

AMSS 40th ANNUAL CONFERENCE

“Looking Beyond 9/11: Islam in the West and
Democratic Trends in the Middle East and North Africa”

Cosponsored by:
Department of Sociology &
Dispute Resolution Consortium
at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY
&
Institute of Global Cultural Studies, Binghamton University, NY
Friday, September 23, 2011

ABSTRACT

“East-West Redemption is not beyond Us:
The Rise of Islam in Wounded French Communities”

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The myths of the traditional strength of the close affinity enjoyed by Muslims thanks to their belonging to the *ummah* serve as justifications to the sense of defeat in a particular group: young Muslims of North African descent living in shabby neighborhoods known in France as the *Banlieux*. The sharp contrast between the fast-moving, impersonal, competitive, often poor living, social and economic conditions which many French Muslims endure and the promise of universal inclusion in exchange for piety is further heightened by internet connection and travel to their family's ancestral lands. Thus, groups of disaffected young Muslims feel torn apart between loyalty to fellow believers living afar - but within actual or virtual reach - and the national/cultural pressure in France to integrate into the largely-Catholic society. As the latter goal becomes increasingly elusive in fragmented cities, and forlorn neighborhoods, the imagined global community of Muslims proves more attractive. This local sense of rejection can turn into personal rage, collective religious anger that blends petty crimes with ideological radicalization, culminating in violence against the domineering, seemingly unhelpful state. That situation is exacerbated by the memory of Muslim humiliation in the medieval Crusades, the subjugation of modern Colonialism, and the contemporary failure of national states in North Africa. The final victory of Muslims over Christians in the Middle East, however, serves as a role model from centuries ago that an ultimate triumph of this generation in Europe is possible, perhaps likely, if faith, commitment, and organization run their blessed course to secure long-term Muslim superiority. Finally, the rampant individualism of the West causes emotional reaction in the collective-minded Muslim communities.