INTRODUCTION

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Recent political events, such as violent confrontations between Muslims and Christians in northern and central regions of Nigeria, and the bloody persecution of ethno-religious minorities, such as the Yazidis in northern Iraq, suggest that religious affiliation plays a central role in defining positions in contemporary nation-state politics. While there are strong indications that, over the past two decades, questions of religious identity and difference have become more salient in structuring relations between religious groups in many regions of the world, it is important to note that divisions and disagreements *within* these groups have been long-standing and pertinent. With reference to Muslims, on whom this collection of essays focusses, a number of authors have pointed out that intra-religious debate and disagreement have posed a major challenge to the peaceful coexistence of different Muslim groups for a long time, and to Muslim religious and political life more generally.

There is now a burgeoning literature on the epistemological foundations and historical legacy of secularism that enable or restrict secular states' capacities to deal with religious difference. Authors who argue along this line of thought offer important correctives to earlier and often simplistic associations of secularism with political modernity. Nevertheless, by focussing on conflicts between religious minorities and majorities or, respectively, by limiting the analysis to situations in which members of certain religious traditions cannot partake fully in definitions of the normative foundations of political community, studies have down played or simply overlooked the significance of intra-religious diversity, both as a driving force of factionalism and as a mechanism that may ultimately facilitate peaceful religious coexistence. This intrareligious

diversity finds expression in the ritual domain and also in various mundane daily activities and sites. For Muslims, there are myriad ways in which to mark off domains of correct religious observance, moral rectitude, and social propriety to set oneself apart from those deemed not to follow "the right path."

In this special issue,[1] the centre of attention is on Muslims living in different parts of Africa. The collection of essays addresses practices and processes of boundary-drawing that allow various groups of African Muslims to claim belonging to particular groups or 'communities' and, at the same time, allow them to dissociate themselves from other kinds of Muslims. These processes have been the subject of numerous anthropological and historical studies that sought to move beyond essentialist definitions of Islam by documenting how Muslims in different parts of the globe become Muslims through discourse and debate.[2] These studies foregrounded verbal claims and arguments, while paying little systematic attention to the role of non-verbal practices, such as bodily practices that 'construct', enact and 'perform' religious affiliation across a range of religious and mundane settings. To be sure, studies of Muslim ritual and Muslim women's dress show that Muslim identity is importantly 'performed' through ritual conduct and through various instances of 'embodied practice.'[3]

1 Some of the contributions to this special issue were presented initially to a workshop titled "Performance of Belonging, Difference and Exclusion in the Muslim Africa" held at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden, in December 2013. The workshop was convened by Tea Virtanen and funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation and the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences.

2 e.g. Michael Fischer and Mehdi Abedi, *Debating Muslims* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); John R. Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse: Religion and Ritual in Gayo Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

3 e.g. Bowen, *Muslims Through Discourse*; Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Dorothea Schulz, "Competing sartorial assertions of femininity and Muslim identity in Mali," *Fashion Theory*, 11, 2/3, 2007, pp. 253-280; Dorothea Schulz, "(Re)Turning to proper Muslim practice: Islamic moral renewal and women's conflicting constructions of Sunni identity in urban Mali," *Africa Today*, 54, 4, 2008, pp. 21-43; Adeline Masquelier, *Women and Islamic Revival in a West African Town* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Janet McIntosh, *The Edge of Islam: Power, Personhood, and Ethnoreligious Boundaries on the Kenya Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009) .

When these authors refer to non-verbal assertions of religious affiliation as a 'performance' or an 'embodiment' of religious identity, they stress the salience of bodily practices in these activities. Nevertheless, in our view, using the terms 'embodiment', or 'embodied practice,' and 'performance' as a heuristic to study Muslim religious identity formation, leaves us with a number of thorny questions.

For one, the concept of 'embodiment' remains notoriously under-specified and hence vague. Generally, authors use the term to pinpoint bodily practices. Yet it often remains unclear whether they mean the term to point firstly, to a process of representation (a embodies b in the sense that a stands for b), or secondly, to a process of manifestation (a is the materialisation of the abstract idea b) or thirdly, to indicate in a broad sense that an activity is effected through bodily movements, postures, and gestures. Because of the polysemic nature of this term, accounts of how Muslims 'embody' their identities in their daily lives or during special rituals often remain elusive about the concrete implications of the 'bodily' dimensions of Muslim identity formation or 'constructions.' Moreover, 'embodiment' in the third sense of bodily activity includes, in a way similar to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus,'[4] perceptions and preferences not immediately accessible to conscious decision making and intentionality; therefore, it is not fully evident how such a conception of bodily practices should be brought into conformity with an account of how Muslims purposefully lay claim to particular religious affiliations. Several contributions to this special issue therefore indicate explicitly what specific forms of bodily practice and experience they see in certain Muslim performances of difference and belonging. Other contributions focus on settings in which Muslims perform difference primarily through stereotyping and hence discursive practice.

Our second qualm concerns the often indeterminate and indiscriminate uses of the terms 'performance,' 'performativity' and 'performative.' Several authors have noted the considerable risk of confusion that follows from the equivocal and underspecified meanings

4 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

of these terms.[5] Other authors have taken a more constructive stand by proposing a functional distinction between two analytical perspectives. The first of these are studies that examine performances "apart from the ordinary;" in other words, by examining performances that are considered to be of a special, spectacular, aesthetic or ritual kind. The second perspective highlights the performativity of everyday life, and examines how people manage their identities, appearances, and status in daily social interaction.[6] Classical anthropological studies have often addressed performance in the first sense; that is, as cultural performances proper. For Milton Singer,[7] cultural performances were the most concrete observable units, "for each performance has a definitely limited time span, a beginning and end, an organised program of activity, a set of performers, an audience, and a place and occasion of performance."[8] Richard Bauman has also paid attention to cultural performances as public events and as heightened experiential and aesthetic occasions.[9]

The second analytical perspective, that of performativity, moves away from explorations of performances as specific, extraordinary events, and instead centres on ways of doing and forms of behaviour and personal *mise-en-scène*. This perspective owes much to Erving Goffman's detailed

5 e.g. MacAloon, John J. "Introduction: Cultural Performances, Culture Theory," in John J. MacAloon (ed.), *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*, 1-15 (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984); Johannes Fabian, *Power and Performance: Ethnographic Explorations through Proverbial Wisdom and Theater in Shaba, Zaire* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

6 On the two perspectives see e.g. Schieffelin, Edward. "On Failure and Performance: Throwing the Medium out of the Seance," in Carol Laderman and Marina Roseman (eds.), *The Performance of Healing*, 59-89 (New York: Routledge, 1996); Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987); Tea Virtanen, "Performance and Performativity in Pastoral Fulbe Culture," Research Series in Anthropology 4 (Academic Dissertation, University of Helsinki, 2003).

7 Milton Singer (ed.), *Traditional India: Structure and Change* (Philadelphia: Publications of the American Folklore Society, 1959); Milton Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes* (New York: Praeger, 1972).

8 Milton Singer (ed.), *Traditional India*, p. xiii.

9 Richard Bauman, "Performance," in Richard Bauman (ed.), *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments: A Communication-centered Handbook*, 41-49 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

explorations of how people present themselves and articulate their purposes in everyday interactions. In an often-cited formulation, Goffman defined performance as “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers.”[10] For Goffman, performing was a mode of behaviour that may characterise any activity in any situation rather than a fenced-off genre.[11]

As the essays in this special issue demonstrate, in real life the analytic distinction between everyday performativity and performance as a framed, separate event is constantly blurred, making the heuristic use of the concept of performance problematic. Performative assertions of identity are not restricted to the minutiae of everyday encounters; they slip into rituals and other scheduled, public events and special performances, where they may take the form of individual behavioural styles and manoeuvres. Likewise, the multisensory appeal of special ritual performances is also effective in everyday social interaction and performances of identity, where it shows, for instance, in consumption styles, gendered dress codes, bodily postures and rhetorical styles.

A further addition to the performativity/performance discussion is offered by John Austin’s use of the term ‘performative.’ In Austin’s definition, performative utterances, or performatives, are speech acts which do not merely describe a state of affairs, but also effect this state; in other words, bring it into being.[12] In such speech acts, the uttering of certain words is essential for performing the act. Anthropological studies that rely on Austin’s usage of ‘performative’ have extended its application from analyses of speech acts to various non-linguistic communicative acts, thereby contributing to what Thomas Csordas has described as “the theory’s implicit blurring of the line of word

10 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1959), p. 22.

11 See Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (Rev. ed.) (New York: Routledge, 1988).

12 John Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (2nd ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986 [1962]).

and deed."[13] Yet another, though related, usage of 'performativity' and 'performative' has been proposed by Judith Butler in her theorizing of gender. She defines performativity as "reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains,"[14] and gender as the effect of reiterated action. Central to Butler's thinking are performative acts, the repetition of which naturalises the status quo: the identities and norms of the society.

The contributions to this special issue position themselves vis-à-vis the various above-mentioned approaches to performance/performativity, through a two-pronged strategy. They align with Austin and Butler insofar as they draw attention to the generative potential of individual bodily moves, gestures and speech acts, and hence pay detailed attention to the minutiae of these acts. Secondly, they offer an ethnographic illustration of the need to move beyond the tendency to compartmentalise and contrast studies of performance-as-special-event and of everyday performativity.

While looking at the performative expressions of belonging and difference among African Muslims, the essays address diverse settings and types of actions, not all of which are restricted to religious venues and practices. Patrick Desplat explores the ways in which religious affiliation and difference are expressed in Harar, Ethiopia. He argues that, for Harari men, afternoon *č̣āt* chewing sessions have become central occasions to claim and maintain an ethno-religious difference from the non-Harari, often labelled as Wahhabi, through chit-chat and gossip. A comparable example is offered by Souleymane Diallo who focuses on a refugee camp on the Niger-Mali border. Here racially 'black' Tuareg (Bellah) refugees from Mali engage in daily socializing activities at the hangar. Diallo conceives of the hangar as a special social place where the Bellah rework social categories and moral hierarchy by labelling

13 Thomas Csordas, "Imaginal Performance and Memory in Ritual Healing," in Carol Laderman and Marina Roseman (eds.), *The Performance of Healing*, 91-113 (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 93.

14 Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. xii.

and dispensing moral judgments on their former masters, the free-born, racially 'white' Tuareg. In Daria Trentini's article the emphasis shifts from verbal to more multisensory practices; namely, to spirit possession performances in Nampula city in northern Mozambique. Trentini discusses how women, who come mainly from the non-Muslim mainland, carve out a historically specific female Muslim identity for themselves by becoming "Muslims of the spirit" during the possession performance. Paola Abenante similarly focuses on the female spiritual sphere by looking at *riqqa*, a particular female sensitivity that, conceived of as a particularly female capability, grants Burhani Sufi women in Cairo access to the spiritual world. Abenante maintains that the performance and cultivation of *riqqa* is closely related to the idea of being a virtuous Muslim woman in a modern society. Finally, Joseph Hill examines claims to belonging made in Wolof-speaking villages in Senegal through what he terms "performative apologetics." Using this term, Hill points to a range of virtuous and philanthropic practices by which a group of Fayda Tijaniyya Muslims seek to demonstrate their piety and, by doing so, reconcile *yëngu*; that is, their controversial way of performing communal *dhikr*, with proper Muslimhood.

All these articles highlight the ambivalences of boundary work. Sometimes the boundaries are not clear-cut such as in Hill's case study in which divergent religious practices among the Fayda adherents create differently bounded but overlapping communities. Along similar lines, according to Trentini, the women in Nampula embrace the larger frame of Islam through multisensory bodily practices in their secluded spirit huts during the spirit possession performances, even if these practices set them clearly apart from mosque-oriented 'modern' Muslims. Among the Burhani women, studied by Abenante, the ambivalence is more about the proper management of the *riqqa* sensitivity which, if not properly disciplined, can induce women to neglect their daily social obligations, and thus jeopardise the very same belonging to the Burhaniyya community that it is supposed to strengthen. Sometimes these ambivalences are also related to specific historical moments when boundaries shift or obtain new meanings. In Cairo, where the performance of *riqqa* has a specific

relation to the discourse on modern womanhood, women adherents to the Burhani Sufi path see it as an alternative to the restrictive dominant form of Islam. In Nampula, in contrast, female participants in possession rituals revitalise an older local strand of 'chiefly' Islam which acquires new meanings in relation to the more recently-arrived Sufism and reformist Islam. Finally, among Malian refugees in the Niger camp studied by Diallo, former status distinctions between the Bellah and their former Tuareg masters take on a new relevance; new cleavages have also emerged among the Bellah.

One might also ask about the everyday, practical consequences of boundary work for Muslims. Sometimes the consequences are rather negligible such as when, in Harar, men's gossip about the so-called Wahhabi never reaches the ears of the latter because interaction between the two groups is virtually non-existent. Here and in other instances, Muslims' boundary work strengthens first and foremost their sense of belonging to a group. However, in some instances, the consequences are more momentous such as when Muslim women in Nampula feel they are regaining some of the ritual power they once held through their new identity as 'non-mosque' Muslim spirit healers. Yet in other examples, Muslims strive to prevent open confrontation. As Hill demonstrates for the Fayda Tijaniyya community in Senegal, the practitioners of the controversial *yëngu* performance purposefully avoid displaying it when important Fayda leaders are present. All these examples taken from African Muslim communities counter the trope of bloody intra-Muslim conflict that has dominated media coverage since the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The essays shift the focus away from settings in which assertions of difference and exclusive belonging by groups of Muslims take on a confrontational character and prompt dramatic consequences. Instead, the contributions provide a comparative insight into practices of boundary making and identity assertions that allow Muslims to manage to live together relatively peacefully.