



Youth in the Contemporary Muslim World

Conference Report

The Youth in the Contemporary Muslim World international conference brought together scholars, activists, artists, film-makers, and NGO practitioners to explore the multiple ways that Muslim youth are dealing with political challenges, neoliberal and structural changes in their lives, the means by which they are negotiating new and continuing religious and moral conflicts, and how they are using art and culture to express identities that often oppose government policies but just as often address cross-cultural exchanges throughout the Muslim world. This report captures the panels and discussions as expressed on April 8-9, 2015.

**BOSTON
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Convened at the Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies
at Boston University

Conference Report

Youth in the Contemporary Muslim World

April 8-9, 2015

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The Institute for the Study of Muslim Societies and Civilizations (SMSC), the Institute for Iraqi Studies, Institute on Culture, Religion & World Affairs (CURA); and North Africa Studies at Boston University; the Boston Consortium for Arab Region Studies (BCARS); the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies (AIAS); the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (OCIS); and iPlatform for Global Change

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Conference Objectives

In recent years scholarship in the social sciences and humanities has increasingly demonstrated the problematic limits to the study of contentious politics that focuses solely on the formal political arena and electoral process. This is especially true when a few key actors and alliances monopolize the national parliamentary area in which legal political parties compete for power.

In response to such restrictions, youth activists and grassroots organizations across the Muslim world have creatively politicized a range of spheres beyond state control. With the closure of regular party channels, the state's periphery has become a vibrant site for youth contestation and political organization. Religious institutions, student and labor unions, and professional organizations have paralleled the state's functions by providing crucial social services, like public health for their communities. Meanwhile, activists have also claimed and reshaped collective public spaces through cultural expression of graffiti, photography, artwork, music, and joyriding.

This conference brings together scholars, activists, artists, film-makers, and NGO practitioners to explore the multiple ways that Muslim youth are dealing with political challenges, neoliberal and structural changes in their lives, the means by which they are negotiating new and continuing religious and moral conflicts, and how they are using art and culture to express identities that often oppose government policies but just as often address cross-cultural exchanges throughout the Muslim world.

The panels address the art and culture of dissent; the local and global impact of youth activism and cultural movements; the discrimination and coping strategies of migrant Muslim communities in the West; the challenges of education in conflict zones and student activism; and trends in youth radicalization in the Middle East and South Asia.

Rapporteur's Note

I am honored to be entrusted to report on this conference on such a timely and important topic. The following report reflects my understanding of panelists and attendees arguments and discussion. Any mistakes in capturing panelists' nuance and complexity is my own and not that of the panelists.

~Louise Klann

Speakers

Qais Akbar Omar

Afghan novelist

Visiting Fellow, Scholars at Risk, Harvard University

Manal Al Dowayan

Artist, Saudi Arabia

Asef Bayat

Professor of Sociology, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Cynthia Becker

Associate Professor of History of Art & Architecture, Boston University

Eric Davis

Professor of Political Science, Rutgers University

Kevan Harris

Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of California, Los Angeles

Linda Herrera

Associate Professor of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Lance Laird

Assistant Professor of Medical Anthropology, Boston University

Doreen Lee

Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Northeastern University

Pascal Menoret

Assistant Professor of Middle East Studies, New York University

Brian Moore

United Nations Relief & Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East

Beth Murphy

Founder, Director, Producer at Principle Pictures

Asma Mustafa

Research Fellow on Muslims in Britain, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies
Senior Tutor & Senior Research Fellow at Linacre College, Oxford University

Bernard Rougier

Director, Centre d'Études et de Documentation Économiques, Juridiques et Sociales Cairo, Egypt

Ahmet Yukleyen

Associate Professor of International Relations, Istanbul Commerce University
Associate Professor of Anthropology and International Studies, Croft Institute, University of Mississippi

Moeed Yusuf

Director, South Asia Program, United States Institute of Peace

Table of Contents

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: PARDEE SCHOOL INAUGURAL YEAR LECTURE	1
ASEF BAYAT	1
PANEL 1: THE ART AND CULTURE OF DISSENT	7
AL DOWAYAN: CRASH: A RESEARCH INTO A STATE OF DISAPPEARANCE	7
BECKER: VISUAL CULTURE AND THE AMAZIGH MOVEMENT IN THE MAGHREB	9
MENORET: JOYRIDING IN RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA	10
LEE: GRAFFITI IN INDONESIA	12
PANEL 2: MUSLIMS IN THE WEST	14
MUSTAFA: THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY RECOGNITION: CHALLENGES FOR SOCIETY	14
LAIRD: YOUNG, AMERICAN & COMPASSIONATE: MUSLIM COMMUNITY-BASED HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS AND THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF ISLAM	15
AKBAR OMAR: BRIDGING CULTURAL GAPS THROUGH STORYTELLING	16
PANEL THREE: EDUCATION & ACTIVISM	21
HARRIS: YOUTH TRENDS IN IRAN: CREDENTIALIZATION AND CONSUMPTION	21
HERRERA: EDUCATION IN EGYPT AFTER THE UPRISING	23
MURPHY: WHAT TOMORROW BRINGS: DOCUMENTARY ON GIRLS' EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN	24
MOORE: STUDENTS IN GAZA & THE 2014 SUMMER CONFLICT	26
PANEL 4: YOUTH RADICALIZATION	28
ROUGIER: EVERYDAY JIHAD: YOUTH RADICALIZATION AND THE SPREAD OF IDEOLOGIES	28
YUSUF: TRENDS OF RADICALIZATION IN PAKISTAN	29
YUKLEYEN: GROWTH PATTERN OF SALAFISM AMONG EUROPEAN MUSLIM YOUTH: MOROCCAN AND TURKISH ISLAMIC FIELDS IN THE NETHERLANDS	32
DAVIS: IDENTITY, RECRUITMENT, AND POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE ISLAMIC STATE	34

Keynote Speaker: Pardee School Inaugural Year Lecture

World-renowned expert in the politics of Muslim youth, Asef Bayat was one of the few theorists to meaningfully predict the 2011 uprisings' form and content. From his own youth in an Iranian village, Bayat experienced first hand the youthful upsurge in support for Ali Shariati's revolutionary new modernist interpretation of Islam. Since then, Bayat has dedicated his career to understanding how ordinary everyday people engage in politics and change the Middle East.

Asef Bayat

Asef Bayat opened the conference by posing a series of questions. Do young people have the capacity to be agents of social transformation? Are they necessarily revolutionary? Is there anything specific about Muslim youth at all? Bayat argued that the answer to these questions is always conditional. Muslim youth's politics and the social category of youth are conditional. Rather than generalizing on youth's transformative power Bayat argued that Muslim youths experience unique constraints that inform their politics and potential for mobilization.

An Alternative Theorization of Muslim Youth

Bayat sketched out and then proposed an alternative to two broad perspectives on the subject of youth as a social category, Muslim youth, and their politics.

The first perspective sees youth and the youth bulge as causing political instability.

Drawn from literature done on child soldiers in Africa, this view sees social deprivation as the

source of potential radicalization. Translated to the Muslim world, this line of thinking proposes a causal link between social deprivation and Islamic radicalization.

For Bayat, the first perspective is too simple because Islam does not define all of youths' lives. Muslim youth share similar aspirations to youth everywhere, including the aspiration to have fun. Radical Islam is not just the subject of Muslim youth but also their object. Islam transforms young people, but they also transform Islam.

The second perspective sees young people as potentially progressive or revolutionary agents of transformation, but Bayat pointed out that youth are not necessarily transformative. Egyptian youths prior to 2011 were not agents for social change. They were demoralized and apathetic. Bayat instead argues that the politics of youth is not generalizable. It is contingent on political circumstances. The challenge and task for scholars is to analyze when youth are agents of social change and transformation and when they are not.

Bayat proposed a focus on three areas of unique constraints shape the politics of Muslim youth. First, in Muslim majority countries, young Muslims feel constrained in realizing their youthfulness. Second, in the West, youth feel constrained in expressing their Muslim-ness. Both groups feel the third constraint - transitioning to a secure adulthood.

Categorizing Youth Movements

Youth movements seek to claim youthfulness by defending or extending their youth habitus, and the considerable constraints and social controls on youthfulness create a potential for mobilization. Youth claims can pose a challenge to state authority if the state lacks the capacity to absorb them. Bayat argues that if youth movements feel there are constraints on their ability to imagine a secure future, there will likely form resistance or dissent.

Bayat warned against collapsing all youth movements into one category. He suggested that scholars conceptually differentiate movements based on the issues they pursue rather than the ontology of their agents. Youths do not necessarily have transformational agency or even the same goals. Youth political movements should be treated differently than student movements. A student movement seeks student rights: fair exams or reduced student fees. Youth chapters of larger political organizations seek to address particular political issues.

Bayat argues that youth are an important basis for mobilization and dissent only once youth become a social category. The mere presence of young people is not enough, and the process is not automatic. There must first be a sociological experience of structural irresponsibility. The social category of youth is primarily an urban phenomenon rather than universal.¹ Cities easily construct categories of youth through mass schooling, public spaces, and media. Youth develop a consciousness of being young and want to protect their youthfulness.

Youth movements need not necessarily be deliberate mobilizations. They can instead be non-movements. Non-movements are the collective actions of dispersed atomized and stratified people. Non-movements occur in authoritarian situations where dissenters are not given space to express themselves. Prior to uprisings, non-movements were key expressions of cultural and lifestyle politics.

Youth movements may therefore challenge political or moral authorities by inculcating new norms. Youth non-movements are less about what the youth do but how they *are* – how they walk or act. A collective being rather than a collective doing, the forms of the expression are less about collective protest, and more about collective presence. Youths do not need structural organization or ideology to craft new social norms or social codes. Still, if they want to be agents

¹ In some villages, women quickly move from being irresponsible children to adults with responsibilities for others.

of political transformation, they must think about the political and move beyond their narrow purview.

Youth Movement Accommodation of Social and Political Constraints

The social controls or constraints that young people feel on an every day basis engenders certain practices and certain politics even beyond issues directly related to their youth claims. Youths either subversively or innovatively accommodate these felt constraints. Accommodating innovations push youthful claims within existing political economic or societal constraints. Rather than questioning existing norms and institutions, they changed these norms or institutions to their advantage. Subversive accommodation takes prevailing norms or institutions and undermines their power or authority.

Bayat contrasted innovative and subversive approaches to sexual relations in Iran and Egypt. Egyptian youth relied on accommodating innovations to alleviate pressures from familial control and lack of income. Youth innovatively accommodated in their sexual relations through underground dating and temporary marriages (*urfi*). In contrast, Iranian youth experienced pressure from political authorities. They subversively accommodated an existing religious institution during Muharram Shia Muslims' traditional month of mourning the martyrdom of Husayn ibn Ali. Iranian youth used the solemn celebrations as a way to stay out and interact freely between the sexes until the government found out and increased regulation.

Apathy to Transformation: Youth Movement Mobilization before the 2011 Uprisings

Bayat sketched out Egyptian youths' role in mobilizing prior to the 2011 uprisings. Not transformational before the mid 2000s, Egyptian youth actively participated in cultural politics

but eschewed contentious or electoral politics. However, in the mid-2000s, a noticeable shift occurred. A new trend of civic activism emerged. Youths collectively mobilized around the Israeli incursion into the Gaza strip and West Bank, and took over Tahrir Square. Young people became involved in NGOs and opposition groups like Kifaya. Social media gave civic activism increased momentum. Online activists focused their attention on torture, corruption, injustice and jobs. The April 6th Movement organized people online in supporting striking textile workers. In the late 2000s, young people transcended merely youthful claims and took part in explicitly political causes – issues of torture and dignity. Eventually, this merged into revolutionary mobilization on January 25, 2011.

Rather than a youth revolution, Bayat argued that only when ordinary people join the extraordinary can transformation occur. Youth emerged as a new Egyptian public, and young people took an important part in initiating the 2011 protests. These youths acted as extraordinary protagonists in the uprisings, but on their own could not have caused breakthroughs in revolutionary transformation.

Discussion

Noora Lori noted that there is a political logic for extending childhood even beyond its biological endpoint. A later legal date of adulthood is a liberal strategy of exclusion. It determines when people can partake in rational consent and therefore vote. This prevents groups from being seen as fully adult who can participate socially and politically.

Bayat agreed that childhood is an invented period of innocence and irresponsibility extended by schooling. He added that the relationship between the biological and subjective youthfulness presents a tricky conceptual challenge.

Augustus Norton pressed Bayat on the question of childishness, which he pointed out is many ways is a luxury in developed countries. Difficult circumstances often compel youths to terminate secondary school and obtain jobs. Norton commented that in Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria even middle school students have already moved beyond innocence and are highly politicized. Bayat agreed that at times, in some communities youth quickly become adults. However, whether youths are politicized or inactive is highly contingent and not generalizable.

Bayat responded to a question about social media's role in the 2011 uprisings. He noted that scholars should be careful not to magnify technology's role. At a particular juncture, social media did play a very important role. However, in the future, it may not have the same effect. Movements are not one sided and must only be discussed in relationship to their adversaries. At the time, social media caught government's by surprise, but they are quickly learning how to use social media to their own advantage.

Jenny White questioned what made youth politics Muslim rather than an expression of middle class young people. Bayat noted that subaltern youth share similar claims. He agreed that Muslim youth share a great deal with non-Muslim youth. However, their constraints are unique and stem from religion rather than culture. Youths internalize actions beyond these constraints as wrong (*haram*). This indicates a conscious connection to religion.

Panel 1: The Art and Culture of Dissent

Al Dawayan: Crash: A Research into a State of Disappearance

Manal Al Dawayan

Hundreds of Saudi women from all age groups apply to participate in Manal Al Dawayan's contemporary art workshops that engage in women's social issues.² Dawayan's projects explore how Saudi culture and media actively avoid discussing or portraying women. This contributes to women's stories and issues disappearing rather than being addressed. Dawayan uses these projects to give women a free and safe space to speak and interact. Dawayan's exhibits her artwork in Saudi Arabia and around the world.

Many of the women whom Al Dawayan works with have never seen contemporary art or expressed themselves artistically. In the workshop, they first discuss the pertinent social issues and then collaboratively participate in the project. One example of this approach is "Suspended Together," an installation of 200 fiberglass doves, each made of male-guardian-issued permits that every Saudi woman must carry when leaving the country. Each permit belonged to one of 200 Saudi women who participated: among whom were scientists, engineers, artists, educators and journalists.

Another installation, "My Name," critiqued Saudi men's resistance to saying a woman's name in public. To Dawayan, neither religion or historical precedent justifies this practice. In the installation, enormous prayer bead necklaces hang from the ceiling. On each bead, workshop participants inscribed their names.³ In a similar vein, Saudi families remember their family trees

² Many of the women involved came from an older generation without many opportunities to express themselves unlike younger Saudis with access to social media, etc.

³ The prayer bead necklace is called *misbahah* and is used in several different devotional acts in Islam, such as the recitation of the "99 Names of Allah."

only with male relatives. Dowayan's 2014 workshop "Tree of Guardians," pushed back against this practice by asking participants to draw their family trees with only their female relatives.

One project entitled Crash drew attention to alarmingly widespread car accidents often involving the injury or death of female Saudi teachers. Treating women's issues in generalities and en masse obscures or denies the state and social responsibility for women's deaths.

Gendered policies cause accidents disproportionately affecting women. To ensure that female teachers teach girls, the Saudi government funds teachers for any village with more than five girls. Many female teachers must commute for hours from larger cities to teach in remote villages. Legally they cannot drive. On meager salaries, they cannot afford decent drivers. As a result, many female teachers are hurt or killed in car crashes. Despite the number of accidents, the media packages each crash in an identical media narrative and almost never includes the names or identities of the women victims. Although Saudis pay close attention to these car crashes, the media does not address one of the root causes: the ban on women driving.

Dowayan argued that the media's portrayal of women impedes serious thought and policy on women's issues. In both liberal and conservative media coverage of women, women were completely undifferentiated, ghost-like in black abayas and often moving as if in a herd. Without a face, advocacy and humanization is more difficult. After cataloguing newspaper clippings of crashes, Dowayan noticed they repeatedly re-used the same images of women. Dowayan sought to counter the subversive effects of repetitively portraying women as interchangeable ghosts. Her art pieces portray the mangled cars in abstract when observed up-close. As the viewer steps back, the imagery of the crash becomes clear.

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Dowayan suggested that art opens new platforms to exchange ideas and perspectives. This can make it a powerful tool for cultural diplomacy. Art offers insights into different cultures, particularly that of the youth. Youth are the most active supporters and incubators of contemporary art throughout the region. Contemporary art's relative obscurity and lack of state support paradoxically makes Saudi Arabia an idea-rich and exciting art world.

Becker: Visual Culture and the Amazigh Movement in the Maghreb

Cynthia Becker

Cynthia Becker discussed an emerging Berber or Amazigh⁴ ethno-cultural resistance to mainstream Arab culture in the Maghreb. Historically suppressed or outright persecuted, the contemporary Amazigh movement seeks the rights of the indigenous peoples of North Africa. The Amazigh/Berber people have felt marginalized by the use of the totalizing term "Arab" to identify the countries where they have historically resided.

Becker emphasized that the current Amazigh political agenda no longer seeks pre-Islamic transnational unity among all Tamazight speaking peoples. Instead, Imazighens pursue more subtle forms of cultural salience to protect and connect Imazighens in the Maghreb and diaspora community. To protect their practices, Imazighen activists have consistently advocated for cultural pluralism by keeping religion within the private sphere in Maghreb countries. Ever since the middle of the 20th century, they have called for recognition of their language. As a result, Algeria and Morocco recently included the Tamazight language as one of their official state languages. They also created an Amazigh flag to mark out a more cohesive cultural identity.

⁴ Becker noted that most activists reject the moniker "Berber," because of its root in the Latin/Greek "barbarian." They prefer "Amazigh" (plural "Imazighen"), which translates roughly as "happy people."

Unlike Maghreb flags that feature Islamic symbols, the Amazigh flag highlights the movements three key ideas: language, land, and people.

Activists reconnect to and reclaim powerful discourses from their pre-Islamic history to ground a modern identity rooted in resistance and opposition to oppression. Today, activist graffiti depicts Amazigh rulers who waged war against the Roman Empire, and Dahlia, a Berber queen who led the resistance against Muslim conquest. Through visual culture, Algerian Amazigh activists have reclaimed Dahlia's evocative image of strength and resistance. Dahlia's image claims social equality for women that existed in pre-Islamic Amazigh society. Through Dahlia, the modern Amazigh activist movement also identifies itself with tolerant egalitarianism, and pluralism.

Menoret: Joyriding in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Pascal Menoret

Pascal Menoret's fieldwork focused joyriding's (*tafhit*) powerful dissident culture for men on the margins of Saudi society.⁵ Taking an urban history and social anthropological approach, he asked why, in one of the richest city of the Middle East, young men risk their lives joyriding instead of behaving like rational economic agents within the bounds of their structured social environment. Joyriders are generally between the ages of 15 and 35, many of them students, university dropouts, or unemployed young men. Joyriders or 'drifters' perform artistically daring stunts primarily with stolen cars in the outskirts of Riyadh. The more deviant the performance, the

⁵ Published in Dr. Menoret's recent book *Joyriding in Riyadh: Oil, Urbanism, and Road Revolt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

greater the spectacle; at times, drifters intentionally crash. The presence of police cars only enhances the deviance and therefore the popularity of the performer.

Menoret argued that poor urban youths use joyriding to subversively express their frustration with their limited social mobility. Joyriders tend to be young men marginalized by rapid modernization in the 1970s. Hoping to take advantage of urban jobs, rural Saudis massively migrated to cities. However, social stratification quickly solidified a middle class based on closeness to the royal family. Those unconnected instead found economic and social despair. Today two to four million Saudis still live under the poverty line.

The act of joyriding protests young men's economic and social exclusion and enables a brief escape from strict social controls on youth. To Menoret, the practice is political in several ways. First, it subverts Saudi middle class consumerist culture. Young men joyride and sometimes spectacularly destroy cars stolen from the middle class. This shows an utter contempt for products (the car) and the global economic chain that subalterns have no part in. Second, Menoret argues that joyriding is a protest against the state's corruption and all-encompassing control of public space. Joyriders perform in the outskirts of Riyadh. Like most of Saudi Arabia, the royal family owns these suburbs. Intended for sale to royal clients, these suburbs have only the necessary basic infrastructure developed. Marginalized from benefitting from these real estate opportunities, joyriders instead take advantage of the empty roads to artistically and dangerously destroy property.

Joyriding reveals the criminalization of politics and politicization of crime in Saudi Arabia. Through clashes with and victories over the police, joyriding became explicitly political. Despite steadily more draconian punishments for joyriding, joyriders occasionally showily hijack patrol cars. As Bayat argued, the state extends the period of structural irresponsibility in order to

maintain control over younger populations.⁶ If youth are not rational actors then they cannot be full members of society and must be overseen and regulated. The Saudi state and the ministry for the 'husbandry/custody of youth devotes considerable resources to streamlining young people's socialization into appropriate adulthood. Through speed, joyriders reclaim some of their autonomy and disrupt police control. Joyriders exaggerate their irresponsibility through clashes with the police. Taking the idea of irresponsibility to its extreme makes state control seem ridiculous.

Lee: Graffiti in Indonesia

Doreen Lee

Doreen Lee spoke on graffiti art in Indonesian youth politics since the 1940s.⁷ Because of this history in Indonesia, youth are perceived as being inextricably linked to revolution. This gives youth culture a particular political power. Part and parcel to every revolution, graffiti gave youth a political voice, and visually reminded politicians that people power simmered just beneath the surface. Although it no longer holds the same visceral political power, media continually reifies graffiti, as a symbol of disobedience and political tumult.

Graffiti visually expressed changing political tides since the colonial period. Under colonial rule, widespread graffiti erupted across Indonesia and marked the beginning of revolutionary Indonesian nationalism. By the end of the 1945 independence struggle, the slogan 'Freedom or Death' ("Merdeka atau Mati") covered walls across the islands. The post-colonial state sought to harness the revolutionary youthful spirit in their ideological state building. An

⁶ In Saudi Arabia everyone under the age of 49 is considered a 'youth'

⁷ Lee looked at youth at large rather than Muslim youth because Muslim Indonesian youths do not experience the types of constraints that Middle Eastern Muslim youth do.

elevated sense of youthful significance also inculcated a youth consciousness and youth political involvement. Student movements dominated state politics as a revolutionary ‘thought elite.’ At that time, the category of youth described anyone under fifty who championed liberation.

In the 1990s, youth once again used graffiti as a political weapon to counter the state. Through subversive messages or threats, graffiti called the state to task harkening back to the ideals of the 1945 revolution. Artists called for justice, and decried the Suharto regime’s human rights abuses. Unrest culminated in student protests toppling Suharto in 1998.

While highly individualistic and at times evocative, contemporary graffiti culture is no longer directly political.⁸ Some art reveals corruption or abuse of political power, but artists also use graffiti for self-branding. No longer primarily tied to local concerns, teenage street artists play with ideas of local and global significance in English. Their borderless culture allows them to have crewmembers who have never set foot in Indonesia.

Commoditized graffiti informed by Indonesian consumption culture and cosmopolitan aesthetics has not necessarily lost its ‘vernacular’ value. A culture of handwritten signage is still strong. An indigenous signage system grants citizens informal license to use wall space to dialogue with neighbors. Lee added Indonesians in conversation might overlay and intertwine messages such as the price of vegetables or haikus such as, “Pray for me I’m going swimming!”

⁸ Lee did find a political edge in graffiti art covering failed infrastructure projects. Youth claim these dilapidated spaces and highlights the state’s neoliberal disregard for its public policy commitments.

Panel 2: Muslims in the West

Mustafa: The Politics of Religious Identity Recognition: Challenges for Society

Asma Mustafa

Asma Mustafa argued that Britain's secular democracy has struggled to fully integrate a Muslim religious identity. Through interviews, Mustafa concluded that British Muslims feel they deeply belong in the United Kingdom's diverse cultural fabric. However, Muslims may simultaneously feel ostracized from a modern British society that constantly questions their allegiance. In recent years, religiously observant Muslim populations have grown significantly and brought these tensions to the forefront.

Pervasive counter-terrorism surveillance and populist anti-immigrant sentiments impede young Muslims freedom of belief. In Bayat's terms, young British Muslims experience constraints on expressing their Muslim-ness. Although private belief can often easily integrate into secular British society, publicly observant religion receives much less recognition or public acceptance. Religious accommodation for Muslims is overshadowed by debates about extremism, terrorism, and violence. Actively practicing British Muslims have requested equality in the workplace, but critics argue that religious exemptions such as halal meat or state funding for alternative schools only encourage hostility and hinder national cohesion.⁹

Counter-terrorism legislation and the informal norms and stereotypes that radiate from it create the greatest tension in public Muslim religiosity. British multicultural policies have proven ineffective in these counteracting these norms. While the British strongly value religious freedom of belief, interventionist post-9/11 counterterrorism policies have fostered a suspicion of

⁹ Education is at the forefront of this policy debate

conservative Islamic practice. Counterproductive counter-terror measures treat conservative Islamic religious expressions as potentially criminal or as a threat to British values.¹⁰ Post 9/11 public discourses have emphasized citizenship as both an emotional and legal attachment to the state. Such norms cast suspicion over Muslims who do not emotively identify with their British citizenship. As a result, young British Muslims struggle to find full acceptance as British citizens.

Nonetheless, young British Muslims are constructively engaging in popular discourses by asserting their fully British Muslim-ness. One British Muslim fashion designer Tabinda-Kauser Ishaq incorporated the British symbol for Remembrance Day, the poppy flower, into a versatile headscarf. Another group made a music video of British Muslims of all ages and walks of life dancing to Pharrell Williams' "Happy."

Laird: Young, American & Compassionate: Muslim Community-based Health Organizations and the Public Image of Islam

Lance Laird

Lance Laird argues that a growing movement of Muslim charitable healthcare organizations embodies a thoroughly American Islam. Presenting research on three major Muslim community-based health organizations (CBHO),¹¹ Laird noted that clinics are vehicles of personal piety for founders, funders, and staff. This piety dovetails nicely with American values of community-oriented voluntarism. CBHOs articulate and normalize a new method of Muslim belonging by fostering a public image of Muslims as a compassionate and healing community presence.

Grounded in the nitty-gritty of their communities, health organizations give the Muslim

¹⁰ Including increased scrutiny of supplementary religious schools, clampdowns on Sharia law councils, and tracking school governors who have advocated for Muslim religious education.

¹¹ Laird's team defined Muslim CBHOs as community clinics that offer some sort of health services and identify themselves as inspired by Islam, or are founded by Muslims, or refer to Islam in their name or mission statement

community access to social power. Increasingly involved in policymaking, these organizations represent Muslim Americans from the local to federal level. Selfless service and political influence together counteract negative stigmas of the Muslim community.

Providing free healthcare fulfills zakat an obligatory religious duty to act charitably to the needy. In that sense, these organizations symbiotically serve the needs of providers as much as the patients. Unlike Jews or Catholics in the 19th or 20th century, Muslims did not begin CBHOs because they did not receive adequate care in the existing health facilities or because their medical professionals were not being hired. Their founders primarily acted out of a motivation to give back. As one interviewee said, “If Muslims aren’t giving – they’re in trouble!”

Focused on zakat rather than proselytization, these clinics tend not to display overtly religious symbols or advertise their link to Islam. Indeed, the LA clinic UMMA’s board is predominantly non-Muslim as is its staff. This satisfies a federal funding requirement that boards represent the community served. To best serve their communities that may be islamophobic, funders and board members also avoided overtly religious language in their mission statements and organization names. Still, organization acronyms evoke Islamic values: IMAN (faith) in Chicago, UMMA (community) in Los Angeles, and HUDA (right guidance) in Detroit.

CBHOs realize and articulate community power by actively engaging in policymaking and promoting a positive public image of Islam. CBHOs have become an important vehicle for Muslim advocacy in the United States. The Obama administration recognized the American Muslim Health Professionals organization for its mission to help vulnerable Americans.

Omar: Bridging Cultural Gaps Through Storytelling

Qais Akbar Omar

Internationally, Afghanistan is known for its bloodshed and the Taliban, but its culture is much deeper and broader. Omar commented that as the world becomes more interdependent, it is more important for Afghans to voice their own stories. Coverage by the international media, academics, and foreign writers often obscure or misinterpret Afghanistan's historical, cultural and religious complexities.

Afghanistan's robust oral tradition of storytelling, which is full of tales of war and resilience, rarely grab global media attention, and many excellent Afghan historical and cultural works have not been translated into other languages. Instead, publishers and global audiences read less qualified Western authors who write in English. After the success of *The Kite Runner*, many Afghans realized that their stories could resonate in the West. Even the Taliban has begun to tell its own stories.¹²

To Omar, Afghan storytelling bridges one person's inner world to another's in real time. Omar endured Afghanistan's brutal civil war, in which 2.6 million people died in four years. Hiding from bombs, his extended family spent many years in their basement. Like millions of other families, they found respite from the war in telling and listening to stories. Omar then re-told a short story that he wrote about a Talib whom he met in Kabul.

*Excerpt from "A Talib in Love"*¹³

In this excerpt, soon after the Taliban's arrival in their village, a young Talib catches Qais in his friend Zaki's shop buying an illicit movie poster. The poster depicts Rambo, bristling with

¹² Abdul Salaam Zaeef's "My Life with the Taliban" gives a compelling rationale for the Taliban's emergence.

¹³ Omar, Qais Akbar. "A Talib in Love." In *That Mad Game: Growing Up in a Warzone: An Anthology of Essays from Around the Globe*, edited by J. L. Powers. Cinco Puntos Press, 2013.

muscles, about to fire a huge gun. As the story progresses, Zaki and Qais slowly win the Talib's confidence and coach him through wooing his first crush by softening his strict Taliban code.

As I was looking at the poster, a Talib in his early twenties walked into the shop. He was tall and skinny with a bushy beard. Unlike many Taliban who had very short hair, his was down to his shoulders though most of it was covered by his white turban. We had not noticed him until he was well inside the shop. It was too late to hide the poster. I panicked. He looked at me with large eyes under thick eyebrows, read the fear on my face and knew that something was wrong. He took out his whip and said in Pashto, "What is going on here?" as he looked at us both. His words came out of his thin lips in a funny way. Like most of the Taliban, he had a wad of snuff under his tongue. When the Taliban spoke, their sentences got tangled in their spit.

I showed him the poster without saying a word.

"Who is this? He has a very good gun," he commented as he rapped his whip against his thigh.

Zaki and I looked at each other in terror.

"Yes he does," I managed to say.

"Where did he get this gun?" the Talib asked. "I want to have this gun," he said.

"I think he bought it," Zaki said, his voice quivering, because he knew he was in more trouble than I was. He had several hundred of those posters locked in the back of his shop. He knew he could spend several months in a Taliban prison where all kinds of horrible things would happen to him if this Talib found those posters.

"Where did he buy this gun?" he asked more insistently as he took the poster out of my hands.

Zaki stuttered, “China, I think.”

“Does China make guns like this?” he asked very seriously. “Nevermind that. Where is this guy? I want to arrest him. I’m sure he has many guns like those. I will give you a small one when I have confiscated them all.”

Zaki and I looked at each other, desperate not to burst out laughing.

“I don’t know where he is,” Zaki said very fast, his voice strong now. “I think he is a Panjshiri with Ahmad Shah Masoud. He is a very strong man. Look at his muscles.”

The Talib nodded slowly. He was about twenty years old, but he did not seem to understand things that any twenty-year-old in Kabul would know. “I have been wondering why we have not been able to take control of that small valley in all these months. It must be because they have more guns like this.”

“And strong soldiers like this guy,” Zaki added, sounding as if he were trying to be helpful.

Recommended Afghani Authors:

Fiction and Non-Fiction:

Steve Coll: Ghost Wars

Anand Gopal: No Good Men Among the Living

Ahmed Rashid: Descent into Chaos

Sarah Chayes: The Punishment of Virtue

Khaled Hosseini: The Kite Runner, A Thousand Splendid Suns, And the Mountains Echoed

Atiq Rahimi: The Patience Stone and Earth and Ashes (also made into films), A Thousand Rooms of Dream and Fear, A Curse on Dostoevsky

Afghani memoirs:

Tamim Ansari: West of Kabul, East of New York

Fawzia Koofi: The Favored Daughter

Abdul Salaam Zaef: My Life With The Taliban¹⁴

Movies:

Osama

The Black Tulip

¹⁴ The only book yet written by a member of the Taliban.

Wajma, an Afghan Love Story

Panel Three: Education & Activism

Harris: Youth Trends in Iran: Credentialization and Consumption

Kevan Harris

Kevan Harris argued that Iranian pursuit of social mobility through education created a credentialing boom since the 1978 Islamic Revolution. Growth in credentialing may lead to unintended social and political consequences. Since the 1970s, Iran massively expanded its university enrollment,¹⁵ but the economy has not increased its ability to absorb this new class of high skilled labor. Unmet graduate and particularly female graduate expectations may portend increased political upheaval.

Harris suggested that women's commitment to higher education (60-65 percent of graduates) might have reverberating social consequences. Socially, not needing to work gives women status, but women increasingly achieve higher educations than their husbands. Women make up a disproportionate percentage of the educated unemployed. These highly educated housewives challenge culturally accepted norms. Some run businesses out of their homes. Women now marry later, have fewer children, and divorce at higher rates. Women also customize marriage contracts in their favor¹⁶ and feel freer to tell their husbands to leave if they do not fulfill their contractual marital duties.

Many Iranians see higher education as a pathway to higher social status and mobility. Since the 1990s, academic credentials replaced revolutionary credentials as a means to have

¹⁵ Within one generation, Iranians have substantially increased student enrolment. Only 3.8% of university aged Iranians enrolled in the late 1970s, but by 1999 this increased to 18 percent. In 2012, almost 55% enrolled. The number of public and private universities also increased from 1,300 to 2,505 between 2005 and 2012.

¹⁶ For example, some marriage contracts require men to lie in court in order to secure a divorce.

access to power and influence. However, very few credentialed Iranians succeed in moving up in status, and the revolution's promised social mobility never materialized. Post-graduate unemployment is a visceral reminder of that. The Iranian political elite recognizes this as a problem. The Ministry of Education attempted to switch to a tiered vocational training model to channel Iranian youth toward low skill labor. However, mobility oriented Iranians shun these vocational schools.

Positional rather than absolute, the value of the credential decreases relative to its scarcity within and outside of the country. More qualified graduates are competing for scarce high skill jobs. As a result, the worth of credentials deflates causing graduates' earnings to decline relative to un-credentialed labor. In 2013, the economy only absorbed about 22 percent of new graduates. From 2011 to 2014, unemployment among college educated Iranians increased from 19.4 to 21.8 percent.

Harris implied that credentials without social mobility might erode Iranians 'buy in' to the state's Islamic religiosity. He commented on a survey asking twelve thousand Iranians how often they went to Friday prayer. In Tehran, Isfahan and Ardabil, 50 percent of responders on average said they hardly ever go to Friday prayer.

Asef Bayat added that the statistics on mosque attendance actually were higher than he might expect. Prior to the revolution, Iranians did not go to the mosque to pray unlike most Arab countries. After the revolution, those who prayed regularly in the mosque were largely regime supporters. It was part and parcel with the officialization of the religion.

Herrera: Education in Egypt after the Uprising

Linda Herrera

Linda Herrera argued that the current volatile political climate in Egypt has made education a highly political, ineffective and at times a dangerous space. As a result, many Egyptians now opt out seeking alternative education models. No longer bastions of nation building and youth building, Herrera points to three main reasons for their decline. First, many state-run schools and universities are overcrowded and lack the basic resources needed to provide a quality education. Second, schools no longer act as safe havens from violence. Internally, rising numbers of reports indicate that educators physically abuse their students and peer bullying has intensified. Post-Arab uprisings schools have been deliberately targeted throughout the region,¹⁷ and the number of children kidnapped to or from school significantly increased.¹⁸

In post-uprising Egypt, schools have become more ideologically vitriolic, nationalistic, and pro-military. The regime uses schools to repress the revolutionary ideas that led to the Arab Spring, but students' emerging youth consciousness make them feel more impelled to express themselves and their anti-status quo political beliefs. This puts students associated with leftist or opposition groups in a dangerous position.

¹⁷ In Gaza, the Israeli military targeted UN funded schools because of reports that Gazans hid weapons within classrooms. In Pakistan, the Taliban attacked numerous schools, killing 132 students in the past year. In 2014, Boko Haram burned down a boy's dormitory and kidnapped numerous female students, most of whom have never been found. In April 2015, Al-Shabab militants attacked the University of Garissa in Kenya.

¹⁸ Often gangs kidnap children walking to or from school for ransom.

Leftist or opposition youth attempt to complete their education with minimal risk to their ideological, moral, physical, and psychological well-being. For those youths, finding credentials outside of public schools is less difficult than it once was. Parents instead place their students in alternative educational spaces. The Muslim Brotherhood facilitates homeschooling. Youth camps, virtual learning, and hybrid online/offline discussion circles seem to provide safer and higher levels of education. For Herrera, more questions should now be asked about how and where students absent from ‘brick and mortar’ schools study, and whether a new educational model is emerging.

Murphy: What Tomorrow Brings: Documentary on Girls’ Education in Afghanistan

Beth Murphy

Documentary filmmaker, Beth Murphy discussed Afghani girls’ education in her recent film, *What Tomorrow Brings*. The film documents the success and struggles of Zabuli School and its founder Razia Jan who runs the first school for girls in a remote village. For Murphy, a powerful countercultural moment has slowly emerged from the school. Zabuli girls now identify first as students who ought to graduate rather than future wives and mothers. In addition, the school facilitates small but quite significant victories in adjusting local marriage practices. Although village elders initially resisted, the school now enrolls almost 500 students including many elders’ daughters. Murphy suggested that the dynamics learned from the school’s founding might be a helpful model for others seeking to educate Afghani girls.

Jan, a former village member, founded the school by convincing reluctant elders that women’s education could help the community. To ensure the best education, Zabuli bussed in

highly qualified teachers from surrounding larger cities. The school quickly found local success and international acclaim. In turn, the community began to take pride in the school. One disgruntled father asked the school to open its doors to boys in the evenings, but the elders would not allow it. They argued the rowdy boys would deface the beautiful, modern buildings. However, there are ongoing tensions between the school and the community. Continually expanding, elders became concerned that the modern building's prominence might make the village a target for a Taliban headquarters if they returned.

Over time, the school found they elicited better outcomes through a gradual approach to advocating for women's education and an expanded role in the family. Most Afghani girls marry early around age 16. Initially, the head mistress went to parents' homes and begged them to allow their girls to remain in school instead of entering into early marriages. However, this had unintended consequences. Families became chary of placing their young daughters in school for fear of complications later on. In recent years, the school found more success in equipping girls to better navigate complicated family situations. Working behind the scenes, they help girls negotiate more favorable marriage contracts, which would allow them to complete their educations. The school now hopes to establish a small college to give local girls opportunities for further education.

During discussion, Murphy responded to questions asking why the foundation does not start a boys' school to quell potential jealousy. Murphy stated that two major impediments make a boys' school impractical. First, it would be a major change in the organization's mission, and second, a change in mission might lead to reduced funding from international donors who solely support girls' education. To ensure good relations with the community, the school supplies water to a nearby boys' madrassa and buys a goat for the community on holidays.

Moore: Students in Gaza & the 2014 Summer Conflict

Brian Moore

Brian Moore, a United Nations Relief Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)¹⁹ officer in Gaza, discussed UNRWA's work to mitigate the effects of the 2014 summer conflict on education in the Gaza strip. UNRWA educates about 240,000 students double shifted in its 252 schools. UNRWA schools provide safe and politically neutral environments, and include programs on peaceful conflict resolution and human rights. Gazans have a strong culture of education. Parents place a high value on credentials, and will pay large amounts of money to ensure their children receive them.

The 2014 summer conflict only compounded the increasingly intense 65-year-old conflict with Israel. More volatile in recent years, Gazans have endured three wars in seven years, and the economic situation is dire. Tightened land and sea restrictions in 2007 created de-development, and the lack of access to foreign markets devastated the Gazan economy. Refugee unemployment reached 44 percent.

The 50-day summer conflict resulted in massive destruction. 80,000 pieces of heavy ordinance crowded into Gaza, and 'no-go' zones covered 43 percent of Gazan territory. Gazans fled to UNRWA schools for safe haven and temporary shelters. At the height of the conflict,

¹⁹ Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict, UNRWA was established by United Nations General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949 to carry out direct relief and works programs for Palestine refugees.

about 300,000 people sought shelter in about 90 schools. Families lived long term in schools, which added to children's trauma once classes resumed.

The conflict ended in August, and two weeks later students returned to school. A return to normal school schedules aided children in the process of healing. It focused attention on a hopeful future in spite of looming conflict. Workshops prepared teachers to help traumatized students. Cognizant that some children were mute from horror at losing family members and homes, schools slowly reintegrated students back into academics over the course of a three-week staged plan. The first phase focused on psychosocial support: including social activities, like free play, drawing, and theater. The second phase combined psychosocial support with small amounts of academic studies. In the final phase, students returned to full academic schedules. The schools hope to return to a full academic schedule next year.

Panel 4: Youth Radicalization

Rougier: Everyday Jihad: Youth Radicalization and the Spread of Ideologies

Bernard Rougier

Bernard Rougier laid out a paradigm for understanding radicalization based on studies of Iraq and Syria. Rougier argued that the radicalization resulted from highly religious communities not having any incentives to engage in party politics. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Iraqi and Syrian regimes destroyed civil society and the channels through which poorer citizens could reach the state with their problems. In Syria, the Baath regime relied on the Alawi asabiyyah to function. In so doing, it slowly divided the Sunni community and impeded their access to the state. At the same time, the Iraqi and Syrian regimes depoliticized those within the polity who had access to the state. For average citizens, Iraqi or Syrian citizenship no longer had privileges or benefits.

Muslims could shape and be empowered by their religion instead of party politics. The state fostered religious dynamics on the ground through private Islamic universities, religious television, or the promotion of mosque building in the 1980s. Increasing religiosity turned into a Muslim consciousness once Al Jazeera began broadcasting throughout the region. Just as Nasser's Voice of the Arabs created an Arab consciousness, Al Jazeera's advent created a visceral notion of the umma. Muslims could see and feel sympathy for attacks on fellow Muslims.

Rougier stressed that the continual lack of state provision of basic services to Sunnis made radicalization possible. Across the region, young Sunnis have gone to fight in wars for the state but have yet to be rewarded. Young radicalized Sunnis receive no benefits from the state,

and feel no loyalty to it. Instead, their loyalty lies with the radical militias many were socialized in. Disillusioned, now many of them are joining the Islamic State.

Rougier argued that Salafism's popularity stems from the condition of the urban poor. Salafism provides a way for the disenfranchised to belong to a religious aristocracy. Their status is not determined by education or rigorously following the Brotherhood's legal rules, but straight from the Qur'an and hadith. Identifying with a pure origin enables Salafis to feel a powerful sense of superiority. Economically, young peasants in Palestinian camps could become quite wealthy through religious study funded by the Gulf.

Rougier added that, only after the 1980s did the Sunni-Shia cleavage become politically salient. While Iranian Shias captured the state, Sunni radicals set up an anti-system Islamic utopia in Afghanistan. As time went on, the Islamic Republic of Iran's imperialism was a politically useful organizing principal for anti-system strategists like al-Qaeda's Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Al-Qaeda leaders who wanted to fight Shiites won out against those more interested in fighting the West.

Yusuf: Trends of Radicalization in Pakistan

Moeed Yusuf:

Radicalization is one of the biggest issues facing Pakistan today. Still, unlike India's detailed radicalization data, Pakistan only has open-ended opinion surveys. Moeed Yusuf pushed for a more nuanced and concrete approach to Pakistani radicalization. Without hard data, radicalization reports tend to be based on conjecture and lump a huge spectrum of the radicalized

population together. These reports place religious Pakistanis who pray five times a day in the same category as those who actually join al-Qaeda.

Yusuf offered a clear continuum of radicalization based on youth perception surveys. First pre-radicalized individuals begin to have a clear ‘us vs. them’ polarized mentality. Second, individuals begin to actively sympathize with radical groups. Third, they support radical groups, and finally they join in the violence. The pre-radicalization phase is the most important part of the continuum. During this phase, families and officials could intervene to discourage youth radicalization. The continuum also helps differentiate the process of radicalization from terrorism. Terrorists actively engage in violence and must be treated with force rather than dissuasive tactics used with radically inclined members of society.

Yusuf discussed the findings from post 9/11 youth surveys. Surveys indicate an increasing polarization among Pakistani youth, but find that they do not support violence by non-state actors. Young Pakistanis clearly believe that violence against Pakistanis is haram (religiously forbidden). However, there is more ambiguity about violence to create a caliphate. He found that relative deprivation was far more important than absolute deprivation for radicalization. Those absolutely deprived tend to be resigned to their fate. Those who go to school, but cannot find a job may radicalize.

Yusuf argued that poor governance drives youth radicalization, while other factors merely enable it.²⁰ When surveys asked youth what they thought the main problem in Pakistan is, youth point to governance not terrorism. Corrupt or inadequate governance breed frustrations, which ultimately creates support for terrorists. For example, Pakistanis largely support the

²⁰ Such as Islamized education funded by Gulf states

imposition of the sharia. However, Yusuf emphasized that a desire for social justice drives this support. Pakistanis feel they do not receive this justice from the corrupt state. They see the Pakistani state and the United States as the main cause of their socioeconomic deprivation.

Yusuf pointed to the state as the main structural variable in enabling terrorism. The Pakistani state has in the past supported militancy as a foreign policy tool. The state and its international allies provided funding for some jihadi networks to further regional policies and it has been unable to bring clarity on its policy to date even as it is having to fight some of the very same monsters it had created. The state's mixed incentives make effective anti-terrorism policies undesirable.

Yusuf argued that the real problem is that Pakistanis are ambivalent about violence and the state cannot bring any clarity to the war of narratives. Radicals on the other hand very successfully create confusion, which feeds into ambivalent attitudes toward terrorism. No good counter narrative exists to the militant or the government. Yusuf found that an abnormally large number of youth answer "don't know," on surveys asking how sure they are about their political opinions on violence.

Militant narratives exploit the disconnect between state and society. They point to the state's poor governance and that it cannot provide basic services. Militants portray themselves as strongly anti-American using an 'us vs. them' frame. To legitimate their violence, militants say they only target the military not citizens because it's a Western proxy. They promote their misinterpretation of religion as orthodoxy. Militants claim they are obligated to declare jihad because the state is Islamically illegitimate.

Meanwhile, the state argues that it is Islamic and embodies true Pakistani culture and values. They claim that Americans force them to fight in Afghanistan and that drone strikes are

unacceptable. However, the state cannot counter radical messages directly without improving their governance.

Discussion

Yusuf responded to questions about the efficacy of engaging in a debate over a true Islam. Rather than trying to convince the Islamic State (IS) that their religion is wrong, the aim is to connect with the large percentage of believers who are not sure. Because average Muslims do not have a nuanced understanding of their religion, IS can prey on what little they know to make a convincing but fictional religion. Yusuf argued that Pakistan and scholars downplay the importance of narratives. Instead, the number one counterinsurgency strategy in all states is to throw money at the problem building more roads, etc. At the end of the day, these strategies have not worked.

Yusuf responded to a question asked about the effect of madrassa education. Islamized curriculum does seem to exacerbate radicalization, but is not causal. Gulf funded madrassas do produce militants, but only 1.5 percent of Pakistani children attend them.

Yukleyen: Growth Pattern of Salafism Among European Muslim Youth: Moroccan and Turkish Islamic Fields in the Netherlands

Ahmet Yukleyen

Ahmet Yukleyen presented on his fieldwork among Dutch Salafis. He sought to understand what attracts young Muslim Moroccans to Salafism in much higher numbers than Turkish immigrants. Throughout Europe, third generation young Muslims have become more radical. Salafism's rising popularity in the Netherlands provides an interesting case study in this phenomenon. The

Netherlands has an almost equal population of Moroccan and Turkish/Kurdish Muslims, but Moroccans make up 70 percent of Salafis, while Turks make up only 5 percent.

Salafis take an exclusivist approach to Islam. Their exclusivist and totalitarian discourse delegitimizes democratic political systems. They do not accept religious innovation (*bida*), and consider more lax Sufi practices idolatrous (*shirk*). In fact, in many cases any non-Salafi might not be considered a true Muslim. Yukleyen added that this puritanical approach seemed to be anxiety driven. Salafis worry about the states of others souls.

Belying their seemingly anachronistic goal, young Salafis invert concepts to responds to the modern needs and concerns of young Muslims dealing with a liminal identity. Dutch Muslims are very European in their habitus, but have an abstract Muslim identity as well. They feel they do not quite belong in either identity. Salafis frequently go through a reborn Muslim experience. For many interviewees, they hit rock bottom after involvement with drug abuse or petty crimes. In shock, they turned to something that can give them structure. Salafism fills that void. Certainty fills the uncertainty of liminality. Clear-cut, Salafism offers young Muslims simplicity and self-assurance. Youths use Salafi interpretations to legitimize rebellion against their parents and society.

Structurally, Turkish religious communities are much more difficult to penetrate than Moroccan. Salafis are just one among many Turkish Islamic movements of various interpretations competing for members. To attract followers, many Turkish movements and organization provide services like education, but Salafists do not. Within Moroccan communities, the situation is different. Lack of religious competition opens up more space for Salafism to dominate.

Language plays an important role in facilitating Salafi growth among Moroccans. Salafis use Dutch for their religious marketing. Moroccans often speak Berber or Dutch while Turks still primarily use Turkish for religious communication. This makes attracting Moroccan youth much easier for Salafis.

Yukleyen concluded by arguing that Islamic organizations are well positioned to facilitate or impede Salafism's growth in the Netherlands.

Discussion

Asef Bayat suggested that Moroccan Muslims are further from their religious culture, so they are attracted to an abstract Islam, which is devoid of its culture. Malleability makes abstract religion is dangerous. Yukleyen added that Salafism actually replaces or makes concrete an abstract idea of Islam, which is problematic.

On increasing Salafi violence, Yukleyen commented that for those Salafis not yet on the path to violence, an effective intervention might be to undercut the idea of utopia by showing the internal fighting among jihadi groups. Then people may see jihad is not about accomplishing an Islamic utopia but about petty power struggles between leaders who seek to establish their own status.

Davis: Identity, recruitment, and political economy of the Islamic State

Eric Davis:

Eric Davis focused on three aspects of the Islamic State: identity, recruitment, and the political economy of the organization. As liberal ideologies credence falls, and the Islamic State (IS) has

filled the vacuum. Growing global structural inequality has driven trans-national migration and undermined traditional forms of secular nationalism.

Eric Davis argued that youths join the Islamic State to recreate a sense of belonging missing in their home countries. Playing on this desire, IS carefully cultivates the aura of an Islamic utopia to recruits. Their finely tuned social media presence exploits the anger and insecurity of Muslim youth in European urban ghettos. For youths adrift, the IS promises to take care of them; give them a job, and that no one will marginalize or discriminate against them again. Converts to Islam join seeking adventure and often come from dysfunctional families.

The combination of unemployment and identity issues draws youths.²¹ Not just a terrorist organization IS has a very sophisticated state structure. Its well-functioning political economy draws members. Unemployment from the youth bulge in much of the Muslim world facilitates their recruitment. IS gives recruits jobs and free housing. Oil sales, theft, extortion and kidnapping funds its roughly 20 thousand strong fighting force²² and recruitment. IS distributes franchises to tribes to manage oil.

Using a distorted Islam, IS creates a narrative of authenticity. This narrative has allowed disaffected adults and youths to reestablish a social and political identity. Davis noted that IS has invented its religiosity, which melds a superficial understanding of religion with Western culture. However, Islam does foreground an anti-Western ideology and allows IS to draw upon powerful historical memory. Members are true Muslims while others are apostates.

²¹ Davis added that if the U.S. had used some of the money funneled into Iraq at the height of the war to create public works programs, IS would not have been as successful.

²² Recruits come from about 80 different states, but Tunisians and Saudis make up the majority.

Ultimately, Davis believes that IS will fail because it is not organically based and must continually draw new recruits. As the promise of utopia withers, so will recruiting streams. News of IS killing Western recruits who want to go home and its other brutalities may help in this regard. Second, IS faces significant military opposition that should slowly degrade its capacity to create the illusion of utopia for its members.