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BEING MUSLIM: ISLAM, ISLAMISM AND IDENTITY POLITICS

THE BASES OF IDENTITY in the contemporary world vary, diverge and converge. It is commonplace to state that identities develop in reference to nation, religion, gender, language, socio-economic position and lifestyle. While identities are not fixed or unidimensional, they may be constructed in a manner which is exclusive of some other dimension of identity formation. For example, it is argued by some – such as secular French Republicans – that a secular national identity cannot be reconciled with a religious public identity. According to this view, the public space cannot accommodate religious symbols such as the *hijab* (headscarf). The problem here is that the *hijab* may be an expression of identity politics, used to deliver a message in the public sphere: a message that is not about religion per se, but about difference and a right for public recognition. Identity politics, in this respect, asserts difference in terms of distinctions in tastes, lifestyles and modes of representation in the public sphere. These distinctions are affirmed as politically viable, and not just culturally tolerable.

The intersection of religion and identity is complex and raises important questions both in public spheres presumed to be secular and in contexts where religion is thought to play a significant role in defining the public sphere. In secular polities, there is an assumption that religion is a private matter that is withdrawn from the public domain. In principle, it cannot and should not be used as a frame of reference to justify public policy on social issues (e.g. abortion, reproductive rights etc.), nor should any reference be made to religion in drawing up the framework of government or the principles of the polity. Yet, even in western secular polities, signs and symbols of religion can be found in the public domain (for example, Sunday shopping laws, Christian public holidays and commercialized Christmas celebrations). At times, the discourse of political leaders in these polities (e.g. Berlusconi, Blair, Bush) does not shy away from making reference to Judeo-Christian principles and heritage.

In the case of Islam, or countries where Islam is the dominant religion, the view propagated in western scholarly writings, as well as by many Muslims, is that religion is the defining element of Muslim identity. Other dimensions of identity-formation such as class, gender or national belonging are treated as secondary to religion. In this article, I seek to explore the various manifestations of identity politics in relation to the religion of Islam. This exploration is set against the background of the unfolding dynamics of Islamist politics over the last three decades. While the various contemporary constructions of 'being Muslim' cannot be equated to 'being Islamist', Muslim identities have, nonetheless, been articulated in recent years in relation to the claims of Islamist political movements. At the same time, the assertion of a Muslim identity does not necessarily represent an endorsement of these movements. There are processes at work in the construction of 'being Muslim' that reveal a complex web of interaction among the various expressions of identity politics involving Muslims and Islamists.

The interaction of religion and politics in the contemporary period has been associated with the rise of Islamist movements in the Middle East from the 1970s on. During that period, Islamist politics came to be characterized by a diversity of actors, modes of action and, to some extent, objectives. Islamist actors can be classified, largely, into militants, conservatives and moderates. Each of these groupings tends to be characterized by particular social origins and modes of action. On the whole, militants originate from lower-middle-class backgrounds. They have social and economic concerns at the heart of their agenda and have used violence as a means of action. Conservatives and moderates belong to the middle classes with professionals as their main supporters. Conservatives focus on morality issues and seek the Islamization of society and state institutions but not a take-over of political power.[1] Moderates attempt to work within the institutional channels of participation. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood Organization in Egypt ran candidates in alliance with state-sanctioned political parties. Members of the Organization have also been active within the professional syndicates. Conceptions of culture and identity are articulated by all these various actors.

In this article, 'Islamism' is used to encompass both Islamist politics and the process of re-Islamization. 'Islamist politics', meanwhile, refers to the activities of organizations and movements that agitate in the public sphere while deploying signs and symbols from Islamic traditions. It entails a political ideology articulating the idea of the necessity of establishing an Islamic government, understood as government which implements the shari'a (Islamic law). 'Islamization' or re-Islamization signifies a drive to Islamize the social sphere. It involves a process whereby various domains of social life are invested with signs and symbols associated with Islamic cultural traditions. Efforts aimed at Islamization are pursued by actors who are not necessarily adherents of the Islamist project. For instance, there are entrepreneurs who promote the principles of Islamic economics and veiled women who articulate some Islamic ideal of modesty and gender relations yet are not active in Islamist movements. However, their engagement in Islamization is political; it is a central strategy of identity politics which, like other forms of politics, is about claims and contestation. Islamist politics both diverge and converge with the process of Islamization, presenting us with some interesting questions on the interaction between religion and politics. I will go over the grounds of convergence and divergence in the course of

reflecting on the dynamics of interaction between religion and the politics of identity. In doing so, I will elaborate on the different expressions of being Muslim discerned in the intersection of religion and other dimensions of identity formation: gender, class, age and lifestyle, for instance.

In exploring the issue of religion and identity formation, I begin by looking at differing conceptions of religion and Islam in order to see how they have presented us with particular frameworks for understanding identity politics. The discussion then turns to an examination of existing debates on modernity and post-modernity. I conclude by examining the workings of processes of identity-formation that emerge out of global experiences. Throughout, I stress the importance of conceiving religion and those aspects of our identity that it shapes as deriving from a whole range of social practices rather than a given set of theological doctrines.

Religion and the social

Some explanations of Islamism posit Islam as the determining factor, and view it as embodying some unchanged, essential beliefs and ideas that motivate the believers to act. From this perspective, Islamists are moved by the ideal of the early Muslim society and a belief in the unity of religion and politics.[2] Such an account is problematic, however. It gives rise to a central question about the terms in which inquiry into the subject is conceptualized and framed: what is the basis for privileging religion over class, nation or gender in the constitution of an individual's identity? In the case of Muslims, this account rests on an ontological principle that constructs Muslims as different to most other social beings. They are primarily determined by their religion that itself is understood in narrow terms as embodying fixed principles, key among which is the idea of the shari'a. Further, it is argued that Muslims are comparatively more devout than the adherents of other religions, and that their religiosity is intimately tied up with their politics. This sort of account is often countered by a related, but equally misleading, historicist view. Islamist politics are worked into a meta-narrative according to which religion declines in salience/importance with economic development and industrialization. Muslims are thus seen as existing at a lower stage of development and will experience secularism once they have advanced to a higher stage. Challenging this view are many historical studies which demonstrate that realms of secular governance and profane spaces existed in Muslim societies. Beyond this, religion continues to play a role in decidedly modern societies, from the political influence exercised by the Moral Majority in the USA to Christian socialist movements in Europe and other subtle invocations of religious symbols. The starting point of both these accounts is often textual and to some extent theological – reference is made to sacred texts and a body of religious interpretation and then invested with explanatory powers. It is the text and the tradition that explain the religious practices or, to some extent, dictate them. There is a need to assess this premise in terms of how religion interacts with the social and, more fundamentally, what is meant by religion. For what is left out is the sociality of religion.

Religion as a set of rules involving reference to the divine/transcendental cannot be understood outside the social context of practices. In this sense, conformity with or transgression against the rules cannot be solely referred back to the rules for explanation

and interpretation. Looking at instances of practices where religious injunctions exist, we find that the everyday life provides us with the terms of understanding. To illustrate this point, I shall examine a number of cases of conformity with and transgression against socially and religiously sanctioned norms in Egypt and Morocco.[3] These cases concern adultery, abortion and divorce. They are intended to demonstrate that competing frames of reference and situational logic shape the everyday experience of the interaction between religion and the social. The argument here is that the situational and context-bound effects of all systems of meaning apply to norms articulated in reference to Islamic traditions.

The first case concerns an Egyptian woman involved in an extramarital affair. She consults the Lajnat al-Fatwa (committee of religious rulings in al-Azhar) on how to deal with a neighbour's threat to publicly expose the affair.[4] The threat is accompanied by an offer to keep silent in exchange for the woman's sexual favours. The woman refuses to succumb to the neighbour's blackmail, but fears public exposure. The fatwa of the Lajnat advises that she end the illicit affair and not succumb to threats of publicity. In another case of adultery, a married couple in Egypt consults a Shaykh in Sayyida Zaynab.[5] The wife has confessed to an adulterous affair with the landlord of the house in which the couple lives. The Shaykh advises that the husband forgive his wife and accept her repentance and that the marriage continue. The Lajnat's response in the first case and the Shaykh's response in the second both depart from the established norm of condemning adultery and seeking punishment following the transgressor's confession. Should the Lajnat and the Shaykh's opinion/advice be placed outside the realm of orthodoxy? In a case from Morocco, a Muslim woman helps an unmarried friend get an abortion.[6] In undertaking this action, she viewed her support as private and not subject to societal rulings of morality. Instead, she considered herself answerable to God alone and the matter to be strictly a private affair.[7]

In the adultery cases we may note that the Lajnat and the Shaykh drew on alternative traditions that discourage publicizing transgressions and recommend clemency rather than punishment. In the case from Morocco, the exercise of individual morality superseded any notion of transcendental morality. Cases such as these abound and demonstrate the limited benefit of relying on scripture for apprehending social norms even when they make explicit reference to religion, whether involving practising Muslims or individuals in positions of religious authority. The examples also confirm that norms are situated within alternative frames developed in reference to social situations and existing in public and semi-public spaces. Moreover, they compete with dominant representations in the public sphere that are sustained by power relations. In the adultery case, people sought to resolve the moral dilemma through the mediation of religion, by referral to the Lajnat and the Shaykh. The resolution was framed in the language of religion, but it did not amount simply to following the rule.[8] Nor was the resolution conditioned purely by religion. In the abortion case, the woman's mode of reasoning did not exclude the divine, but nor did it conform to religion as a set of rules. What is pertinent in these examples is that competing frames and situational logic shape the everyday experience of the interaction between religion and the social.

Looking at the inscription of religion in social life, we find that social *enjeux* structure the choices of the actors whose judgements and conduct are guided by religion.[9] To illustrate the social *enjeux*, let us look at a divorce case involving a lower-class

woman employed as a domestic helper in an upper-middle-class Cairo household. The woman's divorce took the form of repudiation (the enunciation of *talaq*) by her husband following a dispute. According to religious convention, she was no longer his wife. The woman informed her employers about the situation, and they judged that it would be illicit (*haram*) for her to return to her husband's home or to resume marital relations with him. To be certain of the appropriateness of their position, they decided to call on the office of the mufti, which is responsible for issuing religious edicts and judgments. While awaiting the mufti's response, the woman decided to return to her home and took her neighbours' advice that the husband's repudiation did not qualify as a true declaration of divorce because he was angry when he enunciated *talaq*. What were the social *enjeux* underlying this case? There is no doubt that the social class background of the various actors influenced their positioning in relation to religious knowledge and their modes of arriving at ethical decisions. It can be argued that the upper-middle-class family placed more stock in the religious knowledge of formal religious authorities, while the lower-middle-class neighbours used common sense to arrive at a resolution that conforms to their sense of justice and that, ultimately, could not contradict Divine intentions.

The main points to be made here are not only that there are differing and divergent interpretations of the text and law, but also that, as frames of reference for individual and social relations, these interpretations are conditioned by other social practices and situational ethics. As Jean-Noël Ferrié insightfully puts it, the closed world of religion, totalizing the practices of the believers, does not exist.[10] In other words, in its interaction with the social, religion ceases to be religion (understood as fixed beliefs, dogma, immutable rites and so on). This observation does not simply apply to the modern and post-modern periods but has meta-theoretical implications.[11] This rests on a distinction between religion as faith involving direct and immediate relations with the divine – relations which are personal and intimate – and religion as a set of rules interpreted and negotiated in social settings where all situational and contextual considerations come to bear on the interpretations and negotiations.[12] Going beyond this distinction, Talal Asad suggests that the experience of the spiritual world is shaped by conditions in the social world. Asad also rejects all transhistorical conceptions of religion. He argues that 'there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes'.[13] Integral to Asad's view is the idea that religion cannot be separated conceptually from the domain of power. From this perspective, religious meanings cannot be established outside the disciplines and authorities that determine correct reading and apt practice.[14] This constitutes the domain of 'orthodoxy' which always remains open to contestation and redefinition.

Islamism, Islamization and identity politics, or locating Muslims on the modernity–post-modernity track

The discussion of the position of Islamism from both modernity and post-modernity ties in with debates on the nature of identity-construction in the contemporary period. Post-modernity signals the destabilization of the idea of absolute truth and the

abandonment of certainties and essential modes and ways of being associated with the fixed, singular subject, the always- and already-there subject, in favour of a bracketing of ideas of truth and falsehood. Instead of singular subjects, post-modernity speaks of hybridity and multiplicity. Locating Islamism in relation to modernity and post-modernity has not simply represented an inquiry into the nature of Islamist movements, but an elaboration on the efforts to capture the particularities of Islam. In one view, Islamism/Fundamentalism is constructed as an anti-modern movement, which is explained in terms of the essentially traditional character of the religion. This perspective has been subject to much discussion and criticism and I will not go over this ground here. By contrast, others have affirmed Islamism as a modern phenomenon that captures the affinity between Islam and modernity. I will briefly discuss the second view as a point of entry into an exploration of how 'Islam' is worked into processes of identity construction.

The view of Islam's modern character or at least its compatibility with modernity is intriguingly argued by Ernest Gellner.[15] In his schema of Muslim society, Gellner posited a scriptural Islam or High Islam (assuming a position of orthodoxy) in opposition to an ecstatic Islam or Low Islam. The former is urban, egalitarian and puritanical, while the latter is practised by unlettered Bedouin. Gellner's scriptural Islam bears similarities to the Protestant ethic and reasserts itself with modernization. The expansion of literacy and communication technology contributes to this reaffirmation of orthodoxy, assuring its ultimate victory over Low Islam. Islamists are the rational fundamentalists whose zeal is unattenuated by the forced moderation experienced by the Christian zealots.[16]

The assumptions underlying these propositions are not questioned but modified in Bryan S. Turner's thesis that Islamism is a reaction against post-modernity – a thesis which is also advanced by Akbar Ahmed.[17] Indeed, Turner agrees with Ahmed that Muslims are threatened by icons of post-modernity such as Madonna. Along the same lines, Benjamin Barber contends that Jihad is unleashed by the forces of 'McWorld'.[18] Turner's analysis crystallizes much of the complexity of arguments about Islamism, modernity and post-modernity. In line with Gellner, he does not see a contradiction between Islam and modernity (Islam is rational, universalist etc.). Fundamentalism, then, is a reaction against the failure of modernization and a defence against post-modernity. It is a reassertion of a universalist quest and an insistence on established certainties and absolute truth in the context of a globalized system of exchange commodities that alter, in fundamental ways, the everyday life experience of ordinary persons. Post-modernity challenges faith and reorganizes belief through social transformation in everyday life brought about by the consumption of commodities in which there is a sense of inauthenticity of culture.[19] In this sense, fundamentalism is an attempt at redeeming a fragmented identity and an escape from the post-modern condition of anxiety.

This view is premised on the idea of an orthodox Islam understood as the true/authentic doctrine, that is now engaged in a struggle for universal dominance against other systems of faith, as well as against the relativism of post-modern cultures. From this perspective, hybrid forms of religious identity are seen as inauthentic and a confirmation of the triumph of globalization and post-modern consumerism.[20] My argument against this reading by Turner, Roy, Barber, Ahmed and others, is that they continue to hold on to a notion of essential Islam and an essential Islamism

or fundamentalism. For example, although Turner concedes that Islam is subject to the dynamics of post-modernity (self-reflexivity, for instance), this self-reflexive Islam continues to maintain global pretences to homogenize and totalize the cultural identity of Muslims against the diversity of consumer cultures. We need to ask where is this Islam located? In what way can it stand outside the same processes it seeks to overcome? Where does the space of externality exist? The answer, it would seem, is in the text, the norm and tradition; that is, in the trans-historical Islam that overrides temporality and spatiality of the world. As demonstrated in the discussion of the interaction between religion and the social, this notion is untenable if we shift our focus to the level of practices, the sociality of religion or the everyday-life politics of the believers. Similarly, we should focus on the different terms of insertion of Muslims into the political sphere. With these injunctions in mind, let us examine how Muslims are positioned in relation to globalization and post-modernity.

Globalization, post-modernity and the construction of muslim identities

In current accounts of Islamism, we are presented with either the alienated subject of modernity or with the confused subject of post-modernity. Working within the classical sociological framework of urban change, scholars of Islamism posit the alienated and uprooted subject who is disenchanted with modernity.[21] Under post-modern conditions, the subject is self-reflexive and unhappy about uncertainties. S/he desires a coherent moral view. Abhorring risk, s/he takes a fundamentalist turn. Given that one of post-modernism's postulates is that there is no unitary subject, we should ask what has become of the multiplicity of subject positions and the fragmented selves? The issues that we need to zero in on here have to do with the construction of Muslim identity in the present. Clearly, the processes that shape identity construction in general are at work in the particular case of Muslim identities. As such, some scholars have argued that processes associated with modernity and with post-modernity, such as objectification, rationalization, individualization and relativization, have contributed to the definition of contemporary Muslim selves.

Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori have identified 'objectification' as the process at work in the production of Muslim identity.[22] By objectification, they mean Muslims coming to consciousness of their identity as Muslims and their reflection on that identity. Although they link this process to changes in forms of cultural production and structural social transformations, objectification appears contingent on subjectivist developments and changes in Muslims' self-perceptions, rather than on structural or infrastructural change. This is somewhat similar to the idea of 'self-reflexivity' articulated by Beck and Giddens.[23] With the spread of literacy and the expansion of education, Muslims no longer rely solely on religious authorities to understand and make sense of their religion. In their modern condition, they ask themselves what it means to be Muslim. Their answers come to form an 'objectified consciousness' constituted through the processes of modernization, particularly the expansion of literacy and print. These developments are associated with the breakdown of the clerics' monopoly over religion/religious life and hence the introduction of new actors, namely the Islamists: Muslims whose consciousness has been objectified.

This formulation carries tensions between the view – found in Gellner – that processes of modernization buttress rational fundamentalism and the view that high modernity provides the ground for self-reflexivity, inquiry into self-identity and remaking that identity. The problematic that arises for us here is how to deal with this juxtaposition of a fixed tradition in perpetual reaffirmation and a lived tradition subject to reproduction, redefinition and constituting a space of contestation and reconfiguration of identity. Objectification, as conceived by Eickelman and Piscatori, allows for shifts in forms of authority. But the question that remains is: does objectification translate into changes in the nature of religion and religious knowledge?

In examining the religious field in contemporary Muslim societies, we are confronted with an ongoing redefinition and reconfiguration of religiosity and the place of religion in society and politics. In *Being Modern in Iran*, Fariba Adelkhah methodically shows how Muslims reconstruct practices and redefine beliefs in the context of globalization and consumerism. She argues that the processes of rationalization and individualization could be observed in the production of Muslim identities.[24] The rationalization of religious practices and the accompanying emphasis on the individuality of the believers indicate an increased differentiation of the religious field. Further, these processes are part and parcel of the imbrication of religion in the social. As Iranians partake of the modern world, they redefine their Muslim identity(ies). The new forms of religious sociability and the reconfiguration of practices surrounding religious festivals attest to the sociality of religion. For example, the *jalseh*, as a form of religious meeting, serves as an opportunity to attend to everyday life matters such as finding suitable partners or exchanging consumer goods procured in the free trade zones.[25]

Processes of identity formation in the post-modern period have been linked to commercialization and commodification. Through consumption, individuals construct their identities and social relations in different ways. Consumption, as a process of meaning production, can be discerned in the multiple configurations of Islamism and Islamization. Islamism, for some, expresses a particular lifestyle and patterns of consumption. This has been labelled post-modern Islamism, post-Islamism or New Age Islamism.[26] However, these formulations obscure the differentiated positions occupied by Muslims in relation to processes of globalization and post-modernity. New and changing forms of religious identification may constitute the means by which some middle-class Muslims assert a modern or a post-modern lifestyle. However, for many others, whose experience of globalization is not predominantly in the consumption sphere (i.e. access to goods and commodities purveying a globalized lifestyle), but through incorporation into the informal labour and housing markets, Islamism reworks popular practices and operates within the infrastructures of action at the local level.

Commercialization and consumerism have entered into the making of identities whether Islamist, secularist or just Muslim. Symbols associated with Islamism have been recast in the marketplace. The insertion of the veil into the world of fashion underlines the commodification process – a process that is enmeshed in the web of class, gender, lifestyle and taste-related identities and politics. The layered and multiple meanings that the veil evokes challenge the dichotomy of 'modern' and 'traditional', as demonstrated by the hybrid dress adopted by Muslim women: veiled yet fashionable. Working women in countries such as Egypt have adopted colourful headscarves combined with figure-hugging dresses or jeans and T-shirts.

Indeed, Cairo fashion boutiques and shopping malls offer new brands of trendy 'Islamic' dress, adapting the latest international styles. In Turkey, the new veiling styles are paraded on the catwalks of fashion shows by western and westernized models.[27] Are these women Islamists or post-Islamists? What does this classification yield? Studies of veiling in Turkey point to the multiple appropriations of the veil. For instance, *tessetur* (a distinct urban style of veiling), by upwardly mobile educated women, expresses a particular lifestyle and is a marker of an elite Islamist identity, while, by lower-class women, it could be read as response to populist Islamist mobilization.[28] In another context, the reverse could be true. Yet, things are not that simple. Reasons for adopting the veil vary. They include economic, social, political, religious and cultural motivations. The symbolism of the veil continues to reinforce the idea of the Islamization of the public sphere because of its association with the Islamist project and because of the terms of reception.

The multiplication of choices in the consumption sphere extends to the educational sector. Schools are sites of differentiation of identity where the interplay of class, lifestyle and taste come into full view. In Egypt, the relatively recent phenomenon of 'Islamic' foreign language schools provides a good example of the interplay of these forces and identity formation. The Islamic foreign language schools are private and enrolment fees are often very high.[29] They are preferred by a segment of the upper-middle class because they teach students IT skills and make use of computers and the internet. They also teach foreign languages, primarily English, which is often the language of instruction. Their curriculum covers the subjects set by the Ministry of Education with the addition of expanded periods of religious teaching. The mixture here captures many of the features of the lifestyle of the Egyptian upper-middle class as a whole. Members of this stratum are upwardly mobile and view progress in terms of technology and the use of English, the dominant international language. The added Islamic teaching satisfies what appears to be a need on the part of a segment of that class, a need that is linked to the preservation of a 'self-identity' in the globalized world to which they 'willingly' belong. For this particular segment, the choice of Islamic schools is most likely part of a lifestyle preference that includes listening to the new preachers promoting the accumulation of wealth as a sign of God's blessing, preaching conformity to modesty codes as an expression of love of God and so on.

These devout upper-middle-class families are positioned differently from the lower-middle-class families I interviewed in popular Cairo neighbourhoods.[30] There, some parents send their daughters to public schools where the veil is enforced by the school principal in contravention of state regulations. These parents are concerned about declining morality in their neighbourhood. Their engagement with the instruments of globalization is limited and uneven. They get glimpses of the new commodities on television. They are also exposed to the lifestyles of expatriates returning from the Gulf. These latter sometimes bring with them a conservative morality, particular styles of dress and capital, all of which are part of the global flows characterizing transnationalism. In this case, the opportunities made possible by globalization are more restricted and differ from those available to the well-off segments of society.

In these Cairo neighbourhoods, the production and consumption of cultural items enter into strategies of social and political resistance through the carving-up of spaces of difference. In these neighbourhoods youths in general, and Islamist youths in particular, generate forms of identity by asserting their own distinctions vis-à-vis

other social groups. Islamist youth culture is hybrid and mediated through complex spheres of interaction. In my fieldwork with youths in Cairo, I found a richly textured construction of Muslim identity through Islamic music bands, proselytizing groups, male fraternities and mosque study groups. It is interesting that we can find parallels of this Islamic youth subculture in Turkey, where 'green pop' has emerged as a music genre, blending Islamic chants with a synthesis of Turkish and western music.[31] In certain respects, the youth experience bears similarities to that of other youths and cannot be simply abstracted as Islamic or Islamist. In Cairo, I found that Islamist and non-Islamist male youths shared common views with regard to women and their status and position in society. They articulated a critique of lax morality evidenced in women's attire and conduct. Some held that a subversion of the veil's ethical significance was taking place, as women used it to cover up or hide their moral transgressions. Islamist interventions in popular neighbourhoods reinscribed modes of action that recalled traditional practices of spatial control and moral governance (e.g. monitoring of women and gender interaction, reinforcing the familial ethos and investing in networks of solidarity and mutual aid). Even here, we may find co-option of globalized practices. Sports, in particular football and martial arts, became part of the networks of sociability of Islamist youths and sympathizers.[32] The male fraternities that formed around these activities acquired an Islamic association. The youths' self-fashioning is carried out in relation to religious traditions and cultural messages about gender relations as played out in popular films and television series and narratives of the past.

The manner and aesthetics of Islamic identities represent different inner dynamics and forms of resistance that are shaped by the local contexts. If we turn to British Muslim youths' assertion of an Islamic identity, we find that they are differently positioned in relation to religious traditions. As members of migrant and minority communities outside mainstream society, but conscious of its dominant cultural texts, they are engaged in the invention of syncretic cultural traditions out of the multiple registers available to them. In Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, the British-born Milat Iqbal, a resident of Hackney, tries to fashion himself as a Muslim in a manner that would retain his desire for becoming a Hollywood style gangster. He joins KEVIN (Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation) because 'it's got a wicked kung-fu kick-arse sound name to it'.[33] Milat Iqbal and his fellow KEVIN members are engaged in a settling of accounts where migration, minority status and the history of imperial subjugation are concerned.

The expansion of consumerism into local societies has undoubtedly affected the everyday life or the lifestyles of Muslims. But we should not assume that their responses are uniform. Nor should we label whatever comes out of the interaction between the global and the local as inauthentic and somehow equate change with heresy, newness with fakeness. In matters of belief, religious practice and views of the faith, contemporary Muslims challenge received ideas and established authorities in a way that cannot be explained solely by reference to modernity and post-modernity. Rather, conformity and transgression against religious norms can be more appropriately explained by reference to alternative lifestyles and local social and cultural practices and norms. To illustrate, I recall the example of the woman who decided to return to her husband after his declaration of *talaq*. According to official Islam, it was illicit for her to cohabit with him again. Her decision may have been based on

affective, economic or social considerations. She received both support and condemnation that expressed the socio-economic and cultural positions of the various actors. The upper-middle-class employers upheld an official-Islam position, while the woman herself and her neighbours followed their own rulings. One may argue that self-reflexivity allowed her to adopt a critical, empowering resolution, but what role did it play in the decision of the others?

Concluding remarks

Taking account of the sociality and historicity of religion is central to understanding the production of religious identity in the public sphere. In other words, the identity constructed is relational: it shapes and is shaped by other social dimensions such as gender, class and lifestyles. Muslims, as actors, occupy different positions in their social settings and in relation to the processes of globalization. They do not engage, in a uniform manner, in the construction of Muslim selves. Nor do they reproduce a monolithic Muslim identity. Rather, their engagement in identity construction informs us of the power struggles that are embedded in material local conditions and global processes, and that make use of a multiplicity of registers and frames of reference.

Notes

1 For a discussion of conservative Islamism see Salwa Ismail, 'Confronting the Other: Identity, Culture, Politics and Conservative Islamism in Egypt', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 30 (1998), pp. 199–225. Reprinted in Salwa Ismail, *Rethinking Islamist Politics: Culture, the State and Islamism*. London, I. B. Tauris, 2003.

2 See, for example, Hrair Dekmejian, 'Islamic Revival, Catalysts, Categories and Consequences', in Shireen Hunter (ed.), *The Politics of Islamic Revivalism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988, pp. 3–22; John Obert Voll, *Islam, Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, 2nd edn, Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1994.

3 The following discussion of the adultery and abortion cases draws on Ismail, *Rethinking Islamist Politics*, op. cit., pp. 18–19.

4 Nabil Abd al-Fatah and Diya Rashwan, *Taqrir al-Hala al-Dinniya fi Misr* (Report on the Condition of Religion in Egypt), Cairo, Markaz al-Ahram lil-Buhuth al-Istratijiya, 1996.

5 This case is discussed in Nadia Abu Zahra, *The Pure and the Powerful: Comparative Studies in Contemporary Muslim Societies*, Reading, Ithaca Press, 1997.

6 This case is discussed in Jean-Noël Ferrié, 'Prier pour disposer de soi: Le sens et la fonction de la prière de demande dans l'Islam marocain actuel', *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord*, 33 (1994), pp. 113–27.

7 Some Islamist women's groups in Morocco provide support to unmarried women seeking abortions. Their rationale for extending this kind of support may be different from the case discussed here. It is likely that their intervention is part of a vision of reform and provision for repentance and self-improvement. See Connie Carøe Christiansen, 'Women's Islamic Activism: Between Self-Practices and Social Reform Efforts', in John L. Esposito and François Burgat (eds), *Modernizing Islam: Religion in*

the Public Sphere in Europe and the Middle East, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 2003, pp. 145–65.

8 Ferrié, 'Prier pour disposer du soi', op. cit., p. 125.

9 Jean Noël Ferrié, 'Vers une anthropologie deconstructiviste des sociétés musulmanes du Maghreb', *Peuples méditerranéens*, 54–5 (January–June 1991), pp. 229–45.

10 Ibid.

11 For an elaboration on the idea of the historicity of Islamic reason see Muhammad Arkoun, *Tarikhiyat al-Fikr al-Arabi al-Islami* (The Historicity of Arab-Islamic Thought), Beirut, Markaz al-Inma' al-Qawmi, 1987.

12 My reading of Ferrié, 'Vers une anthropologie deconstructiviste', op. cit., p. 238.

13 Talal Asad, 'The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category', in Michael Lambeck (ed.), *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2002, p. 116.

14 Ibid., p. 128.

15 Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982.

16 See Ernest Gellner, 'Civil Society in Historical Context', *International Social Science Journal*, 43: 3 (August 1991), pp. 496–510.

17 See Bryan S. Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism*, London, Routledge, 1994; and Akbar Ahmed, *Post-Modernism and Islam*, London, Routledge, 1992.

18 Benjamin Barber, *Jihad Versus McWorld*, New York, Balantine Books, 1995.

19 Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism*, op. cit., pp. 17, 78, 90, 92.

20 Olivier Roy, 'Le Post-islamisme', in Olivier Roy and Patrick Haenni (eds), *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 85–6 (1999), pp. 11–30.

21 For a critical discussion of the psycho-social approach to Islamist movements, see Salwa Ismail, 'The Popular Movement Dimensions of Contemporary Militant Islamism: Socio-Spatial Determinants in the Cairo Urban Setting', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42: 2 (2000), pp. 363–93. Reprinted in Ismail, *Rethinking Islamist Politics*, op. cit.

22 Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996.

23 Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society*, London, Sage, 1992; Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1991.

24 Fariba Adelkhah, *Being Modern in Iran*, London, Hurst, 1999. The comparison with the unfolding of projects of modernity in Malaysia is instructive. There, the shari'a courts are engaged in the production of an individualized Malaysian Muslim identity while also contributing to the rationalization, if not the dissolution, of the bonds of kinship and tribe. These efforts are inscribed in the broader state objective of instituting disciplinary mechanisms that are at the service of its project of modernity. See Michael G. Peletz, *Islamic Modern: Religious Courts and Cultural Politics in Malaysia*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2002, in particular pp. 204–22.

25 Adelkhah, *Being Modern in Iran*, op. cit., p. 110.

26 Patrick Haenni and Olivier Roy, 'Au-delà du repli identitaire, dans les espaces de convergence entre islamisation et globalisation', mimeo, September 2002.

27 Yael Navaro-Yashin, 'The Market for Identities: Secularism, Islamism, Commodities', in Deniz Kandiyoti and Ayse Saktanber (eds), *Fragments of Culture: The Everyday of Modern Turkey*, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 2002, pp. 221–53.

28 Jenny White, 'The Islamist Paradox', in Kandiyoti and Saktanber, *Fragments of Culture*, op. cit., p. 208. The inscription of veiling in spatial and symbolic representations shaped by gender, the Islamist–secularist divide and class in Istanbul is examined in Anna J. Secor, 'The Veil and Urban Space in Istanbul: Women's Dress, Mobility and Islamic Knowledge', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 9: 1 (2002), pp. 5–22.

29 See Linda Herrera, 'Islamization and Education in Egypt: Between Politics, Culture and the Market', in John L. Esposito and François Burgat (eds), *Modernizing Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in Europe and the Middle East*, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 2003, pp. 167–89.

30 These interviews were part of field research I conducted on everyday politics in Cairo's new urban quarters (conventionally referred to as the informal housing communities) in 2000 and 2001. This research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council of Great Britain.

31 Ayse Saktanbar, '"We Pray Like You Have Fun": New Islamic Youth in Turkey between Intellectualism and Popular Culture', in Kandiyoti and Saktanber, *Fragments of Culture*, op. cit., p. 265.

32 A parallel experience among youths in Algeria is documented in Miriem Vergès, 'Les jeunes, le stade, le FIS: Vers une analyse de l'action portestaire', *Maghreb-Machrek*, 154 (October–December 1996), pp. 48–54.

33 Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 2000, p. 295.