenty-first century. Let us keep listening to what this compromise will sound like.

Bart Barendregt is Lecturer at the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology, Leiden University.
Email: Barendregt@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

Notes

1. Arabic *nashīd* (pl.: *anāshīd*) is "song, hymn." The verb stem *nashada* means "to implore, to recite, to sing." *Nasyid* is the standard Indonesian spelling of this term.
2. The Indonesian *dangdut* genre makes use of western instrumentation and when first emerging in the 1970s was extremely amenable to conveying Islamic messages. *Qasidah* was a hybrid genre that was especially popular in the 1980s. It was mainly performed by young women and targeted, like *nasyid*, at Indonesian and Malaysian Muslim youth.
3. On You Tube clips of many of the *nasyid* ensembles and artists discussed here may be easily found. Watch and listen for example to:
   - Raihan's *I'tiraf* (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5NdwWgVC4U);
   - SNada's *Jagalah hati* (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3tyus2W3iA);
   - Hadad Alwi's *Tholama Asyku* (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-_x8Pmntyl);
   - Waheeda's *Wassini* (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QbpVAW3mH6U);
   - and Izzatul Islam's *Jalan Juang* (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EX6siW7Qa9Y).

Good Girls & Rebels

MIRIAM GAZZAH

In a Dutch-Moroccan community which often casts music as immoral, illicit, or inappropriate, female musicians in particular struggle to legitimize their morality and authenticity as Muslims. This article explores the divergent strategies through which two female Dutch-Moroccan artists negotiate their identities as Moroccan, Muslim artists, whether by seeking acceptance or by flagrantly transgressing norms. Whatever the case, the private and public lives of the artists are best understood in light of a normative public discourse which disapproves of their work.

Whether music and performance are permissible in Islam remains a legally and theologically controversial topic. Many Islamic scholars do not claim that music, singing, and performance are forbidden per se, but put restrictions on the kind of music, its lyrics, the audience, and the social environment. These restrictions often stem from associations that are envisioned between music and all kinds of immoral, un-Islamic qualities, such as infidelity, adultery, and idolatry. Additionally, social contexts in which music is performed are often associated with gender mixing, flirtatious behaviour between the sexes, alcohol, and drug abuse. What determines if music and performance are to be considered haram or halal is whether there is a tangible danger of Islamic norms – regarding gender segregation, the respectability of the performers and their audience, and the occurrence of illicit activities – being transgressed.

The position of female artists in many Muslim communities is ambivalent and often controversial. Whereas male performers are considered to make a living for their family, women performers are often put in the same category as prostitutes because they use their sexual bodies to seduce audiences and make money. My fieldwork research shows the prevalence of these ideas among the Dutch-Moroccan community and that even parents do not approve of such career choices for their daughters. The stories of two female Dutch-Moroccan performers, Chadia and Farida,[1] demonstrate that the discourse that considers female performers as immoral and un-Islamic greatly impacts the way they present themselves to their audiences.

Chadia is pre-occupied with her self-portrayal as a decent, proper, and respectable artist.

Coping strategies

Chadia and Farida manage their female, Muslim, Moroccan, and artistic identities each in her own specific way. They adopt different strategies to harmonize these identities and their, sometimes, contradictory significances. Both strive for acceptance by the Dutch Moroccan community and their social environment and to gain respectability as female artists.

Chadia, born in the Netherlands, has been performing since the age of twelve. Her music is a mix of Arab and western styles, which she herself calls "oriental R&B." Farida, a youth worker in her thirties, was born in a small town in Morocco but has lived in the Netherlands since age three. She is a semi-professional lead vocalist in an ethnically mixed band. Both Chadia and Farida do not wear headscarves.

Both of these talented artists have to find ways, albeit different, to deal with the negative image of female singers among the Dutch Moroccan community: their morality and authenticity as Muslima is put to question in discussion forums on the Internet or in random conversations and rumours.

Chadia, *bint el-bled*

Chadia is pre-occupied with her self-portrayal as a decent, proper, and respectable artist. She tries to carry over as a "nice girl," i.e. does not drink alcohol, wear revealing clothes, or socialize with men and people who are associated with alcohol or drugs. Chadia refers to this image as being a *bint el-bled*, literally "country girl."

> Chadia: "I hear it a lot, people telling me that I am normal and that I've just got what Morocco needs. They often say: *bint el-bled*, that's what they always say. And that is really nice to hear. And it doesn't have to be all revealing and open, for all to see [i.e. sexy clothes]."[2]

The expression *bint el-bled* is commonly used in North Africa. In the Maghreb, when a girl is called *bint el-bled*, it is a compliment. The term stands for a female who does not forget her roots, people, and homeland and who shows respect for and conforms to her origins, culture, and traditions, through a particular way of talking, dressing, acting, and behaving. The concept of *bint el-bled* is often used in opposition to the stereotypical concept of the "westernized, immoral woman."[3] Additionally, *bint el-bled* supposedly comes from a family of good standing and is supported by her family. For Chadia this is also the case; her father is her manager, her mother her stylist, and her brothers her biggest fans. Without their support, it would be far more difficult to pursue a career as a singer, as Chadia admits.

Her identification with *bint el-bled* is reflected in how she shapes her musical repertoire, including lyrics most of which are in English or Arabic-Moroccan. Chadia stresses the importance of the suitability of the lyrics with her personality. In due time, Chadia has grown to be very critical of her song lyrics.

> "I just try to take it easy, and finish every thing [the songs] in my own pace … Because, I have noticed how, every time someone else writes a song for me, it is every time just not IT… And yeah, that's why I prefer to write my own lyrics. The lyrics they [producers] write … they are just not that good … That is not my style … Then I think: well I should just stick to my own style. I won't pretend to be someone I am not. It [the lyrics] should represent me."

Thus, Chadia refuses to sing lyrics, which are not "appropriate" for her; she does not drink alcohol, so consequently she will not sing about it – or any other taboo topic – not even when it is used as a metaphor for something else.

Chadia reaffirms her image as *bint el-bled* through her dress style. She dresses "neatly" (not too revealing or sexy) and wears little make-up. She is nevertheless dressed in the latest fashion, often wearing jeans and tops revealing her neck, shoulders, and part of her chest. Her preferences for artists like Alicia Keys and Asala, a contemporary female pop singer from Syria, stem not only from their musical qualities, but also, or even more so, from their images as decent artists:

> "Alicia Keys is really one of my great idols. And Asala as well, because I like simplicity … It doesn't have to be all glamorous and open and revealing [the clothes]. I don't like that at all and Keys is a great example of that. For her it is all about the voice and the music. A nice look is great, but in the end it is the music that counts. With Asala it is the same thing …"

Keeping up appearances and maintaining a good reputation is equally important for Chadia as the suitability of her song lyrics. In response to whether she would perform to, or sing, rai music, she says:

> "… rai, I would never sing rai. Every music genre has its own label, its own reputation. People who sing rai, they are in a totally different world than the world I live in. Such people are totally different from me."

So, singing rai is out of the question because of the bad reputation of the genre and its association with alcohol (ab)use. Not surprisingly, she considers her nice-girl image a sufficient compensation for her being a singer:

> "You know what it is? I don't spread any negative vibes. And I don't say that I will be singing the rest of my life. It is so diverse, I don't do anything bad … I mean, I don't drink, I am not performing on stage half naked, I try to portray a positive image of us, so then they have to understand it a little bit, actually, I think."

Significantly, Chadia does not intend to go on singing for the rest of her life. Dutch-Moroccan youth, when justifying their visits to dance parties, often talk about "becoming serious when they are older." This notion of "becoming serious"[4] refers to the idea that, even though one might not perform all Islamic duties when one is still young, but one is

expected to start doing so as one gets older, often meaning from the moment one gets married. Youth is then considered a stage of life in which you are suspended from certain social and religious duties. As social-cultural norms are inherently linked to religious norms, conforming to social expectations also enhances ones religious status. Being a "good Moroccan," also implicitly implies "being a good Muslim." Hence, the two cannot be truly separated.

Chadia's story corresponds to this holding off of religious duties, in particular the postponement of marriage and the starting of a family, which is expected from a woman in her twenties. Chadia, however, plans to fulfil this duty in the future, when she is finished with her musical career which, she admits, is seen by many of her community as a reprehensible vocation.

Identifying with Islam is important for Chadia, in so far as Islam provides her with some moral guidelines as to whom she can talk to, what to wear, and what to sing about. Her Muslim identity seems to be based not so much on an Islamic spirituality, but on socio-cultural Moroccan-Islamic rules and norms, in which Moroccanness and Muslimness are intimately linked.

PHOTO BY MARIO ANZUONI / © REUTERS, 2008

Alicia Keys, role model for Dutch-Morrocan female singers

Farida, the rebel

Farida is not afraid to be different from other Dutch Moroccans and cross boundaries. Her story shows how she tries to maintain her Moroccan and Islamic identities, while at the same time putting forward a very strong individual, artistic, female identity disconnected from social, cultural, and religious boundaries. Farida deals with issues of social control, maintaining a good reputation, and gender ideology in a very different way from Chadia. Farida is not at all concerned with the kind of reputation she has among the Dutch-Moroccan community:

> "The Moroccans over here, in the Netherlands, really, I find them so strange. In Morocco, it is just normal, much more relaxed; the whole family asking me when the CD will be finished and when I will be performing again …"
>
> MG: "What about the reactions you get here in the Netherlands?"
>
> Farida: "Oh, we've got so many reactions: one of them was that people said that we were possessed [by demons]. Yes, really! So many gossip stories, yeah, the rumour mill … I am just infamous here in my town … But I have always done what I wanted to do, and you guys, you just do what you wanna do."[5]

Accordingly, Farida is not bothered by other people's opinions and does not succumb to the pressure to measure up to Dutch-Moroccan cultural norms. Her family's non-involvement in her musical career also enables Farida to maintain this individual approach. One that becomes particularly clear when she speaks about the future plans of the band:

> "Well, I would like to do this for the rest of my life. When I talk about this to my mother she says: 'Well you cannot do this your whole life, because then you will never find a partner.' Then I say: 'Well, then that is just bad luck!'… I would never stop [singing] because of a man! My mom says that I pay the price for that now, because I am still by myself … But she is just concerned for me … I mean, you should just have the freedom, also within a relationship, to do what you like, to be creative."

Evidently, Farida's mother prefers her daughter to get married and end her musical career. However, by saying that Farida will not get married as long as she makes music, her mother is not judging the religious permissibility of her status as an artist, but is simply acknowledging that female artists are looked down upon. Her mother fears that the Dutch-Moroccan community would consider Farida a "bad Moroccan and a bad Muslima." Nevertheless, Farida is not planning to comply with her mothers' expectations.

Thus, like Chadia, Farida has to deal with the bad reputation of female performers. Whereas Chadia tries to keep these associations away from her by literally distancing herself from people and spaces linked to these associations (alcohol, drugs, and sex), Farida is not afraid to confront these issues.

> "People can get the wrong impression when they see you perform. It is my passion [performing], but in real life I don't like the nightlife at all. I'd rather go to the theatre or to the movies, instead of spending an evening in a sweaty, smoky space, with people bumping into you, throwing beer over you, and making stupid remarks: '*Wesh inti maghrebiyya?* [Are you Moroccan?]. In the beginning, I used to answer them politely, but after a while it really started to get on my nerves … I used to go to rai parties, but once you've been there, then you immediately get labelled 'a whore.' It gave boys the right to come up to you and talk to you, while I just wanted to enjoy the artist's performance …"

Farida is not afraid to attend these socially reprehensible occasions, even though she has been through some bad experiences. Although Farida totally rejects the dominant discourse that frowns upon female performers and all of its negative associations, she cannot escape being confronted by it or dealing with it.

Dutch-Moroccan female singers are constantly subjected to a discourse stating or at least suggesting their low status and questioning their integrity as Muslimas. This discourse is based on religious imagery, which is in turn intrinsically linked to socio-cultural norms of the Dutch-Moroccan community that brackets "Moroccanness" together with "Muslimness." This leads to alternative ways to achieve legitimacy and respectability by Dutch-Moroccan female singers. They use strategies such as conformism or individualism in order to overcome the obstacles and ambivalences with which they are confronted. The choices they make in their professional and private lives in order to justify their career and to strive for acceptance as singers need to be understood within the context of the normative discourse that disapproves of female singers.

Miriam Gazzah was Ph.D. Fellow at ISIM from 2003 to 2007 and recently defended her dissertation *Rhythms and Rhymes of Life: Music and Identification Processes of Dutch-Moroccan Youth* at the Radboud University Nijmegen.
Email: m.gazzah@isim.nl

Notes

1. These are fictive names.
2. Quotations are taken from my interview with Chadia, 23 November 2004.
3. The expression *Bint el-bled* has a prominent place in the rai music subculture and its song lyric repertoire as well. In many songs the male rai singer expresses his preference for *a bint el-bled* over a *gaouria* (female foreigner), because of her "authenticity and respectfulness."
4. Dutch: *serieus worden*.
5. Quotations are taken from my interview with Farida, 7 June 2005.

Purposeful Art
Between Television Preachers and the State

JESSICA WINEGAR

For two of the most popular Egyptian television preachers, Amr Khaled and Moez Masoud, art is central to the project of Islamic Revival. For them, art is a special means of bringing people closer to God, making them more cultured, and building the ummah. The author argues that, intriguingly, their focus on art overlaps with that of the Egyptian state's nation-building and civilizing art projects.

In the early 1990s, the Egyptian government began allotting millions of pounds to art projects in the cultural sector whose goals included creating a modern national culture, uplifting Egyptians' cultural level, and countering what many officials viewed as a rising threat to state secularism coming from both Islamism and the Islamic Revival in general. In the 2000s, two popular new television preachers, Amr Khaled and Moez Masoud, began encouraging the production of *al-fann al-hadif* (purposeful art) to bring Muslims closer to God, build the ummah, raise its cultural level, and counter the threat of immorality and identity loss seen to come from globalization and secularization.[1] This coinciding interest in art as a tool to achieve certain ends suggests an overlapping of state and religious projects that warrants closer scrutiny. On the one hand, both the preachers and some state actors are reinvigorating ideas about art from the Islamic discursive tradition, but often to different ends. On the other hand, the similarities between these two groups suggest an overlap of the civilizing impulses of both state secularism and Islam. To lay groundwork for future research in this vein, more direct attention needs to be paid to the preachers' actual lectures on art.[2]

> . . . the preachers . . . , like the secularist state elites, also seek to correct a population considered to be largely "ignorant" of the value of art.

Art as vital to Islam

Khaled and Masoud have been at the forefront of changing the dominant discourse on art in the Islamic Revival, which previously focused on art's negative aspects and effects. Khaled targets art as a central field for revival in his popular *Life Makers* project, begun in 2004, to spur Muslims to undertake development works to revitalize Islam and their communities. As a result, Internet "teams" have formed devoted to developing aspects of the arts in different countries. Meanwhile, Moez Masoud lectured extensively on art in his 2007 Ramadan programme *The Right Path* and is building an "Artistic Corner" on his website. Khaled and Masoud not only provide audiences with a means to reconcile religious belief with certain kinds of art (e.g., painting, sculpture, music, film, literature); they also urge them to see art as central to their religious practice. Both start by arguing that there is no contradiction between art and Islam. Here they are addressing potential audience concerns, drawn from parts of the Islamic discursive tradition, especially as disseminated by other prominent religious figures such as the late Shaykh Shaarawi, that certain forms of art might encourage immoral behaviour, idolatry, or the vain imitation of God's creation. Yet they draw on other parts of that same tradition to do so; they argue that art constitutes a longstanding means within Islam to come closer to God and to build the ummah.

Both Khaled and Masoud tell their audiences that art is vital to Islam – not only because God's creation *is* art, but also because it is through experiencing art (an earthly reflection of God's beauty) that humans get closer to God. Khaled invokes Quranic verses and various deeds of the Prophet Muhammad to show that God is the source of all art and beauty, that the Prophet valued the arts, and that the arts – including the visual image, poetry, and music – have been among the most effective tools of spreading Islam's message. This, he says, is because Islam, through the Quran, "cultivates the sense of beauty" in human hearts. Masoud makes similar points by relying on a hadith that has been used for centuries to give credence to art: "God is beautiful and loves beauty." Masoud defines art as the "ability to express a particular beauty that God makes visible in our hearts; a specific beauty that our Lord showed us and with which He has guided us." Thus, both preachers argue that because God is the original Creator of all things beautiful in the universe, and because beauty has the power to move the heart, then engaging with art not only shows appreciation for God's work, but, in Masoud's words, helps us "remember God." Art, then, is conceptually likened to dhikr, that important act of remembering God in Islam. This relationship between beauty, art, the heart, and remembrance of God has been a key element of Sufi philosophy for centuries.

Masoud also makes the very significant claim that art is a *fard* (obligation) for Muslims. In his view, to deny art is to deny God, because art is a reflection of God. Furthermore, God endowed some humans with artistic talent, and therefore to reject art-making is to deny God's gift. Not only that, he says, but artists are compelled to use that talent to remind others of God. Art is an *adah* (tool) that artists can use to move hearts in the right direction, especially in these times. Herein lies another central reason for Masoud's insistence on art that again has roots within the Islamic discursive tradition. Because art has a special capacity to enter the heart and move it, immoral things made today that "are called art" can also enter the heart and move it toward illicit *shahawat* (desires). Therefore, beautiful art is needed now to help people reject these dangerous, impostor forms of art, and to remind people of God's beauty.

State actors draw on some of the same Islamic texts as the preachers, but also highlight European Enlightenment and Nasserist/socialist discursive sources. In so doing, they seek to create different kinds of subjects and communities. The hadith quoted by Masoud has been especially favoured in modern Egyptian state contexts. For example, it is frequently used by state visual art college imams and professors trying to set concerned Muslim students at ease so that they can learn art in order to build the nation; and it is quoted by graduates and practicing artists when trying to convince religious sceptics of their artistic practice. Sufi philosophy is also the main source of Islamic inspiration for artistic practice, though there are non-religious sources which are more prominent. But in state contexts, art is only rarely presented as a way to come closer to and remember God, or to move the heart away from illicit desires. Rather, it is presented as a way to express individuality and Egyptian identity. Khaled and Masoud seek to create proper Muslim artists, while the state seeks to create secular-national artists.

Art to build community

The preachers do share with state actors the view that art is an especially helpful tool for building a cultured community. Yet although both preachers speak positively of national communities – Masoud

COURTESY OF MEHWAR CHANNEL, 2008

Still from a commercial for Moez Masoud's 2008 Ramadan programme

argues that Muslims need not give up love for the *watan* (nation) when they come closer to God, and Khaled's *Life Makers*' projects are also oriented to fixing situations in individual countries – it is more the Islamic ummah to which they refer. Khaled develops this idea the most. He makes the significant claim that art is the most dangerous field of the twenty three he targets for *al-Nahda* (revival), but not for the commonly expected reason. Spending little time on the question of immorality, he tells them that it is "ignorant" to think that art is shameful. He then goes on at length defining culture as that related to (1) education and high/literate arts ("books, theatre, cinema, poetry, novels, museums, monuments, old manuscripts, painting, sculpture, plastic arts, acting, and songs"); and (2) "the malamih (defining features) of the ummah." He links both by arguing that art is a primary means for giving the ummah defining features of quality, instead of cheap importations of western artistic features (e.g., western images in video clips, Turkish and western musical forms).

Several times he returns to his central point: the *Nahda* cannot proceed without first having art "pave the way." In sum, if a central goal of the awakening is to build the ummah, then to succeed the ummah needs to have defining features, or art that gives the Islamic community its unique visual, aural, and literary identity. Only artists can provide this, but currently many are imitating western art. By reminding them of the potential consequences of their actions on Judgment Day, Khaled intends to draw all artists closer to Islam, as well as to implore them to use their God-given talent for a larger cause. He is also asking his audience to help him reach artists, telling them: "We will not be able to carry out the *Nahda*" without art. Similarly, Masoud makes the eradication of western imitation and building an Islamic identity one of the three core goals of his television show *The Right Path*.

The way that these preachers, especially Khaled, discuss art as a tool of progress and ummah-building bears similarities to that of Islamic scholars of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century al-Nahda movement (e.g., Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh). Like these scholars, the preachers seek to revitalize Islam for a modern project and rely on the Islamic discursive tradition to do so. Their ultimate goal is to create a modern and cultured Islamic ummah, filled with art-appreciating Muslims. Yet Khaled's positive reference to arts and culture in 1950s Egypt compels us to consider the influence on preachers of Nasser-era cultural development discourses, which still proliferate in the state cultural sectors today. Indeed, Khaled's emphases on building institutions of high art and culture, on combating the "ignorance" of those with low cultural levels who do not understand the benefits of art, and on preserving and defining identity in the face of western influence are exactly those emphases of state elites today, with the important exception that the main identity with which he is concerned is an Islamic one. Furthermore, when Khaled exclaims, "where are the museums and exhibitions of fine art and paintings?!" and then offers London's Hyde Park as an exemplar of high art for the public, he uses a rhetorical strategy that has characterized state press calls for raising the cultural level of the nation for two decades. For both preachers and state arts officials, western art and institutions are something whose level (when ethical) should be emulated in building community, but whose features should not be imitated. Yet for state actors, art must avoid western imitation in order for it to give a distinctive identity to the Egyptian nation; whereas for the preachers, art must do so in order to give defining characteristics to the ummah.

[The] ultimate goal is to create a modern and cultured Islamic ummah, filled with art-appreciating Muslims.

A new art and culture?

The preachers' positive approach to art should not be understood as entirely new, then, but rather as a reinvigoration of earlier Islamic discourses on art, including those from the turn-of-the-century Nahda movement in Egypt, and perhaps also as a recurrence of some Nasser-era developmentalist approaches to art and culture. Yet the fact that both the Egyptian government's and lay preachers' interests in the arts coincide today demands that we consider the significance of the relationship between the two. The appearance of a positive preacher focus on art some ten years after the beginning of a concerted government effort to support art and culture projects suggests some areas of influence, particularly since these preachers and their core constituency of fans are from the same urban, educated, upper middle classes as those who visit arts institutions and attend state-sponsored arts events. On the one hand, the preachers' projects could be understood as a specific attempt to counteract the Mubarak government's project to secularize society in large measure through the arts, by opening a space to define artists as "Muslim," and culture as "Islamic," rather than (or instead of) just "Egyptian." On the other hand, the preachers could be understood as operating in tandem with the state's civilizing mission through art. It is clear that the preachers see a need for Islamic "high" art and culture, yet the category of art as they have defined it thus far differs little from that promoted by state programmes. Furthermore, they, like state elites, call for art at the same time that they denounce violent acts perpetrated by Muslims as "misunderstandings" of Islam. Both groups' notions of progress rest on a cultural hierarchy that privileges the styles and knowledges of their shared social backgrounds. And although the preachers seek primarily to edify the ummah, they, like the secularist state elites, also seek to correct a population considered to be largely "ignorant" of the value of art.

Notes

1. For more on the art and artists influenced by this phenomenon, see the articles by Patricia Kubala and Karin van Nieuwkerk in *ISIM Review*, no. 20 (Fall 2007), and Karim Tartoussieh, "Pious Stardom: Cinema and the Islamic Revival in Egypt," *Arab Studies Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 30–43.
2. For more on state arts projects as discussed here see Jessica Winegar, *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

Jessica Winegar is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Temple University and the author of *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).
Email: winegar@temple.edu

Al-Huda & its Critics
Religious Education for Pakistani Women

FAIZA MUSHTAQ

In the past decade Pakistan has witnessed the emergence of Al-Huda, an institute offering religious education to women. Its popularity is greeted with hostile scepticism by many in Pakistan. Male religious scholars, feminists, and the mainstream media are amongst those who disagree with the practices of these women and their vision of moral reform. The author argues that by introducing women in new roles Al-Huda disrupts traditional structures for transmitting religious learning.

The Al-Huda International Institute of Islamic Education for Women started as a small religious academy for women in Islamabad in 1994. Since then it has mushroomed into a well-organized movement with branches in large and small cities all across Pakistan, and now abroad as well. Dr. Farhat Hashmi, its founder and leader, has become a household name through her lecture tours, radio show, books, and cassettes. The primary activity Al-Huda offers is education in religious subjects that is intended to supplement rather than replace secular academic credentials, and by now thousands of Pakistani women have passed through these training courses. Hashmi herself is not a traditionally trained scholar but has a Ph.D. in Islamic Studies from Glasgow University.

The women of Al-Huda belong to the urban educated classes in Pakistan and span all age ranges. Many graduates from the school go on to serve as teachers and organizers of new branches, as well as conducting informal gatherings at private residences where women can be present in large numbers. The opportunities for congregation and leadership roles that are provided to women are new for many, as is the chance to study the Quran collectively and not just alone at home. Earlier initiatives at offering religious instruction for Pakistani women have either tended to remain informal and localized, or have been subsidiary units of larger male-run madrasas catering mostly to lower socio-economic classes. Al-Huda's education is distinctive in this context as it gives women the tools to approach, understand, and actively engage with the religious texts and also puts this learning at the service of a broader moral vision of character training and social reform.

This education takes the form of rigorous one-and-a-half year diploma courses, less intensive certificate courses, programmes for children and for teenagers, short courses during summer, and in the special months of the Islamic calendar. All of them share a basic format and teaching philosophy. The main emphasis is on study of the Quran in three ways: a) Arabic recitation and listening; b) literal, word for word translation to memorize the basic vocabulary; and c) in-depth contextual explanation of each verse that also relates it to contemporary, practical concerns. Different courses include a mix of other subjects that supplement this core of Quranic study.

Hashmi's followers explain her appeal by referring to her prowess as a teacher, her ability to communicate fluently in English, Urdu, and Arabic, her logical building of arguments where she identifies the source of each opinion rather than invoking blind trust, and her devotion to her work. However she has attracted much criticism and controversy that has snowballed alongside her fame and the increasing visibility of her followers. Her critics come in various stripes but can be grouped into two categories. One is centred around the male scholars of Islam, or ulama, who have traditionally been the interpreters of religion and who perceive Hashmi and her brand of religious education as posing an alternative power structure and a challenge to their own authority. The other is a looser grouping of men and women who identify themselves as belonging to the secular, liberal, educated segments of Pakistani society which include feminist and human rights activists, professionals, and members of the intelligentsia, who see the increasing presence of religion in public life as a threat to their progressive worldview and lifestyles.

Between two fires

These two groups of critics level charges at Al-Huda and Hashmi that seem to be mirror opposites of each other. The ulama find her lacking in qualifications that would equip her to interpret core religious texts and reject her innovative pedagogical style on the basis of its rupture with traditional modes of learning. They are also horrified by the elevation of women to visible public roles as teachers and preachers of Islam. By casting doubts on the education Hashmi herself has received in the West, they go so far as to portray her as an agent of vested interests rooted in a western secular liberal ideology and her movement as a conspiracy to distort Islam so as to lure true believers away from religion. In their evaluation of the group's practices, views and aims, the traditionalist ulama find it to be too modern.

On the other hand, the second group of critics claims that Al-Huda's "brand of Islam is as retrogressive as the mullahs, but because she [i.e. Hashmi] is educated, speaks out against the religious right and is a woman, other women find her teachings more acceptable and legitimate."[1] In the English-language media and in conversations amongst the Pakistani intelligentsia, the movement is regularly described using epithets like "reactionary," "dogmatic," "fundamentalist," "conservative," "anti-feminist," and lambasted for being out of tune with the needs of contemporary women. In other words, they find it to be not modern enough. They have their own version of a conspiracy theory to explain Al-Huda's rise, claiming that Hashmi "epitomizes hard-core, doctrinaire orthodoxy – a worldview which appears to be gaining strength as a result of ambitious funding from certain quasi-governmental organizations in Saudi Arabia and Yemen."[2] These contradictory evaluations of Al-Huda by different groups of outsiders speak of a more general ambivalence about how the group ought to be categorized. The familiar dichotomies between the traditional vs. the modern, conservative vs. progressive, and above all between fundamentalist/ religious vs. secular/liberal are unsettled when applied to this particular women's movement. This confusion is visible in such reports: "Now at social gatherings, women wearing the hijab are increasingly seen alongside those in sleeveless dresses. With religion the new 'in' thing, it is questionable who is now the modern woman."[3]

Religious expertise and contested credentials

The ulama in Pakistan have been vociferous in their attacks on Farhat Hashmi and her credentials, as well as on the credibility of the entire enterprise she has launched. They argue that she has not been through the eight-year course of education that a religious scholar traditionally has to go through in South Asian Islam. Further, her higher education credentials are of doubtful merit in the eyes of the ulama for having been acquired in a western university under the supervision of non-Muslims who themselves are not qualified for Quranic interpretation. For the ulama, she clearly does not have the authority or capability to interpret and comment on the canonical religious texts of Islam. Her students, having received one or two years of Islamic education at Al-Huda, are not seen as being equipped to teach the Quran either.

Many ulama from prominent Islamic schools in Pakistan have issued *fatwas* (formal opinions) on the work being carried out at Al-Huda, in

response to questions and concerns raised by members of the public. In rejecting Hashmi's authority they explicitly invoke the weight of their own qualifications and the historical evolution of their own role as guardians of the sacred knowledge. Moreover, they see themselves as being comparable to specialists in other fields such as lawyers and doctors. They claim her approach assumes that the text of the Quran can be understood and interpreted only through translation, as if there is a direct correspondence of meaning to words, and dismisses the technicalities involved in Islamic law and theology, and ignores the depth of issues and the evolution of scholarly opinions, debates, and consensus. By chucking out 1400 years of intellectual history, she wants to turn religion into a matter of convenience and expediency. On the other hand, her lay critics argue that Hashmi's "interpretation is dogmatic, fails to recognize the essential flexibility of Islam and that she is engaged more in developing a cult than encouraging a true understanding of religion."[4]

Most of those who have been involved with the group grew up having read the Quran and being exposed to the basic teachings of Islam, and few of them doubt the religiosity of their mothers and grandmothers. Yet all agree that they have been introduced to something new through Al-Huda classes, i.e. a better, more powerful way of understanding the Quran. Instead of rote memorization, they learn to appreciate the Arabic language of the text, the significance of each verse and its relation to history and context, and what relevant personal meaning to extract from it. Similarly, in her own statements, all Hashmi takes credit for is unlocking the power of the text for her students. She emphasizes the need to make the Quran approachable and relevant to all lives, and not let it remain only the subject of specialized discourses. The difference between her approach and that of the ulama is noted by enthusiastic participants: "I always wanted to study Islam in greater depth but balked when hearing the mullahs talk of heaven and hell and the *purdah* (veil)… It [Al-Huda's] is a very practical, very precise version of Islam."[5]

PHOTO BY FAIZA MUSHTAQ, 2008

Inside an Al-Huda classroom

Class and gender concerns

One of the most frequent criticisms of Al-Huda is that it targets women from the well-to-do urban upper and middle classes, and consequently the newfound religiosity of these women can be suspected and brushed aside as a short-lived fad. One of the ulama scornfully points out that "they book expensive halls in the hotels and clubs of the big cities, where fashionable women congregate in the name of attending a dars-e-Quran."[6] Media reports are full of comments like: "These women spend hours at these religious sermons and could well spend that time doing some positive social work" … "It is also a cleansing issue. Many amongst our elite are corrupt to the bone. So the women of these houses now want to cleanse themselves."[7] This assumption blinds the critics to the full array of activities and membership that in fact characterize the group and limits the scope of public attention to their most visible, high-profile converts and events. Wealthy elites continue to be important in the organization's expansion but a lot of the growth has come from middle-class urban neighbourhoods, and regular courses attract a diverse composition of enrolled students.

The ulama in Pakistan disagree especially strongly with Hashmi's interpretation of Islamic custom which states that women are allowed to go and pray at a mosque rather than in the privacy of their homes, and condemn her for not displaying appropriate modesty herself by appearing on the media and travelling internationally. On the other hand, the feminist and secular-liberal critics are disturbed by her and her followers' conservatism, especially their practice of veiling themselves, and of not questioning unequal gender roles within the family and community. They decry the conservative interpretations of the Quran and the unquestioning acceptance of the group leader's views that these classes offer, as well as the confinement of these women to their roles as compliant housewives.

Activism

Al-Huda's innovations as a religious movement lie more in its organizational practices and teaching methods than in its interpretive strategies, and much of Hashmi's intellectual output is based on conventional sources and reformist critiques of Islam. She challenges the more orthodox teachings of male Pakistani scholars on issues like ritual obligations and restrictive practices for women, leaving some scope for flexibility and contextual understanding, but does not offer a thoroughgoing critique of existing gender relations or contentious Quranic verses in her lectures. She does, however, keep repeating a passionate call for women to gain a well-rounded education, while many of her students and alumni pursue educational and professional careers. Al-Huda participants do not necessarily see themselves as making a choice between their spiritual and moral awakening, on the one hand, and their participation in the public sphere, on the other. Hashmi herself says: "Although I believe that the woman is in charge of the domestic arena, I don't think it should limit you as a productive member of society … For example, every human being has the responsibility to educate themselves and others … We don't have time to spend in trivial pastimes."[8]

Hashmi occasionally refers to herself as an "Islamic feminist," and both terms in the label are contested by outsiders. Al-Huda is positioned to offer an alternative to the two extremes that flourished during the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980's – the state-sanctioned, male-dominated, and orthodox version of Islam and the stridently secular feminism of its opponents in the women's movement – while selectively utilizing elements of both. Hashmi and her followers emerged against the backdrop of improved access to higher education, mobility, and employment for urban women, and the absence of opportunities for women in mainstream Islamic institutions in Pakistan. The activism of Al-Huda participants is driven by moral concerns, and their enterprise of Islamic education reflexively links the goals of personal and social transformation. The most significant impact of the movement, however, might lie in its disruption of traditional structures and authorities for transmitting religious learning, by the introduction of women in these new roles.

Faiza Mushtaq is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology at Northwestern University.
E-mail: faizamushtaq@gmail.com

Notes

1. Eman Ahmed, "Not the Only Way," *Fundamentalisms: A Web Resource for Women's Human Rights*, September 2004.
2. "Farhat Hashmi operating in Canada," *Daily Times*, 6 May 2005.
3. Sahar Ali, "Pakistani women socialites embrace Islam," *BBC News Online*, 6 November 2003.
4. Kamila Hyat, "Letter from Lahore – Hijab is new fashion statement among wealthy," *Gulf News*, 7 March 2001.
5. Ali, "Pakistani women…"
6. *Maghribi Jiddat Pasandi aur Al-Huda International* [Western Modernism and Al-Huda International] edited by Mufti Abu Safwan (Pakistan: Jamhoor-e-Ahlu Sunnat wal Jamat, n.d).
7. Kamal Siddiqi, "Dars of Pakistan," *Stringer.it*, at http://www.stringer.it/Stringer%20Schede/STORY/Stringer_story_karachi2.htm.
8. "Empowering women through Holy Quran," *Gulf News*, 14 November 2002.

Religious Conviction & Social Activism

Muslim Women in Rotterdam

HANNAH LEYERZAPF

This article considers the connections between internal religious commitment and social activism through the life stories of Dutch-Moroccan women vigorously promoting gender equality in their communities. For these women, religious commitment spills outwards from personal conviction into physical demonstrations of religiosity, personal development, and consciousness raising. It is their individual identity as Muslims, and not their Moroccan or Dutch heritage, which determines the ways these women participate in Dutch public life.

Leila by now knows more about Islam than her parents. Together with Selma she studies classical Arabic, so that they can read the Quran for themselves. Selma has a Turkish background and is the only woman in her family who goes to the mosque for prayer. A few years back, Halima took a radical decision. She "gave up her job and house," and broke off her engagement, started anew and became a conscious and practising Muslim. On Sundays, these three students – Halima studies social welfare, Selma architecture, and Leila education – attend the sermons in the mosque Dar al-Hijra given by imam Adil, a young history student, whose voice is so "beautiful and gripping." Four other women, Faizah, Hafsa, Badiah, and Raouda, recently started studying again as well, wanting to set an example for other Muslim women. They had married, had children, and then started doing voluntary work. Now they form the women's commission of the "social-cultural organization Ettaouhid" and want to make Muslim women conscious of their abilities to develop themselves within Islam.

"We want emancipation and development from within Islam."

Their life stories illustrate the choices and views of several Dutch-Moroccan women, who are active in Rotterdam as teachers and organizers in local associations and whose inner religious conviction, self-development, social responsibility, and engagement seemed to be connected. They are consciously participating as Muslim women in society as an expression of their true belief in personal responsibility and Islamic duties and virtues, and as ways of getting closer to God. For them, being a good Muslim not only comprises a true and just inner conviction, but applying that to day-to-day activities as well. The spiritual equality of men and women, central to this true Islam, forms the basis on which the women proclaim equal worthiness of men and women, Muslims and non-Muslims within Dutch society. Through activities in which they link up religious ideas and ideals with actual, social matters, they strive for equal treatment of Muslim women by their husbands, families, and the Dutch Muslim community, and press for more knowledge and a more positive image of Islam and (Moroccan) Muslims within society as a whole. Faizah, trainer with SMACCV, a cultural centre for Dutch-Moroccan women on women's rights and the Quran, claims that:

> "Muslim women should not stop working or studying when they get married, because they are expected to take care of the children … I want these women to participate … Knowledge and development, and striving for an objective in life, these are obligations in Islam! Muslim women in the Netherlands should first of all realise the importance of language, study and education."

Women's meeting at Ettaouhid

COURTESY OF SPIOR, 2008

Self-development

These women experienced certain personal developments upon becoming practising Muslims. Notably, their outlook on the hijab, which most of them only recently started wearing. Badiah started to wear a headscarf, after she had been married for quite a while, and stresses that this had nothing to do with the views of her parents or her husband. Zaineb just started wearing Islamic clothing and the hijab from one day to the next. Like Halima, she remarks she always paid a lot of attention to how she looked and was particularly proud of her hair; one night, however, she dreamed she was standing before God, woke up sweating, and decided that veiling was her individual spiritual responsibility and necessity. Some of the women describe these developments as a gradual, step-by-step and greatly unconscious transition. Others, like Zaineb, seem to have made a very conscious and radical change.

Fundamental to their decisions, these women explain, is the development of a new spiritual consciousness. They say they had "missed something" in their lives, had not felt "completely themselves" and were more like "roaming." Selma and Leila explain their attitude to veiling: "you have to wear the hijab but only if you personally want to do so and feel the need in your heart; you have to have the right intention otherwise your wearing it will have no meaning"; while Raouda adds, "many Moroccan women wear this on cultural grounds nowadays, without realizing the spiritual and religious purpose of getting close to God, and this is wrong." Contrary to many Dutch Muslims who proclaim belief in or with their heart, those women state that "to practice completely and be a good and true Muslim you have to show your belief to the world around you and act accordingly."

These women volunteer for good deeds to obtain extra religious merit and gain spiritual closeness. A few years ago, around the time Leila started wearing the hijab, both she and Selma decided not to shake hands with men any more. Selma even considers discontinuing her studies, because she feels uncomfortable working as a Muslim

woman in such a "men's world." Like the women from Dar al-Hijra and Ettaouhid, Zaineb started to study again and switched from finance to teaching. Married mothers like Zaineb seem to see their voluntary work and studying as marking a new phase for them, consciously expanding their role as wife and mother, by committing to others in society. As such, practising true Islam gives them a sense of inner peace and strengthened self-worth.

Striving for equality

Besides their personal development, many of these women target the development of Dutch Muslim women, and the Dutch Muslim community in general. In this context Badiah, Hafsa, and Raouda, like Faizah, claim that many Muslim women lack an understanding of the central duties of Islam and therefore hold on to women-unfriendly conceptions and practices, which are generally supported within Dutch Moroccan and Muslim communities. Independently Hafsa and Halima point to the mental health problems many Muslim women in Rotterdam are suffering from, due to social and economical pressures that they face as Moroccan and Muslim women migrants. Hafsa, who studies to be a spiritual caretaker, states: "especially through my work and contacts at Ettaouhid, I noticed that there are so many women with mental problems. Yes, perhaps it has to do with alienation from society … another culture, a completely different life – it's a big step and you get so much fear and doubt in society … Also if you have a real traditional Moroccan husband at home: you can't do this, you can't do that. It plays a big part in pressuring women and causing these mental problems." Besides organizing activities within the mosque, Halima acts as a social worker for the female visitors. She relates: "I provide guidance to women who really need it. Women come here with a lot of problems. The threshold is low here … I refer them to the physician, for instance … and it helps, so … my objective is being fulfilled here." Leila and Selma mention the overall passivity of Dutch-Moroccan women and criticize the fact that Islam is often used to legitimize women staying at home, although this is not right according to "true Islam."

Ettaouhid, Dar al-Arqam, and SPIOR regularly organize meetings where Islam and the position and rights of women within their "own" community are discussed. With projects like the one coordinated by Rajaa, concerning the issue of forced marriages, the women strive to address the community as their collective responsibility to denounce gender inequality. The project on forced marriages thus tries to involve not only young Muslim women themselves, but also their parents and the young Muslim men, because as Rajaa says: "… a lot of the parents think that this is the way it should be done according to Islam, but in the Quran it is written exactly the other way round! The rights of the Muslim woman are obscured by culture. We want emancipation and development from within Islam." Emina, a former teacher of empowerment trainings, believes that giving Islamic guidance is a logical undertaking, because Islam stimulates women to think critically. "Muslim women," Emina states, "… have to use the traditions to empower women."

Social engagement

The women are seriously committed to Dutch society. Although they do not participate physically in public or political debates – in fact they made clear they do not aspire to be on national television or to become political figures – they do actively discuss the position of Islam, Muslim women, and Dutch Moroccan citizens in society. They try to include non-Muslims as well. Through informational and discussion meetings, they concentrate on "distinguishing true and just Islam, from negative culture and cultural traditions," distancing themselves from the women-unfriendly, violent and undemocratic, image of Islam as it is represented in media, politics, and public discourse in the Netherlands. Basing their religious practices and belief first of all on the Quran, as the literal word of God, they describe Islam as entailing love, tolerance, personal freedom, individual responsibility, and equal worthiness. In this light Halima, Selma, Leila, and other women from their mosque formed a women's group called Seal of Prophecy. They invited Muslims and non-Muslims from the neighbourhood to spend an afternoon of dialogue across religions. While leaving, everybody received a rose as token of intercultural understanding, respect, and tolerance.

While the women want to reach out to Dutch society, they feel it does not appreciate them. They make clear they continuously feel discriminated against and excluded as Dutch-Moroccan Muslim women. Former students Saïma, Farhat, and Bushra from Dar al-Arqam, all had difficulty finding jobs because of their religion and background. Zaineb, teacher in Rotterdam, tells about her recurring problems arranging internships for her students; companies admit to her over the telephone, not to accept someone with a Moroccan name and wearing the headscarf, not realizing that Zaineb, who has an explicit Rotterdam accent, was born in Morocco and wears hijab too. According to the women, non-acceptance by Dutch non-Muslim society has slowly increased after September 11 and the murder of Theo van Gogh. Moreover, Badiah remarks it especially affects the younger generation of migrants, "ironically those who just don't know better than to be Dutch." Emotionally she adds:

> "In the last years you feel it [being discriminated against] very explicitly and then you think: should I go back? I never felt it but my children, they feel it now … and that's bizarre!… where does this lead to? Because we try to integrate as much as possible and to my feeling we are – while keeping our own identity! … And still you have to prove yourself every time, do your children have to prove themselves every time?"

Feeling neither fully included within Dutch national identity nor a Moroccan one, these women say they feel "first and foremost" Muslim. Indeed, being practising Muslims is the only way they can be "truly themselves." It forms an alternative to being Dutch and native (autochtonous), or Moroccan and foreign (*allochtonous*); identities all of which do not fit or suffice them. Badiah explains: "because we don't feel we are ór Dutch ór Moroccan … but we just don't belong with anything … So those youths went looking for themselves – I don't belong here, I don't belong there. Where can I hold on to?! – To being a Muslim, because that's an identity, because then I can say that is truly mine …"

For these women, being a good Muslim involves both an internal, spiritual conviction and a publicly visible commitment to social action. This action, directed at improving the lives of Muslim women in the Netherlands, is inspired by the strength and nature of their internal commitment to a "true" Islam. They expand their spiritual consciousness beyond an internal faith and into physical demonstrations of religiosity, personal development, social action among Muslim women, and consciousness raising among the broader Dutch public. In each of these cases the women return to their religious belief as the inspiration for their social action and as their justification for the claims they make to women's rights. It is no wonder that women such as these identify themselves as Muslim before Dutch or Moroccan, when the social activism that characterizes their daily life is connected so wholeheartedly to their personal religious convictions.

For these women, being a good Muslim involves … a publicly visible commitment to social action.

Hannah Leyerzapf obtained an M.A. in Cultural Anthropology and Sociology of Non-Western Societies from the University of Amsterdam in 2007.
Email: h.leyerzapf@gmail.com

Muslim Organizations in Poland

DOBROSŁAWA WIKTOR-MACH

Poland's Muslim population is comprised of two distinct communities: Polish Tatars and Muslim immigrants. Despite demographic and ethnic differences, the groups resemble one another in their insistence that Muslims in Poland are not impervious to assimilation and modernization. Through the approaches of Euro-Islam, as adopted by the Polish Tatars, and *Wasatiyya*, promoted by Muslim immigrants, these Muslims grapple to find a response to radicalism and to present a moderate face to their fellow Poles.

In November 2006, the Muslim League of Poland co-organized a conference entitled "Integrating Muslims in Central-Eastern Europe." The aim was to broadcast positive examples of social and cultural integration by Muslims, and to promote the concept of *Wasatiyya* (from Ar. *wasat*, middle), or what has become known as "Islamic Centrism." Forged in response to interactions between Muslim countries and the West, the proponents of *Wasatiyya* seek to construct a positive European-Muslim identity. In so doing, they reconsider the relevance and application of Sharia to modern Muslim environments.[1]

Though Muslims from Russia, Arab countries, and Iran first arrived in Poland in the nineteenth century and subsequent waves of Arab, Iranian, and Afghani Muslims blended into Polish society during the 1970's and 80's, the country's Muslim population only started to increase significantly from 1989, when the Soviet Union began to lose its grip on the surrounding provinces. While there is no official data, researchers and Muslim leaders estimate that there are now around twenty to thirty thousand Muslims in Poland. Some of the reasons why foreign Muslims come to Poland include: benefiting from business opportunities, studying, reconnecting with family, and escaping conflict in their own countries. The majority of Poland's Muslims come from Arabic speaking countries: Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Algeria, Iraq, and Tunisia. But Muslims from Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, post-Soviet states, and Africa (mainly Somalia) have also recently taken up residence in the country. Likewise, large numbers of Muslims have arrived from the North Caucasus as a result of the second Chechen war which started in 1999. (Indeed, over 80 percent of all refugees in Poland are currently Chechens.) From a different perspective, a growing number of ethnic Poles are converting to Islam. Among these are Orientalists, Arabists, artists, young people searching for spiritual meaning, and those embracing Islam to marry. Members of these groups tend to join such organizations as the Association of Muslim Students, and, since its establishment in 2001, the Muslim League in Poland.

The Tatar community

Islam in Poland is diversely expressed; there are even small Shiite and Ahmadiyya communities, though their influence is relatively insignificant. By far the most populous group, Sunni Muslims, is divided between two main sub-groups: the historically well established Polish Tatars; and members of the aforementioned Muslim League. Poland's "indigenous" Muslims, the Polish Tatars, have been living in Poland since the fourteenth century. They are often presented as a model example of successful integration. While undergoing profound acculturation – their social and economic situation does not differ from that of other ethnic Poles – they nevertheless manage to retain their Muslim faith. The Tatars emphasize their attachment to Poland and their contribution to its development. Many Tatars identify themselves as Poles of Tatar origin. Under the communist regime, a decline in Islamic practice and knowledge among the Tatars was observed, but nowadays a cultural and religious revival is taking place within the same circles.

Before the outbreak of the WWII, Tatar leaders set up *muftiat* (Islamic council) headed by a mufti, which provided for the imams' education, and for the religious needs of the community. In 1925, the Muslim Religious Association was established; thereafter, the Tatars managed to pass the Act on the Relations between the Polish State and the association. Because of their industriousness, those Muslims arriving in Poland during the last decades of the twentieth century found a well-organized Muslim community in good relations with the state.

The Muslim League

Poland's Muslim League, by contrast, is a relatively new organization, which despite its lack of experience has proved enormously popular among Polish Muslims especially recent immigrants, refugees, and Polish converts. There are already eight local centres in the main cities in Poland and, although formal membership is limited, it appears likely that many other Muslims are engaged, at some level, in their activities. Arabs seem to play a vital role among its active members. From an international perspective, the Muslim League pushes for the development of contacts with Western European Muslim organizations, such as the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe. Most importantly, the Muslim League is the main proponent of *Wasatiyya*.

Despite their success in Polish society, the newcomers have so far distanced themselves from the Tatars. This has led to an air of competition between the two groups. In 2004, the Muslim League gained the status of an Islamic religious association, a status previously limited to the Muslim Religious Association founded by the Tatars. In riposte, two months later, the Tatars appointed a young Tatar, Tomasz Miskiewicz, as Mufti of Poland.

Paradoxically, instead of trying to help each other out, the two comparably moderate organizations now struggle for leadership over Poland's Muslim communities. Both present an Islamic solution compatible with the values of liberal democracy to radicalism. Likewise, both groups make an effort to present Islam to Catholic Poles; and to combat the damaging stereotypes that have arisen since 2001. The Tatars emphasize their patriotism, referring to historical ties with Polish society. Conversely, the League's newcomers prefer ideological arguments and the reinterpretation of Islamic concepts to argue their cause. Tatar intellectuals, such as Selim Chazbijewicz describe Tatar religious ideas as "Euro-Islam"; while Muslim League scholars, such as Samir Ismail, highlight the importance of *Wasatiyya*.[2] Thus, in different ways, both groups work at the same task.

The nature of the relationship between Tatar and non-Tatar Muslims is complex. Many members of the Tatar community, especially the older generation, stress cultural differences between their group and the Arabs (the largest percentage of Muslim immigrants in Poland). The newcomers point to elements in the Tatar tradition that contradict "pure Islam" (e.g. the buying of Christmas trees) and criticize Tatars for their insufficient religious knowledge and lackadaisical habits in worship. Pressure from Arab activists has made some Tatars avoid further contacts. Aware of the risk of being marginalized, other Tatars see potential advantages to cooperation. Moreover, such relationships can contribute to a revival of religious feeling among Tatars. In Bialystok, for instance, an important Muslim centre in northeastern Poland, incoming students from Muslim countries organize religious lessons and other activities for the Tatar youth.

Transforming Islamic traditions

The Tatars have managed to assimilate into Polish society while maintaining their Muslim identities. It has been a gradual process through which aspects of Muslim tradition have been Europeanized. The same process has been supported by privileges granted to Tatar communities, and eased by the key role played historically by Tatars in the Polish army. "Polish Islam" acquired many elements from Polish Christian culture. The Tatar understanding of Islam stresses similarities with Chris-

tianity; notably, it accepts the separation of religion from state. An important point of reference in contemporary Tatar thought are Muslim reformist movements, especially the modernization trends, such as Jadidism, that developed in Russian Islam in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, while Polish Tatars lived separate from the rest of the Muslim world for most of their history, the emergence of moderate Islam among Tatars resulted from their daily interactions with people from different faiths, rather than through theological debate.

More problematic is the situation of Muslim newcomers who often find life in European societies inconsistent with Islamic rulings. In this regard, the League claims to speak for all Sunni Muslim immigrants and proposes *Wasatiyya* as a way to avoid the growth of parallel societies. Further, it places special responsibility on the shoulders of local imams to ensure that this does not happen.

The imams that uphold the need for *Wasatiyya* also emphasize the need for *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning) in modern Polish settings. For these imams, *ijtihad* acts as a means of strengthening their authority in such settings. Many issues, such as keeping a dog in a house, in vitro fertilization, the holding of bank accounts, and changing of the prayer times to accommodate working hours, may cause problems within immigrant Muslim communities. Exercising *ijtihad*, imams tend to tolerate such matters on the grounds of a ruling by the chairman of the European Council for Fatwa and Research, the exiled Egyptian Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi which states that a Muslim should strive to obey the basic sources of Islam, but be flexible in secondary matters.

In recent years, such pragmatic solutions seem to have been gaining ground in Poland. This *ijtihad*-friendly approach allows religiously oriented Muslims to legitimize changes in their lifestyles that suit life in the modern western world. "We want to live practically, not like slaves," a young Muslim woman told me.

Interestingly, immigrant Muslims can even serve to moderate the opinions of local Polish converts. A young Muslim convert wanted to break with his Christian background and duly announced that Christmas was haram. Quoting from the Sunna to show how Islam encourages respect for one's parents, his Arab friends convinced him that he should not boycott a family gathering as important as Christmas.[3]

Contributing to the spread of moderate ideas is the fact that, to date, there have been no serious outbreaks of conflict between Muslims and the state. In fact, in Poland, leading Islamic organizations cooperate with public authorities and representatives of other religions. Since 1997, for instance, the Joint Council of Catholics and Muslims has worked on developing inter-religious dialogue. Despite the sudden influx of Muslims into Poland over the last decade, there are no Muslim ghettoes. Rather, the immigrants learn Polish, and many of them work as doctors, businessmen, or scientists.

Of course, there have been instances of negative reactions to Muslims, verbal aggression, comments on the Muslim headscarf, or opposition to the idea of building a mosque in the centre of Kraków. Yet, such instances are comparatively rare. More worrying is the fact that the average Pole seems to know very little about Islam. Further, what people do know tends to be shaped by the media, which invariably focuses on the "Islamic threat." The lack of information available to the public is underlined by League activists, who regard the dissemination of "correct" material on Islam as a vital aspect of their mission. In Wroclaw, for example, the Wroclaw Muslim Centre of Culture and Education has been organizing special lessons about Islam for Polish youth. According to the organizers, these have been a great success.

PHOTO BY DOBROSŁAWA WIKTOR-MACH, 2008

Tatar mosque in Kruszyniany, northeastern Poland

Questions of interpretation

Characterized by attempts to form moderate western-Islamic forums and attitudes, the rise of the *Wasatiyya* movement marks the decline of Islamism. The leader of Poland's Muslim League, drawing on Qaradawi's concepts, defines *Wasatiyya* as a style that upholds main Islamic principles, while also permitting adaptation to modernity.[4] The League claims that one of its aims is integration with wider Polish society without the sacrificing of Muslim identity. It therefore encourages its members to engage in positive cooperation with citizens of different religious backgrounds.

In terms of *'aqidah* (creed), the *Wasatiyya* relies not only on the Quran and Sunna, it also recommends "discernment in Sharia matters, independent of what is literally prescribed in Islamic scripture."[5] Indeed, a well-known imam in Poland, Abi Ali Issa, who heads the Muslim Religious and Cultural Centre in Wroclaw, has preached that it is the literal interpretation of the Quran, without due consideration of the ulama's opinions, that has contributed to the stereotyping of Muslims and Islam. In his opinion, classic terms in Islamic thought, such as *dar al-islam* (land of peace) and *dar al-harb* (land of war), can now properly be understood only in terms of safety. Thus, for instance, when there is a war going on, even a Muslim country may be classified as *dar al-harb*; while, as long as Muslims are still able to practice their religion, there should be no objection to regarding European countries as *dar al-islam*. Not surprisingly, the ongoing debate on these matters overlaps with another related debate on jihad; a concept which, Ali Abi Issa argues, may only be understood along defensive lines.

Muslim leaders in Poland, whether from the Tatar community or the Muslim League, universally praise the Sharia as superior to any human law code. At the same time, they accentuate such meanings and practices within the Sharia that may coexist comfortably alongside European values. Muslims linked to the League focus particularly on the moral connotations underpinning Islamic law. Values such as equality, nobility, and moral excellence are thus presented as intrinsically Islamic. In this way, moderate Islam is shown to oppose fundamentalist calls to rebel against the West.

The Tatar place similar emphasis on moral values embedded in the Sharia. Chazbijewicz speaks of a universal and liberal approach to the Sharia that is already widespread among members of his Tatar community.[6] Largely, Tatars emphasize that the notions, norms, and ideas underpinning Islamic law exactly resemble those held by moderate Christian Poles.

Both styles of approach in Poland, *Wasatiyya* (Muslim League) and Euro-Islam (Tatars) constitute alternatives to prevailing representations of the Muslim world as anti-western and incapable of modernization. Clearly, neither approach eradicates all economic, social, or cultural problems. Many Muslims, especially those who have just arrived in Poland, feel culturally alienated and consequently reject what they feel to be the West's individualism and materialism. Nevertheless, as long as they can find suitable conditions in which to live, work, and worship in Polish society, moderate ideas will continue to flourish among the country's Muslim communities.

Dobrosława Wiktor-Mach is a Ph.D. candidate at Jagiellonian University, Kraków.
Email: dobroslawa.wiktor@gmail.com

Notes

1. Wasatiyya has its ideological roots in Egypt. See Sagi Polka, "The Centrist Stream in Egypt and its Role in the Public Discourse Surrounding the Shaping of the Country's Cultural Identity," *Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 3 (July 2003): 39–64.
2. Samir Ismail, *The Civilization of the Centre (Alwasateiah)* [in Polish], at http://www.islam.info.pl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=208&Itemid=8
3. Marek Kubicki, *Christmas and Muslims* (in Polish), at www.arabia.pl/content/view/291333/160/.
4. Ismail, *Civilization*.
5. Eric Brown, "After the Ramadan Affair: New Trends in Islamism in the West," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology,* 2 (2005): 7–29, at www.hudson.org/files/publications/Current_Trends_Islamist_Ideology_v2.pdf.
6. Selim Chazbijewicz, "Turning a Face towards the East and West [in Polish]," *The Polish Tatars Yearly* 11 (2006).

Universal Aspirations
The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe

BRIGITTE MARÉCHAL

Since its foundation in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood has advocated a holistic vision of Islam as being both a political ideology and a social doctrine. This vision is now also propagated in Europe, where members and sympathizers of the Brotherhood form a largely informal but nevertheless quite influential movement. The author argues that the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe, while encouraging citizenship and integration within European societies, still promotes the totalizing discourse of the days of Hassan al-Banna.

Shumuliyyat al-islam (Islam as encompassing every aspect of life) is the first of twenty principles laid out by the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, Hassan al-Banna, to teach his followers the proper understanding of Islam. Even though this principle, usually translated as the "comprehensive way of life," still remains integral to the teachings of the members of the Brotherhood, both in Egypt and in Europe, it is strangely enough neither commented upon in scholarly references nor by the wider public. When the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE, representing the Muslim Brotherhood movement at the European level) presented the European Muslim Charter to the international press in January 2008, none pinpointed this "universal dimension" of their understanding of Islam despite the potential tensions or even incompatibilities, both political and legal, that this concept might have on a discourse on integration and citizenship. What do the Muslim Brothers traditionally say about this concept and how do they justify their call for it? What are its constituents and the scope of its application? Are there any significant modifications to the concept in attempting to contextualize it within a pluralist Europe?

Muslim Brotherhood's principles

The Muslim Brotherhood offers its members a basic Islamic education informed by the teachings of its founder that promote both a personal and communal sense of Islamic identity that is proud of itself, strong, and capable of the revitalization of the ummah. One's affiliation to the movement is built around the proper understanding of the Islamic message contained in the first of ten pillars. That pillar is itself comprised of obedience to twenty principles that, together, constitute a real practical method for grasping Islam and the spirit of its message: it is an all-encompassing framework of attitudes to be adopted with regard to individual practices all leading to escaping the "pathways of hell." For example, while the sources of legislation are the Quran and the Sunna the principles warn that the use of intuition is not allowed unless it does not contradict Quran and Sunna.

> . . . it is precisely the fluidity of the discourse that allows its persistence.

The very first of these twenty principles concerns the comprehensiveness of the message of Islam. It suggests that Islam should be understood as a complete system that concerns state and nation, beliefs and legislation, cult and behaviour, and the social, political, and the historical. According to the Muslim Brotherhood scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi, al-Banna derived this notion from examining the early history of Islam: the Prophet was both a spiritual guide and a head of State. It is also based on the interpretation of Quranic verses, notably S. 16, V. 89: "And we reveal the Scripture unto you as an exposition of all things, and a guidance and a mercy and good tidings for those who have surrendered (to Allah)" as meaning that Islam takes into consideration the totality of all matters.[1] Together, these twenty principles induced for the Muslim Brothers a holistic vision of the world that contains a political ideology and a social doctrine. On this wise, al-Banna sought to construct an Islamic orthodoxy to go beyond the differences that divided Muslims in order to reinforce Islam and the power of Muslims world-wide as well as to counter foreign ideologies that might weaken Muslims.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe

Members and sympathizers of the Muslim Brotherhood have migrated from Arab countries to Europe as political exiles or students since the end of the 1950s. At first, they organized inward-facing groups. But since the 1980s, they became a powerful force acting within the community as a whole: they established mosques, Muslim student organizations, Islamic charities and centres, national bodies, etc. aiming at a full representation of Muslims within the European countries.

Today, the movement is mostly composed of a variety of secretive informal networks with low membership count (around a thousand for United Kingdom, France, and Belgium together). Nevertheless, they are quite influential: through inner circle education and open conferences, they continue to transmit an ethos of living as Muslims.

In Europe, the organization still considers the ten pillars as unalterable and the Brothers continue to endorse these principles. The most important of which is *shumuliyyat al-islam*. It is mainly understood as a complete way of life that can solve all human problems and as a worldwide message addressed to all people because it is inclusive of all divine messages that are relevant for all times and places. A second concept, *fikr al-jihad*, calls for exerting one's effort so as to change oneself. Altogether, they remind Muslims of the importance of devotion to God and perseverance and of getting involved in "Islamic work," to bring about a "gradual reform" of society. These themes represent milestones that define the contours of behaviour that is supposedly authentically Islamic.

The European Muslim Brotherhood thus advocates the principle of the universal nature of Islam, but without fleshing out the principle in detail. Despite the fact that European societies are mainly composed of non-Muslims it still aspires to an Islam that could inform every single aspect of life, even collective life. It seems as if it takes the context into consideration, but not when it invokes such traditional concepts. The concept is neither explicitly stated in the discourses, precisely defined, nor are its implications clearly expounded.[2] It is usually contextualized in references to those abstract concepts of *i'tidal* (principle of right behaviour) and *wasatiyya* (principle of moderation): The principles of Islam supposedly are all comprehensive of every aspect of life but they also have to be understood in a moderate way – the paradox can hardly be resolved.

This constant reference to the universal nature of the message of Islam tells us something about how and why the ideology of the organization usually succeeds to survive beyond the shifting context in Europe: it is precisely the fluidity of the discourse that allows its persistence. The organization's concrete activities are nevertheless nowadays limited; whereas previously its members had joined politi-

PHOTO BY DOMINIQUE FAGET / © AFP, 2008

FIOE President Chakib Benmakhlouf presenting the European Muslim Charter

cal parties and created a secret military apparatus to defend their organizations, today they shun political parties and hardly invest themselves in social actions, although they are involved in representative organizations for Muslims. However, they reinforce the concept of Islamic norms via the establishment and promotion of the European Council for Fatwas and Research, which tries to legally advise Muslims on sensitive issues. As such, they keep alive this idea of an Islamic law that might still be relevant for any aspect of contemporary life for all European Muslims.

Universal aspirations in two countries

The emphasis on the principle of the universality of Islam differs according to each country. In the United Kingdom, home office policies promote multiculturalism and a wide autonomy for ethnic and religious communities. Accordingly, some claims are explicitly referring to the sphere of politics and to the juridical dimension of Islam, carried on by a few Muslim Brotherhood intellectuals. In France, where government policies are focused on the integration of individuals and not collective groups, the claims are usually less explicit and provocative as they seem to be limited to the social sphere. Nonetheless, at the end of the day, the actual understanding and use of the term shumuliyyat al-islam does not really differ that much.

In Great Britain, the discourses refer to historical slogans including, explicitly, some political and juridical dimensions: at the 2004 annual conference of the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), Jamal Badawi took up the slogan "Islam is the solution" (to all problems). He based this proposition on *rabbanniya* (the majesty of God, that imposes God's will in and of itself, upon everyone) and the fact that Islam gives fundamental guidance to human beings and offers practical advice. It is also common to hear Islam spoken of as a societal alternative, especially with regard to the application of Islamic law in family matters. And the British approach is not limited to this aspect either. For example, a partisan of the MAB expressed the view that Islam offers solutions to each of our contemporary social evils; he recommended assigning a higher value to individual piety and a complementary approach to the social alternatives most often proposed. He recognized the two-sided nature of this universalist project, concerning the this-world and the beyond. When he claimed that this is not antagonistic to existing societies, he went against the views of Zahid Parvez who presented Islam as an alternative to both socialism and capitalism at a seminar of the MAB in Glasgow in December 2002.

In France, such ideas are usually not expressed in the same way and the claims seem to be more limited. In a mosque near Lille, in 2005, the imam Ahmed Miktar intones the same incantatory formula, but he adopts a slightly different tone of discourse: he does not claim that Islam is the solution for everything but only claims that Islam is the solution to many social problems, that it produces good citizens who act for the common good, and that it is a positive force in society without going any further.

Some innovations are nevertheless noticed in France even if the claims expressed might finally be understood as radical stances as in Great-Britain. A first example refers to the public discourse of Mohsen N'Gazou a member of the Union of Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF), who is also a member of the FIOE. At the annual meeting of the UOIF, in Paris in 2003, he emphasizes the universal dimension of Islam as completely correlated to the modern context. After presenting spirituality as a fundamental dimension, he affirms that humanism is not sufficient in order to make human beings fully human. Faith, according to him, gives meaning to existence and is an irreducible universal imperative. Moreover because the world is global nowadays it is important that Muslims should undertake action on a global scale as well. Therefore, it is the context that "justifies" the global responsibilities that have been placed upon Muslims, that concern even non-Muslims. A new form of argument, of a contextual type, is thus applied by this speaker to the claim of the universal nature of Islam, initially only derived from the sacred texts, in order to reinforce its relevance.

A second example shows a paradigmatic change in the way to conceive the imperatives of the divine law, the Sharia, presented as not questioning the western system at first sight although it does so radically: when Abdallah Benmansour, influent member of the UOIF, affirms in 2005 that "Islam is involved in almost every insignificant thing," he implies that Islamic prescriptions are ever-present for any person who pays attention to them. The divine hegemony is all the more in evidence, inasmuch as each action offers us the possibility of conforming to the Islamic way, whatever its importance may be. Instead of exhorting the faithful to modify current laws or to push for the adoption of political amendments that would make current laws and policies more compatible with the spirit of Islam, rather he challenges his listeners to realize that every human activity already presents, in and of itself, an occasion for action in conformity with Sharia. Implicitly, he lets it be understood that the perspectives of a utopian Islamic system should still be part of the present, and easily accessible for any individual. Every aspect of life, be it work, marriage, or finances is an opportunity to introduce Islam into life.

Old slogans in a new context

The differences in the concept of *shumuliyya* in the United Kingdom and in France are very relative however. In both countries the European Muslim Brotherhood adopts an unquestioning and totalizing discourse which maintains its long-term vision. Islam is still affirmed as a whole alternative system, probably under fear that any restriction to it would end up destroying the whole ideology. The tradition is kept alive, so is its utopia, even if its realization remains quite limited and their new modalities of action prove that they take changing circumstances into consideration.

The Muslim Brotherhood actively promotes citizenship and integration within the European societies (such as in their European Muslim Charter) but far from accepting the marginalization of their ideology after all its past failures in achieving their goals anywhere, some of the members are still also fully promoting their old slogans in quite a simple way. In doing so, they show the limits of their will and abilities to really develop a renewal of their ideology that would be adapted to the modern European pluralist context.

Brigitte Maréchal is Professor in Contemporary Islam at the Centre Interdisciplinaire d'Etudes de l'Islam dans le Monde Contemporain (Cismoc), Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium. She is author of *The Muslim Brothers in Europe. Roots and Discourses* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).
E-mail: Brigitte.Marechal@uclouvain.be

Notes

1. Hassan al-Banna, *20 principes pour comprendre l'islam* [explained by shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi] (Paris: Médiacom, 2004).
2. Tariq Ramadan, in his book *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, could only dare to express that this idea could be confusing.

New Muslim Youth Associations in Spain

VIRTUDES TÉLLEZ DELGADO

Ever since the legal recognition of Islam in Spain Muslim associations have been increasing in number. The March 11 bombing attacks of 2004 brought to the fore a new group consisting largely of young Muslims born in Spain who are engaged in social participation through the creation of social and cultural associations.

In the rise of Muslim associations in Spain four events have been crucial.[1] First, the legal enactment of freedom of religion in 1967 coincided with the appearance of Muslim associations mainly founded by the Muslim population from Ceuta and Melilla and students coming from Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine. In 1970 and 1971 the Jamaat Ahmadia of Islam in Spain and the Muslim Association in Spain were registered in the Muslim Communities Register. Following this, in 1979, Spanish converts to Islam created the Muslim Community of Spain.

The second event was the recognition in 1989 of Islam as a deeply rooted and clearly established religion in Spain because of its evident integration into Spanish society. The current structure of the Comisión Islámica de España (CIE) – an umbrella organization representing Muslims – was created with the formation of the Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities (FEERI) and the Spanish Islamic Communities Union (UCIDE). Ever since, Muslim associations have had to register within one of these federations.

Thirdly, the signing of the Cooperation Agreement between the Spanish State and the Spanish Islamic Committee in 1992 enabled Muslims to practice their faith, at least in theory. The fourth event was the increase in numbers of Muslim migrants, since the early 1970s, and the settlement of their families mainly in the 1990s, thanks to the 1985 Immigration Law.[2]

During these years, the majority of Muslims registered their associations in registers for minority religious groups with a few registered as social and cultural groups. In general, associations were created on the basis of origin (Spanish converts to Islam or migrants) and their status in Spain (workers or students). Three different groups represented the members of Muslim associations: Muslim migrants settled before the Spanish current democracy, Spanish converts to Islam, and different migrant groups arriving in the 1980s and 1990s.[3]

This changed after the March 11 train bombings when the offspring of migrants, young Spanish converts, and young migrants living in Madrid decided to create new organizations and to revitalize others. While old Muslim associations used religious registers, these new associations appeared in social and cultural ones, outside the two Muslim federations. Their members do not speak as migrants but as natives who simply practice another religion. Also they prefer to participate in society as young Muslims regardless of where they were born, what their family origin or their social status is; and ask that their participation not be limited to religious activities.

They are mostly between twenty and thirty five years old, male and female, highly educated and interested in reflecting on the meaning of being a Muslim and ways to express that meaning to non-Muslims. While in the past Muslim associations worked to achieve the institutionalization of Islam in Spain, these new associations take advantage of that legal recognition in order to show who they are. This concern determines their activities, as well as points to a new social situation. On the one hand it shows the increase of Spanish Muslims in society and their effort to combine Islamic belief with Spanish nationality. On the other hand, it shows a global tendency among Muslims living in non-Muslim countries to distinguish between "good" (peaceful) and "bad" (terrorist) Muslims. This is related to the wish to be accepted as good citizens, irrespective of their beliefs, and to be recognized as integrated people able to manage between civil rights and religious belief. To this end they organize seminars and meetings. Apart from reflecting on the concept of Muslim identity, they develop common social projects and show what Islam means through their deeds.

Two such organizations are Tayba and Jóvenes Musulmanes de Madrid, both in Madrid. Both have the same goal, i.e. to show non-Muslims that they do not support violence and terrorism in the name of their religion, but choose peaceful and tolerant methods to promote their beliefs. Tayba started as a group of *da'wa* addressing both the Muslim and non-Muslim population of Madrid. They aimed at deepening their own knowledge of Islam by organizing meetings and seminars, and through reading the Quran and hadith. They also collaborated in social projects such as visiting and helping sick people, and collecting money for their treatment. While these actions were directed at Muslims, they wanted to do something positive to non-Muslims as well. Therefore they promoted a blood donation campaign and engaged in a social voluntary programme to collaborate with non-religious NGOs.

Members of Jóvenes Musulmanes de Madrid, on the other hand, are more interested in addressing broader issues related to the social position of Muslims in Spanish society. This was mainly achieved by arranging debate meetings rather than by offering social services. In these meetings they would discuss topics such as the clash of civilizations, Orientalism, unemployment among Muslims, stereotypes, marriage, and so on. Although these two organizations thus focus on two different kinds of activities, they both aim to be recognized as embodying good Muslims.

The search for the meaning of being a Muslim started after 9/11 among some Muslims in Spain, but became urgent after the attacks of 11 March 2004. Muslims in Madrid went through that event as Madridiens, but at the same time were confused when the train bombings were connected with terrorists who claimed their acts in the name of Islam. That claim motivated Spanish Muslims to know more about their religion, especially young Muslims who, for the first time, organized themselves outside the existing Muslim federations, taking an active social and political role after that unforeseen event. But this also reflects the global desire of Muslim groups all over the world to change the stereotypes non-Muslims have about them. This is another important feature of the new Muslim associations: they are part of and participate in global debates, which shape their concerns, activities, and goals. The new associations are still few, but their participation, as we have seen, means a change in Spanish Muslim associational life.

Notes

1. This article is based on my DEA dissertation defended in the Social Anthropology Department of Universidad Autónoma de Madrid in 2004 and funded by the Predoctoral I3P Fund of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC).
2. Iván Jiménez-Aybar, *El Islam en España. Aspectos institucionales de su estatuto jurídico* (Pamplona: Navarra Gráfica Ediciones, 2004); Elena Arigita Maza, "Representing Islam in Spain: Muslim Identities and the Contestation of Leaderships," *Muslim World* 96 (October 2006): 563–84.
3. Jordi Moreras, "Musulmanes en España. Más allá de la memoria histórica: la viva presencia musulmana en España," 1999, at http://allserv.rug.ac.be/hdeley/moreras2.htm.

Virtudes Téllez Delgado is a Ph.D. student at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and member of the Research Group for the Anthropological Study of Cultural Heritage and Popular Cultures at the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC). She was Visiting Fellow at ISIM in 2008.
Email: vtellez@ile.csic.es

Islamic Religious Practice in Outer Space

NILS FISCHER

In October 2007, Malaysia sent its first astronaut into space. The thirty-six year old orthopaedic surgeon, Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor, was sent to the International Space Station on 10 October 2007 and returned to earth on 21 October 2007. As the astronaut was a practicing Muslim the Malaysian space agency provided him with advice on religious practice in the form of a guideline for performing the Islamic rites at the space station, and adapted classical legal opinions on religious practice during travel to the new context of outer space.

The National Space Agency of Malaysia (ANGKASA) was founded by the Malaysian Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation in 2002. In August 2003, then-prime minister Mahathir bin Mohamad announced that Malaysia would send an astronaut to the International Space Station (ISS) within the framework of a joint programme with Russia. This programme stipulated the purchase of 18 Russian Sukhoi SU-30MKM fighter jets amounting to approximately 700 million Euros by the Malaysian Ministry of Defence. In return Russia agreed to train two Malaysian astronauts of whom one would be sent from the Cosmodrome in Baikonur, Kazakhstan in a Soyuz TMA-11 spacecraft to the ISS. Malaysia expects from its space project an increased international reputation, and is planning an expedition to the moon for the year 2020. Also anticipated are impulses for the country's science and economy in regard to the development of space technology and the establishment of space research.

The Department of Islamic Development of Malaysia (JAKIM) emphasized in a Friday sermon distributed to the mosques that space exploration helps in understanding the mysteries of the universe. Islam is the state religion in Malaysia and sixty percent of the twenty six million Malaysians are Muslims; this made it necessary for the ANGKASA to prepare for the case that a Muslim would be chosen. Therefore the ANGKASA in cooperation with the JAKIM organized a two-day "Seminar on Islam and Life in Outer Space" in April 2006. Although Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor was not the first Muslim to be in outer space, the seminar was the first occasion during which the issue of Islam in outer space was discussed. At the end of the seminar a guideline was adopted.

Islamic scholars face several problems when they deal with journeys to outer space. Would prayer be conducted after world time, meaning five prayers within twenty four hours, or after ISS-time, meaning eighty prayers as the ISS circuits the earth sixteen times in twenty four hours? Given that ablution is not possible due to water conservation at the ISS, would the prayer be legally valid? How would the direction of prayer be determined? Furthermore, the required prayer motion would be difficult to perform because of weightlessness and shortage of space at the ISS. Another complication involved how to perform the Muslim fast since Shukor's ISS-mission was taking place during Ramadan.

The "Guideline for Performing Islamic Rites at the ISS" gives answers to the most pressing of these questions. Prayer times, it points out, should be measured after world time, which means five prayers every 24 hours while the exact times for prayer should follow the prayer times of the point of departure, in this case Baikonur. To lift the state of ritual impurity ablution should be practiced by performing *tayammum*. This is originally a symbolical ablution which uses sand instead of water, but since even sand is not available at the ISS the hands should be stroked on a wall, mirror, or similar surfaces.

Facing the Kaaba is also required for prayer in outer space but if this causes difficulties the earth should be used as orientation, and in cases where even this is impossible the Muslim astronaut is free to perform his prayer in any direction. The course of movement of the Islamic prayer is confined to the situation at the ISS. The astronaut is allowed to make symbolic movement or even perform these movements mentally. He can perform the Islamic fasting during the month of Ramadan but he is free to suspend it and continue it when he returns to earth. If he decides to fast he should follow the fasting times of his point of departure.

The Muslim astronaut should adhere to the Islamic diet and prefer food with halal-status. But if there is no such food, he is allowed to eat just enough to alleviate his hunger. The Islamic dress code also applies to Muslim astronauts: the male astronaut has to cover the body between the navel and the knees and the female her whole body except for her face and hands. Nothing is said in the guide about gender-segregation, which is especially surprising since a female Muslim astronaut had already travelled to the ISS. But the actions to be taken in the case of death in outer space have been specified: The dead body should be returned to earth so that the required funeral can be performed. When this is not possible, it is permissible to perform a "space funeral" with a simple ceremony.

The guideline not only gives advice for Muslim religious practice but also articulates the main features of Islamic ethics in outer space in the section entitled "etiquette of travelling" which states that the Muslim astronaut should maintain his relationship with God, sustain "harmonious relationships among people", and preserve the space environment. Although several Muslim countries among them Malaysia, are members of international organizations which address outer space issues, such as the United Nations "Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space" (COPUOS), none of them preceded Malaysia in formulating an Islamic approach to space ethics.

COURTESY OF ANGKASA, 2007

Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor at the ISS

After his return to earth Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor reported that he had no difficulties performing his prayers at the ISS. Meanwhile, the "Guideline for Performing Islamic Rites at the ISS" is no longer the only Islamic legal opinion on Islamic religious practice in outer space. The Islamic scholars Rifaat Fauzi Abd al-Muttalib from Egypt and Sano Koutoub Moustapha from Guinea have issued fatwas on how to perform the Islamic prayer in this context. Both these fatwas and the Malaysian guideline offer pragmatic solutions for performing the Islamic religious practice in outer space. Their solutions stand in analogy to the Islamic regulations on travelling. In this respect the guideline does not enter unchartered territories but treads the trails of the classical Islamic legal opinions. What is new is the fact that the concept of travelling on earth is extended to the travelling to outer space and that journeys to outer space are explicitly allowed.

Nils Fischer is a student research assistant at the Institute of Science and Ethics at the University of Bonn.
Email: fischer@iwe.uni-bonn.de

Ambivalent Purity

MARTIJN DE KONING

Since the end of the 1990s Moroccan-Dutch youth increasingly identify themselves as Muslim and are categorized as such. Regardless of the way they practice their faith, reference to a "pure" Islam and to being Muslim as being one's "true" self are the most important constituting elements in their identity politics. While some scholars and politicians see young Muslims' distinguishing between religion and culture as a sign of radicalization or lack of integration, the author argues that Muslim youth's reflections on their Islam and their practices and experiences are a cultural construction grounded in a contemporary local and global context.

In September 2001 (a few days before "9/11") a new imam was appointed in a Moroccan mosque in Gouda, a small city near Rotterdam in the west of the Netherlands.[1] Within a short period of time, imam Abdallah had gained enormous popularity among Moroccan-Dutch youth (males in particular). Although the board of the mosque and many of the first generation migrants appreciated his attracting so many young people to the mosque they were still wary about his message to these youth. This imam did not approve of women riding bikes, questioned the necessity for women to have a higher education, and he abolished several traditions in the mosque which he deemed incompatible with "true" Islam. A great controversy arose; the older generation rejected his view of the correct Islamic lifestyles as being too strict for the Netherlands whereas the young people saw that rejection to just mean that he was speaking "the truth":

> There are of course people who have problems with this (what the imam is telling, MdK), people who cannot handle the truth… They (older Moroccan-Dutch) think he is too strict for the Netherlands but it is not about the imam. You have to look at the faith. There is no Netherlands, Africa or Morocco, Islam is Islam. Period. (Rachid, 20 years)

The case of the imam is exemplary for Moroccan-Dutch Muslims for several reasons. First of all, the controversy about the imam reveals the gap between first generation Moroccan-Dutch migrants and Moroccan-Dutch youth in Gouda. The latter have since the end of the 1990s become more vocal about their quest to purify Islam of what they see as the "contamination" of Islam. For this "contamination" they blame Moroccan traditions and "bad integration," especially as pertaining to the failure in upholding Islamic rules with regard to gender relations. Secondly, imam Abdallah as part of one of the Salafi groups in the Netherlands is trying to revitalize Islam by propagating a return to the example of the Prophet Muhammad and the first generations of Muslims. Thirdly, the case also shows the involvement of Moroccan-Dutch youth with Islam. Although, like all other people, Moroccan-Dutch youth can identify themselves on the basis of numerous categories such as "Moroccan," "Dutch," gender, youth, rappers and so on, since the second half of the 1990s they have increasingly identified themselves as Muslim, and are categorized as such by outsiders despite the enormous discrepancies among them in the way they practice their faith. At the same time, notwithstanding the differences, most of the young people in my research expressed the necessity to purify Islam from (Dutch and Moroccan) culture, something that has been called the process of "deculturation" by Olivier Roy and is in public debates often equated with radicalization and a lack of integration. But what does separating culture from Islam or rejecting culture altogether actually mean?

People's knowledge of how to behave appropriately is formed and informed by the contexts in which they find themselves . . .

Deculturation

In his well-known and important study *Globalised Islam* Roy sees the separation of culture and religion amongst Muslim youth in the West as an example of the process of deculturation: decontextualizing and deterritorializing religious practices and dismissing culture.[2] Roy argues that migration from the Muslim world to the West and the emergence of global media have created a situation where there is no religious authority for Muslims in the West, where the "pristine culture" of the parents' home country is diluted, and where Islam is no longer embedded in cultural and social relationships. Consequently, youth start to reflect about their faith and to question previously taken for granted ideas about Islam and being Muslim. Through this process Muslim youth tend to distinguish Islam from "culture" in search of a "pure" or "true" Islam.[3] Roy's ideas have been used in many of the Dutch policy reports on radicalization of Muslim youth. These reports suggest that radicalization is the consequence of the process of deculturation.[4] However, the problem with accounts such as these is that the conceptualization of culture and religion is confusing. Notions of "pristine cultures" and "deculturation" as used by Roy and others seem to be based upon an essentialist notion of culture wherein cultures are clearly identifiable and homogenous. Such pristine cultures never exist, however, where, for example, Morocco has a complex history of conflicts between Arab and Amazigh groups and between critics of the Moroccan monarchy and loyalists.

In order to have a more adequate understanding of Muslim youth's beliefs and practices, Islam can best be seen as a particular kind of cultural repertoire of beliefs, practices, and experiences that enable and limit people to navigate in, act in, and give meaning to the social realities surrounding them. People's knowledge of how to behave appropriately is formed and informed by the contexts in which they find themselves and accordingly a person's individual cultural repertoire is not always consistent and may even appear illogical.[5] A girl for example can be convinced that wearing the face-veil (*niqab*) is obligatory in Islam but only wears it at religious meetings in mosques and not at school or when she is in the presence of her parents because she does not want to offend others (in particular her parents) or because (as one girl stated:) "I'm not that strong yet." Such a statement is also an example of how the individual subject and her ideas about personal development and self-fulfilment have become central to the religiosity of youth. The quest for a "pure" Islam is a personal project filled with ideals such as self-realization and personal development or, as one boy said: "Islam is being yourself." Making choices from a cultural repertoire in terms of "pure" Islam and "being yourself" is then a way of activating and organizing their beliefs, practices, and experiences according to their ideas of a "true self" and an authentic Islam.

Purifying Islam

People do not make choices from a cultural repertoire in a social and cultural vacuum. During the last decade both native Dutch as well as Moroccan-Dutch youth have interpreted perceived differences between them in religious terms. According to Moroccan-Dutch youth the native Dutch usually categorize them negatively; Islam is portrayed as suspicious, related to terrorism, intolerance, and the oppression of women. This leads to a confusing situation; the search for a Muslim identity means, in relation to native Dutch people, an attempt to transcend the perceived dichotomy between "Moroccan" and "Dutch". Thus, one boy's statement: "When I'm a Muslim, it doesn't matter whether I'm Moroccan or Dutch." At the same time it also means trying to maintain a certain distance towards Dutch society and their parents. Their views on girls' behaviour and dress are particularly important for preserving a distinction between them and Dutch society. "They (the girls, MdK) let themselves be influenced too much by western things. People call that integration, but I do not call that integration." In the process of negotiating identities girls occupy a central position because they are, much more than boys, frequently scrutinized by other Dutch Moroccans and native Dutch people who focus on their behaviour and attire. With regard to other Muslims and native Dutch people, girls also use

the discourse of true Islam to define themselves and Islam. They criticize the stereotypes (such as the oppressed Muslim woman) that native Dutch entertain about them and challenge the gender inequality they sometimes experience in their relations with other Muslims. This was clear in Gouda where most women did not publicly express their views in the conflict with the imam but some of them accused the imam of "being ignorant and mixing up Moroccan traditions with Islam" while at the same time they remained critical about the Islamic traditions of their parents. Instead of creating an Islam without culture, they are making choices from a particular repertoire that is closely related to their cultural context and moreover relies on common cultural forms such as language (in this case Dutch and sometimes English).

Connecting individual experiences

The choices Muslim youth make are by definition products of a cultural environment and the way these processes evolve is dependent upon the changes in societies.[6] The idea of a purified Islam makes their faith stand out as a positive or even superior benchmark in an environment they experience as filled with crises: the high crime rates among Moroccan-Dutch youth, the attacks against Islam by Dutch politicians, the injustice that Muslims, according to them, face worldwide, and so on. The questions young people have about Islam and how to be a "good Muslim" are derived from their daily life; the issues they deal with have to do with contemporary political circumstances. They ask questions on the Internet in which they compare themselves to native Dutch youth (for example whether having a boyfriend or girlfriend is allowed in Islam or is it permissible to marry a non-Muslim); they study texts about the position of women in Islam and their relationship to non-Muslims; gather information about the conflicts in the Middle East (especially in Iraq, the Palestinian areas, and also Afghanistan); and attend meetings about "how to be a Muslim in Dutch society?".[7] In the process of finding answers to their questions, Muslim youth turn to alternative authoritative persons whom they think do not dilute the message of Islam; they range from the Egyptian Amr Khaled, Tariq Ramadan, Abdullah Faisal to Gouda's imam Abdallah. By asking these questions and turning to new authorities youth connect their own individual experiences to global themes and authorities. Thus, instead of a loss of religious authority there is emergence of new authorities and hierarchies sometimes resulting in conflicts between their rival group followers.

Practicing Islam

The concept of deculturation seems to reflect the praxis of Moroccan-Dutch youth proclaiming their construction of Muslim identities as an ongoing purification of their cultural repertoires which stresses the sharp distinction between them and Dutch society and between them and their parents. But instead of creating their own individualized Islam, Moroccan-Dutch have to find recognition and acceptance for their ideas with others. This makes the way they practice Islam much less straightforward and rigid than is suggested in their accounts of a "pure" Islam or in the aforementioned conflict with imam Abdallah. For example, during one meeting the girls asked the imam if they were required to wear a headscarf. The answer was a clear "yes, it is obligatory." Although this confirmed the opinion of the girls, they still faced a problem because the school in question forbids headscarves. After a short discussion the imam again stated the norm clearly but also validated the girls' practice of removing the headscarf when they were in school as something that did not violate the norm. This was important for them, because they felt guilty every time they removed the headscarf and every time they put it back on. The concept of deculturation overestimates the agency of youth who seem to be able to create their own Islam regardless of the context. The construction of a "pure" Islam in which according to the girls and the imam a headscarf is obligatory takes place within different relationships such as with the schools and the parents and the girls have to manage all of the loyalties that come with it. Paradoxically their quest for a "pure" Islam in daily practice is neither an expression of breaking up with Dutch society nor with their parents, but rather of an ongoing process of negotiation and making compromises as a means to carefully balance all their loyalties.

PHOTO BY WALTER HERFST, 2008

The Nour Mosque in Gouda

This sought after "pure" Islam is actually a hybrid cultural construction based upon and emerging within specific historical and cultural contexts and relationships. Instead of an indication of crisis of pristine cultures, lack of integration, or signs of radicalization, it denotes customary processes during which the new generation tries to re-define and re-organize different cultural repertoires in response to the challenges of their lifeworld. Because of the inevitable changes that come with this re-interpretation, many older people often experience these developments with regret and nostalgia. Sometimes this may lead to conflicts over the question of who interprets Islam the right way and who represents "the truth," such as in the case with this imam.

Martijn de Koning is Postdoctoral Fellow within the ISIM/Radboud University project "Salafism as a Transnational Movement". He recently defended his dissertation "Searching for a 'Pure' Islam. Religious Belief and Identity Construction among Moroccan-Dutch Youth" (in Dutch) at VU University Amsterdam.
Email: m.dekoning@isim.nl

Notes

1. This article is based upon my Ph.D. thesis. An English summary can be found on http://religionresearch.org/martijn.
2. O. Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (London: Hurst, 2004), 258.
3. Ibid., pages 151 and 272.
4. See also "A Clash of Cultures or a Debate on Europe's Values?" *ISIM Review*, no. 15 (2005): 6–7.
5. André Droogers, "The power dimensions of the Christian community: An anthropological model," *Religion* 33, no. 3 (2003): 263–280.
6. M. Adams, "The reflexive self and culture: a critique," *British Journal of Sociology*, 54, no. 2 (2003): 221–238.
7. De Koning, "Identity in Transition. Connecting online and offline Internet practices of Moroccan-Dutch Muslim Youth," ISET Working Paper Series 9.

Muslim Identities in the Banlieue

MELANIE ADRIAN

Drawing from the voices of young Muslim women living just south of Paris, this article argues that Muslims are developing a form of Islam shaped by French customs, values, and institutions. The development of this form of religiosity is apparent in the way French Muslims negotiate their multiple identities. In this process, space plays a crucial role in the form of the banlieue.

In the face of increasingly vocal minority initiatives, Europe is trying to come to terms with its diversity. Integration has become the buzzword of almost a decade of politics. The Dutch are trying to reconcile the face-cover with its traditionally liberal social policies, the British are re-evaluating the meaning of a multiculturalism that many fear has gone too far toward balkanization, and since 2004 the French have banned religious symbols – most notably the Muslim headscarf – in public schools across the country.

Although Muslim groups have not been the only minority communities in question, many of the debates have focused on the building of mosques, education, and religious manifestation and attire, including the headscarf. What permeates these discussions is an expectation that as the minority group, Muslims are expected to adapt their behaviours to meet the socio-cultural norms of the society. These discussions, however, fail to consider the intricacy of identity. This is particularly, but not exclusively, so for second and third generations of people with a background of immigration.

Identities

The expectation of integration of Muslims begs the question, what does integration in France mean for a group of approximately four and a half million people, many of whom are second and third generation French nationals whose parents or grandparents hark from 123 different countries?[1] They come from diverse regions with varying ethnic, cultural, linguistic, social backgrounds. This variety equips them to understand religion and its importance – or lack thereof – in distinct terms that affect the way they understand themselves in relation to the wider socio-political framework. But this is the case only for those who have a direct experience of immigration, which many (if not most) do not have. Many people commonly referred to as people *issu de l'immigration* are in fact French nationals; bred, born, and educated. Some of them argue that a Muslim may identify as both Muslim and French (and woman, man, student, etc.) and show that they are in constant negotiation within these identities. Stephanie, a young convert to Islam made this clear during our conversations in her apartment located in one of the rougher neighbourhoods just south of Paris. I asked her to explain what it means to have to integrate into the society of her birth.

I asked her … what it means to have to integrate into the society of her birth.

I met Stephanie at a weekly prayer group where approximately ten women would meet to discuss the Quran and the realities of faith in their daily routines. All of the women had a different background to share: recent immigrant, not-so-recent-immigrant, local, or a French/Other mix. All of them wore some sort of head covering, either a bandana-like scarf tied just around the hair, a loose fitting scarf that enveloped the head and neck, or a black headscarf that tied closely around the head, neck, and body.

Stephanie stood out during the first meeting because of her stunning and, at times strongly worded, opinions about how she and her veiled Muslim sisters were treated on the streets of France. "We're spit on, and harassed," she said while the others nodded in agreement. The veil, they very clearly voiced over many hours of discussion, was for them a religious obligation and a choice they made when they were ready to accept the responsibility in light of the general and employment discrimination they would face. This is not to say that all women are able to make a free choice to veil; some may succumb to social pressures. At the same time, the veil also protected them from the violence they encountered on the streets of the banlieues they all lived in. The veil, they said, "Serves for many things. For one, it shows obedience to God … and it protects you from nasty looks … if you take two women, one who is dressed up all sexy and the other who is covered from head to toe … the one who will be yelled at and shouted out to [by the young men on the street] is the one who is not veiled."

Banlieue

It is here where the borders of the banlieue are important and show a marked difference between the culture that exists inside and outside these imaginary walls. These spaces encourage a distinct culture to flourish and this further enhances the feeling of separateness. Living inside this particular environment is one factor that helps develop an Islam of France.

Inside the banlieue, the veil protects because it covers women and renders them less prone to abuse or harassment. Some women told me that the veil made them feel invisible to harassers and provided them with a certain security. Outside the banlieue, however, the veil is a liability.

Outside the banlieue, the veil is a sign of a lack of integration, an unwillingness to meet the basic standards of what it means to be French. The veil, for many non-Muslims, is not just symbolic of a religious belief, but is, at best, considered a sign of non-integration. The veil renders the women more visible by the very fact that they stand out. In speaking to non-Muslims, I came to understand that for many of them, the veil is symbolic of an "other" who is dangerous in her ambiguity and foreignness.

The geographic distinction between banlieue and non-banlieue is critical; for there is a specific culture of the banlieue that helps shape individual decisions to veil or not to veil. These areas generally exhibit increased public and familial violence, lower educational achievement, and higher drug presence.[2] There is a culture all its own. Students from this neighbourhood, for example, developed their own pigeon-French language which they learned to speak so quickly that even native French speakers could not follow what they were saying. Many wore loose fitting, white or baby-blue exercise suits that buckled at their shoes and hung from far below their waists. They walked to school in groups of two to four and would speak in raised voices and demonstrate their points by physically touching or shoving their conversation partners. These types of interactions differed from how individuals from non-banlieue areas would behave.

This culture is important because it helps form, although it does not solely determine, how some women view veiling. It is also important because this environment is specific to France and thus helps foster a particular setting in which Muslim women make decisions on the manifestation of faith. That is not to say that there are not other areas in Europe which host a high percentage of Muslims and where a distinctive culture has developed. However, France is exceptional because of the way the state has managed and (in many cases) sponsored the building of large housing estates post World War II.[3] The irony that these neighbourhoods – many of which have degenerated considerably over the last decades – were built largely by foreign workers whose descendents now call them home, is not lost on these generations.

PHOTO BY JOEL ROBINE / © AFP, 2005

French girl selling "Dawah Wear"

Personal capacity

Each woman I spoke to made the choice to veil or not to veil. The differences were the result of a symbiotic relationship between this specific French context and their personalities, value orientation, and personal history. For example, Stephanie chose not to veil while her sister-in-law took to wearing the veil a year ago. The manner in which each person professed her faith lay in her understanding of herself, her history, family, comfort level, and ability to sustain the (at times) negative repercussions of being part of a visible minority. What was common to them all was that they believed that religion should not be difficult. As Stephanie said, "Religion is easy – it just has to be adapted to your situation. God said that when I give you a situation, do what you can … but it should never be hard for you, that's not the goal." Thus, the veil as it is worn, or not worn, by the women is in some ways uniquely "French" because they are responding to the specific context in that country. A friend of Stephanie's explained it to me in this way: "We try to advance with the Quran and there are people who take it more or less seriously. There is a verse in the Quran which says that God gives to each according to one's personal ability … you see the women outside who are completely covered? God has given them the capacity to wear all of this … with the gloves and all that. Personally, I'm still too little for that. I don't have the courage to do that … All of these things, we try to progress with all of this, according to each of our own capacities."

This understanding of each according to her capacity or ability is an important notion used by the women to sustain, encourage, and support their understanding of religious duty balanced with what they see as "fitting in" to French society. The women explained that they each had the responsibility to understand their own histories and situations and made a determination on the manifestation of faith based on this complete picture. If someone did not feel strong enough to wear the veil given the harassment, or, if she needed to work and this proved difficult because of the veil, she might make her choice based on these series of factors. That is not to say that these decisions would be made lightly or necessarily involved removing the veil, but this understanding of capacity would allow them to decide for themselves. This negotiation with the local culture can be seen as the development of a "local Islam," as Leila Ahmed argues.[4] This is an Islam *of* France as opposed to an Islam *in* France.

It is through using this logic of capacity that the rules decreed by religion are negotiated – within the context of socio-political institutions and social expectations. Thus, the women agreed that it was reasonable to expect them to remove the veil when picking up children at school or when posing for identification papers or to be treated by a male physician at the hospital. They were very well aware that certain concessions had to be made because they are living in France.

Integrated identities

The women were clear about the concessions and equally as lucid about their boundaries. They drew the line, for example, at the prohibition on getting married in a veil or veiling in school. By not allowing young women to veil in schools, French society is making them choose between religion and education – an impossible choice, they thought. Stephanie, in her typically provocative manner, conveyed her frustration, "I understand that they [educators] are sick and tired of the issue and that they don't give a shit … but if we need to suppress everyone's liberties, then that's what I call a dictatorship."

Identities are complex and are themselves reflections of the incorporation of various cultures within the individual. In addition, there is, as Stephanie and her friends demonstrate, a trend toward the development of a specifically French Muslim culture and manifestation of faith – a local Islam. It is distinctively French because of the negotiations made by believers that both limit and express their faith in this particular socio-political context. The reality of integrated identities and the development of a local Islam show that it is problematic to focus on integration as a means to reconcile religious and cultural diversity.

Melanie Adrian is Lecturer at Harvard University.
Email: adrian@fas.harvard.edu

Notes

1. J. Laurence and J. Vaïsse, *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), 16-19.
2. Ibid. 38-39.
3. Ibid. 35-43. See also Hacène Belmessous, *Mixité sociale, une imposture: Retour sur un mythe français* (Nantes: Atalante, 2006).
4. Leila Ahmed argues that, "meanings of hijab … are intensely local." See L. Ahmed, "The Veil Debate – Again," in *On Shifting Ground: Muslim Women in the Global Era* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2005), 153-171.

Imam Hussayn is Love
Individualization of Shia Practices in Britain

DANA MOSS

Britain's Shia community is currently engaged in a process of individualization and privatization of religious belief. The recent flourishing of lectures, community organizations, and films intended for youth points to the younger, English speaking generation as the primary locus of change. Exploring Shia activities during Muharram and Ashura, this article traces the changing nature of religious authority and the structure of community organization among the second generation of the Middle Eastern Twelver British Diaspora.

In the past few years, lectures, community organizations, and films intended for the consumption of the younger, English-speaking generation of Shia in the United Kingdom have sprung up. Numbers for the Shia community in the UK vary wildly, but estimates given by members of the community are generally between 200,000 and 600,000. Whilst the first Twelver Shia to arrive in the UK hailed from the Indian subcontinent, Iraqis and Iranians form the largest groups of UK Shia, followed by those from the Subcontinent, the Khoja community, Alevis as well as far smaller numbers of Lebanese and Shia from the Gulf, and non-Twelver immigrants. Communities are, in general, geographically distributed in the UK according to their place of origin.

Every *marja'a* (Shia religious authority) has an office in the UK, from the Imam Ali Foundation, the Liaison office of Ayatollah Sistani, to Shirazi's office. The various institutions differ greatly in size, ranging from al Khoei Foundation, which has schools attached and maintains relations with the government, to smaller *hussayniyyat* catering for small local communities. Some Shia institutions also participate in larger umbrella organizations which include non-Shia, such as the Muslim Council of Britain. Officially, there are good relations with the Sunni community, but privately, many in the Shia community will speak of a souring of relations as a result of the large Wahhabi presence in the UK.

Celebrating Ashura

The emergence of post–Islamist patterns among British Shia is most evident during the month of Muharram and the time of Ashura, which marks the martyrdom of Ali, the Third Imam, and the theological pivot of Shiism. In the Shia world, the death of Ali has been recounted in a variety of ways. In the UK, interpretations of Ashura offered to the youth portray an individualized and instrumentalized Shiism, a religion seen as a tool for self-improvement and personal happiness. This re-reading has been fuelled by the desire of Shia activists to capture the imagination of the under twenty-five generation.

> … leaflets … like Imam Hussayn to internationally recognized figures such as Mahatma Gandhi

On the tenth of Muharram, in 2007, in a hall in London, one shaykh addressed a gathering of around 300 teenagers and young men and women in English. He boldly proclaimed Ashura has three goals, the first of which is "self-reformation," beseeching the crowd to "lets pay attention to ourselves." Near the end of his talk, which deliberated on the immorality of drink, drugs, and non-marital relations, he declared that the most important item at home is a mirror, insinuating that its importance supersedes that of a Quran. This item, the shaykh continued, will enable us to "look inside our heart, so we can improve our behaviour." He compared Ashura to the flight one takes towards a holiday destination, arguing that "you will enjoy this journey" and emphasising the pleasure and reward this will afford the participant. Shaykh Qawzini in Manchester continued along similar lines, arguing "take care of your prayers – that is the message of Ali. Spend more time doing them and your life will change."

Such interpretations diverge radically from earlier interpretations of Ashura in the Middle East. For example, in Iran in the mid 70s, religious authorities championed Imam Ali's death at the hands of Yazid as part of a discourse requiring dissent and opposition to monarchical tyranny in order to obtain a just and Islamic political order. Reflecting the tyrannical practices of the Shah, this interpretation absorbed not only the class struggle but also the economic and social cadences of the time.

In Britain, individualized interpretations find their way into a variety of media, impacting upon the message of Muharram and the nature of Shiism. A leaflet drawn up by the AhlulBayt Islamic Mission (AIM ISLAM), a Shia organization set up by young professionals and university students with the aim of educating Shia, Sunni, and non-Muslim students about Islam, describes Imam Hussayn as "a symbol of love." The leaflet does not include traditional pictorial depictions of Hussayn at the battle of Karbala, but rather, the text is overlaid above a drawing of flowers. Other leaflets produced, also intended partly for Shia consumption, liken Imam Hussayn to internationally recognized figures such as Mahatma Gandhi.

Such patterns are mirrored elsewhere. One shaykh, during a lecture in the run-up to Ashura, stressed the appeal of Imam Hussayn to "Jews, Christians, and Buddhists," reflecting the exigencies of a globalized, multicultural society and giving the Third Imam a patina of deculturization. This is reflected in the film *Karbala: When Skies Wept Blood*, a commentary by a variety of primarily British, Muslim authorities on the chronology of Imam Hussayn's death. The film, among the first of its kind, is intended for the younger generation of British Shia. Made by a British–Iraqi university student it has reportedly sold or distributed over 5000 copies. One of the main regrets voiced by the film's director, was that there was no time during the filming to include commentary by a priest, in order to "add variety." The stated intention of the director was to produce a film that would resemble *The Passion of the Christ*, though he regretted that the budget did not stretch that far.

Whilst only relatively few in the Middle Eastern community practice tatbir (flagellation to express mourning for Imam Hussayn), even this practice has been transmuted. One participant describes the practice as "a way of cleaning out your head," thereby transmuting a religious obligation into self-help psychology similar to non-religious practices.

Religious authority

The trend towards post-Islamist individualization is also visible in a variety of Shia practices. Notably, the concept of *marja'iyya*, the choice of religious representation, is undergoing modification. Whereas followers once chose one specific authority to follow and adopted his ruling, among some in the younger generation there appears to be a shift in attitude. In this group, an individual follows different *marja'a* for rulings on different topics, adopting a bricolage style. According to one Shia lay activist, this has become "a personal issue," an "individual

choice," whereby the believer decides autonomously which elements of Islam (s)he considers to be binding.

Another symbol of this transformation is the growth in lay figures delivering what can be termed as religious instruction to the younger community. Whilst Muharram lectures are still delivered by qualified shaykhs, non-traditional, non-learned figures are also growing in importance. Part of the reason for this transformation is a result of the English language difficulties of the older generation of clerics and the generational gap between them and British Shia youth. "Up until five years ago, we were excluded. There was a language and generation gap which prevented others from understanding what we face, what it's like, living in a western society" pronounces Bushara, a twenty three year old Bahraini-British Shia dressed in black, sitting in a lecture hall in North West London on the eve of Ashura. The use of lay people testifies to the fragmentation of authority structures, the democratization of the paths to experience religious "truth," and new ways of interaction between religious authorities and recipients of religious knowledge. A plurality of voices is highlighted and the monopoly of religious truth is broken down.

Noor Youth, an organization run by students and devoted to young Shia life in Britain, invites not only scholars, but also lay people to deal with topics from abortion to drug use from the Shia perspective, because, as one of the organizers phrased the matter, "we find it really easy to relate to them." An article on AIM ISLAM's website which stressed the need to recruit speakers, both scholars and lay people, argued that "no matter what your occupation is, gaining enough knowledge to give lectures and preach about Islam isn't that far-fetched." Although the article distinguished between the two categories, it is clear from the comment section that not all respondents made the same distinction and that they saw little wrong in lay people delivering a form of religious instruction.

One student activist at an Ahlul Bayt Society (a Shia student society) at a London university phrased the choice of speakers as "it depends what you mean by a scholar, we obviously wouldn't take someone off the street, they need to have a general understanding of Shia issues" thereby not addressing the question of whether a formal Shia education is necessary.

In the *Karbala* film, the focus was as much on lay people as on traditional clerics. Out of the various figures chosen to give a commentary, several were lay people and women. Although the two groups were dressed differently (the clerics wore traditional garb) the film made no distinction between the importance and relevance of the lectures by the learned and non-learned, with both groups interviewed against a background of holy books, thereby equating the type (and nature of acquisition) of knowledge of both groups. The justification for this, according to the director of the film, is that "sometimes a non-*'alim* can speak better than a *'alim*." Bushara echoes this argument arguing that "a mixture of scholar and non-scholar is ideal." This overall trend has provoked a response from trained scholars, who fear counter claims to their authority. As one traditionally trained scholar lamented to me following a speech by a student activist about Ashura "he is competition for us."

PHOTO BY TONY KYRIACOU / © REX FEATURES, 2006

Ashura march in London, 2006

. . ."no matter what your occupation is, gaining enough knowledge to give lectures and preach about Islam isn't that far-fetched."

New activities

Another signifier of the individualization of Shia Islam in the United Kingdom is the growth of new forms of organization and activity catering to the second generation. The launching of "Ashura Awareness Week" on university campuses, particularly in the south of the UK, is a clear example. This event, which began roughly four years ago and takes place during Muharram, is intended for Shia, Sunni, and non-Muslim students. The aim, in the words of a student campaigner, is to "raise awareness of the morals of Karbala" for non-Muslim students, and to help Shia students to "relate issues to our own community… to benefit itself and its people." Ashura Awareness Week entails setting up stalls, organizing lectures, and handing out material. As such, it detaches Ashura from its religious connotation of a one-day lamentation, and transposes it into a traditional student activism framework, not much different from say, environment week. Indeed, this year, Ashura Awareness Week in Imperial College University in London, entitled "Thirsty for Justice," focused on water scarcity in the region through the prism of the notion of injustice, as opposed to more "traditional" readings of the sacrifice of Hussayn. Organizers created links with the Environment Society and instead of showing the customary visual images of Imam Hussayn, the stand was stacked with water bottles and covered with a motif of a green leaf, stickers of which were also handed out to passers-by.

These developments mirror post–Islamist trends documented in certain Sunni communities in the West and among some social strata in the Middle East. Olivier Roy has argued that an individualization of Islam is taking place, whereby "faith is a face to face encounter … between individuals and themselves,"[1] a shift from "religion to religiosity"[2] and the recasting of Islam "in spiritualist and moral terms."[3] This argument dovetails with Asef Bayat's thesis on Egyptian society, which argues that emphasis in now placed on "an active piety concerned with personal salvation and culture."[4] It also echoes Patrick Haenni's "Islam du Marché," which focuses upon the quest for individual happiness, including ambition and social success.[5] It is among the younger generations in the West, distanced from the "traditional" religious authorities held in esteem by their parents and benefiting from the transformations engendered by new media, that these general trends are most perceivable.

The younger generation of Middle Eastern British Shia very much reflects these processes. Individualization has found an outlet in the message of Ashura and the portrayal of Imam Hussayn in a variety of media. It is also reflected in practices intimately tied to Ashura and Shiism in general, including the nature of religious authority and the structure of community organization, impacting upon the shape and form of the religion in the UK.

Dana Moss is Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Transatlantic Institute.

Note

1. Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam* (London: Hurst & Company, 2004), 185.
2. Ibid. 9.
3. Ibid. 191.
4. At http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2003/639/fe1.htm.
5. At http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2003/09/HAENNI/10460.

The Politics of Humour in Iran

RAVINDER KAUR

Though the genre of political humour is popular across different societies, it is commonly seen as a product of repressive regimes – a mild substitute for free speech and public critique denied to people therein. Moving away from the binary of totalitarian vs. democratic states, this article reads the recent spurt in Ahmadinejad jokes in Iran as a middle class response to fears of a return to the conservative agenda that Ahmadinejad's victory symbolized.

"One day, Ahmadinejad found lice crawling on his head. He took a comb and made a neat middle parting in his hair. Someone asked him why he had done that. He replied, 'One side is for male lice and the other for females'."

"Do you know what caused cholera in Tehran? Yes, Ahmadinejad finally took a bath and washed his socks in river Karaj."

One of the more entertaining aspects of Iranian politics is the burgeoning repertoire of jokes and satire it has produced in the public domain. It is not unusual to find young people – alone or in groups – hunched over their mobile phones in public parks, streets, restaurants, and shopping centres dexterously circulating and receiving funny text messages. That a new funny joke has just made an appearance is duly noted with a burst of laughter and shared smiles. While a wide variety of jokes – ethnic and regional stereotypes, sexual proclivities of individuals and communities – are available for popular consumption, it is the jokes aimed at political developments and personalities that evoke most attention among the youth population as well as the state authorities. The Ahmadinejad jokes, for example, have struck a particular cord with the youths who form a sizeable proportion of the population and whose techno-savvy ensures instant circulation and mass availability of these jokes.[1] The under-thirty year population reportedly accounts for the largest consumer share of a rapidly growing telecom market in Iran that records traffic of twenty million text messages per day.[2] This has spawned an electronic humour loop that, unlike the oral traditions of joke-telling, instantly amplifies, archives, and makes available the contents in transnational locations.

That jokes are not just innocuous entertainment became clear when in 2005 the telecommunications department tried to disrupt the short messaging service (SMS). The story goes that one of the jokes ridiculing Ahmadinejad's sense of hygiene actually reached him. He did not find the joke as funny as many others had found it and ordered disruption of the mobile text services. The disruption of mobile services, in fact, became a frequent occurrence, as is the practice of blocking access to particular Internet websites considered harmful. Moreover, the young men and women who were traditionally stopped and searched for *badhijabi*, or un-Islamic dressing by the *Basij* (auxiliary police) were now searched for jokes on sensitive matters on their mobile phones. The chief prosecutor of Tehran, Saeed Mortazavi, was reported to have warned those who spread jokes and rumours against political leaders with prosecution and confiscation of their phones.[3] It is not clear how far the threat was carried out, but there were widespread rumours of individuals who were being prosecuted for blogging seditious jokes. Though there is no law against jokes per se, the sixth article of the Iranian constitution forbids anyone from insulting and "instigating individuals and groups to act against the security, dignity, and interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran" and "offending the Leader of the Revolution and recognized religious authorities." The political/religious leadership as well as "sensitive" government policies, thus, constitute the sacred sphere that may not be subjected to ridicule. Yet, jokes, cartoons and satires on such "sensitive" political subjects continue to appear unceasingly in the Iranian public sphere. The obvious question is: how to read humour that is at once popular and perilous?

"Reading" political humour in Iran

A particular view gaining ground in the western media is that these jokes are evidence of ordinary people's resistance to the Iranian state power.[4] The frame of "political humour" is frequently borrowed from the former Soviet and Eastern European experience to explain the jokes as subversive response to "totalitarian regimes" like that in Iran. This is partly due to the popular discourse on "conformism" in communist societies and partly because the western gaze on revolutionary Iran is largely framed through the binary of hegemony/resistance. Even before President Bush labelled Iran as part of the "axis of evil" in 2002, the Islamic revolution of 1979 was already viewed suspiciously in the West as the harbinger of totalitarianism. Thus, any government post-1979 is a priori assumed to be in contravention to the will of the Iranian people who could only be in opposition to it. This binary neatly split the good "people" from the evil "regime," thereby laying ground for a possible military intervention to "liberate" the Iranian people. The appearance of jokes soon after the election of Ahmadinejad conveniently fed into this discourse of people vs. regime. This article challenges such narrow readings of Iranian political humour, locating it instead in those

Students in a Tehran park

PHOTO BY NICK HANNES / © AP/REPORTERS, 2007

aspects of state power that invoke fear, loathing, and uncertainty in a given context. Humour is situated here as a fresh vantage point from where to view the complicated field of interaction with the state power in everyday life.

A central concern, therefore, to our understanding of political humour is its "commonsense" association with totalitarian states. I suggest that the production and circulation of political humour be located outside the binary of totalitarian vs. democratic states, and more specifically in those aspects that invoke fear, loathing, and uncertainty in a given context. The genre of political humour – jokes, satires, and cartoons offering a commentary on political developments – is a familiar one in most societies and not restricted to those labelled "totalitarian" alone. For example, the events of 9/11 and the subsequent "war on terror," at once, inhabit an emotive, fearful, and perilous domain within the American domestic politics. While serious political critique was sparse until more recently, the Internet has long been abuzz with "Bush jokes" that ridiculed critical intelligence failures leading up to 9/11, Iraq war as Bush's personal revenge on Saddam Hussein for plotting to kill his father, and Bush's ill-informed and ill-prepared military advisors who committed strategic blunders among others. These jokes make possible airing of uncensored opinions, conspiracy theories, rumours, and other unacknowledged, albeit highly potent, forms of information about a theme that remains "sensitive" in American politics.

Politics of humour

Since 2005, one of the most visible symbols of state power within Iran and outside has been the persona of President Ahmadinejad. He is, on the one hand, spectacularly associated with the escalation of international conflicts over nuclear energy, involvement in Iraq, and rivalry with Israel, and on the other, his personification of his government's inability to fulfil election promises to the poorest, rising inflation, fears of US military strikes, and internal dissatisfaction. His ascent to power also coincides with the marked increase in production and circulation of political jokes. While most political leaders are subjected to ridicule, it is Ahmadinejad who has emerged as the favourite figure of utter derision and lampoon in the production of jokes. For example, a popular joke connects his personality with the attributes of filth:

> "If you want to see Ahmadinejad in your dreams, do not take a shower for forty days. Then, for forty nights, right at nine, put the garbage bin in the middle of the room. You will see him in your dream on the fortieth night."

This joke takes on a popular tradition of seeking the blessings of revered saints or deceased family members in dreams. To invoke the spirits from the other world, many rituals and prayers involving objects and practices associated with the desired person's earthly life are required. In this joke, Ahmadinejad is inextricably linked with unclean bodies and refuse collection, both undesired objects and expendable therefore. The joke bears a double-edged transgressive quality that not only dislocates Ahmadinejad from his familiar political habitus into the realm of bare and vulnerable, but also allows personal ridicule to shape the political field.

The Ahmadinejad jokes are primarily of two kinds – about his person and the governmental policies he espouses. A good example of the latter is the recent petrol rationing policy that became a source of discontent in Iran. In 2007, Ahmadinejad announced a small price hike of five pence and placed limits on fuel consumption. This was a politically volatile occurrence in a country that reportedly is the world's fourth largest oil exporter and where consumers take cheap fuel for granted. The rationing system allowed each consumer coupons worth three litres each with a limit of 100 litres for private cars and 800 litres for registered taxis per month. A major source of livelihood in big cities like Tehran is taxi services and often, private cars double up as taxis during peak hours. The announcement caused widespread unrest and violence especially in Tehran where ten petrol stations were burnt overnight. This mix of resentment, frustration, and anxiety over consequences of fuel rationing soon became inspiration for popular jokes. For example:

> "A passerby asked a man standing in a mile long queue outside a Tehran petrol station, 'what is this queue for?' The man replied, 'a gang of thugs has kidnapped Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad and they are threatening to burn them alive if we do not pay $30 million before midnight.' The passerby said, 'Oh, so you are contributing to the ransom amount to free them.' 'No,' said the man, 'we are collecting petrol to burn them before the kidnappers do.'"

Another joke along the same line is:

> "If anybody needs more transportation than their three-litre coupon affords them, they can ride one of those seventeen million asses who voted for me two years ago."

While the first joke displaces the political leadership from its position of comfort to the perils of violent contestation over precious resources in everyday life, the second locates the source of frustration within the people for having brought Ahmadinejad to power. The joke tellers often laughingly apologise for causing offence to those seventeen million people, yet the message is clear – these voters had brought in a President who had falsely vowed to bring the country's oil wealth to the ordinary people. In other words, it is as much a self-critique for bringing the country to the brink of disaster as a critique of the leadership.

. . . it is Ahmadinejad who has emerged as the favourite figure of utter derision and lampoon in the production of jokes.

A two-fold interlinked conclusion follows. Firstly, the object of ridicule in the Ahmadinejad jokes presented above is not necessarily the state power in revolutionary Iran, rather the representatives of state who are found unworthy of the exalted office they occupy. Of all the political leaders of the Islamic republic, Ahmadinejad has been a particularly popular figure of lampoon among the youths and the upper classes. His street level polemics, ill-fitting clothes, unkempt beard, and slight frame offer a study in contrast compared to Ahmadinejad's predecessor, the elegant and erudite former President Khatami. While Khatami's term is not necessarily remembered in glowing terms, he has seldom been subjected to ridicule in the same ways. A frequent sentiment expressed is that Khatami with his striking appearance, flowing robes, and learned disposition was a suitable and respectable representative of modern Iran to the outside world. Whereas Ahmadinejad in comparison is more a rabble-rouser from the congested, less prosperous, lower-middle class South Tehran districts than a distinguished statesman. The ridicule that he is subjected to is also of a more intimate nature, for example, his lacking sense of hygiene, simple-mindedness, and feeble logic. The popularity of these jokes, particularly among the urban middle classes, testify to the social class distinctions at subtle play in the way Ahmadinejad is identified as the object of mockery and consequently unfit to represent the Iranian state.

Secondly, the wide popularity of Ahmadinejad jokes signifies both the continued disenchantment with the state power and unintended corrosion of its visage. These dual processes enable the subjects to refigure their own position in relation to the state power through humour. The ascendance of Ahmadinejad to the state power was a shocking event, representing fear and uncertainty, particularly for the elite and urbane upper-middle classes. The depth and intensity of humorous ridicule and the extreme response of Ahmadinejad in closing down the mobile networks are indicators of this ongoing political refiguration in Iran.

Ravinder Kaur is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Society and Globalisation, Roskilde University, Denmark.
Email: rkaur@ruc.dk

Notes

1. The 15–24 years old youth population is estimated at 25% of a total of ca. 70 million. The under-15 years population was estimated in 2005 at 29% (according to the UN Human Development Report 2007).
2. The number of mobile phone users was reported at 21,300,000 in December 2007 (nearly one third of the population) and is projected to reach 36,000,000 by 2009. The Internet connections are pegged at 12,500,000 though it may be significantly higher because of the Internet cards sold in open market. Performance Report, Telecommunication Company of Iran, December 2007, at www.irantelecom.ir.
3. See http://www.isna.ir/Main/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-544160.
4. See for example, Robert Tait, "Heard the One about the President?" *The Guardian*, 14 April 2006.

The Ahmadiyya & Freedom of Religion in Indonesia

LEENA AVONIUS

The recent controversy over the Ahmadiyya movement in Indonesia pitted supporters and critics of the movement against each other. This article shows how both sides present their own definition of religious freedom and how they push forcefully their views on the Indonesian government. The author argues that what is at stake is not only the destiny of a religious orientation, but also thexstate's power in religious matters.

Since the change of regime in 1998, Indonesia has reformed its national legislation to better correspond with international human rights principles by introducing new laws, amending the Constitution, and ratifying the core international human rights covenants. Yet the ongoing struggle over the position of the Ahmadiyya community illustrates that no consensus has been achieved on some basic human rights principles – namely, freedom of religion. On the one hand, the Ahmadiyya case shows how both radical Islamic organizations and defenders of freedom of religion make use of public space in trying to influence the government. On the other hand, it suggests that the Indonesian government still hesitates to let go of state control over religion.

. . . the ongoing struggle over the position of the Ahmadiyya community illustrates that no consensus has been achieved on some basic human rights principles . . .

The Ahmadiyya case, spurred by demands to ban the sect by Muslim radicals and the rejection of this demand by the supporters of religious freedom, has been defined by two major series of events. The first, in July 2005, culminated with a fatwa by the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) demanding the government to ban Ahmadiyya. The second gathered momentum from late 2007, reaching its peak in early June 2008 when a joint ministerial decree was released concerning Ahmadiyya and its teachings. In both these situations, tension was built up by radical Islamic organizations through lobbying, inflammatory meetings, and violence that aimed at presenting Ahmadiyya as "a problem" to which MUI and government institutions were supposed to find a solution. In this process Islamic radicals have also had to deal with counter-lobbying from the supporters of religious freedom who are equally organized and vocal but non-violent in their efforts to have an impact on government policies.

The Ahmadiyya controversy

The Ahmadiyya came to the Indonesian archipelago since the 1920s, and the JAI was formally registered by the Indonesian state in 1953. The current controversy concerns the JAI, which is part of the London-based international Ahmadiyya Qadiyani Movement and claims to have up to seven hundred thousand members in Indonesia. Indonesia also has a smaller Gerakan Ahmadiyah Indonesia with approximately three thousand members, representing Ahmadiyya's Lahore Movement. As early as 1980, MUI had issued a fatwa on Ahmadiyya. The decree had advised ulamas to inform people that the teachings of Ahmadiyya fell outside the bounds of Islam and to redirect the members of Jamaah Ahmadiyah Indonesia (JAI) to go back to the "correct form of Islam." During that time MUI was strictly under government control, and the fatwa went largely unnoticed. By 2005, the MUI had become a more independent-minded actor, and its statements reflected the growing influence of Islamic hardliners in its body.[1] In its 2005 fatwa, the MUI aggressively pointed out Ahmadiyya's deviancy and that its followers were to be treated as apostates. Most remarkably, in 2005 the MUI claimed that the Indonesian government was obliged to ban the Ahmadiyya movement and to close down its premises.

The MUI's 2005 fatwa was preceded by MUI and government meetings on Ahmadiyya and some other religious groups. Parallel to these meetings radical Islamic organizations arranged violent attacks against the JAI's national headquarters in Bogor, forcing it to close down in July 2005. Ten days later, the MUI's fatwa proposed the banning of the sect as a correct response to the anti-Ahmadiyya violence. However, during that time the government was not willing to act upon the demand. The MUI's fatwa has been followed by repeated violence against the premises of JAI, Ahmadiyya mosques and the private houses of JAI members. In Lombok, for example, over two hundred Ahmadiyya members have lived in temporary shelters in the provincial capital Mataram for over two years due to violent attacks.

Violence and inflammatory public speeches by radical Muslim leaders were again used to step up pressure in early 2008 to force the government to ban the JAI. In February 2008, a series of public gatherings were organized; during one these gatherings Sobri Lubis, the Secretary-General of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), even urged FPI members to kill Ahmadiyya followers. These gatherings took place when the JAI and Bakorpakem, an ad hoc coordinating body consisting of the representatives of Attorney General's Office, national intelligence body BIN, police, military, and the departments of religion and education, were in the middle of subtle negotiations over the acceptability of the movement's beliefs and practices. As a result a list of recommendations was drafted on how to make Ahmadiyya "correctly Islamic" again.[2]

For three months Bakorpakem teams observed Ahmadi mosques and JAI premises, but in April 2008 the body concluded that JAI had not followed its twelve recommendations. A joint statement by the Ministry of Religion, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Attorney General's Office was considered necessary. According to the law on religious deviation and offence (No. 1/PNPS/1965), such a statement can recommend the President to ban a religious organization or sect. For a moment it appeared to be simply a matter of time until the demands of the radicals would be fulfilled, and the MUI "solution" – banning Ahmadiyya – would be taken to its final conclusion. Meanwhile, however, JAI and the supporters of religious freedom had also organized themselves. JAI members demanded the MUI to nullify its fatwa. The National Alliance for Freedom of Religion and Belief (AKKBB), a civil society network that was initiated after the 2005 attacks, published a petition for religious freedom in some major Indonesian newspapers that was signed by several notable members of the national elite.

Both sides organized street demonstrations. Finally, on the first of June violence took place again when radical Muslims attacked the AKKBB's demonstration at the Monas Square in central Jakarta. After the incident it was evident that the government could not just ban Ahmadiyya, but it had to find a compromise that would please all parties. A week later a joint statement was announced, but it appeared to have left both sides displeased. The statement does not recommend the banning of the JAI, but forbids its members from spreading interpreta-

tions and holding activities that deviate from the principal teachings of Islam. The statement does not clearly articulate a position on Ahmadiyya and whether continued worship would be also considered a form of "spreading its interpretations" of Islam.

Police complicity

The perpetrators of violence against Ahmadiyya and the AKKBB are identified as belonging to such radical Islamic organizations as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and Hizb ut-Tahrir. Of the two, it is the former that is known to provide the muscle for street actions. The FPI's close association with the police again became apparent in the anti-Ahmadiyya attacks. According to eyewitnesses, during the 2005 attack against the Ahmadiyya premises in Bogor the police supported the mobs carrying out attacks.[3] Police also failed to prevent the violence during the AKKBB demonstration in Jakarta, even though they were well aware of the possibility of a clash.

The history of the FPI's origins provides some explanation for police inaction if not collusion. It is no secret that the FPI was created in 1998 with the help of then Commander of Armed Forces General Wiranto and the Jakarta Police Chief Nugroho Jayusman.[4] At first, a "voluntary security force" of thousands of petty gangsters and hooligans was a useful tool against the student-led pro-democracy demonstrations that heavily criticized the first post-Suharto government and demanded the perpetrators of human rights abuses, including Wiranto himself, to be taken to justice. While other such vigilante groups disappeared, the FPI continued its activities, and became famous for its raids on places of entertainment and prostitution. It coordinated its actions with the police, and despite some disagreement, the close relations between the two have been upheld throughout the post-Suharto years. In 2006, the police even sponsored FPI leader Habib Rizieq's speaking tour in Poso, a region hit by communal conflict.[5]

The raids conducted by the FPI in the name of its populist Islamic radicalism may have assisted the police in its efforts to keep criminality and murky businesses under some control. But the attack against the AKKBB, whose members include prominent Indonesian politicians and intellectuals, apparently exceeded the limits of tolerance of state authorities towards their actions. Four days after the Monas incident, the Indonesian police organized a spectacular arrest of Habib Rizieq and fifty-nine FPI members. It remains to be seen whether the FPI's warm relations with the country's security forces have now finally turned cold.

What is freedom of religion?

The Ahmadiyya case has led to discussions about the state's role in religious matters. The JAI and the AKKBB insist that the government has no right to ban any religious orientation, because it would assault the constitutional right of all Indonesian citizens to embrace the religion or system of belief of their choice. According to this view, freedom of religion must be respected at all times, and the substance of any particular belief has no relevance. The state should limit its actions to guaranteeing public safety and ensure that freedom of religion is respected by all. Because Ahmadiyya believers have never caused threat to public security, the state has no grounds for forbidding their activities.

Many AKKBB activists whom I recently interviewed stressed that they did not personally agree with the JAI's religious ideas. They regarded Ahmadiyya as a departure from mainstream Sunni Islam that they themselves practiced, but they also felt that they had no right or even need to interfere with Ahmadiyya's religious ideas. From their point of view, religiosity is creative like any other form of human activity. New interpretations of existing religions are acceptable and even welcome, but nobody should try to force his own beliefs on anyone else.

Those who support the ban disagree with this view and claim that Ahmadiyya's existence in Indonesia as well as its practices and preaching insults their rights as Indonesian citizens. According to them, the state has the obligation to protect religions that are formally recognized in Indonesia from deviant teachings and blasphemy. This view is backed with the national law on religious deviation, which prohibits anyone from deliberately making interpretations or participating in public activities that deviate from the formally recognized religions. This article has been repeated in the Indonesian Criminal Code article on religious offence, which has been used several times to prosecute religious orientations that the Bakorpakem has deemed deviant.

COURTESY OF AKKBB, 2008

The AKKBB demonstration of 1 June 2008

Legal solutions

FPI leader Habib Rizieq and the former Minister of Justice and Human Rights Yusril Ihza Mahendra are among those who have stressed that the Ahmadiyya case has nothing to do with freedom of religion and merely concerns the besmirching of Islam. Both have suggested that the easiest solution to the problem would be that Ahmadiyya declares itself a new religion outside Islam, referring particularly to the example of Pakistan. But as Indonesia currently only recognizes six world religions, it is difficult to see how this would resolve the problem without leading to others.

According to the anti-Ahmadiyya group, freedom of religion means allowing individuals to choose one of the recognized religions or to establish a completely new religion. But it does not allow individuals to make new interpretations of any already existing religion. Religions are fixed, unchanging and have rigid boundaries. This view has been criticized by Harkristuti Harkrisnowo, the Director General of Human Rights Department at the Indonesian Ministry for Justice and Human Rights, who has questioned the very existence of an authority able to determine the correct form of Islam or any other religion.[6]

The AKKBB plans to take the current legislation to the Constitutional Court for judicial review. From their point of view, these laws contradict with the Indonesian Constitution that guarantees full freedom of religion. If Indonesia would indeed abolish the laws on religious offence it would follow the example of the United Kingdom in making a historic decision in May 2008 to abolish the law that criminalized blasphemy. Taking such a decision, Indonesia would leave behind countries such as Finland, the Netherlands, Italy, Pakistan, and Malaysia, countries that all have laws criminalizing religious offence and/or blasphemy.

Leena Avonius is Postdoctoral Fellow at the Renvall Institute for Culture and Area Studies, University of Helsinki.
Email: leena.avonius@helsinki.fi

Notes

1. "Indonesia: Implications of the Ahmadiyah Decree," *International Crisis Group Asia Briefing*, no. 78, (7 July 2008): 8–10.
2. For a complete list, see *The Wahid Institute's Monthly Report on Religious Issues*, no. 6 (January 2008), at http://www.wahidinstitute.org/english/content/view/200/54/.
3. Robert W. Hefner, "Muslim Democrats and Islamist Violence in Post-Soeharto Indonesia," in *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization*, ed. Robert W. Hefner (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 273–301.
4. *ICG*, 13–14.
5. Habib Rizieq, "Ahmadiyah Menipu (Lima Perkara Tolak Ahmadiyah)," at http://bukuputihfpi.blogspot.com; Yusril Ihza Mahendra, "Sekali Lagi SKB Tentang Ahmadiyah," at http://yusril.ihzamahendra.com/2008/06/11/sekali-lagi-tentang-skb-ahmadiyah/.
6. "Ahmadiyah can worship, Kalla says," *Jakarta Post*, 11 June 2008.

The Southern Movement in Yemen

SUSANNE DAHLGREN

During the past year, people of the former South Yemen Republic have joined a popular movement demanding fair rule and equal citizenship against which the Yemeni government has taken harsh methods. While the western world concentrates on Al-Qaida and kidnapped tourists, the movement has taken a visible presence on the Internet, which offers a whole new platform for political protest.

In a video clip posted on Youtube, images of mutilated bodies follow one another followed by the grim face of the Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh and the text "In this image he is swearing, swearing to clean the land from the owners … us!!" It continues showing maps of Southern Yemen with the text "Our land, our country South Arabia" ending with the announcement "We don't believe in war and power, we will return our land in peace." The background music from the popular rock group Linkin Park with the song "In the End" lends a youthful tone to the clip.[1]

While most of the picture material comes from the London-based opposition movement's Sout al-Ganoub (The Voice of the South) website that forms only one arm of the locally rooted movement, the sentiments in the video reflect well those prevalent throughout the country itself. The video has triggered months-long discussions. One participant, Oneyedboxer, expresses sentiments common among Adeni youth towards the Northern Yemeni rulers: "don't you forget your Imam(s) locked you for years from civilization; don't you forget that when European officials came to visit North Yemen they used to tell you that they are Jinns with blue eyes, so that you don't talk to them… How do you expect a government with ninety percent of its people illiterate to rule? Shame on you to have someone rule over you who does not even have a high school diploma. This is not a war of the South and North, it's a war of Ideology."

These and similar voices to be found on the Internet point to today's social and political dissent in what used to be South Yemen, which has roots in the uneven state-society relationship and the imbalanced development of the two parts of the country. Since Yemeni unification this imbalance has to some extent deepened despite opposite expectations, resulting in protests and mass demonstrations. While such protest have been stifled by the government, the movement's presence on the Internet is harder to silence.

Unification of the "one Yemeni homeland"

In the area that forms today's Republic of Yemen, a centralized administration and state territorial control have proved to be difficult tasks. The Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) came into being from a long and violent civil war (1962-1969) that brought Egyptian troops and civil servants to an area basically untouched by foreign rule. The republican state never managed to establish full territorial sovereignty and large parts of Northern and Eastern regions still today remain under tribal control. In the South, the rulers managed to do something the British had failed a little earlier when in 1967 they formed a nation state out of the British Colony (Aden) and the two Aden protectorates: the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY).

Whereas the unification in 22 May 1990 was at first enthusiastically welcomed by everybody in Yemen, years that followed crushed the illusions in the South. High inflation, inefficiency in running the state fiscals, centralization of state bureaucracy and the accompanied marginalization of Southern administrative centres formed the basis of dissatisfaction. Once World Bank policies started to frame socio-economic development impoverishment befell not only the poor but also many among the middle sectors of society. These were accompanied by kidnappings, house robberies, and murders of Southern politicians – presumably linked to president Saleh. By 1993 it became clear that the unity was not on a solid ground and the Southern leaders withdrew to Aden. The short but devastating civil war was fought in early summer of 1994 between the Northern and Southern army factions. Emerging from the war, Southern popular sentiment was that the honeymoon was over and what had come to replace it was simply Northern occupation.

With unity came also a political culture unfamiliar to the South. Corruption and dishonesty substituted earlier good governance.[2] It also became evident that the multi-party system actually meant choosing the "right" party, one that has access to state funds and can deliver everything from development schemes to land properties and government jobs. Ever since the harmony of the early years of unity when government posts were distributed evenly between Southerners and Northerners, there has been no question that the party that delivers is the People's General Congress, the party of the Republic's President.

To the disillusionment of the Southerners, the authoritarian system of one party rule was simply replaced by clientelism which demanded unreserved loyalty to the government in exchange for personal benefits such as a government jobs, expensive cars, or pieces of land; a practice they imagined to have originated in the North. Moreover, hard-line religious moralizing that spread among the Southerners has contributed to the marginalization of women's earlier visible roles in the public sphere.[3]

There are also economic reasons for dissent. During the 1994 war factories in Aden were affected. Machines and raw materials were demolished or looted and factories had to send workers, mostly women, home. With a salary from the state, these workers just stayed at home until years later came their retirement. Now these former factory workers, people in their best productive years, are bitter. With a small pension that hardly covers daily expenses, they do not waste time in job seeking since hardly any new job opportunities have been created. Dr Suad Uthman Abdulrahim from Aden University suggests that not only rivalry for markets hit the factories but also greed for huge land properties that the closed factories could release.[4] Hunt for lucrative land properties has been one of the activities in which the elite has been busily engaged. According to some estimates, the Northern elite has taken possession of fifty percent of Adeni land. While part of the land acquisitions are disputed and some even litigated in court, most land distributed is state land without previous private owners.

But political and economic factors are not the only sources of dissent; some believe that the two parts of the country have irreversibly different cultures, too. While in the North it was common in the early years of unity to believe that Southerners are "disbelievers" and that their women are "loose," in the South many viewed Northerners as "ignorant" and "looters of state property." Despite early hope that the two Yemens will slowly come together in terms of customs and psychology, Southerners now think that it is impossible to live with "those people" since their culture is entirely different from that of the South. This attitude is visible in the manner in which the "South" is symbolically constructed in the popular dissent. Bad governance and corruption is thought to be characteristic of the Northern culture at large. According to this constellation, the North is imagined as a community of tribes and tribal thinking while people in the South are adherents of a nation state ruled by state law. Thus the new Southern state is not designed to replicate the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen but to be built according to principles of equal citizenship.

Protests

In late spring 2007 dissent started to culminate in public demonstrations and increased criticism was voiced in opposition newspapers and civil society media. Popular protests spread throughout the former South Yemen and the slogan of *infisāl* (separation) was also raised

among *al-harakat al-ganubiyyat* (Southern movement) as the movement is popularly known. The movement is particularly strong in Hadhramaut governorate to the east where most of oil wealth comes from. The activities there have included stopping Northern people from buying or confiscating land, erecting road blocs to harass drivers with Northern license plates, and pushing demands for getting at least twenty percent of the oil income.

The Southern movement has no national leadership or joint organization and locally takes a variety of forms. It has been most active in small towns in Dhala' governorate, some hundred kilometres north of Aden where the 1963 Southern revolution had its starting point. These locally based initiatives are not necessarily connected to exiled Yemenis who have formed the Southern Democratic Assembly (TAJ) in London, or with the National Opposition Front (MOWJ), an older resistance coalition working from outside but active on the Internet.

The movement unites people of all social strata. It was sparked in spring 2007 by popular protests organized by the Yemeni Retired Military Consultative Association, formed by former military commanders and army men. Following the 1994 reorganization of the army, these men feel they have faced systematic discrimination. Often accompanied by unemployed youth, former civil servants and factory workers, as well as human rights activists, demonstrations have been staged in front of local government premises. Due to lack of job opportunities and discrimination in access to foreign education, youth with university and high school diplomas have also joined the movement. Since the revolution this is the first time young people have taken an active role in politics, which predicts a good future for civil society activities in the South at large.

Notwithstanding the arrest of leaders of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), political parties and the opposition united in the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) largely remain outside the movement. These parties, most notably the Islah Party (Congregation for Reform) and the YSP took a long time to announce support to the movement. In addition, activists of the movement regard the opposition parties' cooperation with the government with aversion.

PHOTO BY SUSANNE DAHLGREN, 2008

A sit-in in support of the opposition newspaper al-Ayaam in March 2008 in Aden

Secession or federation

While most people in the South view that a change is necessary, not all agree that secession would be the right solution. Another scheme is federation where each governorate (Yemen is divided into 21 governorates) could enjoy autonomy, including deciding on its own norms for public morality. A group of religious personalities recently demanded the establishment of a state body to monitor public virtues in the manner of Saudi Arabia, causing alarm among Southerners.

In another upsetting incidence Nasir al-Shaibani, the former Minister of Religious Endowments (*awqaf*) and currently preacher in a Northern mosque, issued a fatwa against the protestors calling them "Infidels" and "Communists" who want to "Christianize and Americanize the country," thus applying rhetoric typical to some Islamist groups throughout the Middle East. In response, the Coordination Council of Military and Civil Retirees Societies, joined by the unemployed youth committees in all Southern governorates, filed a lawsuit against the former minister accusing him of instigating bloodshed in the demonstrations.

Still the question of secession and re-establishing a state to the territory that used to be the PDRY is not an uncomplicated issue. Historically a big number of Adenis have roots in Ta'izz area just across the former border. These Adenis object to any secession even if otherwise favourable to the Southern cause. While culturally Ta'izz resembles the South, inclusion of this fertile area in a secessionist state would be out of the question for the mighty Northern highland tribes. To the Yemeni state the movement poses a big challenge alongside other problems caused by sympathizers of Al-Qaida and the armed conflict that was going on in the Northern province of Sa'ada for years, all making foreign analysts call Yemen a potential failed state.[5] It is evident that the government cannot just suppress the movement and disregard its demands. Throughout Yemen similar anti-government protests have occurred where demands for price regulation, fair rule, measures to eradicate poverty and equal distribution among regions of national resources, and development schemes have been raised. Unless the movement stops being framed as a movement for the South it is unlikely that it will be united with Northern cities where the above demonstrations have taken place. A lot will depend on the changes that are evident when Ali Abdullah Saleh's presidential term ends in 2013.

Still the Southern Movement has attracted also Northerners in its ranks. One of the most well-known is Dr Muhammad al-Saqqaf, lawyer and university professor who has joined the demands for secession from the North. When I met him in a sit-in in Aden in March 2008, he enthusiastically showed the orange t-shirt and basketball cap that he brought from Dhala'. In waiting for international attention, the Dhala'ian movement has created a visual image and presence on the Internet, inspired by Eastern European popular uprisings. With these postmodern elements to fashion the popular uprising, the movement wants to show the world that the Southern Yemeni cause deserves global media attention, the way of other troubled lands of Tibet, Zimbabwe or Ukraine. While the protests have continued a good part of 2008, the Southern rebellion finally made top headlines in all international news networks at the end of March 2008 to be faded under news about the "Yemeni Al-Qaida."

Parliamentary elections are due in April 2009. However, people joke about their need to get to vote in the US elections as whatever happens on the superpower's political stage will have a bigger effect on their lives than the results of the Yemeni elections.

Meanwhile, in a manner typical to Yemeni politics at large, elite response to the problems in the South has been to establish new "civil society" bodies. Two competing committees have been established to ensure a smooth move towards a democratic process and to end the civil unrest. The first one, established by Presidential Decree and headed by one of President's Southern allies, was charged with the task to evaluate the situation in the South and to find solutions to calm down popular dissent and to work towards enhancing national unity. A competing committee, the Yemeni Centre for Historical Studies and Future Strategies, was to follow, set up by prominent Northern army generals, and members of the political elite and intelligentsia from both South and North. While it is clear that the former committee works in close contact with the government and the latter one with the opposition parties, it remains to be seen whether this truly Yemeni solution to the problem, setting up of new "NGOs" to hold meetings preferably in five-star hotels, ever finds feasible solutions to the deep-rooted dissent prevalent throughout the country.

Susanne Dahlgren is Academy Research Fellow at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies.
Email: Susanne.Dahlgren@gmail.com

Notes

1. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaBhzsUz6E0.
2. On corruption in Yemen, see A. S. al-Dahı, *al-fasad fil-yaman. Al-asbab, al-muzahir, al-nitadhig, al-mu'alagat*. The Arab Center for Strategic Studies Monthly Monograph Series no. 40, 2006.
3. See S. Dahlgren, *Contesting Realities. Morality, Propriety and the Public Sphere in Aden, Yemen* (University of Helsinki Press 2004).
4. S. 'Uthmān 'Abd al-Rahīm, *al-khaskhasat wal-mar'at al-'āmilat*. The Arab Center for Strategic Studies Monthly Monograph Series no. 11, 2000.
5. J.M. Sharp, *Yemen: Where is the Stability Tipping Point?*, Arab Reform Bulletin Vol. 6 issue 6, July 2008. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, www.carnegieendowment.org.

Engaging Europe's Muslims

MALEIHA MALIK

Debates on the role of Muslim citizens in Europe question how European liberal democracies should engage with non-liberal ideas. Until now the debate has focused on how Muslim groups and individuals should behave. The author seeks ways to redefine liberal democracy in order to make it more inclusive of those who may hold illiberal views, Muslim or otherwise.

Recent events in Europe, such as the Danish cartoon affair, have offended many Muslims and aggravated liberal angst about the precise balance between free speech and civility towards non-liberal religious groups. While the question of how liberal democracies might engage non-liberal ideas is not, of course, solely about Muslims or Islam, in practical terms some of the most pressing questions of European domestic and international politics are about Muslims. In order to maintain liberal values in European democracies it is necessary to de-link the notion of liberal democracy from that of the liberal consensus. A more complex notion, encompassed in the relation of agonistic respect, allows for liberal values such as free speech and gender equality to be maintained while including those groups who may reject the liberal consensus.

In the past, "extremist" challenges were often from anti-system parties who were potentially a viable political threat to European democracies. Today, it is unlikely that those Muslim groups who challenge the liberal democratic consensus – and who are usually limited to fringe elements within small minority communities – will ever command the wide-spread political support to achieve electoral success. The key issue is not that certain groups may grasp political power by "playing the democratic game," but how to maintain liberal values while engaging potentially non-liberal Muslim groups.

The traditional approach of liberal political theory presents liberal democracy as a "rational consensus" in which all participants agree on the key values governing political life. The challenge posed by the presence of Muslims in Europe is to find a way to respond to those individuals and groups whose values are radically different from, and often incompatible with, liberalism. Such groups frustrate the possibility for rational consensus on liberal grounds. Thus, we need a strategy that allows liberal principles to be applied to intractable and incomprehensible religious and political differences. This may introduce the risk of uncertainty about the outcome of the process, but this destabilization of existing political identities can also be an advantage. It can yield more complex forms of democratic politics that are more appropriate where citizens have widely different sets of beliefs, whilst at the same time retaining a core set of liberal commitments, such as to freedom of speech and gender equality.

There are a number of routes into this more complex form of politics. William E. Connolly has introduced the concept of "agonistic respect" into a definition of liberal democracy[1] which has three important implications. First, "agonistic respect" emphasizes that its goal is not to seek a rational liberal consensus but to allow discussion and development of a complex political identity amongst all citizens. For example, it is more important for individual citizens to have a full debate about the Danish cartoon affair and free speech than reaching an agreement about whether it was correct for the cartoons to have been published. Second, "agonistic respect" welcomes the introduction of "difference" into the public sphere rather than relegating it to the private sphere. Therefore, rather than treating the commitment of some Muslims to ideas such as the "Caliphate" or "Islamic state" as a problem, agonistic respect encourages Muslims to debate these ideas in public along with all other citizens. Third, agonistic respect moves beyond limiting democratic politics to a defined territorial nation state by recognizing that an individual's political identity may transcend national boundaries by drawing on transnational allegiances. This allows us to overcome one of the alleged hurdles to full Muslim participation in the European public sphere, since it challenges the false accusation that Muslims in Europe are incapable of loyalty to their countries simply because of their allegiance to their religion or their ethnic background. Accordingly, the fact that Muslims strongly identify with a world wide community of believers would not be problematized as incompatible with their identity as national citizens. In fact, the British government is increasingly recognizing that the fact that British Muslims are full members of a wider global community can be a considerable asset, and includes them as prominent British representatives in their initiatives to build stronger diplomatic ties in the Muslim world.[2]

The first two features of agonistic respect open up political space to disagreement rather than enforcing consensus, and use politics to express private identity in the public sphere. Accordingly, agonistic respect generates a more appropriate paradigm for analyzing the place of radically "different" group – such as some Muslim – in liberal politics. This analysis treats "difference" in the realm of ideas as an advantage rather than a problem, and prevents democratic politics becoming a sphere within which liberalism is entrenched as the received dogma. Agonistic respect enables established concepts, such as what is meant by "gender equality," to be problematized and debated in ways that are similar to the "free market place of ideas" envisaged by classical liberals such as J.S. Mill. Agonistic respect's implication of non-territorial democratization explicitly de-links liberal democracy from geographical limits, thereby providing an ideal paradigm for analyzing the global context of Muslim politics, as seen, for example, in the Danish cartoon affair.

A model of agonistic respect is valuable not only because it is more inclusive than a liberal-consensus model, but also because it strengthens liberal values as it defends them. One recent example of this is the "veil debate" which has led to a substantial debate about the status of women. This heated debate has, in turn, led to Muslims explaining their distinct ideas about women's rights, as well as non-Muslims articulating and defending their central political commitment to gender equality. In this way, in addition to providing a model in which liberal democracies can engage with non-liberal ideas, agonistic respect treats the constant problematizing of freedom of speech or gender equality as a means of strengthening these core values and liberal politics.

Despite its arguable value, a model of liberal democracy based on agonistic respect is not a panacea. It raises questions about the implications of adopting this strategy for liberal politics. For instance, does this process of engagement undermine the critical edge of discourse in the public sphere? How does a liberal democracy ensure that non-liberal groups are themselves willing to engage in a relationship of "agonistic respect"? Furthermore, does the model collapse into uncritical acceptance of difference? Does liberal politics have to accommodate all illiberal practices in the name of tolerance and "respect"? Such difficult questions must be addressed to move successfully from a discourse about the potential of "agonistic respect" towards its practical implementation.

Crucially, this political process of engagement with non-liberals does not require an uncritical acceptance of all their ideas. In fact, an automatic grant of approval can sometimes collapse into condescension rather than a genuine engagement with new ideas. Instead, the challenge for those offering a critique of non-liberal ideas and groups generally, and Muslims and Islam in particular, is to strike a balance between two goals: first, including and understanding new ideas in the European public sphere; and second, maintaining an authentic critical perspective towards non-liberal ideas. A form of European liberal politics based on ideas of "agonistic respect" may provide some of the resources to meet this challenge.

Notes

1. William E Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).
2. See details of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office policy at, "Engaging with the Islamic World," (EWIG), http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/ (6 August 2007).

Maleiha Malik is Reader in Law at the School of Law, King's College, London and co-author of *Discrimination Law: Theory and Context* published by Sweet and Maxwell.
Email: maleiha.malik@kcl.ac.uk

Migration Matters
The Longer View

DAVID WAINES

The editors of the *Enzyklopädie Migration in Europa. Vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 2007) coined the phrase homo migrans to describe the phenomenon of human migration. This collaboration of German and Dutch historians was prompted by the current debate in their respective countries over Moroccan and Turkish immigration. This massive volume, however, covers only the past three centuries of migration including both to and from Europe.

Doubtless migration has been a constant factor in human history. However, with the advent of the modern nation state and the construction of "minorities," migration has become, in post-colonial times especially, a political football. By contrast, in medieval times migration often took the form of large uncontrolled movements of tribal nomads. An illustrative example from the fourteenth century involves reference to the very people that inspired the above work on migration, that is, Turks and at least one Moroccan. The Moroccan Ibn Battuta spent fifteen months in 1332–33 journeying through Anatolia, a region he calls the Land of the Turks, while acknowledging its former Christian origins. Ibn Battuta observes, "there are still large numbers of Christians in Anatolia living under the protection of the Muslims, these latter being Turkmens to whom jizya and other taxes are paid."

FROM *ALT-STAMBULER HOF- UND VOLKSLEBEN*, F. TAESCHNER (ED.) (HANNOVER: LAFAIRE, 1925)

Miniature from an Ottoman album

The first migrations of Turkish nomadic pastoralists from Inner Asia had begun to pass through Transoxania into Persia in the eleventh century. Led by the clan of Seljuks, who were already Sunni Muslims, they entered Baghdad in 1055, ousting the Caliph's Shia rivals, the Buyids. Several branches of Seljuks came to dominate the Middle East opening the way to the Anatolian interior by roundly defeating the Byzantine army in 1071. Further penetration of Turkmen groups led to the creation of rival principalities chiefly in the central Anatolian plateau. Byzantine hopes of ever recovering Anatolia effectively ended a century later. The rise of Mongol power in the Middle East, their destruction of Baghdad, and the annihilation of the Caliphate in 1258 drove further waves of Turks together with Persians westward into Anatolia. By the time of Ibn Battuta's journey through the region, Anatolian society had been undergoing ethnic and religious transformation for nearly two and a half centuries. The Flemish Franciscan friar William of Rubruck (Willem van Rubroeck) passing through the region in 1253 estimated Muslims to comprise only ten percent of the population. Twenty years later, Marco Polo labelling Anatolia "Turkey," said it was inhabited by three races: Turkmen, a primitive people who worshipped Muhammad; then Greeks and Armenians who mingled with the Turkmen in villages and towns.

Ibn Battuta's account provides many further details. He was overwhelmed by the kindness of the Turkish inhabitants and notes that women were unveiled. The associations of *akhis*, formed from members of the various trades, impressed him owing to the generous hospitality and lodging for strangers provided. Their network of hospices provided a degree of cohesion in new urban settings as the *akhi* leaders helped protect local populations from injustices. Together the *akhis* and other Sufi leaders provided leadership for Turkish migrants by mediating disputes among tribal factions.

Ibn Battuta's Anatolian account contains his only description of a Christian community. He describes the great city of Antalia where each community of foreign Christian merchants, Byzantine Greeks, Jews, and Muslims occupied separate walled quarters. He marvelled at the famous cotton fabrics of Ladhiq (now Denizli) made by Christian women artisans while equally fine fabrics were produced in Arzanjan (Erzincan) whose population was mainly Armenian. He had travelled on a Genoese boat from Syria to Anatolia and took another Greek vessel across the Black Sea to the Crimean side where he hired wagons from Turkmen of Christian faith.

Nonetheless, his account leaves the strong impression that the demographics in Anatolia had reached critical mass favouring the Turkicization and Islamization of the population. The political endgame was played out more than a century later. Naturally unaware of that future, Ibn Battuta had enjoyed the hospitality of the sultan of Bursa and his wife. He cannily describes this ruler as the "greatest of the Turkmen kings." This was Orhan Bey, son of Osman whose descendants in 1453 captured Constantinople, the jewel in the crown of then flourishing Ottoman dynasty and the cornerstone of the even greater Empire to come.

The editors of the *Enzyklopadie Migration in Europa* caution against drawing easy lessons from modern migration movements. Are there any to be learned from a medieval movement as described above? It is certain mobility and displacement are part of the human condition, reflected in the concept of *homo migrans*. It then matters that both sides of the equation – immigration and emigration – or, expressed differently, the push and pull factors of migration are considered. Turkish migration into medieval Anatolia went unchecked but resulted in one of the world's most formidable empires, succeeding its dying Byzantine predecessor. If, however, modern European governments are today genuinely concerned about Muslim immigration, they individually and through the European Union could do far more than they have ever attempted (or imagined) in assisting the development, in every sense, of Muslim countries so that the push factors of economic deprivation and political repression are reduced to a point where Muslim citizens of these countries are less attracted by the pull of European societies. European politicians who advocate draconian immigration policies directed mainly against Muslims, need to acknowledge that the bulk of the populations of their own countries originated, in some distant past, from somewhere else. Migration does matter but only the immigration side of the phenomenon raises political passions. On the longer view, migration in both its aspects is basically a neutral value in history.

David Waines is Emeritus Professor of Islamic Studies at Lancaster University.
Email: d.waines@lancaster.ac.uk

Studying Islam in Southeast Asia
State of the Art & New Approaches

GREG FEALY & MARTIN VAN BRUINESSEN

On 7 and 8 July 2008, more than thirty people gathered at the Snouck Hurgronjehuis in Leiden for the workshop on "Studying Islam in Southeast Asia: State of the Art and New Approaches," which was organized under the auspices of the Australia-Netherlands Research Collaboration (ANRC) and ISIM. Martin van Bruinessen (ISIM) and Greg Fealy (Australian National University) were the convenors.

The workshop aimed to reflect critically on the current state of scholarship on Southeast Asian Islam and consider new approaches and possible collaborations to understanding Islamic politics, culture, society, and law in a regional context. The workshop was divided into three broad themes: (1) governance and bureaucratic administration of Islam; (2) transnational Islamic networks in Southeast Asia; and (3) Islam, media, and performance. A total of twenty-three participants, including seven Australian, four Indonesian, and nine Dutch scholars, presented papers on various aspects of these themes.

The discussions in the first panel began with a fresh look at the policies of the late colonial state and the under-studied "Guided Democracy" regime (1958-65) and at continuities across historical turning points and political divides. The relations of trust established in the struggle for independence, e.g. among members of the Hizbullah militia, who later ended up in the state apparatus or in armed insurgent movements, constituted one such continuity that came up in several of the papers. Other papers engaged with Indonesian and Malaysian debates on the legitimate place of the Sharia in society and state. Close attention was given to the modalities of incorporation of elements of the Sharia in national legislation and local regulations in both countries, with participants putting forward different interpretations of data to support arguments about the extent of the impact of Islamic law. A third group of papers discussed the elaborate bureaucracies in both countries that administer Islamic courts, education, and the hajj, and that occupy themselves with the struggle against alleged heterodoxy.

The transnational Islam panel looked at the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafism, Hizb ut-Tahrir and Tablighi Jamaat, as well as more liberal currents of Islamic thought in various parts of Southeast Asia and their networks of communication within the region. The discussions focused on explaining the remarkable differences between the various movements in degrees of adaptation to local cultural traditions. The relative weakness of intra-region connections as compared to linkages with the Middle East was another recurring theme of discussion.

The final sessions considered a variety of Islamic cultural expressions in Indonesia and Malaysia, and the role of performative arts – including dance and musical forms as well as oratory and adaptations of Sufi ritual – in *da'wah*, spreading religious messages. Presenters looked at how political, religious, and commercial forces, as well as the possibilities of old and electronic media – radio, audio cassette, video disc, Internet – are shaping these popular cultural forms, and analyzed the rhetorical styles and doctrinal content of popular preaching.

Greg Fealy is Fellow and Senior Lecturer in Indonesian Politics at the Australian National University.
Email: Greg.Fealy@anu.edu.au
Martin van Bruinessen is ISIM Chair and professor at Utrecht University.

Transnational Relations and Muslim Diasporas

MARTIJN DE KONING

The workshop "Transnational Relations and Muslim Diasporas" jointly organized by York University, Toronto, and the VU University, Amsterdam in cooperation with ISIM and the follow up to the one held at York University, June 2007, took place in June 2008. Both are part of the project "Muslim Diasporas: Religious and National Identity, Gender, Cultural Resistance." The convenors of the workshop were Haideh Moghissi, Saeed Rahnema, and Halleh Ghorashi.

In the first session Tariq Modood focused on reconciling Muslim identity politics and multicultural citizenship while Jörn Thielmann explored different sites of conflict in Germany. In the second session Annelies Moors examined Muslim fashions and transnational relations and Jeanette Jouili discussed the transnational dimensions of cultural and artistic scenes among Muslims in France and the UK. Cassandra Balchin explored the emergence of a transnational feminist consciousness among Muslim women in Western Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand. In the third session attention shifted towards Islamic publics and counterpublics in Alexandre Caeiro's paper on the emergence of an Islamic counterpublic in Europe and Thijl Sunier's exposé on styles of leadership among Muslims in Europe.

On the next day Jasmin Zine examined the consequences of the "war on terror" for Muslim youth in Canada. Jonas Otterbeck and Nadia Fadil focused on the intra-Muslim politics. Otterbeck presented some of the findings of his research project which examines how young Muslims in Denmark negotiate Islamic traditions in search of answers to the question of "true" Islam. During the session on Muslim youth the importance of the generation gap between youth and parents emerged. Nadia Fadil nuanced this gap showing how youth both identify and distance themselves from their parents. In the third session Anne Sofie Roald discussed Muslim women's right to divorce in Sweden and addressed the question whether collective or individual rights should prevail. Schirin Amir-Moazami questioned the liberal politics in Germany concerning the position of Muslim women showing that the basic assumptions of liberal governance have far-reaching and sometimes negative consequences for women. Fauzia Ahmed raised the issue of feminist leadership in the Muslim diaspora. In the fourth session Elena Arigita showed how the Moroccan Al-Adl wa-l-Ihsan movement was established in Spain through the use of local structures while Welmoet Boender discussed the institutionalization of Muslim development organizations in the Netherlands.

During the last session, Haideh Moghissi, Saeed Rahnema, and Mark Goodman presented their findings of a large study among Muslims in Canada while Kamran Rastegar discussed Ebrahim Hatami-Kia's movie From the Karkhe to the Rhine and the different ways of representing the traumas of Iran-Iraq war in the diaspora. Halleh Ghorashi, the convenor of this workshop, closed the event.

Altogether, the participants tried to explore different modalities of opposition against hegemonic structures of inclusion and exclusion and expressed the necessity to continue this line of research in the future, in particular the assertiveness of Muslims in the public sphere against the background of integration policies, radicalization and counter-radicalization, and human rights debates. Several of the papers presented in the workshop will be published.

Martijn de Koning is Postdoctoral Fellow within the ISIM/RU project "Salafism as a Transnational Movement".
Email: m.dekoning@isim.nl

'The Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan and Afghanistan and the Rise of the New Taliban'

ISIM Annual Lecture 2008

Ahmed Rashid

The ninth ISIM Annual Lecture, marking the tenth anniversary of ISIM, will be organized in collaboration with the Mayor and College of Aldermen of Amsterdam, Odeon and Atlas Publishers. You are cordially invited to attend.

Thursday | 13 November 2008 | 5.00 pm | Odeon | Amsterdam

Ahmed Rashid (Rawalpindi, 1948) is an expert on Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central-Asia and regularly writes for major international media. Rashid is also a consultant for Human Rights Watch and the UN and the author of *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia* (2000). In June 2008, his *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* was published.

Rashid will discuss the failure of nation building in Pakistan and Afghanistan. For the first time since 2001, the Afghan and newly created Pakistani Taliban are on the offensive in both countries. It seems that the earlier US-NATO solution of more resources, nation building and rebuilding the Afghan security forces is not working. How did this situation come about? And where will NATO go from here?

Please register before 9 November via registration@isim.nl.

NEW FELLOWS

– **Shereen Abou El Naga**
(Visiting Fellow)
Women Writers in the Islamic and European Tradition
1 October 2008 – 31 December 2008

– **Alexandre Caeiro**
(Visting Fellow)
The Constructions of " Europe " and "Islam" in Contemporary Muslim and non-Muslim Practices
1 September 2008 – 31 December 2008

– **Jeanette Jouili**
(Postdoctoral Fellow)
Islamic Artistic Performances and the Production of Piety in the UK and France
1 May 2008 – 31 January 2011

– **Nandagopal Radhakrishna Menon** (Visiting Fellow)
Islam, Media, and Religious Pluralism in Kerala, India
1 October 2008 – 31 December 2008

– **Zoltan Pall**
(Visiting Fellow)
Salafi Movements in Northern Lebanon
1 September 2008 – 31 December 2008

– **Valeria Saggiomo**
(Visiting Fellow)
The Role of Islamic NGOs in the Somali State Building Process 1991-2006
1 October 2008 – 31 December 2008

– **Roshanack Shaery-Eisenlohr**
(Visiting Fellow)
Cultures of Trauma: The Science of Suffering in Postwar Lebanon
1 June 2008 – 30 November 2008

– **Arzu Ünal**
(Ph.D. Fellow)
Dressed to Differ: Changing Meanings of Tesettür *among Turkish Women in the Netherlands*
1 January 2009 – 31 December 2011

– **Vanessa Vroon**
(Visiting Fellow)
The Politics of Celebration in the Context of Dutch Female Conversion to Islam
1 June 2008 – 30 November 2008

– **Ali Zaidi**
(Visiting Fellow)
Identity Politics, Individualization, and the Secularization of Islam in Canada
1 September 2008 – 31 December 2008

Nomination for Societal Impact Award Junior

Postdoctoral Fellow Martijn de Koning has been nominated for the 2008 Societal Impact Award Junior of VU University Amsterdam. He was nominated for the award to be given to a Ph.D. student whose thesis is of major societal relevance, on the basis of his thesis "Zoeken naar een zuivere islam."

ISIM EVENTS

16 October 2008
Seminar
Jerusalem Seminar
Organizers: Gemak, ISIM, UCP, and NAI
Venue: Gemak, The Hague

28-29 November 2008
Workshop
Understanding Immanent Critique: Cultural Politics and Islamic Activism
Organizer: ISIM
Convenor: Irfan Ahmad
Venue: Leiden University

16 December 2008
Debate
Moslims als Markt
Organizers: ISIM, Kosmopolis, and De Nieuwe Horizon
Venue: Rotterdam

For more information on these and other events, including the ISIM Ph.D. and Staff Seminars, please consult the ISIM website or contact the secretariat at info@isim.nl.

Gestures
Religion qua Performance

MARTIN VAN BRUINESSEN

On 9 and 10 July 2008, the Netherlands Science Organization (NWO), in co-operation with ISIM, organized a conference titled "Gestures: Religion qua Performance" at Utrecht University. This conference, convened by ISIM's Martin van Bruinessen with Prof. Anne-Marie Korte of Utrecht University, is part of the large NWO-funded research programme "The Future of the Religious Past," which examines new forms of the religious. Following earlier conferences dedicated to "Conceptualizing Religion," "Powers: Sovereignty, Media and Beyond," and "Things: Material Religion and the Topography of Divine Spaces," the conference on "Gestures" focused on the performative aspects of religious phenomena, from ritual and liturgical acts to dramatic expressions and various forms of embodiment.

Over thirty papers were presented, about half of them by junior and senior scholars taking part in the "Future of the Religious Past" programme. Major themes were introduced with keynote speeches by John R. Bowen, Kim Knott, Brent Plate, and Regina Schwartz, and further fleshed out in papers and comments by various other invited scholars, including Peter Clarke, Michael Lambek, Yvonne Sherwood, Ward Blanton, Meerten ter Borg, Annelies Moors, Christoph Baumgartner, and Thomas Quartier.

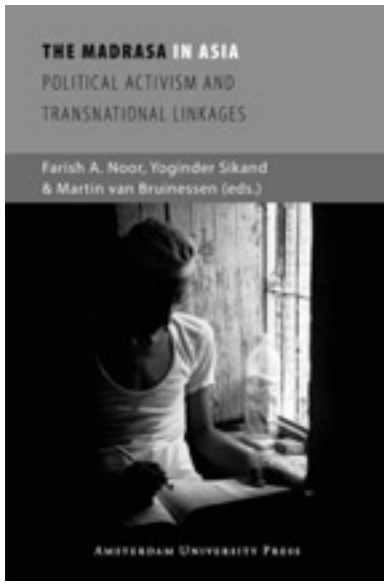
The conference was expressly multidisciplinary, with contributions from anthropology and sociology, literary studies, ritual studies, philosophy, cultural studies, and musicology all discussing religious phenomena in four continents and concerning various religious traditions. The "Gestures" discussed included pilgrimage, sacrifice and martyrdom, as well as theatrical and musical performances, blasphemy, religious fashion, and spirit possession.

Largely thanks to ISIM's participation in the event, Islam and Muslim societies were strongly represented, with papers on religion and secularity in the late Ottoman Empire, martyrdom for love and nation, Sufi ritual and modernity in Sudan, Islamic fashion in Europe, musical performances with an Islamic message, and blasphemy and the ritual of insulting Muslims in contemporary European societies. A detailed programme of the conference and the abstracts of all papers presented are published on the ISIM website.

Martin van Bruinessen is ISIM Chair and professor at Utrecht University.

ADVERTISEMENT

ISIM Publications

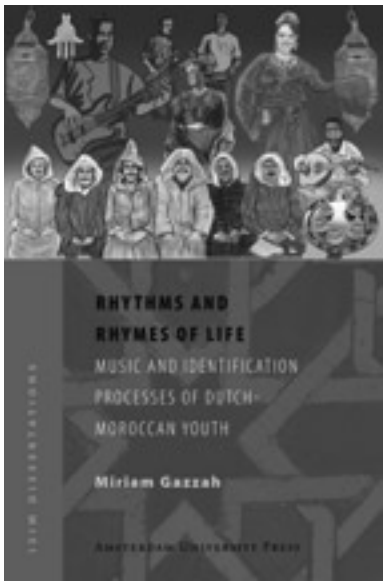


■ Farish A. Noor, Yoginder Sikand, and Martin van Bruinessen (eds.)
The Madrasa in Asia
Political Activism and Transnational Linkages

Since the rise of the Taliban and Al-Qaida, the traditional Islamic schools known as madrasas have frequently been portrayed as hotbeds of terrorism. For much longer, modernisers have denounced madrasas as impediments to social progress, although others have praised them for their self-sufficiency and for providing "authentic" grassroots education. For numerous poor Muslims in Asia, the madrasa still constitutes the only accessible form of education. This book sheds light on the dynamics of Muslim education and activism at the grassroots and provides an overview of the social, educational, and political roles of madrasas across Asia, from China and Indonesia to Iran.

Martin van Bruinessen is the ISIM Chair for the Comparative Study of Contemporary Muslim Societies at Utrecht University.

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008
ISBN 9789053567104
304 pages
€ 39,50



■ Miriam Gazzah
Rhythms and Rhymes of Life
Music and Identification Processes of Dutch-Moroccan Youth

This dissertation is a comprehensive anthropological study of the social significance of music among Dutch-Moroccan youth. An emerging Dutch-Moroccan music scene in the Netherlands includes the development of events and websites, while Dutch-Moroccan youth are also pioneers of the Dutch hiphop scene. They (re)present and position themselves in society through their music and musical activities. This study provides insight into the development of the Dutch-Moroccan music scene, the construction of Dutch-Moroccan identity, the impact of Islam on female artists, and the way Dutch-Moroccan rappers deal with stereotypes of Moroccans.

Miriam Gazzah was ISIM Ph.D. Fellow from 2003 to 2007.

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008
ISBN 9789089640628
280 pages
€ 39,50

All ISIM publications published by AUP can be ordered online through www.isim.nl or www.aup.nl or by email: orders@aup.nl.

■ **Een keuze uit 10 jaar ISIM Review**

To mark ISIM's tenth anniversary, ISIM publishes a selection of *ISIM Newsletter* and *ISIM Review* articles from its beginning up to now. The volume will be published in Dutch, in order to disseminate the insights of ten years of international scholarship to the Dutch general public. The articles reflect a decade of innovative, comparative, and interdisciplinary research on contemporary Muslim societies and communities. Covering a broad range of topics, from the war on terror and Salafism to youth culture and Islamic philosophy, and exploring current debates on Islamic NGO's, popular piety, and reproductive technology, this collection represents the diversity of Muslim societies, as well as the diversity of ways to approach these.

New Project

ISIM, in cooperation with PricewaterhouseCoopers Advisory (PwC), has been commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to coordinate and administer its Research Programme "Strengthening knowledge of and dialogue with the Islamic/Arab world," in short, the Islam Research Programme.

The general aim of the Programme is to strengthen knowledge of, and dialogue with, the Muslim world. Against this background, the Programme concentrates on research in contemporary trends in the Muslim world that are relevant to Dutch policy development in the field of international cooperation. Subjects of research fall within the areas of Islamic law, political and socio-economic development, and culture and religion.

ISIM will connect Dutch embassies in various Muslim countries with Dutch and local researchers and support them in formulating research questions relevant to policy. The Programme's Academic Advisory Committee, consisting of nine academics, will review research proposals and findings and therewith guarantee their academic quality. The research projects will be planned and carried out in close consultation with Dutch policy officers stationed in the participating embassies with the aim of gaining, sharing, and using knowledge of developments in the Muslim world. In this way, partnerships between researchers and embassy staff would expand. Likewise, the Programme will contribute to a further strengthening of the quality of Dutch policy and to the linking of scientific research and policy-making. In this light, knowledge activities such as conferences and networking meetings will be organized.

A Project Office has been established by ISIM and PwC to manage the Research Programme. The academic impetus of the Programme is provided by ISIM, involving, among other activities, the coordination and review of individual research projects. PwC bears responsibility for the Programme's financial management.

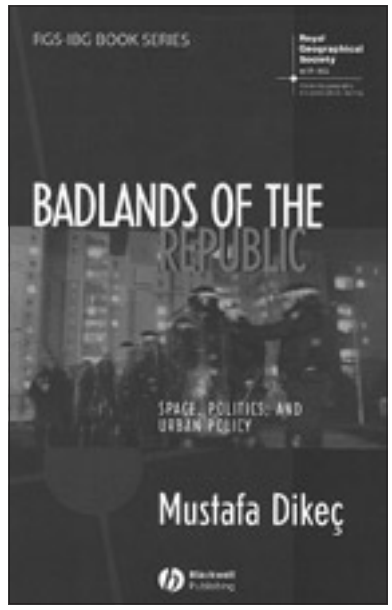
■ For more information please contact Dennis Janssen at: ProjectofficeIRP@isim.nl.

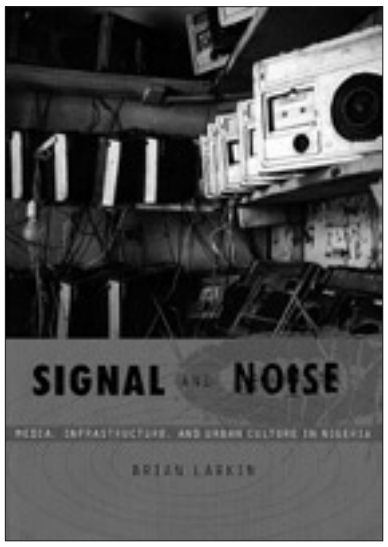
Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party
Edited by **Ümit Cizre**
London and New York: Routledge, 2008

This collection of articles examines the evolution of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey since it came to power in 2002 and its retreat from a reformist agenda to a conservative-nationalist outlook. Contributions discuss the party's historical background, political agenda, social bases, and its relations with the Kemalist establishment, the military, and the European Union.

Badlands of the Republic: Space, Politics, and Urban Policy
By **Mustafa Dikeç**
Malden (MA): Blackwell, 2007

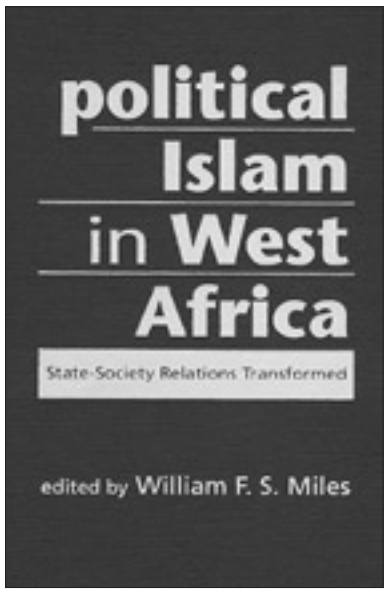
This book is the first comprehensive account of urban revolt in French banlieues in a close examination of urban policy in the French Republic. It represents a fresh approach to space and politics, and the struggles of the marginalized groups, exploring the meaning of citizenship and the right to the city.





Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria.
By **Brian Larkin**
Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008

This book is a fascinating historical ethnography of media technologies in the Muslim city of Kano in the north of Nigeria. Focusing on radio networks, mobile cinema units, and the building of cinema theaters, Brian Larkin investigates technology's encounter with norms shaped by colonialism, postcolonial nationalism, and Islam. Next, he examines how media technologies produce the mode of leisure and cultural forms of urbanity by analyzing the circulation of Hindi films to Muslim Nigeria, the leisure practices of Hausa cinemagoers in Kano and the emergence of Nigerian video films.

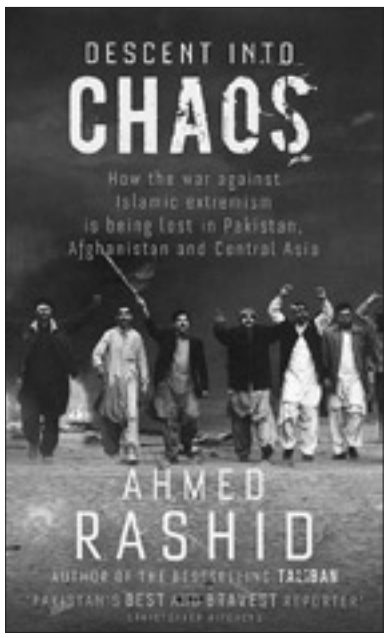


Political Islam in West Africa: State-Society Relations Transformed
Edited by **William F.S. Miles**
Boulder and London: Lynn Rienner, 2007

This volume explores political Islam in key countries of the Sahel region. It discusses the transformations in the relationship between religion and state in nations with sizeable Muslim populations. The chapters examine those ongoing transformations and the changing nature of domestic politics and foreign policy since 2001.

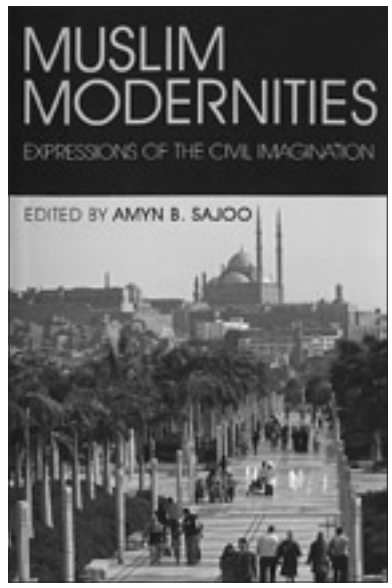
Descent into Chaos: How the War Against Islamic Extremism is Being Lost in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia
By **Ahmed Rashid**
London: Allen Lane, 2008

Rashid chronicles the US and European attempts at nation-building in Afghanistan, attributing their failure to an insufficient commitment to development and reform, not only in Afghanistan, but in the region at large. The book documents how the war in Afghanistan is no longer a war against the Taliban and Al-Qaida in one country, but has become a far wider regional conflict which also involves Pakistan and the five Central Asian states.



Muslim Modernities: Expressions of the Civil Imagination
Edited by **Amyn B. Sajoo**
London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008

This book is about Muslim encounters with the modern: how Islam and those in its orbit have shaped and been shaped by histories that are overlapping and distinctive. Identity and citizenship, poetry and protest, music and mode of dress are explored as expressions that bear on the making and remaking of the modern public sphere.



Hasan & Husain Essop

Hasan and Husain Essop (Cape Town, 1985) studied printmaking and photography respectively at the Michaelis School of Fine Art in Cape Town. The fraternal twins construct and perform roles in staged scenarios that explore sibling rivalries, opposing beliefs and cultural systems, the politics of public space in Cape Town, and larger global conflicts from the perspective of Muslim youth. Their work, which combines photography with graphic design manipulation, has been featured at Goodman Gallery Cape, among others, and they have been selected for the 2009 Havana Biennial.

COURTESY OF GOODMAN GALLERY CAPE AND THE ARTIST, 2007

Pit Bull Fight / *Lightjet C Print on Fuji Crystal Archive Paper, 60 x 84 cm and 84 x 118 cm*

Thornton Road / *Lightjet C Print on Fuji Crystal Archive Paper, 70 x 123 cm*

COURTESY OF GOODMAN GALLERY CAPE AND THE ARTIST, 2008

Martial Arts

PHOTO BY AHMAD MASOOD / © REUTERS, 2008

Afghan sportsmen exercise at a martial arts club in Kabul.

PHOTO BY AHMAD MASOOD / © REUTERS, 2008