

Conference, Symposium, and Panel Reports

Cosmopolitan Islam: Globalization, Transnationalism, and Muslim Diasporas

The Thirty-ninth Annual AMSS Conference, held at Chicago's DePaul University, continued the association's tradition of exploring cutting-edge scholarly issues by examining the notion of Islam's inherently cosmopolitan nature, focusing upon its transnational and diasporic dimensions in the age of globalization. Welcomed by Conference Chair Aminah McCloud of the host institution, this one-day symposium was rich in the generation and development of new ideas and concepts and the stimulation of vibrant discussion and debate among the participants and attendees. The twelve presenters undertook a concise yet highly concentrated and comprehensive effort to identify, define, and examine the major debates within an ever-evolving subject of how diaspora communities face the challenges of an equally unstatic world and society in which they seek to find space and agency.

The opening session, "Cosmopolitan Islam: Identity Issues," addressed a central component of inquiry in the field – identity politics – and how it pertains to the Muslim experience. Babacar Mbengue (DePaul University) surveyed how migration, transnationalism, and multiple cultures have impacted upon the West African Muslim community currently living in the United States. According to Muna Ali (Arizona State University), for Muslims in the United States the spatial is not the only perspective for study available; the temporal is equally germane. Ali presented on the self-perception of Muslim Americans before 9/11, a sense of enfranchisement as part of the mainstream American fabric, and their marginalization into a counterculture "other" after September 2001. Shabana Mir (Oklahoma State University) demonstrated how college and university campuses are an important locus of contesting identity issues for Muslim American women, especially through socialization challenges on campus.

The afternoon sessions began with a thematic continuation of issues explored earlier in the day. The "Muslim Diasporas: Defining Cosmopolitanism and Its Influence on Identities" panel delved into specific communities within the Muslim diaspora of the West to reveal how identity is a fluid,

yet powerful, factor for them. At the same time, attention was paid to prescriptives designed to facilitate challenges associated with identity politics. Hishaam Aidi (Columbia University) discussed the negotiation of identity politics for young Muslims of North African descent in France and their ability to appropriate counterculture tropes in response to a perceived hostile dominant society. The importance of emotional, cultural, and other types of well-being was analyzed by Mazen Hashem (American Center for Civilizational and Intercultural Studies), who argued that the successful navigation of identity currents requires the stabilizing force of well-being. Helena Zeveri (New York University) maintained the panel's attention on identity construction for members of the Muslim diaspora by assessing how it is formed among the Afghan community in New York City.

A key issue of cosmopolitanism is interpretation. On the panel "Muslim Cosmopolitanism: Interpreting Islam," Besheer Mohamed (Chicago University) examined the perceived correlation between extremism and religiosity among Muslims in the United States. Ermin Sinanovic (United States Naval Academy) approached the topic through a theoretical lens, proffering cosmopolitanism as a more accurate term than such alternatives as liberalism and other western constructs. Similarly, Kenan Cetinkaya (Temple University) drew comparisons and parallels across faith traditions by maintaining that there are many similarities between the Confucian concept of *ren* and the Islamic concept of *iman* as virtues in their respective religious belief systems.

The effects of globalization inform Muslim perceptions of self and society in profound ways. On the panel "Challenges of Globalization in Muslim Diasporas," Saeed A. Khan (Wayne State University) offered a new theoretical approach to studying Muslims in the West by applying world systems theory in a transatlantic context. Zareena Grewal (Yale University) explored how students who travel outside the United States are affected by their experiences in shaping their Muslim identity. Junaid Ahmad (Cape Town University, South Africa) reviewed the impact of foreign political and military forces on shaping neo-Orientalist perspectives among Pakistan's liberal elites, who ostensibly guide the country's civil society and public opinion. AMSS president Ali Mazrui (State University of New York at Binghamton) ended the day's events with a succinct summary of the papers and ideas presented.

The event's resounding conclusion was the evening banquet, featuring Columbia University's Saskia Sassen, who delivered a riveting keynote address as the Ismail Raji al-Faruqi Memorial Lecture: "Transnationalized Religions and Renationalized States." Sassen's vast scholarship as a renowned sociologist and pioneer in globalization theory was well on display through her assessment of current trends regarding the complex con-

nection of territory, authority, and rights for the Muslim world as well as for a global context. Following her well-received remarks, she welcomed a lively question-and-answer session from the floor.

Although only a single-day event this year, the Thirty-ninth Annual AMSS Conference yielded a memorable array of papers that furnished provocative and insightful scholarship that should contribute greatly to the existing field of knowledge. The conference benefited greatly from the interactive and informal nature of discussions, a long tradition and feature of AMSS conferences, which consist of presenters, panel chairs and discussants, as well as attendees alike.

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