

Faith-Based Communities and Minorities in Europe and Beyond: Concepts and Methodologies

Abstracts

"Loving Middle Eastern Christians to death?"

Annika Rabo, Stockholm University

In this presentation I would like to draw attention to how the legitimate solidarity with Middle Eastern Christians today - on the part of opinion-makers in Sweden - by unfortunate necessity becomes a critique against Muslims. It also helps define Middle Eastern Christians as 'minorities' in special need of protection, thus harking back - perhaps unwittingly - to Western colonial traditions.

What methodological and theoretical tools do we as researchers need to develop handle this dilemma?

Celebrating Saints in the diaspora and its function in the process of diasporisation of the Catholic Maronite Church in Lebanon and the Maronite Diocese in Australia

Paul Tabar, Lebanese American University

In this presentation, I will discuss the religious practice of Christian Maronites in Sydney as a mode of coping with the migration experience. For this purpose, Maronite emigrants and their descendants engage not only in the building of their own parochial church and many other welfare and educational institutions associated with it, but they also receive visiting Saint relics sent out to them by their mother church in Lebanon. My short presentation will discuss the significance of these visits in the context of the process of settlement of Maronite migrants in Australia and their identity building and reinvention.

Nationalism, Security and Discourses of Religion: Hindu and Sikh identity constructions in transnational India

Catarina Kinnvall, Lund University

This paper proceeds from a critical reading of the role of religion for nation-building in India. In particular I discuss how the Indian notion of secularism relies upon a number of religious legacies manifest in a Gandhian notion of what constitutes religious and political communities. Proceeding from this general picture, I examine the extent to which Hindu nationalists and Sikh communalists/separatists have used such legacies to enforce exclusionary practices by establishing certain hegemonic structures of rigid religious boundaries and practices with the aim of maintaining antagonistic movements within their respective fold. This, I argue, has been the case among Hindu nationalists in India and among its widespread diaspora in Europe, Canada and the United States, but has also been evident among some Indian Sikh communities as well as among Sikh diasporas in Canada and the UK, thus affecting security relations more generally and foreign policy in particular at



home and abroad. Here I critically evaluate a number of attempts to challenge these hegemonic structures in terms of secular and religious forces as well as in terms of legalistic understandings of citizenship rights and security in an increasingly transnational India.

Orthodox priests in Norway: serving or ruling?

Berit Thorbjørnsrud, Oslo University

According to Valerie Karras, there is a clericalization process going on in the Orthodox Church in Europe and the Americas, which challenges Orthodox teachings on the relationship between clerics and lay people (2005:2-3). Based on my studies of the Orthodox Church in Norway, I agree with Karras that the priests have become very prominent, in the sense that much of congregational life revolves around them. In this article I will however question whether the priests' prominence amounts to what may be described as clericalization.

When analyzing the relationship between priests and lay people in Norway, there are particularly two factors which must be taken into account:

- *the existence of parallel Orthodox jurisdictions*, i.e. the so-called problem of the Orthodox diaspora, which makes it difficult for priests to cooperate, but easy for lay people to change jurisdiction if they are unsatisfied with their priest.
- *specific Norwegian laws regulating religious groups*, which challenge the authority of the priests. In order to receive public funding, leaders of religious groups must be democratically elected and priests from another country cannot be elected until they have acquired the skills listed by the government.

Under such circumstances there is little space for clerical elitism and/or for clerics to acquire more power over lay people than they are supposed to have. On the contrary, the priests in Norway tend to become more dependent on the laity, and as their main priority is keeping their congregations together, they are, in general, careful not to challenge their lay people.

Methodological dilemmas: gatekeepers and positionality in Bradford

Gurchathen Sanghera, University of St. Andrews

This paper explores the ever-evolving relationship between gatekeepers and the researcher, and the ways in which it may facilitate, constrain or transform the research process by opening and/or closing the gate. I explore the methodological issue of positionality and discuss the ways in which gatekeepers drew on different axes of the researcher's identities – religion, ethnicity, gender and age – in ambiguous and contradictory ways. In analysing this relationship, I locate the discussion within its historical context, as I contend that contextuality influenced the way gatekeepers positioned the researcher. This paper draws on the field experiences in four inner-city neighbourhoods in Bradford, West Yorkshire, a northern city with a well-established Pakistani Muslim community that has become synonymous with the Rushdie affair and the 1995 and 2001 urban disturbances.



Understanding and Approaching Muslim Visibilities: Lessons Learned from a Fieldwork-based Study of Muslims in Copenhagen

Garbi Schmidt, Roskilde University

Within Western nation-states such as Denmark, Islamic identities are often seen as inherently and divergently visible, an aspect that some argue is detrimental to the secular nation-state. From a research perspective, one way to nuance this position is by focusing on groups of ‘invisible’ Muslims. Another path, which I pursue here, is to situate the activism of Muslims in the historical fabric of the neighbourhood(s) in which they live, in this case the Copenhagen neighbourhood of Nørrebro. Given that Muslims and others use Nørrebro as they do, this neighbourhood has become a prominent example of the effects of multiculturalism in larger national debates, a situation affecting research engagement with the community. In the last part of my article I describe my dialogical approaches for engaging with the community, thus situating the article within wider discussions of research self-reflexivity and critical ethnography.

