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Modern Islamic Thinking and Activism

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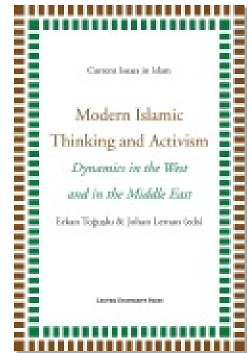

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CHAPTER 1

Contemporary Islamic Activism and Muslims

Erkan Toğuşlu and Johan Leman

In this book we invited some authors to look at the basic issues that Islam faces today, touching political, cultural, spiritual and economic dimensions in which Muslims are involved to develop their understanding and strategies in different geographical and national contexts. We asked them to do that by focusing on some very precise situations. Such an approach cannot be a complete one. We are very conscious that such analysis has its weaknesses. But it surely also has some very strong points. It avoids analyses that are so general that they become quite abstract and can never be found in the reality of social and cultural praxis at grassroots level.

So, the chapters in the book focus on some areas of applied Islamic principles and understandings including welfare organizations, educational institutions, political implications in civil society and spiritual authority. Confronted with modernity and a Western form of secularism, Muslim socio-religious activism develops a Muslim-self at various dimensions and intersection points. The exploration of Muslim implications in these socio-economic and political domains enables us to analyse the new salient identity of Muslims.

The recent debates on current issues in Islam emphasize the question of the Muslim adaptability-compatibility in a global civil society and how to contribute to it. In this regard, the different aspects of Muslims living in Britain, France, Egypt, Turkey and so on show how they engage with modernity and pluralism. The chapters offer an analysis of a contextualized and localized Islam in the modern world while having different ideological, identical positions. The chapters look

at various types of Islamic groups and identities in different frames. Inside the confines of one volume we will try to be attentive to a variety of interpretations in the Islamic tradition, i.e. also looking at Sunni and some new Sufi dynamics. The multidisciplinary view of certain Islamic figures, organizations, ideologies and thinking provides some elements to figure out Islamic socio-religious activities.

The chapters investigate the characteristics and dynamics of Islamic activism in politics, social work and intellectual thought. They pose the question whether the change and transformation of this activism offers new points for the development of civil society and democratization at the social-political and intellectual level. It also analyses how this Islamic-Muslim activism can be comprehended in terms of democracy, modernity, and also in social work.

A loose definition of Islamic activism

The term Islamic activism refers to Muslim engagement in different socio-economic problems, not just in terms of politics. Thus, Islam is not taken as a political factor. This indicates the endeavours of ordinary Muslims who are inspired in their activities by an Islamic framework (Fuller 2004). According to Fuller, political Islam conveys a body of ideas that emphasizes certain political thinking derived from religion to suggest how society should be ordered (Fuller 2004: xi). This framework includes discourses, public actors, organizations, symbols, idioms and rhetoric as well as religion (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996). Islamization refers to the organization of politics, state, law and society according to Islamic principles and religious rules. Researchers use this concept widely to analyse the political activism of Muslims (Roy 2004 and 1994; Kepel 2003). Salwa Ismail defines the terms Islamism and islamization (or re-islamization) interchangeably to signify a process of changing the nature of the social sphere through religious symbols, signs and actions. In her formula, all ordinary Muslims who believe and follow Islamic practices are actors in the islamization project. She gives the examples of Muslim entrepreneurs and veiled female Muslims who promote the principles and values of Islam. This personal engagement is ascribed in the identity politics of Islamism (Ismail 2004: 616). This sort of misleading account that Islamism is everywhere is often countered by the complex analysis of religious activities such as Muslim agency and particular practices of piety (Mahmood 2005; Deeb 2006), possible ways to modernity (Göle, 2000; 2005)

and the emergence of a pious bourgeoisie (Haenni 2005; White 2012; Yankaya 2013). The new public-private practices (Göle 2006; 2002; Deeb 2006) cannot be purely reformulated in the Islamist lens and picture. However in the following pages Ismail notes that the new forms of religious sociability cannot be reduced to the label of post-Islamism, new age Islamism. For her, these labels obscure the differentiated situations and complex realities of Muslim identifications in relation to globalization and post-modernity (Ismail 2004: 626). However, Islamic activism in this formula is ambiguous, since this meaning can be applied to every ordinary Muslim. Thus the view that Islam as politic is the blueprint of Muslims does not encompass what is going on at the social level to understand the aspiration of young Muslims who do not refer to Islamist utopia or Islamist politics (Haenni 2005; Nasr 2009). Islamic activism is manifested as an orientation of praxis through different orientations that emphasize several sources of Islam. Then the question is whether Islamic movements and groups maintain their Islamist ideology or over time change their politics, their understanding of society. Many studies treat Islamic activism in terms of religious revivalism and a manifestation of loyalty-authority; however this phenomenon can be analysed in different categories of social sciences such as social movement theories (Bayat 2010). How can a large population be defined in terms of social-religious activism referring to different understandings of Islam, from a very conservative, essentialist one to the very tolerant, modern and pragmatic? What is the actual emergence among Muslim activists and intellectuals in politics, charity and education? What constructive role does religion play in stabilizing and strengthening civil society today?

In the aftermath of the Arab revolutions, more complex modern forces of demographic shifts, economic disparity, cultural transformation, political turmoil and social crises should be considered as the key factors to explain the socio-religious activism happening among Muslims. The disruptive change in and transformation of societies where Muslims live describes a malaise of modernity (Taylor 1998). The social transformation, economic crises and experience with modernity deepen and extend this malaise in various ways from ambiguity to strengthening a revival of religion and religious particularities in public spheres as a result of this malaise. In a secular worldview, Islam is always questioned and interrogated, as it can be adjustable and flexible to change. In other words, individualization, pluralism, democracy, human rights and gender issues are the main challenges that Muslims encounter in the western world (Bayat 2007; Bilgin 2011; Hashemi 2009). How can Islam take care of and respond all these

issues? Islamic actors witness these challenges as a replacement of old identities and practices with new ones and patterns. This replacement has sometimes happened in a brutal way, creating violence, rupture and failure. To understand these changes and ruptures, this book looks at different aspects of Muslims' presence and experience with this malaise of modernity which is manifested in similar debates on secularism, democracy, human rights, and social cohesion.

Islamic social movements working in different areas and emphasizing new cultural-religious identities contribute to the extending of public space and civil society. They do not want to turn from it (Yavuz 2003: 21), but the civic side is embedded in the socio-religious activities to actualize their politics, strategies and practices. Islamic activity is conceptualized as "signifying agents of engaged in the social construction of meaning" (Wictorowicz 2004:15). It creates collective action through Islamic frameworks and notions. The social mobilization of Muslims via different Muslim thinkers, organizations and movements brings with it the idea that multiple modernities (Eisenstadt 2000; Göle 2000) are emerging from this social construction of meaning. Muslim scholars have influenced this emergence of Islamic modernity and Muslim politics as explained by Eickelman and Piscatori (1996).

Islamic scholars: making Islamic reasoning in secular coding

Muslim thinkers and activists cannot be reduced to a single pattern of Islamic behaviour or religious orientation, simply using Islamist-Islamic intellectuals and *ulema* (Abu-Rabi 1996; Zaman 2002). Islamic scholars vary politically and ideologically (Mandaville 2007). The first part of this volume looks at these particular differences and variations to describe autonomous labels of Islamic scholars, often described using the references taken from Islam. Islamic scholars can be understood as part of the religious-cultural contexts; in each their respective roles and influences are diverse. Thus, among Islamic scholars, intellectuals and thinkers, they have actively committed to a modern, secular and democratic debate. They support discursive elaboration of democratic Islamic thought. Toğuşlu's and Limpens' chapters examine how Islamic scholars use Islamic reasoning to deal with contemporary issues. Some notions such as *maslaha* and *nasiha* have gained importance for understanding the circulation of Islamic idioms and narratives which has become a tool implying the role of Muslim scholars in the new socio-political debates. Toğuşlu reflects on how

Gülen, Ramadan and Qaradawi apply the classical concepts and how they consider these concepts in the articulation of Islamic reasoning referring to secular language. These conceptions formulated by these contemporary scholars shape Islamic knowledge faced with secular knowledge. Making Islamic reasoning in secular coding fits well to describe and categorize Muslim scholars' engagement with modernity and pluralism (Esack 1997; Hefner 2005). This approach manifests the rational-comprehensive engagement of Muslim scholars and places them at the centre of Islamic thinking. Limpens' formulation in this volume on conservative-liberal and reformist Muslim thinkers analyses Ramadan's and an-Naim's influence on Muslim women living in Brussels. The emancipation of women constitutes one of the emblematic issues in Europe to categorize Muslim thinkers. The case of LGBT has become more interesting to discuss how young female Muslims adopt the liberation discourses of Ramadan and an-Naim in a small-scale area in Brussels.

It is interesting to see that these scholars do not develop an opposition to "Western ideas". Instead, we argue that many elements come into play, such as citizenship, entrepreneurial sensitiveness and secularism issues, when Islamic scholars discuss a question. The fear of Muslim terrorism has spread and been manipulated in public opinion (for an example of the effects of it see Leman 2012). It thus becomes a common comment and argument that assumes Islamic scholars nourish these sectarian, fundamentalist religious values and strategies of militant Muslims that foster anti-modernism, secularism and the West. They have been suspected of harbouring anti-modernism, misogyny and hatred messages. In this vein, Metcalf underlines how Deobandi *madrasas* and *ulama* are accused of always being part of terrorism (Metcalf 2002). This sentiment against Muslims is widely present in all strata in Europe among different ideological positions. Parekh highlights the European liberal anxiety about Muslims concerning their non-integration and their particular situation (Parekh 2006). To tackle this anxiety, Muslim scholars' role has primarily become important in suggesting and discussing new possibilities and ways to construct a meaningful dialogue and understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. In this context of misunderstanding and suspicion, the new interpretations of Islamic knowledge and Islamic training have gained importance. A reasonable and workable Islam in Europe depends, on this argument, on the intellectual side of Islam, and training of imams who can put into practice a change in Muslim theology adaptable to European values such as democracy, human rights, gender equality and secularism (Toğuşlu 2012).

The Sufi path is another important element in this workable Islam in Europe. Along with the first two chapters, islamologist Eric Geoffroy draws on a reading of Sufi thought and its influence in Europe, especially among French contexts and converts. His analysis seeks to show how Sufi terminology spread out in Europe and attracted non-Muslims. The notion of spiritual taste (*zhahwk*) is recognized as a part of this contribution to the spread of Islamic knowledge (Geoffroy 2010). For Geoffroy, young Muslims in Europe look forward to more open and non-strict use of Islamic knowledge and practices. The Sufi terminology, idioms and symbols endorse this demand in some circles by contributing to whole debates and current issues in Islam. It is explained that Sufis deal with the internal side (*batin*) of Islam that is approved by many Islamic scholars (Hodgson 1974: 219).

Indeed, Sufi and traditional brotherhood networks are effective in the dissemination of Islamic knowledge as practice. They help people to preserve continuity with the corpus of socio-religious practices (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996). Many scholars examine the influence of Sufism as an alternative to political Islam in the dissemination of knowledge (van Bruinessen 2009).

Although some Islamic scholars are politically active and engage in politics in radical ways, the chapters in this book look at traditional, modern and reformist Muslim thinkers. Their primary focus is on religious renovation in secular and democratic contexts. Their message influences distinctive political thought, not as a political party as they have not directly participated in politics. In fact, these scholars have never played a leadership role among Muslim political activists. In the next part, Yılmaz, Meijer and Platti call attention to the great variations in state-religion-society relations that constitute the multiple ways of practising the politics of Muslims.

Islamic activities as Muslim politics

Debates on Islamic activism have been focused on politics since the 1960s and since the Arab revolutions. Islamic activism is directly linked to the political area and power relations (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996). In the so-called Muslim world, the political participation of Islamic movements has been considered as the end of democracy, because in line with this argument, when they arrive and control power, they end democratic secular regimes. In the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Twin Towers, this perception is widely accepted and circulated in academia. Islam is considered as an emerging threat to

the liberal democracies. The al-Qaeda attacks on 11 September 2001 resurfaced this debate.

Many Islamist activists think sovereignty is not divisible and reject the idea of democracy and human rights, because it is a contradiction of God's sovereignty. According to these political islamists, an Islamic society based on sharia rules and a theocratic regime can work with the rules of God and not humans' values and norms. The objective of the political Islamist is the creation of an Islamic state in which politics serves only the sharia rules.

However, Islamic activists do not form a homogenic and monolithic structure. An apparent question is to place Muslim politics into the wider multiple and shifting contexts, in this sense, Muslim politics is not unique (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996: 20-21). The various varieties of political Islamists now use different discourses and implement several politics from democracy to fundamentalism. They participate in democratic rules in the existing political system. They now see democracy as a non-vulnerable element of the political regime, which can be a basis of the Islamic system and Islamic values (Brusse and Schoonenboom 2006). They do not oppose human rights and do not consider them as a product of western models. They try to connect Islamic ideas with democracy and human rights to reconcile secular thought with Islamic thinking by formulating political programmes, joining in coalitions, producing policies on different socio-economic problems and issues (Yilmaz 2012). All of these processes push Islamist activists to re-think in secular worlds, because they are facing secular problems. They are now fighting against fundamentalist, not secular ideologies. The younger generation, often nourished by Islamist ideas and political thinking, coming from the grassroots level, have become more familiar with human rights, democracy, and liberty issues through participation in socio-economic life. They develop ideas against political oppression, social injustice, fraud and corruption. They do not use the same dialectic, Islamic utopia, top-down organizational model (Haenni 2005), do not admire apologetic, non-reasonable Islamist discourses. In this vein, the examples of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) in Turkey are very keen to observe this change and evolution in a broader sense.

The young generation in the party and movement want to transform the Brotherhood into a political party. In this process, they are looking at the Turkish model, the AK Party experience. They want to separate the movement from the political party (Meijer in this volume). However, for Meijer, the biggest problem of the Brotherhood is its insufficient embracing of politics, which results in a

duality between acceptance and rejection of a parliamentary democracy and a constitution. The social transformation of and cultural change in Arab society contributed to the change in the Brotherhood. It had become embarrassed by the Islamist populist rhetoric of "Islam is the solution". Indeed, the paradoxes still emerge in the politics of the Brotherhood and between different streams in the party. Initially, following the example of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Islamist movements abandoned their initial radical standpoint against democratic rules. They adopted pragmatic solutions which drove these groups towards accepting the constitutional system. One of these examples is the shift seen in the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Under the Mubarak regime, they ceased to use violence and renounced armed Islamic struggle saying that using violence delegitimized their Islamic cause and principles. They created the Freedom and Justice Party to compete in the political debates and elections. Mohammed Morsi was elected in the summer 2012 from this party. This engagement and creation of a political party during the last elections can be understood as a sign of the acceptance of secular rules of the political process. This decision can be regarded as a strategic adaptation and acceptance of the Brotherhood's leaders; at the same time the old Islamic elites have been pressed to distance themselves from fundamentalist political ideology. This enables them to open up to the general public and to gain the support of Egyptians. This pragmatic turn resulted in a discursive and epistemological change appearing in theological discussions on the sovereignty of God, engaging in politics, democracy and pluralism. Despite this evolution and moderation, some members kept their political Islamist identity forging dichotomist ideological positions on Islam, democracy and liberalism. The development of new notions embracing liberalism in terms of economy opens up new spaces for new actors, new elites and a young generation frustrated with Islamic slogans and Islamic utopia. The other aim is to encourage economic liberalization that provides new opportunities for the middle class to overcome the authoritarian and corrupted elite's control over the political and economic system (Perthes 2004).

This is why in a country such as Egypt, a sharp contrast remains between old elites and new elites who negotiate between them the possible future scenarios on democracy and Islam, pluralism. There are still major problems in representing all parts of society, including minority groups and non-Muslims, in the coming constitution. The struggle about the essence and substance of the political regime, whether Egypt is to be a pluralist Islamic democracy or an authoritarian regime, is on the table. Two chapters (Yılmaz and Platti) echo the familiar problem

of interiorization of the democratization and secular ideals in the coming constitutional processes in Turkey and in Egypt. The proposed chapters in the new constitution guarantee freedom of speech and in some cases (prohibiting blasphemy) limiting this freedom; the state is considered the primary means of protecting religion and religious values.

Why is there a resistance to democratic change in the so-called Muslim world? What went wrong, as Bernard Lewis asked in his book? (Lewis 2002). The core problem is political; however; the uprising of the middle class in Egyptian economic life has much more to do with the new society adopting new values and shrinking into a kind of authoritarian politics. Some scholars argue that the lack of civil society and democracy in Muslim societies is the result of Islamic fundamentalism, a unique problem linked with Islam (Lewis 1990). The perception of the Middle East and, more generally, Muslim exceptionalism argued that Muslim societies tend to be static and resistant to change (Bayat 2010; Lakoff 2004). Thus, Muslim activists have trouble with adopting human values, liberalism and human rights, and there is always a gap between modern western values and Islamic countries (Bielefeldt 2000).

Another explanation focuses on the forced, top-down modernization in Muslim societies. Different processes of modernization initiated by Western or westernized elites in Muslim societies are considered to be colonialism, instead of innovation, a quick imitation, a catch up process to close the gap between the west and Islam. This policy undertaken by modernized elites creates a discrepancy between elites and wider society. Political and social changes are top down, not to be internalized by the public. These reforms and political measures did not engage and incorporate civil society. Turkey and Iran are the best examples, as both countries exercised a forced modernization.

In the case of Egypt, the military and the new business elites are the key elements and allies of Morsi before the election of 2012. Their concern is to maintain the stability of the regime after Mubarak; thus they do not target the promotion of Sharia law in the country. Within this transition process, one should acknowledge the continuation of the military's role in politics. This is similar to the Turkish situation where military force has played a major role in every dimension to guarantee the secular regime. Political power does not allow a free space for civil society and civil actors. It is very important how political power, including Islamist and *Salafi* groups, shapes the public sphere and civil society. In fact, the authoritarian character remains even in the revolutionary change which ended the Mubarak regime. In order to protect the regime and

the hegemony of the state over civil society, the military is the determinant. The biggest mistake of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is that in some cases it is found to be very opportunist in its thirst for power. The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) thinks and develops its policies at state level. This strategy does not let it go back to its non-state social mission in support of the change coming from society, continuing its efforts in education and supporting the middle class. Thus, the middle class and the young generation in the Brotherhood take the initiative to change their state oriented politics. In Mubarek's times, its supporters already experienced the failure of its strategy. Some members of the MB noticed the growing discrepancy between real politics and high Islamic ideals, political Islam. In this vein, MB goes in different directions having various factions, some of which follow a more liberal economic programme and model and do not believe in an Islamist utopia; others probably become more radical and concerned more with state oriented politics. Whatever does happen in the MB, Egyptian society will rise against any kind of authoritarianism, corruption and social injustice. The major dilemma is to understand the new socio-economic direction that society wants to go in. Social justice and economic development will be key elements in the new process of politicization in the Arab regimes. According to the optimistic evolution among young educated Arabs, new elites emphasize practising new models. In recent years, a "Turkish model" has spread in the media to give an example in which democracy and Islam live side by side, an educated middle class grows and becomes the transporter of Muslim democracy and Muslim politics. However, an anomaly has appeared in Turkish politics during the Justice and Development Party's (AKP-Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) reign. When the Arab spring spread out into the Middle East, many democrats and intellectuals sought for a model and experience among Muslim countries, and they turned to the AKP's experience. At that time, Turkey seemed to combine Islamic values with economic prosperity, democracy and secularism. The Gezi protests in Taksim square and the corruption investigations in 2013 have changed this hopeful image of the 'Turkish model'. The last corruption investigation seriously damaged the image of the AKP that made meaningful constitutional reforms between 2003 and 2011. The AKP has become more authoritarian and tries to control civil society, religious groups and the economy by creating big companies that support the AKP's policies. Reference to the religious values, prohibition of alcohol in certain public areas and the abortion debate signifies a return to the old Islamist discourses. İhsan Yılmaz's chapter gives an insight into the dilemma of being secular and religious in politics. The AKP's example characterizes this

dilemma after the 2011 elections. Meijer follows this dilemma in the pragmatism of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt whose candidate, Mohammed Morsi, won the presidential election in 2012 before being deposed by the military. It did not respect the balance between different groups in the country. As many ask, has the Arab Spring turned into an Arab Winter? The rise of Islamist parties after the toppling of longstanding dictators in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt seems to suggest so. How can we begin to make sense of these events? The second part of this volume answers these questions, drawing upon lessons from the early phases of the Arab revolutions.

Charity and social welfare networks

The third part focuses on faith-based NGOs among Muslim activists in order to understand their missions and activities that are based on Islamic concepts, discourses and sense. Are there any specific differences between Muslim-Islamic aid organizations and non-Muslim ones? How do humanitarian principles go hand in hand with Islamic values? What are the changes and challenges for Islamic aid organizations? In these three chapters, we follow some fault lines to demonstrate their identity, their mobilization channels and local-transnational networks.

Charity and almsgiving have been transformed from family-individual care and beneficence to the social welfare system (Singer 2008: 176). This transition was accompanied by the development of secular-religious philanthropy[1] and voluntary associations who deal with the question of poverty and development. However, the traditional forms of charity and individual efforts still continue as the modern welfare state system progresses well. Organizations and foundations linked with faith-based communities and movements participate and involve themselves in charity activities. Over time, charity is mixed with various actors, individuals, organizations, professionals, religious movements, states and governments. Each of these new actors expands the borders and the meaning of charity and humanitarian aid in Islamic terms. The increasing of a "mixed economy of charity" raises the question of how Islamic charity is defined. Is it a social welfare net, a humanitarian programme, an Islamic missionary activity? In the coming chapters, the discussion focuses largely on the charitable organization, network, discourses and objectives of NGOs which participate in the work of social-educational services, public works and economic

projects. In the classical time before modern times, the most visible charitable individuals were rulers, dynastic families and wealthy people (Singer 2008). After the modernization in the nineteenth century, the growing middle class took the initiative in implementing new charity institutions and activities, and individuals en masse joined in charitable giving thanks to religious belief which is the fundamental part and impetus of the social safety networks. The month of Ramadan and religious holidays are the occasions and times when Muslims are more sensible and attracted by NGOs and states. The shifting point of the traditional charity is the contribution coming from contemporary governments in the form of social welfare assistance, public service and international aid (Singer 2008: 179). The Turkish *Kızılay*, supported directly by the state, is one of the examples that classify this social welfare system as charity. However, the connection between the state's social welfare responsibility-duty and charity is not apparent voluntarily, because it is the state's obligation towards its citizens. This connection is another complex debate on charity and the social welfare system (Ostrower 1996). As Singer puts it, the state's motivations and obligations are somehow different from individuals' and NGOs'. Spiritual and religious considerations have strong influence on the individual's decisions. The welfare system's connection with charity has been analysed in connection with public-private relief and rehabilitation efforts, to provide minimum living conditions for the citizens. However, after the 80s, an economic liberalism re-opened the doors to local actors and religious organizations which regained the social work arena. It is noted that the role of religion in social service is increased and highlighted in the recent studies (Cnaan 1999). Sometimes, the line between government politics and faith-based initiatives is blurred. The *zakat* (obligatory almsgiving) and *sadaqa* (voluntary almsgiving) are two examples of the blurred areas of Islamic charity. There is state-organized collection of *zakat* in many Muslim countries (Clark 2003; Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003; Singer 2009). The idea of social justice would be achieved by major non-economic means, which is *zakat*. In this regard, *zakat* is not a part of charity, but it is a fulfilment of the Islamic mission and Islamic economic thought. *Zakat* takes a central place in the moral economy.

In the contemporary application of *zakat,* or more generally in Islamic safety nets, there is an extention of the traditional use of *zakat* in new conditions and contexts. The classic regulation on *zakat*, *sadaqa* has been reinterpreted and adopted to take into account the changing of boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims, certain issues such as gender, poverty and mass education,

as we follow in different examples in this book. In opposition to the idea of state oriented charity organization and *zakat* distribution which envisages the state as the agent of the aid, *Kimse Yok mu* and *Islamic Relief* provide such examples of the civil society organizations that have been stimulated, created by individuals, social movements and religious groups. The funds collected by these civil organizations and NGOs have been used in the creation of schools, clinics, water wheels, the distribution of food, and helping poor people. In some cases, Muslims choose to donate to civil organizations rather than a state institution (Scott 1987; Scott 2013).[2]

It is also important to note that contemporary governments do not act only by their own means and institutions; they collaborate with the growing number of associations, networks, civil society organizations and partners using different motivations, aims and methods. All of those constitute the welfare networks composed by families, religious movements, professional groups, *tariqats*, friends, people coming from same country-city-village. Each welfare network is more or less formalized and institutionalized. As discussed in different chapters of this book, the charity ethos and social responsibility are the main ideas rooted from Islamic notions at large. One might point to these networks as the output of civil society's implementation and realization of (de)centralized institutions which are working with different agglomeration of nodes, peoples and centres.

In all of these faith-based initiatives, one of the major socio-cultural changes is the secularization of social work among Muslim aid projects and programmes at discursive and organizational level after the liberalization turning point in the 80s. Muslim social welfare associations have emerged in this era also for different reasons (Adama 2005; Yavuz 2003). The relative disengagement of the state from certain social domains opened up new opportunities to religious civil organizations. It is noteworthy to observe how religion is implemented or a humanitarian motivation inputted into the religious sense of charity and philanthropy. The ambivalent existences of secular social works and religious based social activities interchangeably replace each other, and this replacement surprisingly creates spaces for religio-secular (Marty 2003) habitations.

Islamic relief organizations are active in different areas and domains, such as in education, health, social welfare and employment. They achieve these activities in various geographies, including non-Muslim societies. The concerns of these NGOs are clearly drawn up as a remedy and struggle against the poverty problem; in fact, they tackle relatively different issues: human rights, gender and environment crises are discovered in the humanitarian field that Islamic

NGOs encounter. The Islamic NGOs face different problematic issues in various domains, and this makes complex the social aid. The studies on Muslim NGOs (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003; Clark 2004; Harmsen 2008), give some insights into these complexities between Islamic and humanitarian. They work and collaborate with other non-Muslim NGOs, including western development agencies. This collaboration and working with other western NGOs drives Islamic NGOs to modify their engagement in the Islamic framework against the poverty and developing humanitarian aid to needy people. The historical studies on the Islamic charity and aid system give some points on the continuity and new interpretations of Islamic notions on almsgiving (*zakat* and *sadaqa*). Studying the charity from a historical point of view enables valuable insights to be drawn (Singer 2008). Where do they stand and for what purpose? In these transnational complexities and multiple localities, the NGOs' work exemplifies the blurring areas of belonging and participating, especially when they do work with other non-Muslim NGOs. Such Islamic NGOs use an Islamic notion and discourse in their practices and motivations. The discourses used by Muslim actors are cherished by an Islamic sense and values. The new orientation as opening to humanitarian discourse and sensibility reduces the Islamic tonality of the mission. Stemming from Islamic political ideology to moderate humanitarian discourse is not necessarily a break from Islamic piety and devoted religious attitude. *Kimse yok mu*, a humanitarian faith-inspired association, is working for different causes: delivering hot meals, medical treatments, waterwheels projects and vocational training. In these projects, a kind of hybridization between Islamic devotional practice and global development approach takes place (Harmsen 2007).

Doing humanitarian work in a locality where the population is Muslim or not, no matter to whom the aid is conveyed, has the effect of changing the nature and identity of the Islamic NGO. There is a continual transformation and strengthening of Islamic identity and reference to a Muslim organization: from faith-based initiatives to more humanitarian activity. Michel's chapter deals with the question of this border between Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

The Islamic and Muslim NGOs deal with educational, environmental and religious issues in different part of the so-called Muslim world. One of the largest Islamic NGOs in Europe, Islamic Relief, is providing aid, food, materials in different countries. At the grass roots level, their efforts are appreciated and very welcome. They open Quranic schools which offer religious courses and Arabic language classes. In these religious spaces, the chapter demonstrates how Islamic solidarity is maintained by social projects and institutions. Harmsen, whose PhD

is on Muslim NGOs in Jordan, discusses the practices and strategies of Al-Afaf Society. Harmsen points out that much of Islamic voluntary activism is linked to the political question and Islamic NGOs are analysed under the political science framework, such as Islamic solidarity, revivalism, realizing *umma* and Islamist movements (Harmsen 2007). For him, the emphasis on the political and ideological function of Islamic associations reveals the empowerment of the Muslim middle class. Islamic voluntary activism strengthens underprivileged Muslims by offering them education, health service. In this case, Islamic welfare associations avoid political aims and address social-economical purposes and questions of the people. Harmsen's chapter reviews the empowerment of the orphans and families struggling suffering from poverty.

There is a strong emphasis on the importance of education and developing the educational skills of young Muslims, as Michel and Harmsen indicate in this book. Supporting the achievement of educational projects and tutoring schoolboys and girls during their education by opening learning centres, private schools are targeting the embodiment of the religious duty with humanitarian responsibility. Social welfare organizations give priority to some values such as hard work, doing good deeds, being useful to society. The examples and various programmes in Muslim NGOs illustrate how an empowerment process is operated in civil welfare organizations. Building on ethnographic studies from Jordan, Harmsen argues that a combination between a paternalistic approach and empowerment designates the orientation of the NGOs' activities. Such paternalistic and empowerment orientation has been nuanced in different contexts and associations. In the Jordanian case, the paternalistic view encapsulates the Islamic notion of religious duty; in *Kimse Yok mu* from Turkey the philosophy is derived from Islamic concepts, targeting not only Muslims and operating in different areas and geographies. In this case, the paternalistic view of solidarity is weakened, however, by using the humanistic discourse, the organizers' aim is to focus on poverty and development. They call for businessmen to invest in the region, opening new economic opportunities, schools, building houses after earthquakes.

Contents of the book

Islamic activism and thinking are not simply the political project of some Muslims reflecting on questions relating to contemporary issues. The chapters in this book are intended to respond to the demand of the current play of Islam and Muslims

in an ongoing discussion about Muslim scholars' authority, Muslim politics and Islamic social welfare systems. The chapters are based on papers of which most were first presented at the Lecture series in KU Leuven Gülen Chair on "Current issues in Islam", held at the KU Leuven University in 2012. This book opens with a chapter by Erkan Toğuşlu on Muslim scholars and Islamic knowledge. This chapter reveals the paradoxes and dynamics of Islamic public reasoning used by Muslim public intellectuals among Muslims in Europe. This public reasoning is much more fragmented due to the secularism and individualization effect on the pluralization and functionalization of Islamic knowledge in Fethullah Gülen, Tariq Ramadan and al-Qaradawi's views.

A critical rethinking of reformative-conservative framework and labelization requires, argues Thierry Limpens in the second chapter, a deconstructive reading of Muslim scholars. Limpens brings an ethnographic study of the gender reformative theories, networking and programmes of the Islamic scholars Abdullahi An-Na'im and Tariq Ramadan. It concludes from the 2007-2013 field data that were collected in a Moroccan dominant Muslim area of so-called 'core Islamic Brussels' in Belgium that the Muslim community shows an elevated level of what is called in the text 'categorical ethnicity'. This refers to the building of relationships that are 'remote' or not so 'directly' defined for reasons that they are clearly 'differential' as gathered around 'higher values' that come under the idea of justice.

A chapter by Eric Geoffroy shifts the discussion of the reformulation of Islamic knowledge in sufi circles and among Muslim scholars. It is necessary also to look at how some Islamic notions are re-circulated by French Sufi scholars in Europe. Drawing from the imaginable world (*âlam al-khayâl*), or the world of spiritual imagination, Sufism knows how to apply its creativity to remove religious and cultural blocks. Being grounded in the vertical axis of Unicity (*tawhîd*), the Sufi should be able to contemplate multiplicity around him serenely; thus Islamic knowledge encapsulates plural thinking.

Ihsan Yılmaz discusses the post-islamist shift to see if and to what extent Islam and secularism could accommodate each other. What is more, revival of Islam and deprivatization of Islam are more observable phenomena compared to the other religions; especially after the Arab revolutions, we look at the return of Islamism in political sphere. Yılmaz argues that a post-Islamist understanding of religion-state-society relations is more compatible with this Habermasian post-secularist condition with regard to religion in the public sphere. Following the same line, in the next chapter Emilio Platti focuses

attention on the apparent contradiction in the term of "Islamic citizenship" in the draft constitution in Egypt. At Tahrir Square, people used the complex term of "*muwâtana islâmiyya*", "Islamic citizenship", meaning a civil Nation-State (*dawla madaniyya*) with an Islamic reference or background; few want the Islamic character of Egypt completely to be erased from the new Constitution. For Platti, these terms mean that there is no contradiction between a democratic system and Islamic Law. Platti went to Tahrir Square many times and observed the Egyptian revolution and counter-revolution. Roel Meijer is asking one of the crucial questions of this book: aside from the continuous struggle with the Egyptian military and the tactics of the Brotherhood, what will the Muslim Brotherhood do in the coming years? Is there a line in the policy of the Brotherhood or is it simple political opportunism? The argument developed by Meijer is that one of the problems with the Brotherhood is not that it mingles religion with politics but that in the past it has not embraced the political sufficiently. It is still to a large extent a religious movement that has included politics as one option. Meijer also analyses the effects of the Muslim Brotherhood's evolution in politics for Europe in terms of politics and ideology. In this regard, this chapter focuses especially on the attitude towards politics and development of political thought in the Brotherhood.

Tracing how the categories of the islamist, post-islamist and salafis in politics work to produce assumptions about the nature of Muslim politics, in the last part the secular, the humanitarian and the religious categories of social safety nets are examined. Benthall, Michel and Harmsen look at the activities of religious humanitarian organizations and workers in the context of globalization and transnationalism. Benthall says that voluntary welfare provision by Muslims has much in common with other charitable traditions, though with some differences relating especially to the Quranic doctrine of *zakat*, the Islamic tithe (deemed to be obligatory), as well as the concepts of *sadaqa* (charity over and above what is obligatory) and *waqf* (the Islamic charitable trust). Harmsen's chapter deals with a particular form of Muslim social activism, namely the activity of Muslim voluntary welfare organizations delivering services of a varied nature (financial and in-kind support, counsel, employment, education etcetera) to socially vulnerable target groups such as the poor, orphans, single parent families, children at risk and the disabled. It analyses this activity from the perspective of the respective roles of tradition and modernity, especially in relation to civil society theory. In the final chapter of this book, Thomas Michel reflects on the realization of Islamic humanitarian networks. Using the example of the *Kimse*

Yok Mu? aid organization, Michel depicts the circulation of Islamic motivation in the humanitarian-secular works to show the complexity of purely 'Islamic activism'.

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Notes

1 Philantrophy is always interconnected with charity, even if there are some differences between them. Charity is directed towards the needy poor people by organizing relief services, while the concept of philantrophy is broader than charity, and includes many private donations, contributions and social service institutions. These activities do not directly target the poor. For more discussion see Ostrower (1995).

2 Scott analyses the Muslim peasant in Malaysia to see how he resists a central bureaucracy in the state *zakat* fund. He minimizes his obligatory payments to the state. He does not just resist the state *zakat* system, but he develops another way in which he can fullfill his religious duty to return to local needs.

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