

Mieke Groeninck

Hardship as Opportunity

Through my ethnographic research on Islamic religious knowledge transmission for lay adults in three mosques and three Islamic institutes in the region of Brussels, I have been regularly confronted with themes such as suffering, compassion, as well as social and personal responsibility. These courses in Islamic sciences can be situated within the field of Islamic revivalism, which focuses on a pious personal reform through the incorporation of specific ethics and virtues. A pious behavior in reaction to one's own and other's misfortune belongs to human's 'domain of well-doing' and ethical self-formation. However, whereas previous research has approached this ethical praxis as a process of reasoning that takes into account not only one's self, but also the larger society's well-being (Jouili 2015: 18), I tend to expand this approach by elaborating on the ontological status of suffering in the subject/Divine axis as well. This allows me to focus on what Amira Mittermaier has called an ethics of passion, wherein suffering is perceived as a situation of being acted upon (Mittermaier 2010). By focusing on how personal and diverse others' suffering is enacted, understood and reacted upon, new possibilities for agency, or for the development of a specific form of agent, emerge (Asad 2003: 79-91).

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