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**International Sociological Association**  
***e-bulletin***



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**Contents**

From the Editor

**Featured Essays**

God Verses Allah: Islam, Pentecostal Christianity and the Contest for Public Space in Kenya

*Damaris Seleina Parsitau*

Religion, Migration, and Confusion: Why Germany and the United States are so different

*Michael Werz*

**In Conversation with Susan A. McDaniel**

Interview by *Jayme E. Day*

# **International Sociological Association**

---

## ***e-bulletin***

### **Reflections**

Existential Choices faced by Sociologists-in-Training

*Justin Lee*

It's Not Just about Food: Exploring the Ordinary Experience of Eating among  
Filipina Domestic Helpers in Singapore's Lucky Plaza

*Jayeel Serrano Cornelio*

# International Sociological Association

---

## *e-bulletin*

### From the Editor

The ISA E-Bulletin is now in its third year and tenth issue and continues to receive good support from members. In this issue of the E-Bulletin, I am excited to place before you engaging and insightful voices ranging from established sociologists to those of young sociologists just embarking on their research and academic careers, in keeping with the spirit of diversity and inclusion of this publication. The feature essays segment carries two articles: the first, *'God Verses Allah: Islam, Pentecostal Christianity and the Contest for Public Space in Kenya'* by Damaris Seleina from Egerton University in Kenya and the second, *'Religion, Migration, and Confusion: Why Germany and the United States are so different'* by Michael Werz from the German Marshall Fund of the United States in Washington.

The interview segment features a conversation between Susan McDaniel and Jayme Day from the University of Utah while the "Reflections" section of the E-Bulletin carries voices of two sociology graduate students, Justin Lee and Jayeel Serrano Cornelio from the University of California, Los Angeles and the National University of Singapore respectively. I am grateful to fellow sociologists who have supported the ISA E-Bulletin as contributors and readers. I look forward to many more suggestions, feedback and of course, contributions.

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# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

### **God versus Allah: Islam, Pentecostal Christianity and the Contest for Public Space in Kenya**

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Damaris Seleina Parsitau is a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the Egerton University, Kenya. She is also a PhD Candidate. She specializes in religion and society, gender, politics and media and popular culture with a special interest in Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity. She is the author of several articles including 'Sounds of Change and Reform: The Appropriation of Gospel Music in Socio-political Process in Kenya', *Studies in World Christianity*, Vol. 14 (1); and 'Then Sings My Soul: Gospel Music as Popular Culture in the Spiritual life of Kenyan Pentecostals', *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, Vol. XIV.

#### **Introduction**

Prior to the hotly contested and discredited 2007 general election, there emerged a fierce battle and contest for public space between Pentecostal Christianity and Islam in Kenya. This contest, which has been growing over the last few years, appears to have been heightened by an allegedly signed Memorandum of Understanding popularly known as the (MoU) between presidential candidate and now Prime Minister, the Honorable Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), and a section of Kenyan Muslims represented by the National Muslim Leaders Forum (NAMLEF). The document whose contents appeared to advocate for the interests of Kenyan Muslims who have felt

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

marginalized for a long time were exaggerated and distorted, especially, by some Pentecostals and were interpreted to suggest that the Hon. Odinga had intentions of turning Kenya into an Islamic state should he become the president of Kenya. This document sparked off unprecedented public debates and discourses and different interpretations thrashed both faiths into the public limelight like never before. In many Pentecostal Church circles, the MoU appeared to intensify and fuel animosity towards Islam as Pentecostals ‘engaged in spiritual warfare against a faith they singled out as their key spiritual adversary, its diabolical nature closely associated with Satanism and witchcraft.’<sup>1</sup>

Throughout some Pentecostal church circles, night long prayer vigils known locally as *keshas* (largely perceived by Pentecostals as the most effective spiritual weapon) were held with the sole aim of praying against the perceived “demonic influence and spread” of Islam. These prayer vigils were largely sparked off by rumors circulating via short text messages and emails claiming that one of the provisions of the allegedly signed document was to facilitate the Islamization of Kenya. Pentecostals, who were the most agitated by the said MoU, positioned themselves through spiritual warfare to resist all attempts of a subsequent Islamization of the country. The fear of a subsequent Islamization of Kenya was largely fueled and sustained by rumors mainly sparked off by several emails heavily circulated in cyberspaces, purporting to give a true interpretation of the said MoU long before the contents of the original documents were even made

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<sup>1</sup> Englund, Harri, 2008, ‘From Spiritual Warfare to Civic Virtues: Islamophobia and Evangelical Radio in Malawi’, Paper Read at a *Conference on Christianity and Public Culture in Africa*, on February 29, 2008, University of Cambridge.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

public. Modern means of new media and communication technologies that Pentecostals have been heavily appropriating over the last few decades assumed new proportions in the 2007 general elections as emails and text messages were heavily used to access information and spread rumors about various political parties/candidates and their religious affiliations or lack of it. As this paper will show, an email circulating in the internet was used to create a kind of “Islamophobia”, to borrow Englund’s words,<sup>2</sup> further straining relations between Pentecostals and Muslims in Kenya.

Adopting a different approach therefore, and using an email that was circulating in the internet spaces about the said Memorandum of Understanding together with texts from Pentecostal Christianity, the article seeks to highlight the growing tension, emerging conflicts and the contest for public space between the two faiths. I obtained a copy of this email from a lady who engaged me in intense debate about the allegedly signed MoU and who was clearly agitated by its contents. The more agitated she was the more I sought answers and views of as many Pentecostal Christians, both leaders and laity. I also sought the views of as many Muslim leaders and laity as I could. I hope to use this email to try and tease out the growing tensions between Pentecostals and Muslims in Kenya, a development, which, in my view, poses serious challenges to the peaceful coexistence two faiths and, which has serious implications not only for ecumenism but also for inter-religious relations in a deeply multi religious and multi ethnic nation like Kenya.

This paper argues that although there has been growing tension between the two faiths over the last 10 years or so, the tension seemed to have intensified during the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

campaign period leading to the 2007 general elections. During this period, religious intolerance appeared to grip the Eastern African region, especially Kenya and Tanzania, as emotive issues such as the said MoU and the Kadhi courts, sometimes known as Islamic courts, preoccupied public discourses for a long time.<sup>3</sup> In fact, East African Muslims have been pushing for the recognition of their religious rights since independence, one of which is to be allowed to operate what Christians perceive as parallel judicial systems anchored on the Islamic faith. Christians fear that sharia courts and sharia law have the potential to unleash religious extremism in a generally peaceful region.<sup>4</sup>

The MoU appeared to renew a new dimension of fear, resentments and suspicions that Christians have held against Islam for a long time. In my view, the MoU was the catalyzing factor that pointed to heightened suspicions, mistrust and animosity between the two faiths, hence sparking off a contest for public space in Kenya. In the paper, I argue that although both religions are reflective of negative attitudes toward each other<sup>5</sup> and their relationship has been marked by continuous competition for public space, emerging issues since the advent of the millennium points to the fact that the Pentecostals, who display a lack of respect for other faiths, especially Islam, which they associate with demons, Satanism and Witchcraft are, in most cases, the aggressors. While tensions have been building over the years, it appears to have heightened since the clamor for a new constitution when the Muslims advocated for the inclusion of the Kadhi courts,

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<sup>3</sup> Mpinganjira, Ernest, 2007, 'Religious Intolerance Grips East Africa', *The Standard*, November 18.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

sometimes known as Islamic courts, in the proposed constitutional draft in 2005-06. The MoU only dramatized the tensions and thrashed both faiths, especially Islam, which had otherwise been neutral in public space as Islam emerged as a force to reckon with in Kenyan politics throughout the electioneering period.

The paper, therefore, looks at the nature of religious conflicts and suspicions between Pentecostals and Muslims in Kenya. It is based on the premise that conflicts expressed in religious terms, to use Morrier-Genoud's words, usually reflects other kinds of secular tensions (economic, political, social, racial, ethnic and ideological) and that, as he further observes, such issues more often than not embodies several other issues of contention.<sup>6</sup> The paper also points out the polarization and deteriorating relationship between the two faiths and opens up debates about secular versus religious foundations of the state.<sup>7</sup> The article aims to contribute to the debates on religious conflicts, particularly where Islam is concerned.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the article maintains that while the clash has been primarily for religious and theological space, it is also becoming a contest for public space in Kenya. The paper attempts to raise crucial questions that are often left unaddressed: Firstly, it attempts to address the growing influence of Pentecostal Christianity in politics, the pervasive Pentecostalization of the public sphere and the increasing militarization of this type of Christianity and its impact on other religious traditions in Kenya. Secondly, the paper will analyze the politicization of Islam in the country and explain its implication for national politics. In so doing, it will examine the

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<sup>6</sup> See Morrie-Genoud, op.cit.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

# **International Sociological Association**

---

## ***e-bulletin***

role played by the state in the rise and politicization of Islam and in the development of a religiously free market where religions compete with each other in the making and unfolding drama.<sup>9</sup> To be able to do this, we must ask a number of questions. What are the conflicts? Who are the protagonists (Pentecostal or Muslims) of this conflict? What are the contested issues? What circumstances gave rise to these conflicts? What is the role of the state in this contest and how has it contributed to religious tensions and conflicts?

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

# International Sociological Association

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## e-bulletin

### The Email

The following email, whose contents sparked off intense and emotive public debates/discourses, was doing its round in the cyberspaces and other media for the better half of 2007. The email, whose source is believed to be from a group of Pentecostal Christians calling themselves the *Apple of God's Eye*, purports to give a true picture and interpretation of what transpired in the alleged agreement according to some Pentecostal groups and raised issues about the fate and the future of Christianity should the Hon. Raila Odinga, the leader of the Orange Democratic Movement, become the president of Kenya. The email read like this,

Dear Brethren,

Subject: Interesting MOU

*LET THE TRUTH BE TOLD*

*THE ODM PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, RAILA ODINGA, HAS ENTERED INTO A SECRET MOU WITH A SECTION OF KENYAN MUSLIMS.*

*THESE MUSLIMS, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THEIR BROTHERS FROM THE ARAB WORLD, WILL SUPPORT RAILA'S PRESIDENTIAL BID IN THIS YEAR'S ELECTION, 2007, AND IN 2012 WHEN HE SEEKS RE-ELECTION FOR HIS FINAL TERM AS PRESIDENT. IN RETURN, RAILA HAS PROMISED TO INTRODUCE MAJIMBO (OR DEVOLVED STATES) ONCE HE GETS TO POWER.*

*AFTER THE INTRODUCTION OF MAJIMBO (DEVOLVED STATES), THE COAST JIMBO WILL DECIDE THAT THEY WOULD LIKE TO OPERATE AS AN ISLAMIC STATE. THIS WILL THEN BE FOLLOWED BY THE NORTH EASTERN JIMBO WHO WILL ALSO DEMAND TO BE AN ISLAMIC STATE.*

*THIS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WILL SEE THE BEGINNING OF A DETERMINED QUEST TO TURN THE WHOLE OF KENYA INTO AN ISLAMIC STATE AN ACT THAT THE HON.RAILA ODINGA HAS SWORN TO HIS MUSLIM BROTHERS TO SUPPORT TO THE HILT.*

*COME 2017 AND WITH THE ODINGA PRESIDENCY COMING TO AN END! THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING STATES THAT POWER WILL NOW SHIFT TO THE*

# **International Sociological Association**

---

## **e-bulletin**

*MUSLIMS THROUGH NAJIB BALALA (A DEVOTE MUSLIM AND A MEMBER OF ODM). AS IS EVIDENCED BY THIS MOU THE MUDAVADI (A KEY ALY OF ODINGA) VICE PRESIDENCY IS JUST A PLOY TO GET THE LUHYA VOTE AND NOT TO HAND OVER TO MUDAVADI, SOMEONE WHO RAILA DESPISES AS A SPINELESS INDIVIDUAL WHO IS EASILY SWAYED AND HAS NO ABILITY TO RULE.*

*BALALA STEPPING DOWN FOR RAILA DURING THE ODM PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATIONS IN KASARANI WAS NOT AN ACCIDENT BUT A WELL CALCULATED MOVE BY A GROUP OF PEOPLE INTENT ON IMPOSING THEIR WAY OF LIFE UPON MILLIONS OF UNSUSPECTING KENYANS. WHY ELSE DID RAILA REFER TO ALLAH AS THE GOD OF KENYA?*

*THE FREQUENT AND VICIOUS ATTACKS ON KALONZO MUSYOKA (VICE PRESIDENT AND A DEVOTE CHRISTIAN) BY NAJIB BALALA WERE DRIVEN BY NAJIB'S FEARS THAT A KALONZO PRESIDENCY WOULD DERAILED THEIR WELL LAID OUT PLANS DUE TO KALONZO'S STRONG CHRISTIAN BACKGROUND.*

*THIS IS WHAT LED NAJIB TO SWEAR THAT HE WOULD NEVER VOTE FOR A NON REFORMER EVEN IF HE CLINCHED THE ODM PRESIDENTIAL TICKET IN A FAIR CONTEST. RAILA'S WEAK RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND, COUPLED WITH HIS OPEN GREED FOR THE PRESIDENCY, WAS SEEN AS THE EASIEST WAY BY NAJIB AND HIS ISLAM EXTREMISTS TO ACHIEVE THEIR SINISTER GOALS. NAJIB'S OFTEN REPEATED CRY OF "TUNATAKA MABADILIKO"(WE WANT CHANGE) MEANS EXACTLY THAT.*

*A CHANGE IN OUR LIVES AS WE KNOW AND BELIEVE, TO LIVING A LIFE ACCORDING TO THEIR WAYS AND BELIEFS. THEIR DETERMINATION TO INSTALL THE BOMAS DRAFT(ONE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL DRAFTS), PRINCIPALLY BECAUSE IT CALLS FOR THE ENTRENCHMENT OF THE KADHIS(ISLAMIC) COURTS IN OUR CONSTITUTION, IS AS STEADFAST AS THEIR BELIEF THAT IT IS HONOURABLE TO DIE FOR ONES RELIGION.*

*ENTER 2018, ENTER NAJIB BALALA AS IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE ODINGA PRESIDENCY, NAJIB'S ENTRY WILL BE MARKED WITH THE CLAMOR, BY THE COAST, FOR SHARIA LAW FOR THEIR JIMBO. THIS WILL BE CLOSELY FOLLOWED BY THE SAME CALLS COMING FROM THE NORTH EASTERN JIMBO. ONCE THESE TWO ARE SAFELY UNDER SHARIA LAW, AGAIN THE QUEST TO TRANSFORM KENYA TO BE UNDER SHARIA LAW WILL BEGIN IN ERNEST. THIS WILL BE NAJIB! BALALA'S SOLE AIM AS THE 5TH PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA , AN AIM THAT RAILA HAS STATED IN THE SECRET MOU THAT HE WILL AGAIN DO EVERYTHING IN HIS POWERS TO HELP ACHIEVE.*

*IT IS INDEED UNFORTUNATE THAT AN INDIVIDUAL'S HUNGER FOR POWER CAN LEAD HIM TO SELL HIS OWN COUNTRY AND FAITH TO A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHOSE ONLY AIM IS TO TRANSFORM KENYA, AND THE WORLD, INTO AN ISLAMIC STATE UNDER SHARIA LAW AND TO IMPOSE THEIR WILL ON OTHER PEOPLE.*

*FUTURE GENERATIONS OF KENYANS, OUR CHILDREN INCLUDED, WILL NEVER FORGIVE OUR GENERATION FOR MAKING DECISIONS THAT WILL EVENTUALLY RENDER THEM SLAVES OF OTHERS, SIMPLY BECAUSE WE COULD NOT SEE THROUGH THE LIES THAT ARE CURRENTLY BEING FED TO US.*

*LET US STAND UP AND DEFEND OUR COUNTRY.*

# International Sociological Association

---

## *e-bulletin*

*MAY THE ALMIGHTY GOD BLESS US ALL, MAY THE ALMIGHTY GOD BLESS OUR COUNTRY, KENYA*

*APPLE OF GOD'S EYES<sup>10</sup>*

### **Background Information: An Overview of Pentecostal Christianity and Islam in Kenya**

Over the last few years, there has been a growing contest for public space between Pentecostal Christianity and Islam in Kenya. According to Lonsdale, two world religions are competing for the allegiance of modern Kenyans: Islam and Christianity.<sup>11</sup> Christianity is the religion of the majority while Islam is the minority religion. Lonsdale further points out that Islam came to the Kenyan coast in Islam's first Century. Christianity on the other hand, according to him, made a late start in Kenya but never stopped growing and mutating as it grew, becoming ever more popular in its practices and beliefs.<sup>12</sup> In 2003, a religious demographic survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life indicates that about 88.5% of the population in Kenya is Christian – 62.6% Protestants and 25.9% Catholic, 7% of the population is said to be Muslim and 4.25% is said to practice no religion at all.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the state department estimates that 80% of Kenyans practice Christianity, with Protestants accounting for 58% of that religious majority and Roman Catholics make up the rest of it.

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<sup>10</sup> I obtained a couple of this email in early October 2007 from Eunice Wairimu, a devoted Pentecostal Christian who was clearly agitated by its contents.

<sup>11</sup> Lonsdale, John, 'Religion and Politics in Kenya', The 2005 Henry Martyn Lectures, Trinity College, Cambridge on February 7, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life Surveys Overview: Pentecostalism in Africa, 2006. Also see World Christian Encyclopedia 2001 and World Christian Database 2006.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

10% of Kenyans, according to the state report, are said to be Muslims although some Muslim groups claim to represent about 30%.<sup>14</sup> This figure is however not supported by demographic data and, in the absence of precise figures, the population of Kenyan Muslims is estimated anywhere between 10 to 30 percent although the latter figure may be on the higher side.<sup>15</sup> The National Population Census carried out every 10 years, which would have yielded much data, does not ask for information on religious affiliation or ethnicity.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, although these numbers are not certain, one thing is clear that Christianity has the largest number of followers.

Although constitutionally speaking Kenya is a secular state, reality on the ground appears to suggest that Christianity is the *de facto* religion.<sup>17</sup> In fact, as Lonsdale correctly points out, the foundations of Kenya's nationalism have been Christian.<sup>18</sup> Islam played a very passive role in national life in the past but is currently emerging as a powerful force in Kenyan politics. At the same time, while the Muslim population may be described as the religion of the minority, their influences and voices in the public space are increasingly growing and visibly heard. According to Sperling, the Muslim peoples of Kenya are a diverse and heterogeneous minority spread across the country and they can be found among many ethnic groups in country.<sup>19</sup> However, although the Muslims constitute a minority in Kenya, certain areas such as the Coastal region and

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<sup>14</sup> See Mpinganjira, op.cit.

<sup>15</sup> Warigi, Gitau, 2007, 'Why Battle for Muslim Vote is so Highly Charged', *Sunday Nation*, October.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Parsitau, Damaris, 2006, 'Then Sings My Soul: Gospel Music in the Spiritual Lives of Kenyan Pentecostal/Charismatic Christian', *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, Vol. XIV, the Fall.

<sup>18</sup> See Lonsdale, op.cit.

<sup>19</sup> Sperling, David C., 'Islam and the Religious Dimension of Conflict in Kenya', <http://payson.tulane.edu/conflict/Cs%20St/SPERLFIN5.html>.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

North-Eastern Provinces have significantly high numbers of Muslim concentration.<sup>20</sup>

And while there are no accurate statistics to show the exact numbers of Muslims in those regions, Mombassa, Tana River, Malindi, Kwale and Lamu districts have a high concentration of Muslim faithful. Muslim communities are also found scattered throughout the interior of Kenya, in all the major towns and rural areas but, as Sperling shows, nowhere in the interior are they the dominant population.<sup>21</sup> Thus, large areas of the interior of the country have fewer Muslim communities or none at all and, where such communities exist, they tend to be small and physically isolated from other Muslim communities of Kenya. Except for the people of North-Eastern Kenya and perhaps Mombassa District, many families in Kenya boast of both Muslim and Christian relatives.<sup>22</sup> According to Lonsdale, the existing pattern of Muslim population distribution is a result of the way Islam was spread throughout the interior in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>23</sup> Only a small number of Africans in the interior came into regular contact with Muslims, and of those who did, only a minority were attracted to Islam.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Muslims represent a sizeable but significant minority with small communities of Sikhs, Jews, Jains and Baha'i's found in the country.

On the other hand, Pentecostal Christianity, which came into the country in the 1970s and 80s but gained momentum in the 90s, has experienced tremendous growth over the last almost four decades now and constitutes a huge majority besides boasting a

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<sup>20</sup> Mayoyo, Patrick, 'Muslim MoU to be a Major Voting Factor', *Sunday Nation*, December 16, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> See Sperling.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> See Lonsdale, op.cit.

<sup>24</sup> See Sperling.



# International Sociological Association

---

## e-bulletin

large Christian constituency. According to the 2006 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life survey, the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement accounts for more than half of Kenya's population. The survey also found that approximately seven in ten protestant in Kenya are either Pentecostal or Charismatic, and about a third of Kenyan Catholics surveyed can be classified as Charismatic.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, according to newspaper reports, the Registrar General's office is overwhelmed by the increasing demands for registration of these churches.<sup>26</sup> The Attorney General Amos Wako, while speaking in a workshop for church leaders, revealed that the department is overwhelmed by the increasing demand for registration of churches and the facility is facing difficulties in processing 6,740 pending applications by various religious organizations. The Attorney General also revealed that there are about 8,520 registered churches and that about 60 applications are filed every month.<sup>27</sup> Although not all of these churches seeking registration are Pentecostal, the majority of them are of Pentecostal and charismatic inclinations. Such is the tremendous growth of Pentecostal Christianity where thousands of newer churches have sprouted in all major urban centres, some within less than three to five kilometers of each other. Some are huge mega churches while others are too small to be called churches but anyhow add to the numbers. If the above statistics are factual and not just wild imaginations, then the numerical and institutional growth and strength of Pentecostal Christianity in Kenya cannot be ignored. Besides the numerical and institutional growth

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<sup>25</sup> The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life Surveys Overview: Pentecostalism in Africa, 2006. Also see World Christian Encyclopedia 2001 and World Christian Database 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Ndegwa, Alex, 'Over 6,000 Churches Awaiting Registration', *The Standard*, September 4, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

of this type of Christianity, their influence in national politics and democratization has also grown increasingly.<sup>28</sup>

Propelled by the heavy appropriation of mass media technologies and their obsession with public image, the Pentecostals have pervaded the public space, especially the political space over the last few years. In fact, in the 2007 general elections, the Pentecostals fielded presidential, parliamentary and civic candidates. It is this tremendous growth of Pentecostal Christianity coupled with its growing contest for public space particularly political space that has upset the religious landscape in a deeply multi-religious and multi-ethnic nation like Kenya. In this paper, I argue that it is this tremendous growth of Pentecostal Christianity together with the state abandonment of religious regulation that has led to the establishment of a free religious market that has fostered religious competition and heightened tensions between the two faiths.<sup>29</sup> And while there has been growing concern about the need to regulate the growth of these churches, the government, to borrow Morrier-Genoud's words, has not taken a clear stand in religious matters, and faith-based organizations have consequently continued to flourish uncontrollably.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, whenever there has been complains about the need to regulate the registration of these churches and other religious organizations, the clergy have often invoked the constitution, which provides for freedom of worship and

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<sup>28</sup> Parsitua, Damaris, 2008a, 'From Fishers of Men & Women to Fishers of Votes: Pentecostal Church Leaders in the Scramble for Votes in the 2007 General Elections', Paper presented at a conference on Kenyan Elections on January 17 at Oxford University.

<sup>29</sup> Morrie-Genoud, Eric, 2000, 'The 1996 Muslim Holidays' Affair: Religious Competition and State Mediation in Contemporary Mozambique', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol.26, No.3. September, pp 409-427

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

have interpreted any such move to infer that their freedom of worship is being curtailed contrary to the constitution.<sup>31</sup> The politicians also do not want to upset this large Christian constituency whom they co-opt as they seek for legitimacy from the clergy and religious institutions particularly during general elections. The clergy, on the other hand, are not keen to upset the politicians whom they rely on for favors, such as land to build their institutions, exemption from taxation (church materials are never taxed in Kenya) and the need to use the media to propagate their faith. Thus, the growth of Pentecostal Christianity in the last few decades and its growing influence on public life has upset the religious landscape of the country and further strained relations between various Christian traditions and other faiths, especially Islam. This is because religious pluralism, as Serbin has pointed out, introduces a variety of voices in the public sphere thereby upsetting the religious equilibrium.<sup>32</sup> For example, ever since the unprecedented growth of these newer Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Kenya, the mainline churches, which were for many decades regarded as the voice of the voiceless and the conscience of society, have been facing challenges in maintaining their influence and significance in an increasingly multi-religious, multi-denominational, multi-ethnic and pluralistic Kenyan society.<sup>33</sup>

Religious pluralism has not only upset the religious landscape but has further strained inter-religious relations and dialogue. For example, relations between Muslims

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<sup>31</sup> See Ndegwa, op.cit.

<sup>32</sup> Serbin, Kenneth, 1999, 'The Catholic Church, Religious Pluralism and Democracy in Brazil', Working Paper.

<sup>33</sup> Parsitau, Damaris, 2008b, 'No Longer the Conscience of Society: Mainline Churches, Religious Pluralism and Ethnicity in Kenya', Working Paper.

# **International Sociological Association**

## ***e-bulletin***

and mainline churches, especially the Catholics and National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), were warm and cordial, but the emergence of Pentecostal Christianity in public space appeared to have upset these relations and introduced suspicions between Islam and mainline Christianity. This was especially evident during the clamor for a new constitution where Muslims propagated for the inclusion of Islamic courts in the constitution. The Pentecostals opposed this vehemently and convinced some of the mainline churches such as the Catholics, Protestants and other Evangelicals to form an outfit called the Kenyan Church to oppose the Muslim demands. During the referendum in November 2006, the Pentecostals organized its large Christian constituency in collaboration with some mainline Churches to oppose the draft constitution, which, in their view, appeared to elevate Islam because some clauses provided for the inclusion of Islamic courts.<sup>34</sup> This saw the beginning of tensions between Christianity but especially Pentecostal Christianity and Islam.

Yet, the advent of religious pluralism represents significant social changes in Kenya's socio-political and religious history. It has also created a shift in the way various religious traditions such as the Mainline Churches and Muslim organizations contact their social political responsibility as they are no longer the only voices of the poor or the conscience of society. At the same time, and since the advent of the new millennium, democratization and good governance has emerged as the major issues of concern for Pentecostal church leaders. While for many years, democratization could be viewed largely from the mainline churches' point of view, today, it is impossible to consider

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<sup>34</sup> Sunday Standard Team, 'Churches Campaign against the Referendum', *The Sunday Standard*, August 21, 2005.

# **International Sociological Association**

---

## ***e-bulletin***

democratic consolidation without studying new religious pluralism created mainly by the rapid growth of Pentecostalism.<sup>35</sup> For, as Serbin has so aptly argued, because of the emergence of Pentecostal Christianity, religion is no longer an immutable social given but a private and non permanent choice.<sup>36</sup> In my view, it is this religious pluralism coupled with state deregulation of religious organization that has fostered competition between various religious organizations. Scholars often cast religious conflict as the result of the numerical growth and political rise of a single faith. Where Islam is involved, arguments about religious fundamentalism are quick to surface and often stand as an explanation in their own right.<sup>37</sup> Yet, this is not the bigger picture as it were. Firstly, it avoids the question of the rise of other religions such as Pentecostalism and their contribution to conflict, even tension. Secondly, it reduces the role of the state to a reactive one. We must not assume that Muslims in Kenya or the rest of the world always or usually promote or provoke the conflict in which they are involved.<sup>38</sup> I shall now briefly sketch the Christian-Muslim relationship in Kenya prior to the MoU in order to understand its impact on Pentecostal-Muslim relations in Kenya.

### **Christian Muslim Relations in Kenya**

While Christian-Muslim relations in Kenya have, in the past, been described as warm and cordial, Christian hostility towards Islam seems to be growing. Yet, there has been a long

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<sup>35</sup> See Serbin, op.cit.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> See Morrie-Genoud, op.cit.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

tradition of tolerance and mutual respect between most Muslim and Christian groups, especially those from mainline denominations such as the Roman Catholics and the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), an umbrella body that brings together protestant churches such as Anglicans, Baptists, Presbyterians and the Methodists. As Sperling observes, the NCCCK, for example, has for many years kept a desk on Islam; more recently an organization calling itself Programme on Muslim Christian Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) has been operating in the country.<sup>39</sup> At the same time NCCCK has commissioned a number of studies on Islam and Muslims in the country as an attempt to understand Islam and promote inter-religious dialogue and ecumenism. Until the 1990s, the Muslim community seemed to be working more closely with the Catholic Church than with other Christian denominations. This co-operative spirit has been explained in the context of the conservatism to be found in both Catholic and Muslim doctrines especially in matters to do with sex and reproduction.<sup>40</sup> The formation of Chemi Chemi Ya Ukweli (Fountain of Truth) – an inter-faith initiative primarily working with Muslims and Christians, yet almost exclusively funded by the Catholics, contributed towards lessening of the mistrust between the leaderships of Muslims and Christians.<sup>41</sup> In the Mid 1990s, the Muslims, Catholics, Protestants and Hindus congregated under the Ufungamano Initiative<sup>42</sup> for constitutional review and most of civil society worked with leadership from various religious organizations in the search for a new constitution. For

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<sup>39</sup> See Sperling, op.cit.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ufungamano is the name of a building jointly owned by Catholics and Protestants, where different faith groups gathered to discuss the constitutional review process.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

the greatest part of Ufungamano, the steering committee acted as one community – the faith community. A prayer by either of them in any of their traditions was respected by all. Inter-denominational prayers are also common and respected.<sup>43</sup> This cordial relationship seem to be supported by a report by the International Religious Freedom in early 2007, which indicated that Kenyan authorities respect religious freedom, and Kenyans are tolerant of the diverse creeds in the country.<sup>44</sup> The report also cites that Intermarriages between members of different Christian denominations is common and interfaith prayer services occur frequently. The same report further states that although inter-marriages between Muslims and Christians are less frequent, they are nevertheless socially acceptable.<sup>45</sup> This report was, however, released before the MoU was signed and it does not reflect the tensions that the ODM created.

But, while relationships between mainline churches and their Muslim counterparts have been good, the relationship between Pentecostals and Muslim has never been cordial and Pentecostals, who have had a history of intolerance towards other faiths, have clearly been the protagonists. For example, it was after the advent of Evangelicals and Pentecostals into the Ufungamano initiative that marked the beginning of the resurrection of the mistrust between Muslims and Christians generally. The Evangelicals and Pentecostals would not miss an opportunity to emphasize their differences from other religious groups in respect to the quest for a new constitution for Kenya. During the referendum politics in 2005-06 and in the forthcoming general elections, Pentecostals are

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<sup>43</sup> See Sperling, *op.cit.*

<sup>44</sup> Kelly, Kevin, 'Kenya Commended for Faith Relations', *The Sunday Standard*, September 16, 2007.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

developing a common front in the face of what they perceive as “Muslim fundamentalism”. This trend has worsened ever since the Pentecostals began to invade the public space and assumed prominence in national politics. However, developments since 2005-06, the referendum politics and the issues of the contentious Kadhi courts and now the alleged MoU signed between Raila Odinga and Muslims, point out that relations between the two faiths have deteriorated speedily with accusations and counter accusations, suspicions, mistrust, competition, and contest for public space.

The Pentecostal groups demonize Islamic groups as is featured in many of the Pentecostal discourses and propagandas. It is evident that the issue of the Kadhi courts is one that generated a lot of concern not only for Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians but even those from the mainline churches and led the overwhelming rejection of the proposed draft. On the other hand, Muslims reacted angrily by insisting that Kadhi courts, no matter what, must be established. Sheikh Mohammed Idris, the chairman of the Council of Imams and Islamic Preachers, said that they would not support the proposed constitution if it did not acknowledge Kadhi courts.<sup>46</sup> This created a lot of suspicions and tensions between the two groups. Some of the Christian material for the constitutional referendum in late 2005 was particularly hostile to Islam. In May 2006, after comparing the Quran and the Bible in a programme, Hope FM, broadcasting from Nairobi Pentecostal Church, was fire bombed where a guard got killed.<sup>47</sup> Although the police said they will investigate, many Pentecostals interviewed believe that investigation has been

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<sup>46</sup> Itula, M., ‘Churches Keen to Sponsor Clerics in Elections’, *The Standard*, October 2, 2006.

<sup>47</sup> Gifford, Paul, 2008, *African Christianity: Some Recent Developments in Kenya*, Unpublished Manuscript.

# **International Sociological Association**

## ***e-bulletin***

stalled deliberately, even aborted so that the issue does not increase tension between the two faiths. Yet, recent developments, especially since the dawn of the millennium and during the clamor for a new constitution and also recently prior to the 2007 general elections, appear to point out the emerging tensions between Muslims and Pentecostal Christianity in particular. The competition between the two faiths, as I have shown above, has been catalyzed by the state deregulation of the religious scene allowing for competition between different faiths.

Similarly the relations between the Muslim community and the Kenyan government have been frosty, sometimes hostile. In early 2007, a report by the International Religious Freedom noted complaints about discrimination voiced by the members of Kenya's Muslim community against the government of Kenya and observed that the complaints have worsened since the 1998 US embassy bombing, the 2002 attacks at the coast and terrorists incidents elsewhere around the world.<sup>48</sup> In fact, there has been growing concerns and complains among some Muslim groups, especially the youth, that they have felt discriminated against by the successive regimes in Kenyan politics.<sup>49</sup> Indeed there has been a general feeling among Muslims at the Coastal and North-Eastern provinces that they have had less opportunity than people from other provinces, and that, as a consequence, they are less integrated into the modern economy, and have benefited less than other peoples of Kenya during the post-independence years. The feeling of alienation and marginalization is particularly strong among the unemployed Muslim

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

youth,<sup>50</sup> who have felt marginalized educationally, politically and economically. Education along the Coastal region and in North-Eastern Provinces (where large Muslim populations are to be found) is largely underdeveloped right from primary to the university level. Mombassa, for example, which is Kenya's second largest town after Nairobi, has had no public university until 2007 when the government promised to start one. This has led to strenuous relations between the Muslims and the Kenyan Government.

Because of this feeling of marginalization and the feeling of being left out in national developments, many groups have emerged to fight for the rights of the Muslims, who are perceived as a minority group. And in the last few years, the Muslim community is engaging in discourses concerning their human rights and they certainly want their needs to be evaluated in the context of minority rights. Sperling has argued that much of the public agenda of Muslims is aimed at defending their religious and cultural values against secularization and Christianization.<sup>51</sup> These values, which receive the universal support of all Muslim communities in Kenya, constitute a common religious denominator of Muslim identity and, thus, provide a common idiom of protest.<sup>52</sup> In this connection, certain key topics have dominated the relations between the Muslims and the state. These are: the need to allow Muslims to be governed by Islamic law, respect for Islamic dress code, provision of food in government institutions in accordance with required Islamic norms, and public regard for facilities for Muslims (for worship and the celebration of

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<sup>50</sup> See Sperling, *op.cit.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

feasts) equal to those accorded to Christians.<sup>53</sup> These are the grievances that the Muslim people of Kenya have had to grapple with and, in my view, these are the issues that have thrashed Islam into public space especially in the 2007 general elections. Although the Kenyan government has acceded to many Muslim demands, especially in the fields of education, law, dress code and freedom of worship in schools, Muslims still perceive that many of their social and educational needs are disregarded. They also believe that their cultural values continue to be threatened, if not disrespected, under a secular, Christian-dominated government, and that they have been neglected and marginalized politically and economically in modern Kenya.<sup>54</sup>

Yet, the way the Muslim community was thrashed into focus in the 2007 general election was not entirely because of its numbers, crucial as they are.<sup>55</sup> Historically, the Muslim community has played a passive role in public life for a very long time. But in 2007, there was no passiveness as a number of issues have come up that have sharply politicized the community and caused unprecedented internal divisions at the same time. However, one emotive issue that appears to have angered the Muslim community is the transfer or rendition of suspected Islamic terrorists to Ethiopia. There was incredible confusion about the fate and nationality of 12 Muslims suspected terrorists handed over to the Ethiopian Government by Kenyan authorities. The government spokesman denied the claim that the deportees are Kenyan nationals. This deeply angered the Muslims leaders who insisted that the families of the deportees are known and that there are signed affidavits to that effect, which the government has in its possession. President Kibaki, on

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<sup>53</sup> See Warigi, *op.cit.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

the other hand, asked the Muslims to give him the names of the suspects, so he could follow the issue. The next day, the Hon. Raila Odinga released the names of the alleged deportees claiming that they are Kenyan nationals whose families are known.<sup>56</sup>

Related to this are the frequent anti-terrorist police swoops carried out at the coast, which have antagonized many Muslim families. Older issues of concern to Muslims are alleged discrimination in the issuance of passports and identity cards. Muslim youths have also expressed displeasure with the Kibaki administration citing discrimination, poverty, lack of jobs, regular police harassment and association with terrorist and have often held demonstrations against the government. Muslims have also been discriminated in the issuance of birth certificates, IDs and passports.<sup>57</sup> But the same grievances sharply politicized Islam and further thrashed it into public space as politicians scrambled for the Muslim votes. These concerns kept Muslim issues alive in Kenya's public space throughout the electioneering period.

At the same time, there are signs of increasing tensions between Muslims and the Kenyan Government and with good reasons. Somalia to the north is unstable, and Muslim refugees of Somalian descent have flocked to Nairobi and established themselves as entrepreneurs in East Leigh and other major towns. After the bombing of American Embassy in Nairobi in 1998 and the attack on Twin Towers in 2001, the USA has put heavy pressure on the Kenyan government to enact anti-terror legislation, which has not gone down well with Kenyan Muslims who resent it and see it as directed on them.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> See Gifford, op.cit.

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

### **The Memorandum of Understanding**

It is against such concerns that affect the Muslim peoples of Kenya that the leader of the Orange Democratic Movement is said to have signed the so-called MoU with a section of Kenyan Muslims represented by NAMLEF. This body brings together various Muslim organizations, such as the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya (CIPK), the Muslim Education and Welfare Association (MEWA) and the Kenya Association of Ulamaas and Imams (KAULI).<sup>59</sup> According to media reports the Hon. Raila Odinga pledged to address the above mentioned issues and several others that touch on the lives of Kenyan Muslims. These are: to embark on radical transformation of Kenya through a devolved system of government (popularly known as Majimbo), pledged equitable hiring of Muslims in public appointments, outlawing the targeting of Kenyan Muslim community and set up a commission to inquire into the extradition of Kenyan Muslim to Somalia, Ethiopia and Cuba. On the other hand, a significant number of Kenyan Muslims pledged to publicly support the Hon. Raila Odinga's presidential bid, support no other candidate for the presidential elections, mobilize Muslims to support ODM candidate's bid and to provide Mr. Odinga with support and wise counsel if he wins the 2007 general elections.<sup>60</sup> The Hon. Odinga also committed himself and an ODM government to give a budget allocation to North Eastern and Coast Provinces (the two provinces are predominantly Muslim and seriously underdeveloped especial North-Eastern) in the first two years in power and that he would help to build roads, houses, provide clean water and promote

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> *Daily Nation*, November 2007

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

education and health facilities in the region and in other marginalized areas.<sup>61</sup> Besides, the Hon. Odinga pledged that his government will investigate the extradition of Kenyan Muslims to Somalia, Ethiopia and Guantanamo Bay (a US military detention base in Cuba). Extradition of Muslims on suspicion of having a hand in terrorism has generated a lot of anger against the government, compelling the president to set up a special presidential committee to deal with alleged harassment or discrimination of Muslims in the application of and enforcement of law, particularly with regards to security issues.<sup>62</sup> Other policies include the entrenchment in the constitution of provisions that will outlaw the targeting and profiling of Kenyans and subjecting them to human rights abuses, violations and discriminations under any guise whatsoever.<sup>63</sup>

These were the issues raised in the Memorandum of Understanding and were meant to protect the interests of Muslims who are said to have been marginalized over the years. But these issues opened up debates, which dominated the public discourse throughout the campaign period. When Mr. Odinga disclosed that he had signed this document with a section of Kenyan Muslims, it sparked off national debates with some Christian leaders denouncing it. The issue was also seized by Party of National Unity leaders, who denounced the pact as allegedly meant to create religious animosity. The pact was immediately interpreted variously; its contents were distorted and given different interpretations and the email cited above is one such interpretation. The contents of the email seemed to raise various concerns, suspicions and resentments that Pentecostal Christianity appear to harbor against Islam. This document immediately

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> See Warigi, op.cit.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

sparked off unprecedented public discourses and fueled animosity between Christians and Muslims. It became a subject of intense emotions fueled by rumors, sustained by the media, condemned by various clergy and exaggerated by politicians, who used it to outdo each other and spark off public debates, even outrage, in some Christian as well as Muslim circles.

This controversial document preoccupied and captured people's imaginations throughout the campaign and electioneering period. It became the subject of many debates in famous eateries, pubs and other social circles. It equally generated huge debates between media personalities, political analysts and politicians, and became the subject of many columnists and commentators. The reactions it generated from the public also occupied many commentator's talk shows and significant pages and air time in both the print and the electronic media. It was the subject of many FM radio stations, phone in programmes, and many others. In homes and churches, families debated the contents of the MoU and its implication for the future of Christianity and how it would shape the electoral landscape. In short, the supposedly signed document generated a huge public debate in the country and thrashed both faiths into public space like never before. In fact, while many subjects such as Majimbo or devolution were issues of concern for many Kenyans, few bogged and held people's imaginations with such intensity as the MoU did. This emotive issue clearly determined not only the electoral politics in the 2007 General election but also redefined the electoral landscape in Kenya and significantly influenced the outcome of the controversial results. The email became the subject of public debate and generated a lot of attention. It became a big campaign issue between the Party of National Unity and ODM as the scramble for the Muslim Votes intensified. Yet, the

# **International Sociological Association**

## ***e-bulletin***

contents of the MoU, as was published in the media, were completely harmless and only meant to safeguard the interests of Kenyan Muslims, who have felt marginalized by successive regimes in Kenyan politics.<sup>64</sup>

### **The Pentecostal and Evangelical Responses to the MoU**

The first and initial reaction of some Pentecostals against the allegedly signed MoU was characterized by intense debates, condemnation of the pact and calling for its revelation to be made public. When the document was published through the media, they denounced and rejected it as the true pact and insisted that the true contents of the document are not what were published. They claimed that the true contents of the pact are the ones stipulated in the above cited email. The revelations nevertheless led to a lot of discontents among some Christian leaders but especially those of the Evangelical and Pentecostal inclinations under their umbrella body the Evangelical Fellowship of Kenya (EFK) who condemned it and issued several press statements against it. They came up with their own version, which bore a lot of resemblance with the email cited above. The email, which had been interpreted variously, immediately sparked off prayer vigils among many Pentecostals and engaged them in what they called spiritual warfare against the demons of Islam. Some Pentecostals and mainline Church leaders cautioned their large Christian constituency to reject the MoU and the Orange Democratic Movement because of this document, which they believed would undermine Christianity as the religion of the majority in the country.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

It also became the focus of many sermons in church pulpits, especially from various Pentecostal Church leaders, who condemned it strongly intensifying competition and tensions between Christians and Muslims in Kenya.<sup>65</sup> Under their umbrella body, the Evangelical Alliance of Kenya, they challenged the Hon. Raila Odinga to make the document public and when he did so, the Evangelicals and Pentecostals refused to accept it as the real thing and produced different copies that were altered and exaggerated and which bore huge resemblance with the copy of the circulated email cited above.<sup>66</sup> The bishops led by Bishop Mark Kariuki of the Deliverance Church said that the MoU could turn Kenya into a religious state, a move that would hurt Christians and other religions who want Kenya to remain a secular state. These churches issued a press statement to denounce the MoU and called on their followers to denounce it and not to vote for Raila Odinga because he is favoring Islam.

The Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches who represented and signed the press statement include, Christ is the Answer Ministries, African Inland Church, Baptist Church of Kenya, Redeemed Gospel Church, Full Gospel Churches, Free Pentecostal Fellowship of Kenya, AGAPE Fellowship Centre, Christian Church International and Voice of Salvation and Healing Church. In a statement signed by Bishop Dr. Boniface Adoyo of Nairobi Pentecostal churches, the bishop said that according to the constitution, Kenya is a secular state and any attempts to divide Kenyans into religious blocks would be resisted by all peace loving citizens. They argued that Evangelical churches

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<sup>65</sup> Bishop Mark Kariuki's Televised Sermon on Family TV, Celebration Times 11a.m on December 16, 07. In this sermon the Bishop condemned an unnamed presidential candidate who has consulted witches and has entered into secret MoU with people who have no fear of God.

<sup>66</sup> Nation Team, 'Now Churches Condemn MoU with Muslims', *Daily Nation*, November 29, 2007. Through this Daily the Evangelicals issued a Press Statement and cautioned Kenyans against the said MoU.



# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

constituted 30% of the population that rejected the 2005 draft constitution during the referendum in 2006 because it favored one religion and they would mobilize their large Pentecostal constituency again not to vote for the Hon. Raila Odinga and ODM.<sup>67</sup> The Catholic Church equally joined the Evangelicals and Pentecostals in condemning the MoU arguing that it was unacceptable to use religion as a platform to ascend to power.

The statement read like this

Kenya is a secular state and no one should be allowed to turn it into a religious state. Promises to give any faith group special rights and application of its particular religious laws for governance are contrary to the constitution.<sup>68</sup>

It is important to note that nowhere in the pact was the idea of turning the nation into an Islamic state or even giving Islam special preference was mentioned. The MoU simply promised to promote the interests of the Muslims who have felt marginalized and discriminated against. But some Christian churches appear to have reinterpreted the pact differently causing enormous confusion and creating unnecessary tension. Some Christian church leaders even described it as ‘a recipe for tension and even chaos’<sup>69</sup>

However, not all Pentecostals and Evangelicals agreed to the stand taken by the clergy mentioned above and who are mostly from Nairobi. In fact, the Pentecostal response was anything but monolithic. The response was not only diverse and reflected divergent views and stand points but also assumed ethnic, even tribal, dimensions and

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<sup>67</sup> *Sunday Nation*, November 3, 2007.

<sup>68</sup> Statement cited by the media and is said to have been issued from the Vatican, *Daily Nation*, November 20, 2007.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

proportions. It appeared like the Nairobi-based clergy supported president Kibaki while those from Luo Nyanza supported the Hon Raila Odinga. For example, it was under the leadership of the Rev Dr. Wellington Mutiso, several churches first challenged the signatories to the pact to make it public.<sup>70</sup> And after it was laid bear, they criticized it and demanded its withdrawal. A week later on November 29, 2007, a group of church leaders under the aegis of the Nyanza Religious leaders, responded with a strongly worded two-paged statement signed by 23 leaders.

As Kenyans head towards the general election, we as Nyanza leaders note with great concern the partisan involvement of a section of Kenya's religious leaders in the country's political issues. It is on this note that we express our disgust with our Nairobi based Evangelical brothers' attacks and unnecessary criticisms of the agreement made between Namlef and Mr. Odinga<sup>71</sup>

A few days later, on December 5, Anglican Church of Kenya and bishops of Maseno Southern Nyanza and Bondo (both Luo domains and who barked the honorable Odinga to the letter) came with a statement entitled *Misplaced Concern: Criticizing the Position taken by Evangelicals on the Raila-Muslim Pact*.<sup>72</sup> The bishops told the evangelicals that it was the right of any group to enter into an MoU with political leaders as long as it was not injurious to any person or group in respect to the constitutional order of the country.<sup>73</sup> This led to further divisions within various religious organizations as it became very clear that Christian churches lost credibility and took partisan positions during the general

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Munene, Mugumo, 'Church Split as Pools Draw Near: Controversy over Pact with Raila and Muslims Opens Kicks up Dust', *Daily Nation*, December 16, 2007.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

elections. The bishops from Maseno and Nyanza supported Raila Odinga and ODM, while those from Nairobi and its vicinity supported president Kibaki and his Party of National Unity. In fact, after the country was engulfed by ethnic clashes shortly after the announcement of the discredited presidential elections, some Christian churches notably the Protestant churches under their umbrella body the National Council of Churches of Kenya publicly acknowledged that they were partisan prior to the general elections and asked for pardon from the public. In the statement they said that ‘religious leaders failed to stay on the middle path, took sides and were unable to bring unity when the crises arose’,<sup>74</sup>

In Muslim circles, the story was the same and there were obviously deep splits within Muslim ranks with the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM) and NAMLEF differing completely over the MOU.<sup>75</sup> Some Muslim leaders notably SUPKEM opposed the MOU while Namlef not only supported the Hon. Raila Odinga, but was the architect of the pact leading to divisions within the Muslim community that has always displayed unity as one community. Namlef is said to represent about 70 Muslim organizations while Supkem has over 300 bodies. Namlef made the pact public and according to its contents, it aims at safeguarding the interests of Muslims.<sup>76</sup> The contents of the pact were clearly distorted and Namlef described the exaggerations in a press conference this way:

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<sup>74</sup> Nzioka, Patrick, ‘Churches We Let Kenyans’, *Daily Nation*, February 13, 2008.

<sup>75</sup> Wachira, Muchemi & Robert Namunae, ‘Muslim Groups object to MoU with Raila’, *Daily Nation*, November, 2007.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

We are shocked as Muslims, about the heat generated by this matter. A false MoU has been circulated via email and other media to cause fear, despondency and animosity between Christians and Muslims.<sup>77</sup>

According to Namlef, the fears that Muslims want to introduce Sharia law and make Islam the supreme religion in the country are false and only meant to generate hostility between the two faiths. He argued that Islam does not suppress other religions.<sup>78</sup>

### **The Email and Pentecostal Concerns**

The controversial MoU appeared to raise a lot of concerns and fears that some Christians, but notably the Pentecostals, appear to harbor against Islam. The emails that were circulating in the internet not only heightened suspicions and created unnecessary tensions between the two faiths but were also calculated to pit one faith against another as it played on old suspicions and stereotypes that both faiths holds towards another. As revealed by this email, there were rumors and fears of a well organized, orchestrated plan of transforming Kenya into an Islamic state, ruled by Sharia law, and with plans to turn ordinary Kenyans into slaves that will serve their Muslim masters. There were also rumors that there were plans to abolish Christianity and stop the immediate spread of the gospel or Christianity as soon as Kenya becomes an Islamic state. To many Pentecostal Christians, the contents of the email were as true as was the possibility of turning Kenya into an Islamic state. The fear of Muslims bringing in terrorists to rain terror against

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

ordinary Kenyan citizens as they plan to turn each of the eight provinces in Kenya into Islamic Jimbos or states as stated in the email was a possibility for many Christians. This is largely because Muslims have been ignorantly and maliciously associated with terrorists who have been accused of loving death more than life itself as the email purports. It has not helped matters much that Kenya has been a victim of terror attacks in 1998 and in 2002. These claims have absolutely no basis and the contents of the email were heavily exaggerated and distorted. These were also meant to influence the large Pentecostal Christian constituency to vote against the Hon. Raila Odinga and create tensions and heightened suspicions between the two faiths. Politicians used the email to pit the Pentecostals against the Muslims just as they played against ethnic and tribal animosities to pit one community against another, resulting in tragic and violent consequences.

The controversial document was of tremendous concern to Pentecostals who read and interpreted the document uncritically, yet they were the greatest critics of the pact. Although there were various emails circulated, the one cited above was the most dramatic and elicited unprecedented attention. It fed on rumors and propaganda and in a country where public discourse is sustained by rumors and gossips<sup>79</sup> many clergy as well as laity mostly from Pentecostal denominations accepted it as gospel truth.<sup>80</sup> Yet, without any critical reflections and despite the fact that the email was just one of the propaganda wars used by various political parties to out do each other, the document opened a heated national debate as it continued to generate unprecedented anger, mistrust and suspicions

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<sup>79</sup> See Englund, *op.cit.*

<sup>80</sup> During an interview with Nakuru Town Pastors Fellowship several pastors I spoke with believed that there is an orchestrated plan to turn Kenya into an Islamic State.

# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

among some Christian leaders as well as fears of increased demands for Sharia, an Islamic code of religious law. While the email may not reflect what actually transpired in the original document, it aroused many emotions and points out suspicions and mistrust that the Pentecostal Christianity holds towards Islam as a religion. It also represents a selective yet typical reaction and interpretation from a faith that perceives Islam as a threat real or imagined from the Pentecostal point of view. The email whose contents are clearly exaggerated and manipulated was obviously used by various competing political groups and parties with vested interests with the large Pentecostal constituency to create panic among Pentecostals about the growing influence of Islam in Kenya's public life and hopefully vote in a reactionary manner against it.

The MoU, whatever its contents and discontents, appears to have opened a widening schism among Christians in the 2007 general elections. It also exposed Christian churches as organizations losing credibility as prelates and pastors publicly took strong positions over the raging propaganda wars. Men and women of cloth openly took sides to the dismay and confusion of their followers and the general public. Just like the deep seated ethnic suspicions and hatred that flared up after the announcement of the disputed presidential elections, religious conflicts and suspicions may soon also flare up if not checked early. And in a country where the Christian-Muslim divide can easily be manipulated for political gain just like what happened with ethnic manipulation, then there is need to check these hostilities before they erupt.

Thus the MoU was definitely a big issue throughout the Campaign period and may have influenced voting patterns in the country. The coast with a high Muslim population largely voted for the Hon. Raila Odinga while North Eastern is said to have

# International Sociological Association

## e-bulletin

voted for PNU, although this in itself was controversial. Some Christians were likely to vote in a reactionary manner to the MoU and there was a general concern among many Pentecostal Christians about losing their freedom of worship as well as fears about growing Islamic influence. Raila's Christian background became an issue and he was depicted as a pagan with Muslim inclinations and at some point he was depicted as a man who sought the help of witches.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, the document further polarized the already strenuous relations and fuelled further suspicions between the two faiths.

### **The Rhetoric of Spiritual Warfare**

The second way in which the Pentecostals reacted to the email after condemning it and laying down their concerns, is by engaging in a series of nightlong prayer vigils. In these prayer vigils, the Pentecostals engaged in spiritual warfare and employed militaristic language or what is called the rhetoric of spiritual warfare to pray against the demonic influence and spread of Islam. The rhetoric of spiritual warfare is used by Pentecostals as a non violent weapon against their perceived enemies and, as Englund has argued, human rights activists could gain from an appreciation of this spiritual orientation that can diffuse physical violence.<sup>82</sup> In these vigils the Pentecostals used language such as *the battle is not ours but the Lords* and *we wrestle not with flesh and blood but against principalities and powers* (such as Islam), *forces of darkness and witchcraft* and so

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<sup>81</sup> Bishop Kariuki Televised Message on Family TV on December 16, 2007 at 11 am. The title of the sermon was the Word Prevails Acts 19:18-20. In this sermon he attacked a presidential Candidate who has consulted witches from Tanzania and South Africa in order to win the elections. There were rumors circulating about the Hon Raila as witch with Muslim Inclination

<sup>82</sup> See Englund, op.cit.

# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

forth.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, while Pentecostals may not engage in physical warfare, their utterances, discourses and texts that associate Islam with demons, Satanism and witchcraft equally inculcate a culture of intolerance and lack of respect for other cultures and religions and are equally dangerous and unacceptable as physical violence.

Their relationship with their Muslim counterparts has been characterized by suspicion, mistrust and the demonizing of Islam. In most cases, they ignorantly associate Muslims with terrorists and sometimes refer to them as people who are possessed by demons and are in dire need of salvation. The Muslims, on the other hand, accuse Pentecostals of being fanatical and dismiss them as loud noise makers who do not even understand the bible critically. They accuse them of taking scripture literally and as a people that cannot defend their faith intelligently and philosophically. The Muslim clerics on their part often engage Pentecostal clergy in debates about the apparent contradictions in the bible that leave most Pentecostals baffled. The knowledge of the Bible by Muslim clerics is amazing and often puts Pentecostals to shame as they cannot defend the bible intellectually due to their literal interpretation of the scripture which often exposes them as an ignorant lot. On this, Pentecostals get defensive and resort to spiritual warfare in the form of night long prayers often characterized by shouting and use of loud speakers. The Pentecostals also attempt to convert Muslims whom they believe are lost and are in dire need of salvation. Nevertheless, these accusations and counter accusations had never created the tensions and suspicions like the ones witnessed during the 2007 general elections.

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<sup>83</sup> These verses are common prayer weapons against unforeseen forces that Pentecostals believe operate spiritually but can have an impact on the lives of Christians.



# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

### **The Pentecostalization of Public Space in Kenya**

Over the last one decade or so, there appears to be a kind of Pentecostalization of public space aided by mass media technologies<sup>84</sup> that has emerged in Kenya. In this Pentecostalization of public space, the Pentecostals are using the media to propagate their own influence and pervade public sphere with a force like never witnessed before. Pentecostalization of public space, as Englund has argued, does not simply refer to the increased presence of Pentecostals in the public culture but also to their influence on style and manners of others, many of whom can be resolutely anti-Pentecostal.<sup>85</sup> This influence is not only visible with the general public but also within Islamic circles. To counteract the Pentecostal onslaught on their religion particularly the rhetoric of spiritual warfare, Muslims now, for example, organize public rallies and crusades at crowded bus-stops, market places, parks and children playgrounds or any other places where there are large crowds. Through the use of loud speakers (like Pentecostals), they preach and recite the Koran. Their preaching often seems to engage Pentecostals with philosophical debates about apparent contradiction in the Bible such as the Godhead or the trinity. The Pentecostals who heavily appropriate the Bible literally are often at lost and baffled by the Muslims eloquence and knowledge of the Bible. The Pentecostals get defensive and dismiss them as people possessed by demonic spirits. The Muslims retaliate by dismissing Pentecostals as a people obsessed with demons and the devil and this

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<sup>84</sup> Meyer, Brigit, 2004, 'Praise the Lord: Popular Cinema and Pentecostalite Style in Ghana's New Public Sphere', *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 31, pp. 92-110

<sup>85</sup> See Englund, op.cit.

# **International Sociological Association**

## ***e-bulletin***

obsession can only be explained by the fact that Pentecostals must have been Satanists themselves as their knowledge of demonic forces can only come from people who have inside knowledge of the devil and his cohorts.<sup>86</sup> They also castigate the Muslims for their obsession with polygamy and as people that esteem death more than live. In the Pentecostal understanding, the Muslim's love for death more than life is the reason why Muslim are ready to die for their religion in order to meet 70 virgins awaiting them in heaven. Because of the constant negative publicity given by the world media to violence in Muslim countries, many persons have come to link Islam with ethos of violence. The Pentecostals would not miss an opportunity to remind the Muslims that while Christ died for the salvation of mankind, the Muslims die for their God through acts of terrorism and suicide bombings. These discourses between the Pentecostals and Muslims in Kenya are not only a pointer to the suspicions and mistrust that each side holds against the other but also points to influences of one faith to the other. At the same time, such discourses have plugged the two religious traditions into public space like never before. This has heightened public suspicion of Islam and has also thrown Islam into the public limelight like never before. Pentecostal's engagement with Islam in political discourses has also helped throw Islam into the public sphere and Muslims are now propagating their interests and fighting for their rights. This has brought about discourses of human rights, minority rights, political rights and religious rights into the fore. Discourses that touch on both religions pervade media and public spaces and capture the minds and imaginations of many Kenyans. This Pentecostalization of the public sphere has increased the contest

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

and competition between various religious traditions. This was even more dramatized in the battle for Muslim votes in the just concluded 2007 general elections.

### **The MoU, Muslim Holiday Affairs, Religious Competition and the State's Politicization of Islam in Kenya**

Prior to the 2007 general elections, there was intense competition between the Party of National Unity (PNU) and ODM resulting in a fierce battle for Muslim votes. This competitive religious history has been profoundly important to Kenya's politics, especially in the just concluded 2007 general elections. Yet, this competition or the scramble for Muslim votes by politicians from the opposition and the government side not only fueled these mistrust and suspicions between the two faiths but also exposed injustices about successive regimes on the Muslims community in Kenya. As the battle for Muslim votes intensified, the ruling party and the main opposition party used Muslim concerns as a campaign issue, and this intensified further the mistrust between the two faiths. But Islam too has been rising over the years and Muslims have become increasingly involved politically over the last few years. The role that religious competition has played, coupled with state policies of non regulation of religious movements and the politicization of Islam have all helped intensify religious strife and tensions. This came out very clearly when president Kibaki dished out Islamic holidays to Muslims shortly before the 2007 general elections.

The President, in a bid to win the Muslim votes and endear himself to the Muslim community, declared two Muslim holidays as public holidays. These holidays are Idd-Ul-

# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

Hajj to mark celebration during the Muslim annual pilgrimage to Mecca and Idd-UI-Fitr celebrated at the end of the Holy Month of Ramadan. The government further announced to the Nubian community (a small largely unknown and marginalized Muslim group in Kenya) as Kenya's 43<sup>rd</sup> tribe.<sup>87</sup> During the 2007 elections, many issues that touches on the Muslim community's welfare were brought to the core, needless to say that these issues were heavily politicized and became campaign issues. These issues threw the Muslims into public space and sharply politicized the community, making it look like a religious market where people compete for the attention of the Muslim community. The state becomes an object of contest or conquests, or is easily ignored.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have tried to analyze the conflicts emerging between Pentecostal Christianity and Islam in Kenya over the last few years but more significantly since 2007. Pentecostal Christianity is one sector of Kenyan Christianity that is most contributing to rising tension with Muslims in Kenya. The culmination of these tensions seems to be the quest for the establishment of the Kadhi courts in 2005-06 and lately the allegedly signed Memorandum of Understanding between the Hon. Raila Odinga and a section of Kenyan Muslims represented by Namlef. These two issues, together with the politicization of Islam, dramatized by the scramble for Muslim votes in 2007 general elections have greatly contributed to building hostilities and further straining relations between the two faiths.

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<sup>87</sup> Kwena, Edmund & Mazera Ndurya, 'Kibaki Gives Muslims Holiday', *Daily Nation*, November 7, 2007.

# International Sociological Association

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## e-bulletin

### **Religion, Migration, and Confusion: Why Germany and the United States are so different**

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Dr. Michael Werz is a visiting scholar at the Institute for the Study of International Migration in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University and a Transatlantic Fellow with the German Marshall Fund (GMF) of the United States. He recently completed a project at GMF on how ethnic diversity positively impacts the U.S. Foreign Service and the development of American foreign policy. His research drew lessons to be learned from the American model in Germany, more specifically how ethnic communities there can add value and cultural competencies to future German and European policies. Dr. Werz has served as the director of the New York office of the Hessen Universities Consortium from 2005 to 2007. He previously taught sociology at Hannover University in Germany, and has held appointments as a public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC, and as a John F. Kennedy Fellow at Harvard's Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies. He holds a PhD in philosophy and an M.A. in philosophy, political science and Latin American studies from Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University in Frankfurt am Main. While studying for his doctorate, he spent a year as a visiting scholar in the History Department at the University of California, Berkeley. He speaks fluent English and Spanish in addition to his native German. He is widely published on the areas of race, ethnicity, and nationalism in Europe. His books include *Limits of Secularization* (in German Frankfurt/M. 2000), *Changed Perceptions of the World* (Co-Editor, Frankfurt/M. 2005), *Philosophy and Empiricism* (Co-Editor, Frankfurt/M. 2001), *A Critique of Ethnic Nationalism* (Co-Editor, Frankfurt/M. 2000), *No Critical Theory Without America* (Co-Editor, Frankfurt/M. 1999), *Anti-Semitism and Society* (Ed. Frankfurt/M. 1995), *Bosnia and Europe* (Co-Editor, Frankfurt/M. 1994). His current project, an intellectual history of race, ethnicity, and immigration in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century United States will be published in late 2008.

There are twelve million undocumented immigrants in the United States; some say, the number is closer to fifteen million. Periodically, academic and political debates grow

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

testy and polarizing as they did in 2006.<sup>88</sup> But even though the battle for and against comprehensive immigration reform in the United States (which included legal status and a path to citizenship for these millions) was fought tooth and nail, only very few opponents of the reform proposal argued on grounds of cultural resentment. Rather, their counterarguments were mainly political and social in nature: illegal immigrants break the law and should not be rewarded for their behavior and they overburden emergency rooms and public schools. Of course, there were some voices that framed the problem in terms of cultural incompatibility. Among them were such known public figures as Samuel Huntington with his memorable essay in *Foreign Policy* that began: ‘The persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages. Unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture, forming instead their own political and linguistic enclaves—from Los Angeles to Miami—and rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream’.<sup>89</sup> The essay proved how far the enclave of New England is removed from America’s reality and was so thoroughly criticized that it became a cipher for the old America as well as a bygone era of antipathy and fear.

During the late 1990s, an analogous debate gained traction on the European continent. In the Old World, one could witness the inception of an amazing and stunning dispute about European Muslims (mostly immigrants), which revived a racializing arithmetic akin to the American Nativist movement of the 1920s. Newspapers, academic

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<sup>88</sup> One of the best argued essays has been written by Jacoby, Tamar, 2006, ‘Immigration Nation’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 6, November/December, pp. 50-65.

<sup>89</sup> Huntington, S. P., 2004, ‘The Hispanic Challenge’, *Foreign Policy*, No. 141, March/April, pp. 30-45.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

journals, and books were increasingly filled with discussion papers and articles asserting that the eleven or twelve million European Muslims who, constituting but five percent of the entire population, would with their high fertility rates soon double in size. Major European cities were suggested as particularly vulnerable places. Chief among them were Marseille and Rotterdam with twenty-five percent Muslim population, Malmo, Brussels, and Copenhagen with fifteen to twenty percent, London and Paris with over ten. In addition, Europeans were reminded that Africa and the Middle East are home to 300 million Muslims under the age of twenty. In an age of global terrorism, the Yellow peril of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century had become the Muslim onslaught of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and an often heated and controversial debate set in as to how this minority could be dealt with.<sup>90</sup>

It was interesting to observe that in the United States, the debate on immigration and minorities was mostly along the lines of political principles and the rule of law. By contrast, in Germany (and other European countries) the question was framed more often as one of Huntingtonian detachment: *They* do not belong, but in case they stay, how can *we* make sure *they* assimilate? The difference between the German and American way of debating these issues has obviously to do with history. However, the reasons reach beyond the widespread notion of one being a nation of immigrants and the other being a very recent democracy. These matters do partly account for discrepancies highlighted in public and academic discussions, but some reasons originate further back into the fabric

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<sup>90</sup> For a systematic analysis of this European phenomenon during the 1990s see Tiesler, Nina Clara, 2006, *Muslimen in Europa. Religion und Identitätspolitik unter veränderten gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen*, Hamburg, Berlin, London. For case studies in France and Great Britain see Roy, Olivier, 1999, *Vers un Islam européen*, Paris.



# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

of society than commonly assumed—they also have to do with notions of continuity and homogeneity, real and imagined.

In the United States, religious pluralism and the genius of the first amendment have not only converted religious affiliations into independent and competing entities but have also dissolved the tie between church and state—resulting in religion being de-territorialized. In Europe, the legacy of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 engraved the principle of “Cuius regio, eius religio” in European societies: “Whose region, his religion.” The notion of territory, power, and religion as critical components to the formation of nation-states held supreme. It is important not to underestimate this distinction, because European secularization and American freedom of religion established very different mechanisms for dealing with diversity and minorities (religious, or otherwise). The first amendment not only deprived the U.S. Congress of the authority to promulgate laws pertaining to religion, but at the same time, transformed the latter into private and competitive enterprise. Historian Dan Diner described this process of religious secularization coinciding with the ‘transformation of pre-modern and material, traditionally-composed religions into creeds that are too internalized as well as removed from all publicness and politics, i.e. a downright privatization of belief’ on the basis of which a secular peace and legal system could be founded.<sup>91</sup> This mechanism has been an important *passé partout* for minority integration, American-style, throughout the past two centuries. In addition, American immigrants brought a very peculiar religious denominationalism with them, establishing something entirely new in world history with

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<sup>91</sup> Diner, Dan, 2003, ‘Neutralisierung und Tolerierung von Differenz’ in Herfried Münkler (ed.) *Der demokratische Nationalstaat in den Zeiten der Globalisierung*, Berlin, p. 43.



# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

its widely distributed, voluntary congregational associations that have competed with one another ever since. As Peggy Levitt shows in her recent book, religion is often practiced as individual folklore in appreciation of the multi-polar palette of American society and its indefeasible tolerance imperatives. This specific and distinct form of pluralistic faith is reflected in the relationship between religion and immigration.<sup>92</sup> It also created opportunities for immigrants to step outside their collective affiliations. This mechanism constitutes the emancipatory side of the American immigration story, for liberation from history is also an individual experience. Many who came to the New World had, for the first time, the opportunity to participate in society and free themselves from regional bonds. Americanism as an “act of choice” is not just an ideology, but also a biographical experience. By neutralizing particularities of origin and private religion, a secular society emerged in which the pursuit of happiness also encompassed being able to live a life of difference without fear. In this sense, Americanization represented the antithesis of the principle of origin. This does not imply the absence of xenophobia, resentment, and conformist pressures. But in American society these tensions are being negotiated every single day and lesions to the Universalist principles are a constant reminder that the civil rights movement and Martin Luther King so forcefully recounted; that no man is free as long as only even one man is not.

Europe’s 20<sup>th</sup> century experience is quite different. The politicization of religious beliefs in the realm of national and ethnic belonging contributed to the rise of ethno-national ideologies as a means of collective organization, mostly in its most intolerant

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<sup>92</sup> Levitt, Peggy, 2007, *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape*, New York: The New Press.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

forms to exclude and persecute. This development peaked for the first time during the Balkan Wars in 1912-13, which were fought between Christian nations and the Ottoman Empire. The struggle for control over Macedonia led to the first modern practice of ethnic cleansing, which, in this case, meant the brutal expulsion of the Muslim population. It was a conflict that included demographic warfare, which obliterated the distinction between foreign and domestic enemies. These legacies of religious and ethnic warfare were not discredited even after the terrifying experiences of the Great War. During the 1919 Peace Conferences, when states were founded and reshaped, social questions were often discussed in national and religious terms.<sup>93</sup>

It is this large scale conversion of social and political issues into ethno-national and religious essentialism that runs contrary to the United States' anti-colonial and pluralist institutions, the content of its founding documents, as well as the anti-aristocratic traditions that continue to exist in North America today. The differences were noted time and again throughout the last two centuries by many observers. 'In America, the most free and enlightened people in the world zealously perform all the external duties of religion', Alexis de Tocqueville famously wrote in 1853, 'the religious atmosphere of the country was the first thing that struck me on arrival in the United States. ... In France, I had seen the spirits of religion and of freedom almost always marching in opposite directions. In America, I found them intimately linked together in joint reign over the same land'.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Diner, Dan, 2008, *Cataclysms: A History of the Twentieth Century from Europe's Edge*, Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, see second chapter.

<sup>94</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis de, 1965, *Democracy in America*, New York, p. 154.

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

European peace was achieved upon the neutralization of denominational differences, in other words, through social standardization; and in contrast to the interventionist partiality of the Great Nation America. While European history conveys ethno-religious ballast, in American history, utopia is not deferred to the future but rather the present is seen as resource of unutilized possibilities for continued perfection. These historically impregnated mechanisms are at the core of the different traditions with regard to minorities and immigration, and they continue to impact policies as well as attitudes.

In addition, the current migration debate in Europe is complicated by the increased need for self-definition and the newly established circles of belonging after both the rapid enlargement and deepening of the European Union since 1990. During the previous forty years, the EU had been mostly an economic entity with little or no democratic legitimacy to threaten traditional national self-perceptions. Another factor is often underestimated: in recent decades, immigration to Europe and Islam were perceived as being almost synonymous. These three coinciding developments contributed to a political situation in the early 1990s in which the most basic questions of modern society, as reaction to the implosion of Eastern Europe, emerged with unexpected vigor: Who are we? Where do we come from? Who is guilty?<sup>95</sup>

The first two questions were often answered in loaded terms of ethno-national self-assurance, the latter frequently with reference to Muslim immigrants who were perceived as growing more religious and thus incompatible with European society. This alteration of self-perception is independent of *specific* groups; Muslims just were readily

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<sup>95</sup> Claussen, Detlev, 2000, 'Jargon der Einheit', in *Aspekte der Alltagsreligion*, Frankfurt, p. 181.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

available since religion became a vehicle for establishing new mode of identification and aversion.

This dynamics also builds upon Europe's belated discovery of immigrants in the early 1980s. After the oil crisis in 1973, most European governments stopped recruiting the so-called *guest workers*, but allowed for family reunification. Many Turkish labor migrants then brought their families to France, Sweden, and Germany. This meant that long traditions of emigration had become permanent and processes of cultural and social institutionalization in the new homelands finally took place. Nevertheless, many European host societies would remain in denial for another decade, pretending that they were not countries of immigration.<sup>96</sup> The "problem", if addressed at all, was broadly framed in terms of social and economic competition during the 1980s, but after the end of the Cold War, a sea change in public discourse occurred.

During the following decade, two events altered the parameters of debate in Europe: Some children of first generation immigrants made their way into European universities and acquired the intellectual and economic capabilities to produce, absorb, and promote ideas of European Islam; and secondly, the end of the Cold War sent shockwaves through Europe, affecting Western societies as much as Eastern neighbors, albeit less visibly so. A surprisingly prominent discourse about the supposed "Christian roots" of European society was inspired at a time of reorientation where an ever growing political Union, lacking the systemic enemy of communism, overwhelmed the senses and familiar life experiences of many people on both sides of the former Iron Curtain. One

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<sup>96</sup> For the German case see, among others, Chin, Rita C.K., 2002, 'Imagining a German Multiculturalism', *Radical History Review*, Issue 83, Spring, pp. 44-72.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

must not forget that long-term national identifications have been crucial to the continent's social and political formation for over two centuries. The fact that in the early 1990s, very suddenly, 12 to 15 million Muslims appeared in public sphere is quite telling. Changed awareness and the reformulation of political conflict within cultural and religious terms are more indicative of the majority society's perception vis-à-vis minorities than of the reality immigration and minorities themselves represent.<sup>97</sup> The debate about cultural incompatibility among longstanding Muslim communities in addition to the conflict about Turkey's EU membership served useful tools to creating the impression that there was still homogeneity in Europe.<sup>98</sup>

It's an irony of history that both majority and minorities seem to react in very similar ways to the political and cultural challenges of the post-Cold War era. Defining Western societies after the end of state Socialism and grasping the meaning of an ever expanding European Union was daunting, and anxiety about those challenges helped to solidify ethno-national escape routes and anti-pluralist views. This perceived dissolution of homogenizing standards of modern nation-states and the weakening of normative assumptions about belonging were especially damaging in debates on minorities and integration. The need for orientation and mental sanity demanded a new subjective grounding and individualism in modern mass society, a society that was disorienting for many, and lacked meaning and stability, which was no longer provided by Cold War

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<sup>97</sup> For example, Von Kemnitz, E-M., 2002, 'Muslims as Seen by the Portuguese Press 1974-1999: Changes in the Perception of Islam' in W.A.R. Shadid & Van Koningsveld (eds.), *Religious Freedom and the Neutrality of the State. The Position of Islam in the European Union*, Leuven, pp. 7-26.

<sup>98</sup> For different aspects of these developments see Sayyid, Bobby Salman, 1997, *A Fundamental Fear. Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism*, London; Vertovec, Steven, and Alisdair Rogers (eds.), 1998, *Muslim European Youth: Reproducing Ethnicity, Religion, Culture*, Ashgate; and Tiesler, Nina Clara, 2001, 'No Bad News from the European Margin', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 12, No. 1, January, pp. 71-91.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

ideologies. The same tendencies could be observed among members of minority communities. Since they were by definition, and often in practice, excluded from majority society, the best option was to redefine belonging and meaning in “their own” cultural terms—often connecting to presumably old Islamic customs that in truth never existed.<sup>99</sup> The root cause is the same for both: newly invented ethnic, national, and religious traditions were used to provide answers to pressing contemporary questions.

Journalists and scholars only rarely set a different tone. A vast amount of literature appeared, impregnated by culturalizing views, which helped to establish an academic discourse about the alleged resurgence of Islam in Europe that regularly developed independently of the realities in towns and cities with assimilated minorities from Muslim countries who were often as unexciting as their French, German, and Swedish neighbors. The Western presence of Islam first becomes an issue mainly because of intensified attribution from the outside since most migrants to Europe did not emigrate to settle *as* Muslims or religious refugees. Furthermore, labor migration itself is an indicator of increased secularization, documenting the emancipation from traditional mores and customs. Exclusively religious ascriptions of European Muslims as well as one-dimensional notions of Islamicization are producing a dual fallacy: continuity and homogeneity; both are misleading.

The silent homogenization of an extremely diverse community that can neither communicate nor has common interest is omnipresent. But what is the connection between a Kurdish Swede, a Kosovar Italian, and a Moroccan in Spain? How can they be

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<sup>99</sup> Roy, Olivier, 2000, ‘Muslims in Europe: from Ethnic Identity to Religious Recasting?’, *ISIM Newsletter*, No. 5, Leiden, June, pp. 1; 29.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

members of a sociological group in any meaningful sense? Furthermore, so-called Muslim communities are internally diverse and their migratory environment constantly creates new constellations. As has been argued; in London Tamils meet Kashmiris, in Finland Somalis meet Tartars, in Lisbon Bangladeshis from Saudi Arabia meet Indians from Mozambique or Mandinga from Guinea Bissau. In Berlin, followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad meet Alevi and secularized Iranians, in Amsterdam Ishmaelite from Surinam meet Sunni from Morocco. Not only does this reality undermine any notion of homogenous cultural groups, it also highlights the establishment of Muslim communities of an entirely new kind.<sup>100</sup> Other significant analytical distinctions are also often ignored. It is vital to take into account whether immigrant groups stem from educated middle classes or whether such groups do not emanate from members with interpretative skills and access to higher education. Another essential question is the existence of a colonial past, or the relationship between or in the sending and receiving society. Germany is a different case than Portugal; the British Commonwealth established a singular kind of colonialism, which is not to be compared with Belgian or French practices. Lastly, it makes a great difference whether immigrants come from Muslim majority societies or if they were minorities in their countries of origin.

Then there is the suggestion of continuity, of immigrants transporting and preserving national and cultural traditions over land, sea, and generations. The case of Turkish migration to Germany is particularly instructive to further complicate the matter.

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<sup>100</sup> This argument is developed systematically Tiesler, Nina Clara, 2008 (forthcoming), 'Muslim Transnationalism and Diaspora in Europe' in Eliezer Ben-Rafael & Yitzhak Sternberg (eds.), *Transnationalism*, Leiden; and Vakil, Abdool Karim, 2003, 'Muslims in Portugal: History, Historiography, Citizenship', *Euroclio Bulletin*, Looking Outwards, Looking Inwards, No. 18, pp.9-13.



# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

Turkish labor migrants were contracted after the 1961 Labor Force Law was enacted. The first 93 Turks arrived in Germany and were followed by roughly 710,000 others until recruitment officially stopped in 1973. The workers that came were in their 30s and 40s and many were peasants. They grew up in a fiercely secular Turkey, in the aftermath of one of the most radical and recent secularization processes implemented in 1924, which included the initiation of the Gregorian calendar, the abolition of religious courts and schools, and the introduction of a secular system of family law. Most notably was the substitution of the Arabic alphabet, basically outlawing the language and scriptures of religiosity. All these reforms were implemented at a time when many other parts of Europe were busy deconstructing their democratic traditions.<sup>101</sup> Paris was the blueprint for the modern Turkish cities at that time, further proof of how deeply connected the new state was to enlightened, cosmopolitan, and Western traditions. Kemalism, with all its archaic and authoritarian downsides, was a form of secular nation-building, a way of modernization the former multi-religious empire in which differences in creed and culture had to be neutralized.

The political pragmatism of today's ruling AK Party is a result of this history; and it has been noted that on the European continent Christian Democratic parties, which were initially opposed to liberal democracy, started participating in politics and were only then "de-radicalized in the process". These parties formed an integral part of establishing democratic regimes, which were 'often expanded and consolidated by its enemies. This lesson should not be lost, especially among those studying the challenges facing

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<sup>101</sup> Landau, Jacob M., (ed.), 2003, *Atatürk and the Modernization of Turkey*, Boulder and Leiden; also Kili, Suna, 1971, *Turkish Constitutional Developments and Assembly Debates on the Constitutions of 1924 and 1961*, Istanbul; Kili, Suna, 2003, *The Atatürk Revolution: A Paradigm of Modernization*, Istanbul.



# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

democratic transition and consolidation in the contemporary world'.<sup>102</sup> After Turkey's military coup d'état in 1980 and the growing number of asylum seekers arriving in Germany, a diverse group of scholars, writers, journalists and political activists joined the older migrants from a mostly agricultural working class. If there was any continuity, Turkish migrants in Germany considered themselves rather an ethnic community, not primarily as a religious denomination. The perception was different, though. When the German government changed in 1983, the first legislation passed was a Return Promotion Law, promising 5,000 Deutschmarks for each adult willing to return to his or her country of origin. Parliament was still in denial and the measure proved utterly unsuccessful. But it sent the clear message that labor migrants and their families were not meant to stay.

This idea only intensified when a unique competition arose after 1989 at a time when migrants found themselves in rivalry of so called "Russian Germans" that emigrated from Eastern Europe and immediately received citizenship based upon German ancestry although none spoke the language any more. Their arrival also helped to revive conservative ideologies of origin in German society at large. These developments hardened a mutual illusion, which drew borders between members of the same community that migrants were temporary guest and not members of the body politic. The obstinacy of this sustained delusion can only be understood within the singular context of German pre- and postwar history as well as Turkish modernization. With regard to Germany, the main predicaments have to do with the same notions that commonly are ascribed to Turkish immigrants: continuity and homogeneity.

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<sup>102</sup> Kalyvas, Stathis N., 1996, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe*, Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, p. 264.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

There were numerous experiences with foreign workforces in 20<sup>th</sup> century Germany but none of them was ever acknowledged as permanent. The Polish workers that migrated before the First World War were not recognized and came in an era of imperial war gains which sharpened German nationalistic self-perception during the war and then again in 1920s. During the Nazi era, the so-called “alien workers” from Eastern Europe were ruthlessly exploited and served as integral parts of an ideological project that was based upon the notions of racial superiority.<sup>103</sup> In the immediate postwar period, displaced refugees from the Eastern part of former Germany came in great numbers and temporarily produced enough labor to fill economic needs. This era had been described by historian Ulrich Herbert as an “interposed chapter” wedged between the deployment of ‘alien workers under national Socialism and the resumption of massive employment of foreign labor in the Federal Republic’. It would be too simplistic to draw a direct line between forced labor in the Nazi period and labor migration in the 1960s, but it is true that ideological remnants survived and contributed to the “guest worker” programs of the newly founded Bundesrepublik. Ulrich Herbert also points out the astonishing fact that the “alien worker” traditions of the Nazi era were never part of the broad public discourse on “mastering the past” that was initiated in Germany during the 1970s and 1980s and has since become an integral part of German political self-perception.<sup>104</sup>

However, the unmediated notion of a foreign labor force that is alien, can (and shall) not be integrated, and will return (or disappear) was prevalent into the years after the failed return promotion program of the early 1980s, which accomplished little but to

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<sup>103</sup> Herbert, Ulrich, 1990, *A History of Foreign Labor in Germany, 1880-1990*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp. 120.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

solidify the distorted picture of migration as a transitory phenomenon. Once it became clear that the migrants were in Germany to stay—less than a third even considered returning—and especially when naturalization numbers skyrocketed to 140,000 and over 180,000 after a new citizenship law was passed in 1999, did perceptions finally change.

There were three triggers and an amplifier to the perception conversion from Turkish labor migrants into Muslims by German majority society: the historical context of forced labor, the impact of German unification and European enlargement challenging traditional orientations, and the long denied fact that Germany indeed was a country of immigration all laid the groundwork. The attacks of 9/11 and the ensuing securitization of immigration debates amplified the problem and provided the semblance of legitimacy to those claims. In an age of increasing discontinuity and diversity, the Muslimization of immigrants was an awkward attempt to establish the illusion of homogeneity and continuity for Germans. A vigorous public debate ensued in which it was often suggested that immigrants were not entitled to the right of being a community of their own (as religious or sub-cultural groups) and the euphemism of a “parallel society” became extremely popular, insinuating that there was an inside and an outside to German society.

Complicating matters further is the fact that the surge in cultural and religious reformulation of political conflicts was neither unique nor limited to Germany or Europe. The mid-80s indeed were a turning point, the Iranian revolt of 1979 served as an omen of what was to come. It brought with it a swell of Islamic self-perception, a marker of global changes that were only barely visible on the horizon. The turning point was the iconic year of 1989. The end of the Cold War, the Salman Rushdie affair, Khomeini’s Fatwa,

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

and the first veil conflicts in France all exemplified new cultural frontlines in politics.<sup>105</sup>

The surge in ethnic and religious self-perception was global, from the Falun Gong in China, to Hindu nationalism, Protestant fundamentalism in the American Bible belt, Le Pen's ethnic nationalism in France, the activities of the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria, all the way to the racists Lega Nord or the movement Comunione Liberazione in Italy. However, the parallels and simultaneities are misleading since they suggest one teleological prime cause that is rooted in the most ancient of all differences: religion. Quite to the contrary, the reformulation of political confrontations and conflicts in religious terms is not only closely related to the specific context of the respective societies, it also could not be a more modern and contemporary phenomenon. The visible changes were easily misinterpreted along these lines. Ali Kettani documents that, in 1962, approximately 32 mosques existed in Europe, by 1992, the number had risen to several thousand—after a lengthy incubation period the abrupt rise started in the mid-1980s.<sup>106</sup>

It is this environment of religion, migration, and confusion that leads the German integration and minority debates into one dead end after another. The problem is more often that not framed in culturalizing terms, the recently installed German-Islam Conference by the Federal Government being a recent example. The conference is meant to develop solutions for the integration stalemate. Contrary to the recommendations of

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<sup>105</sup> This turning point is best described by Gilles Kepel. See chapter 7 in *Schwarzbuch des Dihad*, p. 234.

<sup>106</sup> Kettani, Ali M., 1996, 'Challenges to the Organization of Muslim Communities in Western Europe. The Political Dimension' in W.A.R. Shadid & P.S. van Koningsfeld, (eds.) *Political Participation and Identities of Muslims in Non-Muslim States*, Kampen, pp. 14-35.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

the International Crisis Group's task force on migration<sup>107</sup>, religious representation competes with and takes the place of political representation. Since the vast majority of immigrants with Turkish background in Germany are secular, the government's Islam Conference finds itself in danger of being overloaded with tasks for which the members have no democratic legitimacy. On the other hand it is a first step, adding an interesting layer to German politics by broadening the debate.

The countercurrent to the attempted establishment of homogeneity and continuity in times of turmoil at the expense of immigrants did not take long to come. Islamist organizations increasingly began serving as placeholders for empowerment and self-determination since most other venues were blocked. And contemporary research shows that local Islamist organizations allow for individualized notions of religiousness and also for heterogeneity within Western Islam. Also, it has been shown how patterns of non-traditional religiousness are being established, that deviate from any previous form of Muslim creed.<sup>108</sup> These developments are often portrayed as proof that immigrants consciously chose their own, culturally distinct path and muster no interest in integrating into German society.

But in the end, these new institutions and social networks of Western Islam show interesting parallels with Protestant communities in early industrial England as well as American cities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They are pivots of self-organization, which will ultimately lead their members towards the center of society much as Irish or Polish

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<sup>107</sup> *Islam and Identity in Germany*, Europe Report No. 181, Brussels, 14 March 2007.

<sup>108</sup> See Klinkhammer, Grit, 2000, *Moderne Formen islamischer Lebensführung*, Marburg; and for a review of the situation in Germany and France see Tietze, Nikola, 2001, *Islamische Identitäten. Formen muslimischer Religiosität junger Männer in Deutschland und Frankreich*, Hamburg.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

parochial organizations did in the United States a century ago. Their advantage was that they did not have to fight with the assumptions of primordial traditions and dominant cultures. America was a limitless society and in motion well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a “young country with old memories”, as Horace Kallen once put it.<sup>109</sup> He made another important point when he wrote the following sentences about immigrants: ‘They fared abroad, perhaps, not only because the land and its promise lured them, but because *they would not live at home*. ... Even if America were all one prairie, swept by a universal tornado, it is not the prairie which compels uniformities, nor the tornado that fixes the grammar of assent in which is parsed the modern American mind’.<sup>110</sup>

Germany still needs to develop such a “grammar of assent” in public discourse. The country also needs immigrants, not only because of its dismal fertility rates and the foreseeable lack of skilled labor; it needs immigration in an even more essential sense. Only once religious and ethnic diversity are embraced, will Germany and Europe be capable of fulfilling their pluralist promise. Hence, Western Islam might provide an opportunity for Europe to ultimately come to terms with its past and establish substantial religious pluralism for the first time.

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<sup>109</sup> Kallen, Horace, 1921, ‘The Life of Reason’, *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 18, No. 20, September 29, p. 538.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 540. My emphasis.

# International Sociological Association

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## e-bulletin

### In Conversation with Susan A. McDaniel

Interview by Jayme Day

*Department of Sociology, University of Utah*

Susan McDaniel is a Canadian sociologist/ social demographer with active interests in social policy. Her research is on life course, demographic aging, generational relations, family change and the social impacts of technology. Since August 2007, Prof. McDaniel is based as Professor of Family & Consumer Studies and Senior Investigator at the Institute of Public & International Affairs at the University of Utah. Prior to moving to the University of Utah, Dr. McDaniel had spent her entire career, indeed her entire adult life, in Canada. She has taught at the Universities of Alberta, Waterloo and Windsor. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada (the highest honour Canada bestows for academic achievement and excellence) and the recipient of many research and teaching awards. She has been given Distinguished Teaching Awards by the Universities of Waterloo and Alberta. In 2002, she was awarded the University Cup by the University of Alberta for a career record of excellence in both research and teaching. She is an advisor to governments in Canada, the UK and the EU on social statistics, social policies, science/technology and innovation policies and official data collection. She is presently the Director of the Social Sciences Division, Royal Society of Canada to which she was elected in 2007. She has served as the President of the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association and the Canadian Population Society; and as the Vice-President (Publications) of the International Sociological Association. She was the editor of the ISA journal, *Current Sociology*, for a five year term and prior to that she served as the editor of *The Canadian Journal of Sociology*. She is currently on the editorial boards of many journals including *The British Journal of Sociology* and *The Journal of Sociology*.

Prof. McDaniel is the author of eight books and research monographs and almost 200 research articles and book chapters. She is a frequent keynote speaker at national and international conferences. She is currently the Principal Investigator of a research project on *Income Inequalities in Canada and the US: Implications for Later Life Health Risks* funded by the Canadian Embassy in the U.S.; Co-Investigator on a research project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) on *Social Engagement in Mid-Life*, and another research project funded by SSHRC on *Intergenerational Poverty*. She also leads the Executive Group *the Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Population Change and Life Course*, funded by SSHRC (\$2.1milCAN). Her recent publications include, among others,

- McDaniel, Susan (ed.) (2007): *SAGE Major Work on Ageing/Gerontology*, Vol. I – IV, London, UK: Sage.



# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

- McDaniel, Susan (with Paul Bernard) (2006): 'Broadening the Conceptual Ambit and Policy Utility of Life Course', Human Resources and Social Development Canada.
- McDaniel, Susan (with Paul Bernard) (2007): 'Life Course as a Policy Lens', Human Resources and Social Development Canada.
- McDaniel, Susan (2007): 'Why Generation(s) Matter(s) to Policy', Policy Research Initiative, Privy Council of Canada.
- McDaniel, Susan (2007): 'Pensions, Privilege and Poverty: Another "Take" on Inter-generational Equity' in Jacques Veron, Sophie Pennec and Jacques Legare (eds.), *Age, Generation and the Social Contract: The Demographic Challenges Facing the Welfare State*, Berlin: Springer, pp. 295-315.
- Rozanova, Julia, Herbert C. Northcott and Susan A. McDaniel (2006): 'Seniors and Portrayals of Intra-generational and Inter-generational Inequality in the Globe and Mail', *Canadian Journal on Aging*, Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 373-386.

Jayme E. Day is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Utah. Her research focuses on the social and structural determinants of health and health care policy for the homeless. She has recently completed her Masters on the impact of different social domains on adolescent mental health.

Audio: <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/repository/binaries/audio/McDaniel.mp3>

Jayme Day (JD): How did you come to Sociology?

Susan McDaniel (SMcD): It's a funny story. I wasn't going to be a sociologist. I was going to be an engineer because I was interested in mathematics and science, and thought engineering would be just the thing. So, I was interviewed by a number of engineering schools. They said, 'Well, we don't have very many women and no facilities for women'. They did not have women's washroom facilities in the engineering buildings in those days! I then decided that maybe I wouldn't be an engineer. Instead, I went to a state university, the University of Massachusetts, and took mathematics. The first mathematics professor I had there was ghastly, so I decided that I would take a course in demography



# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

which was sort of mathematical, I thought. That got me into sociology, I never did take an introductory course in sociology, which is curious because I have three degrees in Sociology (one in social demography but still part of sociology) and I taught it for many years at the University of Waterloo; and one of my early books, *Social Problems Through Conflict and Order*, co-authored with Ben Agger, was used as an introductory sociology text at several universities. So, I got into Sociology by accident. But, I love it, and think I was born to be a sociologist.

JD: That's great. You have spent almost all of your career until the past year in Canada. Do you see a distinctive Canadian Sociology? What makes it distinct?

SMcD: I very much see a distinctive Canadian sociology. I don't think that I saw it as fully as distinctive until I moved almost a year ago to the United States. As I became more and more involved in international sociology, I noticed more Canadian sociologists on international stages than the population of Canada might suggest there should be; so I asked myself what was going on. There are a number of things. First, the two heritages, the two cultural ancestries in Canada, the French and the English, have very different intellectual traditions in sociology and in social sciences; so that means that we from Canada get double representation on the world stage. But, there is something else going on that I began to realize, not just when I relocated recently to the United States, but quite a few years ago. Canadians were pioneers in post-colonial sociology. We have people like Harold Innis, for example, who wrote about the fur trade. He wrote about the heritage of the fur trade of course, but also about the notion of the relation between the

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

material world and the culture and social organization of the fur trade. In many ways, he was a pioneer in explicating that relationship. And Marshall McLuhan (of “the medium is the message”), of course, was a Canadian as well. We have all these extremely important and very insightful Canadian sociologists who have led to the enrichment of Canadian sociology and sociology worldwide. Our contributions are both cultural, to cultural studies for example, and coming from the strong literary traditions, and also empirical, but not as rugged empirical as sociology is in the United States. We have a variety of methods and that seems to be very well accepted in the international realm. So, yes, I do think that there is something very distinctive about Canadian sociology.

J D: What propelled you to move to the U.S. and to the University of Utah in particular?

SMcD: It's very interesting because in my career, I have had several offers to move to the United States. I have always said, 'No, no, I'm not going to the United States. Don't want to do American research'. But, this offer was different. The reason why was two factors. One was stage in career. I am established enough that they are not going to make me over now. Besides, I don't want to start doing American research, except comparatively, as I am doing for one of my large projects now. So many Americans do American research and do it well, so why would I try? The other thing about this position was that it was in international public policy. That's what I do, so it was very compelling and exciting. Here at the University of Utah, there is all kinds of policy research being done, in all corners of the world really. My corner is the developed world, which had not been strong here, except for a focus on the U.S. of course. There is a lot of work on

# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

China, and now Africa and the Middle East to some extent. But, Europe and the settler societies, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and the EU and Japan that weren't the focus much here. That is what I brought. And it seems to be very popular. My project in Japan is growing bigger now, and I am doing some interesting comparative research. And I am happy here. I like it. It is a spectacularly beautiful place to live and work with the mountains at the doorstep.

JD: Tell me a little about your current research and work?

SMcD: My current research is going in multiple directions. I am always multi-tasking. I have a project going on income inequalities in Canada and the United States, which I am hoping to broaden to either population samples in each country rather than survey samples, or broaden it to other countries. The idea in that research is to look at how population health in the later years is affected by broadening income inequalities, which are now, in the United States in particular, even bigger than they have ever been in history, including in the 1920s. It's an astounding phenomenon. And of course, right now, the United States and Canada are diverging greatly in terms of social security and the way in which people can control their own lives, i.e. the housing crisis, insecurity about jobs and health care. This is trickling out very rapidly, particularly amongst those in the middle years of the life course. Whereas in Canada, the Canada Pension Plan has been reformed and is estimated to be secure now for the next 77 years. Jobs are, for the most part, more secure, although there are pockets of insecurity in manufacturing for example. The deficit has been solved. There is public health insurance. Canada is not

# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

fighting a war in Iraq that is costing billions of dollars. So, the divergence between the two countries is widening greatly. I am very excited about the qualitative part of this research which is going into the field in September 2008. We are interviewing people in the two countries as they look forward to their own later years, but also those of their children or younger relatives. It could be very exciting since it is quite a momentous time.

I am also doing life course research. I am leading a suite of studies, a bouquet of six studies, to see how life course can be applied as a policy lens. We are finding some really interesting things with respect to homelessness, aboriginal people and the degree of social participation over the life course and how that varies. There are fascinating findings on income over decades which shows that when you consider how occupations have changed and the educational premium for an occupation, and how much that has changed, you discover that when immigrants are jumping into that occupation, it's not necessarily the social or human capital that they do or do not bring with them, but it's rather that they are jumping into an occupation that their qualifications, no matter what they are, do not give them the same premium as in the past. That is true for Canadian-born as well. So, we are finding that the challenge is not that immigrants are coming now from different source countries than in the past. It is an interaction between what they bring and the credentialing process and the degree to which they are rewarded for what they bring to an occupation. The occupations themselves are being reskilled and deskilled. It is fascinating when you look at policy phenomena diagonally across life courses rather than straight on in cross-sectional perspective that you see things very differently. And of course, the policy implications are very different too. So, we are very excited about this research and its prospects for policy. In July 2008, we are holding a

# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

number of sessions on this work at an international conference in Costa Rica, in San Jose. People will be coming from all over the world, so we are hoping that this will be an exciting adventure that could propel the research further. Those are two dimensions of current research. I could mention others but in the interest of time, I'll stop there.

JD: You have been an active proponent of knowledge mobilization, i.e. making sociological research useful, before it was popular in research councils. How do you see that working at present?

SMcD: This is a very interesting process. Let me talk on two levels. I am very involved in that effort now. In early June in Vancouver, British Columbia, I participated in a number of sessions, sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, on knowledge mobilization. My sense is that that Research Council is really leading the world in this. They have produced a volume on knowledge mobilization that was actually led by two Americans, one of which worked in the U.S. Military, with a lot of support and input by SSHRC as a co-author. What they essentially do in the book is to focus on how you can make social science knowledge talk. When you are looking at a molecular pathway, for example, as with the knockout mouse invented by the Nobel Laureate, Mario Cappechi, here at the University of Utah [always evokes to me a mouse in boxing gloves!], where you can control one aspect of a gene and then search for what happens in other areas; we can say out loud that we are searching for useful knowledge. But then, we have this strange viewpoint about social science research as not being useful. Well, we have to strut our stuff and say our knowledge is useful. And then, we

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

must do our homework and trace how our knowledge is/has been useful. We can say then that this was discovered and this is the way it is being used, etc. We must do this, even if our discoveries and uses of that knowledge were unintentional and when we designed the research, we had no idea where it would lead or what would happen.

A lot of people worry about whether granting councils may say that useful knowledge must be found or sought in order to be funded. I am not so afraid of that, but we must be attentive to the possibility because some people see it this way. But, I tend to think that it could be very good for us in social sciences in terms of funding and attracting people to the discipline of sociology specifically, if we could say, this is the impact we have had; this is what we have done.

That's one level; the other level on which I want to talk about knowledge mobilization is a kind of personal excursus, I guess, on how I saw this happening. It is a funny kind of story because when I was first doing research as a young researcher, I had no idea that my research would be useful. I didn't think about that. My goal was to get funded, published, get a job, get tenure, try to make research intelligible to students and all that you are supposed to do. Then I found, when I wasn't looking, that all these people in government were calling me, saying 'I found this research you did very interesting. Could you come and develop it with us and talk about how it could be useful for policy'. Well, I almost fell over! I had no idea! I never set out to make my research useful. I had never thought that way specifically. And, when I won – I don't remember which research award it was, but it was one of them – I was asked to write a paper and then give a major talk about my career and my research and how it all worked. And I found that I was looking at myself and my own career for the first time as if I was social science data!

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

Guess I had been too busy doing it, but I had never looked at what I was doing. I started looking at my own example as if I were a research subject. When I looked at my own life course, I began realizing what some of those connections were, and how, quite inadvertently, I had made that research talk and walk. And to me, it was a flash of light that I hadn't seen before. Many of the research topics I had pursued which I had picked up like you might pick up lint, I realized had come from the questions of policy makers. It is not as if they phoned me and said, 'We have something we want you to test-kitchen'. It was rather that I became very interested in how we can make people's lives better and that is what policy people wanted. They wanted it within a framework and the ones they had didn't do what they wanted. That is how I got into life course as a policy lens. So often in policy research, you are comparing aboriginal people with non-aboriginal people, wealthy people with poor people. The goal always seemed to me at least, under that paradigm, how can we make aboriginal lives more like non-aboriginal lives; how can we make the lives of the poor more like the lives of the non-poor, make homeless lives more like non-homeless lives, and so on. Well, that's ultimately futile because what you are trying to do is figure out what characteristics of those people in whatever category of disadvantage they fall in, that you have to work against to bring them into that other category. It is really fundamentally impossible to do that in a policy paradigm or any other because they become too disadvantaged through the processes of becoming disadvantaged. Those processes are cumulative such that it is impossible to intervene sufficiently to pull them into the desired category. No matter what policy interventions are used, you have to be able to see what those doors are, those snags, those places through which they walked, and then you can see how you can prevent them from

# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

happening, or prevent them at crucial points from getting worse. That is how policy can make a difference. It has to be a trajectory over time. You cannot just say policy will try to make this group into a more advantaged group. It must be recognized that there are processes over time. So, life course is really the only way for social policy to go. I know I sound like an evangelist, but it truly is the only way to go forward with policy. In the study of homelessness in the suite of studies we did, we found that quite clearly – a snap, a crisis, at any point, can be the door through which you can't go back. It is like a revolving door that goes forward and forward, carrying you with it, no matter what you do. Unless you solve the problem immediately at the time of eviction, at the time of a mental health crisis, at the time when you are booted out of the family home at 17 for doing something like staying out late or something, the problem worsens. If you are 17 and cannot get a job, you seek a roommate and the roommate doesn't pay their share of the rent, and then they throw you out of the rental place, and it goes downhill from there. You have to intervene at that crucial moment when the crisis occurs. And the joy of it is that that intervention costs very little money compared to trying to solve the problem down the pike when the disadvantage has accumulated to such an extent that it is virtually impossible to intervene in any meaningful way. So, I really am convinced that shifting the paradigm matters more than the quality of a policy and all the evaluations in the world of that policy. So, a lot of my work has been on paradigms, on conceptual frameworks, particularly the work that has been used by policy. The goal is to try to shift the way we see things, rather than to shift the way we do things. That has been quite fruitful, so I am optimistic that life course, even though there is some resistance to it, that we can change the way we do some policies. The European Union is keen on this



# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

approach and some in Japan are keen. So, we will see where it will go, but I am excited by it.

JD: One last question, if you could define or circumscribe sociology, how would you see it?

SMcD: OK. You know, I remember teaching introductory sociology which I haven't done for a number of years but I really liked it. I remember that I never started with definitions. I always started with the notion of trying to understand better what you think you already know because you have lived to X age, and you think you understand the rules but you really don't. So, what I would try to do is something very different. Some of them loved it, others didn't and some loved it only afterwards. I would set them up by showing them something that they thought they understood – like dating or elevator behaviour or some such – and then pulling the rug out from under them, and showing them the way it really works. So, I tried to do that in my own understanding of sociology as well. I tried to say if you are surprised, this is how it works in a counterintuitive way. When I first got interested in social demography, that is why I was interested, intrigued really. You can imagine the counterintuitive notion of saying that population aging is caused by careful family planning. You can imagine little babies sitting in a nursery somewhere say, ah ha, if there are fewer and fewer of us, we could cook up a problem for policy makers in the future. It is counterintuitive. It doesn't quite connect, but that is the way it actually works – not the scheming babies of course! And so, to me, sociology has all those counterintuitive insights. And that is what is really exciting to me, the discoveries of the unexpected. The image I use for sociology is not a definitional one at

# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

all. It is an image I came across in an old National Geographic. I remember this image so vividly because it was an Appalachian man, his name was Festus Bourne. He said to the interviewer – he was a duck carver, carving ducks out of wood – and I remember the interviewer saying to him, ‘Festus, how do you know there is duck in there – the block of wood?’ He replied, ‘Well, I carve and carve and eventually I find that there is duck in there somewhere!’ That is what I do with sociology. I carve and carve and then I find a duck in those big blocks of seeming impenetrable pieces of wood, and eventually, the ducks form a row.

JD: That’s great. Thank you so much.

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# International Sociological Association

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### **Existential Choices faced by Sociologists-in-Training**

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Justin lee is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is alumni of the Department of Sociology of the National University of Singapore and is currently a teaching assistant there while writing his doctoral dissertation. His current research examines the technical conditions necessary for generating progressive research programs in sociology.

As Masters students in the National University of Singapore, we were advised to apply to American universities if we were interested in pursuing our PhDs, and so we did. But we did this naively. The strategy was simple: we obtained the latest U.S. News rankings of sociology departments, picked out a few top universities to apply to (can't win the lottery if you don't buy a lottery ticket); a smattering of respectable middle tier ones (here, since we already compromised for prestige, we considered extraneous factors such as the livability of the cities); and finally some lower tiered schools (just in case). Of course, the problem with this naive and simplifying approach is that such rankings are crude and often completely inaccurate indications of the likelihood of acceptance. The likelihood of acceptance depends on funding availability, size of department, match between faculty's research interests, and the cohort of students who happen to apply that year, etc., many of which do not indicate one's intelligence; but every rejection letter received still hurts.

I thought to myself at the time that I would be perfectly happy doing a program in any school that wanted me; because I really wanted to do sociology professionally, and it

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

had seemed perfectly plausible to do good work in a school that was not top notch. There were enough exemplars of famous and respected academics in poorly known schools that I could invoke as personal justification in the event that I got into a lower ranked school. Fortunately, I was accepted into a good department; fortunate not because of the prestige, but because of the rigorous training regime that kicked me into shape. The formal program gave me enough substantive knowledge to be a practitioner, while the tacit knowledge gleaned informally gave me crucial analytic skills. The professional socialization process also instilled in us the twin engines of academic productivity: fear and guilt. Before graduate school, I never imagined I could be capable of doing so much work; now, I fret about how little I do all the time.

While the formal training was demanding, it was also “simpler” because one *merely* had to worry about getting good at whatever it was one was training for. What was more disconcerting was the realization that I had to make existential choices between what *kind* of sociologist I wanted to be—which, given the penetration of our professional lives into our private identities, was in effect, deciding on what kind of *person* I wanted to be.

### **Scientist or Activist? Elitist or Populist?**

I know of people who enter graduate training in sociology, hoping to gain some academic armamentarium for some social cause they hope to advocate. These activists quite quickly realize that academic sociology is more suitable for analysts who study the world instead of practitioners who act in the world. Academic researchers expend almost all

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

their energies in getting things right, often working in isolation for sustained lengths of time. Activists, on the other hand, are motivated to act in order to change the world, even if they have incomplete and inadequate information. Some of these students either put their activism on the backburner while they go through graduate school, or they leave the program early on.

Unlike disciplines like psychology, we do not have an army of practitioners who translate academic knowledge in service of lay clients. For example, academic elites (researchers) run tests on the efficacy of psychotherapies that clinical psychologists (practitioners) use to counsel their patients. There is even a separate training track called the Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D) for those interested in getting practical training instead of the Ph.D in psychology, which emphasizes training in scientific research. Despite some inclination towards “public sociology”, there is no institutionalized division of labour between scientist and practitioner, and little avenue to translate sociological knowledge into useful technologies for paying clients. Fortunately, for me, my dispositions are towards research.

Most likely, the only significant place where our actions have any direct consequence to the world is in our teaching. Here, we can choose to be elitist or populist. I have met professors who dumb down the material in order to seem less intimidating, and this invariably gets appreciative student feedback. More elitist professors try to teach what is important, regardless of whether the students like it or not. I have heard stories about how some introduction to sociology classes were so difficult that students actually cried after the exams. A friend made an observation that students in engineering never negotiate with the lecturers that the material is too tough; they merely accept that it is

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

what is required of them. Why is it that in sociology, we should worry that the material is too difficult for the students? This is a rhetorical question, we know why. What we do not know is whether we should go with it or not.

There is an apparent trade-off between a populist or elitist approach: one chooses to increase enrolment or one chooses to improve academic standards. Should we care to extend sociological knowledge to a wider group of students, even if at the expense of diluting its insights? Or should we focus on cultivating a smaller group of more intelligent students who may actually go on to contribute to the discipline later? I lean towards more elitism.

Within classrooms, further decisions have to be made about what “game” to play. The definition of the situation in the classroom can be definitively shaped by the teachers, given their institutional power. But various possible games can be played (sometimes simultaneously) within that same context: 1) *Entertainment*, where teachers hope their show and tell of sociological insights are “interesting” to students; 2) *Examination*, where the teachers assess the intelligence, hard work, even the moral caliber of the students; 3) *Pedagogy*, where students learn how to do things with sociological tools. No formal instructions prescribe what games ought to be played, so sometimes we play these games habitually, merely because it was what our professors did when they taught us. However, the existential choices here become crucial for classroom experience and outcome, and deserve some deliberation. Sometimes teachers will tell you that if the class is not entertaining, then students will not be interested to learn. However, I tend to see my primary responsibility in the explication of sociological tools as clearly as possible, even if this is at the expense of student enjoyment. I also try to leave examination out because

# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

written tests can serve that function, and students stop asking important questions when they think they are being judged for competence in the classroom.

I remember in a theory class I took in graduate school where the professor set up the ground rules on the first day: She insisted that no student is to drop names in course of the discussion if he or she is not prepared to explain the ideas behind those names. I immediately respected her for it, because it was clear from the beginning that that she cared to facilitate genuine sharing of ideas and discussion, and hoped to discourage the academic gamesmanship that insecure students seeking to prove their intelligence tend to engage in.

### **Marketing or Product Development?**

I have come to despise careerists because they focus on getting ahead, and are motivated more by self-glorification than by the work itself. Unfortunately, in a competitive system that rewards go-getters indiscriminately, many of these people tend to get ahead. They expend a lot of effort in marketing themselves: by networking, establishing alliances, presenting an intelligent self in different situations. I, on the other hand, much prefer those who quietly do their work, trying to make sure they have a good product that will hopefully speak for itself.

Many of my colleagues frame academic activity in terms of its political significance, for some kind of self-interest: 'He is forming a working group because he wants to form alliances with those in power' or 'She is friendly with the professors because she needs their connections'. My disdain for politics and marketing is often

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

derided as naive. And most people will simply accept that we need to do both as a matter of practicality. But it turns out that even *this* is a moral choice and not a technical one. One hour spent on marketing or politicking can be otherwise spent on the work itself. This *is* a moral choice. We judge whether the relative significance we give to marketing compared to product development is acceptable by appealing to normative standards. But what is normal may not be ideal. I appreciate those who (much more often) choose working on the product.

### **Heroic Intellectual or Technician?**

I have attended classes with professors who use what I call the “shock and awe” method of teaching. They seem to regard themselves as heroic individuals struggling with ideas and doing battle with opponents in the intellectual field. One is “shocked and awed” by their intellectual charisma, brilliance and wit, and by implication, shamed at our own ignorance. In the process, we are inspired to work harder, in the hopes that we too can become great intellectuals one day.

There are others who do not treat academia with the same hubris. They see their role as a more technical one: attempting to simplify without diluting, clarifying grandiose philosophical issues, showing how these ideas have direct or indirect import for research. They tend to have a practical orientation to the usefulness of sociological abstractions: these are the set of tools we have inherited from sociology, and this is what you can do with them. The heroic intellectual awes but intimidates you by showing you the magic he



# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

can perform with sociological tools; the technician shows you how those tools are actually used and, in doing so, makes them less intimidating.

To be fair, it is likely that under conditions of instability in the intellectual field, heroic intellectuals who drive paradigmatic change will be celebrated, while under conditions of “normal science”, it is the technicians working to advance the program who matter more. Sociology, whether pre-paradigmatic or irrevocably multi-paradigmatic, tends to privilege heroes more than technicians. Still, I choose the technician.

Graduate school can train us but cannot teach us what ethos to have; yet this is greatly important to the respectability and meaningfulness of the profession. Many colleagues I know are typically afraid when they find out that others are working in the same area as they are, and are careful about sharing ideas or information, fearful that others might beat them to the line in publications. But this is not only indulgently self-interested but also short-sighted; it already takes so much effort to do adequate work, why are we so worried about turf? Instead of thinking, ‘Damn, someone beat me to it?’ why not ‘I’m so glad someone smart is doing this, so *I* don’t have to, and can move on and concentrate on other things’.

But lofty ideals aside, sociologists-in-training like us have other things to worry about. As young people who chose sociology out of all the other more lucrative, enjoyable and meaningful professions to invest our lives in, we are faced with great anxiety—we are afraid of *fully* embracing the profession, and our role as sociologists, in case we end up *not* being very good at it. This is because it is an exquisite tragedy to fully invest in something but only be rather mediocre at it. Hopefully we all amount to something decent enough.

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

### **It's not just about Food: Exploring the Ordinary Experience of Eating among Filipina Domestic Helpers in Singapore's Lucky Plaza**

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Even if it's just one day, at least you feel like you've gone home to the Philippines. You get to eat Filipino food and see your friends. If you go to other malls, all you'd see are locals. Here, all you see are Filipinos. It's fun!

---Ella, 26

With three decades of thriving commercialism as a mall in Singapore, Lucky Plaza has unquestionably undergone tremendous changes, both physically and sociologically. Lucky Plaza's establishment in the late 1970s was welcomed as a major enhancement to the shopping experience of individuals frequenting Orchard Road, the center of consumerism in Singapore (Ong, 1979). It was, in fact, the largest mall which provided better facilities and more shopping options. Despite the elitist pricing, it bragged choices

# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

and availability as its main convenience. Accessible by bus, Lucky Plaza showcased many shops selling jewelry, cameras, electrical appliances, clothing, antiques, flowers, and even medicines. Many of these shops have been replaced since then. Nevertheless, jewelry and camera shops remain to dominate the area. In her research, Ong (1979) pointed out that more than 75% of Lucky Plaza's shoppers were Chinese. In terms of age, more than 80% were between 15 – 34 years old. 72% belonged to the middle and upper classes, whose education and income were expectedly higher. Evidently, the posh reputation was vindicated by the target market. By virtue of its origins, there was no way that Lucky Plaza would have adopted the reputation it has today.

It was in the 1980's, when Lucky Plaza started engaging with an emerging market in the Filipino workforce – largely the Filipina domestic helpers (Wong, 1998; Zhang, 2005). Remittance centers offered the most competitive transaction fee to the Philippines, snack bars sold Filipino delicacies and cuisine, and telecommunication companies gave the best deal to call loved ones in the Philippines. Arguably, although shops remained open to the more affluent public, the blatantly targeted commercialism opened the social door of Lucky Plaza to an ethnoscape that is distinctly Filipino. Such ethnoscape is characteristically a modern phenomenon ushered in by the processes of transnational movement and economic globalization that countries such as Singapore and the Philippines are well engaged in (Appadurai, 2004). For the thriving Filipino activities inside, the mall today is endeared to many of its frequenters as “Little Manila” or “Little Philippines” (Zhang, 2005). The Filipino ethnoscape, as a ‘perspectival construct, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness’ of Filipinos in Singapore, is manifested in the interactions that the mall has allowed to flourish, or tolerated, to say

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

the very least (Appadurai, 2004: 102). Today, for the roaring Filipino culture reflected in the trade and informal gatherings that take place in it, the mall has become an ethnic quarter in itself, recognized by the public-at-large.

This paper attempts to contribute to academic understanding not by looking at Lucky Plaza from a macro vantage point yet again (for more on this, see Yeoh, 1998; Wong, 1998; Zhang, 2005). Instead, I focus on one micro-domain of the Filipino ethnoscape: the transformation of the public space of Lucky Plaza's 2<sup>nd</sup> level balcony for eating and gathering among Filipina domestic helpers every Sunday. It is a public space in the sense that such area was designed for transient movement among customers and not for monopolized relaxation.

In other words, what interested me really to conduct this research was not the fact that Lucky Plaza invites hundreds of Filipinos during the weekends in its every corner but the minute – even mundane – experience, particularly of eating, among a group of Filipina domestic helpers occupying one small area in an otherwise dizzying public setting. The radical transformation of Lucky Plaza's 2<sup>nd</sup> level balcony from a public space into an eating place on Sundays is the focus of my research.

We understand that as a social landscape, the ethnoscape is de-territorialized and ephemeral. Nevertheless, the colonization of the public space such as the 2<sup>nd</sup> level balcony for private consumption on Sundays is a process by which the ethnoscape governs a territory. What transpires within that experience is largely defined not by the physical landscape but by the ethnoscape. Interestingly, the colonization of public space for eating purposes, however momentary, is paradoxically lasting in the thought of both the in-group and otherwise. In fact, the literature on space redefinition by Filipinos in

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

Singapore is rich, usually pointing to the contradiction exhibited by the Filipino ethnoscape among domestic helpers in a supposedly elitist and high-cosmopolitan Orchard Road (Yeoh, 1998; Wong, 1998; Zhang, 2005).

Carried out as an independent postgraduate research in 2006, this sociological inquiry aims to identify the meanings attached to the supposedly ordinary experience of Filipino domestic helpers eating together in a public space privatized by them for that moment and occasion. I hope to present in this paper not only the procedures and assumptions but also the underlying motivations and value systems that govern such transformation and the interactions that transpire therein. Within that perimeter arise issues of community, identity, and social support essential to the existence and dynamism of the group neglected – quite consciously – by the very society they serve. But apart from providing some analytical statements, the paper is also incorporating reflections particularly emanating from the encounters during the data-gathering process.<sup>111</sup> Research methods include interviews, a focus group discussion, and a participant observation.

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<sup>111</sup> I disclose here that during the course of my data-gathering I realized that much has to be done to understand Lucky Plaza as a nexus of conflicts between ethnicities (Filipinos and Non-Filipinos), social class (Domestic Helpers and Upper-class Shoppers), and even gender (Female Sex-sellers and Male Sex-buyers). My informants have raised “unspoken” patterns of behavior in particular areas of Lucky Plaza at particular times of the day, which I believe have not been considered comprehensively, possibly for lack of access among researchers. This challenge calls for more research work innovative enough to access the subtle tensions and negotiations in this mall. Zhang (2005) has discussed some of these ideas rather in brief.

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

### **Lefebvre and the Production of Space**

Considering that my inquiry deals with the use of public space, I find it instructive to harness the theoretical framework articulated by Henri Lefebvre (1974/1991) in *The Production of Space* (see also Ritzer and Goodman, 2004). As I intend to elaborate further down, much of the analyses of the experience of eating I will take in this paper is influenced by a critical theoretical point of view. At this point in time, it is useful to frame the succeeding discussions with the idea that space is not to be taken as a neutral physical ground devoid of any meaning or biases on the part of its users and non-users. Following Mansvelt (2005: 56), a fruitful analysis of space must understand that it ‘is produced through consumption’, or the process by which it is utilized for particular purposes. In view of the experience of eating among Filipina domestic helpers, understanding the mundane use of Lucky Plaza’s 2<sup>nd</sup> level balcony must transcend mere physical description of the place. Hence, Mansvelt asserts the need to focus on ‘place, scale, context and spatial organization of consumption to understand how places and processes are mutually constituted... (p. 56)’. Lefebvre is convincingly insightful on this note.

As a neo-Marxian analyst, Lefebvre shifts his attention from *time* to *space*. The former, in opposition to the latter, was conventionally seen by Marxian theory as rich and full of potential for social change. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre transfers his gaze towards the crucial role of *space* in the production and reproduction of a capitalist

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

system characterized by an alienating mode of production. Hence, any attempt to launch social change must take into consideration the use of space.

To elaborate his argument, Lefebvre (1971/1994) identifies three conceptualizations of space that work dialectically and dynamically with one another: *spatial practice*, *abstract space*, and *differential space*.

*Spatial practice* involves the actions that contribute to the production and reproduction of space. Largely determining what spatial practices ought to be are the “representations of space” or ‘space as it is conceived by societal elites such as urban planners and architects’ (Ritzer and Goodman, 2004: 296). Because it is imposed by the powerful in the society, representations of space and spatial practice become one and the same in the eyes of the general public. In the language of semiotics, this is what Roland Barthes (Slater, 1997: 140) calls “naturalization,” the process by which ‘connotation turns cultural categories into seemingly natural elements of the material world’. Such “true space” becomes the standard by which actions transpiring therein are performed and monitored. Hence, even if there are “*representational spaces*” or the meanings that emerge from the actions made by the dominated consumers of space, especially those that are “underground or clandestine,” they are masked by the more powerful “*representations of space*.”

“Representational spaces” nevertheless have the potential for social change because they are essentially the “truth of space” that ‘reflect[s] what really happens in lived experience rather than being an abstract truth created by someone such as an urban planner to achieve dominance’ (Ritzer and Goodman, 2004: 296). However, if the

# International Sociological Association

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## e-bulletin

process of naturalization is far-reaching enough to influence the everyday life, then the elitist ideology is effectively taken for granted.

Although spatial practice seems to concede powerlessly to representations of space, Lefebvre offers another but similar tripartite distinction that accommodates spatial tensions: absolute space, abstract space, and differential space. *Absolute space* is synonymous with natural space which is ‘not colonized, rendered inauthentic, or smashed by economic and political forces’ (Ritzer and Goodman, 2004: 296). One can think of forests falling under this category. For being unprotected, the absolute space is vulnerable to the agencies behind the *abstract space* which is the ‘dominated, occupied, controlled, authoritarian (even involving brutality and violence), repressive’ (p. 297). Intuitively, with the exertion of power by political and economic forces in the capitalist society, the abstract space is the same as the representations of space. In addition, the abstract space itself becomes a tool for the exercise of power by the state and the ruling class.

However, despite the naturalizing strength of the capitalist ideology, Lefebvre believes in the possibility of the oppressed waking up to and working against the contradictions brought about by hegemonic use of space. Abstract space, after all the attempts to erase frictions with representational space, still creates the avenues for the marginalized to realize the pain of their conditions.

This reaction by the oppressed class leads to the emergence of the third distinction, the *differential space*, which ‘accentuates difference and freedom from control’ and restores the ‘natural unity that exists in the world’ (p. 297). Such unity is the ideal or the synthesis in Marxian thought. However, Ritzer and Goodman (2004) point out that Lefebvre has a rather limited discussion on differential space.



# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

In a nutshell, Lefebvre's project is to present the capitalist system to be hegemonic not only of things in space (the factors of production) but also of space itself. Thus, the analyst must consider the 'modes of production in space.' Through the exercise of power by the ruling class, 'space underpins the reproduction of productive and property relations' leading to a more stratified society. This being the context, Lefebvre calls for the re-production of space

in which appropriation is predominant. That is, people in concert with other people work in and with space to produce what they need to survive and prosper. In other words, they modify natural space in order to serve their collective needs....Thus, the production of space is not only Lefebvre's analytic focus but also his political objective.... (p. 298).

Here I point out that, in the context of a globalizing society, the appropriation of meaning upon space becomes a more complex matter dependent on factors other than mere social class. With social class intertwine issues of ethnicity, religion, and gender among many others, which all contribute to the way space is consumed. Appadurai's (2004) conceptualization of the ethnoscape as a fluid and physically unbounded reality clearly reflects this complexity in late modern reality.

With this in mind, I contribute to the refinement of Lefebvre's propositions. The tension between the abstract space and the absolute space that wakes up the oppressed segment of the society can create social actions flavored by ethnicity. Space is, by and large, the battleground. My analysis of the Filipina domestic helpers' supposedly ordinary eating experience in a public balcony aims to reveal the tensions and how

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

representational spaces or truths of space are created within what seems to be the safe and laidback experience of eating.

### **The Sunday Experience of Eating: Revealing the Filipino Ethnoscape**

Malls have been understood as theatres of consumption with contrived sets designed to promote a “retail drama”, as leisure spaces and as tourist attractions, as sites of collective dreaming, pleasure and diversion and as sites of “strolling” for the flaneur. The representational space of the mall is symptomatic of commodification and part of the growing intrusion of spectacle, fantasy and escapism into urban landscapes. Malls are implicated in the production of nostalgia..., carnivalesque, magic and fantasy (Mansvelt, 2005: 62).

Sunday marks the radical transformation of Lucky Plaza. While it is bustling with people on weekdays, Lucky Plaza is far busier on Sundays evidently crowded by domestic helpers. The mall is undeniably dominated by the spirit of Filipinos. Sale and promotions are advertised in Filipino, entertainment showcases are conducted in Filipino, and flyers and magazines on an upcoming concert are written in Filipino. The competition for the Filipino market among the three telecommunication companies of Singapore cannot be overstated. Each company purports to offer the longest talk time to the Philippines. The Filipino restaurants, shops, and remittance centers are up and running as well. Since many shops are not enough to cater for the Filipino demand for seats, one can expect to see clusters of Filipinos in practically all corners of the mall. That includes the 2<sup>nd</sup> level balcony supposedly wide enough for passersby and customers in the area to walk through but is obstructed by many small groups of Filipinos chatting their day away over seemingly unlimited supply of Filipino food. The Filipino ethnoscape has materialized

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

and has found its physical space in a mall originally designed for purposes other than group gathering.

When I came to conduct my observation at noontime of March 12, 2006, the balcony was very noisy however open-air it was. I decided to position myself albeit uncomfortably in one corner of the handrail. The entire stretch on the right wing was overcrowded with overwhelmingly Filipina domestic helpers so much so that it was difficult to move around without stepping on a group's mat and excusing oneself nevertheless. The shops in the area were apparently closed. There were more than fifteen groups, each one distinguishable by being seated around their respective food. In varying sizes, each group contributed to the over-all cacophony with their respective agenda for the day. One group was noticeably boisterous as they sang the birthday song for a lady who appeared to be in her late 40s. Standing up, she blew her candles and the rest of her group cheered on. The celebration was just starting for them. The group to their left was busy exchanging magazines of Avon, a company selling ladies' products through individual distributors. As it is very common in the Philippines, it is highly probable that one of them is a direct seller, doing it for additional income. Another group was busy taking pictures of themselves with Filipino men. When the camera did not work they all laughed, possibly because of having posed longer than usual. The other groups, those beyond my immediate gaze, were busy distributing disposable utensils and food among their members. It was very typical to see members more engaged in conversation than in eating. The environment, though full of life with movement and rowdiness, could also be described as laidback; many did not see the need to rush things. It was their day off from work, after all.

# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

I focused my attention on the group to my right. Although they were not aware I was observing them, it was evident that I was alone. No wonder one of their members offered her plate to me. It was a courteous offer which should not be readily accepted in Filipino rules of engagement. There were about eight of them, majority of which seemed to be in their 30s, with the youngest in her mid-20s and the oldest in her early 40s. Attire was generally casual as most in the group were wearing jeans, blouse or polo shirt, and sandals. Nothing in their attire proved to be of an expensive brand. One had her sunglasses flipped over her head. Aside from two wearing necklace and a pair of earrings, the others were straightforwardly plain in their appearance. The one in her early 40's every so often looked at her handheld mirror and retouched her more flamboyant make up. She tended to be boyish and the loudest in the group.

They were seated on a faded orange mat, with food and disposable utensils at the center as if a shrine in a religious gathering. The cuisine was typically Filipino: steamed rice, sautéed vegetables, lechon paksiw (pork stewed in vinegar), shrimp paste and pansit bihon (the Filipinized version of Chinese bee hoon). Soft drinks were Coca-cola and Sprite, the two most prominent beverages in the Philippines. I deliberately looked for a Singaporean tea drink to check whether it was preferred as a healthy alternative but to no avail. The utensils were disposable, if only to avoid worrying about dishwashing after. When someone came to join them, a paper plate and plastic spoon and fork were handed to her. The guest was asked to help herself in taking the food enough for her. She was also informed to take more if she wanted to. Filipino norms would say that the newcomer is already familiar to the rest of the group. In the Philippines, if a guest is a first-timer in a household gathering, someone would do the serving for her as it is expected that she

# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

would feel uneasy to do it by herself. I myself experienced being given Coke in a plastic cup when I introduced myself as researcher. In a matter of ten minutes, additional three joined them.

While eating, the group was engaged in conversation. It was relatively difficult for me to understand what they were talking about but I recognized they were speaking alternately in Filipino and another dialect. It was most likely Ilocano, a dialect from Northern Luzon. They also spoke in English from time to time, as colloquial Filipino is typically interspersed with English words. But when they did so, it was obvious that they have picked up the characteristically Singaporean accent – notwithstanding the use of “lah” and “aiyo” as expressions. Giggles and boisterous laughter punctuated the conversations. When another group started singing a birthday song, they acknowledged who the birthday celebrant was. This could be an indication that the Filipinos in the area knew one another at least by face. Shortly, two of them bid the group goodbye and the conversations pressed on.

The Filipino ethnoscape reflected in the experience of eating at the balcony cannot be overstated. From the choice of food to eat to the use of “Taglish” (Tagalog-English) and another dialect in communicating with one another, the rich Filipino culture is alive in a Singaporean commercial outlet. The mall that has blatantly targeted the Filipino market now has no choice but to allow pockets of Filipino gatherings in many of its supposedly public spaces despite the clear notice on the walls banning picnicking in the area.

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

### **The Experience of Eating: A Closer Look**

Through the ethnographic account above I attempted to present a glimpse of the domestic helpers' mundane reality on a given Sunday. During the rest of the week, the place is free from such gatherings. Though seemingly ordinary, the colonization of public space for private consumption is an attempt by a marginalized Filipina to assert herself in a society that deliberately neglects her. Considered as unskilled laborers, domestic helpers take up private household chores and hence occupy marginalized social status in the eyes of the State (for example, in terms of a work permit and the corresponding very limited privileges distinct from professionals) and the public (in terms of unfounded but stereotypes working against them) (for more discussion, see Zhang, 2005).

In one look, the very choice of public space as an eating place reflects the position of the domestic helper in the household she serves where she may eat only after her employers are done and may do so in her own private corner in the kitchen, and usually not at the family dining table. In fact, the use of public space for private domestic consumption parallels the experience of illegal squatting, a phenomenon among the economically deprived in many Third World societies like the Philippines. However, though it is synthetic, momentary, and vulnerable as an eating place, the balcony provides her with space wide enough to exhibit her ethnoscape: her food, her language, her fashion statement, and even her emotional state.

With this in mind, the succeeding discussion appropriately views the experience of eating among Filipina domestic helpers at Lucky Plaza's 2<sup>nd</sup> level balcony through

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

Lefebvre's lenses. I concede that any concoction of political struggle, as Lefebvre would probably want them to have, might be absent from their direct consciousness. Nevertheless, I take Lefebvre's position that the abstract space, despite the attempts to wash out contradictions in social organization, inevitably creates the conditions that allow for people to think through the status quo.

### *Defining the Experience of Eating*

Picking up from my informants and the participant observation recounted above, we can understand that *the experience of eating for the domestic helpers is a process revolving around sharing of food, fostering of relationships, and strengthening of identity*. To elaborate, the experience of eating, because of its rich meaning, transcends the mere act of eating in itself. The procedures and actions that take place *during* and *after* food consumption are culturally appropriated by its participants. From the choice of food to the choice of topics to discuss, the experience of eating reflects an ethnoscape that is distinctly of Filipina domestic helpers. I argue that the experience of eating does not end the moment they are done with the primary meal. Throughout the day, they remain gathered around food and their interactions are often punctuated by intermittent munching of leftovers. Here, one can reconsider Lefebvre's point about representational space, governed by its users' actual actions that *redefine* the meaning of the place intended by the elite. The radical transformation of Lucky Plaza's 2<sup>nd</sup> level balcony every Sunday lies in the representational space its members have come to follow and accepted as natural.

# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

By and large, Lucky Plaza is a preferred place among domestic helpers because it is thought to offer a complete range of products that cater for their needs. The availability of Filipino food, internet services, telecommunication shops, travel agencies, and remittance centers is reason enough to consider the mall as a nexus for transactions and interactions among Filipinos. Thus, the mall serves as an efficient mechanism to accomplish one's purposes for going out. This perfectly fits the ephemeral lifestyle of domestic helpers whose time off from performing house chores is very limited. For many of them, they can be out only one Sunday a month and even within particular time. All the domestic helper's objectives for the day including meeting up with friends and sending remittances to the Philippines should, as much as possible, be done in one place. Hence, the commercialist representations of space are accountable for ushering in the Filipino ethnoscape, a process which incidentally has led to the unforeseen colonization of the balcony. Worthy of note is the cultural move to make the colonization process non-negotiable, at least for that time being, by transforming it into an eating place in which the activities surrounding the experience of eating may uninhibitedly come about. Among the domestic helpers, defining the sacred perimeter is done on a "first come, first served" basis. The mat is laid down and the cooked food and utensils arranged on it.

The balcony, then, becomes a wide public space appropriated and privatized in smaller boundaries. A group is easily distinguishable from the others as members are gathered around Filipino dishes they brought to share with others. In view of this, the experience of eating is first and foremost a gathering moment that fosters and nurtures relationships. The group involves both friends and relatives, especially if the latter are present in Singapore. Geraldine, 37 years old, working as domestic helper for more than a



# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

decade now, shares that her group is composed of her aunts, cousins, a sister-in-law, and many of their common friends. With the latter pitching in, the group becomes an extended family in itself.

### *Activities*

As a gathering moment that fosters relationships, the experience of eating entails corresponding activities that allow for interaction. It is important to understand that eating as an act is central to the moment. Through eating, which in essence is about sharing the food they prepared with one another, each member is in a symbolic process that allows him to open up and share other aspects of her life. The act of eating, then, becomes a holy communion within the group; it is about building solidarity.<sup>112</sup> This accounts for the fact that on special occasions such as birthdays, the group may draw up more meticulous plans of carrying out surprise celebrations. One of my informants shares her most memorable experience with the group:

It was my birthday sometime ago. We try, but we are not able to celebrate birthdays every year. Sometimes, people can't cook or even go out. On my birthday, they said they couldn't go out. I was lonely then because I invited them. I didn't know that they actually prepared food. They said, we'll just call you up and perhaps we can meet up at the balcony. To my surprise, they prepared

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<sup>112</sup> I reckon that the sacredness of the community was a primary reason why my identity and even motives were questioned when I introduced myself as researcher to them. My intention became more suspect when I asked permission to record the conversation. After divulging much information about myself they eventually felt comfortable with me.

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

food and they sang the birthday song for me. That was my experience which we eventually did to others.

The surprise celebration is not about food per se. It is about the relationships gathered around it. Meaningfully rich, the act of bringing assigned food to the celebration is a public statement affirming one's membership in the small community. With that in mind, even ordinary days do not mean ordinary celebrations. According to Geraldine, the feeling one gets when meeting up with her group is fulfilling in itself, which is why 'even if we don't have money, as long as there's food and we meet, we're happy'. Indeed, my informants have brought up the idea that profuse humor characterizes their fellowship.

In addition, the Sunday gathering, as an eating experience, includes singing, listening to music (when one brings a portable radio), reading showbiz magazines, doing petty-businesses<sup>113</sup> and engaging in dialogue with one another. Aside from food itself, these are important elements necessarily shared among members of the group. But here, I take note that engaging in dialogue arguably tends to have a crucial role in the experience of eating. Even if they are done with the formal part of eating, they remain gathered around the food, intermittently nibbling whatever is within reach, but most of the time discussing matters concerning their private lives.

At least four themes emerge as topics of conversation for many of my informants. Discussing them, albeit briefly, reveals issues unique to the domestic helpers. For one, *family matters*, whether encouraging or troubling, are typically discussed side-by-side:

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<sup>113</sup> During my interview with Doña, the other members were busy sorting out clothes that she was selling to them. She explains that she bought the clothes from a cheaper source in order to help her friends obtain better deal for their limited money. Interestingly, money transaction was very informal. Her friends are instructed to do their own counting and "pay when able."

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

stories about children's achievements in school and alleged infidelity of the husband. Geraldine describes her situation her friends are familiar with.

I share with them my problem in the Philippines; mostly untruthful stories. I have a husband and one time, news got to me that he was fooling around. I told myself, why should I believe in others? Before I left, we promised each other that we won't believe in hearsay. What's worse is that it's our relatives that bring me the news...No, he's not irresponsible. He fills in for whatever I have missed as a mother to our kids. If I believe in accusations, my family will be affected.

*Personal life issues* are also raised, especially questions on their future plans and how much longer they plan to stay in Singapore.

Equally interesting as a topic is *love life*. But this is particularly sensitive, if only to avoid public humiliation. There is the prevalent reputation that Filipinas at Lucky Plaza engage in illegitimate sexual relations with non-Filipinos. This happens even if the women are married. This, interestingly, is a reality recognized yet carefully discussed in the group. I quote one of my informants.

If I have a "private" meeting, I will not be able to meet with them. They already know I have a "private" affair. I will be meeting up with someone. That's private....

The frequent use of "private" reflects two important points here. The more evident reason lies in my role as a stranger-interviewer. My informant assumes that without her stating it explicitly, I am able to pick up that the private meetings are of a romantic nature. As a matter of verification, I tried probing and she responds: 'If they call me up and I don't

# International Sociological Association

## *e-bulletin*

answer my hand phone, they already know where I am'. This leads me to another point. The use of the word "private" implies that though "meeting up with someone" is a sensitive topic, it is, nevertheless, known to her friends. Whether this is deliberately discussed within the group needs to be verified. Meanwhile, it can be said that this person finds confidence in revealing to the group certain private details of her life.

*Issues about employers* are also discussed within the group. The common angst they bring up mirrors the typical treatment received from their employers. I quote Vivian, 31, who makes it a point to meet regularly her friends at the balcony.

My friends know that I am not happy with my employer. I tell them of what my employer does to me when I commit a mistake. She readily shouts. A lot of work. I am still new here. My friends have been here for six years that's why they always say, 'Vivian, you came to Singapore to help your family. That's what you should think of. Here in Singapore, you need to be tough. Whatever your employer tells you, let it out through your other ear'. It's because I am sensitive. That's why I always take my employer's statements personally. I did whatever she wanted me to do until I felt my patience was being abused. I poured this out to my friends and they gave me advice.

The exchange between Vivian's sentiments and her friends' advice reinforces the solidarity developed within the experience of eating. For this, the dynamics of sharing initiated during the moment of eating facilitates a level of openness that allows for uninhibited dialogue. Whereas in eating the food being shared is good, in the dialogue process, it is openness and empathy. The experience of eating encapsulates both processes.

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

### *The Home*

All the activities surrounding the experience of eating contribute to the fact that the relationships formed at the balcony become the individual's comfort zone in Singapore.

Describing her feelings about the experience, one of my informants candidly admits:

It is much quieter here [tahimik]. Here, we are able to laugh our hearts out. No one will comment that we are sleazy, whatsoever. We can poke fun at one another; it's our simple joy, especially when we eat. No one is able to tell us that we can't eat here. After all, this is our only joy. We can be at peace here, sit in one corner. It's like our own privacy. We are free. No one asks us to leave.

We see that the "here" as the place becomes meaningful through the "we". My informant happens to be the most senior in the group; in fact, she is referred to as "doña," the Spanish/Filipino address for a wealthy lady. But in this context, she is referred to as such both in a humorous and respectful sense. Her view as a senior member of the group is insightful.

The quote too poses a seeming irony between tranquility and noise. Undeniably, the place itself is polluted with noise. But worthy of note is the alignment between "quieter", "joy", "peace", "privacy", and "freedom", words that point not to the place but to the very experience.

Another informant, Ella, 26, associates the experience with being a "second home". An analysis of the concept of "home" in the Filipino context and in view of Doña's statements can be very instructive. The idea of home or "tahanan", by virtue of its

# International Sociological Association

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## e-bulletin

etymology in Filipino, reflects the emotional assurance that the parent can give to the child when she is in distress. In other words, it is the warm and spontaneous relationships that a person goes back to: quiet, peaceful, private, assuring, and liberating. And the Sunday experience of eating reflects these attributes: the sharing of food, material, and company. Hence, the experience of eating that reflects the Filipina domestic helpers' ethnoscape becomes both a *manifestation of* and *reinforcement to* the solidarity created and nurtured within it.

Further analysis of this discourse allows us to recognize the tension between representations of space exercised by the powerful and representational space defined by the dominated. For this, the idea of “freedom” often associated with “home” can take the lead. Rowena, 27, shares her insight:

You can find a lot of happenings here. Here, you can do everything that you want. You can laugh as long as you want to. You can wear whatever you want to. You're free, in other words. You can bring your friends with you and forget the fact that you miss the Philippines. And you can also forget your problems or what not. At least for now, they're all gone.

However transient the feeling of freedom might be, it nevertheless gives them a sense of relief from two main overpowering systems: *work* and *the emotional pressure of being away from their immediate families*. Taking into consideration the past two quotes, the sense of relief (or freedom) is an outcome of the privilege of doing “anything” they want without fear of being insulted or reprimanded. Indeed, the “home” connotes the idea of privacy that allows for interactions and activities that are open only to the family, seen here in its extended form. But because a private home is far from their immediate reach,

# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

the public space that is tolerant enough to accommodate them is colonized. The belief that such a perimeter is home to them at that particular point in time intuitively determines the kind of experience of eating celebrated therein.

Through the topics of conversation, the use of particular dialects, and the choice of Filipino dishes, among many other considerations, the ethnoscape that in essence characterizes the experience of eating can now be understood as a form of representational space created and defended by the domestic helpers. It is an attempt to set the boundaries between the group and the limiting social organization they have been contracted to serve. Another informant elaborates:

We are free in the sense that the things you can do when you are with your employers are different when you are with your friends and relatives. With your employer, your freedom is limited. You don't expect anyone to help you in your work. But when I am with my friends, though we meet infrequently, I feel light and free.

Furthermore, the fact that the moment is shared among domestic helpers who can understand and relate with one another fosters the “we-feeling” that this is a family. As Riza, 33, would point it out, ‘we are Filipinos and yet we won't even bother befriending other Filipinos. How can that be?’ Though the experience is brief, they are able to enter a “home” where relationships are considered filial and sustainable. Needless to say, doing “anything” is governed by the principle of solidarity among friends who consider themselves relatives: eat, laugh, talk, wear casual clothes, celebrate, and even cry.

### **The Experience of Eating as a Weapon of the Weak**

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

Through the experience of eating, the members' identity as domestic helpers is functionally taken out of them as they are momentarily free from any household chores and panoptic supervision. But, ironically, in the very same experience, their identity as such is reinforced as they meet in groups and share a common ground. The mall's reputation associated with domestic helpers explains why many professional Filipinos are wary about being seen at Lucky Plaza especially on a Sunday (Zhang, 2005).

Nevertheless, we understand that *solidarity* (through the relationships) and *identity* (as Filipina domestic helpers) are fundamental qualities of their ethnoscape that mutually reinforce one another in creating a representational space in Lucky Plaza's 2<sup>nd</sup> level balcony. However, such a representational space does not necessarily seek to overthrow the social system in itself but merely to give themselves space to breathe in and exhibit their ethnoscape.

But the abstract space, actualized by the elite's representations of space, does not allow this to flourish without tension. Following Lefebvre, the powerful sector of the society that wishes to assert itself and eradicate whatever representational space that emerges is seen in the reaction of some of the employers and the commercial establishments in the balcony. For one, the employers assert their authority over the domestic helpers by trying to define their behavior when they go on their day off.

Sometimes my employer says, 'ah, you look pretty today ah!' I would say, 'Of course! It's our day off! Our business is none of your business'. It's because they have the tendency to think that we are like the other Filipinas who just look for boyfriends in the place. But it's not always like that. That's their life. Not all Filipinas are the same.



# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

The disjunction lies in the misplaced perception that the domestic helpers lose their morals once they are out in the open (see also Wong, 1998). But even more interesting is to consider the reaction by some of the commercial establishments in the area. One of my informants recounts her experience:

You can't stay in that part of the balcony [referring to the space in front of a boutique]. If they see people staying in front of their office, they will spill water all over the place, pretending to clean the glass door.

The reaction of the powerful recognizes the fact that a representational space, however mundane, is trying to challenge the "true space" that, as I have explained in the previous sections, is commercialist in nature. And such tension is arguably reflected in the experience of eating among my Filipina informants. The literature on the tension and the negotiations that arise between Filipinos and the elitist power of Orchard Road is rather rich (Wong, 1998; Zhang, 2005, Yeoh, 1998).

Bearing this in mind, one can consider the colonization of public space for the experience of eating as a "weapon of the weak" (Scott, 1985: 29). The seemingly safe choices made with regards to their food, attire, activities, and topics of conversation are in essence forms of "individual self-help". This attitude is adequately encapsulated in the response of one of the participants in my focus group discussion:

Ah, we don't care about what they [employers and establishment owners] say. That's their world, this is our world.

# International Sociological Association

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## *e-bulletin*

Lefebvre argues that the very creation of the abstract space by the ones in power to wipe out local activities ironically paves the way for tensions. The commercialist nature of Lucky Plaza has targeted the Filipino market. However, little did it possibly know that such a market will come to colonize major sections of the mall, in this case, the balcony. The bill on the wall prohibiting picnicking in the area is deliberately neglected.

To Lefebvre, representational space is full of potential in effecting social change because it is characterized by collective action. It, however, becomes powerless when ideology or representations of space are naturalized into unconsciousness leading to unquestioning acceptance of its boundaries. In the case of Filipina domestic helpers at Lucky Plaza's balcony, the experience of eating is composed of activities that, in one way or another, deliberately reject the capitalist representations of space in the person of their employers and the commercial enterprises. The common thread running through the assertions of employers and entrepreneurs in the area essentially wants to state their behavioral limitations. The representations of space demand that the domestic helpers behave as such – submissive, plain, and timid.

In response, without seeking reform through their actions, the domestic helpers create a representational space that allows them to exercise the Filipina domestic helpers' ethnoscape in a rather narrow perimeter. To a large extent, then, the representational space, that is the ethnoscape of Filipina domestic helpers' characterized by solidarity and identity, is a coping mechanism that the capitalist abstract space would wish to eradicate. Interestingly, the domestic helpers deal with such assertions on a calculated manner. In this sense, the experience of eating is a weapon of the weak. Although Scott (1985: 29-30) admits that '[t]hey are unlikely to do more than marginally affect the various forms of

# International Sociological Association

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## e-bulletin

exploitation', the experience of eating manifests the domestic helpers' awareness of their current conditions. The mundane activities of eating, singing, laughing, celebrating birthdays, and chatting mutually form and reinforce their identity and solidarity as Filipinas far from loved ones and contracted to serve in somebody else's household. From Lefebvre's point of view, the radical transformation that Lucky Plaza has witnessed through the years and the spontaneous experience of eating among domestic helpers are symbolic of the same tension between true space, the way the elite wants it, and the truth of space, the way the oppressed does it. To him, this lays the foundation for a potential differential space where class differences are ideally abolished.

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# **International Sociological Association**

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## ***e-bulletin***

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