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SYMPOSIUM

ISLAMIC ETHICS AND LIVING TOGETHER IN ETHNIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Het Pand, Ghent, June 21st 2023

PROGRAM

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PART 1 Anthropology's encounters with Islamic ethics/theology (Eng.)

9.30 *Welcome and introduction*

by **An Van Raemdonck** (Ghent University) and **Iman Lechkar** (VUB Brussels, Fatima Mernissi Chair).

9.45 – 11.15 *Roundtable 1*

with **Martijn de Koning** (Radboud University Nijmegen), **Mieke Groeninck** (KU Leuven; Odisee University College), **Merve Reyhan Kayikci** (KADOC- KU Leuven).

11.15 – 11.30 Coffee break

11.30 – 12.45 *Panel 1* (Digital)

Amin El Yousfi (Cambridge University) - Studying Islam ethnographically in the absence of God.

Hakan Çoruh (Charles Sturt University) - Islamic Ethics in Diverse Post-Modern Contexts.

Shajeem Muhammed Fazal Pallikkara Veettil (Indian Institute of Science Education and Research) - Ethics as a set of qualities among Muslims in India.

Derya Iner (Charles Sturt University) - Islamic ethics and Living within Diversity in a Highly Racialized World.

12.45 – 14.00 Lunch break

Please note that lunch is included for presenters only

PART 2 The role of Islamic ethics in the lives of Muslims in Europe

(Live translation Eng/NL)

14.00 – 15.00 *Keynote lecture*

Mohammed Hashas (LUIS University Rome) - "On Islamic thick and thin ethics and the challenge of modern pluralism".

15.00 – 16.00 *Panel 2*

Noor Zehra Zaidi (UMBC) - "Still We Long for Zaynab": Anthropology and Theology in the Study of South Asian Shi'as in the United States.

Erin Atwell (University of Chicago) - Fearing God: Embodied Temporalities of Anxiety and Divine Orientation in Contemporary Egypt.

Dominik Müller (Freiburg University) - Beyond the Imam's Guidance: Exploring Nasiha as a Practice for Shaping the Self and the Other in Swiss Mosques.

Kim Lecoyer (Odisee University College) - When religion meets family law: The role of Islamic norms and ethics in the protection of Belgian Muslim women's fundamental rights within the family.

16.00 – 16.15 Coffee break

16.15 – 18.00 *Roundtable 2* (NL) "The role of Islamic ethics in everyday life"

with members of Muslim civil society organisations **Cindy Raes** (Al Minara), **Kautar Oulad El Haj** (Netwerk Islamexperten), **Amal Miri** (FMV/Antwerp University), **Yasmina Akhandaf** (Green Deen) en **Hilmi Lazhar** (Arteveldehogeschool).

18.00 – 20.00 Reception

***Amin El Yousfi (Cambridge University, UK)* – Studying Islam ethnographically in the absence of God**

Since the publication of Talal Asad's 1986 seminal article "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam", the anthropological study of Islam as an analytical category replaced the orientalist tropes and dichotomies in the study of Muslims. 'Piety' and its 'ambivalences', through 'texts' and 'embodiment', became central in the anthropological scrutiny of Islam as a 'discursive tradition'. Yet, being rooted in MacIntyre's conception of tradition and Foucault's idea of 'power [being] everywhere', this conception of Islam led to fading God into oblivion. Why God is absent from the Anthropology of Islam? What do we miss when we ask the question about Islam without asking the question about God's agency? What do we miss when we omit ontology and theology from the epistemological construction of studying Islam ethnographically? This paper attempts to answer these questions and unsettles questionable assumptions about temporality, tradition and discursivity that might obscure our understanding of Islam.

***Hakan Çoruh (Charles Sturt University, Australia)* - Islamic Ethics in Diverse Post-Modern Contexts**

One of the possible ways for bringing together classical Islamic ethics and anthropology could be adopting a comparative approach. Such a comparative approach can highlight similarities and differences between Islamic ethical traditions and those of other religions or cultures. This can help identify common themes and ethical principles, and foster cross-cultural dialogue. In this context, this article will analyse selected classical Muslim ethicists (Miskawayh, Ghazzali and Iji) and their engagement with the philosophical ethics. Also, it will question what the role of Islamic ethics in environments marked by multiple forms of cultural and religious difference is. The article highlights that Islamic ethics can offer a critical and pluralistic perspective on the diversity of human beings and their moral values and obligations. Islamic ethics can also promote a culture of dialogue, tolerance and mutual respect among different groups and communities. Islamic ethics can also help Muslims to appreciate their own cultural and religious heritage, as well as to learn from other traditions and sources of wisdom. Islamic ethics can thus contribute to the well-being and prosperity of diverse societies.

***Shajeem Muhammed Fazal Pallikkara Veettil (Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, India)* - Ethics as set of qualities among the Muslims in India**

Recently India has witnessed heinous violence against the Muslims from the nation state and over the past few years, newspapers and social media is filled with insidious Islamophobia, constantly equating Islam with terror and barbarism. My ethnographic work is about the ethics of Muslims in the current Hindu majoritarian Indian state. How do Muslims respond to the crisis that they face in Hindu Nationalist India and how this crisis informs the ethics, as in the set of qualities, of Muslims in India? Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Old Delhi, I ask, what brings different sects within Islam to respond to this dilemma? The common topics discussed in the ethnographic encounters I had over the past few years were on how Muslims encountered state violence in their everyday life and how the fear coming from this violence informed their notion of ethics and citizenship in India. Violence will be countered by violence, as one might think, from the Muslims, but

what ethnography shows is the vision of ethics in which hatred is replaced with love of the nation and their Hindu neighbours.

Derya Iner (Charles Sturt University, Australia) **- Islamic ethics and Living within Diversity in a Highly Racialized World**

Multicultural societies are becoming highly racialized, with Muslims suffering the most due to the global scourge of Islamophobia. This phenomenon has posed a serious threat to Muslim minorities in the last few decades, particularly with the resurgence of far-right extremism. Muslims also experience internalized Islamophobia. Niqabi women have shared their experiences of discrimination within their own communities, while Muslim parents have expressed concerns about racism among Muslim peer groups (Iner and Nebhan 2019). Additionally, Muslims from all walks of life grapple with the ethical response to ensuring the safety of LGBTQI communities, who face discrimination, hate crimes, and a sense of insecurity. Apparently, the Islamic theological approach to same-sex relationships may hinder the ability of some Muslims to adopt an unconditional ethical stance against all forms of hate, discrimination, and attacks on marginalized communities, regardless of whether they conform to Muslims' theological criteria or not. In my presentation, I will address these two problems, one related to in-community issues and the other to inter-community challenges. Next, I will explore Islamic ethical principles that can counter internal Islamophobia and foster unconditional support for preserving the dignity of all human beings, defending their rights to live in safety, regardless of whether they conform to Muslims' theological criteria or not.

Noor Zehra Zaidi (University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), US) **- "Still We Long for Zaynab": Anthropology and Theology in the Study of South Asian Shi'as in the United States**

The fall of Saddam Hussain in 2003 led to an explosion in pilgrimage – or ziyārat – to the Shi'a holy cities in Iraq, opening the doors for Shi'a faithful to visit sacred sites that had been closed to them for decades. Yet even as pilgrims from around the world visited Karbala and Najaf in the tens of millions, the increasing unrest in Damascus would curtail visitation to the revered shrines of Zaynab bint 'Ali and Ruqayyah bint 'Hussain. This simultaneous opening and closing have inspired unique and changing emphases on ethics, rituals, narrations, and materiality that accommodate for these political formations. This paper explores the longing for Shi'a shrine cities amongst South Asian youth in the United States, with a particular focus on Shi'a communities in New York and New Jersey. It analyzes how Shi'a shrine cities have replaced the 'homeland' in the discourse of second-generation immigrants, young American Muslims who express deeper affinity to these distant sites – reformulating the 'homeland' and their affairs than to the state of Shi'as in their parents' native countries. For them, the disciplines of Islamic theology and ethics are not removed from the everyday and observations of religious practice, but instead are intrinsically linked. Carrying out anthropological fieldwork amongst these groups of Shia Muslims in the United States illustrates how they deploy theological references, established religious treatises and authorities, and modern notions of ethics and justice into debates about everyday practice, belonging through multilocality, and ziyārat rituals. Rather than thinking of a purely diasporic religion along the lines of Thomas Tweed, employing John Zavos and Sean McLoughlin's shift to multilocality provides an analytical tool to understand how South Asian Shias meld multilocal belonging with an adaptation of ethics and rituals to match this multisite belonging. Like Kim Knott, who draws on spatial theorists like Lefebvre and Foucault, the emphasis on specific locations and the social construction of space allows us to theorize about the adapting role of Islam in diverse contexts.

Erin Atwell (University of Chicago, US) - **Fearing God: Embodied Temporalities of Anxiety and Divine Orientation in Contemporary Egypt**

The importance of being godfearing in the expansive institutes, schools, research centers, and mosques that constitute Egypt's institutionalized religious spaces stretches beyond compliance to a received orthodoxy or even individual commitments to pious practice. Navigating anxieties that Egyptian society is heading towards two equally threatening types of extremism, atheism and Salafism, in these spaces being the right kind of godfearing comes to index at once the cure to these woes and larger shifts in societal orientations towards the divine. The stakes of being godfearing—having taqwā—are the very preservation of a rightly ordered religious society, whether through mufti training programs, the lessons of women preachers, or anti-atheism YouTube Shorts. Exploring these programs and the responses to them by diverse Egyptians, this presentation theorizes godfearingness as an embodied and material activation of a connection between individual interiority and external action established in the earliest days of Islam. On the one hand, there is widespread commitment in contemporary Egyptian religious institutions to the relevance of early Islamic textual sources as a guidepost for responding to contemporary problems. On the other, there is tremendous friction over the ways these sources should be paired with modern strategies and how these pairings are received by broader publics. More than an abstract ethical concept, godfearingness arises as the grounds for contemporary debate in Egypt around right orientations toward the divine whose temporal valences disrupt our very notions of the internal/external and corporeal/immaterial.

Dominik Müller (Swiss Centre for Islam and Society (SZIG),University of Freiburg, Switzerland & Erlangen Centre for Islam and Law in Europe (EZIRE), FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany) – **Beyond the Imam's Guidance: Exploring Nasiha as a Practice for Shaping the Self and the Other in Swiss Mosques**

The study of Islamic authority has gained considerable prominence in recent research on Islam in Europe, primarily focusing on authority figures (e.g., imams, religious teachers), specific organizations (e.g., Diyanet), and formats of religious instruction (e.g., Friday sermons, sohbets, and Quran classes). However, authority relations beyond these established institutional hierarchies or formats are rarely scrutinized. This paper argues that a deeper understanding of the (re-)production of Islamic authority in Europe's highly diverse contexts requires greater attention to everyday interactions and practices between Muslims without formal positions in mosques or Muslim organizations. Drawing on five years of ethnographic fieldwork in mosques and Muslim organizations in Switzerland and Turkey, this paper explores how nasiha - the Islamic practice of giving advice - is invoked as an ethical tool for shaping the self and the other in everyday interactions between Muslims beyond the guidance of established authority figures. By examining a wide range of nasiha practices, from the supposedly supportive counsel provided by elder members of mosque communities to the self-improvement "hacks" of Islamic influencers on social media, the paper demonstrates that nasiha is not only an integral – and sometimes highly controversial – aspect of everyday Muslim life in Switzerland but also a crucial tool for (self-) positioning in relation to fellow Muslims and God. Furthermore, the paper argues that anthropologists should consider the theological underpinnings of their research field and thus engage not only in research on Islamic theology but also with(in) Islamic theology. In doing so, the paper highlights the importance of studying nasiha practices to better understand the complexities of Islamic authority in contemporary Europe.

Kim Lecoyer (Odisee University College, Belgium) - When religion meets family law: The role of Islamic norms and ethics in the protection Belgian Muslim women's fundamental rights within the family

My paper presents the main findings of my doctoral research, a legal anthropological field research concerning women's rights in family conflicts within Belgian Muslim families. The presentation will focus on how Belgian Muslim women deal with Islamic norms in their family lives, and in family conflicts in particular. It addresses the following questions: How is Islamic normativity approached and understood, by religious actors and by "ordinary" Muslim women who experienced family conflict. Which kind of legal/ethical questions are being posed in relation to Islamic family law in the Belgian context? Where do Muslim looks for answers to these questions? A typology of approaches of Islamic normativity and ethics is proposed. The research has found that Islamic interpretations of family law tend to differentiate rights and duties on the basis of gender, generally disadvantaging women. This fact may add an extra layer of hardship to already difficult processes of decision making in situations of family conflict. Nevertheless, some interpretations may empower women to stand up for their rights. The paper presents interesting insights concerning the role of Islamic ethics in the emergency of a rights consciousness on the cross-roads of several normative frameworks: Islamic normativity, Belgian law and international legal norms.