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MUSLIM INTIMACIES
Challenges for Individuals and Families in Global Contexts

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One of the most striking features of Muslim societies is the importance attached to the family. According to Islamic teachings (both in the holy Quran and the Sunnah of the prophet Muhammad), the family is a divinely inspired institution, with marriage at its core. Marriage is considered to be permanent, with specific roles and responsibilities assigned to each spouse. In recent decades, however, the Muslim institutions of family and marriage have experienced increasing pressure due to global mobility and communication, structural changes to the economy, revivalist movements within Islam, and other social developments. Muslim families who have migrated to the Middle East, Europe or the USA face the particular challenges of balancing between older traditions and the expectations in their new home societies (e.g., Al-Sharmani 2010; Horst 2006; Schmidt 2004; Stepien 2008), but Muslims on the African continent, for instance, are no less affected by late modern transformations in their own societies (Parkin & Nyamwaya 1987; Arthur 2012).

Some fifteen million Muslims currently live in Europe, comprising between six and eight percent of the total population in European countries such as Belgium, France, and Germany. Yet the significance of the Muslim population in European public perception is much greater than these numbers would imply. Recent demonstrations in a number of European countries suggest a growing fear of Muslim asylum-seekers and the possible "Islamization" of Europe. Debates are waged regarding the integration of Muslims in Europe and to what extent there is a need to accommodate them socially and politically. Anti-Muslim sentiment is increasingly becoming a normalized part of European societies. For a broader perspective on these debates, it is important to take a closer look at a core institution of Muslim society, not only in Europe, but also through the global interconnections many Muslim families share with each other across national boundaries. This special issue of *Ethnologia Europaea*[1] presents five case studies on Muslim families, conjugality, kinship ties and networks. It brings together researchers trained in folklore and European ethnology, of which several are from the European North yet working across disciplines and in ethnographic fields spanning the globe. Employing ethnographic interview methods, which take seriously people's responses, but which also adopt a critical stance toward the different regimes of knowledge and power constructing them, the articles in this volume focus on family members' goals, their rationales for these goals, and the strategies used to achieve them. Each of the articles in this volume presents a case study in which Muslim families have been affected by social transformations, whether migration, military conflict, shifting trends in employment, or the rise of communication technologies. In the face of these new challenges, families strive to be successful, enhance internal cooperation, and live up to cultural and religious

ideals. The articles in this theme issue seek to answer the following questions: How can family members collectively be the family they want to be? What are the institutional, cultural, and socio-economic frameworks that make this possible? What are the obstacles and limitations to realizing these aspirations, and do these include conflicting goals pursued by family members?

First, however, we must clarify what we mean when using the terms *family* and *Muslim family*. In Western societies, the work of mid-twentieth-century structural-functionalist social theorists such as Talcott Parsons (1949, 1955, 1971) and William J. Goode (1964) focused on the nuclear family. Criticism against using the nuclear family as the analytic standard arose in the late 1960s, and especially feminist theorists in the 1970s and 1980s sought to dismantle the orthodox consensus according to which a "normal" family consists of mother, father and their children under the age of eighteen (Cheal 1991: 3–6, 12–13, 153–156.) In a classic article, anthropologists Jane Collier, Michelle Rosaldo and Sylvia Yanagisako (1982) argued that the "family" familiar to Western capitalist societies is not a universal form of kin association or a functional and necessary unit of society, but rather an ideological and moral statement, a folk construct that glosses over the diversity, complexity and contradictions in intimate kin relationships. Although their focus was the Western family, the points made by Collier et al. remain salient for all groups in modern state societies organized through genealogical relationships. As Garbi Schmidt points out in her commentary in this theme issue, what counts as "family" is context-specific, and strategies for defining family have important consequences for individual commitment to institutions including religious institutions, as well as for the distribution of power within and across networks.

The constructed nature of the concept of family becomes increasingly clear as *mobile families disperse* across the globe, calling into question the bounded and unchanging nature of the family unit (e.g., Körber & Merkel 2012). Whether arriving in new places as tourists, students, clergy, asylum seekers, refugees, etc., the growing number of mobile adherents

to the Islamic faith requires ethnographic scholarship to chart their histories, unique identity formations, economic conditions, and lived experiences. It is through the ongoing dialogue between Muslims' origins and their destinations that specific Muslim identities take shape (see Al-Sharmani 2010: 499– 500; Horst 2006: 7–8; Arthur 2012: 1–3).

The present theme issue treats the "Muslim family" as an object of analysis rather than a pre-existing and a stable category, and aims to give voice to Muslims themselves in this analysis, since in Muslim societies everywhere the family is being subjected to intense scrutiny in order to redefine its limits, functions and meanings. This is particularly true in contemporary Europe where the "Muslim family" has become a highly politicized site of contestation (Grillo 2015). In referring to research on Arab families and the Western notion of the self, anthropologist Suad Joseph (1999: 17) could equally have been referring to notions of the family when she wrote that scholars cannot hope to hear what women and men in other cultures want until they develop descriptive languages that challenge the ethnocentrism of Western concepts. The contributions in this volume represent one step in this direction. In her article, for instance, Outi Fingerroos explores the extent to which the modern and legal European notion of the family is both historically recent and culturally-specific. She argues that using a European conceptual standard when assessing non-European immigrants' applications for asylum and family reunification does not necessarily promote their wellbeing, despite the fact that immigration services exist for humanitarian reasons.

We have chosen the word "intimacies" in our title to highlight the personal and affective aspects of Muslim courtship and family life. In the European media, the marriage practices of Muslim immigrant groups have been problematized as conservative and chauvinistic, in contrast to mainstream European marriages seen to be based on individual freedom and romantic love. Such polarized stereotypes have subsequently been utilized by anti-Muslim and anti-immigration movements within Europe (Keskinen 2011; Hübinette & Lundström 2011: 48–49). But, as

the articles in this volume demonstrate, family and marriage are for Muslims emotive and contemplative domains of life in which voluntary commitment, love and desire play a vital role. Even the Islamic revival movement can be for some young Muslims a means of embracing what Europeans often see as "European" values and a way to distance themselves from what in Europe is looked upon as conservative views and practices, as Pia Karlsson Minganti shows in her contribution to this volume.

This theme issue thus rejects universalizing, essentializing and naturalizing notions of the family, and sees the family as a culturally-specific form of association and target of strategic knowledge production. In this volume, we approach the construct of "family" in Muslim communities from a performative perspective: not as a thing but as a *doing*. We examine not just what people say they do, but more importantly the meanings people attach to the actions they see themselves carrying out. Such actions are framed by what is perceived by Muslim families to be "traditions": discourses and practices related to the management of intimacy and emotion, obligations and responsibilities within families, definitions of personhood and mature adulthood, notions of honor, respectability, and self-sufficiency, as well as strategies related to the division of labor in ensuring the family's economic and cultural survival.

One of these discursive traditions is Islam itself (Asad 1986), which is considered by many Muslims to be a single, universal tradition, where ethnographers tend to see a diversity of local and regional "Islams." Understandings of Islam vary not only across cultures but also across age groups, classes and even within families, and where in some contexts Islamic doctrine is evoked as highly relevant and valid, in other cases is it treated as a separate, non-pertinent realm of knowledge and practice. In order to embrace the broad field of experience that is Islam, in this volume we follow anthropologist Gabriele Marranci's definition of "Muslims" as those who feel themselves to be Muslim because for them, being Muslim has a particular value attached (Marranci 2008: 7–8).

The aim of this theme issue is threefold. First, it seeks to broaden the scope of research on "Islam as lived." Worldwide, the overwhelming majority of Muslims live outside the Middle East and do not speak Arabic, but most research on Islam has focused on Arab-speaking countries. The authors of this theme issue will explore family dynamics among Muslim families in Ethiopia, Finland, Italy, Morocco, Sweden, Turkey, and Tanzania as well as among those living transnational lives across these spaces (e.g., Olsson & Farahani 2012).

Second, this theme issue proposes that many current global concerns linked to everyday Islam such as gender roles, girls' education, arranged marriage, attitudes toward sexual transgression, and the integration of Muslim immigrants and asylum-seekers in Europe take on new meanings when viewed from within the broader context of the hopes, fears and strategies employed by families. This is because for many Muslims, the family is the primary context within which the identity and autonomy of the individual are negotiated. As Pia Karlsson Minganti's article in this volume shows, however, new institutions besides the family such as national youth organizations for Muslims in Europe have begun to participate in the socialization of the next generation of Muslims. The young Muslims in these organizations still consider matrimony and the creation of families to be one of their primary concerns, but choose to invest their reformist efforts in Islamic reinterpretations of marriage and family.

Third, as mentioned earlier, this volume pays close attention to the goals cherished by families and the strategies employed by them to achieve these goals. Muslim family members confront poverty in low-income countries, growing anti-Muslim sentiment in Europe, the increasing transnationalism of everyday practices and the expansion of information technology into all corners of everyday life. The ways in which family members negotiate their agency and create for themselves a positive sense of self while being deeply entangled in familial strategies and religious norms thus become increasingly complex. The difficulties of maneuvering in such changing circumstances are the late modern dilemmas

to which our title refers. A particularly important goal dealt with in this special issue is the survival of the family itself: not only in a physical sense, but also in the sense of the family's ability to conform to an ideal image to which some or all members aspire. Another fundamental goal is maintaining co-residence in the face of disruptive social forces. As Raquel Gil Carvalheira and Outi Fingerroos show in their contributions to this volume, extended families' aspirations toward co-residence can be offset by equally strong aspirations for the privacy and autonomy of the nuclear conjugal unit, but they can also be thwarted by urbanization, armed conflict, and the migration laws of receiving countries. Three articles in this volume (Gil Carvalheira, Häkkinen, Karlsson Minganti) focus on the new strategies successfully employed by Muslim individuals and families to maintain their own cohesion and relevance, while the other two (Fingerroos, Stark) elucidate the broader institutional problems and socio-economic barriers that prevent families from attaining these same goals. Laura Stark's study of the choices of poor Muslim family members in urban Tanzania shows how families trying to escape poverty often end up being additionally burdened with unwanted teenage pregnancies, and as Outi Fingerroos makes clear in her article, many Somali families never achieve the dream of family reunification in Finland. Garbi Schmidt's commentary opens up valuable perspectives on Muslim families' goals and marriage practices, such as the fact that more attention should be paid to how religious authority is created and maintained, that transnational marriage should be seen not as the exception but increasingly as the norm, and that the project of creating a positive and reflexive self-image is not always possible if persons must remain within a marriage market constrained by national boundaries.

A recurrent theme in this volume is the different perspectives on Islamic norms and practices held by older versus younger generations. These differences, however, should not be interpreted as an indication that Islam is losing its importance in the everyday lives of younger Muslims. The contributions by Anne Häkkinen and Pia Karlsson Minganti, for instance, show how the desire among young Muslims in Europe to get to know potential marriage partners on their own terms does not imply secularization but is instead a reinterpretation of Islam by young men and women who see themselves as pious Muslims. Likewise, many younger Muslims' less traditional approaches to marriage and family do not necessarily signify that older extended family arrangements have declined in importance as forms of support in Muslim cultures. Raquel Gil Carvalheira's article shows how one extended family in Morocco has found creative solutions that enable them to live together and cooperate in the same residential compound despite the numerous forces that have threatened to disrupt their co-residence. Anne Häkkinen describes how the tracing of connections – real or imagined – to a potential spouse through extended family or place of birth can be important for young Muslims in the Kurdish diaspora seeking transnational marriage partners through the Internet. Laura Stark's contribution details how for young Muslim women who have rejected their parents' Islamic teachings regarding proper sexual behavior before marriage, parents are still the main source of support when these young women become pregnant and must return home. Despite profound social transformations and economic pressures, it would appear that the family, however it is conceived of and materialized, is still the primary framework within which understandings of Islam renew themselves and adapt to changing circumstances, making the value of a Muslim identity continually relevant for future generations.

Note

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