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Introduction to Special Issue: Muslim Cosmopolitanism: Movement, Identity, and Contemporary Reconfigurations

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Cosmopolitanism has become the new buzzword of the past two decades. Some of its meanings can be traced to the Cynics or the Stoics in Greek antiquity, others to the 18th century elaboration of the concept by Immanuel Kant. Some authors even posit a *new* cosmopolitanism linked to the contemporary processes of globalization, deregulation of markets, post-nationalism, migration, and feminism (e.g. Hannerz 2004). Derived from the Greek conjunction of “world” (*cosmos*) and “city” (*polis*), cosmopolitanism describes a “citizen of the world,” one who is not rootless but embedded in concentric circles of identity and “puts right before country, and universal reason before the symbols of national belonging” (Nussbaum 1994). Cosmopolitanism may denote a certain outlook on the world, a social and cultural condition, a political project, a political subjectivity, an attitude, and finally, a practice or competence (Vertovec and Cohen 2003:8–14). Appiah’s influential moral manifesto intertwines two strands in his interpretation of the concept:

One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance” (2006:xv).

Given the considerable conceptual indeterminacy of the term (Pollock, Bhabha, Breckenridge, and Chakrabarty, 2000:577–578), cosmopolitanism leaves ample room for scholars to attribute to it various advantages. Hannerz (2004) highlights the concept’s use for anthropologists as they move back and forth between “the local” and “the global,” blurring the initial, problematic contrast between the two. Ho (2002, 2006) goes beyond this binary in demonstrating how debates about cosmopolitan forms of self-understanding are neither local, national, nor global, but recognize how forms of identity arise from wider linkages. Werbner (2008) envisions a new anthropology of cosmopolitanism, grounded ethically in ideas of tolerance, inclusiveness, hospitality, personal autonomy, and emancipation. This challenges some of the articulations of the concept in other disciplines: rejecting the view that cosmopolitanism is only and singularly elitist; suggesting that cosmopolitanism’s fundamental values are not necessarily “Western”; insisting that not all postcolonial cosmopolitans are travelers and do not need to reside or move permanently beyond their nations and cultures; and stressing that cosmopolitanism reflects the striving for universal ideals and local multiculturalisms within a particular field of power.

For anthropologists, “vernacular cosmopolitanism” has been particularly popular. Homi Bhabha (1996), in writing against the universalism of Nussbaum, used the term to suggest a cosmopolitan community envisaged in “marginality.” Werbner (2006, 2008), like some contributors to this special issue, groups vernacular cosmopolitanism with similar concepts that combine apparently contradictory opposites and suggest multiple modalities of cosmopolitanism: cosmopolitan patriotism (Appiah 1998); rooted cosmopolitanism (Cohen 1992); cosmopolitan ethnicity (Werbner 2002); working-class cosmopolitanism (Werbner 1999); and discrepant cosmopolitanism (Clifford 1992). All these terms highlight the plurality of practices that constitute, and result from, a cosmopolitan disposition, and that are rooted in regionally diverse historicities and worldviews. By devoting this volume to “Muslim cosmopolitanism,” we similarly center attention on cosmopolitanism as a set of practices, a disposition, and a specific cultural and social condition that allows Muslims to inhabit the contemporary world.

Vertovec and Cohen (2003) argue that travel and immigration have led to a greater acceptance of diversity, of “everyday” or “ordinary” cosmopolitanism. Yet surely, an exploration of Muslim cosmopolitan practices and competences needs to take account of the political and discursive parameters that, since at least September 11, have inflected scholarly debate on whether “Muslims” or “Islam” should be conceived as part or as the Other of a new cosmopolitan order of things. Calhoun stresses the extent to which “Islam” has been mobilized as the central foe in the global War on Terror and as the “bad other to liberalism and progress” (2003:531). Held also makes 9/11 a central example in his new book on cosmopolitanism. Yet his approach is a clearly normative one, counseling the Muslim community on what they *must* do to overcome their religious limitations, so that they benefit from a true cosmopolitan attitude. Stressing that the wider Islamic community “needs to reaffirm the compatibility of Islam with the universal, cosmopolitan principles that put life, and the free development of all human beings, at their centre” (2010:138), Held presents cosmopolitanism and (a certain strand of) Islam as mutually exclusive. Appiah (2006) goes even further than Held. He labels as “counter-cosmopolitans” all “global Muslim fundamentalists” (whom he identifies indiscriminately as recruiting grounds for Al-Qa’ida). Using Olivier Roy’s (2004) term “neofundamentalists,” Appiah suggests that their unitary normative vision for how all human beings should live goes against the pluralism and fallibilism inherent in the notion of cosmopolitanism (also see Beck 2006:112–113). Hoesterey (in this volume), among others, has been highly critical of Appiah’s “flawed” approach. Lawrence (n.d.) argues, contra Appiah, that Muslim cosmopolitanism must displace Muslim terrorism as the referent of assumed “difference” between Muslim and non-Muslim moderns if it hopes to succeed. Yet this critique, by continuing to oppose cosmopolitanism to terrorism as its binary “-ism,” shows how difficult it is to avoid the trap of a “contaminated cosmopolitanism” (Appiah 2006).

We propose in this volume another escape from the confines of this debate by illustrating the diverse forms of cosmopolitanism as they are envisaged and practiced by Muslims in Muslim-majority and -minority countries, as well as in diasporic contexts. We are interested in the forms of sociability that emerge in and are constitutive of the contemporary Muslim world in its various imaginative and geographic configurations. Starting from the historicity of practices and institutions that have made cosmopolitanism a constitutive feature of

Muslim self-understanding and religious practice, contributions point to characteristic features of Muslim cosmopolitanism in the contemporary era. Trade and pilgrimage were important historic avenues for Muslim mobility and cultural exchange (Eickelman and Piscatori 1990; Simpson and Kresse 2008). Muslim solidarity, however uneven, around the Arab-Israeli wars, the Iranian Revolution, 9/11, and most recently the transformative events of the “Arab Spring” has important religious as well as political implications. Current attitudes and practices of cosmopolitanism are deeply shaped by reconfigurations in the relationship between state and society in the era of neoliberal reforms, along with processes such as the intensification of migration and exchange, the proliferation of decentralized media, and the concurrent transformation of national and transnational Muslim publics.

By addressing the specificities of particular regional and historical situations in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and the Muslim diaspora in North America, this special issue highlights the dynamic and heterogeneous nature of contemporary identifications. Contributors examine Muslim cosmopolitanism as articulated through its engagement with the state, business and economics, history, fashion, and imagination. For them, cosmopolitanism is a heuristic concept and a contested category of practice, a form of experience that refers to a variety of imagination, a future possibility that is grounded in present-day realities. As a whole we argue for the centrality of religious traditions and networks to projects of cosmopolitanism, and probe the secular post-Enlightenment and elitist bias inherent in much of the cosmopolitan literature. The Muslim cosmopolitans in this special issue are residing in capital cities or major financial centers but are also located in remote and marginalized villages and small towns. Contributors suggest that Muslim cosmopolitanism can be at once universalist in identifying with the global Islamic *umma* (community of believers) and rooted in particular local histories.

According to Patrick Eisenlohr, Mauritius was, throughout its history, shaped by processes of globalization. He studies cosmopolitanism as a socio-cultural condition, an attitude epitomized by the acute awareness of Gujarati traders of the far-reaching connections made available by processes of globalization, but also of their own transportable place in this world through travel and migration. For Eisenlohr, cosmopolitanism is also profoundly relational, as illustrated by the contrast between the minority population of Gujarati traders to the Muslim majority of descendants of indentured laborers, who enviously emulate the cosmopolitan mobility, education, economic power, and membership in authoritative transnational Islamic networks of the Gujarati traders.

The global imaginary of cosmopolitanism depicted by Eisenlohr as the key to religious pluralism in Mauritius is, for Samuli Schielke, but an escape from the cement walls narrowing the horizons of Egyptians with lofty aspirations yet limited means. The cosmopolitanism of limitations that Cairo’s poor experience shows in stunning, despondent photos of youth waiting aimlessly in barber shops for anything to happen, emulating global Others through wearing a t-shirt picturing Che Guevara or the logo of a European football team. Mediated landscapes portray exotic tourist locations elsewhere, expensive Cairene villas afforded only by the rich, or the lush paradise of the Islamic afterlife, attainable only to those who pray and repent their sins in an Egypt of Islamic revival. Schielke shows how in

Cairo longing for a better life turns into immediate revolutionary political demands which position Tahrir Square, in a fleeting reversal, at the center of the world's imaginary.

James Hoesterey provides a fascinating glimpse into the world of Indonesian corporate management training seminars using pop psychology and "prophetic cosmopolitanism" as a method of recruitment. Muslim self-help gurus communicate a moral model of Islamic ethics and civic virtue through transforming the seventh-century Prophet Muhammad into "a modern cosmopolitan, a citizen-believer who is committed to Islam and tolerant of difference." Arguing against the literature that depicts Muslims as "counter-cosmopolitans," Hoesterey defines vernacular Muslim cosmopolitanism as both inspired by and in opposition to Western understandings of science, self, and citizenship, and promoting of tolerance without religious universalism. Indonesians foreground the worldliness of global psychological discourses and the moral example of the Prophet, bypassing questions of identity and escaping global citizenship.

Similar to how Indonesian human resources consultants become the new preachers, Joseph Hill examines a village *shaykh* and a director of a non-religious NGO in Mauritania, who are the Sahara desert's cosmopolitans. The Bedouin village of Maatamoulana is part of a historic translocal network of the Niassene Tijaniyya "Fayda" movement. Proposing the notion of "hybrid cosmopolitanism," Hill identifies cosmopolitanism with the command of repertoires of behaviors and ways of speaking, with the knowledge of certain customs and expectations, and a competence in managing contradictions. Through strategically capitalizing on networks of hybrid belonging and multiple definitions of community, Sufi discipleship does not obstruct other forms of Islamic cosmopolitan belonging, allowing the participation of Sufis, reformist Muslims, and non-Muslims on different and sometimes conflicting terms.

While Western tourists and international aid workers visit Islamic NGOs in North and West Africa, Senegalese travel the world, and many settle in New York City. Beth Buggenhagen investigates how Murid women engage in the global economy while preserving their distinctively Murid vision of their place in the world. She looks at cosmopolitanism as a practice and form of consciousness, rooted simultaneously in history and universalism. Murid women in New York reference local Senegalese historical practices through their choice of fashion and monetary exchange while abiding by Muslim universalism through modesty in dress, generosity, and engaging in mutual aid. Still, Murids in New York are caught in a cosmopolitan paradox. Although envisioning themselves as cosmopolitans who have seen the world, the War on Terror resulting from September 11, 2001 has also imposed restrictions on their movement in New York City and on their sometimes illicit cosmopolitan competences.

Taken together, contributions to this special issue highlight the varied and shifting practices and identifications by which Muslims around the globe envision their place in the world and a future that, while true to their social, cultural and moral roots and conventions, also meets the challenges of an increasingly interconnected world.

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