

Afterword on Islam and Space in Europe: The Dynamism of a Field

This Afterword focuses on the dynamism of the study of Islam and space in Europe. A comparison with Barbara Daly Metcalf's *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe* (1996) reveals how much has changed in terms of scholarly approach since its publication. In Metcalf's volume, the frames were migration, mobility and transnational connections. Here, urban diversity, settlement, and secularism are highlighted. Despite a common anthropological focus, today's authors pay greater attention to theoretical issues, drawing on ideas about space, governance and the everyday to deepen their ethnographies and engage across disciplines. They have the advantage of being able to examine the impact of time and change. Three final questions are raised, on the move from global to local, the role of academic research in societal problem solving, and the study of Islam as a resource for interrogating the "secular" public domain and everyday lived space in Europe.

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Rethinking Islam and space in Europe is timely, not only for understanding the dynamic relationship between this religion, those who adhere to and practice it, and its settings, but for raising broader questions about how religious people make places, and how their localities are enmeshed with social and historical traces and wider geopolitical discourses. The contributors to this special issue draw principally on the findings and analyses arising from their own research sites, but also offer ethnographically grounded conclusions which connect to a more expansive web of concepts, theories and new directions.

Organising this body of particular but interconnected studies is important not only for giving these articles coherence, but for shaping and directing the current and future contours of research. All editors are required to make choices about how to order their material. In this collection, Moses, Müller and Taleb have highlighted three organising themes, of governance, institutions and performance. As a framework, this certainly resonates with recent public and academic debate about Islam and Muslims in Europe. But it retains the dominant order, of state first and individuals last. As readers, we find ourselves moving from the power centres and urban authorities of Western Europe – in Berlin, Barcelona, London and the major Dutch cities – through to young women in playgrounds, minority Shi‘a Muslims and to the far reaches of Islamic subjectivity in Russian Tatarstan. Having no doubt used similar organising principles myself, I make no judgement in observing this. However, it is worth considering a counter-reading, reversing what might seem like the natural order, by beginning with the question of how ethical lifeworlds and environments are subjectively made and “animated by practices of piety” (Benussi). To do so takes us beyond the expected arenas of Islamic institutions, leaders and contestation with secular authorities on issues of representation and public space, into homes, shops, cafes and playgrounds, and into the domains of health, consumption, learning and play, decision-making and socialising. Re-envisioning the intellectual project of Islam and space in Europe from this vantage point puts a different complexion on Muslim life in Europe, with less focus on public claims-making and contestation and more on everyday performances informed by Islamic prescription and ethical activism, on how European Muslims live out, manage and negotiate their everyday spaces (see also Dessing et al 2013).

However one makes one’s way through this special issue, it is clear that this is a fine volume of essays, each offering a different perspective and case study while contributing to a broader web of themes. The authors take as a starting point certain commonly held ideas, first elaborated by 20th century spatial theorists: that space is physical, social, cultural, ideologically inflected and full of power. As parts of space, places are historically imbricated, and locally and globally interconnected;

they are forged and contested discursively and through practice. As such, these articles are of their time. This is further reinforced if we compare them to an earlier collection of essays.

From *Making Muslim Space* (1996) to *Rethinking Islam and Space in Europe* (2021)

As the editors note in their introduction to this special issue, the subject of Islam and space in Europe was addressed previously by Barbara Daly Metcalf (1996) and the contributors to her volume, *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*. It is instructive to draw on this earlier work in order to better understand the context, contents and underlying assumptions of the present one. Twenty-five years separate the two. The realities of Islam in Europe and of its study have changed significantly in that time, as a result of the impact of global migration, 9/11 and other terrorist attacks, geo-political conflicts, the financial crisis, and the discourse of a clash of civilisations. Muslims have been increasingly exposed – in the media and in public life more broadly – to Islamophobia, discrimination and suspicion.

Not that there was no evidence of such issues in the earlier volume. Reference was made there to the context and contest of Islam and the West, and to the challenging environments in which Muslim communities staked claims to public space. But, overall, the discussion was of Muslim actors as agents of change, seeking to redefine and re-appropriate Islam in new environments. The focus was on Muslims as migrants, on shared ritual practice and its role in place-making and community development, on the material culture of the “sacred word” and the impact of Islam’s shared textual tradition. The mobility and transnational interconnectedness of Muslims, and the cultural circulation and portability of Islam were to the fore.

Superficially, there is some common ground in the current collection. As in the earlier one, there are articles on Islamic institutions, processions and on Muslims in prison. Muslims are seen to make Islamic identities in new contexts, and to contest and negotiate for public space and recognition. “Every day is Ashura, everywhere is Karbala” no less that it was in 1996. But there is more change than continuity. The broadly optimistic paper titles of 1996, of “New Medinas”, “Making Room”,

“Transcending Space”, and “Stamping the Earth with the Name of Allah” have given way in 2021 to those that focus more on the pressures on place-making and less on the vision or agency of Muslims themselves. Other changes can be witnessed too: the turn to theory, the use of different frames and concepts, and the presence of new themes.

The turn to theory

Twenty-five years on from *Making Muslim Space*, the importance of theory, both for articulating the current European context and for explaining Muslim responses and new initiatives, is clear. Several of the key theorists (i.e. Lefebvre, Foucault, de Certeau), on whose ideas current authors now rely, had written their principal works before the publication of Metcalf’s volume. However, it is fair to say that, in 1996, the spatial turn had yet to be fully realised in the humanities and social sciences. The new generation of 21st century authors feels a greater compulsion to situate its work theoretically, in relation to arguments about governance and the production of space, religious place-making, and the relationship between Islam and secularism. Engagement with theory allows the study of Islam in Europe to be connected to broader intellectual debates and other cases of space, knowledge and power. Building on the ideas of those who undertook the groundwork to make earlier spatial theory applicable and tractable for studying religion in late-modernity (e.g. Appadurai, Asad, Mahmood, Ingold, Tweed and Knott), a new generation has developed novel lines of critical enquiry to “rethink” Islam and space in Europe. In doing so, they have brought different voices to the table, such as Jessop’s strategic-relational approach (Müller), Puwar’s concept of “space-invaders” (van den Bogert), Ingold’s “taskscape” (Benussi), and Manabe and Tausig on sound and movement in public space (McMurray). This has enabled the development of new frameworks (e.g. Müller’s analytical configuration of state, space and secularism), concepts (e.g. Benussi’s “pietaskcape”), and perspectives (e.g. Taleb’s Islamic lens on the EU’s imperial formations; McMurray’s spatial and sonic remediations). The authors have also built on their own prior research, including Burchardt and Grier’s publications on urban governance and religious place-making, and Sunier’s work on Islamic moral geographies and activism in Europe.

Shifting context; changing frames

The last quarter of a century has seen significant geopolitical and social changes impacting the lives of Muslim minorities in Europe. The rise of Islamophobia and discourses of terrorism and extremism were challenging for European multiculturalisms, for the establishment of settled communities and the embedding of Islam in the culture and heritage of European nations. The fears and suspicions of majority populations, arising not only from jihadist attacks but from negative mainstream and social media representations of Islam and Muslims, overshadowed new initiatives and everyday relationships. This can be seen within the prison walls described here by Williams, where wider anxieties and moral panics led to security concerns and anxiety about “Muslims taking over”. The hiatus, failures and constraints described by Müller, Burchardt and Grier, and Moses are also a consequence of the often strained relationships between state actors and Muslim groups.

Sunier documents the changes which took place for Dutch Muslims within this 25-year period, finding “a clear shift from enclavisation applied by religious brokers” in the 1980s/early 1990s to the strategy of later leaders “to dismiss the image of Muslims as immigrants and outsiders and to foster Islam as one of the country’s religions, with rights and duties equal to others”. This is also borne out by the different frames employed in the two collections of papers. In Metcalf’s volume, the frames were migration and mobility, with a key Islamic concept being *hijra* (migration). In this one, the major frames are urban religious diversity and Muslims as settled minority communities. In the article by Burchardt & Grier, actors from urban religious communities are seen to be treated differently in their requests to hold public rituals as a result of their positioning in local regimes and interaction orders, with Muslims facing greater obstacles than Buddhists. In another article, Benussi explores the concept of *halal* (permissible) and the ideal of “*halal* living” to show how everyday practices and spaces in one locale are animated by Islamic piety, an example of the ethical approach adopted by one mature Muslim minority. In a third, van den Bogert reveals the confidence of young women in defeating local discourses about Islam and gender as they find expression and identity by playing football. In these and other contributions, we witness the poise and self-confidence which

arise among individuals and communities as a result of being embedded over time in a locality; but we also see that they are required to contend with anti-Islamic sentiments and widely-held negative discourses.

New themes: The secular and secularism

Returning to Metcalf (1996), it is noteworthy that neither “secular” nor “secularism” appear in the index. This is perhaps unsurprising given that it was not until the late 1990s and 2000s that key works on secularism (e.g. Bhargava 1998; Asad 2003; Taylor 2007), and those exploring the relationship between religion and secularism (e.g. Fitzgerald 2007; Levey & Modood 2008; Berger et al 2008) began to emerge. The secular as both context and culture, and secularism as a liberal worldview and dominant western ideology had yet to be incorporated into the study of Islam in Europe in the mid-1990s. *The Satanic Verses* controversy, in 1989-90, had raised the spectre of an ideological power struggle between liberalism and Islam (Webster 1990), but – barring one or two exceptions – little attention was paid by the authors of *Making Muslim Space* to the characteristics, conditions and constraints of European societies, politics and cultures and their impact on the minorities in their midst. The place of secularism in urban governance and of the secular in everyday life had yet to be fully researched.

In this special issue, what were once tacit and unexplored can no longer be ignored. Secularism has been deconstructed and recognised as a “problem-space”, both local and vernacular, for Muslims in Munich (Müller). Intertwined religious and secular motivations are identified at work in the organisation of urban events in Barcelona (Burchardt & Grier), with so-called “secular public space” becoming “infused with new religious meanings”. Van den Bogert considers the implications of incorporating “others” (young Muslim female footballers) into the “normative construction of Dutch public space as white and secular”, whilst Taleb examines how the avowedly secular but also Christian imperial inheritance of Europe is interwoven in the fabric of EU

institutions and practices. In all these cases, it is Islam or Muslim identity that is the complicating “other” that juxtaposes, highlights or challenges dominant norms and spaces.

But Moses resists labelling the local environment, authorities and communities of interest in North Kensington, London, as “secular” or “secularist”. Although it is not clear whether this is deliberate, a possible explanation may lie in his argument that the site in question, designated for an Islamic charitable foundation (*waqf*), was shaped not solely by Islamic prescription but by copious other factors which, when drawn together, explain what happened to the project over time. Neither Islam nor what is often referred to as the secular constituted a “totalising presence” sufficient for framing and explaining local discourses and *waqf* decision-making (Moses).

When an ostensibly secular space is broken open, whether in North London or elsewhere in Europe, a host of diverse factors are exposed – urban, post-industrial state policies and discourses, local histories and current claims, both religious and non-religious. Sometimes, secularist perspectives and strategies are openly espoused and expressed, but more often they remain tacit. The challenge of Islamic prescriptions and prohibitions, and the voices of Muslim actors allow the secular/secularism to be questioned and its complexity and internal diversity to be examined.

Disputes in public space, such as those regarding planning, funding or the holding of events, expose but also shape local secularisms and the production of everyday secular lived space as much as they do Muslim spaces.

New themes: Temporality and locality

Moses’ focus is squarely on the local field-site, his aim being to avoid seeing Islam as a totalising presence and to keep open the possibility of diverse explanations for local outcomes. His detailed research identifies local diachronic and synchronic factors – what scholars of social space, following Foucault (1986), have referred to as “extension” and “simultaneity” (Massey 1993, 155-156; Knott 2005, 20-25). The field-site’s historical traces, together with those spatial

interconnections and forces forged by Muslim actors, local authorities and other external agencies all contribute to the attempt – failed, as it turned out – to create a *waqf* in North Kensington.

The themes of time and change have become increasingly significant as Muslims and Islam have become more established in Europe, with their own migration and settlement histories, institutional embedding and local community development. With hindsight, the absence of such a discussion in Metcalf is unsurprising. Sunier’s article in this volume illustrates this quarter century shift well. In his account of the case of mosque development in Rotterdam in the 1980s and 1990s, he notes that the majority of Muslims were migrants, their mosques local and makeshift, their social relations and loyalties driven by transnational ethnic connections. But, as he notes – and we see this realised in his later case studies – the 1990s was a transitional period, marking a shift from a first to a second generation of leaders, from migration to settlement, and towards a maturity and confidence not witnessed in the earlier phase of migration.

This awareness of change over time arises from Sunier’s decision to unravel the production of Muslim spaces in local settings by comparing cases from different periods. Taking the long view allows Sunier and other contemporary researchers to access a perspective not available to an earlier generation of scholars. Whether researching the complex interaction of forces at work in making Islamic spaces or Muslims as “space invaders” in the disruption of ostensibly “secular” spaces, the authors in this special issue have been able to draw out the temporal factors at work in locality-production. To do so, Taleb in particular, in her examination of the imperial strata within the fabric of the EU, utilises the concept of the “palimpsest” to invoke the hidden traces of prior regimes which remain significant in its constitution, unwritten rules and built environment. Islamic interventions may make such traces visible or at least offer a new vantage point on the presence of – in this case – earlier imperial threads. Like Muslim leaders involved in the *waqf* project (Moses), those applying to hold public events in Barcelona (Burchardt & Griera), or seeking to build bridges and challenge public misconceptions in Dutch cities (Sunier), Muslim interlocutors operating within the EU offer a different perspective and new voice (Taleb).

Three questions

Since the publication of *Making Muslim Space* in the mid-1990s, the field of study has changed considerably. The turn to theory, deployment of new frames and concepts, and the introduction of new analytical and comparative themes are positive signs for current and future research on Islam and space in Europe. Three questions linger, however.

The first concerns the near absence of a major theme found in Metcalf's collection, of Muslims' transnational connections and the global circulation and mobility of Islamic ideas, practices, movements and personnel. Has the deep dive into the production of locality in all its particularity claimed attention at the expense of activity at the global scale? Could more be done to reconnect the two, or has the latter become less significant as Muslims have become more settled in Europe?

The second concerns the role of academic research in societal problems. Should scholars do more with their knowledge and analytical tools to support policy and practice in the neighbourhoods they study? Is it sufficient to remain well-informed and analytically sophisticated bystanders? A further theme to emerge in this collection of papers has been "failure", the failure of projects to come to fruition, and of Muslim communities to successfully stake claims to public space. The researchers writing here have offered compelling case studies, including explanations of how and why local problems occurred. Some have developed analytical frameworks, theories or concepts with the potential for more general application. Could and should such resources play a part in the discussion or resolution of the very problems identified and discussed by scholars?

The final question is about the nature of the spaces being rethought here. Has enough been done to interrogate the nature of the public and private spaces to which Islam and Muslims in Europe make a difference? The authors writing here have undoubtedly made significant headway by exploring the historical and imperial traces, competing interests and complex interactions that inform the production of localities. There is far greater awareness now than in the past of Islam's encounters with secularism. But is there still more to be done to employ the lenses of Islam and Muslim

identity to shed new light on the nature of public and everyday lived spaces, and to identify and draw out the discourses, ideas and values which animate them but are often tacit. As became clear in 1989, during the fall-out of *The Satanic Verses* controversy, Islamic claims and interests, once voiced, exposed liberal assumptions. Analysing how Muslims make space in Europe, and draw on Islam to do so, provides further opportunities for unmasking the ostensibly “secular” public domain and everyday lived space rather than leaving them intact as ideologically unmarked and morally neutral.

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