



Stefano Allievi, Jørgen S. Nielsen, eds. *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and across Europe*. Leiden: Brill, 2003. ix + 332 pp. \$128.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-12858-3.

Reviewed by Teresa Bertilotti (Department of Sociology, University of Essex)

Published on H-Gender-MidEast (November, 2003)

“Transnational” Islam Independent of Migration Chains or Shared Ethnic Identity

“Transnational” Islam Independent of Migration Chains or Shared Ethnic Identity

This book, edited by Stefano Allievi (University of Padua, Italy) and Jørgen S. Nielsen (University of Birmingham, UK) is the first volume of Brill’s Muslim Minorities Series, which “is designed to represent scholarly research into the situation of Islam and Muslims in world regions characterised by long-term European settlement.” The volume opens with an essay by S. Allievi, who, adopting a very original approach, analyzes how new communication technology helps create new transnational Muslim communities. The crucial question addressed by Allievi is “how the Muslim presence ‘happens’ ... how these populations, groups or communities ‘produce’ themselves, through which means and logics.” In particular, what is highlighted in this “production of community” is the “process of construction of transnational and non-ethnic Muslim communities through Islamic networks and the use of (mass) media” (p. 2). Rather than looking at socio-cultural factors underlying the identity-making process of these groups, emphasis is placed on “the borders of the communities and the borders of the society in which they live” and the consequences of such boundary-crossings (p. 3). Basing his study on this fundamental issue, he goes on to define the concept of networks, providing some examples of Islamic networks (Muslim neo-communities) in order to analyze the role of mass media in the construction of these new types of community. Jørgen S. Nielsen examines diverse types of networks: traditional ones (“first generation” of Islamic networks, such as the movements which had tried to renew Islam through education and stimulation of religion learning) and new ones (which practice forms of interaction with realities and institutions external to the Islamic world). With the use of the new technology these networks, on the one hand, have made Islam a transnational reality, and on the other, determine its integration in Europe. Mark LeVine delves into the debate on Mid-

dle East globalization and on the European Union in the last decade. Despite their marked differences, he points out the many similarities shared by the two realities, for their skeptical attitude towards the process of globalization and the expectations arising from it. He also analyzes the Arab discourses on globalization (centered on the “clash of civilization,” caused, in their opinion, by the American foreign policy system) in historical perspective and compares it to the discourses of the Arabs and Muslims living in Europe, addressing the question “whether and how Islamist critiques of the West have been transposed from one side of the Mediterranean to the other, and thus influenced the troubled enculturation of Islam in Europe” (p. 95). What his research highlights is the similarity of Muslim and European perceptions in a U.S.-dominated globalization. Islam in Europe may be situated within a three-way relationship: the Muslim “diaspora” in Europe, the Muslim communities in the countries of origin, and the host countries. This situation engenders two separate realities: the Euro Islam and the “ghetto” Islam. Using network analysis, LeVine analyzes these two possibilities against the backdrop of the wider globalization process. He highlights alternative proposals to neo-liberal globalization and conservative Islam elaborated by some intellectuals and based on the culture of dialogue as the only possible defense against globalization. Peter Mandaville focuses on “European Islam”: Muslims constitute a considerable part of the European reality and Europe is more and more present in Muslim discourse. He examines the way in which this relationship develops within Muslim intellectual activity, especially among those thinkers and activists concerned with the politics of Islamic identity and community in Europe. This analysis envisions two images: a rich symbiosis between the Islamic and European cultures and a “clash of civilization.” The author focuses on the first and provides some background context, placing emphasis on intergenerational issues (that is the Islam of parents ver-

sus the Islam of their children) and leadership change in Muslim communities in Europe: youths rely on thinkers and writers able to reconcile day-to-day realities of European life with religious principles. After defining his use of the term "Muslim" (indicating people for whom religious practice contributes to constructing self-identity) and the term "critical Islam" in Europe (denoting "a particular orientation towards Islam that is marked, above all, by a willingness to historicise the normative import of particular religious interpretation" [p. 130]), he traces the situation of Muslims in Europe from the difficult period of the 1980s to the first years of the 1990s when the most extreme Islamophobia decreases and socio-economic conditions improve: in this context a second generation emerged which was born and raised in Europe. Many of them are highly educated and seek to fashion a different and more sophisticated idiom of Islam. He gives a survey of thinkers and writers who, in the transnational spaces of European cities such as London and Paris, are engaged in the reorientation and reinterpretation of Islam. The new Islamic discourse in Europe manifests itself in the tendency to seek a recognized and legitimate place in the public sphere, that is in a different attitude towards political engagement. In Mandaville's words, "Europe offers a unique context for the reassessment of theories, beliefs and tradition, while increased transnationalism enables these new reformulations to travel the world" (pp. 140-141). Valérie Amiraux focuses on a particular aspect of transnationalism: a trend of political Islam in Turkey (the ex-Refah Partisi), which has drawn benefit from the expatriation of a part of its structure in Germany. This case study is based on the idea, well developed by the author, that "networks of young Turkish Muslims settled in Germany draw advantage, in particular as regard political representation, of their environment although not being citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany" (p. 148). Anke Bentzin focuses on the use of mass media as a means to access the public sphere and analyzes Islamic TV programs as a forum of religious discourse. In particular, the paper analyzes the impact of a local public TV channel (Berlin Open Channel) in the Muslim community of Berlin, a channel that broadcasts programs made by the same spectators. The paper shows how the Islamic TV has stimulated religious discourse among the Muslims of different national backgrounds and religious attitudes. This discourse also has a transnational dimension, as the channel broadcasts programs produced by other channels and shares its own programs with others. In addition, it is a fertile site where Muslims of various national backgrounds and affiliations interact. The implications of communication strategies within diverse pub-

lic commitments is the object of Loïc Le Pape's analysis. Two interesting papers delve into the particular realities of Russian Muslims and Uyghur communities. Galina M. Yemelianova focuses on Russian Muslims and stresses the role of the mass media. After the collapse of Communism, Russia witnessed an Islamic revival which has been part of the process of the political and intellectual liberalization of society. This Islamic revivalism has taken different forms: the acquisition of legal rights to observe Islamic duties; the emergence of numerous new official Islamic Spiritual Boards; the revival of contacts between Muslims of the former Soviet Union and their co-religionists abroad; the Islamic building boom (mosques, cultural centers, secondary Islamic schools, etc). The reintegration of Russian Muslims into the Islamic world has entailed their exposure to transnational forms of Islam. The foreign Islamic influence has been favored by the intensive missionary and teaching activity of representatives of various Islamic institutes and funds from different countries. They have distributed Islamic literature which has propagated non-traditional and transnational Islam. The author examines the relationship between ethnic Islam and transnational Islam in the eastern North Caucasus, paying special attention to the role of the media. The case study is based on textual analysis of the media and elite interviewing, and gives a deep historical background of Sufism. Since the late 1980s, in the context of the reintegration of the Russian *umma* into the Muslim world, North Caucasus has seen the emergence of Wahhabism (also known as Salafism), which represents a transnational form of Islam opposed to Tariqatist (ethnic Islam). Particularly important is the social dimension of the Wahhabi movement for "the democratisation of Dagestani society through cleansing its Islam of mysticism, superstition and patriarchal elements" (p. 266). Post-Soviet Islamic resurgence has been characterized by the merging of Islam, both ethnic and transnational, with politics. The critic provides examples about Dagestan and Chechen and the role of mass media both in the Wahhabis and the Tariqatists forms of Islam. Ytzhak Shichor's paper deals with the growth of a national identity and political activism in some Uyghur communities, primarily in Turkey and Europe. He starts with an analysis of the first phase of Uyghur transnationalist activities (from Mao to the 1970s) stimulated by various stages of Uyghurs' migrations: they fled from China to neighboring countries (India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan) and then, for economic and political reasons, they re-emigrated to a second host country (as in the case of Turkey) and to a third one (Australia, Western Europe, and North America). Turkey has played a key

role in this process as terminal destination as well as a starting point and crucial junction to other destinations, but it has also been, since the late nineteenth century, a model for Turkestan nationalism. Shichor continues his analysis with the resurgence of Uygur transnationalism in the 1980s and 1990s, which is characterized by the use of online digital communication media, especially the Internet. The Uygurs do not have a homeland-state of their own. In the 1980s an organized Uygur transnationalism activism began to grow, animated by the Uygurs refugees all over the world, claiming Eastern Turkestan independence. Last but not least, I would like to mention two articles which focus on the “reform of tradition” in the field of gender and family. Schirin Amir-Moazami and Armando Salvatore analyze the “making of the Muslim woman” based on the assumption that the “tradition-rooted categories of social and religious authority do not impair by default autonomous social agency, but are often their necessary condition. They are part and parcel of the process—also located at the delicate juncture of inter-generational change and conflict—through which forms of authority are transformed through the impact of social powers (like those related to education, social disciplining and social distinction), without this implying a pre-fabricated and normative notion of ‘secularisation’” (p. 53). Gaby Strau-burger focuses on the marriage behavior of Turks who are permanent residents in Germany, adopting two perspectives: the role of marriage behavior in establishing, constructing, or maintaining Muslim communities, which can be non-ethnic or transnational; and the function of religious aspects in Turks’ marriages in Germany. The originality of this analysis stems from its focus not only on marriages based on minority-majority patterns (Turkish minority and German majority), as it often happens, but also on those based on several minority-minority patterns of second-generation immigrants. The author identifies some options (marriages between second-generation Turks in Germany and Turks in Turkey; marriages between Muslims with a different ethnic background, e.g. Turkish-Maroccan, Turkish-Bosnian marriages; Germans converted to Islam; etc.) and considers “how they might contribute to establishing, constructing or maintaining transnational or non-ethnic Muslim communities” (p. 197), taking into account the role of personal ties and social networks (transnational kinship networks). Particularly interesting is the gender-related analysis. For

example, two striking differences emerge from this analysis: German-Turkish weddings account for 18.3 percent in the male population, but only 6.5 percent in the female group; Turkish-Turkish weddings within the migrant population represent 28.7 percent in the male population, but 40.5 percent in the female population. To explain the reasons motivating many second-generation transnational marriages, the author proposes a qualitative analysis—carried out through fourteen case studies—that takes into account structural and demographic factors, social and cultural resources, and individual preferences. Furthermore, Strau-burger analyzes the interrelation of inter-ethnic marriages and the emergence of a non-ethnic Muslim self-perception. The volume ends with an article by Steven Vertovec which “suggests a number of issues, trends and avenues of research surrounding transnationalism and religion with particular reference to Islam” and aims “to understand patterns and conditioning factors affecting current global socio-religious dynamics” (pp. 312-313). The volume suggests several innovative options and the papers presented cover a number of issues and approaches related to the study of the impact of the migration process. It is worth noting some significant contributions that analyze the catalyst function of new non-traditional links, “transnational social spaces,” and the role of media networks and other means of communication—all factors that contribute to the definition of a global Islam. As the editors acknowledge, the articles aim to analyze “different aspects of the contemporary situation of Muslims in western Europe ... under the general perspective of transnational dimensions. What distinguishes the papers in this volume from much of recent literature is the extent to which the ‘transnational’ forms of Islam with which we are confronted are partly or wholly independent of the chains of migration or shared ethnic identity. What the papers show is that there is currently a very active process of constructing Muslim/Islamic networks held together by shared ideas and responses to the European environment, rather than common ethnic or national identity, and using various forms of media as the tool for such networking” (p. vii). The twelve essays collected here reach this objective. Originally written as workshop papers, they are well integrated in the general frame of the volume which stems from a joint discussion and propose new and interesting research paths.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl>.

Citation: Teresa Bertilotti. Review of Allievi, Stefano; Nielsen, Jörgen S., eds., *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and across Europe*. H-Gender-MidEast, H-Net Reviews. November, 2003.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=8434>

Copyright © 2003 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.