

FEATURE STORY IDEAS FOR JOURNALISTS UTILIZING HARVARD FACULTY AND STUDENT RESOURCES

ISLAMIC ETHOS IN PRACTICE: THE ISMAILIS IN THE NORTH EAST, USA

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PARAMETERS FOR USE

We have solicited the support of a series of individuals to provide area expertise for the story. We request that you contact them not as sources for further resources, but to answer questions regarding their specific research areas of expertise.

EXPLANATION

This feature story would highlight a Muslim community active in Boston and New York, focusing upon the variety of ways in which they seek to put Islamic ethics into practice in society. The highlighted community is the Shi'a Imami Ismailis, which constitute the second largest Shi'a community in the Muslim world. This community can be found in more than twenty-five countries in Asia, Africa, Europe and America. The story would highlight one of a diversity of ways in which Muslim ethics are enacted in society by focusing on a specific organization, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN—www.akdn.org). The AKDN was established by the Imam of the Shi'a Imami Ismaili Muslims to implement the social conscience of Islam and demonstrate the ethics of Islam in practice. The article would provide a brief history of this interpretive community of Islam. The bulk of the story would focus on how the AKDN consciously aims to put Muslim ethics into practice.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Ismailis trace the lineage of the Prophet to their present 49th Imam, His Highness the Aga Khan. The Imam has a two-pronged role: interpret the Islamic faith within the changing social, cultural, economic and political context, and improve the quality of life of his followers. His mandate is not restricted to the material development of his followers but is in fact focused on their holistic well-being, which includes their social, intellectual and ethical interests. This responsibility of the Aga Khan has taken an institutional form that manifests itself through a global network of development agencies under the umbrella of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) and the Ismaili Councils. While the latter institutions are responsible for the social governance of the Ismailis, the former seeks to alleviate poverty, improve health, preserve cultural heritage and provide access to knowledge, in addition to enhancing the economic welfare of people, regardless of their faith, gender, ethnicity or nationality.

JUSTIFICATION This feature story would counter the stereotype that there are few social development efforts initiated within Muslim communities. While there are many formal and informal charitable networks in Muslim communities that can be highlighted, the AKDN functions as an international not-for-profit foundation and would therefore be easily comprehensible by non-Muslim American readers.

POTENTIAL SOURCES

ACADEMICS **PROFESSOR ALI ASANI**, Professor of Indo-Muslim and Islamic Religion and Cultures, Harvard University
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Ali S. Asani is the author of many articles and several books, including *Ecstasy and Enlightenment: The Ismaili Devotional Literature of South Asia*. He is currently working on a new book *Infidel of Love: Exploring Muslim Understandings of Islam* to be published by Harvard University Press (2010). Ali Asani is a member of the board of directors of the American Islamic Congress as well as the Academic Council of the Prince Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University. He was recently invited to join the Council of Sages, a multi-faith, multi-national group of prominent religious thinkers and leaders responsible for crafting a charter to promote increased compassion among various faith communities.

PROFESSOR GÜLRU NECIPOGLU, Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture, Harvard University
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Gülru Necipoglu has taught courses on Architecture and Dynastic Legitimacy: The Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires, The Age of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, and Critical Issues in Islamic Art and Architecture. She has also given guest lectures in two team-taught courses, Landmarks of World Architecture, and Approaches to Islamic Studies in the Near Eastern Languages and Cultures Department.

DR. ZAHRA JAMAL, Lecturer, Social Anthropology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Lecturer, Social Anthropology and Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University
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Zahra Jamal is a Lecturer of Social Anthropology at Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is a research consultant for Harvard's Islam in the West Program. She has lectured at Wells, Oxford at Emory, and Bridgewater State. Since 1999, Zahra Jamal has conducted anthropological fieldwork on voluntarism, subjectivity,

gender, morality and exchange, and transnationalism among Muslim communities in North America, South Asia, the United Kingdom, Russia, and Tajikistan and is currently writing a book on voluntarism among the Khoja Ismailis, a sub-group of the multi-ethnic Nizari Ismailis, in Houston, Texas. In 2005, she designed a project on Muslim Philanthropy in post-9/11 America for the Aspen Institute's Nonprofit Sector and Philanthropy Program, which has since become a major million dollar effort to educate Muslim Americans, civil society actors, and others on safeguarding charitable giving. Since 2005, Zahra Jamal has served on the Aga Khan Social Welfare Board for the United States of America, overseeing national and international projects related to social service provision to immigrant Muslim populations.

PROFESSOR KARIM H. KARIM, Director, School of Journalism and Communication, Carleton University

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Karim H. Karim is an Associate Professor at Carleton University. Before joining academia, he worked as a Senior Researcher and as a Senior Policy Analyst in the Department of Canadian Heritage. Karim Karim has also served as Chairperson of the Federal Digitization Task Force's Working Group on the Accessibility to Digitized Collections and as the elected Chairperson of the Canadian Heritage's Committee on Equal Access and Participation. Prior to his work in the Government of Canada, Karim Karim reported on Canada for Compass News Features (Luxembourg) and for Inter Press Service (Rome). He is the Book Review Editor of the *Journal of International Communication* and also serves on the editorial boards of the *Canadian Journal of Communication and Global Media and Communication*. Karim Karim's book, *Islamic Peril: Media and Global Violence* (Black Rose Books, 2000) has been critically acclaimed in international journals and won the inaugural Robinson Book Prize of the Canadian Communication Association in 2001. He has also edited *The Media of Diaspora* (Routledge, 2003).

ORGANIZATIONS **AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK AND ISMAILI COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

SAM PICKENS, Deputy Director, Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)

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Sam Pickens can answer questions about the AKDN.

SEMIN ABDULLA, Information Officer, Secretariat of His Highness the Aga Khan

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Semin Abdulla can answer questions about the His Highness the Aga Khan as Imam.

FAHEEN ALLIBHOY, Investment Officer, International Finance Corporation

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Faheen Allibhoy is an Investment Officer at the International Finance Corporation (IFC), which is the private sector investment arm of the World Bank Group. She is based in Washington, DC and manages portfolio investments in infrastructure and manufacturing projects in East Asia and southern Europe. Prior to joining the IFC, Faheen Allibhoy worked in New York City at Merrill Lynch in its investment banking division. Outside of her professional endeavors, Faheen Allibhoy has served since 2005 as the Communications and Publications member of His Highness the Aga Khan Shi'a Imami Council for the Northeastern USA. Faheen Allibhoy has a Masters in Business Administration from the Harvard Graduate School of Business and a Bachelor of Arts in Economics and Middle Eastern Studies from Wellesley College.

AKBAR MOOLJI, Director, Standard Chartered Bank

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Akbar Moolji is a Director at Standard Chartered Bank and Global Head of Rate Options Trading. He serves as the Regional Chairman for the Aga Khan Foundation (North East). Akbar Moolji has Bachelor of Science degrees in Physics and Electrical Engineering, with a concentration in Economics, and a Master of Science degree in Electrical Engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

STUDENTS **HUSSEIN RASHID**, PhD candidate, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University

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Hussein Rashid's dissertation focuses on racial and ethnic self-identification in South Asian immigrant communities in the US. He completed a Master of Theological Studies (MTS)

at the Harvard Divinity School (HDS), which focused on comparative Muslim-Hindu theologies in South Asia. During 2003 Hussein Rashid worked with the Harvard Islamic Legal Studies Program's Afghan Legal History Project to create position papers on the draft Afghan constitution. He also advised a 2004 Democratic Presidential candidate's foreign policy team on the religious issues in Iraq. Hussein Rashid is an occasional speaker for the Interfaith Alliance, Faith in Public Life, and a teacher at St. Bartholomew's Church in New York City. His recent media appearances include Air America Radio and CBS Evening News. He writes for Religion Dispatches, and at his own blog [islamicate \(islamicate.com\)](http://islamicate.com).

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Shenila Khoja-Moolji is a Master of Theological Studies (MTS) candidate at the Harvard Divinity School (HDS) and a lay minister for the Ismaili Muslim congregation in New York City. She graduated from Brown University in 2005 with concentrations in International Relations and Business Economics, and worked in investment banking before pursuing graduate work in Islamic Studies. Shenila Khoja-Moolji's academic research interests lie in women's studies and Shi'a Islam. She has served as a board member for the Aga Khan Education Board, which seeks to increase the educational achievements of students in the North East region. Most recently, Shenila Khoja-Moolji worked with the Aga Khan Academies on a market study project in the Syrian Arab Republic.

SHAMIR ALLIBHAI, Master of Theological Studies candidate, Harvard Divinity School
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Shamir Allibhai is the producer of the feature documentary *An Islamic Conscience: the Aga Khan and the Ismailis*, which premiered in a number of regions around the world, including the United Kingdom, the USA, Canada, and East Africa. He was previously part of the founding team and the Commercial Director of the Channel 4 British Documentary Film Foundation, which launched with a £2.6 million fund in 2005. Shamir Allibhai worked in Marketing and Customer Relations for the BBC until September 2003, when he joined Linx Productions as an Associate Producer, focusing on documentary, corporate, and new media projects and traveling to the Middle East, East Africa and India on shoots. He is a candidate for a Master of Theological Studies (MTS) in Islamic Studies from the Harvard Divinity School (HDS), and is a graduate of the Richard Ivey School of Business, University of Western Ontario.

NURUDDIN VIRANI, Masters in Public Administration candidate,
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Nuruddin Virani is currently at the Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) completing a Masters in Public Administration (MPA). Previously, he was Managing Director at The Advisory Board Company in Washington, DC, a professional health services company, and an Associate at the Boston Consulting Group. Nuruddin Virani has participated in a number of pro bono and volunteer activities with organizations like Ashoka in Egypt and the Aga Khan Development Network in Pakistan and Tajikistan. He is completing requirements for a Masters in Liberal Studies (MLS) at Columbia University focusing on Islam and modernity.

INTERNET RESOURCES **WWW.THEISMAILI.ORG**

The official website of the Shi'a Ismaili Muslims, a community of ethnically and culturally diverse peoples living in over 25 countries around the world, united in allegiance to His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan (known to the Ismailis as Mawlana Hazar Imam) as the 49th hereditary Imam (spiritual leader), and direct descendant of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family).

WWW.AKDN.ORG

The official website of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). Founded and guided by His Highness the Aga Khan, AKDN brings together a number of development agencies, institutions, and programs that work primarily in the poorest parts of Asia and Africa.

WWW.IIS.AC.UK

The website of The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS). IIS was established in 1977 to promote scholarship and learning in Muslim cultures and societies through a better understanding of their relationship with other societies and faiths.

At the Social Science Research Council sponsored workshop, "Presenting Islam and Muslim Communities in Context," held at Harvard University in November 2008, academics, Muslim community members and journalists affirmed the importance of combating religious illiteracy in the US, particularly around Islam and Muslim communities. These feature story items have been produced in an effort to make available more accurate and complex information about Islam and Muslim communities.



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