

that pervades contemporary Asian and Australasian societies. Rising levels of education amongst Muslim women in the region have made more and more forms of cultural production available to them, and have also made participation in the media, magazines, and popular literature both desirable and easier.

The availability of access to popular cultural genres in the Asia-Pacific region, as both producers and consumers, has consequently greatly expanded the roles of Muslim women and is leading to the redefinition in practice if not theologically of the concepts of *izzat* (respect) and *sharafat* (honor) in which, as Anita Weiss (1994) cogently argues, the role of women is pivotal. Popular culture in the Asia-Pacific region as a consequence is a major vehicle for Muslim women to renegotiate understanding of gender, agency, sexuality, selfhood, and social roles in the context of either modernizing Muslim majority societies, or societies in which Muslims of both genders are small minorities, and in which the media, music, and fashion prove to be essential mechanisms for the emancipation and self-understanding of Muslim women, and for the globalization of Islamically informed genres, which increasingly penetrate the non-Muslim sectors of societies as diverse as Japan, Australia, and Taiwan.

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### Tanzania

In East Africa, Tanzania stands out as having the highest proportion of Muslims, and a particularly vibrant and creative performance culture including improvisational theater, *taarab* music, dance music, and Swahili hip hop.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In Tanzania, popular culture has always been important for political mobilization. In the late 1950s, the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), the political party fighting for indepen-

dence, invited Bibi Titi Mohammed to become a member of the Central Committee. Bibi Titi Mohammed was the leader of a famous *ngoma* group, and she recruited members to the party through her *ngoma* networks (*ngoma* denotes local African musical events, including dance). Dance gained a central role in the cultural policy after independence in 1961, particularly after the country became a one-party state. The explicit goal was to unite the more than 130 ethnic groups as well as the Muslim and Christian communities. At all schools, public institutions, and state owned factories, dance troupes were established. They performed neo-traditional *ngoma* with lyrics in Swahili propagating the socialist *ujamaa* policies and praising the political leaders. In the early 1980s, independent commercial cultural troupes were formed in Dar es Salaam, performing in social halls and bars around the city. Significantly, the performers as well as the audiences at these shows cut across ethnic and religious divisions. The groups, numbering more than 40 in the 1980s, were modeled on the state-sponsored troupes, but quickly developed new genres. The new cultural forms avoided state control and focused on the challenges and moral dilemmas of the urban masses who frequent their four-hour long shows. The two most salient genres that came out of this cultural creativity were Swahili improvisational drama and popularized *taarab* music. Gender relations are of central concern in both genres, and in *taarab* in particular, Muslim women are pivotal in performance and participation.

#### SWAHILI IMPROVISATIONAL DRAMA

The commercial cultural troupes developed two separate theater genres based on existing forms. The first was *vichekesho*, comedic skits inspired by Zanzibari forms and Western silent films. The second form was *maigizo*, one-hour plays inspired by school and church theaters. Some groups use written play scripts, others short synopses. In both cases, actors are expected to improvise. In the course of rehearsal and production, a play may change content and message entirely on the basis of the actors' improvisation and audience response. In this way, the theater becomes an arena for discourse, a place where actors and audiences not only reflect upon their lived reality, but also constitute it. A major theme within Swahili popular drama is greedy relations, and women are often portrayed as greedy and treacherous. A closer look reveals that women are used as powerful tropes when addressing moral dilemmas concerning the conflicting demands of the core family versus the extended family, as well as class relations. The plays may

appear conservative, but speak with many tongues, constantly negotiating state feminism and traditionalist gender roles. Female members of the audience sometimes interpret the plays differently from how the male scriptwriters intended. By rewarding the actors, among them “misbehaving” women, they communicate their own sympathies and interpretations. When television broadcasting was introduced to mainland Tanzania in 1993, Swahili drama gained a new arena. In this new medium, however, the direct communication with the audience was lost, and the television companies proved far more conservative in terms of both style and content. While it is a generic convention of live comedies to end in chaos and confusion, the television directors wanted order and reconciliation. The television version of *maigizo* also lost their burlesque, comical form. One reason may be that comedy is only too well suited to contest power.

#### TAARAB MUSIC

*Taarab* music, a form of sung poetry, has its historical roots around 1870 when the Sultan of Zanzibar, eager to develop a new court culture, sent a musician to Cairo for musical training. After his return, he organized and taught a small musical group that performed for the sultan in his palace. This elite band provided the model for the popular string musical clubs that developed in Zanzibar in the late nineteenth century (Askew 2002, 109). Today, a number of sub-genres exist. Orchestral *taarab* is performed by large orchestras consisting of mainly male musicians. Originally, the singers were all male as well, but in the 1920s Siti Binti Saad revolutionized *taarab* by becoming the first female singer and performing in Swahili. The lyrics of orchestral *taarab* songs are romantic and usually composed by men, but the most famous singer within orchestral *taarab* today is a woman, Bi Kidude. *Kidumbak* is an Africanized version of *taarab* with close connections to *ngoma*. “Women’s *taarab*” (*taarab ya wanawake*) is a form that bridges the former two (Topp Fargion 2000, 39). Tourist *taarab* is performed by small ensembles playing on acoustic instruments. Popularized *taarab*, the version which we focus on here, was developed in the mid 1980s by the commercial cultural troupes in Dar es Salaam, which incorporated it into their variety shows. In popularized *taarab*, classical string instruments have mostly been replaced by electronic instruments, *ngoma* rhythms have been incorporated, and the music has become more danceable. Above all, popularized *taarab* songs have adopted the *mipasho* (backbiting) lyrics of women’s *taarab*. The songs, often composed by men but performed

by women, use abusive language with explicit sexual metaphors to criticize rivals. The songs offer a possibility for women to express in public feelings that they often have no other acceptable way to voice. Through gifts of money to the singer and dramatized dancing, female members of the audience make the songs their own.

With the onset of multipartyism in 1992, the ruling party decided to establish its own cultural troupe, modeled on the existing independent groups. The group was named Tanzania One Theatre (TOT). Since popularized *taarab* had become the most favored item of the variety shows of the commercial troupes, the party decided to focus on this genre. In contrast to the songs accompanying neo-traditional dances, TOT’s *taarab* songs do not have a political content, but follow the *mipasho* formulae. As the state capitalized on *ngoma* in the period after independence, they now capitalize on popularized *taarab* to win support, particularly among women. The press has reacted strongly against the songs and the “indecent” behavior of the female members of the audience, but for the party, winning the hearts of the masses is what counts. TOT draws large paying crowds (up to 2,000 individuals) who come to listen and participate in *taarab*, at the same time as they make themselves available to political campaigning. Interestingly, just as Bibi Titi Mohammed was pivotal in recruiting women to the party before independence, the party has invited the immensely popular and controversial *taarab* star of TOT, Khadija Kopa, to join their National Executive Committee.

In Tanzania, popular cultural forms have emerged in the interplay between official cultural policy and popular attempts to renegotiate, or even resist, state policies and cooption. While this process has been most profound in improvisational drama and popularized *taarab*, Swahili hip hop, represented by Zainab Lipangile (Zay B), among others, and neo-traditional dance music, represented by Saida Karoli, exhibit similar processes.

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## Turkey

Since the 1980s, the discussion of how women relate to popular culture in Turkey has been conducted around three axes in the areas of media and women’s studies: examining performance practices of gender role and patterns on the basis of content; examining the relation between consumption practices of women regarding products of popular culture and their lifestyle; and examining the media sector producing this content and its production relations. Whether these studies are cherished by the culture industry theory of the Frankfurt School or by British cultural studies’ anthropological descriptions of culture and everyday life, their common determination is that productions of popular culture are based on a given sexist definition of gender and circulate patriarchal practices.

The results of studies of consumption practices of television serials, reality shows, melodramas, popular songs, and magazines, which recreate patriarchal social practices, change in line with the epistemological sources. Recent studies of representation of Islamic practices and religious stories in popular cultural products focus on the text. Beginning in the 1990s, several studies have been carried out about the content of Islamic popular novels and Islamic advertisements in Islamist women’s magazines. The so-called “public” broadcast, controlled by the state in Turkey, was eliminated first in practice and then legally as a result of neo-rightist political trends and economic implementations based on the global market economy, and a number of commercial television and radio channels have begun broadcasting since the early 1990s. The presence of these channels enabled representation of different identity politics in Turkey to a large extent. Islamic ways of living and religious practices were brought to the fore in several formats of popular cultural texts by national television channels, such as Samanyolu TV, Kanal 7, TGRT, and Mesaj TV, supported by Islamic and religious capital. Radio channels, such as Dünya Radio, Akra FM, and Radio Arifan, Islamist newspapers, including *Milli Gazete*, *Yeni Şafak*, *Zaman*, and *Vakit*, support-

ing Islamic ways of life clearly make references to primary sources such as the Qur’an, comment on the *ahādīth* in accordance with daily events, tell stories of religious heroes, and advise men and women how to act in their everyday lives as “good Muslims.”

At the beginning of the 2000s, the program “Gate of Secret” (currently renamed “World of Secrets”) began to be broadcast. When this genre of program, which could be described as mystic television serials, achieved high numbers of viewers, the other Islamist television channels and the national mainstream television channels started broadcasting carbon copies (“Eye of Heart” by Kanal 7, “Master of Secrets” by Star TV). In such programs, a storyteller (usually male) summarizes the lesson to be taken from the story at the beginning of the fiction claimed to be made from real life stories, and calls on “believing people” to join the “path of God” at the end. The interesting aspect in regard to gender roles is the support for the traditional and conservative family model, the formation of characters in contrasting facets (good-bad, poor-rich, *halāl*-forbidden, moral-immoral, and believer-atheist), and the proposal that social inequality stemming from a free market economy and cultural deprivation would symbolically attain “justice.”

In these productions, the storyteller plays the role of modern bard, acting as a guide in order to ensure that a moral lesson is learned from the fiction. These productions benefit from the concepts of fate, destiny, and disaster, and support belief in heaven. References to religious stories in popular cultural products and proposals of religious solutions to daily problems have increased recently in Turkey. Mystic television serials and published story books constitute an example of this. When compared to the other popular cultural texts, the representation of women in these serials contrasts women who veil themselves with those who do not. A “good believing” female character veils herself or starts veiling herself by the end of the story. The basic conflict in the story is based on behaviors of good and bad characters. Individuals from lower classes portray good characters while bad characters are shown as individuals from upper classes. Messages conveyed by these popular cultural products, which explain the contestations among social classes over the social, economic, and cultural gap between classes, are based on religious belief rather than political suggestions. This points to the pre-eminence of new conservative ideology in the area of cultural production. A new trend of conservative ideology has emerged in the mentality and everyday life practices of the middle classes in Turkey in the