

Seminars, Conferences, Addresses

Islam in Europe: Generation to Generation

12 - 14 Shawwāl / 5-7 April 1993

St. Catherine's College and The School of Geography
University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom

This conference was opened by Jørgen Nielsen (Centre for the Study of Islam and Muslim-Christian Relations, Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, United Kingdom), who discussed "Muslims in Europe into the Next Millennium." After a brief account of early Muslim migration to Europe, viewed as a migrant population from a "rival civilization" or a "victim" of colonialism, he argued that the second-generation Muslims have become more aware of colonial experiences than the parent generation. He attributed this to their parents' rural background, where people tend to be more illiterate and lack intellectual resources. Although one cannot make broad generalizations on recent trends, Nielson maintained that young Muslims in western Europe are disconnecting themselves from rural-traditional Islam and preferring a more intellectual interpretation of Islam. Felice Dassetto (Université Catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium) outlined the nature and scope of contributions made by anthropologists, sociologists, orientalist, and political scientists to the study of Muslims in western Europe in "The State of Research on Islam in Europe." Dassetto pointed out that the orientalist's methods and theories failed to understand current themes, especially in the context of the Muslim presence in Europe. Universities became interested in studying Islam

and Muslims in Europe during the 1970s and the 1980s. Orientalists have focused on the historical dimensions of Islam; political scientists concentrated much of their work in France; sociologists studied the religious aspects of the Muslim migrant population; and anthropologists came to the scene only in the 1980s. Dassetto suggested that themes such as "the meaning of belonging to Islam in western Europe," "the emergence and legitimization of Islamic leadership in Europe," and "the socialization process in Islam and its intellectual analysis" remain to be explored.

The first session ended with an eloquent analysis of South Asian Islam in Britain by John Rex (Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick, United Kingdom). Drawing upon his vast experience in the field of ethnic and racial studies, Rex reminded the audience of a widespread attitude among westerners that Islam and Muslims connote a "fundamentalist" image. Rex elucidated the nature of two main Islamic movements, Deobandis (puritanical) and Barelwis (mystical), both of which are prevalent in Asian Muslim community in Britain. Rex also made a brief comment on what he called "bourgeois Islam," a term that represents upper-middle class Pakistanis who try to give the impression that "Islam is another cricket" game.

The second session was devoted to Islam in eastern Europe. Alex André Popovic's (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France) presentation, "Les communautés musulmanes balkaniques dans la période post-communiste," illustrated the historical development of the Muslim communities in the postcommunist Balkans in relation to geographical location, population distribution, and popular religious orientations. Popovic analyzed the role of regional Sufi groups in the affirmation of Islamic identity. He conceded that in Albania, for example, where 70 percent of the population is Muslim, the Bektashi Sufi order was influential. He also called attention to several variables, such as whether Muslims were Turkish or converts, whether Islam was suppressed in a given country, and the nature of the most widely accepted and practiced Islamic orientations that should be taken into consideration when trying to understand the postcommunist period of the region.

Petya Nitzova (Bulgarian Academy of Science, Sofia, Bulgaria / Hartford Seminary, Connecticut, USA) talked on "Popular Islam and Indigenization: The Eastern European Perspective." He described the establishment of Islam in the Balkans and its confrontation and interaction with Orthodox Christianity. The tensions between normative/official Sunni Islam and popular esoteric/mystical Islam were also discussed in a historical articulation stretching to the present.

Elmira Cera (University of Tirana, Tirana, Albania) and Yannis Fragopoulos (Université Catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium) pre-

sented more specific papers on Muslims in Albania and in Greece, respectively. Cera gave a brief historical account of the spread of, and voluntary conversion to, Islam in Albania. Cera noted that authoritarian regimes closed religious institutions and sacked religious officials. This is now changing under a new constitution that promises religious freedom. In central Albania, she notes, Islam is an integral part of the social fabric, though as a familial and educational concern rather than as a political one. She confirmed a growing trend: both Sunni and Shi'ah Islam are in the process of revivalism. Indices of Islamic revivalism can be detected by looking at the numbers of open madrasahs and of students sent to Turkey, Iran, Egypt, and elsewhere to acquire Islamic knowledge.

Fragopoulos outlined the case of Pomac Muslims, a minority in Greece that is defined by its language, religion, and geographical settlement in his paper "The Muslim Minority of Pomacs in Greece."

In the dialogue session, Christoph Elsas (Philip-Universität Marburg, Marburg, Germany) addressed "Human Rights: Some Convergencies in Secular, Christian and Muslim Discussion in Europe." The response was delivered by Brian Pearce (Inter-Faith Network for the United Kingdom, London).

The first session of the second day was devoted to such topics as generations, youth, representations, and education. Lars Pederson (Third World Information, Aarhus, Denmark) discussed "Islam and Socialization among Turkish Minorities in Denmark: Between Culturalism and Cultural Complexity," wherein he shed light on the continuity and transformation of cultural values: family and authority structures have changed, but marriage and funeral ceremonies are largely intact. While immigrant culture was reduced to a problem culture in Danish society, religion, ethnicity, and descent assumed more importance as bulwarks against social and cultural fragmentation. Pederson argued that for the younger generation, Islam was becoming a central point of reference and self-assertion.

Lenie Brouwer (Free University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands) focused on "The Meanings of Gender among Muslim Runaway Girls and Their Parents in the Netherlands." She said that although such symbols as virginity, honor, respect, and dress are shared by Muslim young people and their parents, young Muslims have been changing their meaning. Brouwer said that the problem of runaway Muslim girls come from different and, most of the time, irreconcilable interpretations of symbols. She also claimed that local social workers encourage girls to run away because of their tendency to ignore their clients' cultural background.

Ahmed Andrew's (University of Aberdeen, Scotland) paper, "Daycare for Muslim Elders in Scotland: A Case of Dundee," raised questions in ethnic and race relations studies. Another paper, read by Thijs Sunier

(Free University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands), on "The Significance of Islam among Turkish Youths in the Netherlands," argued that Islamic institutions in the Netherlands were increasing due to increased migration, the transmission of religious ideology, and the second generation's, at least in the case of Turks, serious concern for Islamic institutions. Sunier remarked that "Islam among Turkish youths persists not because there is still a strong bond with Turkey, but rather because this bond is loosening and therefore reveals the possibility to deploy Islam in a new area and to reconstruct Islamic discourse. It is precisely this dynamic aspect of Islam which explains the persistence of Islamic organizations and especially the relative success of youth organizations."

The last day was allotted to other themes, such as religious practice and identity. Most of the papers focused on Muslims in Britain and, to a lesser extent, Muslims in Germany and Sweden.

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The World Islamic Movement of the Arab World (WIMAW)

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The World Islamic Movement of the Arab World (WIMAW) is a religious and political organization that was founded in 1978 in the city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It is a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, a global Islamic movement that seeks to implement Sharia law and establish an Islamic state. WIMAW is active in several Arab countries, including Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. The organization has been accused of terrorism and has been banned in several countries. In this article, we will explore the history and ideology of WIMAW, and its role in the Arab world.