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REVIEW



Afghanistan, 2006

Conflict & Development

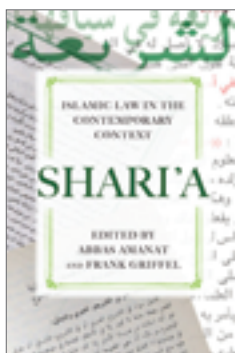
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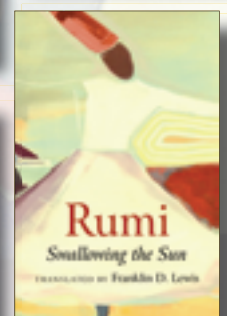
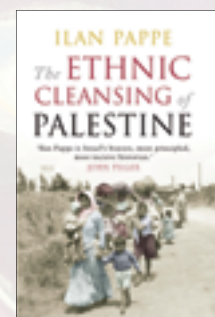
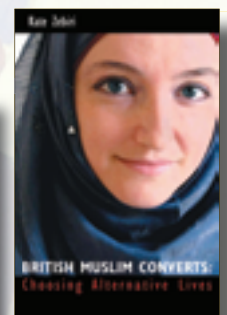
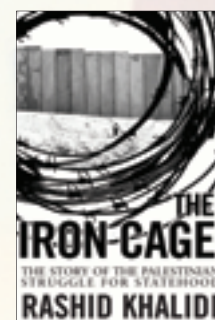
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ISI

MATHIJS PELKMANS

To the outsider, the paintings on the recently constructed "Baghdad Wall" (see back cover) may reflect a wry sort of nostalgia. The romantic portrayals of pre-war Baghdad offer a visual escape from the contemporary omnipresence of violence. Like all nostalgia it offers only a selective view on the past, omitting the oppression experienced during previous decades. But given the dangers and problems of current times, it is quite understandable that Iraqi citizens look back wistfully on the lives they had lived during Saddam Hussein's rule, even if those lives were filled with economic difficulties and political tyranny (al-Ali, p. 28). One can only hope that such romantic visions of the past will facilitate future reconciliation and peace.

However, the need for a wall between Shiites and Sunnis also accentuates a darker side of "dreaming." There is a danger in allowing wishful thinking and ideological dogmatism to steer international politics. On top of the tremendous damage inflicted on Afghanistan, Iraq, and Lebanon, these conflicts have produced situations antithetical to the visions which prompted foreign interventions. Afghanistan has become the world's primary producer of opium and the Taliban is extending its hold over large territories, while the rhetoric of liberation, development, and women's rights—so busily touted six years ago—has shrivelled to a hollow echo. Most people now acknowledge that the occupation of Iraq created a vast breeding ground for terrorist groups. Moreover, the intensifying sectarian violence is sucking U.S. troops into a multi-polar civil war that threatens to destabilize the region far beyond Iraq's borders (Hiltermann, p. 26). Finally, last year's July War on Lebanon seems to have produced only one obvious winner: Hizbullah's stature was enhanced not only by its ability to withstand Israel's attacks, but also by taking the lead in the reconstruction of key areas of Beirut (Fawaz, p. 22). In this context one might wonder whether this issue's title, "Conflict & Development," was inspired by hope or by cynicism.

In the prelude to war, Western governments spoke of "democratization," "women's rights," and "economic progress"—using discourses of development to legitimize violence. It is therefore unsurprising that "beneficiaries" are suspicious of the agendas behind foreign aid. "Democracy" and "liberation" gain new connotations when arriving in the form of oppression, violence, and insecurity.

The political entanglements of "development" require a fine balance be maintained. Ganji (p. 34) criticizes the oppression of women by the Iranian regime and reaffirms his own commitment to democracy. Interestingly, in his recent (18 September) open letter to the UN Secretary General he is equally critical of U.S. politics, including its funding of democracy assistance to Iran. His critique is directed both at the political motives behind the financial aid and the way in which the assistance allowed the Iranian government to denounce the activists as pawns of the U.S. While commitment to the ideals of "development" such as Ganji exhibits is laudable, naïve dreams which pay insufficient attention to social,

political, and cultural realities can be disastrous. The promotion of technocratic solutions to inherently political problems in a volatile country such as Afghanistan has rendered many projects ineffective or counterproductive, as was the case of women's rights initiatives that inadvertently ended up weakening the position of women (Kandiyoti, p. 20).

The contributions in this issue do not offer definitive prescriptions, but by highlighting the complexities involved in "development" they suggest new ways of approaching the issue. Moreover, by documenting the work of Islamic charities they point out that Western or secular international NGOs are not the only, or even necessarily the most important, actors in development. Islamic charities are often more visible on the ground and better connected to the grassroots. This is not to say that they also produce "better" results: several authors note tensions between proselytizing and development activities (Weiss, p. 12; Utvik, p. 16) while others discuss whether Islamic charities empower their recipients or entangle them in new forms of patronage (Harmsen, p. 10; Sparre and Petersen, p. 14). But the relative success of these programmes challenges Western suspicions of religious development initiatives. In fact, in light of the West's less-than-stellar track record in recent development attempts, we may question its right to judge the propriety of development at all.

The front cover shows yet another type of ("post-"conflict) development. Rather than showcasing the work of an international NGO or Islamic charity, we chose to display a more mundane (and perhaps more common) form of development. The men in the picture have just returned to Afghanistan. What they are constructing is not clear yet. Perhaps it will not be beautiful, perhaps its shape will not conform to our expectations, but it is being built with the limited means available to people in a conflict-ridden society. It is their attempt to create a liveable future.

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ISIM

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

Development & Islamic Charities

Aid workers on the ground have become increasingly aware that Islamic associations and agencies have often much better access to the people in need of support than their own secular counterparts. In the case of civil war-torn regions such as Somalia, for instance, there is no other way to bring relief to the victims than through the few transnational Islamic agencies still operating there.

The increased distrust between the Muslim world and the West since 9/11 and the “war on terror” have made it increasingly difficult for both Western and Islamic donor agencies to operate effectively in many areas. In many Muslim societies, the motives of Western agencies are distrusted, and groups have actively opposed them. Besides the old suspicions that aid is a thinly veiled cover for neo-colonial economic penetration or for efforts to spread Christianity in Muslim lands, there is now also a widespread perception that aid and the “war on terror” are intimately connected and that Western development agencies are aiming to subvert Islamic movements and replace them with more acceptable varieties of the faith. Reports on ambitious American programmes to “change the very face of Islam” have strengthened these anxieties about Western charitable involvement in the Muslim world.¹ Even at times of natural disasters, these anxieties have stood in the way of effective help. Christian charities sending relief to Aceh in the wake of the December 2004 tsunami found that the best way to overcome the suspicions and have the aid reach the target population was by channelling all funds through the large Indonesian Muslim association, Muhammadiyah.

The problems faced by Muslim charities are of a different nature. Most of their activities amount to the channelling of zakat and sadaqa funds to needy and deserving recipients. Since a considerable part of jihadist and terrorist activity in the world’s trouble spots has been funded from the same type of sources (and is considered as a legitimate concern by some donors), all international Muslim charities have come under scrutiny for possible involvement in terrorism. Bank accounts have been frozen and financial transfers blocked, causing much genuine charitable work to suffer. It is true that several Islamic charities have in fact channelled money to groups engaged in armed violence against perceived enemies of Islam, and such movements, from Hamas to Al-Qaida, can no doubt count on numerous voluntary contributions to its struggle. However, many other Islamic charities are only involved in charitable work in the strict sense, including relief in disaster-struck regions where Western agencies cannot or do not operate. Their work too has been seriously impeded by the “war on terror,” depriving numerous poor people from aid.

Prejudices against and suspicions of Islamic charities are deeply entrenched, and not only in the West. The uneasiness with which certain charities are viewed, is shared by many in the Muslim world—just like many Westerners object to the way certain fundamentalist Christian associations carry out charitable work. Especially those with headquarters in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states are widely criticized for pushing a political agenda that serves the interests of the Saudi regime and of being oblivious to the basic economic needs of the poor in Muslim societies. Much of the enormous resources of these charities has gone to spread the Salafi version of Islam, to combat beliefs and practices considered as deviant—whether Sufi-inspired, rationalistic, or accommodating local traditions—and to contain the revolutionary influences emanating from Iran. These charities would finance mosques but not

There was a time when Western relief and development agencies working in Muslim-majority countries would, as a matter of course, choose secular or non-Muslim NGOs as their local partners (or, not infrequently, help in establishing such NGOs to be their counterparts). Even where there were Islamic organizations, often much better connected at the grassroots level than the secular actors, these were generally not perceived as proper NGOs and distrusted because of their religious nature and unfamiliar agendas. During the past decades, however, the number and range of activities of Islamic associations involved in charity, relief, and the empowerment of underprivileged groups have dramatically increased; they can no longer be ignored.

and clothing to orphans and the poor, but also cheap medical services and education, income-generating projects, and disaster relief. Their professional staff and voluntary workers are usually highly educated (typically in such disciplines as medicine and engineering, not in religious studies) and strongly motivated. They often provide better services than state agencies, and they are often more trusted by the poorer segments of the population than either the state or secular NGOs. They differ from the latter in that to them the charitable work is a form of *da’wa*, missionary effort, and part of a broader struggle to achieve a more Islamic (and therefore more just) society. Some of them, moreover, may represent ideological positions and political strategies—notably the use of violence—that Western governments find objectionable. There have also been doubts about their commitment to democracy and human rights, especially where religious minorities are concerned. Critics have wondered to what extent their activities empower the recipients or simply make them dependent on patronage.

These are valid and legitimate concerns, and many in the West would reject the possibility of meaningful co-operation with Islamic welfare associations out of hand. Yet most of these concerns are not specific to Islam and are familiar from the experience with development associations of different ideological orientations, e.g. those associated with liberation movements, and the dilemma of patronage versus empowerment is well-known in the history of Western aid. Workers in the field have often tended to take a more pragmatic view and perceive that there is an area of shared interest, in which co-ordination and co-operation with Islamic counterparts are quite possible and perhaps even desirable—if only because in certain contexts the Islamic associations can deliver where others cannot. In the current world environment, Islamic charities and welfare associations have become major actors that need to be taken seriously. It is important to recognize that they are not all the same, nor are they unchanging. There has been much reflection on development issues and, like in Christian charities, there have been efforts to move beyond the distribution of alms to more “structural” approaches. A dispassionate look at these charities and welfare associations may suggest that, in spite of all reservations, here lies one of the most promising prospects of a meaningful engagement with the Muslim world.

modern schools, provide students with grants to study religious subjects but not other sciences, and “educate” the masses with cheap booklets expounding simple Salafi messages and a conspiratorial, dichotomous worldview, in which Islam is under attack by a coalition of Crusaders, Zionists, Freemasons, Orientalists, and a fifth column of liberal Muslims. But this does not sum up their activities, and even less that of other Islamic initiatives.

The range of Islamic associations involved in various forms of aid and social welfare work is enormous.² Those inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood and similar Islamist movements have been especially conspicuous, providing food

MARTIN VAN BRUINSEN

Notes

1. See David E. Kaplan’s report on the White House’s well-funded Muslim World Outreach: “Hearts, Minds, and Dollars: In an Unseen Front in the War on Terrorism, America is Spending Millions ...To Change the Very Face of Islam,” *US News and World Report*, 5 April 2005, at <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/050425/25roots.htm>.
2. A serious overview is: Jonathan Benthall and Jérôme Bellion-Jourdan, *The Charitable Crescent: Politics of Aid in the Muslim World* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2003).

Martin van Bruinssen holds the ISIM Chair at Utrecht University.

The Overreaction against Islamic Charities

JONATHAN BENTHALL

Islamic charity already has a bad image in much of the non-Muslim world, even among the generally well informed. Certainly during the 1980s Afghan conflict and the early 1990s Bosnian conflict, a number of Islamic charities, especially those founded in the petrodollar states, engaged in activities that pursued a mixture of humanitarian, religious, political, and sometimes military aims. It is less often remembered that the United States government actively supported the mujahidin in Afghanistan until 1989, and closed its eyes to some arms shipments to their successors in Bosnia, until in both cases the honourable “combatant” was transformed into the hostile “terrorist.” As regards the years immediately preceding 9/11, evidence of support by some Islamic charity managers for the Chechen mujahidin is fairly strong. Direct support for Al-Qaida type activities by charities as such has been strongly suspected by the U.S. authorities, but seldom, if ever, proved to the standard required by Western criminal courts. As regards the period since 9/11, evidence of the activities of controversial Islamic charities is equivocal as to mixed aims, and always needs to be treated with caution because of the risk of observer bias.

Charities are always vulnerable to abuse because they rely on trust. Moreover, many Muslims involved with charity still subscribe to a “seamless” view of jihad, according to which humanitarian, religious, political, and even military aims are fused. Their defence—in which there is more than a grain of truth—is that the Western devotion to a pure domain of charitable altruism is hypocritical. For the Western aid system is deeply connected to national foreign policies and security concerns: humanitarian action often provides a fig-leaf for military intervention, Christian missions proselytize in many parts of the world, some unfortunate populations are reduced to “exporting” images of their misery through the Western-controlled media and thus becoming aid economies—and so on. In any case, a strong tradition may also be identified within Islam that admires and enjoins selfless charitable giving for the benefit of the disadvantaged. Moreover, a general trend is observ-

able among Islamic charities towards accepting that the charitable sector ought to accept strict disciplines in return for the privileges that it enjoys, which include tax exemptions and the relatively free mobility of both funds and employees. Yet politically sophisticated Muslims wonder whether the present U.S. and Israel administrations actually want to allow a healthy Islamic charitable sector to realize its potential.

The rise of Islamic NGOs is the result of a confluence of two historical movements both of which date back to the 1970s. One was the rise of NGOs in general. The second was the Islamic resurgence, which we may trace back to the time of the Arab defeat by Israel in 1967. Islamic charities all have a family resemblance: for instance in their drawing

The title of this article may be tempting fate.

The British counter-terrorist services have reported that the financial trail leading to the 7 July 2005 attacks on London included direct or indirect links to eight unspecified charities. A single major terrorist outrage anywhere in the world, clearly funded through abuse of an established Muslim charity, would decisively blacken the reputation of the whole sector. However, from the evidence available at the time of writing, one of the repercussions of 9/11 has been hyper scrutinization of Islamic charities by the United States government that uncomfortably recalls the McCarthy period.

on the potent religious idioms of zakat (mandatory alms) and waqf (the Islamic charitable foundation), in their references to the religious calendar and quotations from the Quran and Hadith, and in their special concern for orphans and refugees.

The association of Islamic charities with transnational mujahidin, despite its wide geographical spread, will probably be looked back on as a short-lived historical episode. Of course, violent movements will continue to find ways in the future to equip themselves with weapons. But the charity sector is

under increasing scrutiny by watchdog organizations such as the international Financial Action Task Force (FATF), by national regulators, and by banking compliance officers. Many alternative channels exist whereby clandestine funds may be transferred: trade, tourism, labour migration, *hawala*, cash couriers, and bank remittances between individual account holders. The attack on Islamic charities since 9/11 has had the unintended consequence of driving money underground where regulators have no control over it.

Dubious scholarship

One manifestation of this overreaction is the growth of a new discipline, counter-terrorist studies. Anyone who travels by air or train must be grateful that police and counter-terrorist professionals are continuously trying to protect us by piecing together networks of suspicious activity through analysis of financial transfers, personal meetings, electronic communications and the like. This is a sad sign of the times. But is it necessary to dignify the publication of such analysis, fortified by extracts from heavily biased intelligence websites, with the authority of major university presses?¹ Such books disrespect the normal requirement that serious social researchers should check their information from different sources, make allowances for their own prejudices and those of informants, and situate their findings in a broad political context. Two recently published books of this kind on Islamic charities allow no voice whatever to the charity workers themselves or their beneficiaries. Smearing of a bona fide charity's reputation can seriously wrong its trustees and staff, and destroy their ability to help the people for whom it was set up.

Dubious scholarship of this kind also supplies the expert testimony to support the U.S. government's assault on Islamic charities through the law. Whereas in Britain a number of Islamic charities operate successfully under the regulation of the Charity Commission, virtually all major Islamic charities in the United States have been closed down. Some of these cases are the subject of civil and criminal trials still in process, and it would be premature to comment here. (Likewise, one British Islamic charity set up to bring aid to Palestinians, Interpal, has been designated as a terrorist entity by the U.S. government. Though highly regarded by most aid professionals in Britain and already twice cleared of wrongdoing by the Charity Commission, it is currently being reinvestigated by the Commission.) However, it is hard not to see the way the U.S. government treats Islamic charities in general as of a piece with two other blots on the reputation of the most legalistic country in the world: Guantánamo and extraordinary rendition.

The attack on
Islamic charities
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underground.

Take the case of the refusal of the USA to grant a visa to Tariq Ramadan, the well-known Swiss Muslim intellectual. The root of the problem may be that he is regarded in some circles as a radical. However, he has consistently condemned terrorism and is accepted as an interlocutor by many prestigious academic institutions, and as an important voice for moderation by some political leaders. The grounds for excluding him from the USA seem skimpy. He was refused a non-immigrant visa in September 2006 by the American consulate in Bern, on the grounds that he had made donations to a Swiss charity set up to help Palestinians, the Association de Secours Palestinien (ASP). These donations, amounting only to some 1,700 Swiss francs in all, were made between 1998 and 2002, whereas it was not until August 2003 that the U.S. Treasury designated ASP as terrorist entity. The government's position is that Ramadan ought to have known that it was a terrorist entity.

Strengths of Islamic NGOs

Under Swiss law, ASP was operating, and is still permitted to operate today, as a charitable organization, which Ramadan says he had no reason to suspect in any way. The U.S. government's assumption in black-listing it, unsupported by evidence, seems to have been that ASP was supplying material support to Hamas; and this raises a vital legal point. The USA regards Hamas as an indivisible entity. It would seem to ignore evidence which suggests that, if ASP was sending funds to zakat committees and similar organizations in the Palestinian Territories, these were, in turn, distributing funds in the normal way of charities: on the basis of need. All these charities are regulated by the Palestinian Authority, and the zakat committees in particular by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Survey evidence suggests that they enjoy a high degree of popular trust and approval, being run with minimal administrative costs and having unrivalled grass-roots knowledge about the needs of the most vulnerable.

But even supplying funds to a zakat committee for life-saving medical technology, or emergency food aid, is considered equivalent to an act of terrorism by the U.S. government, if it is satisfied that there is a personal connection of some kind with Hamas. This seems a strange position. Many observers infer that, unwilling to appreciate the distinction between a nationalist movement and internationalist extremism of the Al-Qaida type, the U.S. government is determined to impose a kind of martial law extending even to efforts to alleviate the miseries of Palestinian non-combatants. But America boasts a strong tradition of civil rights advocacy, which is providing a legal counterbalance. The mainstream American non-Muslim charities initially failed to react to the closing down of most of the big American Muslim charities after 9/11, but are now realizing that the steps taken against the latter have implications for the whole charitable sector.

It seems likely that the scapegoating of Islamic charities originates from a very high level in the U.S. administration, and will not continue forever. Islamic charities in many countries, though sceptical as to whether any actions they take will change the American political position, are coming to accept that they have much to gain from improving their standards of professionalism and accountability. The Montreux Initiative, a project sponsored by the Swiss government in 2005 but carried forward by Muslim as well as non-Muslim experts, is attempting to help *bona fide* Islamic charities dissolve the obstacles facing them. The solution proposed is voluntary self-regulation at the technical level, overseen by a board of eminent persons acceptable to all parties. Involvement in this process makes it more likely that such charities will move towards embracing principles such as transparency and non-discrimination when they have not done so already. The Montreux Initiative does not, however, suggest that those Islamic charities which combine religious with humanitarian aims should be disqualified for that reason from admission to collegial relations with the international aid community, any more than Christian evangelical charities such as World Vision or Tearfund should be so excluded. With so much suffering and distress in Muslim countries it is inevitable that Islamic charities should focus on alleviating it. However, widely accepted international codes of conduct insist that, within a given community of aid beneficiaries, there should be no discrimination in favour of co-religionists.

A successful organization such as Islamic Relief Worldwide, founded in Birmingham, England, in 1984 and now the largest Islamic charity

in the world (widely respected even in the USA) is able to channel the generosity of Muslim donors into worthwhile aid programmes, and also benefits from a certain degree of special access in majority Muslim communities. I have been able to verify this by observing Islamic Relief's development work in a remote district of northern Mali, where the Tuareg local coordinator and an all-Malian staff have established an impressive rapport in their mission to help the most vulnerable. It is well established that international Christian NGOs can work effectively in Christian parts of Africa through local church networks, and there is surely considerable potential for international Islamic charities to work in a similar way among Muslims.

Moreover, back in Britain, Islamic Relief offers an excellent example of practical integration with the mainstream non-Muslim aid and development agencies. This has been called "dialogue on the ground." Islamic Relief has also launched an ambitious project called the Humanitarian Forum, which sets out to build bridges between different humanitarian cultures. Obviously there is a considerable difference between a British charity—Muslim or other—and, say, a Saudi charity: for instance, on issues relating to gender. However, politicians and diplomats should not fall back on the easier option of talking only with people who already agree with them. This is the trap into which fall too many well-meaning organizers of conferences devoted to dialogue and toleration.

Because of political turbulence, the immediate outlook for projects such as the Montreux Initiative and the Humanitarian Forum is not unclouded. It is significant that even in Saudi-Arabia and Kuwait, with all their wealth derived from oil, private charities are now tightly restricted in sending funds overseas for relief aid—apparently because of fear of contravening U.S. foreign policy. All charities have difficulty in remitting funds to the Palestinian Territories through the banking system. However, if we look further ahead it is clear both that faith-based organizations in general are gaining more attention in development circles, because of their access to vast civil society networks, and that private philanthropy is becoming a recognized adjunct to the international aid system. There is no good reason why Islamic charities should not play a valuable role, not only at the local and national level, but also in due course on a par with the major international NGOs—which are likely to be so important to our future as a counterbalance to the power of nation-states and multi-national corporations.

Note

1. For example, Matthew Levitt, *Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad* (Yale U.P., 2006) and J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins, *Alms for Jihad* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2006).

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Image not available online

An Islamic charity delivers relief to flood victims in Matuail, Bangladesh.

PHOTO BY RAFIQUAR RAHMAN / © REUTERS, 2007

Sleeping with the Devil?

SHEILA CARAPICO

There has been quite a flow of euros and dollars earmarked for non-governmental organizations south of the Mediterranean over the past decade and a half, and many hundreds of cooperative ventures between Atlantic and Arab NGOs.¹ Apart from the eye-catching example of the shared humanitarian mission of the Red Cross / Red Crescent Societies and the work of some ecumenical missions in the Holy Land, however, the large number of Islamic charities and think-tanks seem conspicuously absent from Western-funded activities. Even before September 11 very rarely did religiously oriented Muslim organizations access international monies available for what donors call civil society organizations in the Arab world, although Islamic NGOs provided medical care, education, welfare, emergency relief, intellectual outlets, and other services throughout the region. With remarkably few exceptions, the overall pattern persisted into the twenty first century: among the many Arab NGOs that rely on foreign funding for at least some of their projects, few are grounded in Islam; and among the even larger number of Arab associations that are Islamic in their orientation, the proportion getting Western assistance for any of their programmes seems low.² Why is this? Are the two kinds of humanitarian organizations so much at cross purposes that they cannot cooperate, or are there institutional and political barriers as well? Here I speculate on several alternative explanations, or hypotheses, suggesting, respectively, that donor prejudices, Arab or Islamist biases, hurdles imposed by Arab governments, institutional incompatibility between international agencies and grassroots movements, alternative sources of hard currency for Muslim organizations, and/or restrictions imposed by the "war on terror" may discourage Islamic-Northern humanitarian liaisons.

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This article analyzes the multiple reasons that underlie the lack of cooperation between Western development organizations and Muslim NGOs. The author argues that there is no singular cause for this state of affairs. Instead she demonstrates how existing biases and prejudices, government-imposed obstacles, institutional incompatibilities, and burgeoning distrust mutually reinforce the unlikelihood that Western-Islamic humanitarian cooperation will gain ground.

A clash of ideologies

First, perhaps Orientalist preconceptions and essentialist stereotypes are at work. One plausible hypothesis is that Western institutions are averse to associate with Islamic associations, even in the provision of welfare or emergency assistance; and, conversely, that donors seek like-minded partners. After all, public opinion in Europe and the United States tends to take a dim view of Islam in general and (to the extent that the distinction is recognized) the Islamist movement in particular. Faith-based or values-driven Western NGOs, charities, and development contractors, especially institutions with Christian or Christian democrat orientations, groups with Jewish constituencies,

secular humanists, and feminists may refuse to collaborate with partners whose values are or are assumed to be anathema to their own moral vocation. Short of pervasive Islamophobia, even a few naysayers among the staff, board of directors, or donor base of some agencies could be enough to dissuade the group from cooperating with Islamists, or, indeed, any Muslim NGO on ethical grounds. European or North American women's organizations whose undertaking is to fortify feminine participation or rights protection in the public sphere might eschew solidarity with interlocutors whose central mission is to promote family welfare in the private sphere, even where the two sets of goals overlap in mother-child health care. Or Northern NGOs might consider embrace of family planning a litmus test for cooperation, or focus on campaigns against genital cutting or honour killings that define Islam as the culprit. Organizations dedicated specifically to serving Muslims may be disqualified by some secular Northern institutions on the nor-

mative grounds that services should be nonsectarian, while religiously oriented humanitarian organizations based in Europe or North America may have traditionally worked in Latin America and Africa through churches and Christian charities. It is not surprising, for instance, that among Egypt's many religious charities, the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) and the Upper Egyptian Christian Association have historically been

favoured by European and American over their Muslim counterparts. Ideological favouritism for "peace camp" Palestinians, capitalist solutions, or buzz-words like civic, women's, or human rights may further narrow eligibility by Islamic and popular organizations.

Self-righteous indignation cuts both ways, of course, along with demonization of the binary "other." The second possibility is that Arab Islamist groups (or, for that matter, on the opposite end of the spectrum, progressive Arab organizations) might demure from association with Western philanthropies and aid brokers on ideological grounds of their own. Within the Muslim Middle East, the issue of foreign funding is divisive. Controversies rage about the ethics of "accepting dollars and euros," and accusations are sometimes hurled at the liberal NGOs most dependent on external financing that they are stooges of Euro-American imperialism. Arab Islamist NGOs that define themselves in terms of the community of Muslims and indigenous cultural authenticity (or any group espousing the rights of the Palestinians, opposing the war in Iraq, or objecting to Crusaders and colonialists) might well be wary of the strings attached to collaboration. Some activists find the ample quantities of technical advice and values training that accompany modest financial subsidies more vacuous than repugnant. Although by no means do all Arab NGOs decline, or even debate, foreign financing, plenty do, and nativism and Occidentalism run deepest among the neo-conservative Islamist movement. Some West-baiting Islamist ideologues may be captive of their own xenophobic posturing against governments and organizations that benefit from foreign largess, while others categorically reject secular humanism, Christian missionaries, feminist agendas, or Western hegemonic discourses. Some simply believe Muslims must help themselves, or rely on other Muslims. As among Northern associations, again even a vocal minority insisting it is simply wrong to partner with the devil can squelch prospects for alliance. On both sides, it seems to me, some objections are simply obstreperous, whereas others are more substantive.

Corporatist politics

The barriers to Western organizations' cooperation with Islamic charitable NGOs may not be entirely, or even mainly, about a clash of ideologies, however. A third hypothesis is that Arab governments stymie such partnerships with bureaucratic red tape. The rulers of Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, Algeria, and the Palestinian Authority all jealously guard access to the international donor monies that are their lifeblood through Byzantine regulations and a practice known as "corporatism" whereby the state centralizes administration of associational life. Charities are required to register, often with a Ministry of Social Affairs, and often in a way that limits the range and scope of their programmes and fundraising activities. In addition, the Ministry or a National Confederation of some sort positions itself as an intermediary between international aid agencies and local NGOs and attempts to capture the disbursement of foreign donations. Egypt's corporatist strategies for monopolizing access to donor funds and at the same time outlawing activities connected to the Muslim Brotherhood are notoriously odious. Observers in Cairo and throughout the southern Mediterranean have described how governments create what are known as "clones" or GO-NGOs (government-organized non-governmental organizations, or the variant, RO-NGOs for royally-organized NGOs in Jordan and Mo-

rocco) in order to appropriate donor funds earmarked for NGOs and, just as importantly, to represent their countries at international NGO conferences. Since the principle rivals to ruling establishments across the Arab world come from the Islamist current, it is not improbable that governments reroute donor funds to their own acolytes.

Alternately, perhaps transnational organizations' own bureaucratic procedures favour certain kinds of counterparts. Large transnational funding agencies' intricate guidelines for book-keeping, the legal liability of boards of directors, the submission of bids or proposals, the credentials of those offering the service, and other matters might not pose impediments to the large urban Islamic NGOs of the twenty first century but certainly did rule out partnership for many loosely-run groups in Yemen, Palestine, and rural villages elsewhere as late as the nineteen nineties. For all the ostensible effort in assisting the downtrodden, a requirement for Excel spreadsheets can put foreign finance out of the reach of barefoot or ad-hoc community self-help even today. It is not only that international donors' favourite Egyptian partner, CEOSS, was a Coptic charity, this hypothesis suggests, but also that it was a professionally-run organization with a full-time accountant, a good filing system, and a staff fluent in English and French. Arab NGOs that successfully compete for grants and contracts from complex transnational organizations most closely approximate the form, substance, institutional culture, and business attire of their patrons. Different organizations may not match the definitions of "NGO" or "women's group" established by administrators in Brussels, Amsterdam, Washington, or New York; registering with the United Nations to attend international conferences is no mean feat, for instance. Indeed, there are plenty of times when European, North American, and UN agencies sponsor new NGOs with complimentary organizational structure, accountancy methods, and declarations of purpose rather than deal with existing potential partners' idiosyncrasies. In some instances, this counter-corporatist policy is explicitly designed to get around Arab or Israeli government restrictions, whereas in others it is an administrative directive. "Donor-organized" NGOs, including franchises of Western-based organizations and self-standing local enterprises, are dubbed DO-NGOs, and occasionally BYO-NGOs for "bring-your-own-NGO." (The popular press in both Arabic and English sometimes calls them "fronts.") Under this hypothesis it is not outside the realm of possibility that international donors and development brokers would clone Islamic counterparts to replicate their own structures and procedures.

Transnational financial networks

In addition to ideology and bureaucratic corporatism, there are at least two other possible explanations for a disjuncture between Western and Muslim humanitarian and welfare projects. The fifth hypothesis is that Muslim NGOs, whether welfare societies, private charities, or think-tanks, do not really need dollars and euros because alternative sources of philanthropy for Arab and Islamic causes are available in riyals. Specifically, both public coffers and private financiers in the oil-rich Persian Gulf region have supported Islamic hospitals, schools, and charities in the more poverty-stricken and war-ravaged parts of the Arab region. The Saudi and sometimes the Iranian government bank-rolled mosque construction across the region and the globe, and all the Arab kingdoms of the Gulf have generous official aid packages with a strong welfare component (and, probably, by the logic of hypothesis 4, above, their own ideological and organizational criteria for partnership). Individual millionaires in the Gulf, including Gulf princes, princesses, and citizens as well as expatriate Arab migrants, presumably tithe a portion of their fortunes to needy Muslims. Migrants in the West also send remittances to mosque-based associations back home. Individuals and families have established charitable foundations. Small and large personal contributions peak in Ramadan; massive fundraising drives are held at moments of greatest catastrophe, as when bombs are pummeling Lebanese slums or bulldozers demolishing Palestinian homes, or during the crisis in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It is almost condescending to add that the Arab Muslim world has a rich tradition of philanthropic giving in the form of waqf foundations, zakat tithes, and sadaqa donations, and that beneficent impulses are equally common among Muslims, Christians, and Jews.

Image not available online

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Suspicious about elements of this transnational philanthropic network form the basis of a sixth hypothesis: that in prosecuting the "war on terror" and freezing channels of "terrorist financing" the United States and its allies have found ways to block flows of funds to any kind of Islamic charity and warn organizations based in the North Atlantic away from even indirect contact with them. Gifts to alleviate Palestinian and southern Lebanese Shia refugees' suffering seem to be mixed up with funding for Hamas and Hizbullah, and by the same logic many Islamic charities are somehow linked to a transnational Al-Qaida network. Osama bin Laden himself was quite the philanthropist in his day, after all. Thanks to massive U.S. efforts, the banking transactions or accounts of some Islamic charities have been jammed, others are under investigation, and all are tainted by some level of suspicion. This is bound to have a chilling effect on international donations to Arab, and especially Muslim, charities. Fear of being discovered in any partnership tainted by an affiliation deemed to be sympathetic to Islamist militants could likewise affect the thinking of European and North American foundations, aid agencies, and development professionals about whether and how to liaise with faith-based organizations in the Muslim world. Perhaps, even, the many professional development and humanitarian organization staff working in Arab countries who had recognized and studied steps to alleviating the clearly anti-Islamic bias in their funding patterns before the turn of the millennium will have put those plans on hold for fear of being caught up in the dragnet. This brings us nearly full circle. There's an element of naked Islam-bashing in the war on terror, to be sure, yet by the same token, like all conspiracy theories, including Arab perceptions of a Western war on Muslim institutions, it draws on at least some empirical evidence.

The gap between the good scholarship on Islamic associations and the equally large body of research on donor financing of NGOs in the Arab world is itself evidence of the scarcity of examples of both. Perhaps explaining the null set of Western-Islamic humanitarian cooperation is like analyzing why strange bedfellows do not mate. Most likely, different but mutually reinforcing ideological, institutional, and geo-political factors operate in various local and national contexts, amidst fluctuations and swirls of globally travelling anxieties and preoccupations, until the very idea of misogynist ventures becomes virtually unimaginable, or terribly risqué.

Suspected of terrorist links, this Islamic charity in Karachi is forced to close.

Notes

1. This is an edited version of a talk entitled "Is there Room for Cooperation between Western Donors and Islamic Organizations?" given at the conference on "Islamic Charitable NGOs: Between Patronage and Empowerment" organized by ISIM and co-sponsored by Hivos in Utrecht in 2007.
2. Federica Bicchì, "Want Funding? Don't Mention Islam: EU Democracy Promotion in the Mediterranean," *CFSP Forum* 4, no. 2 (2006): 10–12 at, <http://www.fornet.info/documents/CFSP>.

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Between Empowerment & Paternalism

EGBERT HARMSEN

The role of Islamic voluntary welfare associations providing services to subaltern groups such as the poor, orphans, widows, and disabled is—in academic as well as media discourse and debates—often emphasized in the frame of political trends of Islamic revival occurring in the Arab world. Political scientist Sami Zubaida regards such associations as instruments of an effort of religious and moral colonization of underprivileged segments of Muslim societies employed by Islamist movements.¹ His colleague Janine Clark, on the other hand, attributes much greater significance to the function of these associations in fostering cooperative ties among actual as well as potential Islamists from the middle classes.² What Zubaida and Clark have in common, however, is an emphasis on the instrumental function of Islamic associations in the service of Islamist movements. The degree to which voluntary associations affiliated to political Islam may contribute to the empowerment of subaltern groups is hardly mentioned by them. Analyzing the role of Muslim NGOs in terms of the empowerment of the underprivileged, this article takes a closer look at this matter.

Voluntary welfare activism

The Muslim Brotherhood is by far the most prominent formally organized Islamist movement in Jordan. Unlike in Egypt or Syria, the Muslim Brothers are officially recognized by the Jordanian state and may, to a certain extent, undertake religious, social, and political activities openly and legally. Establishing voluntary associations that deal with the daily problems of the underprivileged segments of the society is an important strategy to spread Islamist ideology and influence in society. Jordanian legislation knows, however, many restrictions preventing such service-providing NGOs from playing too overt an oppositional role in the public sphere. Transgressions of these regulations may result in the arrest and imprisonment of NGO members as well as in the dissolution of the NGO in question.³ This makes it impossible for these associations to mobilize subaltern groups into political struggle in order to improve their lot. Below, the example of an Islamist welfare institution serving orphans and their families will be given to discuss the question whether its activities are still contributing to the empowerment of subaltern groups, and if so, how.

Do Islamic charities empower their beneficiaries or rather induce new forms of paternalism? The author argues that these options are not mutually exclusive. Dissecting the ideals and practices of Islamic charities in Jordan, he shows that empowerment and paternalism should be understood in their socially and ideologically informed contexts. While blind pursuance of self-interest is discouraged, the goals of improving society may have empowering implications.

The Islamist welfare institution in question is a centre for the poor and orphaned in Al-Hussein, the Palestinian refugee camp in Amman that I regularly visited in 2003. It belongs to the Islamic Centre Charity Society, the biggest Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated NGO in Jordan. This Society runs many such centres, in addition to medical centres, hospitals, schools, and even some institutions of higher education, all over the country. The centre gives financial

and in-kind assistance to so-called orphan families, i.e. fatherless and mostly single-parent families that lack a regular income-provider. The centre offers educational, social, and cultural activities to the same target groups.

The dependency relationship between workers of the centre and the target group was underlined during my observations of the distributions of financial and in-kind aid. The mothers of the orphan families had to wait patiently and quietly in rows in a hall until they were called upon to receive their modest benefits. This was obviously not an example of self-organization by the underprivileged fighting for their own rights. Rather, this was a welfare initiative established and implemented by Muslims from the middle class delivering services to the needy. The centre receives the sources of financial and in-kind assistance mostly from local individual donors and sometimes from donors in the Arab Gulf States.

Many of the ethical messages in folders, brochures, and pamphlets are addressed to potential donors and supporters. The latter are called upon to give selflessly to the poor and orphans *fi sabilillah*, for the sake of God. Fulfilling this duty is supposed to counter one's greed and egoism, to have a morally purifying effect, and to enhance chances for divine reward in the afterlife. The poor recipients, in turn, are told to find inner peace in God by being thankful for that which He provides them, and by cultivating a patient attitude in life. In specific terms, this entails countering their greed and jealousy vis-à-vis the better off. The perfectly just Islamic society is supposed to be realized through a pious mentality or attitude of all the believers, regardless of rank, status, or wealth. Such an attitude has to be translated into honest, selfless, and helpful behaviour.

This orientation on duty is also reflected in the way the centre uses its financial and in-kind assistance as a means of pressuring the orphans and their mothers to participate in its educative and cultural programme. Religious ideology, in my experience, plays a central part in these educational efforts.

During a language class for orphan boys that I attended, for instance, only religious material was used. Among this material was a poem about the life of the prophet Muhammad. The teacher drew a parallel between levels of aggression against the Prophet and his first followers in Mecca and the present situation, during which Muslims were once again humiliated and threatened by others, especially the United States and "the Jews." The message was that Muslims had to regain power by restoring their mutual solidarity as a community of believers with its common faith in God and in His revelation. Similar political messages were expressed in a satirical play that the orphan girls at the centre were staging. In this play, they mock Arab rulers who betray their own people by collaborating with the Americans and the Israelis. At that occasion, the orphan girls and the centre's women workers also sang a song about Eid al-Fitr, the feast which concludes Ramadan. A message of social solidarity as well as protest is clearly

Entrance of a hospital belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood in Amman, Jordan

Image not available online

PHOTO BY MUHAMMAD HAMED / © REUTERS, 2006

discernable in the song. It deals with the fate of an orphan family that is economically unable to celebrate while wealthier people celebrate the feast in luxury.

Interviews with workers as well as orphans reveal that reading and reciting the Quran and the Hadith, and following the behavioural injunctions contained within both sources, play a central role in the activities and group discussions at the centre. Duties and responsibilities in the field of rituals, civilized and pious eating habits, ways of communication and modest dress, especially in the case of women, and the duty of older children to take care of smaller ones and of children in general to respect and obey the elderly or their older siblings are stressed.

In the view of the workers of this centre, religious duty is clearly connected to change and empowerment. Conversations with the orphan girls reveal that they understood the Islamic injunctions in terms of notions of dignity, taking one's responsibility, and developing and utilizing one's capabilities for the sake of beneficial purposes. There is a strong emphasis, for instance, on the importance of knowledge and education and high school achievements. The centre also tries to tutor orphan children in their homework for school. It emphasizes the value of work as a means of self-sustenance, and tries to obtain jobs for the older orphan boys by using its social networks. Furthermore, it offers the older orphan girls and their mothers training and some income in a sewing workshop and a bakery.

This example shows a blending of a paternalistic approach toward clients with certain ideas related to empowerment. Such empowerment, however, is here derived from a vision emphasizing duty toward God and toward the development of a strong and harmonious Islamic society.

Islamic piety and development

Other Muslim welfare NGOs that I visited and even some other centres of the Islamic Centre Charity Society are more obviously willing or able to cooperate with global and Western development actors, including non-Muslim ones. Such NGOs usually base their philosophy and practice of empowerment on global human, women's, and children's rights discourses that are enshrined in international treaties. Such an orientation is not necessarily at odds with a devotedly religious attitude, however. An Islamic women's association in a poor suburb in the industrial city of Zarqa', for instance, is working for the empowerment of school-dropout girls and their mothers from broken and socially weak families. Methods used by this association are literacy courses, a creative handicraft project, confidential discussions of personal and social affairs, and recreational outings. It is led by a woman who is also working as a religious teacher and social worker in a mosque. She wears orthodox Islamic dress, including the niqab or full veil. She was, at the same time, trained by Questscope, a British development organization supporting projects for "children at risk." In the name of the Islamic concept of *karama* or dignity, this association endeavours to enhance the self-esteem of the girls and their mothers, and to counter traditional habits that discriminate against females regarding their social and educational opportunities. Here we have a clear example of a process of hybridization between the discourse of Islamic piety and a modern and global development approach as promoted by Questscope.

Another example is the Al-Aqsa Association led by Nawal al-Fauri. She is an Islamist activist for women's and children's rights who left the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1990s out of frustration with the conservative and patriarchal attitudes among the organization's leadership. The Islamic message means for her that one should adopt a positive, friendly, and constructive attitude toward outsiders, including non-Muslims, and look for beneficial cooperation with them. With the support of several Western embassies, her association has implemented micro-credit projects enabling needy women to set up agricultural and stockbreeding farms. In the name of the Islamic message, the association carries out awareness raising activities for underprivileged women on social, cultural, and political issues, including gender. Again in the name of Islam, Al-Fauri stresses that women have a right to participate in economic, social, and economic life that is equal to that of men, and that a husband has to assist his wife in household tasks and the upbringing of children. Women, she states, should follow the will of God as it is revealed in the Islamic sources, and not the arbitrary and self-interested traditional habits and beliefs invented by men. In my experience, especially females belonging to Muslim, including Islamist, voluntary welfare associations are often critical of traditional gender habits discriminating against women.

Al-Faruq Welfare Society for Orphans, that is mainly active in the Palestinian refugee camp of the northern city of Irbid, is not Islamist in orientation. It provides nonetheless the same type of services to orphan- or fatherless families as the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated centres for the poor and orphans are doing. Its educational and cultural programmes, however, are much less one-sidedly based on a religious doctrine. They pay as much attention to globally formulated human, children's, and women's rights. Their methodology toward orphan children and their upbringing is to an important extent adopted from UNICEF. This approach is focused on letting children discover their own individual qualities and taking their individual feelings and thoughts seriously, rather than on conformity with strictly conceived religious injunctions. However, the Society organizes Quran courses as well, and uses Islamic concepts in its discourse. A female social worker of the Society, for instance, saw in the Quranic principle of *himaya*, or protection of the woman, a basis for the struggle against women's abuse and domestic violence. The social workers use religious concepts like *rahma* (compassion), *tasamuh* (forgiveness and tolerance), and *sabr* (patience) to redirect communication within client families in the direction of mutual empathy, understanding, and respect and to counter practices of verbal and physical violence.

Between empowerment and paternalism

In the more conservative Islamist view, rights and empowerment are not primarily based on the assertive autonomy of individuals, groups, or classes. They can be realized only when Muslim society as a whole achieves an environment of social harmony and solidarity, thus implying that one's rights are necessarily embedded in social relationships of dependency. In this view, a Muslim's duty necessarily fulfils another Muslim's rights. A truly pious lifestyle, Islamists reason, will lead to true social harmony, prosperity, and justice. Concomitantly, they insist that blind pursuance of self-interest and "one's own rights" by any separate individual, group, or class will lead to the undermining, disruption, and disintegration of Muslim society. Such a worldview implies a confirmation and legitimation of existing social hierarchies and dependency relationships along the lines of class, age, and gender, even though the "stronger" are called upon to exercise their power with good care and consideration for the "weaker." Such a combination of power and care creates a relationship of paternalism and patronage. On the other hand, the stress of the Islamist discourse on shaping and improving one's actual behaviour and fully utilizing one's capabilities in a wide range of social fields, including ritual discipline, interpersonal relationships, education, training, and work, may have empowering implications on an individual level for men and women alike.

The Islamic message may also be used to criticize traditional practices often perceived as oppressive, for instance toward women or children, and as negative in terms of social cohesion and well-being in modern society. Muslim NGOs and Islamist social centres with more liberal orientations focus on the reinterpretation of the Islamic message in line with globally formulated rights principles, and on an active cooperation with transnational—including Western—development actors. On the other hand, fear of losing one's independence and cultural authenticity in the face of western-dominated globalization processes is widespread. Islamist ideology is the most outspoken and dogmatic expression of this fear, but the same sentiment is shared by other Muslim associations as well. Generally speaking in Jordanian society, Islam stands for what is good—hence, working for a better social environment is often perceived first and foremost in Islamic terms. This may have implications for the choices international development partners have to make in the selection of local development partners. Secularist biases in the Western-dominated international development community may have to be critically rethought.

Notes

1. Sami Zubaida, "Civil Society, Democracy and Community in the Middle East," unpublished document, 26–28.
2. Janine A. Clark, *Islam, Charity and Activism: Middle-Class Networks and Social Welfare in Egypt, Jordan and Yemen* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 161.
3. Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Embedded Authoritarianism, Bureaucratic Obstacles and Limits to Non-Governmental Organizations in Jordan," in *Jordan in Transition*, ed. George Joffé (London: Hurst and Company, 2002), 115–122.

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The Expansion of Muslim NGOs in Ghana

HOLGER WEISS

In comparison with Western/non-faith and Christian NGOs, the engagement of Muslim NGOs was for a long time left unnoticed by most observers, and if discussed, their input was generally belittled. However, especially after the traumatic experiences in the West of radical militant Islamic organizations, the activities of Muslim NGOs have come under close scrutiny, both in the West and elsewhere in the world. Some Muslim NGOs were believed to be potential supporters of Al-Qaida, others of posing a potential challenge, if not threat, to the Western secular state model.

The situation in Ghana as regards to Muslim NGOs and their relationship to the secular state and their participation in civil society provide an interesting test-case to examine the claim that the expansion and activities of Muslim NGOs pose a potential threat to the stability of Ghanaian society. As I will argue, this is not necessarily the case. Although the Muslim population is a substantial minority—about 18 to 20 percent of the total population of ca. 18 million—it does not consist of a monolithic block but comprises many ethnic and doctrinal groups that have little in common. Some Muslim NGOs are linked to individual groups, such as the Tijaniyya, the Ahlu 's-Sunna [Ahl al-Sunna wa 'l-Jamaa], or the Shia, while many others are not. While there was during the 1990s, and before 9/11, a rising fear among some observers in Northern Ghana that some local Muslim NGOs were branches of militant

One notable result of the societal crisis in sub-Saharan Africa has been the expansion of NGOs during the last few decades, including, especially since the 1990s, Muslim ones. Most regional Muslim NGOs often supported by transnational NGOs, and, as one also has to stress, by foreign Muslim governments, particularly the Gulf States and Libya. Tracing such links, the author argues that while these connections are essential to their activities, the dependency on external actors simultaneously limits their effectiveness.¹

organizations, these suspicions turned out to be invalid. Instead, Muslim NGOs have done their utmost to become accepted partners in both the Ghanaian NGO scene and civil society.

Visions and activities

One of the reasons for the upsurge of Muslim NGOs in Ghana is the distrust on the part of Muslim authorities, both among those connected to the Ahlu 's-Sunna and those connected to the Tijaniyya, of the activities of Western

international donor agencies and Western NGOs. As an outcome, some Muslim leaders have started to emphasize the importance of self-reliance and the need to create a new discourse on the necessity of mobilizing Muslim human resources. However, it is important to emphasize the shift in government social welfare policies. Due to the various economic recovery and privatization programmes, the role of the state as the main provider of basic social welfare has increasingly been eroded. Equally important is the active proliferation of international Muslim organizations in promoting economic and social development in sub-Saharan Africa as part of a counter-reaction against established Western and Christian activities in the field. Thus, it could be argued that the mushrooming of Muslim NGOs in Ghana is as much a philanthropic enterprise as it is also part of a new attempt to "capture souls" and present an Islamic alternative.²

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As elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, some Ghanaian Muslim NGOs are either branches of international Muslim NGOs or have close links to such organizations.³ Several local Ghanaian Muslim NGOs were established by returning Muslims, who had studied in the Middle East and had made contacts with and were inspired by local philanthropists. Some international Muslim NGOs were invited to start activities in Ghana as part of former president Jerry Rawlings' attempts to establish economic cooperation with the Gulf and other Arab states, as was the case of Libyan and Iranian NGOs.⁴ However, many local Muslim NGOs do not have links to international Muslim NGOs nor do they receive any assistance from Muslim countries. As a result, these local NGOs have an erratic range of activities and are working only in a particular locality. The main bulk of them are found in the south, in the Greater Accra Region as well as in Kumasi; a few of them are also active in the north, mainly in Tamale and other centres with Muslim populations. Although they try their best to attract the attention of foreign donors, few of them are in the end successful. Consequently, many of these small NGOs exist but on paper.

Since the 1990s, many Muslim NGOs have commissioned projects for the improvement of the spiritual and socio-economic conditions of Muslims throughout the country. Such projects have first and foremost been the construction of mosques and, to a lesser extent, decent and modern educational infrastructure, community centres and orphanages as well as basic social amenities such as libraries and hygienic sources of potable water, and the sinking of wells in Muslim communities. Charitable activities of various other local Muslim NGOs have been of equal importance, for example, providing gifts to inmates in prisons, assistance to hospitals, orphanages, and handicapped institutions or the distribution of second-hand clothing to the poor and needy. Some Muslim NGOs, such as the Iranian ARD, are engaged in the provision of agricultural extension services in the north, including tractor services and the distribution of fertilizers, sewing centres for training Muslim girls, and financial assistance to women's cooperatives and groups to start small-scale businesses.

There are some highly influential local Muslim NGOs in Ghana, such as the Islamic Council for Development and Humanitarian Services (ICODEHS, established in 1991), Muslim Family Council Services (MFCS, established in 1990), and the Muslim Relief Association of Ghana (MURAG, established in 1986). They have gained a good reputation both within and outside Ghana and have close links not only to international Muslim donor organizations but also Western ones. Like the MURAG, the MFCS has mainly been cooperating with Western donor organizations, such as the UNFPA and the UNICEF, in family planning, fertility management, prevention of female genital mutilation, child-care, and HIV projects. Similar to the MURAG, the strength of the MFCS lies in its community-oriented approach. Further, MURAG is included in a list on "NGO's in good standing" on the homepage of the Ministry of Manpower, Youth, and Employment.⁵ The ICODEHS, on the other hand, is the only Ghanaian Muslim NGO that is a member of the Civil Society Coordinating Council (CivisoC) of SAPRIN-Ghana.⁶ The ICODEHS is also a member of the Coalition of Domestic Observers (CODEO).⁷

Societal impact

Despite all their efforts, the activities of Muslim NGOs have received a mixed response from the local people. Whereas educational, social, and infrastructural development projects in general are regarded as having a positive impact, other projects, such as the building of mosques, have at times been criticized by local Muslim intellectuals for not responding to the needs of the local population. A common argument by Muslim authorities I spoke with both in Tamale and Accra was that foreign Muslim donor agencies are very open-handed in providing resources for the building of mosque complexes whereas it is much more difficult for local Ghanaian Muslim NGOs to get funding from international/foreign Muslim donor organizations for social welfare or infrastructural projects, not to mention the provision of resources for staff salaries. It seems as if international Muslim aid is usually received as a kind of package: a Ghanaian Muslim NGO is able to get funding for an educa-

tional or social welfare project if it is tied to a mosque complex. Or, as one Ghanaian activist explained to me: a project application will secure funding if it is tied to the building of a mosque. Especially foreign Muslim donor agencies that channel funds through Ghanaian Muslim NGOs are criticized for being inflexible and only allowing the funds to be earmarked for stylish or even mere propagandistic projects. In fact, in comparison to various social welfare projects and programmes, huge sums are spent on mosque building projects by foreign donors and their Ghanaian initiators.

Perhaps the biggest problem connected with the activities and projects of Muslim NGOs is their restricted societal impact—although this certainly does not apply to all Muslim NGOs. Projects are usually designed to target a particular group or to accomplish a designed task, say an orphanage or a school. Although the particular project aims to remedy a certain problem, it is usually not linked to or integrated into a wider societal context. Not surprisingly,

therefore, some Ghanaian observers have become rather critical about the concepts behind the promotion of development assistance. The activities of the NGOs, be they Muslim or other, can do little to address structural problems. It could be argued that the very nature of the NGOs is part of the problem: although most of the Muslim NGOs are run by Ghanaians, few, if any, are capable of financing their activities by generating funds from the Ghanaian Muslim community. Instead, most of them are financed by or are receiving funds from international Muslim NGOs or wealthy foreign Muslim states and philanthropists. Thus, there exists the danger of becoming dependent on outside money—a problem not too unfamiliar to many African NGOs.

The dependence on outside investments puts a Ghanaian Muslim NGO in a problematic situation: it is always the foreign donor who decides what to finance and what not. Thus, for the empowerment of the local poor, other approaches have to be sought, in particular initiatives that are designed by the recipients, targeted towards a structural change in the local community, and financed by funds which the implementing organization is fully capable of controlling. Such an approach will need the mobilization of the Ghanaian Muslim population to take collective responsibility not only for the improvement of their livelihood but also to engage in a fruitful debate about "Muslim" solutions for poverty alleviation. Interestingly, such a debate has already started among Muslim intellectuals and leaders in Ghana. This debate is itself part of an international debate among Muslim scholars, namely on the ability and possibility of Muslim societies and communities to make use of one of the most central concept of Islam, namely that of zakat or obligatory almsgiving.

[T]he mushrooming of
Muslim NGOs ... is as much
a philanthropic enterprise
as ... a new attempt to
"capture souls" ...

Notes

1. This article is based on my forthcoming book: Holger Weiss, *Begging and Almsgiving in Ghana: Muslim Positions towards Poverty and Distress* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, forthcoming).
2. See also H. Weiss, *Between Accommodation and Revivalism: Muslims, the State and Society in Ghana from the Precolonial to the Postcolonial Era* (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, forthcoming).
3. International Muslim NGOs with branches in Ghana are, amongst others, the Kuwaiti African Muslim Association (renamed Direct Aid in Ghana), the Saudi/Kuwaiti Al-Hudah Islamic Society, the UK-based Muntada Islamic Trust and the Muslim Aid, the US-based Zakat Foundation of America, and the Pakistani Ghana Tablighi Jamaat.
4. For example, the Imam Hasayn Foundation and the Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) from Iran and the Libyan World Islamic Call Service.
5. See http://www.mmde.gov.gh/gov_corp.cfm?GovCorpID=11, accessed on 11 April 2006.
6. SAPRIN or Structural Adjustment Participatory Review International Network is a network encompassing virtually all major NGOs, churches, and trade unions in Ghana. Internationally, SAPRIN is a joint project of the World Bank, governments, and a global network of NGOs and civil society organizations. See Lindsay Whitfield, *Civil Society as Idea and Civil Society as Process: The Case of Ghana*, Working Paper 92, Queen Elizabeth House (Oxford University, 2002).
7. CODEO was first formed in 2000 to monitor the general elections. It consist of 34 civil society organizations, two of them Muslim, namely the Federation of Muslim Councils in Ghana and ICODEHS.

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Youth & Social Change in Jordan & Egypt

SARA LEI SPARRE &
MARIE JUUL PETERSEN

In studies of religious collective actors, the role of religion as a potential agent of social change has often been downplayed in favour of an emphasis on religion as a reactionary social force. Whereas recent studies of Christian organizations and movements challenge this rather one-dimensional understanding of religion, it still seems to be the dominant approach in studies of Muslim collective action. Muslim organizations and movements are frequently explained from a socio-psychological point of view, seeing collective action

as a product of structural strains and psychological discomfort. In other words, people participate in Muslim collective action because they are poor and unemployed, have no possibilities for political participation, or are frustrated over being excluded from Western modernity. As such, Muslim collective action is seen primarily as a compensatory reaction to structural changes rather than a potential force for change in itself.

While structural strains naturally play a role in the actions of most people, this perspective runs the risk of overlooking other important factors in Muslim collective action. For instance, in their focus on underlying socio-psychological reasons, such approaches often tend to downplay the individual participants' own perceptions of social change, thereby reducing their actions to more or less automatic responses to structural strains, and overlooking the purposive, reflective, and organized dimensions of collective action. We argue that a micro-level focus on concrete Muslim collective actors and their perceptions of Islam and social change can contribute to a more complex understanding of the relations between Islam, collective action, and social change. Yes, people might participate in Muslim organizations and movements because they are frustrated, poor, or unemployed. But they also participate because they see this particular kind of action as the most relevant and powerful tool for changing their situation.

Islam and social change

A new movement of Muslim youth organizations, emerging from Egypt but spreading to other Middle Eastern countries, presents particularly interesting insights on the topic. Urban, upper middle-class young people constitute the backbone of this new movement. The majority is in their 20s, and most have been to university. In order to understand these young people's perceptions of Islam and social change, we have to turn towards the Egyptian accountant-turned-preacher Amr Khaled. Amr Khaled started preaching in mosques and private clubs in the early 1990s, and today, his shows are broadcasted on a number of satellite channels, reaching an audience of millions of young Muslims all over the world. He speaks an easily understandable Colloquial Arabic rather than the Standard Arabic spoken by traditional shaykhs, and his style is soft and compassionate, not disciplinary and strict. While others call his version of Islam "Islam light,"

The Middle East has recently witnessed the rise of Muslim youth movements with an activist agenda. This article shows that these movements prove particularly attractive to urban upper middle class youth for whom religious engagement is about fostering the collective good as well as about self-empowerment. The authors conclude by discussing whether these movements are conducive to political action, hinder formal political participation, or should be viewed as constituting a new form of political engagement.

he says that his main concern is simply to make young people love religion instead of fearing it. Amr Khaled's ideas about Islam appear to have become firmly rooted among young Muslims. He has become the catalyst for a much broader trend, facilitated by the Internet and satellite TV, and showing in the growing number of preachers with a similar style and message, as well as in the establishment of several youth organizations based on his ideas.

Social change plays an explicit role in the discourses of this new movement.

According to Amr Khaled, Islam is not only about praying five times a day and wearing the hijab the correct way, and *da'wa* is not just a call to live by these rules. Islam is about changing and improving yourself and your community, and *da'wa* is a call to actively engage in this change. The overall goal is not only a stronger Muslim individual, but a stronger Muslim society, a renaissance of the Muslim world. As such, two equally important strategies of the movement are community engagement and individual empowerment, both motivated and shaped by the Muslim faith. Each in their own way, the different activities of the organizations

demonstrate this intimate connection between individual empowerment and community engagement.

Let's do it ourselves!

In his TV programme *Sunna' al-Haya* (Life-Makers), Amr Khaled called for young people to engage in their community: "Guys, don't wait for something to happen. Let's do it ourselves!" One of his first projects was the collection and distribution of second-hand clothes in poor areas. Thousands of young people participated, and in the following months, volunteer work among young people increased. This call for participation in society is articulated as a moral obligation: A good Muslim is an active Muslim.

According to the young, one of the main challenges in their society is poverty and poverty-related problems such as illiteracy, unemployment, and illnesses. They see social welfare activities as logical solutions to these problems. In a Muslim context, this focus on poverty and social welfare is nothing

new. The duty to give to the poor, *zakat*, is one of the five pillars in Islam. Likewise, activities such as taking care of orphans and poor families range high in the extensive system for rewarding good deeds, *thawab*. However, the duty to help the poor has often manifested itself in rather traditional charity activities. Few organizations have engaged in more long-term development activities seeking to empower people to break out of their poverty.

The new youth organizations introduce a different approach. This is not just about collecting *thawab* to ensure one's own place in Paradise; it is about developing the Muslim world, creating a renaissance. Here, buzz words such as capacity-building and sustainable development are often heard; several of the organizations run vocational train-

Poster for
Resala Charity
Association,
Cairo



PHOTO BY SARAH LEI SPARRE, 2007

ing centres and organize awareness campaigns, some receive training from secular development NGOs, and many are getting involved in microfinance activities. In addition to this, the organizations also engage in traditional charity activities. They distribute food-bags and blankets, and they invite people to celebrate religious holidays. But they seem to be very aware of the limitations of such activities. As a young man put it: "In the end, poverty will not be solved by giving out 3,000 bags. You need to change the minds of people."

This hints at another important aspect, underlying the youth's approach to social welfare: All change must start with the individual. As such, individual empowerment is a key component in the organizations' social welfare activities. What the poor need is not just money and material goods; they need a direction in their life, and this direction is Islam. Through education, training, and conversations, the young seek to convey their ideas of a good Muslim lifestyle to the poor. Combining secular development tools with Islamic ideals and guidelines, they emphasize the importance of education, hard work, and good morals.

Through their engagement in social welfare activities, they not only try to empower the poor—by default they also empower themselves. Almost everybody says that their engagement in this work had strengthened their skills in areas such as project planning, management, and communication. The young do not just interpret these benefits as common consequences of involvement in any kind of community work. Rather, they see them as the consequences of a specific Muslim approach to community work, emphasizing efficiency, organization, and strategic thinking as important qualities in any good Muslim.

Thus, religion is what initially motivates the young people to engage in social welfare activities: To be a good Muslim is to do something for others. But, combined with secular development ideas, religion is also what provides the guidelines for *how* to do something for others. Poverty is not fought through the random distribution of zakat, but through individual empowerment, including education, vocational training, and moral strengthening. Finally, by providing concrete benefits in terms of strengthened personal capacities, religion is also what makes them *keep* doing something for others.

You have to start with yourself

Social welfare activities are not the only concern of the youth organizations. Many also engage in so-called human and career development courses. Whereas the engagement in social welfare activities is motivated by a wish to fight poverty in general, young people engage in these courses in an attempt to solve more youth-specific problems such as unemployment, apathy, and poor quality of higher education. Successful managers in multinational companies and university professors teach courses in topics such as time management, presentation skills, leadership, business and ethics, offered to university students for free or at a very low price since both organizers and lecturers work as volunteers.

The concrete goal of these organizations is to prepare young people for a professional and adult life. On the more general level, the organizations wish to create a more effective and responsible generation of youth, able to participate in society, and thereby contributing to the renaissance of the Muslim nation. Thus, the courses become yet another concrete manifestation of the relation between social change and individual empowerment: If you want to change society, you have to start with the individual. And most importantly: You have to start with yourself.

Though most courses offered are based on American management theories, Islam plays a significant role in both practices and discourses. In fact, Islam and modern management are seen as mutually reinforcing. Through the introduction of the ideal of a so-called "Muslim professional," the effective businessman's strategies are merged with the values and morals of a good Muslim. A Muslim professional is someone who dresses properly, works efficiently, and has high moral standards. The youth organizations are managed after the model of multinational companies, but in the tight schedule, there is time for religious lectures and prayers. In fact, religious commitment and practice is expected of the organizations' members. The lecturers and organizers act as role

models for the young people, promoting the ideal of a Muslim professional. As one lecturer emphasized: "When I say that the lecture starts at six, six-o-one you're late. When I say that you have to attend three out of four lectures to pass, if you only attend two, you have failed.

There are no excuses. This is what it takes to be a Muslim professional."

Hence, Islam clearly plays a significant role when it comes to empowerment of the young engaged in these organizations. The kind of religion communicated to the participants is not so much about rituals and theological doctrine. Instead, Islam is the underlying motivation and what provides the general guidelines for the modern individual, whether it concerns major choices in life or daily interaction with friends, family, and colleagues. If understood and practiced the right way, Islam will help the individual achieve his or her goals and become an active participant in society. As a leader in one organization told me:

"Our purpose is not to spread Islam—it's already

there. Our purpose is to help people grow stronger. The Prophet was a strong man, useful to his nation. He's our idol."

"... The Prophet
was a strong man,
useful to his nation.
He's our idol."

Perspectives

It is obvious that participants in the new Muslim youth organizations articulate an intimate relation between Islam and change. Society needs change, individuals need change, and Islam is the tool to obtain this change. Problems such as poverty, unemployment, and apathy are seen as moral and social problems, whose solutions must be sought in the individual and in the community. With their faith as motivation and guiding light, young people seek to address these problems through the interrelated and mutually reinforcing strategies of community engagement and individual empowerment, and with the stated goal of contributing to the renaissance of the Muslim nation.

But one thing is how the young people understand social change and what they do to implement this change. Another thing is what consequences this will have on a structural level. In other words, and paraphrasing Foucault, the young might know what they do, but they do not know what "what they do" will do. An interesting question in this respect is whether their social engagement will develop into more formal political participation, thereby perhaps changing the current political structures in the Middle East. Given the novelty of Muslim youth organizations, such questions cannot be answered definitively at this point, and there is a need for more long-term studies. However, based on our own very preliminary observations, we propose three possible answers.

First of all, one could argue that these youth organizations might become breeding grounds for formal political actors. Obviously these organizations strengthen skills that can be characterized as essential to political engagement—skills such as argumentation techniques, teamwork, and critical thinking. However, in their current form they are characterised by an explicit lack of formal political engagement. The young see their participation as an attempt to address social and moral injustice, not political injustice, and they take no interest in using formal political channels to gain influence. This could lead one to conclude that such organizations can end up hindering formal political participation by diverting potential actors from the political scene, luring them into harmless social activities. Finally, a third perspective might see these social activities neither as harmless activities nor as run-ups to formal political participation but rather as expressions of a whole new kind of political engagement, challenging the often corrupt and dysfunctional political system by insisting on different forms and channels of participation. But regardless of which—if any—of these answers will turn out to be true, the new Muslim youth organizations present some interesting micro-level examples of how human beings understand religion as intimately intertwined with social change and how they use their religion as a relevant and powerful tool to obtain such change.

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Development as Divinely Imposed Duty

BJØRN OLAV UTVIK

The need for technological and economic development has remained central in the political agenda of the mainstream Islamist movements up to the present. In Egypt in particular groups such as the Muslim Brothers, the Labour Party¹ (Hizb al-'Amal), and the Centre Party² (Hizb al-Wasat) have devoted a great deal of their political energy to criticizing the failure of the economic development effort, and emphasize the need for building an independent technological base in Muslim

countries, in order to escape the current total dependence on Western and East Asian countries for advanced equipment. Through their press and as elected representatives, Islamists call for rapid industrialization, improved communications, upgrading basic infrastructure and services in the villages, etc. Not least, beyond the level of immediate questions of economic policy, the Islamist interpretation of the social message of Islam is much conducive to economic development, and reminiscent of the Protestant ethics that Max Weber saw as propitious to capitalist development in Europe. This will be confirmed by a glance at what Egyptian thinkers linked to the Muslim Brothers and the Labour Party have written on economic questions.³

Based on their pronouncements the building of a strong and technologically advanced economy emerges as a sacred duty. For Adil Husayn, the deceased charismatic ideologue of the Labour Party's turn to Islamism, this was an integral part of the quest for independence which was at the heart of his political and intellectual efforts. Economy professors Yusuf Kamal and Husayn Shahhata, central spokesmen for the Muslim Brothers on economic issues, for their part state that the Islamic Sharia aims at comprehensive development in order to achieve strength and glory for the Muslim nation. They claim that mankind is entrusted with a sacred obligation to exploit natural resources to the full for the increase of the material wealth of society, and that economic development is a *fard kifaya*, a collective duty, to be secured by the state if individuals fail to promote it with sufficient force. The whole development effort is likened to a jihad. Both Kamal and Shahhata emphasize the centrality of the development effort in an Islamic system through stating that zakat revenue can be used by the state for productive investment in order to further development. Shahhata states that work is to be considered a form of *'ibada*, part of the worship of God. This implies that the perfection of one's work is a religious obligation equal in importance to the fulfilment of ritual duties like prayer and fasting, and is reminiscent of the Protestant idea of work as a calling. Shahhata holds up the furtherance of public interest, *maslaha*, as equal to fulfilling God's will, and in line with this he accords the call for modernizing the economy priority over the formal fulfilment of tenets of *fiqh*, as in Islamist critique of "Islamic" investment companies and banks for not investing in projects which would contribute to the development of production.

There is an old *fiqh* principle stating that in considering *maslaha* in the choice between possible interpretations of the Quran or Sunna on a specific point of jurisprudence, one should proceed according to a descending ladder of priorities: first necessities, *daruriyyat*,

Middle Eastern Islamists have been unequivocal advocates of bringing their societies up to the technological level of modern industrial society. In fact, the most fertile recruiting ground for Islamist organizations has been students in technological and natural science subjects. As Islamist movements gather strength year by year, and are poised to be the main beneficiaries of any turn towards democratic government in the region, it seems imperative to gain an insight into their ideas on economic issues.

then needs, *hajat*, then improvements, *tahsinat*. The Muslim Brothers take up this list of priorities and adopt it as "Islamic priorities for production and investment,"⁴ so that Muslim society, and the Islamic state as its representative, must before anything else secure the sufficient allocation of resources for the procurement of basic necessities for the population. Even if self-proclaimed Islamic financial institutions can be said to be operating without interest it does not make them Islamic

in the eyes of the Muslim Brothers and the Labour Party if they do not support this effort, but concentrate on financing trade and currency speculation.

God's stewards on earth

There is common agreement among Islamist writers that private property is the basic principle in Islam and that this is necessary for stimulating men to exert their best efforts at developing and preserving wealth.⁵ Still they all stress that public interest takes priority over private interests. A central idea is that of man as "God's steward (*khalifa*) on earth."⁶ Everyone has the right to private property, but this right is limited by the fact that all wealth ultimately belongs to God. The individual is seen as holding property in trust from God and from society as God's deputy, as it were. Therefore private property involves a social responsibility. It should be made to bear fruit in the service of society, and it should be preserved and developed for future generations. And others have claims on the property; that is, the return it brings or even parts of the property itself may be needed to satisfy urgent needs of the wider community.

The Egyptian Islamists consider it a task for an Islamic state to secure a minimum of welfare to all members of society. This is to be realized through concentrating investment and production on the provision of basic necessities, and, centrally for Kamal and Shahhata, through the zakat. The Muslim Brother writers emphasize that the zakat should provide more than what is necessary for mere survival; every member of society should have the right to a certain degree of enjoyment of life.⁷ The ideal of the just Islamic society is not one of radical egalitarianism, but rather of balance, of Islam as a moderate third way avoiding the excesses of capitalism and communism. This

implies that the ideal is to seek a harmonious balance between different social groups and between generations. Class conflict is seen as an evil which it is an imperative to avoid lest its divisive cancer split society into warring factions.

The liberating force of faith

Over and above the general principles enunciated as guiding an Islamic economy, the Islamist writers emphasize the liberating force of faith in itself. Faith induces good behaviour towards others and thereby creates a solid framework for social solidarity, says Kamal. Husayn stresses belief in a sacred doctrine as an indispensable prerequisite for the will to sacrifice without which any serious development effort is doomed to failure. More generally this is linked to the idea that a true Muslim is involved in an unceasing battle for good against evil, and

Islamist doctrine

... possess[es]

a substantial

potential for

economic

mobilization.

should use her or his measured time in this world in a disciplined and purposeful way. When the energy of the believer through the values listed above is directed towards the increase of material production, Islamist doctrine would seem to possess a substantial potential for economic mobilization. This is true not least since there is an emphasis not only on an Islamic state enforcing these values, but ultimately on them being internalized as natural instincts by believers.

Misguided belief in miracles?

In his influential works on Islamic economics, notably *Islam and Mammon: The Economic Predicaments of Islamism*,⁸ Timur Kuran presents a rather more gloomy picture. To Kuran the core of the recently emerged idea of an Islamic economy stems from a notion of justice based on the two principles of equality in distribution and fairness in productive, commercial, and financial interaction. The realization of these principles is presented as flowing naturally from the implementation of the Islamic procedures of zakat (which secures equality), and the prohibition of *riba* (which secures fairness). Kuran argues that this is an illusion based on unrealistic presumptions about the workings of a modern market economy. The literature analyzed by Kuran stems mainly from the South Asian Islamic region, and is mostly not produced by political Islamists. It is probably correct to say that the writings in question tend to be of a more technical and scripturalist nature than that of the Arab Islamist discourse. Yet this can at best partially account for Kuran's inclination to reduce Islamic economic thought to a misguided belief in the miraculous effect of reintroducing medieval economic principles.

It would seem that in his effort to disprove the "workability" of Islamist economic prescriptions Kuran becomes insensitive to the dynamic aspect of Islamist reformulations of Islam. He does acknowledge that equality and justice are part of wider set of moral injunctions. But to Kuran these injunctions can be summed up as a general call for altruistic behaviour, and this he summarily dismisses as unworkable, since altruism can only work within small social units, such as the family, and not on the scale of a nationwide market. This statement in itself is certainly debatable. But more importantly Kuran fails to notice that Islamist advocacy of hard and conscientious work, the establishment of merit as the sole criterion for economic decisions, and the urgency of economic development as central Islamic values, gives a thoroughly modernizing flavour to the "package" of values presented as those guiding an Islamic economy. Furthermore, and precisely for this reason the fact that efficiency, growth, employment, and industrialization are held forth as important goals, stands for Kuran as somehow isolated from, and partly in contradiction to, the "moral economy" otherwise propagated. A careful reading of this same moral economy would rather show consistency between the moral principles advocated and what is set up as practical economic goals. Kuran instead ends up suggesting that the only link between Islamism and modernization would spring from social reaction against "fundamentalist" Islamic regimes.

Kuran concentrates on discussing the feasibility of the solutions proposed by the "Islamic economic" literature. This leads him to disregard the possibility that the inconsistencies he points to might be understood as expressing a tension between the resolve to promote a reading of the Islamic message relevant to the problems of modernizing society, and the equally strongly felt need to guard the sanctity of the scriptures. The tension in question reflects precisely the innovative character of the discourse.

A pro-modern ideology

On the whole, then, I would argue that mainstream Islamism in the Middle East as exemplified by the Egyptian movements discussed here should be considered as a pro-modern ideology not only in the sense of its stressing the need for economic and technological development,

Image not available online

Egyptian workers in a garment factory in Cairo

but also in view of the individualizing aspects of Islamist interpretation of the Islamic message. There is a strong focus on the individual as responsible not only for his own proper conduct but for all the affairs of society and state that contrasts with more traditional communalist attitudes and a traditional division of roles where politics would be the domain of notables and religion that of the clerical leaders. Especially with the Muslim Brothers the focus on individual duties is coupled with a strong defence of individual rights against the encroachment of the state. Common to all Islamists is a strong emphasis on merit, which is the idea that there should be full access to social

mobility for every individual regardless of family background, and that all promotions should take place based on consideration of individual merit in piety and in efficient and good work. This would require equal access to education and employment and an end to age-old practices of nepotism and favouritism in public and business life.

The stress on merit is therefore closely linked to the Islamists' frenetic campaigning against corruption. The main target is the misuse of public office to further personal interests or those of individual or groups close to the office holder. The Islamists criticize officials taking bribes and illegitimate charges for exercising their duties, and denounce the misappropriation of funds for buying votes and for paying commissions to cronies of people in office, or by awarding public contracts to other than the one presenting the best tender. In this can also be seen a modernizing aspect, in that the borderline is very thin and vague between corruption and traditional patron-client relations. One might perhaps say that corruption thrives in the confrontation between inherited social structures based on the reciprocal solidaric obligations of kinship and client networks, and the institutions of a modern market and a modern state. The Islamists seem not only in their campaigning against corruption, but also to the extent that they are involved in business, to favour a detached impersonal style focused on economic efficiency.

Notes

1. The Labour Party, founded in 1978, was originally a leftist-nationalist group, but in the late 1980s adopted a clear-cut Islamist platform. Its activities as a legal party were frozen by the authorities in 2000, but the party remains active in the opposition.
2. The Centre Party was formed in 1996 by liberal dissidents from the Muslim Brothers. It has yet to gain formal status as a legal party.
3. Main references: Adil Husayn, *Al-islam din wa hadara: mashru' lil-mustaqbal* (Giza, 1990); Yusuf Kamal, *Al-islam wa'l-madhahib al-iqtisadiyya al-mu'asira* (Mansura, 1986) and *Fiqh al-iqtisad al-amm* (Cairo, 1990); Husayn Shahhata, *Al-minhaj al-islami lil-amn wa'l-tanmiya* (10th of Ramadan City, 1990).
4. For instance Kamal, *Fiqh al-iqtisad al-amm*, 150.
5. Kamal, *Al-islam wa'l-madhahib al-iqtisadiyya al-mu'asira*, 150–155.
6. Shahhata, *Al-minhaj al-islami lil-amn wa'l-tanmiya*, 45–46, Husayn, *Al-islam din wa hadara*, 44–47.
7. Kamal, *Al-islam wa'l-madhahib al-iqtisadiyya al-mu'asira*, 214–216.
8. Timur Kuran, *Islam and Mammon: The Economic Predicaments of Islamism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

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Religion, Ethics, and Development

Some Comments

NIGEL DOWER

Dimensions of development ethics

Development ethics explores the ethical basis of development by bringing out what is often implicit in development discourse.¹ Here, I explore briefly three dimensions to development ethics. First, what are the goals of development? Second, what kind of social/political order should we try to establish? Third, in what ways should we pursue our conception of development?

First, what kind of a society at all are we trying to promote in development? If, as is commonly assumed, development involves economic growth, what does that growth enable people to do or be? At one level, it is about enabling very poor people to escape from their poverty—to empower the disempowered—though, as I indicate later, exactly what empowerment is is a matter of dispute. At another level it is about enabling people generally to achieve (better) quality of life—which may be defined in religious terms or secular/liberal terms. The basic concept of development is capable of many conceptions—and the latter could be informed by religious values, even fundamentalist religious values. This issue is explored more fully below.

Second, there is the question of how the goods of development are to be achieved. This is the distributive question, often linked with ideas of equity and social justice. What is a fair distribution of the bases of well-being and how can it be achieved? Is the primary vehicle individuals acting charitably e.g. giving zakat as a religious duty, or is it various charitable NGOs enabling the poor through aid and training, as Harmsen's article in this issue well illustrates? What is the role of the state in this? Do we need a conception of social justice such as that provided by John Rawls² that requires redistributive measures like progressive taxation?

Third, there is the fundamental issue of how people are to pursue their own goals and also to pursue the goal of development itself. A general commitment to non-violence and dialogue is commonly assumed—and usually also the specific commitment to democratic values as well as strong legal protection of rights and liberties including political and

religious liberty. These are both procedural values to do with how we promote social change, but they also constitute elements of human well-being itself, as it is commonly conceived. But then of course there is always a dilemma when a society falls radically short of our conception of development as it should be. Is one then entitled to use violent means to achieve change? Here the current process of development may, on this view, require violent interventions and pressures, but its goal is a later stage of development in which there will no longer be a need for violence. This was the line taken by the ANC in pre-1994 South Africa and which is taken by Hamas in Palestine. I now explore some of the issues I have raised in more detail.

Nature of development

If development is defined minimally as economic growth or economic growth with equity, then this is consistent with many conceptions of what

In this article, philosopher Nigel Dower outlines the logical implications of the relations between religion, ethics, and development. In doing so, he shows the importance of making explicit the values, assumptions, and conceptions that inform discussions of development. Only by acknowledging that all development agendas are value-driven, is a fruitful dialogue between religious and secular approaches to development possible, even if they will continue to disagree about desirable outcomes.

a full human life consists in, whether religious or secular. It is usually combined with weak pluralist (liberal) and civil society assumptions. (a) Pluralist assumption: many different kinds of goals and life-styles are consistent with this account of development. That is, within the general framework of development, some people pursue non-religious goals, some various different religious goals, of which some could be fundamentalist. (b) Civil society assumption: what is done is pursued in

ways consistent with law, that is, non-violently, non-coercively, non-deceptively, and where public decisions have to be made, goals are pursued by dialogue and democratic decision/negotiation.

Within this framework NGOs can pursue a wide range of goals as part of civil society, where civil society is defined as commitment to particular procedural values of certain kinds (but not to the same substantive values). For example, a pro-life organization and a family planning organization may pursue different mutually excluding agendas, but if they do so non-violently and seek to get their views accepted democratically, then they are part of civil society. (We need to contrast this sense of civil society with a wider descriptive sense of civil society which applies to any non-state/non-business organization and could include the Mafia and the IRA.)

But the pluralist element can be reduced, either somewhat or greatly. A society could accept, even encourage, a wide range of life-styles but still reject certain ways of life, for instance those of homosexuals or of travelling people. A radically secular society might ban all or some religious ways of life, as we saw at least in public life in USSR's communism. A radically religious society may ban or discourage non-religious ways of life; Locke's famous toleration did not extend to atheists (or indeed Catholics). At the extreme it might ban or discourage both secular views and indeed any religious ways of life not in accordance with the dominant conception implemented by a government with the backing of (sufficient of) its citizens.

Development then is normatively based. Usually economic growth or economic growth with equity is seen as *good as a means* towards the achievement of human flourishing in whatever ways it is conceived, consistent with (a) a system of liberty in which the liberties of some are not unreasonably limited by the exercise of liberty by others, and (b) public decisions are made in an orderly and non-violent (non-coercive, etc.) way. In Western liberal democracies (and other societies like them) the framework of liberties and democratic procedures is part of the values assumed. In other societies not modelled on Western liberal democracies, there may also be liberties but less of them, and there may either be democracy (maybe in different forms), or benign autocracy. (There might of course be non-benign autocracies or tyrannies, but these would be seen as impediments to, rather than models of, development.)

An example of a Western approach which acknowledges this normative basis is Sen's well-known capability approach.³ The expansion of capabilities to be or do what we have reason to do or be of course includes the option of developing a religious conception of a good life. This is not of course value-neutral, but it is intended to allow for a wide range of conceptions of the good to be enabled by development. But development could alternatively be defined in an even less value-neutral way:

Is a liberal
education that does
not include kinds
of fundamentalism
a form of
indoctrination?



PHOTO BY SHAH MARAI / © AFP, 2006

Afghan girls work on a carpet loom in their home.

development is the expansion of the material basis (wealth) so that people can achieve more specific goals such as a particular form of religious faith. It is still development, but development defined in more precise normative terms than usually in liberal societies. Sustainable development and ecological conceptions of development also have built into them further substantive values to be achieved, so that insofar as these are adopted in Western countries, development is less simply linked to the expansion of freedoms.

Within the religious framework, an NGO is more or less free to pursue a range of goals: e.g. poverty relief as such, empowerment by providing training; and doing these things but with a view to encouraging a certain set of ethical or religious values, as Harmsen's thesis shows many NGOs in Jordan clearly to be doing. Some it may be said are engaging in indoctrination. But this does not make it inconsistent with development, though it may be something which others may prefer not to happen, either because they would prefer something else to indoctrinate or because they reject indoctrination as such. They may have rival *conceptions* of development, though the basic concept of development applies.

Several points about indoctrination

(a) Different views of indoctrination

We may recall here the old proverb: "one man's meat is another man's poison." What counts as indoctrination for some may be the imparting of reasonable knowledge for another. Is a liberal education that does not include kinds of fundamentalism a form of indoctrination? What counts as indoctrination depends upon whether one thinks about the range of values and beliefs imparted as being either too narrow or simply wrong, compared with what one thinks is the right set of values and beliefs to impart.

(b) Is in any case indoctrination necessarily not empowering?

There are two ways of thinking about empowerment. First, empowerment may be enabling people to do what they want but do not have the material or motivational resources to do. This could be (weakly) giving people greater power over their lives so that they can choose to do what they want—e.g. greater access to resources. Second, it could be (more strongly) giving people the motivational resources to be able to make genuine choices of different *ends*, including what they had wanted but also new things they might now want.

Now indoctrination is consistent with the first level of enabling, but not with the second. But the first form of enabling may be all that is seen as desirable. This is precisely a key difference between non-liberal and liberal views of education. But they are both about empowering people to lead fulfilled lives.

Suppose that empowerment is more about enabling people, not to do what they want, but to do what they have reason to want (though they may not know it). This is more typically what we have in mind with children and young people. Here education is about expanding our capability not merely to take effective means, but also in our goals and aspirations. But even here the non-liberal and liberal may both see their inputs as creating a richer range of values—in the one case by a fuller understanding of what one's religion calls one to do, in the other by an understanding of the range possibilities which one may choose—requiring a society in which that range of possibilities is protected by law.

An example from my society can be given which is in many respects similar to what can happen in Muslim societies including what voluntary organizations are about. A Catholic child, let us suppose, is "indoctrinated" into the Catholic faith and thereafter takes on a life of Catholic faith, never seriously questioning it. A fellow Catholic may judge that that person has been empowered to

live a fully Catholic life. Even a liberal or a person of another religious persuasion could judge that for that person that upbringing has empowered him to live a full life. However the liberal (including of course liberally minded Catholics) would probably take the view that, had the upbringing been less strict and other options made plausible, the person might well have chosen otherwise, and that, whether or not he remained a Catholic, it would have been better if a wider range of options had been built into his education. A person of another religious persuasion would either agree with the liberal or, if his own beliefs are also held in a certain exclusivist form, have wished for another religious education. My point is that empowerment and indoctrination do not mutually exclude each other.

(c) The issue of universalism and NGOs

Finally, we need to comment briefly on the issue of universalism implicit in NGO work. Any organization within development will, with regard to what it does, such as aid for the very poor or empowering through training, (a) be precisely committed to empowering people so as to make their own choices as to how to live (within the law/ground-rules of an organized community), or (b) do so with a view to encouraging people to adopt certain specific values and beliefs. But we need to see that, as between (a) and (b), they are both working with universalistic agendas. There is no problem with an organization having a universalistic agenda. This is in my opinion built into the very logic of ethics and certainly any ethical basis for an organization pursuing public policies. The real question is *what* universal values are being pursued—e.g. the expansion of choice and capacities or the promoting of more specific ways of life and belief (or positions in between with both elements, like those committed to development but with strong commitment to environmental consciousness). There are also background universalistic commitments, at least for those associations which see themselves as part of a civil society. These are commitments to the procedural values of proceeding in an orderly, non-violent non-coercive way, and often additionally to democratic procedures as well. These are universalistic as well, as is made explicit when we accept the idea of *global* civil society.

Notes

1. The theme of this short paper relates to the conference held in Utrecht on 14 June 2007 on Muslim NGOs in the Middle East, organized by ISIM and co-sponsored by Hivos. It is partly based on my comments on other papers at that conference, and partly based on reflections I had made on Egbert Harmsen's thesis on NGOs in Jordan. This paper does not make any direct contributions specifically on NGOs in the Middle East, but it provides a wider conceptual framework for thinking about development and how it relates to religion.
2. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
3. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

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Reconstruction & Women's Rights in Afghanistan

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Attempts to accommodate a women's rights agenda in conflict and post-conflict contexts presents us with unprecedented challenges. Gender advocates often bemoan the fact that scant attention is paid and insufficient resources are allocated to the gender dimension of post-conflict reconstruction, arguing that women's involvement is essential to achieving sustainable peace. However, the prospects for a rights-based agenda are, as I shall attempt to demonstrate throughout this text, compromised by the nature of the interventions that purport to uphold them and by the corrosive, long-term effects of prolonged conflict and endemic insecurity.

In contemporary post-conflict situations we encounter the "internationalization" of state-building under new forms of tutelage. This conjuncture presents its own specific set of challenges. Foremost among these is the fact that donor-led institution-building may create entities with juridical sovereignty (and international recognition) but with little *de facto* power to effectively administer national territories and provide law and order.² This poses serious dilemmas of legitimacy and calls for the management of multiple tensions between global and local players and political factions with different degrees of commitment to state-building.

The first part of this paper examines the nature of the claims made for women's inclusion in post-Taliban Afghanistan by analyzing the outcomes of constitutional and electoral processes. The second part explores whether such claims have any purchase in contexts where the rule of law is severely compromised and where the social dislocations resulting from conflict expose women and girls to new and unprecedented forms of violence and insecurity.

Promise of inclusion: "Democratization" and women's rights

The constitutional process in Afghanistan offers important insights into the contradictions resulting from donor-instigated attempts to secure women's rights in the absence of a stable political settlement between an aid-dependent government and a variety of opposition groups. These include jihadi factions committed to a conservative interpretation of the Sharia and who have, so far, shown little inclination to compromise on matters pertaining to the status of women. These contradictions were reflected both in the process and the letter of the Constitution.

After the fall of the Taliban, the international community and the United Nations acted rapidly to bring mujahidin factions and the political leadership in the Afghan diaspora together to agree to an interim power-sharing arrangement. The resulting Bonn Agreement of December 2001 was not a conventional peace agreement, however, since not all the warring parties were represented and it lacked specific and actionable clauses on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). Instead, it was an externally mediated power sharing arrangement between the Northern Alliance and the international community. The Agreement endorsed the establishment of "a broad-based, gender sensitive, multi-ethnic and fully representative government."³

In the period of consolidation that followed, a process hailed as a relative success, synergies were noted between efforts of the international community, government bodies, and women's civil society organizations. On 4 January 2004, a 502-member Loya Jirga approved the new constitution. Afghanistan emerged from this process with a new state structure based on a presidential democracy and supported by a bicam-

Gender issues are becoming politicized to the detriment of women in contexts where armed interventions usher in new blueprints for governance and "democratization."

Using illustrations from Afghanistan, this article shows that the nature of emerging political settlements may jeopardize stated international commitments to a women's rights agenda, especially in contexts where security and the rule of law are severely compromised, where Islam becomes a stake in power struggles, and where ethnic/sectarian constituencies are locked in power struggles for representation in defence of their collective rights.¹

eral national assembly (comprising a lower house-Wolesi Jirga and an upper house-Meshrano Jirga) where the political representation of women became enshrined in law.

Some amendments to the draft constitution were successfully pushed through in the period leading up to the Constitutional Loya Jirga. These amendments included an explicit reference to the equality of men and women before the law (Article 22) and an increase in the participation of women in the Wolesi Jirga from one to two female delegates from each province (Article 83). In addition, Article 7 of the Consti-

tution requires that the state of Afghanistan "abide by the UN Charter, international treaties, international conventions that Afghanistan has signed, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." These conventions include the Convention for all forms of Discrimination Against Women that was ratified without reservations in March 2003.

On the other hand, Article 3 on "Islam and Constitutionality" states that, "no law can be contrary to the beliefs and the provisions of the sacred religion of Islam." This article, along with its affiliate which declares Afghanistan an Islamic state, is not subject to amendment. The Constitution gives the Supreme Court the authority to determine whether laws and treaties made by the government are in accordance with the Constitution, giving it the power to reject any law or treaty deemed un-Islamic. Thus, a Supreme Court dominated by religious hard-liners could potentially become an unaccountable body controlling the legislature, executive branch, and electoral system on the pretext of protecting Islam.

Contests over the "Islamic" nature of the state were overshadowed by a central dilemma that threatened to stalemata the proceedings of the Constitutional Loya Jirga; the choice between a strong presidential system versus a parliamentary system. The draft presented by the government proposed a pure presidential system, while the opposition, from jihadi groups and non-Pashtun areas of the country, favoured a parliamentary system.

Both the political stakes around Islam and the fact that different ethnic and political constituencies are locked in struggles of representation in defence of their collective rights substantially erodes the political spaces available to women, except as spokespersons of their communal interests. In fact there is little *a priori* ground for making simplistic assumptions about women's primary commitment to subscribing to a common platform. Indeed, a report by Rights and Democracy claimed that "a majority of the female delegates at the CLJ were affiliated with violent, conservative factions and voted in line with their demands, dividing women in accordance with ethnic, religious, and factional identities."⁴ A sizable proportion of the lower house (Wolesi Jirga) belonging to parties that could be classified as Islamist and jihadis are expected to be the best organized legislative force in parliament. Female members who hold 27% of the seats are not necessarily expected to function as a coherent political group since they are affiliated with parties across the political spectrum.⁵

Lest we imagine that this state of affairs is straightforwardly attributable to the "Islamic" nature of society, let us remind ourselves of the historical trajectory that led to Afghanistan's current predicament. The various parties locked in struggle were consolidated in the process of the Cold War by proxy fought on Afghan soil. Different political factions were financed and armed by various countries with their own political agenda. The mujahidin supported by the United States to rise up against the Soviets also included the Salafist groups promoted by Saudi Arabia

and Pakistan. After the withdrawal of the Soviet Union the country was left to its own devices until the Coalition-led invasion in 2001. In the immediate aftermath of the Bonn summit in 2001, the Coalition continued to distribute arms and money to militia armies to assist them in the ongoing battle against Al-Qaida and the Taliban, while the international community stressed the importance of state-building and of a strong political “centre.”

In summary, the notion that democratization by design may herald an automatic expansion of women’s rights does not stand up to scrutiny. It may be argued, with justification, that any reversal of the policies implemented by the Taliban represented an unambiguous gain. However, reading off substantive rights from state policies and legal frameworks remains a misleadingly limited exercise in contexts such as Afghanistan where the vast majority of women have little or no contact with state, market, or civil society institutions. Furthermore, in contexts where security and the rule of law are totally compromised and impunity on the part of multiple perpetrators of violence holds sway, the notion of rights—for men or women—rings hollow. Before turning to explanations that privilege the role of Islam or local culture to understand the nature of abuses against women in Afghanistan, we would do well to train our analytic lenses on the ways in which the war economy has affected patterns of gender inequality and aggravated gender-based violence.

Gendered legacies of conflict

In contrast to sophisticated analyses of political economies of conflict, in discussions of gender relations and women’s rights we often revert to a world of unchanging tradition and cultural stasis. One of the clear dangers of such an approach is to misrecognize or misinterpret what are, in effect, reactive behaviours of ordinary people as they try to grapple with the uncertainties of everyday life by treating them as mere extensions of local custom. The dynamics of gendered disadvantage, the erosion of local livelihoods, the criminalization of the economy, and insecurity at the hands of armed groups and factions are analytically distinct phenomena. However, their effects combine seamlessly to produce extreme forms of female vulnerability. Attempts at addressing issues of gender justice through institutional and legal reforms fall short of acknowledging these interactions or their long-term effects on deepening the disadvantages of women and girls.

The Soviet invasion in 1979 and the resulting collapse of the state eroded whatever little institutional support existed for women’s public roles and legal rights and the period of insecurity and upheaval that followed acted to annul any formal gains. Between 1979 and 1992 an estimated six million people fled their places of origin, rural infrastructure was decimated, and the Afghan resistance set the scene for the growing influence of Islamist parties and local commanders. By the time the Taliban emerged in 1994, at the height of civil war, Afghanistan was in the grip of endemic lawlessness and human rights abuses of all kinds, including crimes against women. The Taliban came to power with the promise to restore law and order, albeit through a particularly harsh application of Sharia. Taliban policies towards women imposed a virtual state of curfew on women and enforced mandatory covering under the burqah, subject to severe punishments for infractions.

The gender regime imposed by the Taliban represented a major break with “traditional” forms of social control in various ethnic communities across Afghanistan.⁶ Decisions relating to the dress and mobility of women and to relations between the sexes that were previously monitored by households, kinship groups, and community elders could now be mandated by decree and enforced by groups of armed young men, sometimes with little regard for local hierarchies. This did not only oppress women but potentially disempowered non-Taliban men by robbing them of their prerogatives. It would, therefore, be quite unhelpful to present their depredations as either reflections of local culture or routine manifestations of Islamic government.

We should concentrate, instead, on problematizing the different uses of gender-based violence deployed by diverse social actors in Afghanistan. The “privatized” violence exercised by kin groups and families in the service of honour and reputation must be distinguished from sexual violence used as a systematic tool of war to intimidate, despoil, and establish positional superiority, and from the public performances of Islamic retribution (featuring spectacular events such as lashings and executions) deployed by the Taliban as a means of social control. The Taliban were not merely affirming their piety or their im-

plementation of Islamic law, but “were engaged in “staged publicity” that ritually affirmed their power and legitimacy.”⁷

We must also re-examine any preconceived notions about the nature of normative frameworks informing gender relations in Afghanistan. A common assumption is that despite years of conflict support networks based on family and kinship have remained robust and that the existence of this social capital has avoided even higher levels of poverty. However, a crucial consideration in war-torn societies are the growing discrepancies between normative expectations and material realities. When men are no longer able or willing to honour their obligations yet continue to use male privilege to convert the vulnerability of their dependents into material assets, we may witness novel forms of abuse. There is mounting evidence that new patterns of “commodification” of women arise in contexts where indebtedness and dependence on local strongmen and drug traffickers lead to loss of community autonomy and enmesh clients in dependency relationships.⁸ A study of indebted drug traffickers in Badakhshan province shows that women rank next to land in the choice of disposable assets used to settle debts. 32% of the traffickers interviewed reported selling a female relative.⁹ And a study by the IOM shows that young rural women (and children) are subjected to forced prostitution, forced labour, and practices akin to slavery.¹⁰

Interpreting these trends as an expression of “natural” tendencies of the societies in question has the undoubted advantage of disclaiming any responsibility for escalating abuses of human rights by blaming them on “local culture.” A similar logic may authorize a form of double-speak that upholds the principle of gender equality and social inclusiveness in official pronouncements, whilst marginalizing women in the allocation of development aid.

Between the hammer and the anvil

State-building and democracy are the product of long and historically specific processes of political struggle for participation and voice. Civic rights—including the rights of women to participate as equal citizens—are also the product of these histories. The women’s rights and gender “mainstreaming” agenda that informs donor-assisted post-conflict reconstruction packages adopts a technocratic approach to address what are fundamentally political problems. The legal and technical solutions offered by gender mainstreaming may be at odds with the “real politics” of highly volatile and insecure environments where women’s rights and the role of Islam become political stakes in the struggles between contending factions.

The evidence from post-Taliban Afghanistan shows how democracy “by design” can legitimize social forces that are likely to resist the equal participation of women in civic, political, and economic life. This is hardly surprising since state-building does not take place *ex nihilo* but draws upon social forces thrown up by the legacies of conflict which are themselves shaped by complex geopolitical influences.

Above and beyond the political platforms of emerging power holders, however, I have argued that the social changes brought about by prolonged conflict have produced their own transformative dynamic—a dynamic that can neither be fully addressed nor remedied by institutional and legal reforms. In that sense women are caught between the hammer and the anvil; they have to fight both for their formal *de jure* rights that are under constant threat from conservative social forces and for their substantive rights to security and human dignity that have become the casualties of endemic lawlessness and impunity in their societies.

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Notes

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4. L. Oates and I. Solon Helal, *At the Crossroads of Conflict and Democracy: Women and Afghanistan’s Constitutional Loya Jirga* (International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 2004), 28.
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Beirut: The City as a Body Politic

MONA FAWAZ

During its blitz of Lebanon in the summer of 2006, the Israeli military ravaged the neighbourhood of Haret Hreik in the southern suburbs of Beirut, razing to the ground or severely damaging 265 residential, commercial, and office buildings, and displacing thousands of households in what Human Rights Watch described as Israeli “war crimes.”¹ But beyond the sheer tonnage of ordinance targeting Haret Hreik was the symbolic violence attempting to erase the body politic which had produced this space. Paralleling the September 11 attack on New York’s World Trade Center, the city was invoked by Israeli war planners as a party to the conflict; erasing a neighbourhood or a number of buildings amounted to undermining the life-support of an enemy, in this case Hezbollah, which had established its national headquarters in the neighbourhood.

Reflecting on the September 11 attacks and the events that ensued, David Harvey proposed to conceptualize the city as a body politic which can be attacked, wounded, remoulded, or rebuilt.² This metaphor, Harvey argued, provides an interesting entry point to examine the relation between processes of urban production and the (necessarily contested) governance of the city. It directs analysis towards the political choices taken as this body politic was historically created and how, once formed, such a body politic confronts various challenges. A year after the “July War,” as it is commonly called in Lebanon, this essay offers reflections on the current post-war reconstruction, builds on the metaphor of the city as a body politic, and places the events of the summer 2006 in a historical context which traces some of the processes in which Haret Hreik³ came to boast a powerful body politic and how this body politic responded to the Israeli assaults.

Formation of a spatial body politic

As a neighbourhood, Haret Hreik witnessed a major transformation during the first years of the Lebanese civil war (1975–1983), when Beirut’s division in two antagonistic and religiously homogenous units resulted in ousting the majority of its primarily Christian dwellers.

Haret Hreik,
Beirut,
15 August 2006



PHOTO BY MONA HARB, 2006

Israeli bombs completely destroyed Beirut’s neighbourhood Haret Hreik in the summer of 2006. Because Hezbollah’s headquarters is located in the neighbourhood, Israeli war planners considered its destruction of particular symbolic and strategic relevance. For the same reasons, authority of reconstruction carried heightened symbolism and led to contestation between the central government and Hezbollah. In the intersection of these two powerful actors there remains little room for local residents to have a voice in the re-organization of their living spaces.

Haret Hreik and surrounding areas became the refuge of thousands of Shiite families displaced from other quarters of the city or from the country’s south that had fallen under Israeli occupation in 1978.⁴ During this decade, it rapidly transformed from a green, low density suburban neighbourhood into a congested area where most construction violated urban regulations that dictated moderate land exploitation ratios. This urbanization was controlled by a handful of developers and was fuelled by the desire to accumulate capital and

by dire housing needs in a war-torn and unaffordable city.

The formation of a popular social and cultural foundation that could sustain an Islamic political movement capable of military resistance to Israel’s occupation of South Lebanon probably began with the establishment of the *Hawzas* (or religious study groups) around 1984⁵ and continued soon after, and in the face of neglect by the state authorities, with the organization of service provision in the southern suburbs of Beirut (e.g. garbage collection, drinking water provision, maintenance of sewer systems). During the late 1980s–early 1990s, Hezbollah’s political headquarters and the main offices of an array of social organizations affiliated to it were established in Haret Hreik. Over time, many linkages were created between this social and political organization and the neighbourhood, generating an “economy of Islamic resistance” there.

These developments modified the character of the neighbourhood. For one, Hezbollah’s security apparatus gradually imposed itself: streets surrounding the main political headquarters (*Majlis al-Shura*) were gated to form its “security quarters” (*murabba’ al-amni*); armed security staff began patrolling in front of the houses and offices of its leaders; researchers and journalists visiting the neighbourhood were required to obtain special permits from the Party; and visitors were frequently questioned about their business there. Culturally and socially, the neighbourhood began to display the political and religious orientation of the community supporting Hezbollah, with the closure of liquor stores, night restaurants, bars, movie houses, and other entertainment considered immoral. Furthermore, neighbourhood streets were plastered with signs and posters celebrating the presence of the Islamic Resistance and its martyred heroes while advertisement billboards conformed to religious guidelines. Many streets were renamed after heroes and martyrs of the Islamic Resistance. Similarly, people increasingly adopted a religious dress code, and apartment buildings began to be fitted with curtains to shield household interiors from eyes in neighbouring buildings. I do not mean to suggest, as it is sometimes claimed, that Haret Hreik was hence “Hezbollah territory.” Like everywhere else, space is the subject of contention and resistance to this appropriation was visible everywhere. Yet, the Islamic resistance had clearly taken root, deeply altering the character of the neighbourhood and delineating it as a space in the city with a clear identity.

Reconstruction of Haret Hreik

In this context, authority over reconstruction of Haret Hreik this past year carried more symbolism than anywhere else in Lebanon and was hotly contested. The central government immediately announced its intention to take charge, as declarations abounded about ending “years of a state within a state” in reference to Hezbollah’s control over particular areas in Lebanon. On the other hand, Hezbollah’s leader, Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah also made a public “solemn” promise that Haret Hreik will be rebuilt “more beautiful than it was” and Hezbollah’s members

recurrently described a prompt reconstruction of the neighbourhood as another “victory” for the Party. Many wondered in the months that followed the war how this reconstruction would play itself out, especially in the context of an ongoing political standoff between the government and a Hizbullah-led opposition which has suspended central government agencies and the Parliament since November 2006.

As a planner, urban researcher, and citizen of this city I became interested in how this conflict influenced the ability of residents to take part in the reconstruction of their neighbourhood. The issues presented here emerged from my ongoing interaction with the neighbourhood and my frustration vis-à-vis the governance of a post-war reconstruction which I have come to believe forecloses the opportunities for public debate and for dwellers to intervene as partners in their making of their living environment.

The position of the state

A public commission was established in the days following the war and included representatives from public planning agencies and local political parties (including Hizbullah). This commission was however rapidly caught in the wider political standoff: it only met a few times and its final recommendations were never adopted. Faithful to a neo-liberal tradition in public governance that conceptualizes the role of the public actor as an entrepreneur whose task is to attract foreign investment rather than as a manager of space or a service provider, the central government retracted developing reconstruction plans for the area when it became clear that Hizbullah would stand in the way of any redevelopment plan that could displace dwellers. The Council for Development and Reconstruction, the central planning agency in the country that had orchestrated much of the post-civil war reconstruction, was sidelined directly by the Prime Minister's office in favour of the Higher Relief Commission. Thus, the state conceptualized its role in reconstruction as “relief”; its involvement would be limited to paying (rather generous) financial compensation to those who had lost their homes, while the management of reconstruction would be left to individual homeowners and contractors. Hence, there will be no strategy to conceptualize or compensate for damage to the public domain or to introduce direly needed open and communal spaces that form the heart of any community.⁶ This was well in line with the post-civil war reconstruction of the country where public efforts were concentrated in large-scale developmental projects (e.g. redevelopment of Beirut downtown, the construction of an international airport) while social policy was essentially reduced to paying indemnities to households displaced during the war.

In the months that followed, even relief proved to be more challenging than expected. Compensation was delayed as the legal requirements for establishing clear ownership titles clashed with the grey zones of real life where multiple inheritances in large families and unprofessional market developments produced discrepancies in national property records. Furthermore, the reconstruction still lacks a legal framework: while most dwellers had adjusted their buildings' legal status in 1994 by virtue of a regularization law and in exchange of penalties, they are not entitled to rebuild outside building regulations if these buildings are demolished. New planning regulations have to be issued if reconstruction is to proceed without dramatically de-populating the area. These however require approvals from the Parliament which has been suspended by the political standoff.

The Hizbullah project

Meanwhile, history continues to repeat itself in Beirut's suburbs as Hizbullah emerges as the planning body developing the neighbourhood's reconstruction plan. The party has established a private development company named Waad (or Promise) in reference to the commitment made by Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah to rebuild Haret Hreik for its community. Six architects, all of them university professors with no necessary affiliation to the party, were asked to develop a reconstruction plan with firm instructions not to change the fabric, density, and general organization of the neighbourhood. It is on the basis of this plan that Waad has now commissioned a number of architectural offices to redesign buildings, with strict criteria to observe the same footprints, building heights, and lot boundaries for every building, thus replicating the environment that was generated by profit-driven processes during the years of civil war. While Waad goes the extra-mile to present an image of religious inclusiveness and open-mindedness by

involving architects of several confessions in re-drawing the buildings, the actual decision about the modalities of reconstruction were taken early on by the political party who determined that there will be no densification of the area and that the overall reconstruction will generally reproduce the pre-war fabric and its concomitant problems of poor ventilation, little natural lighting, and absence of public space.

Moreover, local actors have been excluded from this reconstruction planning. This includes the Haret Hreik Municipality which, though closely allied to Hizbullah, has been sidelined from the project's making; none of its members were included in the plan formulation and it has no representative in Waad. Furthermore, the Municipality's efforts to improve the urban fabric of the neighbourhood by introducing more changes than was dictated by Hizbullah's central political authority were dismissed and have hence been abandoned. The same can be said about neighbourhood dwellers, 85% of whom have already signed documents conferring legal authority over collecting their compensation and constructing their new apartments to Hizbullah.⁷ Among these dwellers are some of the developers who were historically credited for building the neighbourhood but have now lost authority over its making. Asked about why they have opted to sign away their legal rights, those interviewed argued that they had no choice in the current political context.

A legal proposition

Despite their differences, Hizbullah and the central government agree on the legal framework in which reconstruction will occur. The cabinet has already approved a legal proposal in principle which provides a temporary and exceptional permit for the dwellers to rebuild their houses “as they were,” even if in violation of current public urban and building regulations. If this arrangement is approved by the legislative body, dwellers will obtain a short-term entitlement to build “illegal” houses, while the exclusive urban planning framework that generated this illegality in the first place will not be revised. These citizens are hence tolerated rather than accepted and granted a lower-than-normal entitlement to participate in the production of the city.⁸ In the context of the southern suburbs of Beirut, an area that has been historically stigmatized as “illegal” and largely condemned in popular press and public discourse as such,⁹ a truncated entitlement strengthens the community's perception that it is unwanted in the city and that it needs solid political backing in order to retain the precarious entitlement it has obtained. As a result, the community's dependence on Shiite political parties who are able to provide this backing is strengthened further while its relation with the state continues to be mediated through these political parties. Conversely, public agents are able to, whenever they see fit, recite the refrain of “illegality”... every time they opt to attack political opposition through the window of the “illegal” communities they protect.¹⁰

A new body politic?

So what do the events of the past year tell us about how the body politic responded to the Israeli attack? It is certainly premature to draw conclusions but, one year later, it seems that the threatened body politic has responded by further reducing the spaces of contestation. In attempting to re-secure a home in the city, dwellers have to manoeuvre in the intersection of two powerful actors whose respective approaches to urban governance have concurred to foreclose their possibilities for taking charge of the making and organization of their living spaces.

Notes

1. “Fatal strikes: Israel's indiscriminate attacks against civilians in Lebanon,” *Human Rights Watch*, 3 August 2006.
2. D. Harvey, “The City as Body Politic,” in *Wounded Cities*, ed. J. Schneider and I. Susser (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 25–46.
3. It is possible to construct the entire southern suburbs of Beirut under this same narrative. However, as the political centre of this suburb, it is specifically Haret Hreik that underwent this history.
4. According to a survey of the Ministry of Housing conducted in 1983, 80% of the neighbourhood's original dwellers had fled by 1983 (*As-Safir Newspaper*, 9 July 1983).
5. W. Charara, *Dawlat Hizb'Allah. Loubnan Moujtaman Islamiyyan* (Beirut: Dar an-Nahar, 1996).
6. Fawaz and Ghandour, *The Reconstruction of Haret Hreik: Design Options for Improving the Livability of the Neighborhood* (Beirut: AUB-RU publication, 2007).
7. Meeting with Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah held on 13 November 2006.
8. P. Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
9. M. Harb, “La Dâhiye de Beyrouth: Parcours d'une Stigmatisation Urbaine, Consolidation d'un Territoire Politique,” *Genèses*, no. 51 (2003): 70–91.
10. Refer, for example, to PM Siniora's speech on 7 May 2007.

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New “Religious Men” in Somaliland

MARLEEN RENDERS

Northwestern Somalia, although it is part and parcel of the larger context of the Somali civil war which affects all Somali populations in the Horn, stands out as a particular political context. The region declared secession as an independent state as early as 1991 under the name of “Somaliland.” It is generally peaceful and has known a reasonably stable measure of government since 1997. Democratic (externally monitored) elections were held in 2002, 2003, and 2005. The fledgling state-apparatus however, is tiny and severely under-funded. Political stability has been maintained via a peculiar mix of institutions and actors, state as well as non-state ones, with a pivotal role for the elders and the political strongholders of the various Somaliland clans and subclans. Clan politics is a real and important factor in Somaliland’s making and functioning today. In the absence of a protecting and providing state, clan allegiance is a determining factor as far as individual physical and economic security are concerned. Apart from clan, Islam is felt very strongly about. The persistent situation of insecurity and uncertainty over the past fifteen years seems to have only exacerbated this.

Islam in a stateless society

The clan-system and Islam have co-existed for centuries as institutions suited to the needs of an egalitarian Somali pastoralist society. In Somali mythical history, the clan system is as old as Islam itself. It is traced back to the advent of Muslim traders on the Somali coast. Arab traders, who were to various degrees related to the Prophet himself, married Somali women, thus starting the lineages which make up the clan-system today. Somali clans take pride in never having known “paganism.” The Somali polity was a so-called “stateless society.” In a context without formal political hierarchy social order and peace were guaranteed via customary law² (*heer*), a system of contracts between roaming pastoralist (patrilinear) descent groups belonging to the larger groups called “clans” and “clan families.” *Heer* varies from place to place, depending on situations, circumstances, and groups involved. In matters concerning family-related issues such as marriage, divorce, or inheritance, *heer* is considered heavily influenced by the Sharia. Yet, rather than being based on individual responsibility, *heer* is characterized by collective responsibility, which is in fact at variance with Islamic orthodoxy. When blood compensation (*diya*) is paid in case of death or injury, it is paid collectively by the descent group of the perpetrator to the descent group of the victim. In decisions concerning a particular descent group or in case of conflict between two descent groups, the group’s elders are collectively in charge. The elders see to it that the interests of the group are protected either by

negotiation or by having the able men of the group take up arms. In the daily dealings of the descent group, the role of these elders, the so-called “spear bearers” (*waranleh*) is complemented with the role of another type of elders: the “men of religion” (*wadaad*). In principle, these men are excluded from full participation in secular politics: they

A reformist brand of Islam emerged and consolidated during the decades of the Somali civil war, which began in the early 1980s—leading up to outright state collapse in 1991. Initially, its socio-political position was rather marginal. Proponents of the new brand denounced the dominant local Sufi Islam as well as the Somali clan system, to which it was traditionally closely associated. Soon however, lack of political and military success seems to have forced the Islamists back into the organically grown interaction between Somali Islam and the ubiquitous clan system, its politics, and institutions. At least for the time being.¹

are by definition non-combatants in conflicts between descent groups and they do not participate in political deliberations pertaining to their group’s interest. They are supposed to play a mediating role in case of conflict. Except, that is, when the war is a jihad. One famous “wadaad” of the Darood clan however, Sayyid Mohamed Abdule Hassan, nicknamed by the British protectorate forces “the Mad Mullah” became a political leader. He waged a long and bloody jihad against Christian occupation (British as well as Ethiopian) of Somali lands from 1901 to 1920. He thereby predominantly attacked fight-

ing forces of other Somali clans he considered as traitors because they had aligned themselves with the British “infidels.”

A wadaad can be anything from a member of a nomadic group who knows some Arabic and has more than average devotion and knowledge of religion to a truly learned man, a shaykh with intimate knowledge of Quran and Islamic jurisprudence. The religious men attend to the religious affairs of their lineage: they solemnize marriages, give their blessings, settle divorce and inheritance matters, direct Friday prayers, and so on. Their services are rewarded with gifts—some of the wadaads rely entirely on charity for their livelihood, as any gift to a wadaad brings a reward from God. In the fifteenth century, the introduction of the Qadiriyya brotherhood in Somalia gave rise to the foundation of brotherhood “settlements.” In these religious communities, pious Somali from different clan backgrounds lived together as brothers, devoting themselves to cultivation, animal husbandry, religious study, and worship. In addition, they protected the sick, the old, and the disabled and provided religious education to future *wadaado*.

Independent Somalia

The 1960 independence signalled the advent of modern state structures to Somalia. In 1969, the civil regime was overthrown by a military coup. The coup leader, General Siyyad Barre, immediately outlawed the Somali clan system. Sharia remained formally part of the legal system, but in practice it played a marginal role. The regime displaced any potentially competing structure—aiming for total legal and political control. Protests against the promulgation of the new family law of 1975, which in accordance with the proclaimed socialist ideals of Barre (but in contravention of the Sharia) granted equal inheritance rights to men and women, were immediately crushed by executing ten religious men who had stood up against the law. Barre added the extra-legal National Security Courts to the judiciary system, bringing arbitrariness and terror to the Somali. Traditional clan elders were made into state agents as so-called peacekeepers between the “ex-clans.” At the same time, clan was instrumentalized politically. In the government’s discourse, Islam, as well, was “Siyyadized” to serve the ideological purposes of the military regime.

The regime’s “socialist” ideology with its secular, materialist outlook and its dictatorial style of government was a thorn in the side of an increasing number of Somali political and social actors, including a (relatively small and very loosely connected) group of Islamist activists. These Islamists stated that they wanted to establish an Islamic public order—eventually culminating in the establishment of an Islamic state based on the Sharia. One aspect of their ideology stood out as similar to Barre’s proclaimed ideals for the Somali state: the Islamists wanted to do away with the clan system. They resented clanism as a political instrument that served Barre to keep Somali Muslims divided and under

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control. Yet, while Islamist armed militancy slowly started to develop, it was overtaken in speed by clan based military movements. In January 1991 Hawiye clan militia (General Aideed's "United Somali Congress") overran Mogadishu, ousted Barre and ended the twenty-one years of military dictatorship. Somalia fell apart, dismembered in ever more disintegrating clan-fiefdoms.

Upon the disintegration of the regime and the country a new dynamic ensued in the Islamist sphere. Part of the Islamist militants and sympathizers decided to stay out of the war between the clan-based militia and went back to their own clan areas where they promoted an Islamic public order from below, getting involved in various social activities, particularly education and health/sanitation related ones. Another part of the Islamist militants resorted to violent means, forming the then only trans-clan militia of

the war, referred to as Al Itihaad ("Islamic Union"). The Islamist Al Itihaad behaved and operated like any other militia, trying to secure territory and strategic assets to make money out of them. Without long-term success, however. The Islamist militia was beaten by clan militia wherever they tried to set up shop in Somalia, be it Kismayo, Bossaaso, Las Qoray (Somaliland), or elsewhere. Unless they teamed up with one of the clan factions, they remained politically and militarily unable to establish themselves as a sustainable administration. Towards the mid-1990s, the Somali Al Itihaad militia disbanded: the rank and file just went home to their clan areas (including the new Somaliland state) while the leadership went on to pursue other avenues to further the Islamist project—within, rather than against the clan system.³

Islamists in peace-time Somaliland: the "wadaad" revisited?

Despite their ideological disapproval of the Somali clan system, Islamists had to re-insert themselves into that system in order to safeguard their physical safety (and ultimately their political project). Explicit Islamist political activism was virtually impossible in Somaliland's clan-based polity of the late 1990s. Proponents of an Islamic public order became very prominent in business and charity: living, working, and preaching among their clansmen.

Their teachings still propagated a "new" Islam, stressing values such as a strict moral code, modesty in dress, and hard work as well as denouncing typical Sufi practices such as *dikhr* or religious chanting. They also strongly disapproved of the chewing of *qaat*, a herbal stimulant and favourite past-time of the overwhelming majority of the male population. From a religious attribute for Sufi shaykhs who used it for meditation, *qaat* had developed into a social vice, taking up huge parts of household budgets, workers' time, and causing health problems such as mental disorders. Although their religious teachings (especially concerning *qaat*) by no means went uncontested, the "new" religious men were respected in their communities for their virtuous behaviour and their religious knowledge.

Like the "old" wadaad, these "new" religious men were part and parcel of their clans, yet, without a central role to play in actual clan politics. A few of them appear to have been involved in talks following political conflicts between clans or between the Somaliland government and self-appointed representatives communicating "clan grievances," thus allegedly fulfilling the traditional tasks of religious wise men trying to temper conflict. More importantly however, they have been devoting considerable energy—as did the "old" wadaad—to charity and education.

A pet project for Islamic charity is, for example, the construction and maintenance of orphanages. Quite a few were set up in Somaliland, either with the help of locally generated funds or with proceedings from zakat collected and sent over by Muslims abroad. To be sure, orphans

Image not available online

are much preferred beneficiaries of zakat: the Prophet himself was an orphan. As for the educational activities organized by the "new" religious men, these were a far cry from the traditional religious education provided by the wadaad in roaming Quranic schools (known as *dugsi* in Somali). The educational institutions they set up were similar to the so-called *écoles franco-arabes* in Western Africa (Senegal, Mali, etc.) with a broad curriculum but with a strong religious orientation. As such, these private Islamic schools have (together with other private initiatives) filled part of the gap left by the defunct Somali state educational system. They teach Arabic (which is the language of instruction at these schools) and Islamic sciences, but also marketable skills such as math, English, or computer sciences. The schools sometimes even belong to a formalized international network which gives the school's graduates direct access to further education at Arab or Islamic universities worldwide.

Skills such as math, Arabic, and English are highly practical tools when doing business. Indeed, business seems to be the preferred occupation of the "new" religious men. Many of them became well-to-do businessmen, involved in contracting or trade. They are valued business counterparts (sometimes operating as subcontractors for international agencies) as they have a reputation as honest, diligent, and efficient workers who finish their work within the agreed deadlines. Some sources claim that the better part of businesses in Somaliland is in fact controlled by these Muslim-believer type entrepreneurs. As such, once more, they are respected members of their communities, generating welfare as well as actual wealth.

The economic activities of the "new" religious men, however, highlight the most crucial difference with the traditional wadaad. Whereas the old wadaad was for his survival dependent on handouts from his clansmen—in cash or kind—the "new" religious man is economically independent, cultivating all kinds of business connections, independently from his lineage. Despite their apparent re-integration as a new kind of "wadaad" in the age-old interaction between Somali Islam and the clan system, their economic independence and power constitute a crucial change and may make for a fundamentally altered political dynamic in the future.

Commerce
in Hargeisa,
Somaliland

Notes

1. I would like to thank Markus Höhne and Tobias Hagmann for their comments on an earlier version of this article.
2. In "Xeeri," the "X" is pronounced like the "H" in the Arabic name "Hassan."
3. This is also true today in the case of the much later developing Mogadishu-based "Islamic Courts" movement, which briefly administered parts of Mogadishu from mid-2006 to the military intervention of external forces (USA and Ethiopia) in the winter of 2006–7. The Courts did actively rely on clan institutions and political strongholds to establish control.

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Whither the Surge in Iraq?

JOOST R. HILTERMANN

Having failed in its declared objective to turn Iraq into a stable, thriving and democratic country in the Middle East, a model unto the autocratic regimes that are the region's unfortunate hallmark, the United States has had to scale back its ambitions. Facing a growing sectarian conflict and fearing the situation would spin out of control it announced a security plan for Baghdad and surrounding towns, as well as Anbar province, in January 2007. The plan consisted of a military initiative involving an extra injection of some 30,000 troops (a "Surge") that was designed to create space and time for the Iraqi government to reach a political deal with its opponents.

In September, the Surge's architect and implementer, Gen. David Petraeus, was able to claim he had made serious headway on the military front: a number of violent actors, such as Al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) and the Sadrist movement's Mahdi Army (Jaysh al-Mahdi, JAM), had been put on the defensive, and Sunni tribes had launched a revolt against AQI (the "awakening"). But on the political front, he was unable to show even the least bit of progress: the only thing the Maliki government had exhibited since January was its inability, or reluctance, to reach out effectively to Sunni Arab leaders with a view toward bringing them back into the new Iraqi order.

Military presence and political strife

The fatal flaw in the security plan was the decision to rely on the Maliki government to bring peace to Iraq. This government is dysfunctional and weak. In name it is a government of national unity, but in reality it deserves not a single part of its name: it is not unified, it does not represent the nation, and it has failed to govern. While popularly elected (in December 2005), it lacks popular legitimacy. This paradox is resolved when we understand the nature of Iraqi politics: if a majority of Iraqis voted in 2005, they did so by religious edict and simply because they could. By default (in the absence of any alternatives), they voted for the coalition that had received the Shiite religious leadership's endorsement. Yet this coalition's components were, with the exception of the Sadrist movement, parties that returned from exile in 2003 and that by and large have failed to connect with the Iraqi street since then. The Kurdish parties do enjoy a measure of popular support, but only in Kurdistan, and their participation in the Iraqi government enjoys very little support among Kurds, as the Kurds' overriding goal is to secede from Iraq, if not in this generation, then the next.

Not only is the government weak, it is constituted on the basis of an ethno-sectarian logic that favours two communities (Shiites and Kurds) at the expense of the third (Sunni Arabs). As such, it is unwilling to compromise with the Sunni Arabs, whom it considers unchanged regime loyalists, Baathists, and terrorists. To bring Sunni Arabs back into the state's security structures would, in their view, fatally undermine the new order and

The security plan for Iraq has failed, not least because of its reliance on the Maliki government. This government is dysfunctional, lacks popular legitimacy, and has failed to govern. Prospects for the near future are bleak. The looming civil war will involve strife between a great variety of groups; U.S. forces will be drawn into these conflicts; and there is a serious threat that neighbouring countries also may be sucked into this vortex. The challenge to counter this trend is enormous. As the unilateralist approach to managing world affairs has shown its bankruptcy, there is now an urgent need to return to multilateral diplomacy, even if there are no guarantees of success.

augur the return of the former regime in a new guise. Rather than reconciling with its adversaries, the government thinks it will be able to crush them once the Americans have completed their job of building up, training, and equipping the Iraqi security forces. This is why it does not want the Americans to leave just yet, however much it decries the occupation and calls for a timetable for U.S. withdrawal.

This position has a mirror image. Sunni Arab leaders also have come to the conclusion, contrary to their earlier insistence that U.S. forces should withdraw at once, that these forces should stay, because the "Surge" has shown

that only the Americans are able to protect them from a Shiite militia onslaught in Baghdad, which threatens to turn this mosaic of a capital into a Sunni-free city. They hope they can convince the Americans that the Maliki government is a proxy for Iran, and that the Sunnis and the Americans have a common interest in countering Iran's spreading influence in Iraq and the wider Gulf region. They even hope that in this way they can get rid of the Shiite militias and regain power.

All sides, except AQI, are tugging at the Americans to stay and do their bidding—to choose their camp in this civil war, which continues, even if temporarily subdued by the additional U.S. military presence. The Bush administration and the U.S. Congress have made very clear they do not want their forces to play this role, but what options do they have? In the absence of a political strategy that gets around the Maliki government's weaknesses and obstinacy, the Americans could either leave or stay. An early departure, however, is not a viable option. Such a move would leave behind a vacuum that could only be filled by non-state actors that are ready to go at each other's throats

with heavier weapons, thus increasing the possibility of an escalation that could engulf the entire region. In turn, this would require a massive U.S. military intervention aimed at protecting its strategic interests in the Gulf.

Prospects

In reality, U.S. forces will not be able to stay out of an Iraqi civil war. This is because there will not be a single, neatly defined civil war, for example, one between Sunnis and Shiites. The more likely prognosis is one of a failed state in which a great variety of groups, enjoying at most local support, will battle for turf: rival militias, insurgent groups, warlords, and crime gangs. A sectarian conflict will coexist with, and intersect, an intra-Sunni conflict (for example, between tribal elements and AQI), an intra-Shiite conflict (between the Supreme Council's Badr militia and JAM), and possibly an Arab-Kurdish conflict (over the Kurdish region's boundaries, especially in Kirkuk).

In this confusing mix, the Americans will find groups that may be its friends one day and its enemies the next, the principal criterion being whether they serve U.S. interests: to protect a semblance of government and keep its adversaries divided and off-balance. The U.S., in other words, will seek to "manage" the Iraqi civil war(s)

It should be
beginning to dawn
on all the principal
actors ... that the
failure to contain
the Iraqi crisis may
spell a cataclysm of
global proportions.

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with a view to containing the conflict within the country's borders. Such brinkmanship, however, entails enormous risks of spillover. Neighbouring states may be sucked into this vortex, against their will and strategic interest, as they watch their own proxies being hammered by their enemies' proxies. A regional conflagration would then enter the realm of possibilities.

There is a growing awareness in the region of the dangerous situation that has developed. If there is hope of stabilizing Iraq and its borders, it lies in the fact that all of Iraq's neighbours have one thing in common: none of them wants Iraq to fall apart. To turn this premise into a workable relationship is one of the difficult challenges ahead.

Despite President Bush's early, adamant rejection of engagement with Iran in his response to the recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton Study Group in December 2006, the Americans have started talking to the Iranians—for the first time since the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the embassy takeover that followed. On at least three occasions, representatives of the two countries have met to discuss the situation in Iraq (only), but so far progress has been minimal, barely rising above mutual recriminations of the "You're totally wrong" and "You're at fault" type. Almost certainly, to be successful on Iraq, the two sides will have to expand their discussion to include the nuclear question. It is the continuing U.S. threat against Iran over its suspected offensive nuclear programme that has induced the Iranians to act as spoilers in Iraq rather than play the role of regional peacemaker that its own interests in Iraqi stability suggest would be more constructive. (Iran is best served by an Iraq that is weak but friendly and united; continued chaos in Iraq entails serious risks for internal peace in Iran.)

Finding a way to diplomatically manage the nuclear question, let alone find a durable solution for it, is a hugely difficult task that both governments, in Washington and Tehran, seem incapable of. The start of a dialogue should therefore be applauded and encouraged, even if real progress may not occur until after the U.S. presidential elections—if then. It should be beginning to dawn on all the principal actors, in the region and outside it, that the failure to contain the Iraqi crisis may spell a cataclysm of global proportions. It will precipitate a humanitarian crisis in Iraq and neighbouring countries that will dwarf anything we have seen so far in the region. It will also empower a new generation of jihadis, who will seek to destabilize the Middle East by challenging its

autocratic regimes and to spread their activities well beyond the region into Europe. And it will wreak havoc with the global economy, driving up oil prices to unprecedented heights and thereby suppressing economic growth in the United States, Europe, and Japan.

Iraq's fate, and that of the region, now lies in U.S. hands. It is unclear whether the Bush administration has a fall-back approach, a Plan B if and when it comes to the conclusion that Plan A has failed. But for now, it cannot afford to unveil a Plan B, or even to discuss the possibility of the need for such a plan, as doing so would be tantamount to admitting that Plan A is not working—that not only the Surge but the entire arrangement created since April 2003 has descended into unmanageable chaos, the new order as disorder. This, the administration is not prepared to do, at least not yet. But it also does not seem to have a political strategy to get around the Surge's failure to bring about a new national compact. Washington appears adrift, with Democrats and some moderate Republicans (such as Senators Lugar and Hagel) opposing the administration's approach but incapable of mobilizing sufficient support to force a significant troop withdrawal before sometime in 2008.

This leaves us in a dangerous situation. Whatever our position was concerning the U.S. decision to invade Iraq and remove its tyrannical regime, the challenge in front of us is one that all must share. This cannot be done as long as the U.S. keeps the reins tightly in its hands. It will require a joint international effort (such as we have seen, if so far unsuccessfully, on the Iranian nuclear issue), with shared control and responsibility. It should be placed under the aegis of the only agency that has the credibility, expertise, and resources to lead it, the United Nations. The unilateral approach to managing world affairs has shown its bankruptcy. We must now return to the painstaking and protracted approach of multilateral diplomacy, with no guarantee of success, but with the knowledge that the path chosen since 2003 can only lead to disaster.

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Sign which reads "Beware of explosion" at the site of two car bomb explosions in Baghdad

Contextualizing the Plight of Iraqi Women

NADJE AL-ALI

Over the past decade, I have worked both as an academic and as an activist to document the various ways in which Iraqi women and gender relations have been changing in the context of political repression under the Baath regime, changing state policies towards women, a series of wars, as well as economic sanctions. In the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq in 2003, I decided to build on this earlier work, extend the historical frame to include the period

before the 35 years of the Baath regime (1968–2003), looking back to the transition from monarchy to republic (late 1940s through the revolution of 1958 to the early 1960s), and to deepen my understanding by interviewing almost 200 Iraqi women in London, Amman, Detroit, and San Diego.

The women I talked to were of different generations, varying ethnic and religious backgrounds: some were more secular, others more religious. I talked to those who have been politically active and those not, women associated with different political orientations and parties, professional women, housewives, mothers, etc. Yet, the majority of the women I talked to were educated middle class women of urban backgrounds. In terms of places of origin, most women I interviewed were from the capital, Baghdad, but I also spoke to women from other major cities and towns such as Basra, Najaf, Karbala, Mosul, Babylon, Kirkuk, Irbil, and Dohuk.

Plurality and difference

One of the many problems in the post-invasion era is the failure by many sections of society to acknowledge different experiences of the past, therefore alienating parts of the population who do not see themselves represented in a particular narrative. In reference to the present situation, I always feel uneasy when I hear people say: “Iraqi women think ...” or “Iraqi women want ...” generalizing from what is inevitably

The fact that Iraqi women are living under abhorrent conditions often leads to generalized depictions of these women as faceless victims. The author draws attention to the stories and life-courses of individual Iraqi women, as these do not only give a human face to their plight, but also reveal how women have been further marginalized during the U.S. occupation.

Set against this background it becomes understandable why so many Iraqi women are nostalgic for a past that was far from peaceful.

a wide variety of opinions, views, and visions. What arguably has emerged from my research, however, is that difference is historically based on a complex set of variables and can not simply be reduced to ethnicity and religion as is often construed nowadays.

The period after the first Baath coup (1963) is generally associated with increased political violence, greater sectarianism, and a reversal of progressive laws and reforms. Yet, many women I

interviewed spoke about the relative social freedom and cultural vibrancy during the rule of the Arif brothers (1963–68) and the early Baath period (1968–78). The experiences of these periods differ most significantly in terms of class and political orientation. Many secular and apolitical middle-class Shia, Sunni, Kurdish, and Christian women concurred in their appreciation of the achievements of the early Baath in education, modernization of infrastructures, and welfare provisions. However, the memories of those who were politically active in opposition to the regime are filled with accounts of political repression, mass arrests, torture, and executions. Yet, even some of those women who had first hand experiences of the regime’s repressive practices retrospectively appreciate its developmental policies.

At the same time, accounts of Iraqi women reveal that an urban middle-class identity, especially the more cosmopolitan Baghdadi identity, continued to subsume ethnic and religious differences even throughout the period of the sanctions. In other words, a middle-class Shia family in Baghdad had more in common with its Sunni Arab and Kurdish middle-class neighbours in mixed neighbourhoods than the impoverished Shia living in Madina al-Thawra (renamed Saddam city and now called Sadr city), or the majority of Shia in the south. Indeed, Baghdadi families have frequently been multi-religious and multi-ethnic and mixed marriages amongst urban Baghdadi middle classes were quite common.

Since the late 1970s, differences on the lines of secular and Islamist political positions started to assume greater significance and influence women’s experiences of the regime. Members or sympathizers of the Islamist Shia Da’wa party, for example, were targeted not so much because of their religious affiliation but because of their opposition to the regime and their aim to establish an Islamic state. Without wanting to diminish the suffering and hardship that members of the Shia Islamist opposition parties endured, the narrative about being the main recipients of state repression not only belittles the suffering of Kurds, but also other segments of the population, including those Sunni Arabs who actively resisted the regime.

Iraqi women and gender relations under the Baath regime

Based on a more in-depth reading of the previous regime’s gender policies and its attitudes to the position of women in society, many Iraqi women

A woman sits in her kitchen as an Iraqi soldier watches the street.

Image not available online

PHOTO BY DAMIR SAGOLJ / © REUTERS, 2007

gained in terms of socio-economic rights during the 1970s and 1980s within the general context of political repression. Living conditions improved for the majority of the population as the state relied not only on force and its power to control and co-opt, but also devised generous welfare programmes and opened up opportunities for investment and capital accumulation which were of great benefit to a large number of people within the expanding middle classes.

Yet, political repression, a series of wars, and the militarization of society seriously affected women, families, and gender relations, not only in terms of the loss of loved ones, but also in terms of a deteriorating economy, changing government policies, and shifting norms and increasingly conservative values surrounding women and gender. After the end of the war, and under the sanctions in the 1990s and early 2000s, a radical shift took place in terms of women's diminishing participation in the labour force, restricted access to education, inadequate healthcare, and other social services. Women were increasingly pushed back into their homes as unemployment rates sky-rocketed, the economy faltered, and the infrastructure collapsed.

Developments since 2003

Every-day survival is a priority in a context where lack of security goes side by side with incredibly difficult living conditions. The Iraqi infrastructure, which was already severely debilitated as a result of economic sanctions and a series of wars, has deteriorated even further since 2003. Electricity shortages, lack of access to potable water, malfunctioning sanitation systems, and a deteriorating health system are part of every-day lives in post-2003 Iraq. Intisar K., who works as a doctor in a teaching hospital in Baghdad, summed up what has also been documented in several UN-related documents: "We only have electricity for three to a maximum of five hours a day. There is not enough clean drinking water. Lack of sanitation is a big problem and continues to be one of the main causes of malnutrition, dysentery, and death amongst young children."

It is not only lack of electricity, clean water, and petrol that affects the every-day lives of Iraqi civilians. According to recent reports published by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the British-based charity organization Medact, the 2003 invasion and ongoing occupation has led to the deterioration of health conditions, including malnutrition, rise in vaccine-preventable diseases, and mortality rates for children under five. Iraq's mortality rate for children under five rose from 5 percent in 1990 to 12.5 percent in 2004.¹ Similar to the humanitarian crisis during the sanctions period, women suffer particularly as they are often the last ones to eat after feeding their children and husbands. But they are also having to stand by as their often sick and malnourished children do not obtain adequate health care.

Despite incredibly difficult circumstances, Iraqi women have been at the forefront of trying to cope with and improve the exceedingly difficult living conditions and humanitarian crisis since 2003. There has been a flourishing of locally based women's initiatives and groups, mainly revolving around practical needs related to widespread poverty, lack of adequate health care, lack of housing, and lack of proper social services provided by the state. Women have also pooled their resources to help address the need for education and training, such as computer classes, as well as income generating projects. Many of the initiatives filling the gap in terms of state provisions where welfare and health are concerned are related to political parties and religiously motivated organizations and groups. However, independent non-partisan professional women have also been mobilizing to help.

Violence against women

While aerial bombings of residential areas are responsible for a large number of civilian deaths, many Iraqis have lost their lives while being shot at by American or British troops. Whole families have been wiped out as they were approaching a checkpoint or did not recognize areas marked as prohibited. In addition to the killing of innocent women, men, and children, the occupation forces have also been engaged in other forms of violence against women. There have been numerous documented accounts about physical assaults at checkpoints, and during house searches. Several women I talked to reported that they had been verbally or physically threatened and assaulted by soldiers as they were searched at checkpoints. American forces have also arrested wives, sisters, and daughters of suspected insurgents in order to pressure them to surrender.² Female relatives have been literally taken

hostage by U.S. forces and used as bargaining chips. Aside from the violence related to the arrests itself, those women who were detained by the troops might suffer as well from the sense of shame associated with such a detention. As there has been mounting evidence not just of physical assaults and torture but also of rape; women who have been detailed might even become victims of so-called honour crimes.

Islamist militants and terrorist groups also pose a particular danger to Iraqi women. Many women's organizations and activists inside Iraq have documented the increasing Islamist threats to women, the pressure to conform to certain dress codes, the restrictions in movement and behaviour, incidents of acid thrown into women's faces, and even targeted killings. Early on in 2003, many women in Basra, for example, reported that they were forced to wear a headscarf or restrict their movements in fear of harassment from men. Female students at the University of Basra reported that since the war ended groups of men began stopping them at the university gates, shouting at them if their heads were not covered.³

Not only students, but also women of all ages and walks of life are nowadays forced to comply to certain dress codes as well as restrict their movement. Suad F., a former accountant and mother of four children who lives in a neighbourhood in Baghdad that used to be relatively mixed before the sectarian killings in 2005 and 2006 was telling me during a visit to Amman in 2006: "I resisted for a long time, but last year also started wearing hijab, after I was threatened by several Islamist militants in front of my house. They are terrorizing the whole neighbourhood, behaving as if they were in charge. And they are actually controlling the area. No one dares to challenge them. A few months ago they distributed leaflets around the area warning people to obey them and demanding that women should stay at home."

By 2007, the threat posed by Islamist militias as well as the mushrooming Islamist extremist groups goes far beyond imposed dress codes and calls for gender segregation at university. Despite—or even partly because of the U.S. and UK rhetoric about liberation and women's rights—women have been pushed back even more into the background and into their homes. Women, who have a public profile either as doctors, academics, lawyers, NGO activists, or politicians, are systematically threatened and have become targets for assassinations. Criminal gangs increase the general "climate of fear" by kidnapping women for ransom as well as to sexually abuse them and to traffic young women outside of Iraq to sell them into prostitution.

Conclusion

If views of history are by definition directed towards the past, analyzing how history is constructed and used reveals as much about the present, as I show in my book, *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present*. In the context of the aftermath of the invasion in 2003, the escalating violence and sectarian tensions, contestations about power and national identity, history becomes a very important and powerful tool. Contesting narratives about what happened in the past relate directly to different attitudes towards the present and visions about the future of the new Iraq. They relate to claims about rights, about resources, and about power. More crucially, the different accounts of the past lay down the parameters of what it means to be Iraqi, who is to be included, and who is to be excluded. History justifies and contains both narratives of unity and narratives of divisions and sectarianism. Given the current devastation and continuous deterioration of living conditions inside Iraq, it might not be so surprising that many women look at their past with great nostalgia even if their memories are filled with political repression, wars, and economic hardship.

Notes

1. See http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iraq_statistics.html and http://www.medact.org/content/wmd_and_conflict/Medact%20Iraq%202004.pdf.
2. Those suspected of being involved in both the resistance as well as in terrorist activities are regularly detained without informing their families about their whereabouts and their wellbeing. People disappearing, random arrests, as well as torture and abuse in prisons are ironically common phenomena in post-Saddam Iraq.
3. "Iraq: Female Harassment from Religious Conservatives," *IRINNews.org*, 14 April 2004.

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A Dream of Return

SHARIKA THIRANAGAMA

When I went home again for the first time, I thought, this is the soil I was born in. This is the smell of my land, the red fields, the earth as red as blood. This is what my own land looks like ... I wept. I screamed. All the memories I had as a child of every place. When we came home from school we would find the bodies of the slain. Once the helicopter came, the army, and bombed us. I remember all of this ... Now we are like tourists. If we go there, when we think of our homes we cry with our memories, we left this and came. We left our brick house and came to live in *cadjan* (thatch) huts with the rain and snakes. How we used to live there! Our house is bombed, the walls are not even there. The LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) had taken everything there was.

Mumida

Mumida is a young Northern Muslim woman, from the Mannar district in the north, now living as an internally displaced person (IDP) in the Puttalam district in northwestern Sri Lanka. The home she refers to is her former natal village, shared between Tamils and Muslims. She is telling me about her first visit to her former village, 12 years after leaving it, in the brief period of grace opened up by a 2002 ceasefire between the warring Sri Lankan Government and the Tamil insurrectionary group the LTTE. That

ceasefire along with the visits of Muslims to their former homes has now collapsed. The memories she has of that home are of complex and multiple cycles of violence. She recalls the deaths and destruction caused by the military campaigns of the Sri Lankan Army against the Tamil-speaking populations of the north. However, the central event that frames her memories is the ethnic cleansing of Muslims from the north and the continuing violence of displacement.

In October 1990, the LTTE expelled all the 75,000–80,000 Muslims from the five districts in the north under its control, Vavuniya, Mannar, Mullaithivu, Jaffna, and Kilinochchi. They were given 24–48 hours to leave. In Jaffna, Muslims were given only two hours to leave. The order came from the highest ranks of the LTTE and no clear explanation was offered. It was a purely military operation and the reac-

tion from the local Tamil community was of shock and surprise—though Tamils have accommodated it since. By November, there were no more Muslims in the north. The LTTE had made the north the Tamil-only territory that they were fighting for. This ethnic cleansing is known as “the Eviction” and the community of Muslims created by this act are formally “IDPs” and refer to themselves as “Northern Muslims” and “*ahathi*” (refugees). Puttalam district houses over 65,000 Northern Muslim refugees. Through two peace processes and ceasefires, their collective right to return and an LTTE guarantee that they will not be evicted again has never been brokered. A few individual families have returned to the north but have faced harassment from the LTTE. The majority has not yet returned.

Sri Lanka’s conflict has centred on the Sinhalese majority and Sri Lankan Tamils, Sri Lanka’s largest Tamil-speaking minority. Sri Lankan Muslims have barely featured in accounts of the ethnic conflict, but their lives too have been inextricably linked to the civil war. Muslims, though Tamil-speaking, are classified as an ethno-religious minority around the categories of religion and ethnicity, while Sri Lankan Tamils, Christian and Hindu, are classed as an ethnic minority around language and ethnicity. Only the recent

The promise of return which has been embraced by Muslim refugees from Northern Sri Lanka may be ephemeral. Nonetheless, dreams of returning are vital in attempts to repair the past and the wounds of the Eviction. The author shows that through dreaming the prospect of a peaceful multi-ethnic northern Sri Lanka remains imaginable, thus allowing for at least one ray of optimism concerning the future of a deeply troubled society.

clashes between the LTTE and Eastern Muslims, and the Northern Muslim Eviction, have suddenly alerted attention to the precarious position of an ethnic minority that is a minority for both Sinhalese and Tamils. The implications of this positioning continues to leave Sri Lankan Muslims negotiating a war that is not being fought for them but is, nonetheless, consequential for their every day lives. Here I discuss

Northern Muslims’ dreams of “return” and their fragile hopes of a Tamil and Muslim north.

The historicity of loss

They were going from house to house ... I asked them [LTTE cadres], “is this the house that your father’s mother built?” You have to ask! I am asking them straight “is this the house your father’s mother built? Is this the house the leader of the Tigers built? Have you come all this way to take from us, us who built this house, this threshold, who brought these things? Now if you want to go and catch a country, you do that. Take the country. Who would come and ask from people these things?”

Nachiya’s story of the Eviction in Jaffna

Muslims from the north, in contrast to the politically and numerically strong East Coast Muslims and the historically dominant Southern Muslims, were a politically and numerically vulnerable community. In 1990, Muslims from the north of Sri Lanka became “Northern Muslims”—a community created around (1) common origins in the northern districts of Sri Lanka; (2) a shared collective experience of “the Eviction”; and (3) collective internal displacement. Before the Eviction Muslims identified themselves through districts e.g. Jaffna Muslims, Mannar Muslims. The term “Northern Muslim” came into currency only after the Eviction and it denoted a community traumatically born through eviction, it gave them an origin in a place, a region, after they had lost it. The strength of this collective identification and the density of stories of the Eviction in Puttalam cannot be underestimated. Refugees were living, as Nazleen put it to me once, “side by side with their sorrows.” Diverse families, individuals, and villages found that even though their pasts were dissimilar and multiple, in 1990 the LTTE ensured that their futures would be intertwined. This loss continues to structure Northern Muslim identity, through its concretisation in the everyday residential spaces that Northern Muslims inhabit and recreate.

In 2003, I first went to Puttalam. Thirteen years after the Eviction, Northern Muslims continued to construct their identities around their former homes; new settlements and residence in camps were structured around former natal villages from the north. Children were still growing up in Jaffna or Erukalampidy (Mannar) though actually in Puttalam. Refugees continued to make social and moral distinctions between “local” and *ahathi* (refugee) Muslims. While Puttalam has historically a strong and influential Muslim minority, they were also seen as different from refugees—despite their shared ethnicity and language—on the basis of villages of regional origin. Differentiation between local and refugee on basis of regional origin, also worked to allow internal differentiation between Northern Muslims from different districts and villages. Refugees argued that different “homes” made different kinds of persons, drawing on former villages from the north—physically absent but still culturally nourishing. Houses in Puttalam clustered around the social relations of their absent former homes enfolded these as productive absences. Moreover, the idiom of home and natal villages which Northern Muslims still draw upon was consciously multi-ethnic; homes were shared between Tamils and Muslims and the idiom of shared homes and neighbourliness was frequently stressed as a counterpoint to the dominant narrative of a Tamil only north. Common loss was creating a shared everyday future.

“Now we are like
tourists ... we left
our brick house and
came to live ...
with the rain and
snakes.”



PHOTO BY LAKRUWAN WANNIARACHCHI / © AFP, 2006

Dreaming of return

Here I return to Mumida, who, like many of the younger generation of refugees does not imagine actual return to the north, still a war-zone. The key debate that drew together multiple stories, opinions, dreams, and divisions was the question of “return.” “Return” in Puttalam, as it is indeed for many populations (e.g. Palestinians) displaced by political violence, is more than compensation or even physical relocation. It is a profound social and emotional question about one’s place in the world, about recognition of injustice; it opens a horizon of expectations and dreams whose longings can never be fully satisfied. In Puttalam, return plaited together two different kinds of conversations, one about the actual possibility of relocation and the renewal of actual neighbourhoods, and the second, about the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of return.

However, this profoundly divided generations of Northern Muslims as refugees settled down and children married in Puttalam. Relationships to former homes were formed directly for the older generation but, people asked, what of their children? Were these children, children actually of this home, Puttalam? And if so, did that make them different persons from their parents even though they were kin? Sometimes people even wondered if their children had a home. Conversations about “return” opened up the impossibility of a future in which the consequences of the Eviction could be erased, and one in which different generations occupied different emotional landscapes. The older generation strongly desired return to the north, even as they acknowledged its impossibility. An intermediate generation, who came, struggled and raised children in the camps, spoke of their memories of their former villages and their longings for that life. However, they saw themselves tied to their children who had settled in Puttalam; not least many were frightened of undergoing another eviction again. The younger generation, like Mumida, saw themselves very clearly as Northern Muslim but as Razika told me in 2007, “who wants to go back and die?” They were in fact Northern Muslims proper, their identities firmly rooted, not in their former homes as with their parents, but in a common history of displacement and eviction.

While the impossibility of return constantly reminded people of their inability to return to a time before the Eviction, the impossibility of actual return could not exhaust the promise of return. It seemed sometimes that only the promise of return could bring back the ability

to repair the past and the wounds of the Eviction and Tamil/Muslim relations. I heard the interplay of these conversations in many houses and stories, in relation to children, land, Tamil neighbours, and to me. I make this distinction between the return *as promise* and the return *as practical possibility* because the symbolism of return is a story about belonging that is written into the making of Northern Muslim communities. Whether Muslims can physically return or not, which is becoming less likely as time passes, the emotional landscape of possible “return” remains central. Even the young, who do not intend to return, are rooted in the experience of displacement and the story of a terrible injustice. Retelling Eviction stories beckoned to the necessity of insisting on the political legitimacy of return. For Northern Muslims a guarantee of return would be the acknowledgement of injustice and the repair of Tamil and Muslim relations. “Return” as such is a horizon of expectations, dreams, and fantasies; conversations about it speak to “a time before” Eviction and “a time after.”

Tamils and Muslim futures?

One of the themes common to all Eviction stories was Northern Muslim insistence that it had been the LTTE rather than Tamils who had evicted them, and the description of their Tamil neighbours as passive weeping observers. This insistence located ethnic cleansing as coming from the outside, refusing to poison intimate village relations which continued thus to be infused with love and longing. This is also not untrue, Muslim eviction was unpopular among northern Tamils and there is no evidence of civilian collusion. However, this insistence is as much ideological as factual, and it relates to Northern Muslim attempts to imagine a multi-ethnic north.

Muslim conversations about former homes drew on the people that these places were shared with. Shafiq’s memories of Jaffna were all about her childhood relationship with a Hindu Tamil man from whom she and her brother were inseparable. In 2002 after the ceasefire a letter came carried by many hands to Shafiq’s family from the old Tamil man. The letter told of his own displacement and his return to Jaffna. He too was now an IDP living in a cajan hut, the Muslim family should, he wrote, come home to where they belonged so they could be neighbours again. Shafiq, married with a child in Puttalam, cannot return and her despair as she told me about this letter testifies to how “return” also promises the repair of social relations between Tamils and Muslims someday in the future. Despite the tightlipped silence of Tamils on Muslim eviction, some Northern Tamils did visit their former neighbours in camps, continuing intimacies that both sides treasured. However, largely, Tamils remain silent. Many Tamils I interviewed refused to approve but also condemn the eviction of Northern Muslims.

Presently, despite the much more violent and interpersonal breakdown of communal relations between eastern Tamils and Muslims, the Kattankudy Muslim associations have undertaken to raise money and feed thousands of Tamil refugees displaced by recent fighting.¹ They have persisted despite the opposition of the two factions of the LTTE (now fighting against each other). D.B.S. Jeyaraj, a Tamil journalist muses in his writing whether such actions indicate possibilities of a peaceful Sri Lanka.² He points out that in the Tsunami, briefly Tamils, Muslims, and Sinhalese helped each other. Such narratives, in which the continuing intimacy of Tamils and Muslims is highlighted despite the war time atrocities, indicate a local need to cling onto an utopian story of peace in Sri Lanka, one that attempts to make Tamil and Muslim relations the fragile loom upon which a new future can be woven.

Will this weaving of the past with the present prove to be too fragile? Is it fair that it is Northern Muslims, rather than Northern Tamils, who are being forced to demonstrate Tamil and Muslim kinship? At the moment there are no answers. As the war continues to unfold in Sri Lanka, I am grateful that one community at least has maintained a multi-ethnic imagination of Sri Lanka, thereby stressing the necessity of continuing communication and intimacy.

Notes

1. Communal relations in the east are more tense than in the north.
2. D.B.S. Jeyaraj, “Kattankudi Muslims help Tamil IDPs in Araiampathy,” *Transcurrents.com*, 20 March 2007 at, <http://transcurrents.com/tamiliana/archives/302>.

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**Sri Lankan
Muslim
refugees
returning
home**

Still Quarrelling over the Quran

Five Interventions

ASMA BARLAS

On subjectivity

Some scholars argue that in order to interpret the Quran, one must avoid all subjectivity. I do not agree with this proposition since, to be human, is to live a life that is politically, economically, sexually, culturally, and historically situated and subjectivity is merely the effect of encountering and comprehending the world through this situatedness. It is, therefore, unavoidable. Hence, instead of pretending that we encounter texts from some pure or abstract location outside the confines of time and space, we need to be open, honest, and self-conscious about the material and ideological sites from which we read them. In fact, that is one of the pre-requisites for entering into the hermeneutic circle.

My first thesis, then, is that no Quran interpreter can avoid subjectivity because it is an inescapable human condition. At best, we can be more or less cognizant about how our subject positions shape our readings of a text.

On language and interpretation

Another common idea is that only those people who have mastered Quranic Arabic should be allowed to interpret the Quran. I also disagree with this idea since it suggests that there is only one type of scriptural interpretation and seems to confuse translation with interpretation.

In its most basic sense, interpretation is simply the act of giving meaning to what we read, so one does not need to be a language expert or a

philologist to read a text interpretively since one does that anyway merely by virtue of reading it. Moreover, mastering a language does not ensure that we will arrive at the best or only valid reading of a text. If it did, the Quran would not have distinguished between better and worse readings of it; the Prophet's companions would not have differed in their understanding of some *ayah*; Muslims would have had a universally agreed upon interpretation of the Quran; and scholars like al-Ghazali would not have held that each *ayah* has possibly 60,000 meanings.

The point that I am making is that interpretive differences are not reducible to language alone but also have to do with an interpreter's methodology, epistemology, theology, and sexual politics. I will give two examples from Quranic exegesis to support my claim.

The first applies to those cases where, no matter how well scholars know Arabic, they cannot agree on the meaning of a word. A good example is *idribuhunna* in verse 4:34 that most scholars read as "to beat" thereby interpreting the verse as giving a husband the right to beat his wife. However, the root of this word, *daraba*, has several different meanings—including "to go away"—and the Quran itself uses this word in seventeen different senses. So, the fact most interpreters have chosen one meaning, and the worst, and that most Muslims refuse to accept alternative interpretations as legitimate has less to do with language than with the sexual politics of patriarchies that want to maintain male power over women.

In this article, Barlas joins the debates on the right and authority of Muslim women to interpret the Quran.¹ As a way to move the conversation beyond simply asserting or refuting the right of this or that person to read the Quran on this or that condition, she distinguishes between different types of interpretations and authority. Simultaneously, she attempts to come to grips with the tensions between an individual believer's reading of the Quran and that of the community.

Second, we may agree that a word can be interpreted in different ways, but that still does not mean that we will even get to the heart of the Quran's teachings. For instance, the Quran asks us to read it for its best meanings. We may be open to accepting alternative meanings of best—like finest or most excellent—but that does not necessarily mean that we will be able to get to the moral, social, or historical content of the word. That is because what we

understand by "best" or "finest" will depend on our morals, our theology, the type of society in which we live, the time period in which we live, and so on. Thus, knowing Arabic cannot help us to categorically define the best meanings of the Quran.

The discipline of Quranic exegesis itself attests to the limitations of language in yielding a complete understanding of the Quran. Thus, from the earliest times, scholars have known that the Quran has at least two levels of meaning. *Tafsir*, as we know, focuses on the exterior or apparent meanings, while *ta'wil* concerns itself with their interior or esoteric meanings. Indeed, an entire tradition in Islam—the Sufi—is based on trying to recover the interior meanings of the Quran through an array of spiritual practices including gnosis.

Hence, my second thesis is that while the Quran lends itself to language analysis, interpreting it does not necessarily require a mastery of Arabic since interpretation is not an exercise in philology.

On translation

In light of this, I understand the insistence on mastering Arabic as an argument about the need to read the Quran only in Arabic; i.e., as an argument against translating it. I agree that translating the Quran requires one to have mastered Arabic and several scholars (all men until now) have given us translations that most Muslims accept as reliable. It thus seems reasonable to argue that if we can read the Quran in translation, we can also interpret it in translation. But, while Muslims may accept translations of the Quran, they discourage their use for interpreting it on the grounds that the translated Quran is not the real Quran.

Clearly, since the Quran was revealed in Arabic, a special symbolism attaches to being able to read it in Arabic. However, to claim that the Quran in translation is not real implies that its ontological status—its "reality," so to speak—derives from its being in Arabic rather than from its being God's speech. This is a theologically unsound notion since the Quran's ontological status has to do with its relationship to God, not to human language. Thus, divine speech is real in *all* languages because its reality stems from its being *God's word*, not from being in a given language.

If the Quran is a universal text, as Muslims believe, then its universality lies in its being equally real in all languages, and not just in one. In what way can the Quran be universal when non-Arabs, non-literate, non-males, are excluded from understanding or interpreting it in light of the faculties and grace given them by God?

My third thesis, then, is that the Quran is real in all languages and is as open to being interpreted or misinterpreted in these languages as it is in Arabic.

The Quran itself
... does not tie
interpretive rights
to race, sex, class, or
even literacy.

On authority

If I am right that the Quran is a universal text, that knowing Arabic cannot ensure interpretive unanimity or accuracy, that the only way to decipher it is not just through language analysis and that no reading of it can be objective, then it seems necessary to rethink our view of who has the right to interpret it. The Quran itself has made it obligatory for each one of us to use our own intellect and reasoning to interpret it; it does not say that only males, or Arabs, or scholars can, or should, interpret it. In other words, it does not tie interpretive rights to race, sex, class, or even literacy. Literacy and scholarship have never been the hallmark of prophets or sages, or, for that matter, of most believers who have usually been unlettered. To assume that these people cannot understand the Quran because they lack scholarly knowledge is to disregard aspects of the Quran's religiosity and universality and to confuse knowledge of God's words with their "inner meanings,"⁴ a distinction the Quran itself makes. Potentially, anyone can arrive at these inner meanings through reflection.

The Quran does, of course, ask us to learn from and teach one another and a certain pedagogical role is part of the moral praxis of both women and men whom the Quran urges to enjoin the just and forbid the wrong.⁵ This type of moral pedagogy does not, however, allow us to claim a monopoly on religious knowledge or inerrancy in our understanding of it and nor is it based in the sort of institutionalized authority that Muslim interpretive communities have come to claim over the centuries.

Most significantly for our purposes, the Quran does not bind us to the moral authority of earlier generations without thinking through things for ourselves. It censures those who insist on following "the ways of their fathers," a phrase that we can read literally as referring to rule by the father/husband (patriarchy),⁶ or, more generally, to traditions passed down over time. The Quran also warns us that if our parents try to make us "join in worship [with God] things of which *thou hast no knowledge*, then obey them not."⁷ These verses appear in particular contexts of course, but their message is clearly universal: we can only grasp divine truth by and for ourselves without any compulsions or constraints. Is this not why the Quran forbids coercion in matters of faith and religion?

On individuals and the community

Naturally, when we read a scripture within a community, our understanding of it can never be wholly free of the community's understanding of it. Indeed, if there is a conflict between them, we are pressed to subordinate the personal to the communal in the name of tradition, or rather, the dominant view of tradition. How, then, can we take individual responsibility for interpreting the Quran?

This is a complex issue because, for Muslims, community and faith, or "ummah and *din* are mutually defining and they give distinctive characteristics to the Islamic view of communal existence."⁸ But, if this means that we can only practice our *din* to its full potential within a moral community, it does not mean that a community is, by definition, moral. Nor does it mean that living in a community frees us from the necessity of making interpretive choices for ourselves. After all, if communal readings of the Quran were inerrant and we could rely blindly on them, why would the Quran protect our individual right and freedom to read it in light of our own knowledge and reason? Is it not because no one is infallible and no one can decide for another how to approach God? Is it not because God wants to give each of us the opportunity to respond to God's call as best we can? If so, is it not reckless disregard and self-defeating for us to refuse this charge?

Regrettably, Muslims have not thought about the implications of such questions for the relationship between individual and communal readings of the Quran. Instead, we expect individuals to subordinate their interpretation of it to that of the ummah's because we confuse communal norms with Quranic norms. However, communal and Quranic norms are not always the same. For instance, the communal norm is to treat the Quran as the preserve of a small group of males, typically Arabs and often scholars. To me, however, this "norm" is a heresy masquerading as orthodoxy because it subordinates the Quran (the universal) to males, Arabs, and scholars (the particular). The Quran, however, belongs to all Muslims and it gives each one of us the right to struggle to arrive at an understanding of it as a test of our morality.



PHOTO BY RAMZI HAIDAR / © AFP, 2006

Lebanese women read the Quran, Beirut, 2006.

My fourth thesis then is that we should not privatize the Quran by making a group or individual the sole arbiters of its meanings; indeed, it is the ummah's obligation to ensure that all Muslims have free access to the Quran.

On (and in) practice

In principle, Quranic ideas of faith open up "an infinite space for the promotion of the individual beyond the constraints of fathers and brothers, clans and tribes, riches and tributes."⁹ In practice, of course, Muslims have not actualized the promise of such views. Most women, in particular, have never had lives beyond the "constraints of fathers and brothers" for various reasons, including how Muslims have chosen to interpret the Quran.

While I do not blame the Quran for its anti-women readings—the burden lies squarely on its interpreters—I understand the bitterness of those who do. But, then, smearing Islam has become a vocation in the West these days, as has its opposite: recovering the "true" Islam in line with Anglo-European sensibilities. As Disraeli once said of the East, Islam is now a career. Even so, I draw comfort from the fact that for most Muslims, the venture of Islam can never be a policy issue tied to the political ambitions and financial apron strings of a superpower run amok who is chastising us for not being moderate enough.

I do not disregard the urgency of reform in Muslim societies, but I believe that it can only come from those who consider Islam to be their moral compass in this world. Meanwhile, I suspect that Muslim interpretations of the Quran are likely to remain unworthy of it. But, we do not have to settle for the worst, as we have done by embracing anti-women interpretations for so long. To strive for ever-better understandings of our scripture is a calling for all those who are moved by it. The test of a moral community and of moral individuality both is how far we can fulfil that calling by relying on what God has chosen to give us. That is my fifth thesis and also my conclusion.

Notes

1. This is an edited version of a talk I gave in Amsterdam at the ISIM Conference "Redefining Boundaries: Muslim Women and Religious Authority in Practice," on 24 June 2007. For a fuller discussion of my position, see Asma Barlas, "Believing Women," in *Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2002); and "Holding Fast by the Best in the Precepts: the Qur'an and method," in *Changeable and Unchangeable: New Directions in Islamic Thought and Practice*, ed. Kari Vogt et al. (I.B. Tauris, forthcoming).
2. The Quran does this by asking us to read it for its "best" meanings, see 39:18.
3. See Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Quran and its Interpreters*, vol. 1 (Albany: SUNY, 1984).
4. See 10:39 in Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar, 1980), 297.
5. See 9:122; in Asad, 285.
6. For my definition of patriarchy, see Barlas, "Believing Women," 11–13.
7. See 31:14–15 in Ali, 1083.
8. Merryl Wyn Davies, *Knowing One Another* (London: Mansell Publishing Ltd, 1988), 129–130.
9. M. Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, trans. Robert Lee (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994), 57.

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How are we to understand the Islamic Republic's battle against women? Women who want gender equality are tried and given hefty jail sentences. By intimidation and detention, the regime forces women to observe the decreed head and body coverings. But why has the Islamic Republic gone to battle with women? The author argues that the issue is directly linked to the theory of the *velayat-e faqih* [rule by an Islamic jurist] and the legitimization of rule by Islamic jurists. Without gender apartheid, the *velayat-e faqih* would cease to have meaning.

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authority because he is well-versed in fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). Fiqh has to be implemented so that human beings can achieve felicity in this world and the next. The implementation of fiqh requires two things: first, someone who is well-versed in fiqh (a faqih) and, two, the establishment of a state and the handing over of supreme control to a faqih so that he can implement the Sharia.

For a *velayat-e faqih*-based system, the fact that the system is based on fiqh and implements the Sharia is the only criterion and measure for the Islamic-ness of the government. It goes without saying that the implementation of fiqh does not make the government and society religious; if a government would implement the precepts of fiqh in an atheistic or non-religious society, this would not automatically make such a society religious. We will overlook this problem for now and accept the claim made by the fuqaha: that a society in which the precepts of the Sharia are implemented is an Islamic society.

Incomplete implementation of Sharia

However, looking at the record of the fuqaha of the Islamic regime shows that the implementation of precepts is far from complete. The precepts on cutting off a thief's hand, on stoning, on apostasy, and those on jihad are not being implemented. Neither is the precept on interest being implemented. The Quran has spoken in the harshest terms about charging interest on loans and described it as waging war on God. But the Islamic Republic's banking system is based on interest and applies even higher interest rates than many banking systems in the capitalist world. Why are the lower profit rates in capitalist banking systems seen as interest rates that are prohibited by Islam, whereas the high profit rates in the Islamic Republic's banking system seen as acceptable? Is this not the application of trickery in interpreting the precepts of God? The list of unimplemented precepts is much longer. Twenty-eight years after the Islamic Revolution, the observance of ritual prayers is weak, tithes are a dead letter, and the Quran is neglected.¹

When the precepts of the Sharia are not acted upon and the state is not based on fiqh, then what makes the Iranian government religious and what leads to the perpetuation of rule by the fuqaha? Only one remaining feature suggests that the system is Islamic: women's hijab. The Islamic Republic's regime makes women wear the hijab by force so that, one, the country is considered Islamic and, two, there can be a justification for continued rule by the *vali-ye faqih* [supreme Islamic jurist/cleric]. In short, women are used to put Islamism on display.

Women should be free to wear or not to wear the hijab. The government has no right to impose a particular form of covering on women in the name of religion. Let us assume that the Iranian government is a religious government and that the implementation of the Sharia is the government's duty. What is the position of the hijab in the Quran's moral-legal-penal system? Is the hijab more important than not charging interest on loans? Why is Iran's banking system allowed to charge interest, while women are not allowed to deviate from the precept on the hijab? Is the hijab or prayer more important? Prayer is a wholly spiritual and worship-related affair. It is the link between the needy and the needed, the worshipper and the worshipped. It also serves a very important social function as far as the Quran is concerned. Prayer destroys immorality and vice. If the government claims to be implementing the Sharia and combating immorality and vice, why does it not make prayer obligatory? Even if it were possible, it would defeat its purpose. Forced prayer is not a prayer. But the hijab is not important as an act of worship or, even if it were, it is not at all comparable in this sense to prayer and fasting. And the Quran has not assigned any social benefits to it either. Failure to observe many precepts leads to punishment in the afterlife,

We know that the *velayat-e faqih* lacks a rational justification. The justifications based on narrated accounts of the sayings of the Shii Imams are also dubious, which is why historically most fuqaha have not subscribed to the theory. So why is political control over Iran in the hands of the fuqaha? What justifies their rule? According to those subscribing to the theory of the *velayat-e faqih*, a faqih has

but the Quran has not assigned any punishment in the afterlife for failure to observe the hijab.

Lack of security

Why is it that, when people were free in their choice of clothes under the Shah's regime, women and girls used to favour wearing the hijab, while the regime in the Islamic Republic has totally failed to impose its choice of covering on women even by brute force? Why is it that, under the Shah's regime, girls used to go to state schools and emerge as Muslims, whereas today not even the Islamic Republic's officials wish to send their children to state schools? Why is it that before the revolution, girls and women used to use public transport without any problem, but, since the revolution, the problems cannot even be solved by gender-segregation on public transport?

Women need security in society, but they do not have it. They do not want to be viewed as sex objects, but the Islamic Republic has reduced them to sex objects. Women are the targets of devouring eyes. The problem of women is a question of freedom and equality. They do not want to be discriminated against because of their gender. Why is this demand resisted? Is it because of a commitment to Islamic law? No, even Mr. Khomeini held that belief in God and the Prophet was sufficient to qualify a person as a Muslim. As he wrote: "What, in truth, constitutes Islam ... is the principle of the existence of God and God's oneness, the Prophethood and, possibly, belief in the afterlife. The rest of the rules consist of the precepts of Islam which have no bearing on the essential belief in Islam. Even if someone believes in the above-mentioned principles but, because of some doubts, does not believe in Islamic precepts, this person is a Muslim, on condition that the lack of belief in the precepts does not lead to a denial of the Prophethood ..."²

Notes on the of Women

Most of the Iranian women who want equal rights are Muslims. They accept that the precepts of fiqh used to be implemented in the early days of Islam and that they were obligatory then. But, contrary to the fuqaha, they doubt that these precepts hold for all time and everywhere. The unreasoned assumption of the fuqaha is that the precepts of fiqh hold for all time and everywhere unless proven otherwise. The assumption of religious modernists is that these precepts were temporary and belonged to the society of the early days of Islam unless proven otherwise. These precepts solved some problems in the simple society of the past, but, today, they do not solve any problems; instead they produce a negative perception of Islam.

Crisis of legitimacy

When "the destruction" of so many precepts of fiqh is unproblematic, why are the hijab and precepts relating to women so important? Because the political system is naked and exposed, it needs a cover to lend legitimacy to the rule of the fuqaha. But there is no such cover. Oppression, violence, and intimidation cannot be rendered legitimate by forcing women to cover. The regime in Iran has tried these methods for twenty-eight years, but the project for making a fiqh-based society has completely failed. Women are not like a few intellectuals who can be brought into line through assassination and imprisonment. Their lifestyle cannot be imposed on them.

Any regime has an ideology to lend it legitimacy. The ideology justifies rule by the state (the authorities) and makes it appear rightful. Fiqh-based Islam is the legitimizing ideology of the Iranian State. But the State is now facing a crisis of legitimacy for the following reasons: a) The fuqaha have deviated from the precepts of the Sharia and have placed the most important precepts of fiqh in abeyance; b) The formulation,

by religious intellectuals, of a modernist reading of Islam as opposed to the prevailing fundamentalist reading of Islam; c) The universality of democracy and human rights as values that legitimize political systems with which other ideologies are unable to compete; d) The fact that various sections of the population are turning away from the system's legitimizing ideology.

As shown, the fuqaha have themselves deviated from the precepts of fiqh and the only thing that remains is the discriminatory precepts of fiqh on women. Now, women are standing up to these laws and are rejecting them. But their rejection should not be seen as a move against religion. On the basis of Mr. Khomeini's view or, more importantly, religious modernists' reading of Islam, women's resistance can be seen as a move that favours religion. Concomitantly, the state's opposition is not based on a defence of religion either. The state is opposing women's demands because the only thing that justifies their authority is the implementation of fiqh and the only precepts that remain are the precepts that rule out freedom and equality for women. So, the quarrel is essentially not religiosity versus irreligiosity but rather democracy versus dictatorship, since equality is the shared foundation of democracy and human rights.

The centrality of justice

If we want the Prophet of Islam to protect our dignity here and today, we must recognize that God sent us prophets so that they would spread justice, not so that they would implement precepts or force women to wear a hijab. Gender discrimination, owning slaves, and patriarchy did not conflict with people's understanding of justice in pre-modern times. But based on a modern understanding of justice everyone is equal regardless of race, class, religion, or gender. If the Prophet of Islam were to appear today, he would undoubtedly defend equal rights for all human beings.

Repression in Iran

Justice takes precedence over religion in two contexts. First, justice is the criterion for accepting or rejecting a religion. Secondly, justice is the basis for understanding religion. So, religion must be just and rational. Precepts that are not worship-related are for solving practical problems. Rational people in the past devised solutions to problems. Those solutions do not solve problems today. Rational people today have presented new solutions to problems. Let us not forget that the Legislator follows the conventions of rational people, the conventions of rational people do not follow the Legislator. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are the handiwork of rational people living in the modern world. They must replace the conventions of the seventh century.

Dressing codes and naked ideology

It goes without saying that men and women do not walk around totally naked in any society. Convention and law have accepted a minimum of clothing. But this minimum is the product of long, historical experience in conditions of freedom. In Iran, people know that morality and religiosity are mere slogans of the government; power and pretentious religiosity have the last word. A despotic political system cannot decide unilaterally what people should wear and impose it by force. The question of clothing must be left to male and female members of the public, so that they can reach a consensus, through dialogue, on the accepted minimum standard.

The regime's battle to impose a dress code on women has nothing to do with a return to tradition. Rather, these imposed dress codes resemble measures that were taken by other authoritarian regimes that used brute force to keep "a woman in line with ideology." In Muslim societies, measures of this kind began in Central Asia after the Bolshevik Revolu-

tion, reached a peak in Turkey, and were imitated by Reza Shah in Iran.

Extensive measures (known as "*hujum*" or "assault") taken in Soviet Central Asia to force women not to wear the hijab reached a peak in 1927. On the orders of the women's section of the Communist Party, thousands of women threw their scarves and traditional garments into fires in public squares in some cities. However, the "liberation" of women by force never produced the desired results in the Central Asian republics. Douglas Northrop's study on Uzbekistan showed that the "assault" did not succeed in producing a substantial change to the power relationship between men and women and that, in a paradoxical way, it increased Uzbeks' propensity to wear the hijab as "a symbol of ethnic and national identity" and as a form of resistance to the Soviet state.³ The Islamic Republic's use of force in this respect has likewise produced an outcome that is the reverse of what the state intended.

In Turkey the creation of "a woman in line with civilization" was part of the authoritarian modernizing project of the Kemalist state. Atatürk used to say: "I've seen women ... who throw a cloth or a towel over their heads to hide their faces and, when men pass by, they turn their faces and move out of the way ... Gentlemen! Can the mothers and daughters of a civilized nation resort to this kind of strange behaviour and return to barbarous times? This is a scene that brings ridicule for the nation ..."⁴ How arrogant must a person be to describe half of his country as barbarous? This problem remains unresolved to this day. In May 2007, the Turkish army threatened the country's parliament and said that it would not, under any circumstances, allow a man to become president whose wife observed the Islamic hijab. Turkey's Islamists respect the separation of the state and religion, they do not seek to implement the precepts of the Sharia, and they approved all the laws relating to human rights and democracy which were endorsed by the EU. But the Kemalist establishment refuses to tolerate the fact that Islamist politicians' wives wear the hijab. Women do not own their own bodies; they have to present their bodies in a way that is in line with the commands of the Kemalist army. Here, the body is reduced to a product produced by power.

In order to solve this "problem," Iran's pseudo-modern government under Reza Shah devised the policy of the forced discarding of the hijab. Paternalistic and authoritarian elites, who thought they had the cures to all of humanity's ills in their ideological pockets, decided to "liberate" women, who still did not have the right to vote and whose opinion no one ever asked, and thus to grant them "equality." The radicals in the Islamic Republic are trying to "elevate women's dignity and standing" in a similar authoritarian way. Apparently, they have not learned anything from history and continue to resort to force and intimidation.

The status of women during the early post-colonial era has been part of the discourse of power and the attempt to build states and nations "from above." Creating "a woman in line with the ideology"—whether the ideology is Bolshevism, secularism, Kemalism, Reza Shah's brand of authoritarianism, or fundamentalist Islam—has always been part of the state-building project of authoritarian elites. In all these projects, states distinguish between "good women" and "bad women." The discerning analyst can clearly see the power-gender relationship behind these structures.

Women's liberation will be achieved when the plurality of women's social identities is officially recognized and when the state stops imposing on women norms that suit the ideological preferences of ruling elites. Turkey's Kemalists see women who observe the hijab as barbarous and Iran's fundamentalists consider women who do *not* observe the hijab as similarly barbarous. But is barbarity anything other than a state that forces its citizens in a direction that they do not want to go? We must accept freedom of choice. Women must not be used as a means for achieving ideological ends. Freedom and equality have to be accepted so that everyone can live their lives on the basis of their own moral judgements. The modern individual is someone who creates him/herself as a work of art. Every work of art is different from every other work of art. Democracy means recognizing differences and the right to be different and to think differently.

Notes

1. Baztab website, 28 April 2007.
2. Ruhollah Khomeini, *Al-Tahara*, vol. 3: 327–8.
3. Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).
4. Matt Cherry, "When a Muslim Nation Embraces Secularism," *Humanist*, May–June 2002: 22.

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Interview Soroush: Enlightenment & Philosophy in Islam

MICHIEL LEEZENBERG

Just prior to Soroush's departure from the Netherlands, Michiel Leezenberg talked with him about the philosophical origins and dimensions of modernity in the Islamic world. Soroush opened with some of his impressions of the Dutch public debate on Islam, democracy, and secularism.

AS: Maybe due to recent events, and maybe due to the media, Islamic identity has become very central to Muslims here; nevertheless, they consider themselves Dutch citizens. What worried them was that newspapers and television are very expressly inimical to Islam and give a distorted picture. Even Dutch academics, I found, are not very knowledgeable about both Islamic culture and lands. Local Muslims want to abide by the law, and want the authorities to respect Islam just as much as any other religion, and to do full justice to secularism, i.e. impartiality towards all religions. In the United States, where I lived for five years, the whole atmosphere is more religious. In the Netherlands and France, it is not a very welcome thing to be a religious person.

ML: The Dutch press is not only dominated by a secular outlook, but also by the slogan that Islam has not yet had an Enlightenment. This has—in part inadvertently—been fed by studies like Jonathan Israel's *Radical Enlightenment* (2000), which argue that the Enlightenment actually started in Holland, and more specifically in the circle around the Dutch philosopher Spinoza. According to this view, the truly radical Enlightenment of the Spinoza circle was expressly anti-clerical, atheist, materialist, and even feminist, and anti-colonialist. What do you think of the idea that the Muslim world at large, or Islam as a religion, has not had this process of Enlightenment yet?

AS: There has not been anything corresponding to the Enlightenment in the European sense in the Islamic world: neither modern philosophy, nor modern empirical science, nor the modern notion of freedom. These only gained currency in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. I believe, however, that in the early twenty-first century, to blindly follow the eighteenth-century Enlightenment may not be defensible anymore. Enlightenment in the European sense has its historic specificity that cannot be recreated; a reform in Islamic lands would be by definition different from the European Enlightenment.

According to some historians, the Islamic Enlightenment occurred much earlier, but due to historical reasons, it could not continue. We cannot say that rationalism or secularism was absent from the scene. In theology or *kalam*, you have the rationalist and quasi-secular Mu'tazilites, who relied on reason in coming to know God and in moral thinking. Unfortunately the rationalism of the Mu'tazilites was Aristotelian. This was very inauspicious: the European Enlightenment is based on a nominalist rationalism, whereas Islamic rationalism was Aristotelian and non-nominalist. Mulla Sadra's philosophy, despite its appearance, is totally nominalistic; it might bring a kind of modern Enlightenment.

Part of the Enlightenment, of course, is the advancement of modern empirical science, and therefore I have looked at the Enlightenment through the spectacles of philosophy and science. There are

Abdolkarim Soroush is one of the most influential religious thinkers to emerge from post-revolutionary Iran. He is an influential proponent of *kalam-e no* or "new theology," which explores new ways of secularism beyond the politicized and revolutionary forms of religion that marked the Islamic Revolution. From November 2006 through September 2007, Soroush stayed in the Netherlands as ISIM Visiting Professor at Free University Amsterdam.

shortcomings in explanations of the Enlightenment that do not pay sufficient attention to modern science; and from the scientific point of view, the Dutch contribution has been minor. On the other hand, Spinoza, Erasmus, and other Dutchmen have made important contributions to the Enlightenment.

I have a personal relationship with Spinoza; I feel a certain similarity in my fate with that of Spinoza: because of some of his unorthodox views, he

was excommunicated, and had to leave his place of birth in Amsterdam. Of course, Spinoza's was not a biblical God; I think it is very unfair, however, to call Spinoza an atheist. Some of his ideas are very relevant to the modern Muslim world: reconciling the religious law with democracy and providing a modern understanding of the state is much like what Spinoza has been doing. What makes Spinoza modern is that he historicizes all prophethood; but his ideas of prophethood are inspired in part by al-Farabi and Moses Maimonides.¹ Like al-Farabi, Spinoza thinks that philosophy is prior and superior to prophethood: philosophers usually work with their speculative or intellectual faculty (*'aql*), whereas prophets mainly work through the imagination; they cast the universal in particulars and symbols and thus make it accessible to the layman. All of this you can find in Spinoza, but the roots are in al-Farabi; Maimonides thinks that prophet Moses is above imagination, but for Spinoza, all prophets are on the same footing.

More relevantly, Spinoza thinks that religion is not incompatible with democracy. He thinks about religious democracy. He shows that secularism is neither necessary nor sufficient for a democratic state. For example, in present-day Turkey, many people think that secularism is necessary for a democratic state; elsewhere, people seem to think that secularism is sufficient. According to Spinoza, however, you can be a democrat out of a religious motivation and out of religious obligations to spread democracy, to separate powers, and so on.

ML: Perhaps the distinction you make sheds a light on the differences between al-Farabi and Spinoza: you suggest that the Enlightenment is not just a matter of political philosophy, but also involves a specific sense of rationality, and experimental natural science. Al-Farabi sees rationality as superior to revelation, but he does not propagate democracy, and he does not talk about experimental science. Your suggestion that it was his Aristotelianism that blocked the development of experimental science based on nominalism might be worth pursuing.

AS: I have done some work on the question of why empirical science in the modern sense did not develop in the Islamic world. The predominance of Aristotelianism does not explain it, because it dominated European scholasticism as well. Some historians of the Enlightenment argue that most of what we call Enlightenment and modernity was reaction against the idea of an omnipotent God; in Islam, Sufism rather than science was the reaction: it tried to make God a lovable rather than an omnipotent God.

ML: Your critique reminds me of the way in which in the Indian subcontinent, Muhammad Iqbal argued that it was Sufism, which he sees as a specifically Persian element in Islam that undermined every-

thing that was activist and intellectual and modernist in Islam. For him, Sufism was egocentric, politically quietist, and otherworldly. Intriguingly, he pits Nietzschean views of the ego and the will against traditional mystical notions of self-annihilation (*fana*).

AS: One of the things I like in Iqbal is his emphasis on free will. I would like to suggest that free will has been a suppressed entity in both Islamic philosophy and Islamic mysticism. The Sufis are determinists, even fatalists: they see human beings as toys in the hands of God, who cannot control themselves. In Islamic philosophy, the law of causality is so powerful that it, too, corners free will. Free will is part and parcel of the Enlightenment and of modernity. In Iqbal you see it maybe for the first time in Islam. In his magnum opus, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, he proposes to reintroduce the idea of free will and an open future; and through this, he comes to a new conception of God and of religious interpretation.



PHOTO BY DENNIS JANSSEN, 2007

This is why Iqbal is so relevant for today's questions; and mind you, it is also one of the Mu'tazila's ideas. They, too, emphasize free will (*ikhtiyar*).²

ML: You yourself very often refer to Iqbal and Ali Shariati, who in turn gets many of his ideas from Iqbal. Has your reading of classical authors like Rumi, Saadi, and Mulla Sadra been shaped by the ideas and concerns of these modernists, or did reading the classics conversely shape the way you understand modernists like Iqbal and Shariati, or even Anglo-Saxon philosophers like Quine, Popper, and Kuhn? And do you think that classical authors like Spinoza and al-Farabi can play a more than symbolic role in contemporary debates?

AS: I think our whole life is filled with infatuations: you come across somebody by chance, and then you become interested. I liked the argumentative character of Islamic philosophy. I also liked Anglo-Saxon philosophy of science because of its analytical approach to problems; I am still using these analytical tools. Of course, neither Iqbal nor Shariati proceeded analytically. Iqbal was infatuated with Nietzsche and Bergson; Shariati had read Sartre and Fanon. I prefer Iqbal as a philosopher: he sometimes has very deep insights, and he is a poet of the first rank. Shariati was really a prophet in Spinoza's sense: a man of rhetoric and the imaginative faculty. He also turned Islam into an ideology, something that Iqbal never dreamt of doing. He had a very great influence in bringing about the Islamic revolution; but nowadays, we have to be very critical about what he says, and not take him as a guru or a leader.

I discovered Rumi quite early in my life. Rumi has a lot to say, not only to me, but to modern man, about the liberation of reason. Of course, he teaches about love; but for him, love has different func-

tions. One of the main functions is to liberate reason from greed, selfishness, and many other diseases; and through liberating reason to create a liberated man, which is the main objective of all religion and all mysticism. I think everyone, everywhere at any time needs such kinds of teaching.

ML: Does that fit in with your main criticism of Shariati? If I recall correctly, you reproach him for politicizing religion, whereas you think the core, not only of Islam but of all religions, is private faith (*iman*). Did you get that view from Rumi? It need not be a politically quietist faith, because it doesn't exclude public or political action.

AS: I am not a person who lives in isolation, nor do I invite anyone to live an isolated life; and Rumi was not like that either. Even as a Sufi, you still have obligations, e.g. vis-a-vis justice. Shariati's activism was very one-sided, as it was tilted towards politicized Islam and revolution. Islam also has a spiritual side. I think it is so powerful and so important that it has to be reintroduced in modern times.

ML: You argue that the classical Islamic notion of justice (*adala*) as a hierarchical order imposed by a ruler in order to avoid social chaos overlaps with modern liberal rights-based conceptions of justice. Does that imply that modern Islamists and liberals are divided by a common language of rights? Would you suggest that you can speak of a common modernity shared between Islamists and secular liberals, or are there bigger differences between them?

AS: There are big differences, no doubt about it. In my own characterization, modern culture is a rights-based culture, whereas pre-modern or religious culture was duty- or obligation-based. It does not mean that these two are totally at loggerheads, but the emphasis is different. Modern man is seen as freed from the bondage of religion, and as having exiled God to the remote heavens; but he is very close to a morally deterring kind of egoism. In the religious atmosphere, you are supposed to be more humble and conscious of your obligations. Now can duty- and rights-based views be reconciled? Both have their shortcomings. What we need is neither to combine nor to eliminate the two, but perhaps a third paradigm. Perhaps we should revalue the concept of virtue, which may do justice to both obligations and rights.

During the ugly episode of the publication of cartoons of the prophet Muhammad, the people in favour of publication emphasized the publisher's right to free speech. Although this argument is based on the language of rights, I find it very weak. Rights always give you a number of choices. You will not be prosecuted because you have published it, fine; but you had the right to publish or not to publish. The language of rights is not satisfactory in explaining what one has to do. The language of obligations has no such shortcoming: its explanatory power is much bigger than that of the language of rights. In order to have both rights, which is a beautiful thing, and the more powerful explanation of obligations, we need a third paradigm; perhaps one of love, perhaps one of virtue.

ML: You sound a bit like communitarians like Alisdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor, who also argue that liberal individualism runs into contradictions. Would you say that today's worldwide newly visible public religiosity has always been around but has found a new way of legitimately expressing itself in public (as has been said about the recent electoral victory of the Islamist AKP in Turkey), or would you take it as a sign that some of the classical ideals of liberal secularism are untenable, or more dramatically, that liberalism has failed in some respects?

AS: Well, liberalism—as the culture of rights—has definitely failed in some respects, and I think the secularization thesis has proved wrong. People expected a continuous decline of religion in society, but now we see the reverse. We live in a postmodern era, one of the main blessings of which is that the sharp dichotomies of the past, e.g. between secularism and religion, and even science and religion, are getting blurred. These are relics of the positivist era, and no longer tenable.

**Abdolkarim
Soroush**

Notes

1. The connections between Maimonides' and Spinoza's views on prophecy have been explored in detail by, among others, Heidi Rawen, "Some Thoughts on What Spinoza Learned from Maimonides about the Prophetic Imagination," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 39, nos. 2 and 3 (2001).
2. The Mu'tazila were an important rationalist school in early Islamic speculative theology (*kalam*); in Sunni Islam, they were eclipsed by the rise of Ash'ari theology, but among Shiites, their doctrines remained influential.

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Coup.com: Turkey Conquers the Politics of Fear

JENNY WHITE

Despite the high-decibel rhetoric about the Justice and Development Party (known by its Turkish acronym AKP) being an Islamist threat to Turkey's democracy, the party won a resounding mandate in the July 22 parliamentary election. This means that the majority of Turks have rejected the politics of fear spread by AKP's rivals and understand that the struggle in Turkey is not between Islamists and secularists, but between rival elites in a zero-sum game where the success of one diminishes the power and wealth of the other. Traditional republican elites entrenched in state institutions, business, and the military have been calling the shots for decades. The upstart AKP and the socially conservative majority that supports it not only have a corner on political power, but also have begun to do well enough to challenge the republicans in globalization and economic development. The presence or absence of a headscarf has become emblematic of much broader issues in a power struggle between segments of the population. This election marks the high-water point for the AKP, but the politics of fear that preceded it continues to threaten Turkey's hard-won stability.

Since it came to power in 2002 on a wave of popular revulsion against corrupt and ineffectual secular parties, AKP has initiated a courageous programme of reform in a bid to join the European Union. Ironically, those who continue to tout the superiority of a secular European lifestyle are the least likely to appreciate the introduction of European-inspired liberal values that loosen state control of religious practices

and clothing (headscarves are currently banned in government institutions, including universities) and that expand the rights of Turkey's ethnic and religious minorities. Some of the Turkish old guard view minorities like the Armenian, Greek Orthodox, and Jewish communities as a European fifth column intent on undermining Turkish territorial integrity. Forced to play the nationalist card in the pre-election dust-up, AKP seems unwilling to challenge conservative forces blocking implementation of new laws that broaden ethnic and religious minority rights.

The election hothouse

Since so much rested on this election, attempts to manipulate public opinion took a dangerous turn that threatened—and continues to threaten—both Turkey's democracy and its chances for European Union membership. The most important of these was the unexpectedly bold entry of Turkey's military onto the political playing field after almost a decade of acquiescence to the elected government's programmes. The last major military intervention in politics was the so-called "soft coup" of 1997, in which the military-dominated National Security Council, an advisory body to the government, pushed out an Islamist prime minister the army suspected of being insufficiently committed to the secular foundation of the state. Since then, the military's power on the council and elsewhere has begun to be reduced in line with European Union requirements that a

The controversies surrounding the Turkish elections should not be seen as a clash between secularists and Islamists, but rather as a struggle between various elites. In fact, the disavowal of its Islamist agenda has enabled the AKP to occupy the centre of the political spectrum formerly held by the Kemalist establishment. These shifts and turns have come at a price: nationalism and corruption seem to be on the rise. The author concludes that the real danger is that these power struggles will disable Turkey to develop its global, liberal democratic credentials.

nation's military be subordinate to its elected government.

In the hothouse atmosphere preceding the election, the army resorted to a new tool to influence politics—its website www.tsk.mil.tr. On April 27, parliament had voted to put forward the name of the well-respected AKP foreign minister Abdullah Gül to replace Turkey's strongly secular president, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, whose term had come to an end. The opposition Republican People's Party (RPP) claimed the vote was invalid because it lacked a

quorum. That night the military posted a memorandum on its website that has come to be called the first coup by website or "cyber coup." In the unsigned statement, the army threatened to interfere if the election of Gül, whose wife wears a headscarf, went ahead. In following weeks, further statements were posted. One called for a social reaction against "forces who act in the guise of democracy and freedom of speech," leading many to wonder if the army was urging a popular uprising against the government and liberal institutions. Millions demonstrated in support of the military's guardianship of secularism, but a new generation has come of age in Turkey with no experience of coups against elected governments (the last of which was in 1980) that was surprised and disturbed by such blatant intervention in the democratic process. This may well have had an impact on the election outcome—AKP won 46.7% of the vote and 341 of the 550 seats in parliamentary—as thousands of newly eligible young voters had their say.

As a result of the April 27 "cyber coup," the government moved parliamentary elections that had been scheduled for fall to July 22 in the hopes that a larger AKP presence in parliament would ensure a quorum and make it politically difficult for the military to counter the wishes of a democratically elected government with a clear mandate. The AKP also put on the table a proposal to amend the constitution to allow the president to be elected by popular vote, a proposition recently approved by the Constitutional Court and which will be subjected to a popular referendum in October. Despite a higher percentage of votes than in the last election, however, AKP gained fewer seats in the new parliament due to the entry of a third party. The Nationalist Action Party (NAP), which has been associated with ultranationalist violence in the past, picked up 71 seats and will join the militantly secular RPP in opposition. Such a powerful nationalist coalition might well block future liberal reforms. If the new parliament is unable to elect a president within sixty days, the Constitution requires that general elections be held again, prolonging the turmoil and uncertainty. In an interesting development, 23 Kurdish nationalist members of the Democratic Society Party (DSP) were elected to parliament as independent candidates, a ploy that allowed the Kurdish party to avoid the ten percent vote threshold for party representation in parliament. Surprisingly for socially conservative eastern and southeastern Anatolia, fifteen of the newly elected deputies from that region are women, most of them members of the DSP, rather than mainstream parties. The Kurdish DSP delegates are a wild card in future coalition building.

The military has put the AKP's back against the wall by repeatedly and publicly asking the elected government to authorize a military operation into northern Iraq to combat the PKK, a banned Kurdish separatist organization that is using the region as a base from which to attack Turkey. The AKP government so far has resisted, arguing that the Kurdish problem should be addressed first on the Turkish side of the border, but its refusal to authorize military action in Iraq makes it look soft on terror. If the government does authorize a military incursion, it

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will damage relations with the United States and the EU and potentially open the door to a regional conflagration between Turkey (a NATO country) and the Iraqi Kurds, whom Turkey accuses of aiding the PKK, possibly engaging the central Iraqi government and even U.S. forces. A Turkish incursion would give tacit permission for other neighbouring countries like Iran to enter the Iraqi quagmire ostensibly to hunt down their own terror candidates. The Turkish military, which does not like the AKP government, will continue to apply pressure, aided by the RPP and NAP. In the meantime, it continues to mass troops and equipment along the Iraqi border.

Immediate and potential dangers

A further aspect of Turkey's politics of fear are the links emerging between ultranationalist violence and a group of former military officers. The alliance between Kemalist extremists and ultranationalists suspicious of religious and ethnic minorities runs deep. Evidence emerged in the 1980s and 1990s of something Turks call the "deep state," a mysterious group of conspirators with connections high in the state and military bureaucracy that over many years funded and protected violent groups that killed Kurdish leaders, leftist intellectuals, journalists, judges, and other broadly defined "enemies of the state." Recently links have been found between these former officers and suspects in the murder of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink and several other political murders over the past year. There also appears to be cross-fertilization between ultra-nationalists and fringe radical Islamists, the outlines of which are only now becoming clear.

While the more immediate threat to Turkish democracy appears to be coming from the secular camp, creeping conservatism, corruption and the dangers of political monopolization are legitimate causes for concern that are driving the campaign against AKP. People fear that the AKP will consolidate power over all branches of government, leaving no counterbalancing power. (The opposition RPP lost votes in this election and is widely viewed as lacking leadership or new ideas.) The AKP has disavowed Islam as a political ideology, yet contains under its broad umbrella a core group of committed Islamists who would like to ban the sale and consumption of alcohol in public places, hold conservative ideas about gender roles and are unwelcoming of women in the public arena or in positions of authority and power, and who are generally as intolerant of secular lifestyles as Kemalists are of Muslim ones. Nevertheless, the AKP fielded more female candidates in this election than the RPP and the number of women legislators doubled to over eight percent. But conservative and nationalist influences have undermined the implementation and effectiveness of many of the liberal laws passed by the AKP as part of its alignment with EU requirements, particularly those broadening ethnic and religious minority rights.

The dangerous hot and cold games the EU has been playing with Turkey's membership bid have exacerbated Turkish suspicions about Europe's ultimate aims in the region, inflamed nationalist sentiment, and emboldened ultranationalists whose actions, in a self-fulfilling cycle, add to Turkey's negative tally on the part of Europeans who do not wish to see the country join the EU. The United States also has been unwilling or unable to pressure Iraqi Kurds to stop the PKK from crossing into Turkey. In Turkey, this seeming disregard of Turkey's own terror situations appears unforgivable and is a major cause for the growth of anti-U.S. sentiment.

In his post-election speech, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan re-committed to the path of EU membership and reform. General Yasar Buyukanit, the chief of general staff, however, also reiterated the army's position regarding Gül's candidacy. Gül has signalled he still wishes to run for the presidency, keeping the government on a collision course with the army. Turkey's military establishment, which sees itself as the

guardian of Atatürk's dream of a westernized Turkey, must now decide whether the project of joining the West (in the form of the EU) will be a sufficient safeguard of Turkish national identity and secular lifestyle that they can permit themselves to be slowly shorn of power. Anyone witnessing the struggles that have convulsed the EU about the role of religion, minorities, and fears about loss of national sovereignty and identity can well understand the Turkish military's scepticism and reluctance to take the dream of westernization to its conclusion.

What is most frightening to Turkey's old elite is AKP's increasing ability to occupy the centre, where most Turkish voters' interests lie. A popular and centrist AKP devoted to liberal values is much more of a threat to the secularist, westernized, but essentially illiberal establishment than an AKP harbouring a secret Islamist agenda. AKP has been successful where the old guard has not—at least not since the 1980s—in uniting Turkey's fractious political field and occupying the centre. The establishment's response has been to spread fear that secularist lifestyles are in danger and the nation is being undermined by foreign powers. The AKP has been forced to turn aside from its own reform agenda to prove itself to be as nationalist as its opponents. Nationalism has shown itself to be a dangerous force in the past, used to manipulate public sentiment that all too easily can spill over into violence. The real question is whether post-election Turkey can get back to the business of developing its global, liberal democratic credentials or whether the pre-election games of Turkey's embattled elites will have damaged the social fabric and the democratic process to such an extent that Turkey's future will be derailed.

Political posters in Kayseri, Turkey



PHOTO BY BULENT KILIC / © AFP, 2007

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The Hand of the Market & the Boot of the Army

CIHAN TUĞAL

The emergence of a new actor, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), upset the balance of forces in Turkey at the turn of the millennium. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, the main opposition was organized by the Welfare Party (RP), which ran on a platform of social justice, anti-Westernism, and Islamic morality. After the secularist military closed this party down twice, a new generation of leaders split to form the AKP. They received a warm welcome from liberals, business circles, and the West, to whom they promised market reforms and democratization.

Neo-liberal democratization

The rigid secularist bureaucrats and middle classes remained incredulous; they feared a gradual transformation to an Islamic regime when the AKP came to power in 2002 with the support of the business class, the media, religious communities, the USA, and the EU. Yet, four and a half years of AKP rule were marked by extensive privatization and limited democratization, rather than Islamization. The Turkish economy grew steadily, while inequalities rose sharply. The ruling party emphasized democratization, but tended to restrict this with the needs of the market.

Between 2002 and 2006, torture declined. The government granted the Kurds the right to receive private education in their own language. Turkey's ratings in human rights indices improved. These steps, along with economic reforms, sent the global business world the image of a liberalizing country. Foreign capital flowed in. However, the government took no concrete steps to integrate the Kurds into the system. The 10% election barrier, which kept Kurdish nationalist parties out of the parliament for years, is still in force. The major legal Kurdish organization (Democratic Society Party, DTP) received severe blows in the first months of 2007. During the same year, the government itself made attempts to overturn some reforms concerning the Kurds, under pressure from the Army. The AKP cooperated with the secularist CHP (Republican People's Party) to erect yet other institutional impediments in the way of a DTP success at the polls in 2007.

More important for the markets, the AKP government crushed strikes and Prime Minister Erdoğan labelled any popular resistance against privatization as "communist." On May Day 2007, the Istanbul Governor and the police heavily cracked down on demonstrators. *Zaman*, the newspaper of a pro-AKP religious community, even called for military action against the non-violent demonstrators.

Finally, the willingness of the top AKP leaders to participate in Western military action against Middle East countries, despite strong public opinion, bolstered the image of the government as pro-Western,¹ thereby making the country even more attractive for Western transnational capital. At the same time, transactions with Muslim countries also increased, as the ruling party converted its Islamist past into new business ties. In sum, the AKP government pursued democratization and Islam in so far as they served the country's integration with world markets.

In the absence of democratic mass forces, all the social ills that neo-liberal democratization fostered led to the public questioning of democracy rather than a criticism of neo-liberalization. The resulting trend of authoritarianism was also due to disappointment with EU accession. In the last several years, the AKP enacted major democratic reforms also as a part of the EU accession process. European reluctance regarding Turkish membership despite the reforms increased the number

Turkey is going through hard times. The bastion of secularism in the Middle East is forced to make a choice between the hand of the market and the boot of the army. The AKP's conservatives gain momentum by building Islamic and liberal consent for the market option. The opposition, aligned behind the army and nationalist parties, lacks a clear economic alternative, while it mobilizes around anti-market and anti-Islamist slogans. The electorate heavily weighed on the side of the market in July 2007. Yet, the military and its allies still threaten to destabilize the AKP's neo-liberal democratization.

of anti-EU nationalists in the country. The nationalists perceive especially the Kurdish reforms as intended to first weaken, and then to partition Turkey, in line with alleged European and American desires.

Nationalist mobilization

In April 2007, Turkey witnessed its history's biggest rallies. Hundreds of thousands gathered in many major cities against the possibility that the next Turkish president could have a veiled wife. Izmir, the pinnacle, boasted a total of one million demonstrators. Yet,

the veil was not the only item on the agenda of the secularist organizers. Actually, the government had taken only timid steps towards increasing the role of Islam. Together with this concern about moderate Islamization, the rallies also raised issues about the government's pro-market and democratic reforms. The Atatürkist Thought Association (ADD), one of the two primary organizers of the events, emphasized its stance against the "global exploitation system" and Turkey's increasing foreign debt in its call for the event. Despite this apparent social justice orientation of the organizers, Turkey's major unions did not support the rallies, publicly announcing that they would not be on the same side with "coup-mongers."

As the union leaders hinted, the ADD is a part of a network of civil society organizations and political parties which have been resisting democratic reforms. This network includes the CHP as well as smaller secularist parties, associations of nationalist professionals, and some paramilitary nationalist groups. All of these organizations are worried about pro-Kurdish reforms of the government, its dialogue with Armenians, its liberal policies regarding Cyprus, its privatization of natural resources and strategic public companies, and what they perceive to be the increasing salience of Islam in Turkey. Some of them have called for more military involvement in the regime. The Turkish press has uncovered evidence about the nationalist paramilitary organizations' involvement in several assassinations, including the slaying of the Armenian journalist Hrant Dink.

Dink's killing was a link in a series of nationalist murders in 2006 and 2007, which targeted intellectuals, activists, and missionaries seen as agents of the West. This ferocious campaign, coupled with the rallies, raised concern among Turkish intellectuals regarding the possibility of a fascist regime. Indeed, as several analysts pointed out, the parallels with historical fascist mobilization are striking. The nationalist organizations tap into a popular feeling of national humiliation at the hands of the European Union, just like interwar fascisms erupted after military and diplomatic defeats. They are fiercely against the government's "concessions" to minorities. They voice the fears of some middle class sectors and soldiers who find themselves jammed between global capitalism on the one hand, and Kurdish and Islamic movements on the other. Fascisms of yesteryear similarly gave voice to the middle classes squeezed between big business and militant working class movements. Similar to classical fascism, the new nationalism in Turkey combines social justice rhetoric with nationalist authoritarianism. Maybe more important than anything else, the nationalist organizations are all fired up over the possibility of an independent Kurdish state, and want the military to intervene in Northern Iraq, using Lebensraum-like arguments. Just like in interwar Europe, the main leaders of these paramilitary organizations are retired soldiers. Finally, as in interwar Italy, many of the top leaders are also converts from the socialist left. These ex-socialists are dismayed with the democratization and internationali-

zation of the Turkish left. The new nationalists fight these “aberrations” by building purified organizations to which non-Turks are not allowed.

However, all of this does not mean that a fascist takeover is imminent. There is currently no Duce who can turn this loose network of nationalist organizations into a single fascist party. Attempts to forge a grand coalition of secular nationalists (the Kemalists) and more religiously oriented extreme nationalists (the Grey Wolves of the Nationalist Action Party, MHP) have so far failed. The Kemalist perception of the Grey Wolves as religious fanatics prone to senseless murder prevents any smooth coalition of all nationalist forces. This perception emanates both from Kemalists’ secular elitism and from the grey wolves’ murder record in the 1970s. Moreover, what combined millions in the rallies was by no means a clearly defined racist ideology, even though the paramilitary groups have been circulating racist documents for a while. Finally, as different from interwar fascisms that had a clear corporatist alternative to liberal capitalism and socialism, the nationalists of Turkey have no well-defined economic programme beyond an anti-neoliberal rhetoric. Hence, there is (as of yet) no united political will that can thoroughly transform Turkey in a fascist direction.

What seems more possible is a decisive shift in the direction of an authoritarian regime. In that regard, the mobilization succeeded only partially. Ever since mid-April, the military has been intervening in politics via ultimatums, both supporting and being supported by the nationalist street. Taking its lead from the rallies and a military ultimatum, the Constitutional Court cancelled presidential elections. The nationalists thereby initially succeeded in blocking a veiled, neo-liberal presidency.

Two campaigns: chauvinism and demilitarization

Both the neo-liberals and the nationalists centred on the July elections to resolve the presidential crisis. The election campaigns shaped up as a competition between extreme nationalism and democratization (bounded by neo-liberalism). While the only major representative of the second option was the AKP, the CHP, the MHP, and the Young Party (GP) competed for nationalist votes. Along with anti-Islamism and anti-liberalism, the nationalist parties built their platform on the widespread worry that the federal structure of Iraq is not sustainable. Northern Iraq would inevitably become an independent Kurdish state, they believed. An independent Kurdistan, in turn, would lead to the demise of the Turkish Republic, as the Kurds in Turkey would eventually split and join their brethren in the south.

The military chief Büyükanıt publicly asked the government to send the military into Iraq, both to stop attacks by the Kurdish guerrilla positioned in Northern Iraq and to prevent the formation of an independent Kurdish State. The AKP responded by announcing that it did not receive any official request from the military. The major nationalist parties and media channels held the government responsible for dragging its feet regarding an operation. In the weeks before the elections, the visual media and the press drummed up public support for operations in roundabout ways. One example was the unusual airtime devoted to funeral ceremonies of soldiers killed by the guerrilla. The top generals as well as AKP ministers joined these funerals, along with thousands of people. Nationalist crowds chanted in favour of the generals and booed the ministers.

In this atmosphere, it would be difficult for any political party to protect the democratic reforms, let alone pass new ones. The AKP itself gave in to pressures by reversing some of the reforms (e.g. by expanding police capacities against “terrorism”). Today, torture is again on the rise in Turkey. Counter-insurgency in the southeast already has a lot of street support behind it, and the army has been asking for more. In early June 2007, Büyükanıt demanded mass reactions “against terrorism.”

Nevertheless, the AKP’s hands were not tied in the face of this campaign. While avoiding any public confrontation with the military, the ruling party indirectly undermined the military’s authority. Closer to the elections, the conservative police forces started to uncover more

and more links of the military with political murders and paramilitary organizations. Also, pro-AKP sources revealed that the Turkish military was consulting with neo-con think tanks in the U.S., discussing bloody conspiracies to thwart the AKP government. After these dark dealings of the military were made public, the nationalist mobilization lost momentum. The June rallies that the generals had incited could gather only a few thousand people. In the meantime, the liberal think tanks in the U.S. started to openly support the AKP. The party also gave a positive message to Washington by liquidating the (ex-Islamist) members of parliament who had voted against letting the Americans use Turkey’s borders for attacking Iraq.

Self-defeating anti-imperialism

After the invasion of Iraq, there was a sharp anti-American turn in public opinion in Turkey. The nationalist parties used this public sentiment as a weapon against the AKP, and after 2003 politics shaped around taking the right position with respect to the U.S. Yet, the real issue in Turkey is not a choice between pro-Americanism or anti-Americanism, as recent developments demonstrated. Different wings of the Turkish ruling bloc have been negotiating with different wings of the American elite, whether overtly or covertly. The Army itself appeared anti-American and thus appealed to street-level anti-imperialism, while working with the U.S. In this contradictory atmosphere, more anti-imperialism led to more American control. For the first time in Turkish history, the battles between American think tanks were in the centre of Turkish politics and public debate. The new wave of nationalism was strengthening the imperialism it claimed to be fighting against.

The secularists’ shallow anti-imperialism eventually backfired: as a reaction against the authoritarianism of the secularists, a wide array of forces (liberals, Islamists, conservatives) united their forces at the ballot on July 22. The AKP increased its votes from 34% to 46% in four and a half years. More interestingly, the AKP nearly doubled its votes in the Kurdish southeast despite its sluggish human rights record. About half of the Kurdish population gave the message that it counts on the pro-American (and potentially pro-Barzani) foreign policies of the party rather than on the guerrilla-supported DTP’s secular nationalism.

EU representatives, the Western financial press, and Western governments enthusiastically applauded the victory. But so did Middle Eastern governments and Islamist newspapers worldwide. When the AKP’s foreign minister Abdullah Gül officially declared on August 13 that he was still the party’s presidential candidate, both European and Turkish liberals, and local Islamists were jubilant; the former interpreted this step as a guarantee that Turkey would stick to democratic reforms, while the latter saw this as an augury of coming Islamization. The success of the AKP lies in being able to cash such combined democratic and Islamic support into market reforms. For example, immediately after its election victory, the party signalled that it is going to change the constitution to allow the privatization of lakes and rivers.

However, the game is not over yet. Kurdish nationalist politicians entered the July elections as independent candidates to overcome the 10 per cent barrier. Now, there is a strong DTP contingent in the parliament. The military and its allies are likely to use Kurdish nationalism, the yet unresolved presidential crisis, and the spectre of Islamization as excuses to take anti-democratic steps. Given Turkey’s present political cartography, there is no concrete alternative against neo-liberalism, but authoritarian actors still have the power to destabilize market reforms.

Note

1. See also Cihan Tuğal, “NATO’s Islamists: Hegemony and Americanization,” *New Left Review* 44 (2007): 5–34.

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The new wave of
nationalism was
strengthening
the imperialism
it claimed to be
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The Muslim world has been undergoing radical social, economic, political and intellectual change since its encounter with the West. How Muslims cope with the challenges they face necessarily impacts on the wider, non-Muslim world. The underlying aim of this conference is to examine the impact of the Gülen movement on the contemporary Muslim world in transition and the relations between the West and Islam in general.

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- In defence of universal ethical values and principles
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A Tale of Two Trajectories

Debate about “democratic deficit” in the Middle East is not new. What is novel is the excessive attention given to Islam as a factor that is said to hinder democratic reform. With its emphasis on God’s sovereignty and patriarchal disposition, Islam is argued to be essentially incompatible with democracy. Even though many Muslims refute the charge by suggesting that God has granted sovereignty to humans to govern themselves, and that Islamic justice disallows discrimination based on class, race, or gender, the debate has in general been bogged down in entirely textual and philosophical terrains, with little effort to understand the politics of religious affiliation, and how in practice Muslims perceive their religion in relation to democratic ideals.

In *Making Islam Democratic* I suggest that the question, raised so persistently, is not whether Islam is or is not compatible with democracy (itself a convoluted concept), but rather how and under what conditions Muslims can *make* Islam embrace democratic ethos. Nothing intrinsic to Islam—or any other religion—makes it inherently democratic or undemocratic. It depends on the intricate ways in which the living faithful perceive and live through their faiths: some deploy their religions in exclusive and authoritarian terms, while others read in them justice, representation, and pluralism. As to why individuals and groups perceive and present the same scriptures differently is a most intriguing and complex question, one that depends largely on their different biographies, social positions, and interests.

While much is discussed about the “fundamentalist Islamist” trends that draw often on puritanical and exclusivist interpretations of the doctrine, little is known about the social movements, what I call “post-Islamism,” that aim to bridge the gap between Islam and democracy. Grown out of the anomalies of Islamist politics, “post-Islamism” represents an endeavour to fuse religiosity and rights, faith and freedom, Islam and liberty. It wants to turn the underlying principles of Islamism on its head by emphasizing rights instead of duties, plurality in place of singular authoritative voice, historicity rather than fixed scripture, and the future instead of the past.

Whether or not Islam corresponds to democratic ideas depends primarily on whether advocates of these perspectives—Islamism and post-Islamism—are able to establish their hegemony in society and the state. The history of socio-religious movements in Iran and Egypt since the 1970s offers a fertile ground to examine the logic, conditions, and forces behind rendering Islam democratic or undemocratic. In Iran, the 1979 Revolution and establishment of an Islamic state set conditions for the rise of post-Islamist ideas and movements that aimed to transcend Islamism in society and governance. In their daily struggles, as I show in detail, Muslim women, youth, students, religious intellectuals, and other social groups incorporated notions of individual rights, tolerance, gender equality, and the separation of religion from the state into their faith; by their active presence and promotion in society, they compelled religious and political leaders to undertake a paradigmatic “post-Islamist” shift. The reformist government of President Khatami (1997–2004) represented only one, the political, aspect of this pervasive trend.

In Egypt, on the other hand, and instead of an Islamic revolution, there developed a pervasive Islamist movement with conservative moral vision, populist language, patriarchal disposition, and adherence to scripture. Engulfed by the pervasive “Islamist mode,” major actors in Egyptian society—the intelligentsia, the new rich, Muslim women activists, al-Azhar, the ruling elites, and the state—all converged around the language of nativism and conservative moral ethos to configure Egypt’s religious “passive revolution.” This Gramscian “passive revolution” represented a managed Islamic restoration in which the state, the original target of change, succeeded to remain fully in charge, while marginalizing critical voices, innovative religious thought, and democratic demands.

In this article Bayat challenges the widespread assumption that Islam is incompatible with democracy and argues that analysis should focus instead on the conditions in which Muslims can make Islam embrace democratic ethos. Detailing the different trajectories of Iran and Egypt, the article concludes that the extent to which Muslim citizens gain the skill and spirit to assert collective will, in spite of constraints—that is, master the art of presence—proves crucial in the road towards democratic polity.

Thus neither did Egypt’s Islamist movement succeed in fully “Islamizing” the Egyptian state, nor Iran’s post-Islamism in democratizing the Islamic Republic. Both movements encountered stiff opposition from their respective power elites. In other words, the political impasse in these countries has been less a function of religion per se than of structural impediments and the long-time vested interests of ruling elites. To what extent then social movements can, without resorting to violent revolutions,

alter the political status quo in the Middle East—a region entrapped by the authoritarian regimes (both secular and religious), exclusivist Islamist opposition, and blatant foreign domination?

Pervasive social movements are not single-episode expressions that melt away under an act of repression. Rather they are prolonged multifaceted processes of agency and change, with ebbs and flows, whose enduring “forward linkages” can revitalize popular mobilization when the opportunity arises. Through their cultural production—establishing new lifestyles and new modes of thinking, being, and doing things—movements are able to recondition, or *socialize*, states and political elites into the society’s sensibilities, ideals, and expectations. *Socialization of the states*—this concept might offer a clue as to how to understand the effect of social movements and an “active citizenry” to bolster a democratic turn in Muslim societies.



Art installation, Tehran, 2003

PHOTO BY AHA KENARE / © AFP, 2003

However, social movements do not evolve in a vacuum; they need fertile intellectual grounds and basic critical sensibilities, which can not only nurture a collective movement for change, but also embrace democratic institutions. After all, change in societies’ sensibilities is a pre-condition for a sustainable democratic turn. Such change is triggered not only through information and education, but especially by the active citizenry of ordinary people (teachers, students, the young, women, workers, artists, and intellectuals) who in their everyday lives voice their demands, broadcast violations, fulfil their responsibilities, and excel in what they do. Muslim citizens cannot spearhead a democratic shift unless they master the *art of presence*—the skill and spirit to assert collective will in spite of all odds by circumventing constraints, utilizing what is possible, and discovering new spaces within which to make themselves heard, seen, and felt. Through their active presence in every available social space, ordinary citizens can transform their society into one that dejects authoritarian personality, surpasses its governing elites, and becomes capable of enforcing its collective sensibilities on the state and its henchmen.

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Sharia in Norwegian Courtrooms?

KATJA JANSEN FREDRIKSEN

In 2002 the Supreme Court was confronted by a case that questioned the validity of a marriage that had already been dissolved through divorce.² The claim was raised through doubts about the legitimacy of a divorce dissolved at a Sharia court in a Muslim-majority country prior to a marriage contracted in a Norwegian mosque. Muslims in Norway have the right to solemnize marriages in accordance with their own customs and traditions, while separation and divorce only can be granted by the county governor or by the court. The discrepancy in the status of religious marriage and divorce can lead to complicated situations in court. Such situations, in turn, offer insight into the possibilities and limitations of "legal pluralism." The case at hand revolves around Ahmed and Laila (pseudonyms), both of whom are Muslims with an Arab background. Each is also middle-aged and had been married before. Laila has adult children from a previous marriage, one of whom lives in Norway. After a short marriage to Ahmed, Laila filed for divorce in Norway. In this way, she received permanent residence in Norway and could continue to live with her daughter. She could even remarry her first husband if she pleased. Ahmed on the other hand seemed to have gained little from his marriage with Laila. His subsequent actions revealed that he felt deeply humiliated by the whole situation. As the parties solemnized their marriage in a mosque in Norway, he may mistakenly have expected that Norwegian law allowed for Islamic divorce procedures as well. This may well be the reason why Ahmed started a court case in defence of his "honour," expecting justice from the Norwegian Court. One could also assume that Ahmed did not want to pay alimony to Laila, but as the couple did not have children together this point is moot.

The male perspective

After many rounds in court, Ahmed, who had permanent residence in Norway, appealed to the Supreme Court claiming that "his marriage to Laila was invalid since she never seriously intended to marry him."³ He meant that she contracted a marriage of convenience (*pro forma*) in order to obtain legal residence in Norway. He also questioned the authenticity of Laila's divorce papers, implying that she had committed polyandry, a serious crime both in Norway and her country of origin. Ahmed concluded that the case had "important legal and social complications for him personally and that he risked the death penalty or at best life-long imprisonment, in those countries that apply Sharia (Islamic law) such as the country in which his family is currently living." Ahmed obviously attempted to gain sympathy and support for his case by invoking a media discourse that presents Sharia in its most extreme forms.

The Supreme Court agreed with Ahmed that the case involved the material invalidity of the marriage and not a divorce or dissolution as in § 24 of the Marriage Act, as the High Court of Appeal mistakenly had assumed. The Supreme Court thus dissolved the judgement and returned the case to the High Court of Appeal. In May 2003 a

new round started up, during which Ahmed presented new information and documentation. He explained that Laila and her first husband Khalid have a daughter in Norway who had moved there several years

Immigration and other aspects of globalization have brought a wealth of new ideas, norms, and values into Norwegian society and into its courtrooms as well. Analyzing a court case in which a Muslim man tried to invalidate a marriage that had already been disbanded, the author looks at how boundaries between legal systems can grow blurred, and how competing discourses are mobilized in order to influence the judicial process.¹

earlier after marrying a Norwegian Muslim citizen. He suggested that this might have been the reason why they had both earlier applied for residence in Norway.

He also revealed some details about the context of his marriage. In 1999 he had first met Khalid and told him about his wish to remarry a woman who already had children. Afterwards Khalid had contacted his wife and they had

agreed upon a divorce in order for her to marry Ahmed. Laila's brother had represented her husband at the local Sharia court and all parties had agreed. Ahmed called the whole procedure a "farce" and intimated that the divorce was to be understood as *mukhala'a*, not *talaq*.⁴ He also meant that a divorce should be initiated by men in order "to be acceptable by Islamic Law." This opinion is also generally supported by Islamic countries that do not recognize Norwegian divorces when they are initiated by Muslim women without the approval of their husband.

Ahmed also questioned the legitimacy of the divorce for the following reasons: Firstly, Laila already had her foreign divorce approved in Norway before she met Ahmed, meaning that she already may have had plans to remarry in Norway. Secondly, the authorized translation was dated two weeks earlier than the original divorce papers. Thirdly, Ahmed presented the Court a certificate from the local Arab register of population which confirmed Khalid's civil status as still being married.

Ahmed further claimed that he and Laila never actually lived together and that "she was always covered and seemed unwilling to fulfil her marital duties." As a result of the marriage and the following divorce Ahmed felt deeply humiliated and concluded once more by expressing his fear of prosecution ("stoning or even worse") the next time he visited his family. In classical Islamic law the concepts of adultery are a part of criminal law and are regulated by the *hadd* punishments. As these punishments are generally more severe they also require a more rigorous standard of proof. Since this standard is difficult to meet, the normal practice is to apply milder punishments, such as imprisonment, lashes, or a fine.⁵ Ahmed's fear of prosecution thus seemed exaggerated.

The female perspective

Laila did not contest that her marriage with Ahmed may have been *pro forma*, but considered this irrelevant, as it had been dissolved already. Neither did she contest that Ahmed would have committed adultery (*zina*) if he married an already married woman. "This would be the case whether they had had sexual relations or not," she said, "Because if they were married everyone would believe that they had had sexual relations." Both parties agreed that according to the formal Sharia law of their country of origin, a marriage had to be consummated in order for it to be valid. At the same time, Laila appealed to Norwegian law, which does not require the consummation of a marriage for it to be regarded as legitimate. She asserted that, "there would be many illegal marriages in Norway if marriages without sexual relations were invalid." Laila thus attempted to strengthen her own position by appealing to a broad spectre of social, cultural, and religious conventions. As the marriage was contracted in Norway the issue of consummation did not carry any formal weight, but was still deemed of some importance by both parties.

During the court sessions Laila rejected Ahmed's fear of prosecution as being unsubstantiated. She presented a letter from the Norwegian Embassy which explained the workings of her kind of divorce (*mukhala'a*), i.e. one that is based on mutual agreement. "The fact that she initiated the divorce at a Sharia court did not mean that her former

... discrepancy
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husband could not have pronounced a *talaq* earlier in order to free himself from her," Laila added. It is indeed not unusual in Islamic countries for Muslim women to seek judicial divorce in order to receive a divorce registration. Some men deliberately fail to register *talaq* at the local authorities in order to escape the obligation to pay alimony.⁶

Laila admitted that the translation may have been incorrect, but claimed that the divorce papers were originals. "The fact that a year after the divorce her former husband [Khalid] still was registered as married by the local authorities does not prove anything because it is unclear when this information was received," Laila asserted.

Laila consistently emphasized the difference between "pro forma" and "forced" marriages, invoking a discourse that is often staged on the political level with the goal to limit further immigration. Laila explained that it is possible to contract arranged marriages in Norway as long as they are not established under coercion. "As a rule, these marriages also function well and if not, both parts can file for separation and later divorce in accordance with Norwegian law," she added, possibly referring to herself.

Additionally, Laila presented the Court a letter by a mother's shelter which confirmed that she had come to it asking for help when in a poor physical and mental shape. Ahmed had treated her badly, she argued, and this had been the main reason why she had left their marital home. Indeed, Laila suggested that this court case was just another brick in his game to harass her and her family.

Final judgement of the Court

The High Court of Appeal explained in its judgement that, according to the Marriage Act and its later amendments, marriages can be annulled only when coercion and severe abuse of the institution of marriage are involved. Even if Laila had only married Ahmed to improve her immigration status, this would not be sufficient to nullify the marriage, according to the Court.

Norwegian law allows all parties to freely provide evidence to support their cases. Eventually, the Court decides which arguments have most evidential force. In this case the Court relied, not surprisingly, heavily on the documentation provided by the Norwegian Embassy. The documentation provided by the Muslim authorities (population register) was not given any weight. The Court, furthermore, confirmed that consummation is not a marriage condition in Norwegian law and that disappointment about unfulfilled expectations in this sense is not a reason to declare the marriage void.

Overall the Court seemed to be more on the side of the female party, considering her the weaker part. The Court continuously argued out of Norwegian perceptions of justice and Norwegian customs rather than observing the underlying conflict between the parties, or trying to find solutions that could meet the expectations of all parties involved. The Court did not deny that Ahmed could be exposed to prosecution, but did not find this fact, of itself, a sufficient reason to declare the marriage invalid. Ahmed thus did not succeed in his petition to annul the marriage and he was ordered to cover all legal costs both for himself and Laila. Ahmed appealed the decision one final time to the Supreme Court, but his appeal was rejected.

The question pertaining to the nature of Ahmed's motive to go to court and risk such financial losses cannot be answered with full certainty. Was it out of "revenge" or was it in expectation of receiving compensation for his loss of social status both in Norway and in the transnational context? Did he feel betrayed by Laila who had divorced him after such a short period of marriage? As Norwegian law does not allow women to claim alimony in cases where they do not have children together, this issue did not play a role here.

The case also raises other and more important questions. Did the Court actually observe the notion of legal pluralism that came to the surface and



PHOTO BY LAIF / © HOLLANDSE-HOOGTE, 2002

did it respect the different social, cultural, and religious norms and values that both parties clearly expressed? How did the Court meet the different expectations of justice as illustrated by the example of Ahmed and Laila and did it meet these different feelings of justice with tolerance?

Oslo, Norway

A plea for openness and knowledge

The court-case described above shows the complexity of cases with an international dimension as they arise before domestic courts. Such cases require more knowledge and openness from Norwegian judges in relation to other cultures and a willingness to cross the borders of their national law. In a global world, it is no longer possible to see national law as an isolated unity. Its internal sovereignty is continuously challenged by external factors, like European law, human rights, or religious law that are not bound by national borders. These developments challenge the traditional studies of law that are used to think in terms like "rules of law," "validity," and "principles of law," while discourses like "conflict," "process," "function," and "group" are considered irrelevant.

Today, Norwegian courts face the complications of a multicultural society where certain "groups" have their own ideas and norms. Such "groups" can be a nation, an ethnic group, or a subculture.⁷ Norwegian Private International Law allows judges to apply foreign law when a case has a stronger connection to another country, thus opening up possibilities for legal pluralism. Still, Norwegian judges continue to strictly arbitrate according to Norwegian rules of law, without paying heed to the underlying ideas, norms, and values that exist in certain groups from different cultures. This may be due to lack of awareness about the existence of different perceptions of justice. It may also be caused by the lack of knowledge about different law cultures or simply a way to protect their national culture of law.

Notes

1. This article draws on a broader analysis in my Ph.D. dissertation "Islamic law (Sharia) in Norwegian family law cases." There, I discuss the different forms in which Sharia arises before Norwegian courts. This allowed me to focus on how Muslims use their cultural and religious background in family law cases and how Norwegian judges respond to these claims for legal pluralism.
2. Supreme Court of Appeal HR-2002-01322 (Rt-2002-1541 (340 -2002)).
3. All quotations are court descriptions, translated from Norwegian, from the following court cases in chronological order: Oslo District Court nr. 01-01597, High Court of Appeal LB-2002-3920 A/01, Supreme Court of Appeal HR-2002-01322 (Rt-2002-1541 (340 -2002)), High Court of Appeal LB-2002-3920/, Supreme Court of Appeal HR-2003-01067-1.
4. *Talaq*: divorce initiated by men; *mukhala'a* or *khul'*: divorce initiated by the wife, against financial compensation and with the husband's acceptance.
5. Abdullahi A. An-Na'im, ed., *Islamic Family Law in a Changing World: A Global Resource Book* (London and New York: Zed Books Ltd, 2002), 236.
6. An-Na'im, *Islamic Law*, 140.
7. Sten Schauburg-Müller, *Rettssteorier i en globaliseret verden* [Theories of Law in a Globalized World], 184, 319-320.

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Apostasy & Islamic Civil Society in Malaysia

SOPHIE LEMIERRE

While Malaysian society is praised as a harmonious and peaceful patchwork of identities, religious issues are causing social strains. Some sections of the Malay-Muslim community have begun to challenge the official stance on apostasy. The Badawi government's awkward silence reveals its unwillingness to take a position on this issue, as any step forward would certainly cost it the loss of its Malay constituency. There is now a real struggle within civil society between those advocating complete freedom of religion and those condemning apostasy. The two main contenders in this debate are those defending the constitutional freedom of belief, brought together in the coalition named "Article 11," and the neo-conservative parties represented by the "Allied Coordinating Islamic NGOs" (ACCIN). This article looks at the debate on apostasy in Malaysia, focusing primarily on the neo-conservative Islamic movements that wish to turn Malaysia into a modern Islamic state.

From semantic to legal ambiguity

Malaysian society has a long history of religious and cultural pluralism. All Malaysians, be they of Chinese, Indian, or Malay background, are unified under the banner of their common universal Malaysian citizenship. While some non-Muslims find themselves dubbed *kuffar* (non-believers) and, therefore, treated as second-class citizens, apostates who leave Islam are perceived as traitors to the faith. Because Islam is inscribed in the constitution as the official religion of the federation,¹ religion has become overtly politicized.

The emergence of a third category of citizen, the Malay non-Muslim, blurs the margins of a previously clear religious distinction. Malaysian apostates are a minority of Muslims who have renounced Islam. In the Malaysian context this decision has far-reaching consequences: it has taken them on a journey through a legal and social imbroglio.

According to the National Constitution of 1956, a "Malay is a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, [and] conforms to Malay customs."² This legal definition means that the term "Muslim" cannot be disassociated from the category "Malay."³ Accordingly, ethnicity is the determinant of religious confession: a Malay has to be Muslim and popular conventions consider any Muslim as Malay. Therefore, the different usages and meanings of the term Malay create a major ambivalence: being a Malay could entail that someone is (1) a son/daughter of the soil or a Bumiputera, (2) a Muslim, or (3) both. This homogenized definition of "Malay," one that blends religion, tradition, and culture, is central to a heated debate.

The term Malay leads us into numerous ambiguities. The primary meaning of the word "Malay" describes the son/daughter of soil known as *bumiputera*. Nevertheless, the term "Malay" hijacked by the constitution and popular conventions is now widely synonymous to Muslim. Thus, the so-called "Malay category" includes Chinese, Indian, and, of course, Malay *bumiputeras* who also happen to be Muslim. In this category where Islam is the matrix, one may easily ask whether there exists any expression of ethnic differences.

The term Malay has been detached from its original meaning and is inappropriate to describe the Muslim community as a whole. For example, the Chinese Muslim association of Malaysia encounters problems when it comes to conversion. By converting to Islam, commonly defined as "*masuk malayu*" (literally "entering the Malay community"), they will in fact become "Malay." The new converts to Islam fear a loss of their Chinese cultural background. The Malaysian Chinese Muslim association, MACMA, has tried to counter the apprehension of new converts by stressing that being Muslim does not, of itself, entail being Malay.

In Malaysia, legal definitions of the religious category "Muslim" and ethnic category "Malay" imply each other. Consequently, Muslims who have renounced Islam find themselves in an abyssal legal zone. The legal intricacies and the media representations surrounding apostasy reveal tensions between "the secular" and "the religious," thereby providing insight into the imbalanced and bifurcated nature of civil society in Malaysia.

Nevertheless, this semantic route is not a major problem within the community itself. Ethnic differences do not readily lead to tensions within the Muslim community. Islam represents a link between people of different ethnic origins and tends to be a prime quality minimizing cultural differences. The tensions emerge when it comes to political issues and, of course, apostasy.

The challenge of deserting Islam in Malaysia

The religious distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims has been institutionalized by the federal government: the word "Islam" appears on the national identification card of each Malaysian citizen professing Islam as his/her religion. Effectively, this ties the individual to the version of Islamic law active in their place of residence. Every Malaysian professing Islam is officially registered as "Muslim" and placed under the authority of the religious department and the Sharia court. This means that his/her life, from birth to burial, will be guided according to both Islamic and federal law. Consequently, Muslims who have renounced Islam find themselves occupying an abyssal legal zone.

Due to the federal system of governance in Malaysia, each state is allowed to introduce and implement Islamic laws of its own: in the year 2000, the state of Perlis, under the rule of the ruling UMNO party, introduced its own faith protection bill proposing apostates be sent to faith rehabilitation centres. According to Article 4, the federal law edited in the constitution is supreme. Nevertheless, the conservatives claim that no law can supersede Islamic law, which they consider divinely sealed. Referring to Article 160 of the federal constitution, the renunciation of Islam by an ethnic Malay jeopardises the integrity of the legal category to which this individual belongs. At the same time, Article 11 paradoxically guarantees that each Malaysian citizen must be left to enjoy freedom of belief.

In all cases, conversion out of Islam is interpreted as a way of escaping the "Muslim administrative and legal category." Today, dozens of Malaysian citizens have been denied the right to change their religion and to practice the religion of their choice as allowed by the federal constitution.⁴ For a more precise idea of the various ins and outs of apostasy in Malaysia, consider the case of Lina Joy.

Azlina Jailani, converted to Christianity in 1998, changed her name to Lina Joy and wanted to marry a Roman Catholic. The National Registration Department (NRD) accepted the change to her name, but did not remove the word "Islam" from her identification card. In 1999, Lina Joy filed a first complaint against the NRD and simultaneously asked for an official declaration from the federal territory religious department testifying her renouncement of Islam. Lina Joy subsequently entered—and promptly lost herself within—an administrative jungle: the federal court refused to take any decision as long as her renouncement was not certified by the religious department. The verdict of the federal court in May 2007 confirmed the fact that civil court has no jurisdiction in this matter. Therefore, the case has been left to the Sharia court even if the defendant claims not longer to be Muslim.

In other words, Muslims cannot rely on Article 11 relating to freedom of worship, while Sharia law does not allow them to convert from Islam to another religion. Consequently, the supremacy of the constitution is challenged and this decision will impact on other cases waiting for decisions from lower courts. Apostasy has now become a social and legal challenge.

The power rise of a neo-conservative Islamic civil society

In Malaysia, the concept of "civil society" emerged in the 1990s and was promoted by the then Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, dur-

ing his programme of Islamization. Civil society, or Masyarakat Madani, was a way of “rethinking and refashioning modernity for Muslim society” that would pave the way for Islamic principles in an imagined modern future.⁵ According to this way of thinking, civil society is intrinsically linked to religion and particularly to Islam; it is the reflection of the binary Malaysian society. Malaysian society and civil society are divided in two parts: Islamic and non-Islamic. In fact, the Malaysian civil society is intrinsically linked to religious issues. Among those representing human rights, women rights, consumer rights and so on, numerous Malaysian NGOs are religious and a majority of them are Muslim.⁶

Malaysian Islamic NGOs play a key role in diffusing the Islamic message in Malaysia and encouraging conversions to the official line: Sunni, Shafi’ite thought. For example, some of the organizations within ACCIN coalition are offering Islamic teaching classes to Muslim families and, targeting non-Muslim Malaysians and foreigners, special courses to “discover Islam.” The first government of Malaysia has created its own conversion organization. Nowadays, this NGO is still funded by the state. Of course, this fails to fit with the Western definition of NGOs according to which political independence is vital. In fact, many NGOs (in particular Islamic ones) in Malaysia tend to be linked to political parties and/or the government. Conversely, on the grounds that (1) some of their members belong to political parties and (2) their official statements often reflect the programmes or interests of specific political parties their claim to be apolitical is mere rhetoric. For example, local political figures and members of the Islamic party (PAS) joined the demonstration held by members of ACCIN in Penang in May 14 2006. In this context, one in which members of an NGO may also be members of a political party and another NGO at the same time, measuring the significance of Islamic civil society with any degree of accuracy is hard to do.

Only one Muslim organization, Sisters in Islam (SIS), joined the coalition “Article 11” in favour of the freedom of religion. SIS represents a real exception because it is the only Islamic NGOs fighting with the liberal front. The main Islamic organizations which joined ACCIN (the neoconservative coalition) consider SIS’ positions extremely liberal and even deny its Islamic attribution.

ACCIN is an umbrella for no less than 14 NGOs. Their members are mostly from the urban middle class, students or professionals, but the branches spread throughout the country allow them to reach people from most, if not all, social backgrounds. Their activities range from Islamic and general education, social help, to proselytizing. Generally, their funding comes from their members and they have their own website and newsletter.

ACCIN: support and actions

ACCIN’s common enemy is the “Article 11” coalition and their partisans. ACCIN’s ambition is clearly to put an end to the discussion initiated by “Article 11” and counter their arguments in favour of freedom of renunciation of Islam. ACCIN has taken the view that “Article 11” is a threat to Islam and to the right of Muslims to live under Islamic principles and laws.

The defensive strategy of ACCIN is defined by its committee members, presided over by Yusri Mohammed, head of the country’s largest Islamic organization Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM).⁷ Two important NGOs not directly related to ACCIN support its activities: Peguam Pembela Islam, commonly known as Pembela or PPI, and Badan anti-IFC, or BADAI. Pembela was created in 2006 by a group of 100 lawyers willing to fight against the Malaysian Bar council members siding with “Article 11.”

BADAI was created to undermine the project of an Inter Faith council (IFC) which aimed at creating a space where religious issues could be discussed openly. The IFC project was abandoned in 2005 because the main Islamic organization, led by Abim and Jemaah Islah Malaysia (JIM)⁸ were opposed to having their own religious principles challenged. BADAI and its members initiated numerous actions set up in order to reach a large audience through massive media coverage.

A media strategy

The Malaysian media scene broadcasts in all of the languages used in the country (Chinese, Malay, English, Tamil, Hindu). The media voice is controlled by severe rules embodied in the Freedom of Information Act. Nevertheless the coverage of the debate on apostasy is massive. Media provides a useful tool for civil society to reach a large audience



PHOTO BY SOPHIE LEMIERE, 2006

Demonstration held by ACCIN, BADAI, and PAS members, Penang, 14 May 2006

and to promote their respective positions. The rule of the game consists in organizing attractive events bankable for the media: “media coup.” The “media coup” strategy then leads the organization to reach a large audience and overthrow the other party.

“Article 11” started a road show entitled “Federal Constitution: protection for all” about freedom of religion in Malaysia. As the forum started to gain resonance among the public and increasingly received attention in the national media, ACCIN and its allies organized protests in front of the venues where the public talks were held. The forums in Penang and Johor had to be aborted by the police because of security risks, due to the tensions growing among the protesters. The event made the front page of the main newspaper exaggerating the numbers of demonstrators from 200 to 400.

Following the event, the government urged “Article 11” to end the discussion and stop its forums, seen as a threat to social peace. A few days later, ACCIN and its co-allies, the youth branch of the ruling party (UMNO) among them, organized a massive public meeting in Kuala Lumpur. The subject of the forum was: “Challenge to the Rights of Muslims.”

ACCIN coalition is using the media strategically by organizing spectacular demonstrations, such as that occurring on May 14 in Penang. Actually, the media scene represents a virtual room of debate for both coalitions playing the game of provocation and answers through the Internet, newspapers, newsletters, etc. and providing a tool of propaganda by which neo-conservatives aim to create a virtual common front. Without minimizing its importance, the debate on apostasy must be seen as a pretext (similarly to the debate in the film *The Da Vinci Code*, or during the crisis stirred up by cartoons of Muhammad) to affirm their existence and to announce a wake up call to the entire Muslim community. The media are a channel to reach an international audience and the “Muslim public sphere.”⁹

The rise of power of “neoconservative” fronts supported by political allies signifies the imbalanced nature of civil society, which, in turn, underlines the frail balance of Malaysian society. The recent denouement in apostasy cases has not pacified the debate; rather, it has intensified the division between Muslims and non-Muslims. The verdict of the Federal court in Lina Joy’s case refusing the recognition of her conversion to Christianity and highlighting the fact that Sharia court is the only jurisdiction with any authority on this matter reveals the perversion of a dual legal system. From both legal and social perspectives, this decision has limited the debate on apostasy to an exclusively Muslim sphere.

Notes

1. Article 3: “Islam is the religion of the federation; but other religion may be practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the federation.”
2. Article 160: “Malay means a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay customs ...”
3. Farish Noor, “Kafirs ‘R Us: Why we need to think beyond the Muslim-Kafir Divide (Part I, II, III),” *From Majapahit to Putrajaya: Searching for another Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: SilverfishBook, 2005).
4. Federal constitution Article 4: “This constitution is the supreme law of the federation ...”
5. Norani Othman, “Islamization and democratization in Malaysia,” in *Challenging Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia: Comparing Indonesia and Malaysia*, ed. Ariel Heryanto and Sumit K. Mandal (London: Routledge/Curzon, 2004).
6. According to a survey issued by the author in 2006 those NGO’s described themselves as Islamic or Muslim organizations without distinction.
7. Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia.
8. Malaysian Society for Reform.
9. Olivier Roy, *L’Islam mondialisé* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

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Cambodia's Phum Trea as Mirror Image of Religious Change

PHILIPP BRUCKMAYR

Situated on the west bank of the Mekong less than 50 kilometres north of the provincial capital of Kampong Cham, Phum Trea is only accessible by boat or mopeds using muddy, and during rainy season hardly traversable, pathways. However, the visitor, after stepping from the ferry and walking past typical wooden houses on stilts, is soon struck by the sight of Cambodia's largest mosque. Given its modest surroundings, the huge white building makes a strong impression, albeit appearing slightly out of place. In fact, in many other rural Cham villages in Cambodia, the recently built mosques, replacing their mostly wooden predecessors (most of which were destroyed during Khmer Rouge rule), are the only concrete buildings to be seen.

Yet, none of these can match Phum Trea's mosque which has recently replaced Phnom Penh's Arab-financed International Dubai Mosque as the largest place of Muslim worship in deeply Buddhist Cambodia.

The village's location in Kampong Cham province is crucial, as eastern Cambodia was always the country's Cham stronghold. Even today, around a third of the greater than 400,000 Cham Muslims reside in this province along the banks of the Mekong. Even though, or perhaps because, it is so far removed from the Cham agglomerations in several suburbs of Phnom Penh, Phum Trea has maintained its status as the Chams' spiritual centre, a position which was already noticed by the early French ethnographers.

Islamic values and the appearance of Islamic modernism

Whereas, since the relocation of the court from Oudong to Phnom Penh in the 1860s at the latest, the highest Muslim dignitaries were residing in Chruy Changvar in the proximity of the court, religious authority was traditionally wielded by the most eminent teachers (sg. *guru*). Indeed, in the 1930s neither Chruy Changvar nor An Giang in modern-day Vietnam—both renowned centres of Islamic learning among the Chams—could match the prominence of Phum Trea with its foremost

Mecca-educated teacher Hajji Osman. By then, the latter had allegedly already taught generations of students from all over the country.

Predominantly due to Malay influence, in the 1930s the Cambodian Chams were engaged in heated discussions regarding the details of proper religious observance. Even though the same period also witnessed fierce opposition between the religious establishment and adherents of Islamic reformism influenced by Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida (*kaum tua* – new group) mainly in the Dutch East Indies and the British Straits Settlements, the nature of the Chams' disagreements

The village of Phum Trea, located in rural Kampong Cham province, has long been known as the spiritual centre of Cambodia's Muslim minority, the Chams. As such, the religious currents in Phum Trea reflect broader trends of religious change in the region. In fact, many of these currents have manifested themselves most visibly in Phum Trea and its vicinity. Apart from presenting an overview of major developments within Cambodian Islam, this article argues that certain developments, such as the arrival of Islamic modernism and the emergence of Tablighi Jamaat as a locally relevant mass movement, exemplify the traditionalist reaction to other currents of Islamic internationalism, currents that are presently reshaping Cambodian Islam.

was still more fundamental. Perhaps these can most profitably be compared to the antagonisms between observant Muslims (*santri*) and *abangan* or Javanists in Java. Indeed, among the Chams, the split was caused by discussions revolving around the basic tenets of Islam, such as the number of daily prayers. Within these debates the language of religious instruction was of crucial importance: the representatives of traditional distinct Cham Islam insisted on the use of rudimentary Arabic and Cham language, as preserved in Cham manuscripts; whereas a new generation of scholars, partly educated in Kelantan or Patani, came to rely on Malay language and materials

for their religious instruction.¹ Eventually Malayization prevailed over Cham Islam. Yet, the latter has survived as a distinct minority within the Cambodian Chams (at times referred to as *Jahed*), whose leader, like the majority's grand mufti, has been awarded an honorific title by the Cambodian king.² Naturally Phum Trea and its Hajji Osman must have played an instrumental role in the advance of more orthodox teachings. The mentioned controversies among the Chams were not yet associated with the spread of Islamic modernism in Southeast Asia. However, as a major demand of the latter reform movement was not only the improvement of religious instruction, but also the introduction of mixed curricula featuring secular subjects, it is important to note that Phum Trea housed Hajji Osman's famous madrasa as well as a similarly renowned religious school, the first among the Cham community to rely on such a mixed curriculum.

Eventually in the 1950s, reformists educated in modern religious schools in Kelantan and Patani (and in certain instances even India), also came to criticize allegedly un-Islamic and backward practices in Cambodia. Elsewhere these purification campaigns led to intra-community strife. In Kroch Chmar village (located in Phum Trea's neighbouring district), the activities of two reformist imams, who had returned from studies abroad, created dissension and ultimately led to violence. In response, the government chose to have both imams deported from Cambodia in 1960.³

Phum Trea as Cambodia's Tablighi Jamaat stronghold

Beginning in the 1960s, the impact of foreign influences, so decisive for the developments within the Cambodian Cham community outlined above, was sharply reduced, and eventually petered out altogether over the following decade. Indeed, with the beginning of the second Indochina war in 1964, it became increasingly difficult to maintain foreign contacts. Civil war and US bombing in Cambodia in the first half of the 1970s worsened the situation; and Khmer Rouge rule, from 1975-1979, led to the almost complete physical elimination of Cham religious scholars and leadership as well as to the destruction of most religious infrastructure, and the death of a large portion of the Cham population.⁴ Obviously, these were not times destined for major developments within the religious community. Due to armed resistance by the remnants of the Khmer Rouge, notwithstanding the return of Cham refugees, this state of affairs continued throughout the 1980s. Yet, at

[T]he Tablighi centres appear to be self-sufficient communities focused on the preservation and cultivation of Islamic and Cham identity.

the same time, the first trickle of small-scale international Islamic aid started to arrive from the Islamic Development Bank and private businessmen based in Dubai. Such developments foreshadowed important changes in the 1990s and beyond.

During the 1980s, urban Chams actively sought attachment to and aid from the wider Muslim world; by the early 1990s, the number of foreign contacts was on the rise again, and soon reached an unprecedented level.⁵ Significantly, since the 1993 elections, numerous Saudi-Arabian, Kuwaiti, and Malaysian NGOs have built mosques, schools, and orphanages in Cambodia, and, in doing so, have exerted considerable influence on the face of Cham Islam in Cambodia. During the UN peace-keeping mission from early 1992 to summer 1993, Kampong Cham province and Phum Trea were located in the Indian sector and, strikingly, the *da'wa* (or *dakwa*) movement, Tablighi Jamaat, with its Indian roots had just started to gain notoriety in the area.

The movement first made its appearance in Cambodia in 1989, when the far-travelled Imam Sulaiman Ibrahim returned to Cambodia after almost two decades abroad. After his flight from Cambodia he studied in, among other places, Medina and Malaysia, where he first came into contact with the *dakwa* movement. In the following years, he visited affiliated institutions in India and South Thailand. Upon returning, he set out to spread the movement's message in his homeland, and in addition to the mandatory preaching missions, he taught in the village of Chumnik, situated like Phum Trea in Kampong Cham's Kroch Chhmar district. However, as Sulaiman's teachings quickly drew large numbers of students, he relocated to Phum Trea in 1992, where he built a large madrasa with donations from Malaysian supporters and exile Chams.

With its strong sense of community coupled with an emphasis on individual piety and activism, the movement spread rapidly among the Cambodian Chams, and by now has 20 provincial chapters. It seems that it is exactly this form of community mobilization with its focus on personal religious observance instead of forced efforts to come to terms with the demands of contemporary Cambodian realities, which accounts for the movement's mass appeal. The Tablighi Jamaat's character of a mass movement within Cambodian Islam is most obvious in the large crowds of people spending Thursday nights at associated mosques, when itinerant preachers are holding sermons. Perhaps an even more visible sign of Tablighi influence is constituted by their particular style of dress, namely long white robes and turbans, which stands in marked contrast to the traditional Cham attire of *sarong* and white skullcap, or the western dress of many urban Chams. This contrast is even more noticeable in respect to women's dress: while, since the early 1990s, Cham women have increasingly donned the hijab, it is predominantly in villages with a strong Tablighi influence, that one sees completely veiled women. Such attire was unknown in Cambodia until recently.

Despite its origination as an offshoot of the Indian reformist Deobandi movement, the Tablighi Jamaat appears in Cambodia with a distinctively Malay and traditionalist face. Foreign itinerant preachers are often Malays from South Thailand, and thus share a common background with the Chams, both belonging to a Muslim minority in a predominantly Buddhist country. Moreover, the Tablighis' ostentatiously Islamic style of dress stands in marked contrast to the Western costume mostly worn by representatives of Arab or Malay NGOs as well as by figures of the Malaysian political spectrum (either UMNO or PAS), who are similarly visiting Cambodia to aid the Chams.

Due to its emergence as a centre for Tablighi activities, Phum Trea has also regained its role as spiritual centre, at least as far as rural Cambodia is concerned. Although the centrally located mosque of Prek Prah in Phnom Penh is referred to as the focal point of the movement in Cambodia, it is beyond doubt that Phum Trea reigns supreme in terms of popular appeal. After all, it houses Cambodia's largest mosque and Tablighi madrasa; the latter draws students from all over the country and is staffed mostly by Chams educated in Southern Thai schools that are affiliated with the movement. Phum Trea also enjoys the presence of Imam Sulaiman. Moreover, situated in the historical Cham stronghold of Cambodia at some distance from the Khmer centres, its location is also an advantage as it lends support to its claim to be at the heart of "pure" Islamic learning. Similarly, the local strength of the movement serves to compensate for the relative neglect of the rural Chams by foreign charities and the politically active "big power" Muslims. Generally the Tablighi centres appear to be self-sufficient communities focused on the preservation and cultivation of Islamic and Cham identity. The

Image not available online

continuing appeal of the movement testifies to the successful implementation of these directives.

However, this new wave of religious change has also been criticized. The movement has been opposed by modernist Muslims as well as villagers, both of whom view its sectarian character with suspicion. Whereas Cham NGOs such as the Cambodian Muslim Development Foundation as well as Arab charities are promoting both religious and secular education, interaction with the Khmer majority, and participation in politics, with its mostly rural and suburban base, the Tablighi Jamaat is steering a potentially isolationist course by emphasizing religious education alone after primary school as the best means to avoid Khmerization.

The arising conflicts are strongly reminiscent of clashes between modernists and traditionalists in the preceding century. In both instances, such clashes have brought about the division of entire villages, as mosques and schools have been fought over. Often, the situation can only be resolved through the establishment of parallel structures. Similarly, Sulaiman's attempt to monopolize worship in Phum Trea's huge mosque, built with donations from local and exile Chams, and according to certain reports also with financing from Pakistan, was met with opposition. Consequently, the construction of small, independent mosques in the proximity of their giant counterpart was already begun before the completion of the latter.

Today the fates of the Tablighi Jamaat in Cambodia and Phum Trea are closely intertwined, and the future of the latter appears heavily dependent on that of the former. However, given the Tablighi movement's mass appeal among the rural Chams, an instrumental role in future developments within Cambodian Islam will certainly be accorded to Phum Trea. Nevertheless, as with the case of a similar *dakwa* group in Malaysia (namely the Darul Arqam), it is very likely that the movement will soon gain ground among urban Chams of the middle and higher strata of society. This, in turn, could lead to a rethinking of Tablighi efforts regarding the capital. Similarly, the expanding network of modern Muslim schools under the direction of modern oriented Cham NGOs into the rural areas may decrease the demand for the purely religious education espoused and championed by the Tablighis.

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Cambodian boy leaves a mosque closed down for alleged links with Jemaah Islamiyah.

Notes

1. On observations of the Cambodian Chams in the 1930s see Marcel Ner, "Les musulmans de l'Indochine Française," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 41 (1941): 165–200.
2. See Agnès De Féo, "Les Chams sot, dissidence de l'islam cambodgien," *Les Cahiers de l'Orient* 78 (2005): 115–124.
3. See William Collins, *The Chams of Cambodia* (Phnom Penh: Centre for Advanced Studies, 1996), 73–75.
4. See Ben Kiernan, "Orphans of Genocide: The Cham Muslims of Kampuchea under Pol Pot," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 20, no. 4 (1988): 1–33; Ysa Osman, *Oukoubah: Justice for the Cham Muslims under the Democratic Kampuchea Regime* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Centre of Cambodia, 2002).
5. For a more detailed account see Philipp Bruckmayr, "The Cham Muslims of Cambodia: From Forgotten Minority to Focal Point of Islamic Internationalism," *AJISS* 23, no. 3 (2006): 1–23.

Migrant Domestics and Religious Closeness in Yemen

MARINA DE REGT

In pre-revolutionary Yemen it was relatively common to allocate domestic tasks to people of lower social status but only elite families in the cities had permanent servants. They were mostly coming from rural areas and stayed with the family till they married or died. In addition, slavery was legitimate in Yemen until the early 1960s, yet only families of high social status, and particularly those living in the coastal areas, made use of slaves. With the overthrow of the Imamate in 1962 and the development of a nation-state, slavery was abolished. The equality of all citizens was emphasized and laid down in the constitution. Since then economic class has gradually become more important than social background. One of the reasons for this monetarism of the economy was that larger numbers of Yemenis of different social backgrounds migrated to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States in the early 1970s, where the sudden increase of the oil prices resulted in a high demand for (unskilled) labour. This led to a growth of the Yemeni economy and enriched people regardless of their social status. A new middle class emerged of people actively involved in trading, business, and the professions. While the impover-

Ethiopian women on their way to church in Sana'a, Yemen

While the presence of Asian women working as domestics in the rich countries of the Arabian Peninsula is a well-known phenomenon, it is less known that also in Yemen a similar trend has occurred. The majority of these women come from Somalia and Ethiopia, but there are Asian women as well. Why are migrant women employed as domestics? And which role does religion play in their employment?

ishment of rural areas forced people to migrate to the cities, returned migrants often decided to settle in cities as well. In particular, families of *qabilis* (tribesmen) became part of the new middle classes having changed from a rural to an urban lifestyle.

The emergence of this new middle class in the cities has had a major impact on women's lives. For a number of

Yemeni women migration to the city meant a decrease in workload as they lost their agricultural tasks and their work became restricted to domestic work and childcare. Yet, other women experienced an increase in workload. In many cases domestic tasks could no longer be divided between adult women living in the same household—with the younger ones doing the heavier tasks—but falling instead on the shoulders of one woman. In addition, because of the increased school enrolment of girls in urban areas, daughters were no longer automatically available for household chores. Moreover, in the past thirty years a growing number of urban women engaged in voluntary work or took up professional work in education, health care, administration, and other employment sectors. For these women combining their activities in and outside the home became a challenge for which employing domestic workers offered a solution. Employing domestic labour was and is only affordable for the middle and upper classes. Upper class families live in villas and multi-storey houses that require a lot of housework, and often have an active social life visiting relatives and friends and receiving guests at home. Because employing domestic workers facilitates a particular lifestyle, it has increasingly become a sign of social status. Employing migrant women as domestics is an even stronger sign of social status.

Despite the increased demand for paid domestic labour and the deterioration of the economy, few Yemeni women are employed as domestics. In addition to the historically low status of service professions, practices of gender segregation affect Yemeni women's willingness to work as domestics in the houses of unrelated men. But Yemeni families are also not in favour of employing Yemeni domestics. "Yemeni domestics are not clean" was one of the main reasons given in response to my query. This statement does not only refer to the fact that Yemeni women do not know how to clean, as they are often not acquainted with modern cleaning materials, but also to their social background. It refers to the old status hierarchy in which people carrying out service professions were of lower social background and were for this reason stigmatized as "dirty." In addition, in the old hierarchical system of social stratification status differentials between people were very clear and well-established. With the social and economic upheavals that have taken place in Yemen since the 1970s, such as the official abolishment of slavery and the enrichment of people of various social status groups, social boundaries between people of different social classes are less clear. The new middle classes are afraid of a blurring of class boundaries and therefore prefer not to employ Yemeni women. Instead, migrant women of different racial, religious, and national backgrounds are employed.¹



PHOTO BY MARINA DE REGT, 2006

Distance and closeness

The worldwide employment of migrant women as domestic workers is not accidental. In many countries there is a shift from employing local domestic workers to migrant domestic workers. Increasing levels of education and consequent access to higher skilled jobs has made domestic labour an unattractive option for local women of lower social classes, and resulted in an increasing demand for migrant women as domestics. Moreover, the fact that these migrant women often lack citizenship rights and are therefore easier to manipulate is a key factor for their being in demand. As Anderson states: "Racist stereotypes intersect with issues of citizenship, and result in a racist hierarchy which uses skin colour, religion, and nationality to construct some women as being more suitable for domestic work than others."² Given that paid domestic labour takes place in the private sphere of the employer, which is the public sphere for the domestic, boundaries have then to be strictly drawn. Physical boundaries are thus used to underline inequality. In many cases domestic workers do not eat together with their employers and are not allowed to enter certain places in the house. When they live with their employers, domestics sleep in rooms in the basement, on the roof, or on the compound. By employing domestic workers who are different from themselves with respect to class, ethnicity, and nationality, employers emphasize those social boundaries. The threatening closeness that is an intrinsic element of paid domestic labour is then easier resolved. Domestic service "can only operate smoothly when servants and employers are considered different from each other."³

Accordingly, in Yemen there is a clear hierarchy between domestic workers, and this hierarchy coincides to some extent with the class position of the employer. Asian women, such as Filipinas, Indian, and Indonesian women, are employed by the upper classes for cleaning, cooking, child care, and elderly care. Ethiopian women are mainly employed by the upper middle and middle classes, to also do cleaning, cooking, and care-taking jobs. Both Asian and Ethiopian women often live with their employers. Somali women are the predominant group of domestic workers employed by middle class families. Somali women never cook but always do cleaning jobs and they rarely live with the families of their employers. Yemeni women occupy the bottom of the ladder. They are employed as cleaners and for particular tasks such as baking bread or cleaning water pipes.

This hierarchy raises additional questions about the role that religion plays in the preferences of employers for domestic workers of a particular background. Asian and Ethiopian women, who are predominantly Christian,⁴ are higher valued than Somali and Yemeni women who are Muslim. Does this mean that being Muslim is a negative factor in paid domestic labour in Yemen, and if so, how can this be explained?

Religious closeness

When I asked Yemeni employers if religion played a role in their preference for certain domestics, many of them stated that this was not the case: "It doesn't matter if she is Christian or Muslim or whatever, as long as she is God-fearing" was an answer I often received. A small number of employers expressed a preference for Muslim domestics: "I feel more at ease when I work together with a Muslim woman. I understand her and she understands me. I feel better that way." A third group of employers preferred Christian women as domestics: "Christian women are honest, you can trust them, but Muslim women are unreliable, they come and go when they want." Hana, an upper class woman in Hodeidah, told me that her mother used to employ a Muslim Ethiopian domestic worker. But the young woman never wanted to accept orders and was very stubborn. "She did not want to be called *"shaghghala"* (houseworker) and at a certain moment, when we were talking about the washing machine that was not working (*shaghghal*), she started to shout and threatened to run away. She felt insulted because she thought that we were talking about her." Muslim women who are similar to their employers with regard to social and cultural background, educational level, and descent do not accept the hierarchical relationship with their employers, a reluctance which may be related to the emphasis placed on equality in Islam. "She should not think that she is better than me" often expressed Muslim domestic workers' sen-

timents. In response, they use different strategies to undermine this hierarchy, such as coming late to work, not showing up, and avoiding certain tasks. As a consequence they are stereotyped as "unreliable," "unclean," and "lazy." Somali women in particular are stigmatized in this way, which is also related to the fact that they are refugees and therefore seen as a threat and an intrusion.⁵

The intricate ways in which employers prefer domestics that are "religiously close but socially distant" manifests itself in the increasing employment of Indonesian women by upper class families. Indonesian women are attractive as domestic workers because they are not part of the local community and therefore do not challenge social boundaries, while being religiously close. "They have the same religion as Yemenis and that is why there is a demand for them," Fadl, a recruitment agent of mixed Yemeni-Indonesian background, told me. He is regularly approached by upper class families looking for Indonesian domestic workers.

As Muslim women of a different nationality and ethnicity but coming from a country with which Yemenis historically had close contacts,⁶ Indonesian women are attractive domestic workers. Indonesian women are employed as live-in domestic workers and as cooks, nannies, and caretakers of the sick and the elderly. They have replaced Filipinas, who not only have become too expensive because of the high inflation rates in Yemen but who are also seen as too assertive and too "open-minded," a complaint which points to a stronger emphasis on conservative (Muslim) values among certain families. In addition, Indonesian women have a weak legal position and do not claim citizenship status, which implies that they are easier to control.

Employers' preferences have therefore less to do with the religious background of the domestic worker as with the extent to which they can maintain distance and assert control and authority over their domestics. Employers who explicitly prefer non-Muslim domestic workers do so to create distance, yet employers who prefer Muslim domestics do not do so to reduce distance. Instead, they are compromising some of the features of distance for various reasons. The fact that Indonesian women are cheaper than Filipinas is, for example, for some employers, a reason to employ them, while other employers prefer Indonesian women because personal care of the elderly or of children is involved. Religious closeness becomes then more important. Protecting the reputation of the family may be another reason to employ Muslim domestics, and in doing so avoid discussions about possible "inappropriate" behaviour of male relatives or of domestics. Employers prefer to employ domestic workers who are socially, culturally, and religiously distant, but they might feel a need to compromise this preference and opt for an intricate balance of closeness and distance.

Notes

1. This is part of the research programme "Migrant Domestic Workers: Transnational Relations, Families and Identities" at ISIM and the Amsterdam School for Social Science Research. See also Marina de Regt, "Preferences and Prejudices: Employers' Views on Domestic Workers in the Republic of Yemen," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (forthcoming 2007).
2. Bridget Anderson, *Doing the Dirty Work? The Global Politics of Domestic Labour* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2000).
3. Karen Hansen, *Distant Companions: Servants and Employers in Zambia, 1900–1985* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).
4. The majority of Filipinas in Yemen are Catholic, most Indian domestics are Hindu, and the majority of Ethiopian domestics are Ethiopian Orthodox. Almost all Indonesian women are Muslim.
5. Yemen is the only country on the Arabian Peninsula that has ratified the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. There are approximately 80,000 Somali refugees registered in Yemen but their actual number is much higher.
6. Yemeni merchants from the Hadramawt area travelled to the Indian archipelago in previous centuries.

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How “Islamic” is Secularism?

Lessons from Cape Town

SINDRE BANGSTAD

Modernization theory rests on the assumption that to be modern is to be secular, and that state secularism and societal secularization is an inevitable outcome of modernization processes. Developments have long since demonstrated the fallacy of these assumptions. The organizing master narrative for social science analysis of developments in the “Muslim world” since the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the re-Islamization “from below” of large parts of the “Muslim world” since then has, if anything, been that of an Islamic resurgence which sweeps away everything that stands in its way. Hence, in a by no means uncharacteristic assertion, Mahmood sweepingly claims that there had been “two decades of the ascendancy of global religious politics” prior to September 11 2001.¹

Such master narratives provide powerful explanatory paradigms and historical narratives for the organization and structuring of disparate experiences. But much like modernization theory, these particular master narratives tend to start from the inherently flawed epistemological premise that there is but one “royal road” to the understanding of Muslims and the “Muslim world.” More often than not, they miss the fact that the secular and the religious are deeply implicated in one another in any given societal context, and the extent to which resurgent Islam and re-Islamization are in themselves phenomena of secularization—the latter understood as an increasing differentiation of spheres.² Nor does it provide a useful framework for distinguishing between secularism as a theory and a practice in particular contexts, or for that matter for distinguishing between nominal and practising Muslims.

Prominent post-structuralist and post-colonial anthropologists like Asad and Mahmood³ have provided legitimacy for the construction of these master narratives. Asad and Mahmood both tend to posit Muslims as pre-eminently and determinatively religious, and to see Islam as a religious tradition which articulates a radical difference or alterity to secular liberalism. This is apparent from Asad’s statement to the effect that “the Islamic tradition ought to lead us to question many of the liberal categories themselves” and Mahmood’s call for a “critical scrutiny” of liberal notions from the “standpoint of Islamic traditions.”⁴ Such statements are premised on a notion of secularism and liberalism as being of “Western” origin and anathema to Islamic traditions—as well as a fundamental “ethnographic refusal” to engage with Muslims’ actual experiences with secularism and liberalism, and to explore non-“Western” genealogies of secularism. Asad argued in his programmatic statement from 1986 that “one should go beyond drawing parallels and attempt a systematic exploration of differences” between Islamic and other traditions. Furthermore, “for the anthropologist of Islam, the proper theoretical beginning is therefore an instituted practice ... into which Muslims are inducted as Muslims.”⁵

Foundational religious texts play a crucial role in Asad’s concept of an Islamic tradition, as they do for Mahmood. The problem here is of course that Asad’s formulation of what a supposed anthropology of Islam ought to be about predetermines the outcome. The anthropology of Islam, it seems, ought primarily to be about practising Muslims and their embodied and discursive engagement with foundational religious texts, period. But surely the question as to whether a Muslim is practicing or not is a question to be determined in the course of the empirical enquiry, and not at the outset? This is perhaps particularly

Secularism is often seen as anathema to Islamic traditions. The findings from research on the responses of Muslims in Cape Town to state secularism and societal secularization in post-apartheid South Africa indicate the emergence of an ambiguous accommodation between Muslims and the secular state, and thus challenge reductionist assumptions about the relation of Islamic traditions to secularism.

so in contexts in which Muslims live as minorities in secular and liberal societies, contexts in which the “cognitive contamination” from non-religious normative models can seldom be shut completely out, and in which religious faith as practice ceases to form part of the doxic or “taken-for-granted.”

Perhaps it is time to replace the misnomer of the so-called “anthropology

of Islam” with the “anthropology of Muslims.” In my Ph.D. dissertation⁶ I problematize master narratives premised on the incompatibility between secularism and Islamic traditions by exploring the responses of Muslims in Cape Town, South Africa to the advent of a post-apartheid society. Post-apartheid South Africa is a society in which dominant sections of the new social and political elites subscribe to the secular and liberal values enshrined in the 1996 Constitution, and it is also a society which has seen a process of a contested secularization since 1994. My findings suggest that there has been an ambiguous accommodation on the part of Cape Muslims and their ulama with the new social and political regime. This ambiguous accommodation is based on an appreciation of the fact that the post-apartheid state is premised on a secular principle of neutrality as between religions and their adherents—which the apartheid state, with its privileging of reformist Protestant Christianity, was not. Muslim ulama have selectively appropriated a discourse of human rights and constitutional values in order to advance the religious rights of Muslims in the realm of family law and in state institutions, at the same time as they have contested the constitutional and human rights values that they see as anathema to Islamic normativities—such as the legalization of same-sex practice and relationships, abortion, and pornography and the abolition of the death penalty. But this ambiguous accommodation is also based on the fact that secularization among Muslims in hybrid and multicultural Cape Town predates the advent of a post-apartheid society, and is implicated in the practical accommodations between Muslims and non-Muslims in underprivileged communities, townships, and informal settlements on the Cape Flats (the vast area outside the City Bowl where most of Cape Town’s population live). Cape Muslims are therefore in profound ways entangled in the secular logic of a secularizing state.

A short history of Muslims in Cape Town

Cape Town, with an estimated 3.1 million inhabitants, has had a Muslim presence at least since 1658. It is home to approximately 47% of South Africa’s Muslim population. Muslims made up 1.46% of the national population in 2001. Cape Muslims are predominantly Shaf’i. The largest and most influential Sunni ulama organization in Cape Town is the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), established in 1945. In Muslim social imaginaries in South Africa, Cape Muslims are, much like the cityscape of Cape Town itself, often thought of as “liberal.” This imagined “liberalness” makes reference to the fact that many Cape Muslim females are employed outside the home (by choice or necessity), that there is often a remarkable absence of strict gender segregation in private and public spheres among Cape Muslims, but also to a more lax and permissive attitude toward morality and sexuality among Cape Muslims of all social strata (but perhaps more so among Muslims in underprivileged and mixed neighbourhoods in Cape Town). Cape Town’s Muslims are fractured by social status, ethnicity, and religious orientation. A view to

the effect that Islam is determinative for the actions and behaviours of Cape Muslims therefore does not bring us very far. Most Cape Muslims are classified as coloureds for the purposes of censuses, followed by South African Indians and black Africans. The latter group has seen the strongest growth in the number of adherents to Islam, as obstacles to proselytization and interaction under apartheid have disappeared, and as Muslims from other parts of the African continent have established a presence in Cape Town.

Research on Islam in prison

An exploration of the transformation of the religious rights of Muslim inmates in a prison in Cape Town provide vistas to the ways in which post-apartheid secularism has generated new openings for the recognition of what many Cape Muslims regard as "Muslim religious rights" within state institutions. Under apartheid, the prison service had been an instrument in the state-supported empowerment of white Afrikaners: in 1990, 90% of senior prison officers were white, and many of these had a background in Christian churches. In 2005, I found that there were only a handful of prison warders and officials who were Muslims. Christian chaplains still had a privileged position within the prison service. Still, there had been significant achievements as far as the recognition of Muslim inmates rights to religious practice in the course of the 1990s. These were the heydays of "human rights talk" in post-apartheid South Africa. Guarantees for freedom of religion for inmates in South African prisons were provided under Section 14 (1–4) of the Correctional Services Act 111 of 1998. On the basis of tactical alliances with post-apartheid prison managers with a background in the anti-apartheid struggle and as such sympathetic towards the invocation of human rights discourse, and in spite of strong internal opposition to these measures, voluntary Muslim prison imams and the ulama organizations on the outside had managed to ensure the rights of Muslim inmates to regular provisions of halal (ritually clean) food, to being serviced by a Muslim chaplain (from 1998), and to the use of a prison hall for the purpose of weekly *zuhr* (midday) prayer (from 1999). Post-apartheid secularism and the nominal state commitment to neutrality between the adherents of the various religions in South Africa that this entails in this case seems to have provided a grounds from which arguments for greater religious rights for South African Muslims could be made.

New framework for thinking the secular and religious

Inasmuch as the post-structuralist and post-colonial anthropology of Islam of, for instance, Asad and Mahmood is premised on a fixation with Muslims' radical alterity and difference and is anchored in the view that secularism is "Western" in its origins, it constitutes secularism as anathema to Islamic traditions. It can only do so by neglecting pre-co-

lonial and non-"Western" genealogies of secularism, and the actual experiences with secularism of Muslims in particular contexts (particularly in minority contexts), and in so doing, subscribing to what essentially amounts to an ethno-centric view of secularism.⁷ There can be no doubt that a secular state like the South African post-apartheid state is premised on a differentiation between secular and religious spheres, and as such delimits the legitimate expression of religious sentiments in the public and political spheres. But given the fact that 86% of South Africans declare themselves as religious, South African state secularism cannot be seen as determinative on the level of individual consciousnesses, and essentially remains contested. State secularism and societal secularization in post-apartheid South Africa can in a certain sense be seen as having set in motion a process of re-Islamization among Cape Muslims. It finds its most visible articulations among Cape Muslims in the expansion of religious education, the proliferation of Muslim media, in greater identification with a global imagined community of Muslims, the ummah, and an increased emphasis on appropriate dress for female Muslims.

If we venture beyond the ideologization of secularism and of Islamic traditions in the works of some post-structuralist anthropologists of Islam, we might discover that secularism has in some contexts provided a defence of the rights of religious minorities of the kind that Muslims in post-apartheid South Africa constitute. For all their contestations of a particular law sanctioned by the Constitution of 1996 and of the secularization of South African society in general, it seems that it is precisely this that mainstream Muslims in contemporary South Africa have come to discover. Secularism may therefore in practice, if not necessarily in theory, be more "Islamic" than what is commonly assumed.

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Notes

1. Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation," *Public Culture* 18, no. 2 (2006): 323.
2. Sami Zubaida, "Islam and Secularization," *Journal of Asian Social Science* 33, no. 3 (2005): 445.
3. See Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam And Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); and Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival And The Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
4. Cf. Nermeen Shaikh, *Asia Source* Interview with Talal Asad, 16 December 2002 at, http://www.asiasource.org/news/special_reports/asad.cfm and Saba Mahmood's response, "Questioning Liberalism, Too" to Khaled Abou El Fadl's "Islam and The Question of Democracy," *Boston Review*, April/May 2003.
5. Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 1986), 4 and 15.
6. Sindre Bangstad, *Global Flows, Local Appropriations: Facets of Re-Islamization and Secularisation Among Contemporary Cape Muslims* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).
7. João Pina-Cabral, "Three points on secularism and anthropology," *Social Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (2003): 329.



A rally to protest the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Cape Town, 2006

PHOTO BY O. ESACK, 2006

From Repentance to Pious Performance

KARIN VAN NIEUWKERK

The late Shaykh Mitwalli al-Shaarawi is one of the preachers most connected to the “repentance” of Egyptian artists. In the TV serial about his life “Imam al-Da’ah” his influence on artists is represented through the character of Badriyya. Badriyya is a good-hearted poor girl from the Shaykh’s natal village. At a young age she starts working in a coffeehouse and eventually becomes the owner of this coffeehouse. She constantly feels remorse and does not want her child to be raised in a coffeehouse. Instead of opening a “proper” business she is tempted to invest in the lucrative but “sinful” branch of entertainment and opens a nightclub. During her meetings with Shaykh al-Shaarawi she expresses her sincere intention to veil, to leave the sinful profession, and to open an orphanage but it takes many years and encounters with al-Shaarawi to finally “repent.”

Whereas Shaykh al-Shaarawi has always been modest about his influence on the repentant artists—stating that guidance is from God—many artists acknowledge his influence on them. Interestingly this also holds true for some of the leading actors and actresses in the TV serial. Shaykh al-Shaarawi is played by the actor Hassan Yusef who stopped performing for a while after he and his wife Shams al-Barudi met with the shaykh. In the serial, Shaykh al-Shaarawi’s wife is played by Afaf Shoeib. She also met with al-Shaarawi and stepped down in 1992. She returned after ten years and started acting with a veil. Badriyya, played by the actress Sawsan Badr, also stepped down but returned unveiled.

Shaykh al-Shaarawi’s view on the shameful of art has apparently waned and new discourses on art and religion have gained relevance. Two decades later the star preacher Amr Khaled even begged the repentant artists to return and to use their God-given talents in support of the *nahda*, the Islamic revival.

Two decades of “repentant” artists¹

Shams al-Barudi was the first artist to publicly announce her repentance in 1982. During her pilgrimage to Mecca she had several spiritual experiences after which she totally changed her life from a seductive actress into a devoted believer, mother, and housewife. The dancer Hala al-Safi left the profession in 1986 after a vision in which the Prophet covered her loose hair. Actress Hanaa Tharwat and her husband quit immediately after their meeting with Shaykh al-Shaarawi. The singer Yasmin al-Khiyyam, daughter of the renowned Quran reciter Shaykh al-Hosari, continued until 1990 despite the pressure of al-Shaarawi who deemed Yasmin’s profession a disgrace for his friend Shaykh al-Hosari. She eventually left due to her responsibilities as manager of the charity organization al-Hosari, named after her late father.

Since the 1980s, many Egyptian singers, dancers, and actresses, donning the veil, stepped down and publicly denounced art as shameful. Recently, such performers have reappeared veiled on screen. This article highlights the changing discourses on art that inform the artists’ choices. These celebrities have been instrumental in fashioning Islamic lifestyles suitable for the higher classes, a phenomenon which ultimately gave birth to a market for pious performances.



Shaykh al-Shaarawi and the artists, book cover

In the early 1990s, a “caravan” of singers, dancers and actress “repented,” probably speeded up by the 1992 earthquake. Dancers Amira and Sahar Hamdi as well as actresses Shahira, Afaf Shoeib, Soheir al-Babli, Sawsan Badr, and Soheir Ramzi veiled and stepped down. They were accused of being paid by “Islamist groups” and forced to defend their genuine devotion. Spiritual experiences featured less prominently in their stories. Contacts with other repentant artists who gave religious lessons, preached, and invited preachers such as Omar Abd al-Kafi were crucial.

In the mid 1990s, young singers Hanan and Mona Abd al-Ghani, and actresses Abir Sharqawi, Abir Sabri, and Mayar al-Bablawi caused another shock in the secular press when they announced their decision to veil and to step down. Yet most of them returned after a few years of religious study and contemplation as a veiled actress or TV presenter of religious programmes. This inspired the older generation of stepped-down artists to return as well and presently Afaf Shoeib, Mona Abd al-Ghani, Soheir Ramzi, Soheir al-Babli, and Shahira are back on screen, the latter with a religious programme in Amr Khaled style. The latest case of “repentance” by an actress was Hanan Turk. Interestingly, she did not even retire but immediately started acting with a veil. Whereas initially it was difficult to find appropriate roles with a veil—it is forbidden on the Egyptian channels except in religious and historical plays—presently many serials and programmes financed by Saudi

Arabia and the Gulf States find their way into the Egyptian homes of the lucky “dish”-owners. During my fieldwork in 2006, a new Saudi channel, al-Risala, was opened and many veiled artists I had interviewed paraded on the screen.

From Shaykh al-Shaarawi to Amr Khaled

The return of artists is partly related to a more relaxed religious discourse on art that emerged in the late 1990s. Whereas the repentant artists of the 1980s and early 1990s were mainly inspired by the conservative Shaykh al-Shaarawi and Omar Abd al-Kafi, around the turn of the century the moderate Islamist al-Qaradawi and young preacher Amr Khaled are favoured.

Shaykh al-Shaarawi (1911–1998) was venerated by many and died with an almost saintly radiation. He did not extensively tackle the topic of art but generally held that art is like a glass or knife. It can be used for good purposes or for bad ends. Female artists, however, are “itching the sexual instincts.” Shaykh al-Shaarawi was generally unfavourable towards work by women except out of sheer necessity. Citing that God rather prefers a woman’s prayer to be in her house than in the mosque, in her room than in her house, and in her bedroom rather than in her room, he concluded that acting, even with a veil, is not permitted.

Dr Omar Abd al-Kafi was born in 1951 and is a modern-looking shaykh without the customary imam head-covering and caftan. He has become (in) famous for his lectures on Judgement Day and "the torments of the grave." He was banned by the government. Although in general he holds that art is creativity whose right is right and wrong is wrong, he calls cinema the devils' home. Like Shaarawi his view on work for women is that the best place for them is to be protected at home.²

Dr Yusuf al-Qaradawi is considered a moderate Islamist belonging to the *wasatiyya* movement.³ He is very influential through new media such as *al-Jazeera* and *Islam Online*. Several pious performers presently consider his views on art authoritative and final. He firmly states that there is no conflict between piety and moderate entertainment. Reasoning that everything is permissible except if it is clearly stated that something is *haram*, he infers that art is *mubah*, permitted. Diversion is essential to recreate but one should find a balance between religious obligation and recreation. The present state of art, however, is totally corrupt and needs immediate repentance. Also his gender discourse is not encouraging for working women. He considers the home their "great kingdom." Anyone attempting to remove women from their kingdom in the name of freedom, work, or art is the enemy of women and is rejected by Islam.⁴

His younger colleague satellite preacher, Amr Khaled, is a rising star. In 1995, he entered the religious arena without religious education. He was banned by the government but through his connection with Yasmin al-Khayyam, he started working in her mosque. When he was faced with another prohibition, he left Egypt and now works for Dream TV and Iqra satellite channel. Amr Khaled treats women as serious believers and is not against women's participation in work on the condition that they are veiled. He emphasizes the immense importance of art. Beauty is essential in Islam and the Prophet enjoyed beauty and art. The Prophet did not reject the art present at his time but turned it into a tool for building and vitalizing the new community. This is according to Amr Khaled exactly what needs to be repeated at present. He calls upon all male and female artists to return and support the Islamic revival.

Trend watchers and trendsetters

Although the discourse on art became more encouraging, the discourse on gender initially remained conservative. It is only with preachers such as Amr Khaled that ideas on gender, religion, and art are favourable for women's veiled return to art. The current stage of Islamization in Egypt is described as "post-Islamist": "thick in ritual, thin in politics" and mockingly referred to as "air-conditioned Islam."⁵ After a period of violent clashes with militant Islamists, the broad piety movement that had been waxing in the form of mosque attendance, religious lessons, and religious literature and cassettes came to the fore. It did not only involve the lower and lower-middle classes but also reached the higher echelons of Egyptian society. Yet upon reaching the higher classes, the Islamization of life style got a distinctive flavour. It became comfortable and not too strict. To be wealthy, have fun, and recreate is no longer perceived as contradictory to piety. The post-Islamist trend created a need and a market for art and recreation in accordance with Islamic sensibilities.



opened an Islamic school, and Yasmin al-Khayyam has been influential in promoting preachers and in spreading Islamic charity to the higher classes. Artists have thus been influential in Islamizing the higher classes to which they themselves belong.⁶

When the market was open for Islamic recreation they were eager to return. When the options to return as a veiled performer increased, despite the discouragement of the Egyptian regime, they were happy to

develop Islamic productions. They are no longer repentant artists but *multazim* or pious performers. Soheir al-Babli stipulates conditions in her contract: only with a veil, not being touched or embraced by men, except for a kiss on the hand or the forehead if the play needs it. The texts should only contain respectable dialogues on themes which make sense to people. Besides, the play should be about important themes in the Arab world and not a plain imitation of the West. Pious performers try to develop new Islamic aesthetics. When I asked them to mention good pious productions, the list was still fairly short. The TV serial on the life of the venerable Shaykh al-Shaarawi, though, was one of them.

Notes

1. I collected dossiers about 26 stepped-down or repentant artists and conducted interviews with 13 of them. There are many interviews and stories about them in newspapers and tabloids. The Islamist press warmly embraced their stories of guidance and revelation and widely circulated them.
2. M. Fawzi, *Shaykh al-Shaarawi ... al-'ilag bi 'l-Qur'an wa umur al-dunya* (Cairo, 2000); G. Abdo, *No God But God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
3. R. W. Baker, *Islam without Fear* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).
4. Y. al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam* (Cairo, 1997).
5. A. Bayat, "Piety, Privilege and Egyptian Youth," *ISIM Review*, no. 10 (2002): 23; H. Tammam and P. Haenni, "Chat Shows, Nashid Groups and Lite Preaching. Egypt's air-conditioned Islam," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, September 2003.
6. See also Karin van Nieuwkerk, "Piety, repentance and gender: Born-again singers, dancers and actresses in Egypt," in M. Janson and D. Schultz, forthcoming.

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**Amr Khaled
and the artists,
book cover**

[I]f celebrities
choose to veil
and to leave the
spotlights for the
mosque it has an
enormous impact
on millions.

Re-enchanting Turkey Religious Stories on TV

AHU YIĞİT

In the “journey of modernization,” starting from the last days of the Ottoman Empire and heading towards an unknown and indefinite future, Turkey has had to re-sketch the place of religion in different spheres. After declaring the Turkish Republic in 1923, the state elites gained some success in establishing secularism *à la turca*. In contrast to Western style secularism, which requires the total withdrawal of the state from religious affairs, the Turkish elites asserted that all religious activity would be controlled by the state alone. Another side to this success story occurred precisely as a result of these very interventions to regulate individual private religious spheres. For such interventions, aimed at transforming the daily practice of Islam within the public sphere, have rarely left any room for negotiation. Eventually, transformations in the daily religion occurred, but these were not in accordance with the original aims of the state elite. Due to the interventions, daily religion has found new and “modern” ways of expression far removed from the expectations and wishful thinking of those so determined to remove the remains of the past.

Modernization is associated with the loss of enchantment because the most significant indications of religion—such as heavenly miracles or devastating catastrophes caused by sinfulness—are now appreciated as natural and more important, explicable phenomenon. This article explores one of the instances in which the failed transformation proposed above, has been occurring and has, in some points, resulted in a process of re-enchantment. The re-enchantment is presented in new visual settings while employing the original religious plots—which are no longer visible to us—mainly as media representations of religious miracles. Television series in focus narrate little stories that make us believe in the (im)possibility of worldly justice and inject our sense of our own beings as a part of a greater whole in which good is rewarded and evil is punished. The following example, taken from *Büyük Buluşma* on Samanyolu TV, helps the reader to imagine the re-enchanting power of the media.

Islamic science fiction

A woman (called Yildiz) is about to wake up on a platform floating in the middle of the sky. A man dressed in white, called Amil, informs her that she is dead. In the background, there is rock music; some notes are highlighted by *ney*, a traditional (and spiritually symbolic) flute prominent in Middle Eastern music. The verses remind us “you cannot escape from the final judgement; turn back and watch your life.” Amil starts to interrogate Yildiz about the life she has lived, while the audience is shown fragments from her past: She has a sick son, who is in need of constant care, but Yildiz is bored of being at home and asks her husband to buy her a computer. Initially dismissing her request and complaining at the vices of computers, her husband eventually gives in. It proves to be a turning point in Yildiz’s life. Subsequently, she starts to neglect her duties at home and becomes increasingly engrossed in the Internet. The treacherous qualities of the net soon reveal themselves. Her net contacts deceive and swindle her, and Yildiz dies while trying to trace them back.

Focusing on the increasing popularity of Turkish TV programmes in which miracles, morality, and virtue play prominent roles the author describes the re-enchantment of modern media in Turkey. Moreover, while in Turkey divides between the “religious” and the “secular” are assumed to be particularly stark, the TV programmes reveal a vibrant cross-fertilization between Islamists and secularists.

Amil confronts Yildiz with the mistakes she has made; she, in response, admits her guilt, repents and asks for forgiveness. Thereupon, all those who had prayed for the deceased woman following her death encircle her, and suddenly there is a splendour of light on the screen. A book gently falls from the sky into her arms rays of light erupting from it. Yildiz has been given the “book

of light,” an indication that her soul will go to heaven. The episode ends showing Yildiz with a modest and devout smile walking towards a green-lit door.

For the last six years, Turkish television channels have been flooded by series such as this one, all heavily influenced by Islamic ideas of justice. The trend first started with *Sır Kapısı* and *Büyük Buluşma*¹ on Samanyolu tv, followed by Kanal 7’s *Kalp Gözü*. These series were produced and broadcasted by Islamist channels.² Interestingly, secular television channels also joined to benefit from this trend. As a result, in 2005, the same show was broadcast on five different Turkish channels: two Islamist and three secular ones. Secular channels changed the content to some extent, but the framework remained virtually identical.

... ultimate divine
justice is contrasted
with the justice of
men or the state,
which is open
to abuse by the
powerful.

Secular counterparts

Though secular television channels are known for their harsh criticism of the Islamists they did not hesitate to start their own versions of this kind of series. They show miniseries which are the replicas of *Sır Kapısı* or *Kalp Gözü*, even if they have refrained from copying the “science fiction” shows such as *Büyük Buluşma*, described above. The example below, taken from the programme *Gizli Dünyalar* shown on Show TV, serves to illustrate the links, similarities, as well as differences between the two types of channel.

In one series, a girl named Aygul from the provinces arrives in Istanbul to start living with her sister’s family. Soon she takes up a job as a secretary in an unnamed company. Aygul starts flirting with a young man from her office and, before long, the two are living together. This is problematic: extra-marital relations violate established norms concerning what is legitimate in Turkish society. The man had managed to persuade her to agree to this arrangement only after promising that he would marry her within a few months; unsurprisingly, he does not keep his promise. Rather, he starts gambling and courting other women, and paying less attention to Aygul. The series reaches its climax when Aygul tells her lover that she is pregnant, after which he kicks her out of the house. Even her sister does not accept to take Aygul back into her house. Aygul is homeless until an old couple takes her into their home, and they end up becoming her new parents. When the couple dies, she and her son inherit their restaurant business. In the final scene, the boy’s father, physically disabled and looking miserable, comes to the restaurant and asks for a bowl of soup. The moral message is obvious: as a result of gambling or drinking, he has lost everything while Aygul has redeemed herself.

These series were broadcast on Show TV, Star TV, and ATV. However, ATV’s interpretation was different. Here, the main focus was not justice, but love. Thus, whereas the others were concerned with showing how the unjust and immoral will eventually be punished, this one told the audience that lovers would always re-unite. The basic format of these

series, however, did not differ at all. In all of them, a male announcer, filmed in a mysterious, historical setting swirling with mist, gives a short outline of the coming episode, and when this ends, he explains the story's moral message. The plots are not original, but variations of main themes: a woman cheated on by a man, or a man trapped by alcohol or gambling. In the background, we invariably find figures of pity—such as a penniless old man or woman, denied the respect their age deserves.

Symbols, judgement, and endurance

In both the secular and Islamist versions, the narration relies on overt and often very similar symbols, yet the symbols correspond to different sets of values. Whether the images show styles of dress, manners of speaking and behaviour, or even new technological devices, these are all placed on a moral continuum and valued either as good or bad. As a result of the pressing concern with morality, the characters in the series become caricatures acting within an "ideal" reality offering one-dimensional, therefore very familiar, answers and guidelines.

Drinking alcohol and smoking are obviously bad, whereas praying and obeying the elders are valorized practices. Symbols related to ideas of proper femininity centre on obedience to a husband or a father. In the Islamist broadcast, a woman is either veiled or moderately dressed. If she has a job, this is usually the result of poor economic conditions, and she is likely to face problems at the workplace. In secular interpretations, women can work and this is not necessarily degrading. They may dress in a more liberal manner, but they are still responsible to their husbands. Symbols that signal moral deprivation include the excessive use of make up, consumption of alcohol, or loud laughter. The portrayal of a daughter typically includes complaints about her father's poor financial status. In all cases, morally deprived women corrupt men around them. On the other hand, men are corruptible beings.

Submission is another key symbol. In both types of series, the characters suffer from the cruelty of other people. Their misfortunes are presented as opportunities to pass God's test on earth. Rather than complaining, the unfortunate pray to God for salvation and forgiveness. It may take many years, even generations for eternal justice to take place, but in the end, God's justice *will* prevail. This ultimate divine justice is contrasted with the justice of men or the state, which is open to abuse by the powerful.

Symbols are also important for laying out the variables for the concept of justice. While in Islamist series, the characters are judged according to their compliance to the Quran and religious requirements, in secular counterparts, we do not see explicit references to religion. Instead they aim to present "controversial issues, with a mission to make conscience and reason meet."³ Accordingly, the judgement is reached through a set of established moral rules derived from reason and conscience. Yet, we know that the final judgement is identical in both, whether derived from moral or religious rules, which in effect overlap and construct each other.

Islamists vs. secularists/reality vs. fiction?

The original series shown on the Islamist channels are efforts to create Islamic mythologies. Whether they reached their aim or not, they certainly succeeded in attracting public attention, and even triggered another section of society to create similar mythologies. Although usually stressing the virtues of secularism, the secular channels have found it appropriate to model their own series on those of the Islamist channels. They have softened the religious flavouring but preserved the underlying morality of the original. This interaction was not one sided. The Islamists were also influenced by the modernist approaches, which we tend to associate only with the secular public.⁴



SOURCE: WWW.SAMANYOLU.COM.TR

One conclusion to be derived from the content explored is the extent to which the religious and secular circles were able to influence each other under a system that is, to a very large degree, prone to polarization between the two. However, in this article another broader argument has been raised on the role the Turkish media plays in re-enchanting by means of religious and/or moral appeal. Until these series, the appearance of Islam in the Turkish media was either through instructive and mostly unpopular documentaries or through news broadcasts that ridiculed most traditional practices and stressed their vices. Now, by contrast, religion has become popular in a modern sense. Yet, this article also asserts that this popularity, although relating to religion, does not solely concern religion. Rather, it concerns how the ability of symbols to appeal to our imagination has shrunk, so to speak, due to disenchantment caused by modernization. Thus, when the spiritual phenomenon becomes visible to our eyes, even in the television series, the audience enjoys some form of catharsis by identifying himself/herself with the plot and the characters displayed. Accordingly, some sort of enchantment occurs. This is not the direct result of an actual religious experience—as used to be the case before modernity—but as a result of the reproduction and visualization of the virtual miracles of religion.

**From the series
Büyük Buluşma
on Samanyolu
TV**

Notes

1. The names chosen for these series also have religious or mysterious tones. *Sır Kapısı* is "Door of Secrets" and *Kalp Gözü* means "The Eye of the Heart."
2. In this article, the channels established by Islamic capital are considered Islamic. The secular channels dealt with here are the ones that rely on other kinds of capital and those that define themselves as secular.
3. <http://www.showtv.net>.
4. For an account of the relation between modernity and Islam, see: Nilüfer Göle, *Forbidden Mahrem: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

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Islamophonic: New Styles in Reporting

NANDAGOPAL R. MENON

How can reporting be improved? Do emulation-worthy examples exist? This article argues that in his 1997 book, *Covering Islam*, Edward Said provides valuable insights into Islam and Muslim life that could inform a meaningful reporting on the subject. It then points out one rare instance of reportage where those insights have been put to use—"Islamophonic," a weekly information podcast started this January by the London-based Guardian group of publications. By analyzing three reporting samples from the podcast, this paper illustrates how a sophisticated and responsible reporting about Islamic issues and Muslims is realized by "Islamophonic." I conclude by drawing attention to how such reportage could contribute to creating better inter-community relations in a multicultural and multiethnic society like the UK.

Understanding Islam

Edward Said suggests in *Covering Islam* that Islam ought to be viewed at least at three broadly different, yet inter-linked, levels. First comes the Quran itself, the central religious text of the faith. Second is the broad interpretive frameworks: the huge corpus of Quranic commentaries (*tafsir*), the various biographies of the Prophet (*sira*), the traditions of the Prophet (Hadith) and the various schools of Islamic law. Third, and the most crucial, is the level in "which the various ideologies have been lived, the practices to which they have been linked, practices which certainly influenced them if they did not inspire them."¹ That is, the realm of the faithful—Muslims. Here the faith exists in its most complex and diverse forms, making reductionist generalizations, based exclusively on the first two levels, meaningless. However, all the three levels constantly interact and cannot be mechanically separated from each other. Said also notes how Islam cannot be used as a catch-all term to explain everything that happens in the lives of Muslims.

Representing Islam: the Islamophonic example²

Islamophonic started podcasting on 24 January 2007. Anchored by a young Muslim woman reporter of the *Guardian*, Riazat Butt, it is probably the first and only one of its kind produced by a Western media outlet not owned by a cultural or religious minority. A *Guardian* report (22 January 2007) announcing the launch of Islamophonic quoted Riazat Butt as saying that the podcast would "go beyond typical current affairs coverage" and would deal

with "how Islam is lived and breathed in this country [Britain]." To date, in over 20 episodes (of an average 20 to 25 minutes duration), podcast once a week (on Wednesdays), Islamophonic has touched upon various issues related to Islam in Britain—extremism, alcohol use among Muslims, Islamic music, Islamic finance and banking, Muslim magazines, dating culture among British Muslims, etc. Initially, each episode was roughly divided into three parts: reporting and discussion of a core issue (e.g., extremism), a "fatwa focus" (fatwas are given against specific questions asked by listeners), and a brief telephonic interview on current affairs with

The role of the European media in reproducing and reinforcing stereotypes and negative images of religious and ethnic minorities, particularly Muslims, is well documented. Since the media are the main sources of information about minority communities for majority groups, negative coverage has a potentially huge impact on inter-community relations in a multicultural and multiethnic Europe. While it remains important to challenge and falsify inaccurate and stereotypical media coverage, there is also a need for new forms of reporting that are sensitive to ambiguity and variation, and thereby promote intercultural understanding. The Islamophonic initiative offers an intriguing approach to such challenges.

a *Guardian* reporter based in a Muslim-dominated country or region. Of late, this structure has been dropped and the whole episode focuses on one topic. Let us begin with the episode of 7 February that focuses on alcohol and Islam. The reporter (Riazat Butt) goes to Manchester's Curry Mile to interview young Muslims who celebrate the Islamic festival of Eid by getting drunk. The first two to five minutes of the podcast are particularly striking. People shouting, horns blaring, and ear-breaking music played on car stereos from a heavily crowded street ("thousands of young Muslims," according to the reporter) and interviews with young Muslim revelers alternate with recitations from the

Quran by an imam of the local mosque and a local restaurant owner's complaints about how business is affected by the revelry. The imam recites a verse from the Quran and explains: "Islam is completely and totally against involvement in any form or any shape with the business of alcohol. Islam outrightly [sic] and completely forbids alcohol usage." The narrative cuts to the reporter asking the young Muslims on the street why and whom they drink with. One of them says: "We are away from home and we are just enjoying ourselves ... See, all these lads, all are Muslims; they are good lads as well." This is juxtaposed with a local restaurant owner's angry remarks: "The way they [the youngsters] celebrate is just drive up and down the road flashing off their dads' flashy cars ... They block the traffic and our English clientele can't come through ..." But he, being a Muslim, has his own dilemmas. He said he sold alcohol in his restaurant, as did the majority of other Muslim-owned restaurants, and added that there was tension between restaurant-owners and their families, some of who refused to eat there. When the reporter asks if he serves alcohol to his Muslim customers, he replies: "The first thing they come in and ask you is 'Is the food halal?' and we say 'yes'. After that they ask for a couple of pints of lager. And we don't understand that logic ..." Be it celebrating Eid or the demands of business, both provide contexts to flout clerical and textual directives outlawing alcohol as haram. Is alcohol an exception? What about other things traditionally considered to be haram?

The episode of 28 February deals with Islamic music. It begins by playing samples of Islamic music from across the world and the reporter asks an imam for expert opinion on what the religion says about music. The imam explains:

Muslim scholarship has been divided about the rulings relating to music ... The basis for those who feel or believe that music is forbidden in Islam is [a] number of sayings from the Messenger Muhammed (peace be upon Him) in which musical instruments are likened to the tools of Satan ... There is a group that says that string and wind instruments are forbidden; however, the drum is allowed. There is another school of thought that says that ... contemporary music is forbidden; however, music which enhances one's spiritual well-being is allowed ...

This is followed by an interview with a member of the British Nasheed group Shaam. He speaks about how his group is adapting Nasheed to British conditions:

Lot of the traditional material is from many hundreds of years ago. What we try to do is to introduce that to a Western, younger listening audience. Because we were born and raised in the West we add a contemporary touch to our music ... We are trying to have a East meets West kind of thing.

Above all, the reporting proves the impossibility of explaining all these diverse experiences using the term "Islam."

Image not available online

PHOTO BY DARREN STAPLES / © REUTERS, 2007

From the spirituality of the Nasheeds and Qawwalis the focus switches to heavily politicized Islamic hip-hop and rap. Aki Nawaz, mainstay of the band Fun-da-Mental, speaks about his politics, religion, and music:

If you talk about politics in my work, politics comes before the music and it has always done. You find that politics, religion, culture, racism, identity, and sexism has [sic] always been a part of our vision ... My work is a soundtrack to the reality that is going on around us ... In terms of zikr, Allah and all that stuff, I think our work is based on love anyway, but we will go to war for love. That is the difference. We are not passive people.

The problems inherent in jumping to conclusions about day-to-day Muslim life by relying solely on what the Quran or religious scholars say are clearly illustrated by the last two reports on alcohol and music. Now, let us look at another newsworthy aspect of Islam, especially so given the strife in occupied Iraq—sectarian differences. The podcast of 21 March gave an overview of the historical and theological evolution of the Shias and delved into the lives of the Shia Muslims in Britain. Constituting a minority within a minority (Muslims in Britain), the Shiite presence in Britain dates back to only the early 1970s. After a detailed description of an Ashura ceremony among Birmingham-based Shias originally hailing from Afghanistan, a relatively underprivileged group within the community when compared to those who have an Arab and Persian background, the reporter speaks to an Afghan Shia community leader. He explains their situation:

Community Leader: We don't have any place [of worship] ... We don't have anybody to go to ... and to ask ... to help us to settle ourselves here. It is very hard.

Reporter: What kind of help do you get from other Shia communities?

CL: The problem is the language. We cannot communicate very easily with them. They have their own culture, their own agenda ...

R: Is there a class difference as well?

CL: They [the non-Afghani Shias] are a settled community ... Most of us are workers, not professionals ... Working in factories, as security officers ...

Accepting that the larger Shia community has to help the Afghans, a Shia Islamic scholar interviewed for the podcast points to an important emerging trend in his community in Britain:

[New] communities [are coming up] which are multiethnic, which focus their rituals and practices around the use of English ... And there are particular centres, groups which are pretty much focused on the use of English to spread understanding of the faith. [This] includes the [celebration of] Muharram rituals and the Ashura in English [with] the chanting of English verse along with flagellation.

The British Islam that emerges from Islamophonic's representation is quite complex. There is no overarching, one-size-fits-all definition to explain every aspect of British Muslim life; communities are divided and subdivided along class, ethnic and linguistic lines, making the talk of a monolithic "British Muslim community" impossible. At least some of the teachings of the faith are observed more in breach than in practice and, moreover, they have been adapted to meet the requirements of Brit-

ish conditions. In short, Islamophonic brings to light the rich tapestry of and the many shades of green in British Islam. The episodes on music and alcohol almost exactly follow Said's model: What the Quran says and its interpretations (the imams' interviews), and how the beliefs are lived and practised (the youngsters on the street of Manchester, the Nasheed group singer and the hip-hop artist). Islamophonic's style of presentation—for instance, in the episode on alcohol, continuously alternating among the comments of the imam, the revelry on the street and the complaints of the restaurant owner—is equally important. Fürsich writes: "Juxtaposing the traditional dichotomized images with fluid hybrid images smashes the monolithic totality of those images."³ Especially noteworthy is the quotidian life of Muslims revealed in the reporting examples. The revellers in Manchester who have no qualms in identifying themselves as Muslims, but also get drunk; the customers who ask for "halal food," but also demand a "few pints of lager"; and the restaurant owner's dilemma in reconciling his Islam with selling alcohol—all this points to a very personal negotiation and redefinition of the faith, relatively free from any overall control of clerical or textual authority, that exists in British Islam. Much of this happens also because of the changed circumstances (Western/English) that Muslims find themselves in. The Nasheed group singer and the Shia Islamic scholar speak about how English is being increasingly used to win new listeners and to bridge the divide among linguistically different Shia communities respectively. To make sense of their religion in a Western context, they have to interpret their traditions and adapt them to the new situation. Above all, the reporting proves the impossibility of explaining all these diverse experiences using the term "Islam." For instance, to understand the relative marginalization of the Afghani Shias within their own religious community, we have to understand their class status and linguistic differences. No amount of theology or religious history alone can help us to get a full grip on it. Similarly, the music of Aki Nawaz has more to do with a very Leftist brand of angry, anti-establishment politics than Islam. And even if the imams, the revellers, the Nasheed group singer, and the Shia scholar, all lay claim to represent Islam, we will have to look elsewhere, to social and historical factors, to make full sense of the diverse behaviours and views.

Conclusion

The power of negative media coverage is such that even when proximity with the "Others" (in our case, Muslims) is a reality—for example, in a very multicultural and multiethnic society like Britain, where at least some sort of familiarity (e.g., at work places) with Muslims exist—it is insufficient to challenge that coverage. Poole writes: "To override dominant media representations, the contact must include dialogue that encourages an understanding of Islamic beliefs and practices, and a sense of how these are interpreted through one's own cultural frameworks."⁴ By focusing on aspects of Islamic life mostly ignored by the media, representing them in all their complexity and shunning the obsession with "problem-news" when it comes to Muslims, Islamophonic might be doing what Poole is recommending. Islamophonic's reporting also raises some other important questions—Is there a British/European Islam, distinct from its counterparts in other parts of the world? What does it mean to be a Muslim in the UK/Europe? Moreover, significant is the fact that such an initiative has been taken by a mainstream media group which owns one of the world's most accessed and trusted newspaper websites. The result could be that the message would reach more people and have more impact.

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**Central Mosque,
Birmingham,
2007**

Notes

1. Rodinson, 1979, cited in Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world* (London: Vintage, 1997), 58.
2. The episodes of Islamophonic were accessed at <http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/podcasts/cat-766/>. No transcripts are available and the portions of the programme reproduced in this paper were transcribed by the author.
3. E. Fürsich, "How can global journalists represent the 'Other'? A critical assessment of the cultural studies concept for media practice," *Journalism* 3, no. 1 (2002): 57–84, p. 76.
4. E. Poole, *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 241.

Satellite TV & Islamic Pop Culture in Egypt

PATRICIA KUBALA

Before the advent of the satellite era, state television channels did (and continue to) broadcast religious genres of music during major Islamic religious holidays and during the month of Ramadan. These songs are usually older recordings in classical Arabic, with limited instrumental accompaniment and juxtaposed with montages of low-quality, stock images—primarily of natural phenomena, religious sites, Arabic calligraphy and the Quran, and Muslims engaged in ritual acts such as circumambulation of the Kaaba in Mecca. Very rarely are the singer or singers (frequently, but not always, male) depicted alongside the images, and in general, these videos convey a sense of solemn religiosity set apart from the ordinary rhythm of daily life.

In contrast, popular pan-Arab satellite music video channels such as Mazzika, Melody, and Rotana broadcast a new style of religious music video that combines lyrics in colloquial Arabic in praise of God and the prophet Muhammad with *shababi* (youth) style instrumental music and a new set of high-quality, commercially appealing images and storylines in contemporary settings. Although they are broadcast more frequently during the month of Ramadan and religious holidays, the most popular songs appear throughout the year and like other music videos that circulate within the prospering satellite television-mobile phone economy, they are available for downloading as ring tones or videos onto viewers' cell phones.

This new trend of commoditized religious music video emphasizes the dignity and humanity of Islam and its harmonious integration with a comfortable, middle-class modern lifestyle. The popular Egypt-

With the proliferation of music video channels on pan-Arab satellite television in the past decade, new styles of religious-themed videos are appearing on these alternative outlets to state television broadcasting. The growth and popularity of this new genre of religious music videos, along with "clean" cinema and Islamic satellite television productions, reflects shifting discourses concerning the arts and entertainment within the Islamic Revival. This essay explores the appearance of these music videos within a particular cultural moment in the Arab world in which popular culture is increasingly the site of ethical-aesthetic interventions aimed at moral and social reform.

tian boy-band WAMA, for example, released in 2005 the popular hit *Kan Nifsi* (I wish that I could)—a slow, lyrical song with no musical features to mark it as "religious" except the faint sounds of the call to prayer, set against the background noise of a busy metropolitan city, that begin the track. Using the simple colloquial language that predominates in *shababi* music, the four university-aged members of the group take turns singing of their desire to meet the prophet Muhammad, to sit with him and his companions in heaven, and to follow his path in Islam. Dressed in chic, all-white casual cloth-

ing, the boys wander among the golden sand dunes of a beautiful remote desert location, the kind that financially comfortable Egyptians, not just foreigners, increasingly frequent as the national tourist industry taps into the disposable incomes of the new moneyed classes created by the neo-liberal economic policies of the past three decades. The video ends with the boys walking into the sunset shoulder to shoulder, conveying a message of brotherly unity in Islam.

Pious performers

Although many of these stylish religious songs, like the WAMA video described above, present male homosocial worlds and bonding experiences in Islam, others prominently feature female performers. One example is the song *Illa Ibn Abdallah* (Except for the Son of Abdallah), which was first aired around the time of the Prophet's birthday celebration (*Mawlid al-Nabi*) in 2006. A response to the Danish cartoon controversy, the video features a large group of pan-Arab singers staging a peaceful protest to express outrage over the derogatory treatment of the Prophet and their love and respect for the son of Abdallah (the name of Muhammad's father) and his religion. The female performers, dressed in fashionable white veils, sing in the chorus and alternate with their male counterparts as soloists; one of the female singers, Sahar Fadil, is a "repentant" artist who used to star in racy music videos of the variety referred to by critics as "burnu klibhat" (porno clips). Another example from Ramadan 2006 is the song *Khalih 'Ala Allah* (Leave the Matter to God), performed by the respected Syrian singer Assala Nasry. The lyrics in Egyptian colloquial praise God and describe the singer's pious love and devotion, and the images depict her (veiled) in prayer and (unveiled) reading the Quran, donating food, and breaking the Ramadan fast with her children in her well-appointed home.

PHOTO BY STR NEW / © REUTERS, 2006

Image not available online

Sami Yusuf,
Amman, 2006

Egyptian cassette and television preachers such as Shaykh Abd al-Hamid Kishk, Shaykh Muhammad Mitwalli al-Shaarawi, and Shaykh Omar Abd al-Kafi criticized Egypt's national entertainment industry as morally harmful to Muslim audiences and called upon performers to repent and retire from their professional activities.¹ The Egyptian national press sensationalized cases of these "conversions" and attributed them to the spread of extremism and corrupting Gulf influences on Egyptian society. While male stars were also part of this phenomenon, the veiling and repentance of female entertainers by far received the most attention in the popular media. Although most of these "repentant" female artists left the entertainment industry, a few, such as Huda Sultan, donned the veil but continued to work under conditions acceptable to their new sense of religiosity.

Since the late 1990s, many male and female performers and media personalities have embraced the latter alternative. The advent of transnational satellite television broadcasting in the Arab world in the late 1990s has been accompanied by an explosion in private, commercial television productions with Islamic themes. Muslim scholars, popular preachers, and producers are actively encouraging the creation of alternative forms of pious entertainment, and the growth of religious satellite television programming in the last decade has provided numerous opportunities for formally retired male and female media personalities to utilize their talents, but this time appearing in Islamic-appropriate dress as preachers, hosts of talk show programmes, or actors in television serials with suitably pious roles. In the Egyptian cinema industry, a growing number of filmmakers, actors, and actresses, veiled and unveiled, refuse to visually portray sexually explicit scenes, appear in immodest clothing, or depict immoral characters. The new regime of morally disciplined representations in the "clean cinema" trend, as Egyptian critics have dubbed it, marks a shift in the Islamic Revival towards regarding the entertainment industry as an arena for refashioning religio-ethical norms, particularly ones surrounding the female body and sexuality. In this new site of social reform, as Karim Tartoussieh notes in a perceptive recent analysis of clean cinema, "The sinfulness of art—a discourse that was prevalent in the 1980s and resulted in many female actors renouncing their artistic careers and veiling—is replaced by a different discourse that is amicable to popular culture as an arena of social purity and morality."² This alternative discourse of *al-fann al-hadif* (purposeful art) stresses the responsibility of the artist to serve as a model of moral decency and to convey socially constructive messages in his or her work.

Purposeful art

The increasing presence and popularity of religious videos on satellite music television channels reflects this shift towards *al-fann al-hadif* within the Islamic Revival's discourse regarding entertainment and the arts, a discourse that is often reflected in the images and narrative tropes of the music videos themselves. Sami Yusuf's hit music video *al-Mu'allim* (The Teacher) provides an exemplary illustration of the proper relationship between artists, social responsibility, and Islamic piety articulated within the discourse of *al-fann al-hadif*. A transnationally acclaimed British artist of Azeri origin, Yusuf was introduced to Arab satellite television audiences by the popular preacher Amr Khaled, whose discussions on culture and media on the programme *Sunna' al-Hayah* (Lifemakers) encouraged young Muslim artists not to retire but to use their God-given talents in the service of strengthening the Muslim community.³ A trained musician and composer but not a native Arabic speaker, Yusuf's albums blend primarily English lyrics with Arabic, Turkish, and Hindi vocals and refrains, and his compositions employ a range of Middle Eastern and Western instruments, rhythms, and melodic themes. The singer's first album, entitled *al-Mu'allim* (The Teacher)—referring, of course, to the prophet Muhammad—was released in 2003, and a music video of the title track was shot in Egypt using an Egyptian director (Hani Usama) and production team. It debuted on Arab music satellite television stations during Ramadan 2004, and it has remained one of the most popular and frequently aired religious music videos since then.

The video of "al-Mu'allim" juxtaposes English and Arabic lyrics in praise of the prophet Muhammad with images of a chic young photographer, portrayed by the singer, going about his daily life; working in his studio in his large, well-appointed suburban Cairo home; behaving kindly to his veiled old mother and the people in his community; and teaching religious lessons to children amidst the splendour of Islamic Cairo's medieval architectural heritage. At the end of the video, he drives off in an SUV to undertake a solo photography shoot in the desert, and in the darkness, he captures on film the image of a glowing, Kaaba-like structure radiating light, perhaps meant to symbolize *al-nur al-muhammadi* (the primordial light of Muhammad). The video thus emphasizes the special role that the artist, in this case a photographer, plays in devoting his talents to expressing the beauty of God's creation and the truth of the Prophet's message. At the same time, he leads an exemplary and pious life in his community, all the while enjoying the technological amenities and comforts of a modern, cosmopolitan lifestyle. In this way, Yusuf's on-screen music video persona embodies the ideals of *al-fann al-hadif*—tasteful art with an appropriate message of moral respectability and social responsibility—a persona that is reinforced by the singer's interviews and website statements that articulate his dedication to working for the well-being of the Muslim ummah.⁴

Importantly, the music video as a genre on the whole stands in sharp contrast to the moral parameters of *al-fann al-hadif* in the minds of many viewers in the Arab world. The same satellite music channels that broadcast the new style of religious videos also broadcast a notorious and controversial style of racy music videos, labelled "burnu klibhat" (porno clips) by critics, that the genre of music videos as a whole has become associated with. While the banal lyrics, hackneyed tunes, and apolitical nature of these videos also draw criticism, what audiences and critics object to most are the revealing clothes and overtly seductive dance moves of the female models and singers. These sexualized representations of female entertainers, as well as the considerable outcry against them, echo the centuries-old debate in the Islamic tradition over the moral character of artists and the potentially dangerous affect of music and entertainment upon the subjectivity of the audience.⁵ As the work of Karin van Nieuwkerk, among others, demonstrates, female entertainers are regarded as particularly threatening because the improper display of their bodies is understood to easily tempt male spectators to commit adultery and other grave sins.⁶

By adhering to the chaste conventions of the clean cinema genre, which many television dramas as well as the new style of religious music videos also uphold, male and female entertainers and media personalities distance themselves from the cultural association of art with immorality. While representations of women as mothers, devout believers, and socially responsible members of their communities and the Muslim ummah are common in the religious videos, depictions of women in sexual relationships as lovers or even wives are scarce. In this way, female singers and models in religious songs mark out a respectable place for themselves in a media genre (the music video) that has become overwhelmingly associated with immodesty and sexual immorality. As the pop religious music video genre evolves with the shifts in the Islamic Revival and local and international political events, the gender dynamics currently on display can also be expected to shift.

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Notes

1. For an insightful analysis of these figures' critiques of secular media culture, see Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), in particular, chapter 4.
2. Karim Tartoussieh, "Pious Stardom: Cinema and the Islamic Revival in Egypt," *Arab Studies Journal* 15, no. 1 (2007): 41.
3. See the English-language transcript of this programme available from Amr Khaled's official website, <http://www.amrkhaled.net/articles/articles406.html>.
4. Sami Yusuf's website—www.samiyusuf.com—posts statements by the singer on his music and current events and also includes links to several interviews with the press.
5. A concise summary of medieval and modern Muslim viewpoints on this issue is found in Lois Al-Faruqi, "Music, Musicians, and Muslim Law," *Asian Music* 17, no. 1 (1985): 3–36.
6. Karin van Nieuwkerk, *"A Trade Like Any Other": Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1996).

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Islamic Charitable NGOs

On 14 June 2007, ISIM, co-sponsored by HIVOS, organized the conference "Islamic Charitable NGOs: Between Patronage and Empowerment." The event provided a forum for scholars and practitioners to address the perception held among Western development agencies that Islamic NGOs engage in charitable work primarily as a means of *da'wa*, and that they reinforce dependence, rather than promote empowerment.

In his presentation, Egbert Harmsen discussed if and how Islamist NGOs empower their beneficiaries. Drawing on a case study of Islamist NGOs in Jordan he suggested that although the Islamic discourse of these NGOs carries the message of individual and collective empowerment, they fail to actually challenge existing systems of patronage and dependency. Rather, Islamist NGOs seem to hold on to the (rather romantic) notion that empowerment will be realized through the harmonization of Muslim society.

Focusing on social activism in Egypt and Jordan, Sara Lei Sparre and Marie Juul Petersen discussed the role of youth in bringing about social change in Middle Eastern civil society. They questioned whether the empowerment the new movement claims to deliver is accomplished through encouragement of political participation of the underprivileged and challenging patronage patterns and gender stereotypes.

Sheila Carapico shifted the focus of the debate to the relationship between Western donors and Islamic charitable NGOs. Exploring why only a few religiously oriented NGOs in the Middle East have succeeded in obtaining funds from Western donors, she suggested that a main reason for the reluctance of Western players is the perceived risk of sponsoring terrorism. In addition, Islamic NGOs are reluctant to accept "Western" money, as they do not wish to be (seen as) tools in spreading resented Western influence. Barriers set by Arab governments and the failure of Muslim NGOs to meet Western requirements further limit co-

operation. Nevertheless, she noted in her conclusion, cooperation between Islamic NGOs and Western based donors exist through indirect channels, even if the parties involved are not always aware of it.

Attitudes to Islamic charities should be understood within the broader framework of international politics, as Jonathan Benthall showed in his presentation. He argued that global changes after 9/11 have had negative repercussions on the functioning of Islamic charities. At the same time, the international community increasingly recognizes that Islamic NGOs are important grass root players with access to broad layers of the population. A possible way out of this deadlock would be to promote dialogue between various humanitarian cultures and to improve the accountability of Islamic NGOs.

Khaled Hroub discussed links between the rise of Hamas in Palestine and its decade long welfare activities. He noted that the drive to empower Palestinians against the occupation succeeded in building a horizontal network among Palestinians, thus freeing them from dependence on the occupiers. On the other hand, the by-product of Islamic empowerment and welfare is a deep rupture between the religious and the secular part of society.

Nigel Dower in his concluding remarks commented on some of the most debated issues of the conference. Do Islamic charities facilitate empowerment or dependency? Do they motivate social change or reinforce gender stereotypes and patronage? What is the impact of global changes after 9/11 on the functioning of Islamic charities? He suggested that charity as a means of *da'wa* does not necessarily prevent empowerment of the underprivileged and that thus the goals of Islamic charities and Western donors do not need to be mutually exclusive.

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MARIA KEKELIOVA

Redefining Boundaries

NATHAL M. DESSING

"We are doing innovation and not *ijtihad*," said Nasr Abou Zayd in the discussion in the morning session, meaning by *ijtihad* something that is limited to *fiqh* only.¹ However, people striving for equal rights for women may wish to go beyond this. This may vary from endorsing a historical critical approach to tradition, as Abu Zayd does, to raising the question of whether taking human rights conventions as a point of departure is strategically more effective in advancing women's rights than the reinterpretation of religious texts.

This and similar issues were addressed at the ISIM Conference on "Redefining Boundaries: Muslim Women and Religious Authority in Practice," organized in cooperation with the Amsterdam School of Social Science Research in Amsterdam on Sunday 24 June 2007. The purpose of the conference was to bring together some leading female Muslim intellectuals and activists to explore the theme of Muslim women and religious authority. The speakers were Asma Barlas (Ithaca College, New York, USA), Amel Grami (University of Manouba, Tunis, Tunisia), Qudsia Mirza (University of East London, UK), Lily Zakiyah Munir (Centre for Pesantren and Democracy Studies, Indonesia), Ceylan Pektaş-Weber (Al Nisa organization for Muslim women and youngsters, The Netherlands), and Nayereh Tohidi (California State University Northridge, USA). The conference formed part of the ISIM research programme "Individualization, Fragmentation of Authority, and New Organizational Forms among Muslims in Europe," which is funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research NWO.

The Quran is "what God has chosen to give us" and constitutes for Asma Barlas the basis of her academic and spiritual endeavours. Lily Munir considered *ijtihad*, "free and independent thinking to arrive at a juristic ruling on issues over which the Quran and Hadith are silent," as a strategically important tool for women's empowerment and change of Muslim society in general. Similarly, according to Amel Grami, women's

emancipation in Muslim societies can be achieved only by changing the terms of the theological-juridical debates and developing "fresh" interpretations of the Quran. She emphasized, however, that in her experience voices calling for legal reform in favour of women are often silenced and she wondered if the time was ripe for cooperation of secular women and Islamic feminists. Qudsia Mirza also recognized the importance of "feminist interpreters of the scripture." However, she pointed out, among others by equating Islamic feminists to Islamists, that it is important to realize that the strategy of locating gender equality within Islam has its limitations and may not result in equality for all women in the Muslim world. Ceylan Pektaş-Weber, approaching the theme of the conference from a different angle, explored the meaning of *khilafa* (vicegerency or agency) for women from a theological perspective. Religious authority is for her an important tool in the fight against inequality and injustice, but acquiring it should not become a goal in itself. This, she argued, would do no justice to Islamic views of agency. Nayereh Tohidi exemplified all of the above views very clearly in her warning against sectarianism: she emphasized the importance of openness towards, and cooperation between, women activists of various ideological inclinations.

Nathal Dessing is Researcher and Educational Coordinator at ISIM.
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Notes

1. A shortened version of Asma Barlas' paper appears on page 32 in this issue. In conjunction with the conference, the Dutch Muslim Broadcasting Company NMO produced a series of television documentaries on Asma Barlas, Amel Grami, Lily Zakiyah Munir, and Nayereh Tohidi. A master class on the theme of the conference led by Asma Barlas and Nayereh Tohidi was held in Leiden on Monday 25 June 2007.

ISIM Review Young Scholar Awards

ISIM is pleased to announce the winners of the first ISIM Review Young Scholar Awards. The jury made its selection based on the quality and originality of papers and their suitability for publication in the *ISIM Review*. The first prize of € 1,500 was presented to Nandagopal Menon for the paper "Islamophonic: New Styles in Reporting"; the second

prize of € 1,000 went to Sophie Lemière for her contribution "Apostasy and Islamic Civil Society in Malaysia"; and the third prize of € 750 went to Philipp Bruckmayr for his essay "Cambodia's Phum Trea as Mirror Image of Religious Change." All prize-winning essays are published in this *ISIM Review* issue.

NEW FELLOWS

- **Umut Azak** (Visiting Fellow)
Sacred Spaces of Secularism: Neo-Kemalism and Transformation of State Rituals in Turkey
1 September – 30 November 2007
- **Cédric Baylocq Sassoubre** (Visiting Fellow)
Imam Tareq Oubrou and Young French Muslims: Anthropology of Religious Negotiation in a Context of Reform of Islamic Law
1 September – 31 December 2007
- **Carmen Becker** (ISIM/Radboud Ph.D. Fellow, funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research NWO)
Salafism: Production, Distribution, Consumption, and Transformation of a Transnational Ideology in the Middle East and Europe
From 1 September onwards
- **Ernesto Braam** (Affiliated Fellow)
Islamic Reformism as a Global Phenomenon and its Impact on the Three Predominantly Malay Muslim Provinces of South Thailand
1 August – 31 December 2007
- **Alexandra Brown** (Junior Fellow)
Diversity and Uniformity: The (Re)Presentation of the Muslim Canadian Community
1 September – 30 November 2007
- **Kamenko Bulic** (Visiting Fellow)
Bosnian Islam at a Crossroads: Islamic versus Secularist Factors in Current Post-War Developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina
1 September – 30 November 2007
- **Sheila Carapico** (Visiting Fellow)
Mission Democracy: Mixed Messages to the Middle East
1 – 31 October 2007
- **Ramin Karimiyan** (Visiting Fellow)
Iranian Journalists' Associations: A Survey on their Function and Performances: 1997-2007
1 September – 31 December 2007
- **Michiel Leezenberg** (Sabbatical Fellow)
Genealogies of the Modern Muslim World
1 February 2007 – 31 January 2008
- **Brigitte Maréchal** (Visiting Fellow)
European Muslim Brotherhood Members as an Argumentative Network: Production, Relationships, and Change
6 October 2007 – 31 March 2008
- **Julie McBrien** (Visiting Fellow)
Imagining and Enacting Womanhood in Kyrgyzstan
1 September 2007 – 31 January 2008
- **Eric Roose** (Visiting Fellow)
Recent Developments in Dutch Mosque Designs and Muslim Identities
1 August – 31 December 2007
- **David Waines** (Visiting Fellow)
The Past in the Present: Muslims and "the Other"
1 September – 31 December 2007

ISIM E-News

This summer ISIM launched the ISIM E-News, a digital news bulletin that provides up-to-date information on our research projects, publications, upcoming events, and fellowships. For free subscription to the e-news, simply see 'publications' on the ISIM website www.isim.nl.

Erratum

A minor error occurred in *ISIM Review* 19. Last-minute language corrections altered the intended meaning of a sentence in Jouili's article (p.33, before last paragraph). In the printed version it reads as if the author argues that da'wa was understood by the involved women as "cultivation of virtues," while instead these women understood it as "representing Islam."

ISIM EVENTS

28 September 2007 – 31 January 2008

Exhibition

Multiple M: Moslims, Mode, en Muziek

Organizer: Imagine IC, inspired by ISIM research

Venue: Imagine IC, Amsterdam

ISIM Lecture Series at Utrecht University:

1 November 2007

Accommodating European Muslims:

The Role of Pluralism, Law, and Liberal Politics

Lecture by Maleiha Malik

22 November 2007

Shaping the Future of Islam in Norway:

Religious Revival and Identity Politics

among Muslim Youth and Students in Oslo

Lecture by Christine Jacobsen

29 November 2007

Power, Knowledge and Discourse in a Transnational Muslim

Organization-Network: The Case of the Milli Görüş

Lecture by Werner Schiffauer

13 December 2007

Ibn 'Arabi Meets New Age? Sufism and Sufi Spirituality in the West

Lecture by Suha Taji-Farouki

21 February 2008 – 24 February 2008

Workshop

Transnational Circuits: 'Muslim Women' in Asia

Convenor: Annelies Moors

Organizer: Social Science Research Council

Venue: International Conference on Inter-Asian Connections, Dubai

12 March 2008

Workshop

Everyday Cosmopolitanism:

Living Together through Communal Divide

Convenor: Asef Bayat

Venue: 9th Mediterranean Research Meeting, Florence & Montecatini Terme

ISIM PH.D. AND STAFF SEMINARS

Venue: Leiden University

– 23 October 2007

Patronizing Women

Lecture by Sheila Carapico

– 6 November 2007

Constructions of Islam in the Canadian Public:

Multiculturalism and the Controversy of Religious Arbitration

Lecture by Alexandra Brown

– 20 November 2007

Islamic versus Secular Currents in Post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina

Lecture by Kamenko Bulic

– 4 December 2007

French Muslims and Islamic Reform:

Tareq Oubrou and the Local Context

Lecture by Cédric Baylocq Sassoubre

– 18 December 2007

Iranian Journalists' Associations:

A Survey on their Function and Performances, 1997-2007

Lecture by Ramin Karimiyan

For more information on these and other events please consult the ISIM website or contact the secretariat at info@isim.nl.

Salafism as a Transnational Movement

MARTIJN DE KONING

In September 2007, Roel Meijer and Martijn de Koning of ISIM and Radboud University Nijmegen organized a conference on "Salafism as a Transnational Movement." This conference brought together international experts on Salafism to explore the ways in which Salafi movements have been successful in maintaining and disseminating their global message while adapting to the local. Twenty-one papers were presented before an audience of sixty, mostly, journalists and policymakers. The first day focused on the concepts of Salafi transnationalism and a critical debate on the works of Salafi activists, which highlighted the contribution of the intellectual dimension of Salafism to its success. Thomas Hegghammer's presentation critically analyzed the term "Jihadi Salafism" proposing a new typology of militant Islamist actors to capture the different political behaviours of the different Salafi movements. Contributions dealing with Salafism in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and the Gulf region emphasized the local context.

On the second day, an examination of the expansion of Salafi movements in the West Bank, Gaza, and Palestinian camps in Lebanon showed that the flexibility of Salafi movements in merging the universal message of Salafism with local circumstances was critical in their proliferation in different areas of the world. The paper presented by Hugh Roberts revealed the importance of being critical of voices ascribing specific political manifestations to Salafism, as local regimes often manipulate these movements for their own political ends. Presentations on Salafism in sub-Saharan Africa, the Palestinian camps in Lebanon, the Gaza Strip, Ethiopia and Tanzania expounded the interplay between Salafi thought, ethnicities, and local politics and culture. This interplay results in pluralism that is intensified through the role of the Internet that is instrumental in the successful spread of Salafi movements, as became all too apparent in Reuven Paz's contribution.

Martijn de Koning is Postdoctoral Fellow at ISIM and Radboud University Nijmegen.

On the third day, presenters again emphasized the importance of local and regional contexts and dynamics—documenting the competition between different Salafi movements as well as rising tensions within those movements over legitimate representation. Discussing the case of Indonesia, Noorhaidi showed that these tensions can lead to fragmentation of Salafi organizations. Another scenario unfolded in Pakistan where, as Miriam Abou Zahab pointed out, the Deobandi and Ahl-e Hadith partly merged with local movements. The rivalry between movements at the local and global level also brought about a competition for constituency as apparent in the French case. Again the Internet plays an important role, as Ruud Peters showed in his analysis of the Dutch case of Theo van Gogh's assassin who, despite a limited knowledge of Arabic, was able to spread and justify his violent interpretation of Salafism.

Questions such as why Salafi movements are successful cannot be understood from the perspectives of the religious and political authorities of these movements or the political and societal circumstances alone. Experts showed how Salafists in the UK, France and the Netherlands actively create their own notion of what the correct Islamic beliefs and practices are and how they engage with global and local Salafi doctrines. Martin van Bruinessen closed the conference by summarizing the main themes of the conference and by bringing forward that the deliberation seemed to revolve around the relationship between the global and the local. The importance of the local context and the various ways in which individual Salafists engage with the different movements rendered the discussions on conceptualizing "Salafism" into a complicated matter that merits expansion.

A selection of the papers will be published by Hurst Publishers. The programme of the conference can found on the ISIM website.

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Edited by Marc Gaborieau, Gudrun Krämer, John Nawas and Everett Rowson

The Third Edition of *Brill's Encyclopaedia of Islam* is an entirely new work, with new articles reflecting the great diversity of current scholarship. It appears in four substantial segments each year, both online and in print.

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Encyclopaedia of Islam ^{THREE} 2007-1



- June 2007
- ISBN 978 90 04 15017 1
- Paperback (x, 198 pp.)
- List price EUR 109.- / US\$ 153.-
- Price for subscribers to the series EUR 99.- / US\$ 139.-

ISIM Book Series

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

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

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For more information about the Series, please contact Dennis Janssen at review@isim.nl. Guidelines for book proposals and manuscripts are available at www.isim.nl.

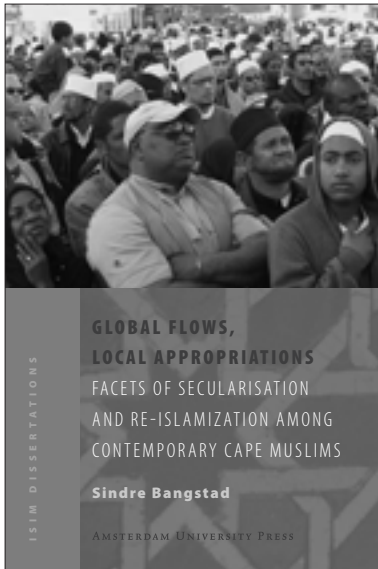
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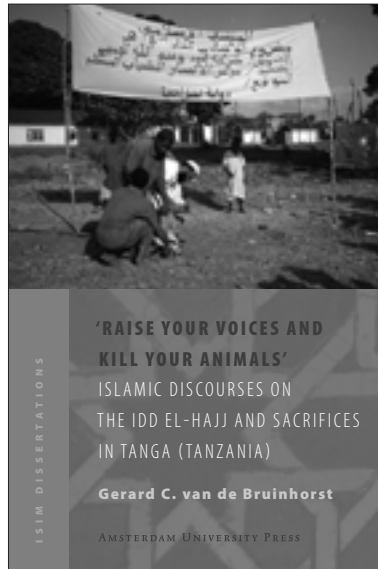
ISIM Dissertations



■ Sindre Bangstad
Global Flows, Local Appropriations
Facets of Secularisation and Re-Islamization among Contemporary Cape Muslims

In this dissertation Bangstad explores processes of secularisation and re-Islamization among Cape Muslims in the context of a post-apartheid South Africa in which liberal and secular values have attained considerable purchase in the new political and social elites. Fractured by status, ethnicity, and religious orientation Cape Muslims have responded to these changes through an ambiguous accommodation with the new order. This study explores this development through chapters on conversions to Islam among black Africans in Cape Town, Cape women's experiences with polygyny, Cape Muslims and HIV/AIDS, the status of Islam in a Cape Town prison in the post-apartheid era and on contestation over rituals among Cape Muslims.

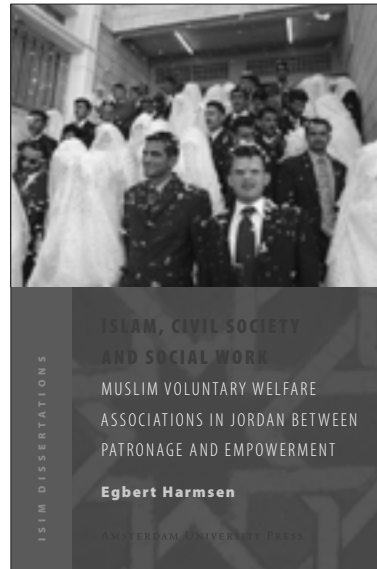
Sindre Bangstad was ISIM Ph.D. Fellow from 2003 to 2007.



■ Gerard van de Bruinhorst
'Raise Your Voices and Kill Your Animals'
Islamic Discourses on the Idd el-Hajj and Sacrifices in Tanga (Tanzania)

This research analyses how groups of people in Tanga discursively construct Islam by animal slaughter. Central to the project are the sometimes conflicting tendencies of grounding ritual practice in authoritative texts and constructing ethnic, social, and religious identity through ritual practices. The discourse on and the practice of daily animal slaughter at the abattoir, sacrifice as part of the annual hajj, the slaughter of sheep after the birth or death of a child, and the Swahili New Year sacrifice all reproduce assumptions of what Islam and Islamic behaviour should be.

Gerard C. van de Bruinhorst was ISIM Ph.D. Fellow from 2000 to 2006.

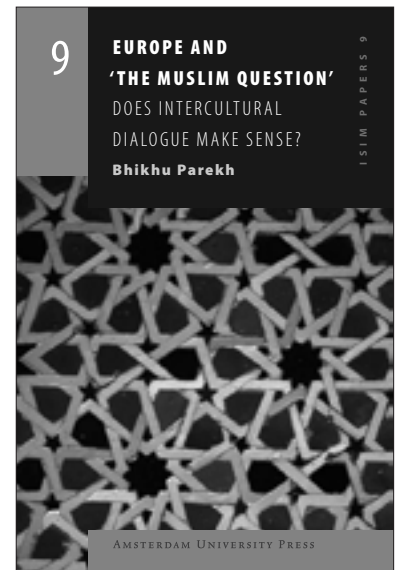


■ Egbert Harmsen
Islam, Civil Society and Social Work
Muslim Voluntary Welfare Associations in Jordan between Patronage and Empowerment

This study analyses Muslim voluntary welfare associations in Jordan from the perspective of civil society theory. It pays special attention to the role of religious faith and discourse in their social activities. These organizations are initiated by citizens and reflect their values and convictions. Their activities and discourses serve to an important extent as government policy goals such as the preservation of social and political stability and public order. They also help to preserve patterns of patronage. However, patronage does not necessarily rule out any kind of socioeconomic and cultural empowerment of underprivileged groups. Moreover, political sentiments of protest and opposition can play a role under the surface. Therefore, these voluntary associations represent a highly imperfect and frustrated, but nevertheless real, motivated and changing civil society.

Egbert Harmsen was ISIM Ph.D. Fellow from 2001 to 2006.

ISIM Paper 9



■ Bhikhu Parekh
Europe and 'the Muslim Question'
Does Intercultural Dialogue Make Sense?

A large section of European opinion believes that Muslims present a long term political and cultural threat. Professor Parekh argues that this view is deeply mistaken. There is, nevertheless, a small underclass, mainly young, which is deeply alienated from both their parental and European cultures. They are in Europe but not of it, and have no commitment to it. A dialogue between the Muslim communities in general and the host societies is therefore necessary. It has its limits and we should not expect too much from it. However, there is no alternative to it.

Bhikhu Parekh is Professor of Political Philosophy at the University of Westminster, United Kingdom.

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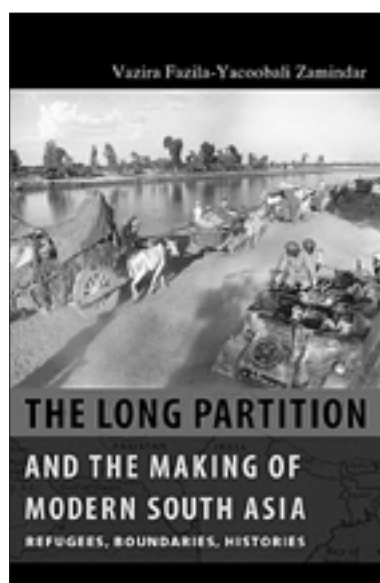


The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia

By **Vazira Fazila—Yacooabali Zamindar**

New York: Columbia University Press, 2007

This admirable book traces the history of north Indian families divided by the partition of India and Pakistan. Based on oral histories and extensive archival research, Zamindar draws out the resistance, bewilderment, and marginalization of Muslims as they came to be pushed out and divided by both emergent nation-states. In doing so the book unravels the - often chaotic - processes by which national difference is constructed in places where it was the most blurred.

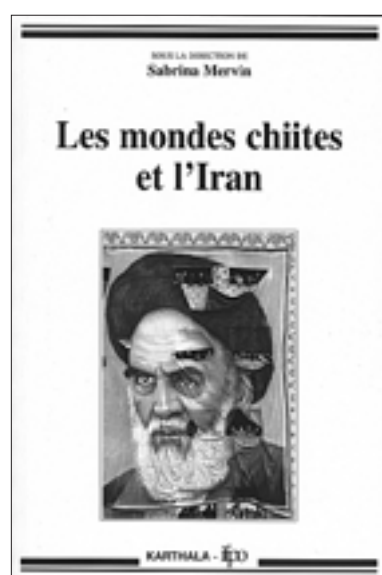
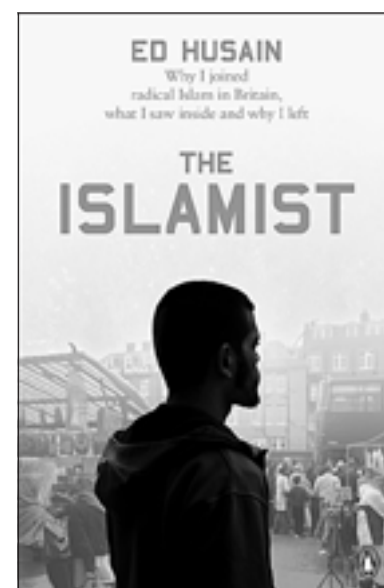


The Islamist. Why I Joined Radical Islam in Britain, What I Saw Inside and Why I Left

By **Ed Husain**

London: Penguin Books, 2007

One of the more interesting examples of 'confession literature' by former members of Islamist movements. In his student days, "Ed" (Mohammed) Husain was a leading Hizb ut-Tahrir activist in Britain. He describes in lively detail the inner workings of this movement, the debates with rival Islamic movements and the way the Hizb gained control of the Muslim associations at various university campuses. After a few years, he returned to the Sufi-tinged, peaceful Islam of his parents.

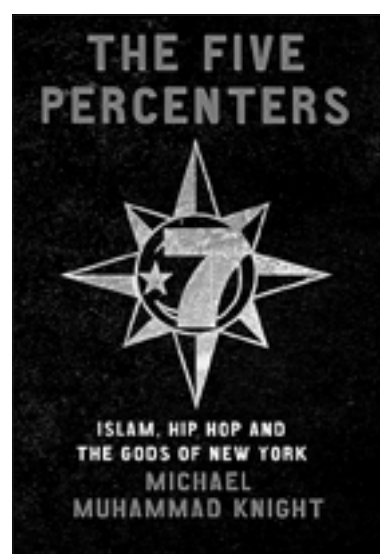


Les mondes chiites et l'Iran

Edited by **Sabrina Mervin**

Paris: Karthala, 2007

A collection of essays by (mostly) French scholars on Shii communities of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Gulf, Turkey, Central Asia, Senegal, Lebanon and Iraq and their relations with post-revolutionary Iran. Some of the chapters analyse major political movements such as Hizbullah and Muqtada al-Sadr's followers; others on Shii minorities' precarious relations with their Sunni surroundings. Interviews with influential thinkers and essays on contemporary religious debates conclude the volume.



The Five Percenters

By **Michael Muhammad Knight**

London: Oneworld Publications, 2007

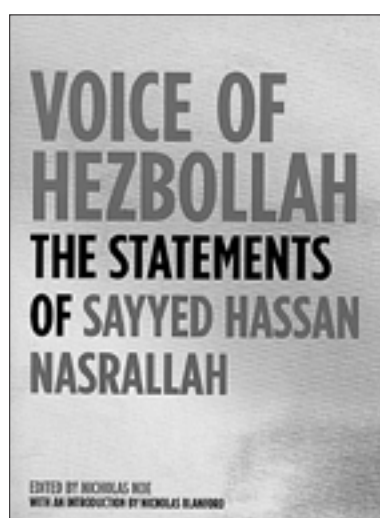
An account of a group that splintered from the Nation of Islam in 1963, led by a man named Allah, who taught that black men are gods. Since their leader's murder in 1969, the group has grown in number and influence, and its membership includes many celebrated rap artists. Knight's account demolishes the myths about the Five Percenters, based on a careful reading of written sources and interviews with members, including many companions of the movement's founder.

Voices of Hezbollah: The Statements of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah

Edited by **Nicholas Noe**

London/New York: Verso, 2007

The first major book that brings to an English-speaking readership the speeches and interviews of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the longstanding Secretary General of the Lebanese movement Hezbollah, currently one of the most popular Arab-Muslim leaders in the Arab world. This book is a crucial contribution to the understanding of the man and the movement.

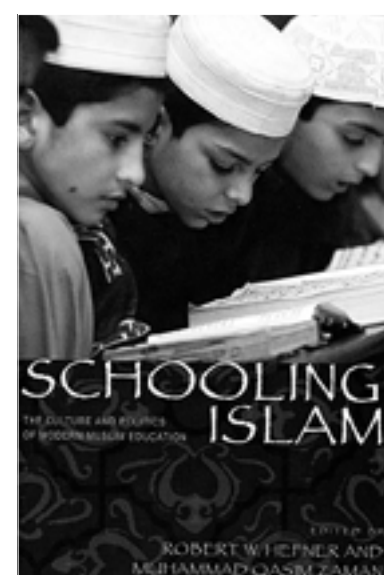


Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education

Edited by **Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman**

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007

Since the rise of the Taliban, madrasas have drawn much negative attention but there has been a dearth of serious studies placing the role of these institutions in a more balanced perspective. This collection of calm and thoughtful essays focuses on the conservative and moderate mainstream of Islamic education, from medieval madrasas to the modern schools of Turkey's Gülen movement and Muslim educational institutions in Britain; from core traditions such as India's Deoband and Egypt's Azhar to the madrasas of Mali, Morocco and Indonesia.



The Return of the Poets



Pearls of Islam



© Photos by JanfokkerT Mulzelaar, Nrianyana Fotografie, Mecca2Medina, and Roderick van der Kroon

Mecca2Medina

Mecca2Medina is the most popular Muslim hiphop group in the UK. Their work expresses self-confidence and pride, relating of both European and transnational Islam. The three British-African band members, who are converts to Islam, offer their vision of a good Muslim to raise awareness and pride among Muslim youths and to promote a positive image of Islam.

This is also the case of Pearls of Islam who play nasheed: songs supported by percussion. For the two Caribbean women "their love for their religion is the most important thing." The Pearls represent the new trend of pious Muslimas expressing their religious commitment via music.

From 4 till 6 October ISIM hosted the "Return of the Poets" concert tour featuring Mecca2Medina and Pearls of Islam. The tour was organized in cooperation with Kosmopolis Rotterdam and Fatusch Productions.

Confinement & Escape

In the summer of 2007
Iraqi artists started
a campaign to paint
Baghdad's newly
constructed security
block walls.