

The Religious Identity of Young Muslim  
Women in Berlin

# Muslim Minorities

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# The Religious Identity of Young Muslim Women in Berlin

An Ethnographic Study

*By*

Synnøve K.N. Bendixsen



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## A NOTE ON LANGUAGE AND SOURCES

Transliteration of Islamic vocabulary in an English publication on Muslims in Germany is a matter of discussion as there are no fixed standards for an “Islamic-American English” or an “Islamic German” yet.

I have chosen to not make use of computer-generated Arabic script. This is because the women in this book mostly made use of the German or English spelling of the Arabic words. Islamic-American English – or rather Islamic-German – is part of how Islam is practiced and lived in Germany. In addition, I use both Arabic terms and English translations of Arabic terms. Translations (such as sometimes using God instead of Allah) is about making the text more accessible and avoiding constructing a radical difference.

Through this practice I also seek to avoid an unnecessary and unhealthy Orientalizing of the youth and the Islamic world. Further, there is a wide range of Arabic words that are by now a familiar presence in English publications.<sup>1</sup>

As there continues to be a divergence in how Arabic words are spelled in the English and German, I follow the standards suggested by Metcalf (*Making Muslim Space in North America*, 1996) in her work on transliteration, though with some exceptions where I have preferred a more colloquial form. The main difference, however, is that I have opted to italicize the Arabic (as well as the German and Turkish) terms with the exception of some frequently used terms, such as Allah and imam. I also italicize German words and expressions. These terms have a bracketed translation the first time they occur in the text and some words will be translated more than once in the text to facilitate comprehension.

German organizations are referred to by their German acronyms in the text.

When I quote the writings of other authors, I follow their style of spelling and italics. I present the plural forms of Arabic terms either in American colloquial forms or standard Arabic.

There is a short overview of Muslim organizations and mosques in Germany and Berlin in appendix I. The main purpose is to situate the movements in this book within the larger Islamic field in Germany.

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<sup>1</sup> For a longer discussion on the use of English versus Arabic terms, see Metcalf (1996:1–3).



## INTRODUCTION

So tell the tale – perhaps they will reflect.  
–Koran 7:176

Arriving in Berlin, Germany, in the spring of 2004 for my anthropological fieldwork on youth with immigrant backgrounds, it was impossible to avoid the heated debate about Muslim women in the newspapers, particularly the so-called headscarf debate: should Muslim women be allowed to work as teachers, administrators, or police officers while wearing a veil? I was struck by the media representation of Muslim women as oppressed, passive, or unwilling to integrate, at the same time as I observed headscarf marches in Berlin and in Paris (January and February 2004) where thousands of young women and men marched for women's rights to wear the headscarf.<sup>1</sup> In my multicultural Berlin neighborhood of Kreuzberg, I observed groups of young women laughing and chatting playfully at street corners, some with headscarves, others without. "How do they feel about this constant media attention?" I wondered. "What impact does the constant media focus on their well-being and inner thoughts have on their daily life?" "What does it mean to be a young woman Muslim in Berlin today?" During my fieldwork with Muslim youth, I gradually came to struggle with a situation in which the media depicted Muslim women as submissive and indoctrinated, whereas the Muslim women I knew were making sexual jokes, contemplating which color of headscarf to wear with what shirt, and reproaching themselves for neglecting certain religious obligations. The tension between the media representations and my ethnographic experience deepened throughout my fieldwork as I listened to the views the young women themselves had about what they were doing. The apparently zero-sum affiliations that the media and others constructed between Muslim and German, religious and modern, collective practice or individualization, have guided my fieldwork and theoretical framework.

The emergence, re-emergence, and transformation of religiosity and Islamic identity among young Muslims living in European societies have

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Guardian, between 30,000 and 40,000 Muslims marched against the headscarf ban at schools in Paris, Marseille, Lille and other cities in France (the Guardian 2004).

been the subjects of significant attention in the last couple of years. Women's participation in, and support for, Islamic organizations in Western, liberal, "disenchanted" or "post-secular" cities have particularly dumbfounded many, including scholars, media, and politicians. Young women who cover their hair with a headscarf have upset the public to the extent that political authorities in various European countries have codified regulations banning the headscarf from public arenas. For example, since 2011, anyone in France wearing the *niqab* or *burqa* in public has risked being fined. In Germany, after a Constitutional Court in 2003 opened the way for distinctive laws by the *Land* (federal departments), several *Land* have gradually adopted laws that ban veiled teachers from state schools.

Muslim communities in Western Europe deal with a greater range of new and diverse challenges in their everyday life compared to Muslims in countries where Islam is a majority religion. Each European country presents distinct structural, political, legal, and institutional approaches to how they deal with Muslim minority claims, which in turn presents both opportunities and limitations in establishing Muslim institutions and encouraging religious practices. The continuous interaction between Muslim minority populations and non-Muslim majorities and institutions in different European countries affects how Islam is institutionalized and practiced. It also has an effect on young people who seek to live as religiously devoted Muslims in European societies.

This book provides an in-depth empirical case study of young Muslim women who were born in Germany and who participate in one of the religious organizations in Berlin.<sup>2</sup> Previous research has thoroughly documented the plurality of ways of being a young Muslim: there are both intra- and inter-generational differences within the Muslim population in Germany and the relevance of religion in their everyday practices varies.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The term "Muslim" should not be used in a reductionist manner. Generally, the media and often current social research consider all people coming from, or having a background in, a country where the majority follows Islam to be "Muslims." However, one must not lose sight of the fact that individuals differ substantially, and that people from a Muslim background may consider themselves non-believers or adherents of another faith (see Spielhaus and Färber 2006 for a discussion about this). In this book, I use the term "Muslim" more narrowly to refer to those who define themselves as a Muslim.

<sup>3</sup> Studies about differences within the Muslim population in Germany and France that are particularly relevant include Al-Hamarneh and Thielmann (2008) Babès (1997), Klinkhammer (2003), Maréchal (2003), Maréchal, Dassetto, Nielsen and Allievi (2003), and Tietze (2001; 2006). According to the study by Şen and Sauer (2006, 20) on the religiosity of Muslims with a Turkish background, in 2005, 28 percent considered themselves very religious, 55 percent considered themselves quite religious, 11 percent considered themselves not very religious, and 6 percent considered themselves not religious at all. In 2000,

Whereas some consider Islam to be part of their cultural and ethnic heritage, others confine religion to the private sphere. Yet others relate to Islam as a way of life, as part of both their private and public life.<sup>4</sup> This study concentrates on a representative group of religiously inclined young women who care about the place of religion in their lives. In the future, this group is also likely to represent a visible manifestation of a nascent German-Muslim identity. This book investigates how these young Muslim women seek to live a devout life in Berlin, in a context of increasing politicization and securitization of Muslims and Islam, and in an atmosphere of distrust in which the behavior, solidarity, and loyalty of Muslims in Europe are being questioned.

In the religious organization Muslim Youth in Germany (*Muslimische Jugend in Deutschland e.V.*, henceforth MJD), young women from different national and ethnic backgrounds are engaged in the study of Islamic scriptures to appropriate norms and behavior that they believe are significant to the crafting of their religious Selves. The youth produce their religious identity through religious education, experiences of rituals, and other events that produce social meaning. This book explores the forms of religiosity among the youth and investigates one of the contemporary forms and religious orientations that circulate among young Muslims in Europe. I also examine how religious practices and beliefs take place both at an individual level and as part of a group socialization process. This analysis sheds light on the different paths and spaces that are available to individuals who seek to identify with Islam or act religiously, and avoids suggesting that they act homogeneously or inconsistently. As youth who participate in a religious organization or faith community are the main focus of this book, I ask not only why young people decide to participate in a religious organization, but also how this participation affects their religious practices and gender identification. As members of this religious organization, young people are presented with religious discourses and social expectations regarding their behavior: how does this affect how they construct or craft their Selves as religious subjects in this faith community? How do religious beliefs and practices shape the way they view the world

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the numbers were 8 percent very religious, 65 percent quite religious, 11 percent not very religious, and 3 percent not at all. However, statistical research on Muslims' relationship to their religion tends to bring forth different numbers and therefore needs to be handled with utmost care.

<sup>4</sup> Scholars frequently divide the plurality of ways of belonging to Islam and of being Muslim into different categories of religiousness. (See e.g. Karakaşoğlu 1999, 2000, 2003b; Klinkhammer 2000, 2003; Maréchal 2003; Nökel 2002; Schiffauer 2006b; and Tietze 2001).

and behave in public life, and how does their milieu affect religious beliefs and activities? What types of actions and practices do the people involved consider Islamically correct, and how are these legitimated?

The rest of this introduction provides a short outline of past research on Islam and Muslims in Germany/Europe, focusing in particular on research on Muslim youth, and the scholarly presumption of an ongoing individualization of religion. It then moves on to situate the themes of the book within past research, before it introduces the concepts Islam as a discursive tradition, “community”, “crafting the Self”, “social field” and “social identity.” The last part of the introduction provides an outline of the book.

*Research on Islam and Muslims in Germany/Europe—A Brief Outline*

The focus and the analytical approaches in research on Islam and Muslims in Europe have undergone a change in recent decades. Until the 1980s, social science inquiry into migrant populations in European societies tended to concentrate on how the ethnic and cultural heritage of these populations persisted or changed in Europe. In the late 1980s, questions of the religious identities of the migrant communities were increasingly included in migration studies (Vertovec 2000). In particular, this change took place in the aftermath of the Rushdie Affair in 1989 when, to the surprise of social scientists and British politicians, thousands of British migrants protested in the street against the publication of “The Satanic Verses” by Rushdie (in 1988). The vehement public response from migrants against the book’s allegedly blasphemous references directed migration researchers’ attention to the importance of ongoing and changed religious attachments in the socio-cultural life of migrants and in their assertions of a particular ethnic group identity within European societies.

Since the 1990s, the fact that youth with migrant backgrounds born in European societies seem to increasingly “turn to Islam” as a locus of identity has received increasing attention both in research and in the media. There has been a tendency to represent Muslim women as “passive victims of oppressive cultures,” or as the “embodiment of a repressive and ‘fundamentalist’ religion” (Dwyer 1998, 53). Simultaneously, the religiosity of the migrant population has increasingly been a feature of debates on cultural diversity, which includes issues such as the provision of special diets to meet religious principles, the hijab, and the building of places of

worship.<sup>5</sup> The religiosity of young Muslims has gradually come to be understood as related to processes of social assimilation or segregation, questions about living between two cultures, or identity crises (Kepel 1994; Rogers and Vertovec 1998). The scholars in the edited volume “Muslim European Youth” (Rogers and Vertovec 1998) rejected an understanding of Islam in Europe as a mere tradition relocated from the migrants’ home country to the new country, or as something that the youth either leave behind or embrace. With case studies from Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, and based on concepts such as hybridity, multiplicity, and cultural creativity, this work challenged the idea that Muslim youth in Europe embodied a “clash of civilizations” (à la Huntington’s 1993 thesis). Instead, the studies argued that Muslim youth were creating hybrid and complex identities and establishing new models of religious and cultural expressions.

Post 9/11 research has increasingly focused on how religion itself changes as a consequence of experiences of migration and the transformation of religious groups in Europe. This research also examines the continuation and transformation of religious identities among youth with immigrant backgrounds.<sup>6</sup> The identification with Islam among youth in Europe has increasingly been seen as a solution to the youths’ social situation in European societies (Cesari 2003; Khosrokhavar 1997). Scholars have argued that Islam is one way that young people can shape, affirm, and situate their identity in a society in which they are not accepted as full participants (Venel 1999, 29). The religious identity of Muslim youth in France has been viewed as a solution for youth “who are more or less excluded from the society and who search for a sense of direction in life” (Khosrokhavar 1997, 39).<sup>7</sup> In this view, by turning to Islam, youth can “recreate a social bond in light of the emptiness of immigration and frustration of integration” (Saint-Blancat 1997: 51).<sup>8</sup>

In these studies, Islam is frequently viewed as a cultural sub-system in relation to which youth can develop a strong identity. Importantly, scholars see religious identification as not necessarily leading to segregation,

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<sup>5</sup> Both Grillo (2004) and Vertovec (2000) offer a good overview of the development of the research agenda during this period.

<sup>6</sup> See in particular the work of Amiraux (2003), Bendixsen (2005, 2009b), Cesari (2002, 2003), Fadil (2011), Khosrokhavar (1997), Jacobsen (2011), Jacobson (1998), Jouili (2009), Leveau (1988), Scott (2007), Tietze (2001, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Author’s translation from the original French: “qui sont plus ou moins exclus de la société et de quête d’un sens à donner à leur vie.”

<sup>8</sup> Author’s translation from the original French: “recréer un lien social face au vide de l’immigration et aux frustrations de l’intégration.”

but instead to potential integration (Kelek 2002).<sup>9</sup> Youths' religiosity or turn to Islam is often considered a response to a situation in which youths with migration backgrounds are "out of context" or discriminated against in Europe. Engagement with Islamic tradition becomes the starting point of an "identity politics" in which the youth not only reinterpret features of migrated traditions, but also start to oppose and assert specific identities. Conceptualizing the youths' turn to Islam in terms of identity politics sheds light on Muslim youths' efforts to demand rights and recognition within the various European states and the construction of new modes of political engagement and belonging. Yet these explanations consider Islam's status as a minority religion and culture within democratic and secular European countries to be the main reason behind transformations of Muslims practices and youths' relationship to Islam (Cesari 2005).<sup>10</sup>

Jocelyne Cesari (2005) suggests a more dynamic approach focused on the dialectical relationship between group resources and their social environment. This is pursued in the edited volume "*European Muslims and the Secular State*," in which scholars analyze "both the cultural and political principles that structure the organization of religion within Western democracies and the influence of these principles on Muslims' adaptation to secularized societies" (Cesari 2004, 1). Additionally, Oliver Roy (2004) has drawn attention to the role of globalization and transnational processes by arguing that we need to look beyond immigration and ethnic relations to understand the contemporary religiosity of young Muslims.

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<sup>9</sup> Subsequent to her doctoral research, Nekla Kelek has altered her view of Islam as not necessarily leading to segregation in the German society, as signaled by her highly controversial and populist books "The foreign bride. A report from the inside of Turkish life in Germany" ("Die fremde Braut. Ein Bericht aus dem Inneren des türkischen Lebens in Deutschland") in 2005 and "The lost sons. Plea for the liberation of the Turkish Moslem man" ("Die verlorenen Söhne. Plädoyer für die Befreiung des türkisch-muslimischen Mannes") in 2006.

<sup>10</sup> This study does not situate Islam within the Euro-Islam perspective represented by scholars like Bassam Tibi, or within Europeanized Islam. The Euro-Islam perspective highlights the pluralistic and democratic character of the European public sphere and is critiqued for de-legitimizing the mobilization of Muslims that deviate from this "enlightened" European system of values" (Amir-Moazami and Salvatore 2003, 52). Euro-Islam, an Islam that is compatible with the Enlightenment, universal values, and Western ways of life, appears to be a normative term with little empirical basis (Thielmann 2008). The Europeanized Islam perspective stresses the transformative and pluralist characteristics of Muslim organizations and social life. It also argues that there has been a privatization of Islam due to its entrance into secular Western societies (ibid.). Cesari is one of the scholars who work within the latter approach. Such perspectives, which primarily situate Muslims and Islam in Europe within the context of the European public sphere, are critiqued both for being implicitly Eurocentric and for constructing a homogeneous view of the European public sphere (Amir-Moazami and Salvatore 2003; Peter 2006a).



They highlight that in their religious involvement and performance, young Muslims in Europe frequently call on the nineteenth and twentieth century reformist tradition and reshape it to the challenges posed by living as a religious minority in a contemporary European society. However, reforms of Muslim traditions are not limited to the modern or postmodern era. Rather, transformations of Islamic traditions have taken place from the beginning, as a consequence of Islam's encounter with other competing traditions as well as of internal interventions in search for coherence in Islamic tradition (Amir-Moazami and Salvatore 2003, 55).<sup>11</sup> Salvatore, discussing the public participation of religious groups in what he calls "European post-national and post-secular public spheres" (Salvatore 2004, 1029), argues that one should not talk about a sudden coming out of Muslims. Instead, the question of reform, renewal, or awakening of Muslim traditions needs to be understood as "entangled with colonialism, decolonisation, nation-state building, and class and gender relations in both their internal-metropolitan and external-colonial articulations" (ibid., 1015).

The idea of a "turn to Islam" can be seen as part of an Islamic process that not only occurs among Muslims in Europe, but also in several Muslim countries. The Islamic revival can be defined as "the reawakening of interest in Islamic symbols, ideas, and ideals subsequent to a period of relative dormancy" (Husain 1995, 4). Historically there is a long tradition of Islamic revival (*tajdid*) and reform (*islah*) in the form of religious, social, and political activism. The current Islamic revival manifests itself on three levels: the individual level (increased interest in Islam as a lifestyle and practice), the group level (Islamic grassroots or populist movements which seek to establish an Islamic system), and the national level (government-initiated programs that attempt to install Islam as the foundational ideology in society) (ibid.). The Islamization process brings with it social, cultural, and religious changes. One of these changes is a tendency to place emphasis on Islam as the basis for the construction of a collective identity.<sup>12</sup>

This book seeks to understand the modes of interaction within a Muslim faith community in Berlin, and how individuals relate to the

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<sup>11</sup> Amir-Moazami and Salvatore draw on Asad's understanding of Islam as a "discursive tradition," which I discuss in chapter 1. Asad points out that "although Islamic traditions are not homogenous, they aspire to coherence, in the way that all discursive traditions do" (Asad 1986, 19). Thus, discussions and debates about what is "correct" are part of the establishing a "domain of orthodoxy."

<sup>12</sup> This has been discussed in various studies in the 1990s, including Barth (1994a); Jacobson (1998); and Saint-Blancat (1997).

Islamic discourse taught in this religious movement. In doing so, it examines how the modes of interactions within a faith community must be understood as formed in relation to various segments of a Western society, as well as in interaction with global and transnational processes. As such, this book recognizes the importance of the socio-political context in which the youth are situated and that identification with Islam should also be understood within the framework of identity politics. However, the focus of the book is on tracing how youth who turn to Islam pursue the crafting of a religious Self within a religious faith community. It does so by examining the broader set of meanings that the youth assign to their religious identification.

As the idea of individualization among young Muslims in Europe is an important framework for my study, I briefly discuss how scholars working on Europe approach this idea. The idea of an individualization process among young Muslims in the West is a complex one and a full discussion of the concept is outside the scope of this book.<sup>13</sup>

### *Individualization of Religiosity*

The perception that Western society has become increasingly individualized is widely acknowledged and frequently thought to have emerged with the modern individual, who is said to be disembodied from social relations (Friedman 1994, 215). The process of individualization does not describe autonomous decision-making processes, but that the subject has become the main social actor within the dominant societal discourse (Laermans and Verschraegen 2001).<sup>14</sup> This social actor is assumed to act as an autonomous person. Charles Taylor has argued that in the modern age, religious experience has become part of “expressive individualism” (Taylor 2002, 83), which means that rather than merely pursuing a model imposed from the outside (by society, the older generation, or religious authorities), it has become important to search for one’s own way.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Fadil for an extensive discussion about the individualization of religion and an elaboration of her understanding of religious individualization “as a particular form of governance, which regulates the relationship between the self and religion in accordance with liberal-humanist registers” (Fadil 2008, 54).

<sup>14</sup> That said, sociologically or anthropologically speaking, the act of individual choice is always socially situated.

<sup>15</sup> According to the structural explanation, this discourse of individualization is the consequence of processes of functional differentiation. Such a society is contrasted to the pre-modern society, namely the segmental differentiated society that is divided horizontally according to class or position (Luhmann 1986; Tönnies 2001 [1887]).

Several researchers have argued since the late 1990s that the Islamic religiosity of young Muslims in Europe is undergoing an individualization and privatization process.<sup>16</sup> Scholars explain individualization as a consequence of migration and rural-urban mobilization (Schiffauer 1990). In the context of migration, individuals are thought to re-create the religious patterns of their daily life on an individual basis (Roy 2000).<sup>17</sup> Individualization is also linked to transnational and globalization processes and new communication technologies (Mandaville 2004; Roy 2004). Young Muslim women's participation in the individualization of religion as practice is thought to particularly relate to the dynamically interrelated processes through which youth choose to pursue Islam as a point of identification in a context of social and emotional detachment from their parents or extended family and a decline in the importance of traditional religious authority, including imams and Islamic scholars.<sup>18</sup>

Several studies that see women's individualization of religion as making it possible for them to "discover" Islam in Germany (Nökel 2002; Klinkhammer 2000, 2003) rely on these aspects of the individualization process. The individualization of religion, which is the process in which women are "discovering Islam and studying the religious sources [which in turn] offers them the chance to distance themselves from the parents' generation, from prescribed Muslim identities and from the existing hierarchies in the mosque organizations" (Klinkhammer 2000, 281). According to Klinkhammer (2003, 269), large parts of what one may call second generation immigrants in Germany are only interested in an "individualised appropriation" of Islam. Youths' preferences are characterized by individualization and recognition of secularity. The women's rationalized and individualized religious identity opens up for individualized

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<sup>16</sup> This includes in particular the studies Babès (1997), Cesari (1997, 1998, 2002), Nökel (2002), Roy (2004), Saint-Blancat (1997), Schröter (2002), and Stauch (2004). Peter (2006a) illustrates how individualization has become a key notion in research on Muslims in Europe. This notion, he argues, is usually utilized to highlight that Muslims are integrating and adapting to European structures. Consequently, a narrative in which secularization and integration converge is established where patterns of secularization among the Muslim population is constructed as not only the result of their move to Europe, but the degree to which this happens also becomes indicative of integration. In short, a perception is constructed where the more secular a Muslim is, the more integrated they are seen to be.

<sup>17</sup> Roy (2000) nevertheless admits that an individual relationship to Islam is not per se a new phenomenon, since all religiosity presumes a form of interiorization. Roy adds that the individualization of religious practice has not brought forth an individualization of the religious frameworks (2000).

<sup>18</sup> Other scholars (Mandaville 2004; Otterbeck 2010) have argued that authority has continued to be important, but that it has been transformed within the context of international migration.

positions through which they can be situated as part of modern society (Klinkhammer 2000). Klinkhammer (1999, 2000) argues that the new dynamics in the migration context strongly shapes the religious identities that the youth's parents brought with them to Germany. She considers that the conceptualization of a religious self changes due to a re-evaluation of religious practices and an increased emphasis on religious identity in Germany. Simultaneously, others stress that growing up in Germany strengthens youths' belief in Islam, their willingness to criticize their parents' traditional values, and also causes a re-interpretation and adaptation of religious rules to German daily life (Stauch 2004). The increased rationalization of everyday life affects youths' moral inclinations, causing generational gaps and conflicts (Schröter 2002).

These studies frequently argue that the religious practices of young women born in European societies must be understood in relation to modernity, as the women combine a "modern life with the Muslim faith" as Karakaşoğlu (2003b, 108) argues for France. For example Nökel argues that Muslim women in Germany demand a radical equality by emphasizing visible differences, such as the headscarf, and that Muslim women become autonomous citizens through Islam, forming a culture of citizenship (Nökel 2002). The youth develop a strong identity and self-confidence by reinterpreting traditional norms, scientific interpretations of the Koran, and by independent Islamic study. In the context of this book, Islam is considered a latent resource from which to create a political and social identity. Furthermore, because Islam transforms the Self and everyday life, and provokes social changes, it can be compared to contemporary social movements.

In France, Jocelyne Cesari (2002) considers the Islam practiced by young Muslims an "individualized religious observance," and she argues that this generation is distancing itself from their parents' traditional piety and turning to a more individualized and privatized expression of religiosity (*ibid.*, 41).<sup>19</sup> By "individualization," Cesari refers to

the appropriation of rights to personal choice in matters of religious belief and practice. Its logical outcome is a shift away from authoritative traditions – in both interpretation and practice – toward idiosyncratic

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<sup>19</sup> Cesari argues that the general tendency towards individualization that leads to a privatization of religion affects fundamentalism, which is "more often than not, a freely chosen identity, not something imposed by the community, tradition, or the family" (Cesari 2004, 54). By "privatization" she means "the restriction of religious practice to the private sphere and the relegation of religious values and rules to a secondary and compartmentalized role in the conduct of daily life" (Cesari 2005b, footnote 10).

constructions of religious life-style. It transforms institutionalized religion into a common well from which each person draws with his own vessel for his own purposes in accord with his own needs. (ibid., footnote 9)

Cesari emphasizes that this individualization does not mean that Islam has become private, but that there is an individual responsibility in religious choice and a distrust of religious mediation by religious leaders or religious institutions (Cesari 2005b). According to Cesari (2002), the increase in individual autonomy contributes to a weakening of Muslim ethnic and family ties within the West.<sup>20</sup>

Likewise, Oliver Roy (2004) has called attention to how the believer has to make a conscious choice to follow Islam. Roy argues that:

Reconstruction of what it means to be a good Muslim in a non-Muslim society essentially rests on the individual. The first reason for this is that, as we have seen, neither the family nor the pristine communities suffices as a transmitter of traditional Islam. Traditional hierarchies, including that of age, are irrelevant. The second reason is the lack of social pressure that constrains believers individually to reconstruct for themselves what it means to live a pious life. (Roy 2004, 175)

Furthermore, Roy argues that “piety has become individualized; people practice their faith in a more personal way; they want a guide who preaches in term of self-fulfillment, like the Egyptian [Muslim evangelist] Amr Khaled; they are losing interest in the utopia of an Islamic state.”<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Göle drawing on Taylor argues that “in the modern age, religious experience become part of ‘expressive individualism’, that is, it becomes important to find one’s own way as against a model imposed from outside – be it from society, the previous generation, or religious authority” (Göle 2006b, 124).

According to these studies, Muslim youth are distancing themselves from prescribed Muslim identities, and rely on a personal or individualized orientation in their religious practices, which are shaped by individual decisions, rather than by religious authorities or their parents. The Self is seen as autonomous and as constructed in relation to individual study of the scriptures. Accordingly, young people’s claim to live according to

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<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that Cesari’s early work differs from her later work with regard to the question of individualization. Her early work has a tendency to emphasize a decrease in religious behavior whereas her later work deals with more orthodox strict observers, for whom Islam embraces all areas of life (Cesari 2002, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> From <http://www.europeaninstitute.org/February-2011/qpost-islamic-revolutionq-events-in-egypt-analyzed-by-french-expert-on-political-islam.html>, accessed August 1, 2012.

Islam implies a need to combine the religious basis of the family with “more modern lifestyles” (Karakaşoğlu 2003b, 114), and individuality is asserted through religion. Youth reinterpret religious norms using an intellectual approach, which results in a synthesis of the secular and the Islamic tradition. Such scholarly analyses tend to suggest that an individualization of religiosity is manifested in the independent interpretation of religious beliefs that young Muslims assert (individualization of religious beliefs).<sup>22</sup> This presumes that individuals are independently choosing which part of Islam to make relevant in their life, and even suggests a cherry picking of elements of so-called Muslim, French or German and Arabic or Turkish behaviors.

In contrast, in this book I argue for a refocusing on the complex interaction between the religious actor and her (or his) religious peers and religious community(ies). I suggest that the idea that Muslim youth are undergoing an individualization process ignores the continued importance of old and new religious authorities, faith communities, and religious organizations at a local, national, and transnational level. Most studies conclude that young women’s Muslim identity is self-adopted and individualized, and that it permits emancipation from parental authority. My own research resists this interpretation. Instead, my research supports the argument that although there is an ongoing individualization process among the youth in their relation to Islam, the youths’ religious engagement must be understood as simultaneously situated in relation to group processes and religious mediations. Two intertwined processes are relevant here: First, the current public focus on Islam and Muslims in Europe creates a dynamic that daily puts pressure on the youth I worked with. This has direct consequences for how the youth craft their religious Self. Second, and partly as a consequence of this dynamic, the youth continue to feel a need to position their religious Self in relation to their faith community’s understanding and teaching of Islam.<sup>23</sup> The ongoing practice in which the youth distinguish between “tradition” and “pure” Islam makes it necessary for them to situate their religious practices and beliefs in relation to other religious actors, mediators, and to a religious discourse. Overall, this book fills in the lack of research examining how religion and

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<sup>22</sup> This is in contrast to the, in my view, equally simplistic media presentation in Germany of youth as being indoctrinated within Muslim organizations.

<sup>23</sup> The idea that individualization emerges among Muslims in a European secular society has also been critiqued by pointing to the similar changes occurring in the countries of origin, set off by factors which might be comparable to those initiating changes in the immigrant context (see e.g. Peter 2006a).

religiosity continues to be (re)learned, contested, (trans)formed, and practiced within religious faith communities in European societies.

*Issues and Perspectives*

This book engages with how young people craft their religious Self within an Islamic organization, MJD, which is a local religious faith community in Berlin.<sup>24</sup> It explores how religious practices are formed within a group, in part through the development of collective identifications. It examines the continued interrelation between an individual's identification with Islam and group identification processes.

By focusing on how young Muslim women in Berlin craft a religious Self and religious identity, the chapters explore the formation of a Muslim identity as a continuous negotiation between autonomy and group identity, while illuminating the ways in which the local Berlin context affects this religious identification. In order to investigate the processes of religious identity-formation—and in particular the effects of a group dynamic on shaping the attitude young women have towards their religion—I have chosen a sub-set of the Muslim population. I focus on women between 14 and 32 years old, who live in Berlin, and who have chosen to participate in the Islamic youth organization MJD, which was established in the mid-1990s.<sup>25</sup>

Research on Muslim women has tended to focus on how they situate their Self and religious identity in relation to modernity and often describes the women's action based on a liberal understanding of agency, freedom, and autonomy. In contrast, some scholars have drawn attention to how nonliberal religious women's critique of the secular world, such as their goals for individual freedom and autonomy, necessitates the

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<sup>24</sup> I am aware of the long-standing literature on the concept of community and the skepticism towards the use of the concept. These discussions are outside the scope of this book. That said, I agree with Ortner, who argues that the concept of community is “worth keeping” as long as we do not identify it “with harmony and cohesion, nor imagine that the sole form of community is a group of people in one place” (Ortner 1997, 63–64).

<sup>25</sup> By “active participant” I do not mean formal membership in the organization, but rather that the youth continuously took part (at least once a month) in MJD weekly meetings throughout the period that I spent in the organization. Most of the youth I worked with attended religious activities organized by the Muslim Youth in Germany, though some were not MJD participants, but took part in prayer meetings and group discussions about the Koran and other Islamic texts in mosques or in friends' homes. I do not attempt to provide a representative overview of young Muslims across Germany.



recognition that these research accounts and analyses are based on secular liberal assumptions. For example, Saba Mahmood's 2005 study of Egyptian women's involvement in the mosque movement that is part of the wider Islamic Revival shows how liberal ideas about agency, freedom, and autonomy have been naturalized in feminist theory. In contrast, Mahmood argues that women's engagement with religious studies and their desire to come closer to God is about developing autonomy to discipline the self to religious practices. In a different religious and cultural context, R. Marie Griffith (1997) argues for a more multifaceted understanding of the concept of agency in her study of the Women Aglow movement, an evangelical Christian prayer network in North America. Griffith argues that the evangelical women's individual autonomy or fulfillment is not precluded by their submission to a patriarchal religious hierarchy. These and other scholars advance the study of religion by proposing that nonliberal women's religious activities should not merely be understood within secular liberal conceptualizations and assumptions about the individual, power, and agency.

I build on this scholarship while simultaneously proposing a different approach that enables a deeper understanding of the interrelationship between the youths' individual religiosity and the religious discourse taught by their wider faith community. I also argue that a religious identification is a creative process that is continuously being crafted in relation to desires that are shaped within social spaces and structures. This book examines the complex and continuous process through which individuals (re)position themselves between their own perceptions of right and wrong and those of the group. In other words, this book asks how the Self is crafted in relation to the group and at the level of the individual. I examine how group identification is constantly renewed and how the individualization of religious practices may occur at the same time as certain religious practices are made normative by the expectations of a faith community and its take on Islam. Importantly, I also focus on the impact of religiosity on how young people perceive their gender and ethnic identity, and show the complex dynamic between various sources of identification and self-perception.

This book examines how the youth practice Islam within a particular group situated in a particular socio-historical moment. Simultaneously, the youth are clearly not developing a homogeneous Muslim identity. I explore individual differences in how young people related to the weekly religious sessions, which is not only a matter of appropriation, but also of contestation and transformation. I also examine how these individual



differences were negotiated within a specific religious social group.<sup>26</sup> Importantly, this religious group is not defined by one ethnic or national group, but instead intentionally draws participants from a variety of backgrounds. Thus, by examining the Muslim identities of youth from a variety of backgrounds, this research also addresses the scholarly gap created by research on Islam in Germany having primarily been examined through “Turkish lenses.”

During my first period of fieldwork, I discussed media portrayals of Muslims with Fatima’s (31).<sup>27</sup> She told me that the negative media focus on Muslims in Germany is one of the reasons why she felt attracted to MJD:

That is why we need this community [*Gemeinschaft*]. ‘Cause otherwise you start to think that you are the only one thinking like that and you feel so alone – so much more difficult. We are the minority here, you know. (...) I sometimes wonder how it would be if I lived where I would be in the majority. (...) My sister once said that we should be happy that we are living here ‘cause we are forced to think about our religion the whole time. Like people are asking us questions the whole time and we have to justify ourselves. Many in the Arab countries are not really behaving Islamically, also ‘cause they are not thinking about it continuously. It’s part of their life, like [everything around them is Islamic, and so they don’t have to think about whether they are living Islamically or not]. And, because of that they sometimes do not behave or live Islamically at all. I sometimes wonder whether we live Islam correctly here. (...) I wonder whether, if the majority society didn’t attach so much importance to the headscarf, whether we wouldn’t either—I notice that I give my headscarf far more value ‘cause of that. I think that when someone is wearing a headscarf she must be strong, ‘cause it’s so difficult today, so much pressure at school and work, and to be like the others. But also, some think that it is enough, to wear a headscarf. Many think that someone who is wearing a headscarf is a good Muslim and someone who is not wearing it is not. And that is not true either. That is to simplify it.

Fatima’s comments shed light on five aspects of living as a Muslim in Berlin that I discuss in this book: first, the role of Islam in shaping the youth’s subject formation; second, that youth feel a need to participate in a religious community due to a context in which Islam is stigmatized and

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<sup>26</sup> My research refers to a particular phase in these women’s lives. I recognize that religiosity often varies with age and family situation. This is thus a representation of one period in the religious careers of these youth.

<sup>27</sup> All names of the youth in this book have been altered to comply with academic ethics. Additionally, I have slightly altered people’s ages in order to further ensure anonymity. The age, provided in brackets after the name, refer to the age of the person at the point when I started my fieldwork. I have used the real names of prominent leaders of organizations, where they are public figures and in one case where the person is the author of books and thus used as a reference.

because they feel required to think about being a Muslim in order to behave as one; third, the youths' sense that they must justify or legitimate their religiously defined behavior in the context of being a minority; fourth, the continuous reflection on whether or not each youth behaves in an Islamically correct manner; and fifth, the symbols attached to being a Muslim. Certain signs, such as the veil, expose the youth as Muslim, the meanings of which are not exclusively religious, but are also shaped by the political context that has an impact on their (religious) identification and behavior in public space.

I concentrate on one main religious organization and a limited number of young women and their religious identification for several reasons. First, to study youth provides an opportunity to appreciate the creativity of religious agency and practice and how religiosity can change over time and space. Youth have appeared in studies on Muslims in European societies since the mid-1990s, but more often as potential adults rather than in their own right. Studying youth and their relation to religiosity is particularly important since this generation has begun to make demands in the public sphere. A deeper understanding of the conception of Islam that contemporary young Muslims are developing in European societies is also significant as this generation will in various ways socialize the religious beliefs and practices for future generations.

Second, this generation is also engaged in making Islam visible in the public sphere and in Islamic activism, as indicated for example by the increase in veiling. As Islam has become increasingly visible (through political debates, the growing number of mosques being built, and the practice of veiling), scholars have discussed the consequence of this "coming out" of Islam, both for European societies and for Islam as a religion. Some studies have focused on claims made by religious organizations, particularly in European cities, and argued that there are similarities between religious movements and social movements. Others have studied governmental responses, policies, and media images related to the headscarf.<sup>28</sup> Working both on Turkey and France, Göle's examination of the visibility of Islam in public space focuses on the sociological significance of the headscarf and women as symbols in the so-called "civilizing project" in Turkey (Göle 1996, 5). She argues that the contemporary Muslim

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<sup>28</sup> For Germany, see for example Amir-Moazami (2007), Jonker and Amiraux (2006), Maréchal, Dassetto, Nielsen and Allievi (2003). For France, see for example Bowen (2006), Gaspard and Khosrokhavar (1995), Keaton (2005), Mas (2006), Silverman (2007).

movement is comparable to other social movements, such as feminism (Göle 1997). Cesari's focus, on the other hand, is largely on the social dimension of Islam being more visible through what she calls the "Islamization of French public space" (Cesari 2005a, 1039), and she looks at the resultant public attention and political debates. Bowen (2006) argues that the French decision to ban the headscarf in 2004 must be understood as a response to a large array of issues and concerns, including Islamic fundamentalism, anti-Semitism, the growing ghettoization in the suburbs, and the failure of order in schools; issues that are only distantly related to the headscarf. There is a need for an increased understanding of the effect that this intense public exposure continues to have on youths' religious identification and their process of crafting a religious Self.

Third, several studies suggest that there are indications of reconfigurations and re-formations of Islamic identities among youth. In discussions on Muslim youth, studies suggest that a new generation is rejecting the Islam of their parents, and that they are developing an autonomous, individualistic Islamic identity rooted in European societies.<sup>29</sup> Several studies claim that a young woman's views on Islam leads to conflict with her parents' generation who, in the youths' opinion, have a traditional view of Islam.<sup>30</sup> In this view, young women are thought to challenge the traditionalism of their parents and appeal to a "pure religion" found in literature, lectures, and education and which is seen as distinct from "cultural" or "traditional" religion (Karakaşoğlu 2003b). Thus, both Sunni and Alevi young people are perceived to make an effort to live a pure Islam by reconciling Islam with more modern lifestyles, although a cultural reference remains important in their adherence to Islam. Yet Muslim youth still participate in Islamic organizations, and mosques shape their religiosity or religious Self in these spaces. What impact does this participation have on their formation of an individualized religious identity? In examining one religious movement and its participants, this study delves into the complex process through which youth develop their religiosity in relation to their socio-economic surroundings, peers, the religious scriptures, and their faith community. I argue that in order to understand youths' religiosity, we need to examine how the individual juggles and negotiates self-identification and group identification.

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<sup>29</sup> See in particular Boos-Nünnig and Karakaşoğlu (2005), Karakasoglou (2003a, 2003b), Kelek (2002), Nökel (2002), Schröter (2002), Stauch (2004), Venel (1999, 2004).

<sup>30</sup> This includes the studies by Karakaşoğlu (2003b), Klinkhammer (1999, 2000) Roy (2004), and Schmidt (2004b).

The women I worked with belong to a part of the young generation who seek to become religiously proximate (Appelros 2007, 9) or what I call Good Muslims.<sup>31</sup> Being “religiously proximate” refers to the degree to which an individual’s religiosity conforms to the religious practice considered to be at the center of the religion (and thus to the authorities and power). Here I think of the youth as trying to become religiously proximate in the sense that most make an effort to practice, understand, and perform the religiously-defined obligations, rituals, and actions in as “correct” a manner as possible. I also make reference to piety, which is understood as the perfection of virtuous behavior to become religiously proximate (Mahmood 2006). The correctness of their beliefs and practices is consciously or unconsciously evaluated by situating them in relation to the religious discourse displayed by their faith community. I draw on Foucault’s understanding of “discourse” as both language and practice, in that discourse constructs the topic and both defines and produces the objects of our knowledge.<sup>32</sup>

In trying to shift the focus towards the complex group dynamic that takes place in the formation of a religious Self, I focus on how young people negotiate their religious identity and identification by reference to their religious social group (their faith community), family, peers, their ethnic group, the German public, and Muslim and non-Muslim strangers in the urban landscape. I suggest that the religious practices of these youth must be understood in relation to the need to articulate and legitimate their religious practice and belief within the religious social field in which they are situated. Thus, this study recognizes the need to treat people as contextualized social beings and to describe the thickness of their lives, in light of the knowledge that “people live in a world of relationships as well as a world of abstract social forces and disembodied images” (Ortner 1997, 64), which in turn inform their desires, identification processes, and social practices.

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<sup>31</sup> Here the idea of being a Good Muslim is examined in relation to a religious discourse, and in relation to other Muslims rather than the majority non-Muslim society. Mahmood Mamdani (2004) discusses how the idea of “good” Muslims, who are secular and Westernized, and “bad” Muslims who are premodern and fanatical are part of the Western political discourse. After 9/11, President Bush started to distinguish between “good Muslims” and “bad Muslims,” where “bad Muslims” were responsible for terrorism (Mamdani 2004, 15). Mamdani argues that such judgments of “good” and “bad” do not refer to cultural or religious identities, but to Muslim political identities.

<sup>32</sup> Discourse, Foucault argues, governs how a topic can be talked about in a meaningful way. It defines legible ways to talk, write, or conduct ourselves, and limits other ways of talking or conducting ourselves. Discourse produces meaning and meaningful practice.

*Conceptualization*

In my operationalization of Islam in this book, I make use of Talal Asad's concept of Islam as a "discursive tradition," which I first briefly introduce here. Furthermore, as the concept of community is a contested one in social anthropology, I provide a short clarification of my use of this term. Further, in the effort to understand processes of religious identification of young Muslims in European societies, the book is guided by two interrelated conceptions that need explanation: crafting the Self and identity.

*Islam as a Discursive Tradition*

No central authority defines or represents Islam theologically, unlike for example in Catholicism. The religious doctrine is based on sacred texts (the Koran and *ahadith*) and a set of customs. Religious interpretation is a combination of knowledge of divine truth and knowledge of how to put this into practice. While there is a tendency for each particular Islamic community to claim to represent the pure Islam, the fact that Islam can encompass a broad range of interpretations remains unquestioned. All Islamic communities have a source of religious authority. In Europe, there are competing voices who claim to represent Islam, including educational institutions, intellectuals, media, Islamic organizations, communities and websites. In Bringa's words, the place of Islam in people's daily lives "creates a community of Muslims and also communicates differences between Muslims in life-style, forms of religiosity, practices, and interpretations of the role of Islam in everyday life" (Bringa 1995, 197) Simultaneously, there is a continued debate over the correct interpretation, practice, and understanding of Islam: there are always some Muslims who assert that what others take to be Islam is not Islam (Asad 1986).

Too often, Islam is depicted by the media, politicians, and scholars in Europe as an unchanging unit with a particular set of characteristics (essentialization of Islam), or as haphazardly chosen rules of behavior that differ between the various socio-cultural groups (fragmentation of Islam). For example, Khosrokhaver (1997) argues that there is a process of a fragmentation or pluralization of Islam in France. He writes: "There is not one Islam in France, but several, each form following its own dynamic, and not letting itself be influenced by the others more than in a limited way" (ibid., 23).<sup>33</sup> In showing the variety of ways that youth identify with

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<sup>33</sup> Author's translation from the original French: "Il n'existe pas un Islam en France, mais plusieurs, chaque forme obéissant à sa propre dynamique et ne se laissant

Islam, empirical studies have proposed that there is an “Islam of the youth”, “neo-Muslims”, “Cool Islam”, “Pop-Islam”, and an “Islam of action”.<sup>34</sup> The Islam of the youth is portrayed as new because it is “essentially a non-ethnic Islam”: it is modern and shaped in the Western European urban centers (ibid., 24). In contrast, I agree with the social anthropologist Leif Manger’s critique of the artificial construction of a fragmented Islam. He writes: “[t]he fact that local traditions developed did not produce many Islams but rather many versions of a theme that was continuously developed in those local traditions, but within a greater tradition” (Manger 1992, 53).

In line with this, I follow Asad’s (1986) approach to Islam as a discursive tradition. According to Asad, “Islam is neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs, and morals. It is a tradition” (Asad 1986, 14). Drawing on McIntyre, Asad notes that:

A tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history. These discourses relate conceptually to a past (when the practice was instituted, and from which the knowledge of its point and proper performance has been transmitted) and a future (how the point of that practice can best be secured in the short or long term, or why it should be modified or abandoned), through a present (how it is linked to other practices, institutions, and social conditions). (Ibid.)

By seeing Islam as a discursive tradition, we can recognize that practitioners are induced to follow certain practices that are viewed as religiously correct because of how the practices are situated within a Muslim discourse that is oriented by perceptions of the Islamic past and future, while being focused on a present Islamic practice. It is a mode of discursive engagement based on the sacred texts. As a dynamic process, reforming tradition must account for the inherent search for coherence that is implicit in traditions (Asad 1998) and in relation to which internal reform might be compelled (Amir-Moazami and Salvatore 2003). This conception

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influencer par les autres que de manière limitée.” While this circumvents presumptions of Muslim cultural homogeneity and continuity, it simultaneously risks recreating new reifications and essentializations of Islam: by focusing on particular kinds of Islam it begs the question of which level of abstraction should be the starting point (local, national, gendered, individual) for each “type” of Islam.

<sup>34</sup> The authors of these terms are as follows “Islam of the youth” (*l’Islam des jeunes*) (Cesari 1998; Kepel 1994; Khosrokhavar 1997), “neo-Muslims” (Nökel 2002), “Cool Islam” (Boubekour 2005, 12), “Pop-Islam” (Gerlach 2006), and an “Islam of action” (*l’Islam d’action*) (Weibel 2000).

of Islam can be understood as a specific type of Foucault's discursive formation, where the past is an essential condition for the comprehension and reformulation of the present and the future (Mahmood 2005). Like Foucault, Asad treats religious discourses as historically situated and produced in power relations.

The Islam being examined in this book is an Islam as it is practiced by people in daily life, which should not be confused with an examination of Islam as a conceptual system. This book looks at how Islam is practiced within a particular organization and in daily life, and the challenges the youth face when they seek to craft a particular Muslim Self in Germany. My account is committed to recognizing the interpretive tradition in Islam, and should neither be taken as an account of the complex general Islamic awakening, nor as part of the development of an anthropology of Islam. I conceptualize Islam as a discursive tradition because this sharpens the focus on young people's experience of Islam while avoiding a homogenization and simplification of Islam as a uniform theological body of reference.<sup>35</sup>

### *Community*

Postmodernism displayed a healthy skepticism towards the presumption that an individual is merely a product of their ethnic or religious group or community. For a long time, studies of migrants assumed that the migrants were rooted in social and cultural collectives that consisted of the extended family and ethnic or trans-national networks. This position essentializes the individual and their relation to collectivities. Other research, such as Gerd Bauman's (1996) work on group identities developed by the diverse inhabitants of Southall, London, go too far in dismantling the concept of community. Instead, this book argues for a continued concern with how a faith community can shape an individual's understanding of right and wrong and how the community itself is produced through the interactions of its members. This argument draws upon the understanding that religious belief is not only an individual mode of believing or belonging,

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<sup>35</sup> Yet I agree with Ismail (2007) that some difficulties arise from Asad's analytical focus in that it favors the written traditions, and largely omits the oral traditions. As Ismail points out, "Muslims occupy differing and multiple positions in various social and national formations that shape how they relate to each other and to their government" (Ismail 2006, 5). Ismail stresses the need to situate the representation or signification of belief as part of a system of meanings that interrelates with other systems of meaning that are pertinent in other social fields.



but is also a collective venture that is communicated socially and is in need of regular affirmation (Hervieu-Léger 2001).

I focus on one local faith community, but also discuss interactions with and the importance of peers, other Muslim organizations, and imams for the youths' religious identification and performance. Further, the strong individualist elements in religious experiences in modern times do not imply that the religious content will be individuating (Taylor 2002, 83); people will continue to connect to religious communities. I understand faith communities as social, religious groups that become the main reference point for individuals in their search for religious answers, norms, rules, ideals, and a space (physically and virtually) in which to share and shape their religious beliefs. I take up Ammerman's call to consider religious organizations as "a shifting collection of persons, engaged in a complex set of actions and rhetoric, actions that are supported by and indeed define the collectivity they inhabit" (Ammerman 2003, 208). This description challenges a static view of religious groups and their activities and recognizes differences among individuals who participate in the same organization.<sup>36</sup>

This book is driven by a desire to better understand the aspirations, aims, and desires of these young women, while retaining a critical perspective on their conduct. The Muslim woman is under scrutiny by politicians, the media, the (wo)man in the street, and scholars. Restricting her to a fixed position is a fallacy risked by sometimes well-meaning and sometimes less well-meaning politicians and scholars. To avoid this, I avoid dichotomies like traditional/modern and instead acknowledge the multiplicity of voices, which are themselves affected by being part of a faith community.

### *Crafting the Self*

I seek to conceptualize the term "crafting of a religious Self" empirically, where becoming a virtuous or Good Muslim is the objective of the actor. Here, I refer to the crafting of the Self as a continuous, creative process (Kondo 1990, 48) through which the individual becomes a subject as she (or he) constantly positions her (or him) Self and is summoned into a position of interaction with a variety of discursive social fields. The concept of "crafting" directs our attention to the creativity involved as well as

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<sup>36</sup> Not all youth have a faith community and individuals relate to their particular faith community differently. People can also change their personal faith community over time.



to the processes of a continuous formation of the subject. It also requires us to pay attention to the larger interactive field and social relations that an individual continuously relates to and which cannot be easily controlled.

I endeavor here not to situate the subject in a location, but rather examine how the subject actively envisions herself vis-à-vis a position or ideals. The cultural theorist Richard Johnson insists that “subjectivities are produced, not given, and are therefore the objects of inquiry, not the premises or starting points” (Johnson 1986, 44). Johnson and the anthropologist Kondo (1990) consider the crafting of the self as being context- and paradigm-specific, meaning that the self is simultaneously variable and temporary. Selves are never absolute, but are rather, as Kondo argues, “nodal points repositioned in different contexts. Selves, in this view, can be seen as rhetorical figures and performative assertions enacted in specific situations within fields of power, history, and culture” (Kondo 1990, 304). This approach can be critiqued for being reductionist in that it may be read as proposing a radical constructionism. In drawing on the concept of crafting, I am aware of this danger. I seek to avoid a reductionist approach to the subject by insisting on the interconnection of the crafting of the subject and structural dynamics (see McNay 2008, 9). I insist that subject formation and social structures are connected in intrinsic ways in that impersonal forces shape—often subtly—the requirements of everyday life. Furthermore, I also rely on concepts of social identity and identification that recognize that the individual Self must be understood as formed in relation to socially relevant others and in relation to various *nomos* present in a multiplicity of social fields within which the subject acts. In short, the examination of the Self as crafted must be situated within spheres of power and group formation processes that shape, limit, and provide opportunities regarding how the Self is crafted.

We cannot derive selfhood from culture and we cannot derive the virtuous subject from religion or religious texts. At stake here is the recognition that “culture can never simply determine individual agency, although it certainly sets out the patterns within which that agency becomes intelligible, and is open to consideration and self-reflection” (Moore 2007, 36). Several anthropologists are critical of a portrayal the Self as being controlled, subsumed, or obedient to cultural categories.<sup>37</sup> These scholars are developing an analytical framework that highlights how the Self is

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<sup>37</sup> I am particularly thinking of Cohen (1994), Ewing (1998), Kondo (1990) and Moore (2007).

produced in interaction with culture and others, without being reduced to these relations or categories. Instead, a sense of invention, negotiation, and opposition is retained. On the one hand, we need to focus on the individual as self-motivated and not only responding to their social material context.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, the Self is not autonomous or situated outside social relations of power. Rather, to craft oneself as a pious or Good Muslim implies a set of techniques of mind-body practices, norms, and ideals through which distinctive Selves should gain a particular kind of agency.

This book examines how young people continuously interact with an “Islamic discourse” (Asad 1986) in their crafting of a religious Self. The Islamic discourse that is given form within MJD represents a culturally and historically specific pathway to self-realization, but also possibly to domination of certain power structures (see Kondo 1990). Young women craft a religious Self through complex social realities. I consider this crafting of a religious Self to take place through the “technology of the self,” namely as operations that one person performs on themselves in order to become a specific ethical subject (Foucault 1988). The term “technologies of the self” is discussed in chapter 4; suffice to say here that “technologies of the self” are practices by which subjects constitute themselves as subjects within and through systems of power (*ibid.*).<sup>39</sup>

### *Social Field*

The crafting of a Self is a contextual and historically positioned act that is situated within power relations and that must be understood as crafted within “social fields” (Bourdieu 1990). Youth, like all social persons, move in different social fields (Bourdieu 1990; Grønhaug 1972), environments, and settings, and they meet other people face to face in these contexts. Bourdieu understands society as composed of a number of overlapping social fields of activity that are “relatively autonomous ‘worlds’” (Bourdieu 1994, 73). Each social field has a different logic or structure of requisites and significance, which is both the result and generator of the specific habitus proper to that field.<sup>40</sup> Habitus refers to a set of corporal

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<sup>38</sup> To Cohen (1994), culture remains the main concept in anthropology, and he argues that self-consciousness is another way to study it.

<sup>39</sup> In his later work on technologies of the self, Michel Foucault turned his attention to the question of how the self constitutes itself as a subject (see Foucault 1988, which was published after his death). Technologies of the self, Foucault argues, are found in various forms in all cultures.

<sup>40</sup> One of the advantages of the concept of the field is that it makes it possible, particularly in the context of gender-related research, to conceptualize power relations that

dispositions and cognitive templates that are culturally and socially conditioned (Bourdieu 1990, 2004 [1977]). These are acquired by individuals through their socialization and life experiences, which in turn produce social practices. It is a repertoire of neither entirely conscious nor entirely unconscious outlooks, values, perceptions, and orientations that direct personal goals and social interactions.<sup>41</sup> Each social field is regulated and ruled by its own *nomos*, which is the field's premise or its social laws that determine what is considered valid and significant. In short, different everyday spaces of activity operate according to distinct sets of rules that create the expectations to the self-presentation of individuals who shift into and between these spaces.

In this study, my main concern is how young people in MJD craft their religious Selves within a faith community that is situated within a larger religious social field. This larger field encompasses the various Islamic movements in Berlin at a local level, in Germany at a national level, and the worldwide Islamic movements at a global level. The Islam (as a discursive tradition) that is taught and practiced within this faith community provides the main premises for what being a Good Muslim means for the youth in this study. I show that the youths' religious identification and the crafting of their religious Selves must be understood as formed within a specific religious field. This social field is shaped not only by the particular socio-historical context of Germany and its history of migration, secular formation, and approach to integration, but also by processes of religious revivalism and dynamics of globalization and transnationalism.<sup>42</sup>

A subject's effort to become a Good Muslim is continuously crafted in relation to their socio-economic context and historical time and space. Crafting a religious Self within a Sunni Muslim youth organization in Berlin will be different from crafting a Muslim Self in a public school in Cairo. What or who is pious or virtuous is evaluated by comparisons to what is impious or to those who are not virtuous (Turner 2008, 3). Everyday

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are not embraced by the idea of the private and the public. The social field is not a determinist category as "its internal relations are multidimensional and, as a generative principle, the habitus is able to react back upon the field and alter it, it 'transforms that by which it is determined' (Vandenbergh 1999: 50)" (McNay 2008, 13). All fields have a socio-political history and change over time (Grønhaug 1999).

<sup>41</sup> The concept of habitus recognizes that subjectivity is realized through practice.

<sup>42</sup> I recognize that a variety of social spaces, such as the school, family, and friends, advocate different disciplinary practices or technologies which may encourage a similar or yet another regime of the person (Rose 1996). The family is a particularly important site where Selves are crafted. The family is outside the scope of this project because in light of the current politicization of and suspicion directed towards Muslim organizations it is important to improve our understanding of what is going on within them.

negotiation, reflection, and resistance are situated within mechanisms and processes of power within which constituencies are formed. In this analysis, the Self is creative, relational, and reflective, but at the same time entangled in cultural and religious frameworks, including social, moral, and value discourses (see Moore 2007, 37) that regulate the various social fields.

### *Social Identity and Group Dynamics*

Social identity is the understanding one has of who one is and who other people are (Jenkins 1996). Identity processes, whether involving individuals or collectivities, are always social. This means that they are established through interaction. As Jenkins argues, “others don’t just perceive our identity, they actively constitute it. And they do so not only in terms of naming or categorising, but in terms of how they respond to or treat us” (ibid., 74). Although identity is a construction that is always in process (Hall 1996a), I argue that identity cannot be developed or chosen freely, but rather needs to be understood as an ongoing process of constant interaction with one’s social environment (Gullestad 2002).

Self-image, the way one sees oneself and would like to be seen by others, and public image, how one is categorized by others, do not necessarily overlap. Nevertheless, in the continuous making of social identity there is usually some relationship between self-image(s) and public image(s) (Jenkins 2000). The sense of self is developed from early childhood, partly through verbal and nonverbal dialogue between the child and socially relevant others (ibid., 11). This dialogue is a multifaceted interaction of separation from and identification with socially relevant others, which informs the child of who they are and what they should do. Even during the period of early socialization, categorization is part of constructing a sense of who one is. In the transition from youth to adulthood, both how young people see themselves (cf. Willis 1977) and how they are categorized by others shape their future. Additionally, youth experience life differently due to available resources. As youth grow up, “processes of identification begin to have material consequences” (Jenkins 2000, 12).

Although group identity presupposes collective internal definitions, it also includes categorization from others (Jenkins 1996, 84).<sup>43</sup> Collective

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<sup>43</sup> A category does not mean that its members are aware of their collective identification. Most often, people would know that they have been categorized, but are not necessarily completely aware of the impact and content of that categorization. Whereas a group is distinguished by the nature of the relations between its members, membership of a

identities are generated both by group identification and by social categorization. These identities are generated in transaction and interaction, and are thus, at least potentially, flexible, situational and negotiable (Barth 1994b). At the same time, as Barth (1994b) argues, collective identification is inherently political.

I investigate how the various dimensions of social life—and in particular the cultural and political dimensions—come into play to different degrees, and I also examine how they inform the process through which youth identify with Islam. Further, I investigate how religious identification informs how young people reach an understanding of their other social identities. How a person lives out their religious identity will have consequences for their gender and ethnic identification. What holds these identities together is a “superordinate, narrative, self-reflective self” (Moore 2007, 38). The self is the result of both identification with inner experiences and with groups, cultural representations, and other individuals. Identity, thus, is the “sense of self that results from identification” (*ibid.*, 39). Such identifications can be social and subjective, meaning that they include both social and individualistic features of the self (*ibid.*).<sup>44</sup>

Rather than being concerned with the individual Self *per se*, this book aims to understand how social relationships are constituted and substantiated. As meanings are shared and asserted within smaller communities, it is essential to recognize how individuals come together to shape these communities (Berger and Luckman 1967). Participants in MJD take part in forming a new social grouping with a specific system of solidarity, and as such the group helps bring forth new collective protagonists in the German public sphere. By recognizing internal conflicts and conversations, I highlight the continuous process of negotiation and reject the simplistic idea that youth are either indoctrinated within Muslim spaces or merely indifferent to these discussions. I explore both how a subject’s religiosity is informed by her social location within the group, and how a subject pursues available strategies and creative ways of acting.

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category does not involve mutual recognition of that categorization, since this would involve the first step towards group identification (Jenkins 1996).

<sup>44</sup> The question of how and why an individual achieves, consents to, or opposes parts of social identities, including gender, religion, class, and ethnicity, is one of the main features of the organization and experience of self-other connections (Moore 2007, 38). Moore remarks that the discourses on identity and self seldom intersect in anthropology. I have chosen to do so here as I agree with Moore that there is a connection between the Self and identification.

*Outline*

Chapter 1 situates and presents the key religious organization, MJD, in which most of the youth in this study participated. In order to position the organization in Berlin, as well as within the broader field of Islamic revival, this chapter details the organization's aim, profile and characteristics. I briefly outline the process that led to MJD being scrutinized by the media and the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*). This is followed by a discussion about the methodological and epistemological implications this scrutiny had for my research. This is a research account about participant observation (the access to the field), how I pursued my understanding of what the youth were doing, and the complexities I encountered in representing their practices.

Chapter 2 introduces the conceptual socio-geographical landscape of young Muslim women in Berlin through an empirical study of how religiously devoted Muslim women in Berlin perceive religious spaces while seeking a religious mode of living and a religious way of inhabiting the city. I first explore the visual impact Islam has on public places and spaces in Berlin as Muslims seek to live religiously. I then examine how young women perceive their engagement with mosques and other local religious social spaces. I argue that in order to understand young people's religious participation, attention must be paid to the youths' ethnic backgrounds, their religious orientations, and their individual experiences.

Chapter 3 delineates the concept of the Other and examines how stereotypical and Othering discourses about Islam and Muslims in Germany have multiple implications for the daily life and identification processes of the young Muslim women in MJD. At the weekly meetings, the youth are taught and give each other advice on how to best behave, which can be considered a way of becoming streetwise (cf. Anderson 1990). I suggest that practices such as reminders to each other to be friendly in public spaces, to help older women with bags, and to use humor, are part of everyday micro-politics that attempt to subvert stained perceptions of Muslims in the public sphere. I argue that the young women's efforts to improve their knowledge of Islam and to practice how to best react can be considered a tactic (de Certeau 1984) that aims to challenge ingrained hegemonic power structures and improve negative images of Islam.

Chapter 4 examines how the youth craft a religious Self by reference to virtuous Islamic ideals presented in the MJD faith community. In this context, the youth critique traditional practices by making a distinction

between pure and traditional Islam. I focus on three aspects through which the crafting of a religious Self takes place: learning to distinguish between culture and religion; emphasizing the relation between internal and external motions; and a focus on character. I examine the process through which these distinctions are established, and how they are actively learned, played out, and performed.

Chapter 5 discusses different trajectories of religious action available for a young woman who seeks to craft her Self as a Good Muslim. I suggest that young women are not crafting themselves in a uniform way with respect to what they are taught about religious ideas and ideals. This chapter raises questions such as, which paths are open for an individual, and which do not undermine or challenge her religious Self? How can a young woman creatively craft a religious Self without challenging, contesting, or openly confronting existing religious norms? I illustrate how even if the young women are not always religiously diligent, they do not necessarily feel that they are failing their religious Self. The religious identity and identification with Islam is more complex than picking and choosing between Islamic concepts and values.

Chapter 6 illustrates how religious identification informs the youths' understanding of gender relations and ethnic identifications. How do the youth do gender religiously? How do gender, ethnicity, and class intersect in the crafting of Muslim identities in Berlin? I examine how MJD meetings cultivate a religious gender order and how young people's response to this shapes a religious gendered habitus (Bourdieu 1990, 2004 [1977]). This chapter proposes that how young people perceive their ethnic and gender identification is a consequence of their religious identification, which distinguishes between a pure and a traditional Islam. I argue that at the level of group identification, women make a discursive change in their perception of gender roles from those of their parents' culture and traditions, to a perception of gender roles defined by Islamic norms and ideals.

Chapter 7 investigates the motivating forces for the women's decisions to participate in a religious organization while living in a secularized society. What motivates a young woman growing up in Germany to participate in a religious social space and to take up religious subject positions? I argue that their religious identification and practices must be understood both in relation to the socio-economic context and the meanings they give to their practices. Religiously defined meanings tend to be explained away by anthropologists by locating them in social and historical structures, or in psychology. I seek instead to take religiosity at face value, by paying attention to its social dimension, and to how belief in God can show the way to

certain practices and actions, without passing any judgment on this belief. In doing so, I contend that the experience of simultaneously coming of age and searching for a religious lifestyle needs to be included in any understanding of this religious subject formation, the identification with Islam, and the specific faith community.

The conclusion draws together the arguments from each chapter and provides an overview of the discussions and ethnographic findings. It also examines some analytical and theoretical contributions that this study makes to wider conversations in anthropology about religiosity and religious identity.



## CHAPTER ONE

### SITUATING THE FIELD AND METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

The documentary maker bends over and the world enters them, chance encounters, happenstance and surprise are their playgrounds. “Oh look,” someone says, invariably a stranger, they fill their life with strangers, and then they look. They make trips whose destination is unknown, and from which there are no return fares. When you come back, you never arrive at the same place.

—Mike Hoolboom 2005, 100

This chapter is a research account about participant observation: I discuss how I gained access to the field, how I have approached young people’s understanding of what they are doing, and how I represent (or “translate”) this. The fact that MJD was being scrutinized by the media and that the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*) suspected it of being connected to the Muslim Brotherhood turned out to have consequences for my fieldwork and epistemological foundation.<sup>1</sup> How should the anthropologist deal with a situation where she is met with suspicion by both the organization being studied and the potential readers of the final research? The socio-historical context in which my fieldwork was positioned meant that I daily had to deal with discourses that were politicized differently by different actors. Both “researchers” and the “researched” might be aware of the difficulty of retaining social, cultural and even political objectivity.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Whether or not MJD or members of MJD have links to radical or fundamentalist Islam is not the focus of this research. One of the few publications that has dealt with MJD in Germany is Gerlach’s “Zwischen Pop und Dschihad. Muslimische Jugendliche in Deutschland” (“Between Pop and Dschihad: Young Muslims in Germany”) (2006). However, this book is based on interviews and provides a very general impression of young educated Muslims in Germany from a more journalistic point of view. The author calls participants in MJD and this generation of well-educated and socially active youth “pop Muslims” (Gerlach 2006), a term I object to for two reasons; first, many of the youth I worked with discussed this book and felt that this terminology did not respect them and their activities; second, the term not only neglects, but also take attention away from, how the religiosity of the youth is part of a complex process where the youth actively interact with religious sources.

<sup>2</sup> Rijk van Dijk and Peter Pels argue that “[e]thnographic dialogue is always contextualised by an authority of power relations that conditions and inhibits it” (van Dijk and Pels 1996, 245). The power relations are not unidirectional; whereas the researcher can (mis)use

Further, the researched might ask questions about potential hidden agendas and particular viewpoints.

The first part of this chapter provides an overview of MJD, the primary religious organization in which most of the young second-generation migrants in this study participated. I discuss the organization's goals, participants, and public profile in order to situate it within the field of German Muslim organizations, and within the wider global trend of Islamic revival. The second part of the chapter reflects upon the discursive position of MJD in the German public sphere, my methodological choices, and the challenge of suspending judgment.

### *Introducing MJD: A New Generation of Muslims*

#### *MJD's Beginnings*

The religious youth organization Muslim Youth in Germany (*Muslimische Jugend in Deutschland e.V.*, MJD) was established in 1994 under the "House of Islam" (*Haus des Islam e.V.*, HDI) which is based in Lützelbach by eight young Muslims between 17 and 20 years old.<sup>3</sup> Starting modestly with the idea of providing religious teaching and activities to youth born in Germany, the initiative later split off from HDI and registered independently in a small village in Baden-Württemberg, which is in the south-western part of Germany. Comprising approximately 50 branches Germany-wide, the organization is currently the second-largest Muslim youth organization in Germany, after Milli Görüş (*Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş*, IGMG).<sup>4</sup> Fatima (31) told me that during a Muslim camp in 1994, organized for youth from across Germany by HDI, a Muslim brother

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the voices of the researched, the researcher's voice can later be used by the researched (ibid.). Thus, the power relations between the "researcher" and the "researched" are not straightforward; the "researched" can, in case of distrust or dislike, try to keep information from the researcher or avoid contact with her/him altogether.

<sup>3</sup> According to its website, HDI is a member of the ZMD (*Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland*), an umbrella organization of Islamic organizations and communities. Their website also notes that HDI, within the framework of youth-work in Germany, works together with MJD. Thus, at infrequent intervals, MJD uses HDI's premises, and members of MJD help with HDI's youth work. See [www.hausdesislam.de](http://www.hausdesislam.de), accessed December 8, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> The Milli Görüş (*Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş*, IGMG) is closely linked with political Islam in Turkey, including the *Refah Partisi* (Welfare party) and its predecessors (Henkel 2004). The nature and quality of this relationship is disputed. A report by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (1999, 164; 2000, 207) argues that the IGMG is an extremist Islamist organization that aims to hinder the social and cultural

from the United Kingdom told them about a youth organization for Muslims in England.<sup>5</sup> Fatima recalls sitting around a campfire saying, “would it not be great if you were living in Hamburg, but were moving to Aachen, and you would know where you could find other young Muslims who actively practice their religion?”

Weekly MJD meetings attract few people—often less than 10 young women—but annual national meetings, such as the summer camps, are more popular, with an upper limit of approximately 1,200 participants.<sup>6</sup> Similar Muslim youth organizations exist in Austria, France, Italy, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom, and MJD is represented at the European level by FEMYSO (Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations) which was established in Leicester (United Kingdom) in 1996.<sup>7</sup> According to a *shura* member and the MJD homepage, MJD is funded by an annual membership fee, events, donations (from previous members, parents and friends), and income from the religious bookstore “Green Palace,” which MJD owned since 2000–2001 and until it closed down in 2010. As I discuss further below, since 2003, the organization has faced negative media attention and suspicion, and in 2005, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution included MJD on its list of

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integration of youth into German society. What is clear is that IGMG represents a more politicized version of Islam, endorsing Muslim activism in the public sphere, and asserting that in order to secure an Islamic life, Muslims must have political representation. See for example Şen and Aydin (2002). For a critical discussion about the regular accusations against IGMG as threatening the German national identity, see Ewing (2003). See also Schiffauer (2008) for a discussion of the relation between the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Islamic organizations, and Schiffauer (2004) for a discussion of Milli Görüş in Germany. Appendix I provides a short overview of the Muslim organizations in Germany, with a specific focus on the major organizations in Berlin.

<sup>5</sup> The national British Muslim Youth Organization (YM UK, Young Muslims UK), which was established as a national youth moment in 1984, springs from the Islamic Youth Movement (IYM), which was established in the 1970s. It focuses on second-generation Muslims. It was inspired by the influential Islamic ideologue Khurram Murad, who thought the time was ready to “provide opportunities for the development of an educated elite that would provide ways of connecting with and provide leadership to a new generation of Muslim young people” (Hamid 2009, 4). For an analysis of that organization’s establishment, structure and ideology, see Hamid (2009).

<sup>6</sup> According to the MJD meeting pamphlet, there were 150 youth at the first MJD summer camp (1995), and in recent years around 750 youth have attended. In 2006, the organizers had to close the registration at 1,200 (MJD meeting pamphlet, available online at [www.mjd-meeting.de](http://www.mjd-meeting.de), (accessed March 24, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Some authors suggest that FEMYSO is linked with the Muslim Brotherhood (see Vidino 2005). While there may well be links, in particularly ideological ones, the evidence for these accusations mostly consists of “guilt by association,” which I discuss further in this chapter.

Islamist organizations in Baden-Württemberg. In 2006, it was also included on the list for Hessen (where the annual national MJD meeting takes place).<sup>8</sup>

According to Fatima (31), one of the main reasons MJD was established was that young people did not feel comfortable in the mosques established by their parents. Despite internal modifications in the late 1990s, the organizational structures of most mosques have largely remained ethnically determined and anchored in national or ethnic ties to the participants' country of origin instead of linking to the worldwide Islamic community (the *umma*). Fatima recalled that as a teenager in the mid-1990s, she and her peers found the mosques boring and many participated only to humor their parents. The seminars and religious lectures were given in the language of their parents, which not all of the youth were fluent in, and answers were given by imams (formally trained prayer leaders) who were brought from their parents' country of origin and who were therefore unfamiliar with the specific German socio-political situation. Fatima, and other religiously active youth, feared that this would have a negative effect on their own generation's religiosity. She felt that religious education within the family had failed, and that this was partly because their parents were part of the "Atatürk generation," which had not received a "proper religious education." In her opinion, the older generation was unable to teach Islam properly, since they are uneducated and tend to mix religion with traditions from their villages. Further, the young founders of MJD felt that what they saw as an increased secularization among migrant youth would not lead to better integration in German society, but rather to

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<sup>8</sup> The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution officers monitors publications, statements and meetings to identify potentially violent radicals or terrorists; this includes monitoring explicitly non-violent Islamists. In the 2005 Federal report on extremists, 28 Muslim organizations (compared to 24 in 2004) – Arab, Pakistani, Turkish and Turkish-German – are categorized as "Islamist" (see Crisis Group Europe Report N°181 2007, 16). A report that scrutinizes the work of the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution argues that "[t]o arrive at the number of 'Islamists', authorities count those belonging (or paying dues) to these organisations. The federal Bundesverfassungsschutz estimates that roughly 1 per cent (32,100) of the Muslim population is Islamist, including 27,250 of Turkish and 3350 of Arab origin" (Crisis Group Europe Report 2007, 14–15). The report concludes that "[a]t the very least, Bundesverfassungsschutz surveillance is an overly blunt instrument that leads to stigmatisation and the lumping together of the many non-violent with the few potentially violent. Aggressive mosque raids and administrative exclusion of 'undesirable' (though actually law-abiding) interlocutors give fodder to extremists, who thrive on an antagonistic relationship with the state. (...) It is unlikely that the creation of Islamic milieus through Islamist organizations (such as weekend trips, summer camps, sports groups, and computer courses) actually serve as effective 'recruitment' areas" (Crisis Group Europe Report N°181 2007, 16).

impolite, troubled and confused behavior by these youth. According to Fatima, what she called the second and third generations of migrants should be taught about the “pure Islam” (versus a “traditional” or “cultural” Islam), which would allow them to use Islamic ideas as a way to integrate (rather than assimilate) into German society.<sup>9</sup> The creation of new spaces of and structures for learning and for developing and expressing youth’s religiosity should open up for new ways of identifying as Muslim in Germany.

### *The Structure of MJD*

MJD is a representative organization, in that it exemplifies some of the general current changes in the religious identity of Muslim youth in European cities. Its structure and characteristics can be seen as a reaction towards the current situation of Islam in Europe, both internally (how Muslims are organized in Europe) and externally (how Islam is depicted by the majority society). Moreover, MJD can be considered part of a broader Islamic resurgence among young Muslims worldwide. Although MJD draws on Islamic authorities and knowledge from all over the global Islamic *umma* (the worldwide Islamic community), it seeks to instruct participants in how to best live as young Muslims in Germany.<sup>10</sup>

MJD differs from other Muslim organizations in Germany in four ways (Bendixsen 2009b). First, it considers itself “*multi-culti*” because most members of the group in Berlin are born or raised in Germany and have parents from different countries or ethnic groups, including Bosnia, Egypt, the Kurdish areas of Turkey and Iraq, Turkey, Palestine, Syria and Sudan.<sup>11</sup> The group is also frequented by children of mixed marriages (e.g. a German mother and an Egyptian father) and German converts. One of the main aims of the organization is that the youth should primarily identify as

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<sup>9</sup> Cesari (2003) suggests that the limited religious education within the family is a result of how their parents approached Islam during the early phase of migration. According to Cesari, the parents paid little attention to Islamic instruction as they viewed their settlement in France as temporary. She further points to the limited number of Koran schools in France where children could receive religious instruction, something that changed in the 1980s. Schiffauer (1988) suggests that the first generation of Turkish migrants also went through a process of change in their relation to Islam in Germany.

<sup>10</sup> The concept of the *umma* is generally translated as community. However, it is a more complex concept within the Islamic discursive tradition. For a discussion of this term, see Asad (2003, 199) and Mandaville (2004).

<sup>11</sup> In Berlin, the term “*multi-culti*” is politically thick, most often related to migration and integration policies targeting youth with migrant backgrounds living in Berlin and initiatives to integrate them. The youth make use of this term about themselves, mostly in a positive manner, and sometimes jokingly.

Muslims, and only secondarily by ethnicity or nationality, including as German. Secondly, the organization is German-speaking. Most of the participants are born in Germany and feel more proficient in German. One of the group's main goals is to change the idea that it is impossible to be both German and Muslim. Thirdly, the organization has an elected *shura* ("consultation," also translated as "committee"), but it is based outside a mosque and does not employ imams or educated religious teachers. Indeed, established mosques were initially skeptical to the idea that the young Muslims in the group would be able to combine references to the Koran, books, *ahadith* and the internet and TV instead of making use of imams. Fourthly, it is organized by and for young people between the ages of 15 and 30, with weekly local meetings organized by a leader elected from among the membership. The local groups have gender-divided weekly meetings: one day for the "brothers," another for the "sisters." The majority of its female participants do not live in Kreuzberg, but in other parts of Berlin, including Neukölln, Wedding and Spandau.<sup>12</sup>

The general structure of this particular religious youth organization consists of a national *shura* with ten members elected every two years by a membership meeting (in 2012, the *shura* consisted of seven female and five male members), and a male chairperson/president (*Vorsitzender, Amir*).<sup>13</sup> The *shura*, whose members meet in different German cities or towns every four to six weeks, is responsible for all MJD activities and represents MJD at the national level. The *shura* deals with general questions from other organizations or local MJD groups, and plans MJD events and their religious content. Individual assignments are delegated to different AG (working groups), such as the Editorial AG, Organizational AG, Handbook AG (which develops the branch handbooks used by the different local branches), Fun Day AG, Regional AG, Meeting AG, Dialogue AG and the newly (2008) developed Design AG. Anyone can become active in an AG. There are also one or two people responsible for contact with the press. In sum, MJD is, as far as I know, the only organized multi-ethnic

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<sup>12</sup> The neighborhoods in Berlin with the highest density of Muslim residents are Neukölln, Wedding and Kreuzberg. Kreuzberg is nicknamed "little Istanbul." The characteristics of these neighborhoods are discussed in chapter 2.

<sup>13</sup> The chairperson of MJD has always been male. The previous chairs are: Muhammad Siddiq (1994–1995), Rüstü Aslandur, Imran Sagir, Khallad Swaid (2001), Bilal el-Zayat (2003–2005), Mohammed Nabil Abdulazim (2006–2008) and Hischam Abul Ola (2008). From [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslimische\\_Jugend\\_in\\_Deutschland](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslimische_Jugend_in_Deutschland), accessed April 20, 2009 and <http://www.mjd-net.de/steckbriefe>, accessed August 6, 2012.

religious social space in Germany for Muslim youth that offers religious knowledge in German and that is managed by and for youth.<sup>14</sup>

### *Profile of the Participants*

MJD attracts young, well-educated, and upwardly mobile Muslims from immigrant families; participants are likely to be active in future representations of Islam in the German public sphere. For the first time, a large group of ethnically mixed Muslim youth in Germany is coming together to learn about Islam in German, while categorizing themselves as German Muslims. The majority is educated in a Western intellectual tradition, is socially and politically well-informed, and most are active users of the media and the Internet. On average, the youth I worked with had a higher level of participation in organized religious activities than that of the general Muslim population in Germany.<sup>15</sup> However, the young women who spoke with me differed in terms of their socio-cultural background and character. Some disliked but tolerated each other. Most had passed the *Abitur* (qualifying examination for university), although this did not apply to all. Some worked, others studied at university, in programs such as law, Islamic studies, social education, graphic design, education, or dentistry, or aspired to become doctors. The majority sought to acquire more knowledge of Islam and religious practices, and searched for better ways to live according to Islam in a non-Muslim country. Thus, they represent a part of a young generation in Europe that is turning to Islam as a form of identification.

MJD's main focus is on youth, and its stated goal is "to integrate Muslim youth by providing an opportunity to develop their creativity and talents as young German Muslims in the German language."<sup>16</sup> My impression of

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<sup>14</sup> Though the age limit was set to 15, occasionally some of the participants at the meetings and events were younger.

<sup>15</sup> According to Şen (2007), 19 percent of youth (18–29 years old) with Turkish backgrounds belonged to a mosque organization in 2005, compared to 21 percent in 2000. In the same period, 41 percent of the youth were using the cultural, social or educational activities offered by the mosque organizations (*ibid.*, 24–27). Slightly differently, Şen & Sauer (2006, 35) suggest that 55 percent of Muslims with Turkish backgrounds are not members of a mosque organization, although 72 percent visit mosques occasionally and 40 percent make use of the cultural or educational facilities. Only 23 percent are members themselves, while 22 percent are affiliated with an organization through a family member.

<sup>16</sup> Author's translation from the German original in the leaflet 'Selbstdarstellung der Muslimischen Jugend in Deutschland e.V.' (Self-representation of the Muslim Youth in Germany), published April 2003. MJD presents its goal as being "to assist in the integration of Muslim youth, by offering them a perspective from which to develop their creativity and



MJD's main activities fall into three categories: at the local level, it targets Muslim youth of both genders who want to live as religiously proximate or Good Muslims in Germany; as an organization, it seeks to attract young so-called "born Muslims" who are religiously inactive or who do not perform the "pure" Islam; and at a national level, MJD takes on a public role in representing Islam in Germany through dialogues with politicians and journalists, and in interfaith projects.<sup>17</sup> From my fieldwork, I have the impression that most MJD activities target and attract young people who are already religiously oriented and who seek religious knowledge by attending weekly meetings.

There is an open door policy, and young members are encouraged to bring friends to meetings. According to the official membership numbers, there are 600 members nationwide (2008). This does not correspond to the numbers of young people who actually participate in meetings; according to the national MJD leader, only about 30 percent of the participants at annual conferences are official members.<sup>18</sup> According to the leader of the *shura*, the organization does not actively promote membership, as its goal is to provide religious activities to every young person rather than represent a particular Muslim community to public bodies in Germany. Participants may be reluctant to become members due to their personal financial situation or a perception that there may be personal consequences if they become formal members of a group that is under surveillance.<sup>19</sup> Some Muslim youth groups situated within different mosques and organizations are unofficially associated with MJD.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the relatively low number of participants, MJD plays an important public role within the larger religious social field in Germany and in

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talents as well as abilities and qualifications as young Muslims and to participate actively in the constitution of the society. At the same time, young Muslims should be supported in finding their identity" (author's translation from the original German). See also MJD's homepage: [www.mjd-net.de](http://www.mjd-net.de).

<sup>17</sup> Chapter 4 discusses what participants' ideas about a "pure Islam" include and how the youth explicitly mention the traditions of their parents. I use this term as an emic (description of behavior or belief in terms that are meaningful to the actor) rather than etic concept (description of a behavior or belief by an observer), making no judgment as to whether or not their concept of a "pure Islam" is theologically more "correct" than that of their parents.

<sup>18</sup> Telephone interview with member of the *shura* June 17, 2008. MJD's Facebook page had 2,413 likes as of December 27, 2012. This official MJD Facebook page was founded on October 27, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> The membership fee is 3 EURO monthly, which makes it financially accessible to most.

<sup>20</sup> According to one *shura* member, some youth groups situated within mosque organizations prefer to be unofficially associated with MJD. This is particularly the case when the



the German public sphere. They do so by inviting German government representatives to events, giving interviews in the media (TV, newspapers, and magazines), and as individuals representing the Muslim woman to the German audience. However, MJD members also involuntarily represent Muslims in the German public sphere through the negative media attention that the organization has been subject to from 2003 onwards, and which I discuss in this chapter. The educational level of its participants as well as the high level of activity that the organization and individual members have in the German public sphere suggest that the group has more significance than its numbers indicate. Overall, MJD is a space that represents one of the possible roads that Islam in Europe may take in the future.

Most of the participants are so-called second-generation immigrants in Germany. The use of this term is problematic, as it may well, as Friedman argues, stand for “an official ethnification, *jus sanguinis*, of the immigration process” (Friedman 1999, 680, footnote 3). Although there are reasonable criticisms of the term “second generation”, I use it here in the sense that most of the youth are born in Germany but have parents who migrated to the country. Several of the youth are socialized in a transnational space; in other words, they are embedded in familial and other relevant social relationships and networks through a biography formation in their parents’ home country as well as in German society (Apitzsch 2003). Still, the “second generation” categorization only works as an overlapping bracket for specific positions and identity processes, which should not be generalized to all individuals with immigrant backgrounds, but be left open to the plurality of life-realities.

As noted, a high proportion of MJD participants belong to an upwardly mobile part of the migrant population, either because of their parents’ education, or because of their own success in the German educational system. The organization’s structure may explain its popularity among highly educated youth: participants are expected to contribute with religious presentations and take part in discussions of how to understand religious knowledge. Everyone is encouraged to actively share in the administration of activities and (public) events. In many ways, MJD exemplifies a generational shift in the practice of Islam in Europe, both because of its approach

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mosque organization to which the youth group belongs is hostile to any formal affiliation with MJD. According to the *shura* member, unofficial cooperation with MJD is acceptable to MJD since it does not seek to represent any Muslim community in Germany. Telephone interview with *shura* member June 17, 2008.



Figure 1. Participant with MJD logo at MJD summer camp 2004. Photo: Synnøve Bendixsen.

to Islam and because of its teaching methods. When teaching Islam, MJD participants make use of books that address Islam in a universal way, including sacred texts like the Koran and the *sunnah* (the way of living and acting as stipulated by the Prophet Muhammad). During seminars, the teaching and practice of Islam takes place within the quest for what the youth consider the pure Islam. This is contrasted to the Islam of their parents, which the youth judge as mixed with tradition and superstition.<sup>21</sup>

The focus on knowledge and self-discipline as the correct way to Islam echoes similar processes taking place in several European societies and in Islamic movements in the Middle East and Turkey.<sup>22</sup> Emphasis is placed on how individual actors can choose between various interpretations and make individual assertions in relation to Islam (Eickelman and Piscatori

<sup>21</sup> Several scholars have noted the distinction youth make between “pure” Islam and the “traditional” Islam of their parents. (See Amiraux 2001; Amir-Moazami and Salvatore 2003; Bendixsen 2009b; Cesari 2002; Jacobsen 2011; Jacobson 1998; Karakaşoğlu 2000; Nökel 2002; Roy 2004; Venel 1999, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> See for example, Jacobson (1998) for the UK, Roy (2004) for France; Salih (2003) for Italy, Sanktanber (2002) for Turkey, and Mahmood (2005) for Egypt.

1996; Mandaville 2002, 2004). This particular religious consciousness is usually understood as being realized through a process of modernization, where the expansion of literacy and education plays a role in diminishing the dependence on more traditional religious authorities to make sense of one's religion (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Ismail 2004). Media and access to higher education have made it possible for an increasing number of actors to engage with and modify religious traditions. This has led to a democratized access to religious texts (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996, 111) and a democratization of religious authority (Hirschkind 2001a)—a process in which MJD takes part.

### *Local and National Connections*

MJD does not promote ready-made religious instruction, but draws on a variety of authorities that they believe follow an “Islam of the middle way,” including Tariq Ramadan, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and the Egyptian television preacher Amr Khaled.<sup>23</sup> The messages from these authorities are not followed in their entirety; whereas some aspects of Qaradawi's teachings, such as “women are allowed to travel alone,” are acknowledged, a recent call to jihad against Israel was rejected. Furthermore, whereas some members might be attracted to Khaled's profile, other members will find him objectionable and too populist. Like most organizations, MJD has developed a particular organizational culture and content, which successive *shuras* uphold with only minor modifications. According to the leader of the *shura*, changes in what is religiously acceptable or not (for instance whether or not hip hop is suitable at religious meetings) could be understood to be a result of a situation where the organizers have gained more and more experience. They have become adults and thus are less afraid of doing something that may be considered incorrect.

At the national level, MJD sends out nationwide Friday emails; arranges regional monthly seminars called *Tarbiyah* (i.e. education generally and the upbringing of children specifically); and organizes annual regional and national camps, which bring together Muslim youth from all over Germany. The establishment of new branches in cities or towns is either initiated centrally, meaning that a local member will be

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<sup>23</sup> Yusuf al-Qaradawi is considered one of the main intellectuals in the contemporary Islamic Revival (Mahmood 2005, 61). The controversial Swiss thinker Tariq Ramadan is often presented as one of the leading Islamic thinker among Europe's second- and third-generation Muslim immigrants. Critics of Tariq Ramadan argue that his hidden agenda is to promote fundamental religious viewpoints on behalf of the Muslim Brotherhood.

given responsibility for setting up a branch, or more organically by young people who approach the *shura* and want to establish an MJD branch in their region. The *shura* will then provide the youth with guidance and advice, a branch handbook with guidelines, and invitations to participate in seminars for religious education to become youth leaders.<sup>24</sup>

The local branches are connected to the national level not only through the larger national meetings, but also because each branch follows a handbook with suggestions about how to organize their weekly meetings (both in terms of logistics and content) and makes active use of the central MJD website, which by now is professional and continuously updated. If there are issues with the local government or a local mosque, one of the national *shura* representatives will assist the local MJD branch. Participants and members from various parts of Germany also meet regularly through MJD activities, including regional meetings, Muslim Girls Meetings, Brother Meetings, and the yearly summer camp (the latter is the highlight of the year, and participants from all over Germany come together for seminars on Islam, creative activities such as Calligraphy workshops and music performances by famous Muslim singers, and speeches by well-known Islamic preachers).

### *Coming Out in Public: The Scandal*

MJD had received little public attention before it ventured out of the margins by applying for and receiving public recognition in the form of state funding for a project on youth with immigrant backgrounds. One consequence of entering the public arena was increased attention from non-Muslims, including the media. Hostile media coverage resulted in the increased marginalization of the organization in the German public sphere. I have deliberately not focused on this “scandal” in this research as my interest lies elsewhere, but a short overview is needed in order to situate MJD in its German context.

The project “*Ta’ruf/Kennenlernen!*” (“Getting to know each other”) was developed by individual members of MJD in 2002, and aimed to counter prejudice and racism by having young Muslims speak directly to youngsters with immigrant backgrounds at different schools in Berlin.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Telephone interview with the national leader of MJD, June 17, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> The project was founded by the German Federal Ministry of Family, Seniors, Women and Youth (*Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend*). The main idea was to focus on young people from immigrant backgrounds who faced difficulties, and to try to strengthen their identity through the medium of Islam. The person behind this

The project, which was one of only a handful of projects led by a Muslim organization with funding from a German state agency, was subsequently discontinued after a press-generated scandal that started with the headline, “Muslim organization evangelizing in Berlin schools.”<sup>26</sup> The *Tagesspiegel* newspaper expressed fear that the “controversial organization” was using the project to recruit “Islamists’ Offspring” in Berlin schools.

Suddenly, MJD was the focus of public attention, which increased when investigative journalists found a “Friday talk” (*Nasiha*) on MJD’s homepage that they claimed had anti-Semitic undertones. MJD publicly apologized for the text on its homepage and changed the online access of its members in order to restrict online publication of unmoderated posts. MJD also issued a statement defending itself from the media accusations, which was published alongside a supportive statement from representatives of the Federal association of the Catholic Youth Community (*Bundesverband der Katholischen Jungen Gemeinde*, KJG), who declared that they had good relations with the Muslim organization in question.<sup>27</sup> Despite these measures and the support, public funding was withdrawn and the Ta’ruf project was discontinued.<sup>28</sup>

During this process, connections between MJD and other Islamic organizations were brought into focus, as were individual members of

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project told me that it was in fact a personal initiative, but he needed a partner organization behind it to get funding. MJD had been the natural choice for him as he had been an active member for a long time.

<sup>26</sup> Author’s translation from the original headline: “Muslimischer Verein missioniert in Schulen” in *Tagesspiegel* 6.11.2003. According to one of the participants in the project, the journalists had been first approached by a teacher at one of the schools in Kreuzberg in which the project had worked.

<sup>27</sup> Together with KJG and the Federal Association of Jewish Students in Germany (*Bundesverband der jüdischen Studenten in Deutschland*, BJSJ), MJD participated in a multi-religious dialogue project “TRIALOG - Together in Difference” in 2003, funded by the Federal Ministry of the Interior (*Bundesinnenministerium*). The media statement declared: “With regret we have to assert that in the internet archive there is a Friday-talk (Naisha) that can hurt [or offend] the feelings of our Jewish fellow men. We apologize for this.” Author’s translation from the original German. From online “Statement to the articles in *Tagesspiegel* of 6th and 7th of Nov. 2003,” dated Berlin November 7, 2003. The press statement further deplores that *Tagesspiegel* did not wait with publishing its article until after the discussion it had arranged with the project leader, so as to hear his arguments against the accusations.

<sup>28</sup> This did not go unnoticed by *Tagesspiegel*, which used the article headline “Ministry withdraws funding from the Muslim Youth, the organization corrects internet appearance and denies the accusation of Islamism” (author’s translation from the German original), *Tagesspiegel* November 8, 2003: [www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/art270,1987501](http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/art270,1987501), accessed October 20, 2004.

MJD.<sup>29</sup> The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution classified MJD as Islamist and connected to the internationally controversial Muslim Brotherhood—a classification that MJD rejected. The link that the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution made to the Muslim Brotherhood was primarily based on a link by kinship: one of the MJD *shura* members for 2004 was the brother of Ibrahim el-Zayat, the president of the Islamic Community Germany (*Islamische Gemeinschaft in Deutschland*, IGD), who the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution suspected of representing the Muslim Brotherhood in Germany.<sup>30</sup> The media focused on one additional member of MJD: Fereshta Ludin, who was born in Afghanistan, had fought a long legal case in Baden-Württemberg to be able to veil and work as a teacher. Fereshta Ludin was considered not suitable to be a teacher because of her reasons for wearing the headscarf.<sup>31</sup> This was a trial that the media had followed closely, mostly with unsympathetic statements about Ludin's arguments. She had been a member of MJD in Stuttgart for a long time. The media came to rely on a circular argument in which Fereshta Ludin was presented as a fundamentalist because she was a former member of MJD, and MJD was viewed as fundamentalist because Fereshta Ludin used to be a member of the organization.<sup>32</sup> The logic of rumors (Schiffauer 2006a) in this media campaign was reinforced by guilt by association or the practice of infection: any group that has contact with people distrusted

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<sup>29</sup> Following the media debate in which the Green delegate Özcan Mutlu claimed that there was “a clear link” between MJD and the Muslim Brotherhood, the potential connections between MJD and the Muslim Brotherhood were also discussed in the German Bundestag. The official transcript shows that the debate was characterized by a lack of any concrete information or knowledge about links between the two organizations, as was even admitted by the speakers (See Deutscher Bundestag 74. Sitzung. Berlin 2003, 6360–6362).

<sup>30</sup> There was also a focus on MJD's connection to the prohibited Al-Aqsa organization. MJD publicly rebutted the accusation, which suggested that if MJD folded, its funds would be transferred to the Al-Aqsa organization. MJD stated that at an earlier MJD meeting, during a period when Al-Aqsa was still a recognized charity, it had decided that Al-Aqsa would be one of the recipients of remaining resources in the event that MJD disbanded. MJD maintained that this position was changed after the *Bundesinnenministerium* included Al-Aqsa on its list of prohibited organizations. See [de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslimische\\_Jugend\\_in\\_Deutschland](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslimische_Jugend_in_Deutschland), accessed February 20, 2008. MJD participants told me that this Wikipedia entry on MJD was written by MJD members.

<sup>31</sup> See Pressemitteilung Nr. 119/98 des Ministeriums für Kulturs, Jugend und Sport Baden-Württemberg, July 13, 1998. For an overview of the process and debate, see Oestreich (2004). For a discursive analysis of the debate, see Sinclair (2012).

<sup>32</sup> Ludin is no longer an active member of MJD (she is more than 30 years old) and in 2006, she was a teacher at the Islamic Grammar School in Berlin (a private, state-funded school for 1–6th grade).



by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution was infected with the virus of Islamism.

Journalists also pointed out that the Islamic bookshop “Green Palace,” which was run by MJD until it was closed down in 2010, sold copies of the German translation of the Islamic scholar al-Qaradawi’s “The Lawful and Prohibited in Islam” (“*al-Halal wal-Haram fil-Islam*”).<sup>33</sup> Yusuf al-Qaradawi is a well-known member of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, and is seen as an ideological link between MJD and the Brotherhood. Furthermore, the book refers to the death penalty for apostates. MJD insisted that 99 percent of the book, which was published in Egypt in 1960 and is standard reading for many Muslims, was compatible with German legislation, and that the paragraph about apostasy was not considered relevant for Muslims in Germany. This did not alter the standpoint of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution vis-à-vis MJD.<sup>34</sup>

The allegations brought against MJD remained based on generalizations about its ideological orientation, and appear to have been made without any serious and thorough investigation.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, public discussion focused exclusively on MJD’s public national activities, disregarding what MJD regards as its main work, namely local weekly meetings with young people. The negative media attention has apparently had less direct impact on local meetings, but public projects have become more difficult to pursue, including hiring public venues for larger MJD events. Possibly, MJD finds it harder to attract new members. However, there has been an increase in the number of members from the beginning of 2007, when MJD had 350 members, to the first half of 2008, when membership had increased to 600. According to one member of the shura, for MJD, the consequence of the negative press and the stigma from the suspicions that the media and the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution

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<sup>33</sup> Telephone interview with a member of the *shura*, June 17, 2008. The authors whose books Green Palace published included Tariq Ramadan and Mustafa Islamoglu. The books sold included authors like Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Sayyid Qutb (an Egyptian supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood), Abdul ‘Ala Maududi, Ahmad von Denffer, and Amir Zaidan. Green Palace also sold *Nasheed* (songs with an Islamic angle) and religious music CDs by e.g. Yusuf Islam, and the German convert (with an Ethiopian background) Ammar 114, who is a hip hop artist.

<sup>34</sup> See also Mühe (2007) for an overview of this critical event.

<sup>35</sup> Ewing (2003) has also illustrated how the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution largely frame their accusations against the Muslim organization Milli Görüş on blurred images, including the presumption that Islamist extremists are hiding behind a rhetoric that includes multiculturalism, human rights and constitutionality in their endeavor to obtain followers and resources in order to influence and undermine governmental power.

asserted is not only that public funding for new projects will be problematic, but also that MJD may not receive invitations to discussions with private and public non-Muslim figures. Moreover, the media and political response towards MJD might prevent future Muslim organizations, including MJD, from taking an active role in the German public sphere for fear that it would lead to more muck-raking by journalists, with little attendant space for the Muslim organizations to respond.<sup>36</sup>

This critical event, which occurred before my research began, turned out to have consequences for my fieldwork and writing. In order to explain the consequences for the epistemology of this research, it is necessary to first clarify how my methodology, my entrance to the field, and the fieldwork itself, were informed by the particular context in which the people I studied were made to appear suspicious by the media, and in turn became suspicious of others.

### *Methodology: The Art of Fieldwork*

#### *Entering the Field*

I was introduced to the Muslim Youth in Germany by one of their former members (Aishegül, a 31 year old Muslim woman) at an “Islamophobia” conference held by the German *Henrich Böll Stiftung* at Rosenthaler Platz, in Mitte, Berlin, in March 2004. When Aishegül told me about her religious community (MJD) and said that it was ethnically mixed, consisted of second generation migrants, and that its activities took place in German, I asked whether I could visit one of their meetings. She agreed and contacted the then-leader of the women’s group in Berlin.

Two days later, I met fifteen young women at a venue in Kreuzberg. Most of the women wore headscarves and long coats, although some had long loose hair and wore jeans and tops that ended above their hips. I talked about my research on Muslim youth with migration backgrounds in Berlin, and asked whether I could participate in their group for a period of time. I also explained the social anthropological concept of participant observation, and the leader and the participants agreed to let me participate. From this meeting at the end of March 2004, I conducted intensive fieldwork with members of the organization until February 2006, with more random encounters and visits until December 2007. I participated in

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<sup>36</sup> Ewing (2003) suggests that these kinds of practices also hint that a Muslim identity is incompatible with a German identity.



MJD weekly meetings, MJD regional and national meetings, leisure activities, religious events and celebrations, weddings, engagement parties, private parties, high school events, and shopping.

In addition to the empirical data gathered through the fieldwork, I make use of the organization's publications, websites, brochures, newspapers, and magazines, as well as semi-structured interviews and informal conversations. I have chosen to rely less on interviews with the young women I worked with and have instead sought to develop my understanding and analysis of the role of Islam in their lives based on social situations and encounters with the women that could not be captured by collections of narratives or interviews. Participant observation enabled a broader understanding of the relationship between the particular context of the youth and their everyday choices, constraints and daily social acts.

Although the social space of the organization will necessarily be included in the analysis, this book focuses less on the organization per se, and more on its attendees. I am not interested in the possible (external) fundamentalist influences on the organization and its structure, or in how the organization positions the Islam it teaches within Islamic theological traditions.<sup>37</sup> Instead, this book reflects on how learning about Islamic knowledge and practices within a religious organization shapes the way youth craft their Self. Although this necessarily includes an examination of the religiously defined knowledge, sources, and approaches of the organization, my attention is on how this knowledge and these practices become part of the youth's subject formation.

This book focuses on the lived experiences of a group of young women in Berlin for whom Islam has become a nucleus of identification. I am conscious of the possible pitfalls of essentializing the participants by focusing mainly on one aspect of identification, namely Islam. A sole focus on religious identification tends to omit that the women are also young people who study, work or are unemployed, and are members of families. Identification as a Muslim cannot be understood by reference to Islam alone (Bringa 1995), as religious practices and beliefs are not the sole reference in their constructions of identity. Just as Othering discourses define the young people by their ascribed identities instead of by their social roles (see Allievi 2006, see also chapter 2), I am aware of the risks of reducing them to representatives of a religious category. I am aware of this danger and risk it nonetheless, because this categorization is a very

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<sup>37</sup> Had this been my focus, I would have had to significantly improve my knowledge of Islam and reconsider my methodological starting point.

powerful one in their lives and MJD is a space in which this particular identity is developed and negotiated.<sup>38</sup> That said, I also explore how gender, class, ethnic background, and being young affect how the Muslim identity is negotiated and played out at different times and in different spatial contexts. The variety of ways these youth related to their religious identity is addressed throughout the book.

There are two main reasons that I decided to conduct fieldwork in this religious organization. First, its social space provided an accessible field where I could regularly connect with Muslim youth. Conducting fieldwork in an urban space comes with great methodological challenges for any researcher. How can the researcher access the vast range of experiences and forces shaping individual lives as urbanites participate in disparate and often private arenas? One additional difficulty about studying (mostly) veiled religiously oriented women is that they are less present in public space compared to men. Veiled women tend not to visit cafes, and do not regularly hang around in the street. Instead, when not at school or university, piously oriented Muslim women frequently spend time at home, with family or friends, or sometimes shopping. Secondly, and more importantly, my interest lies at the interface between individual and group interaction and the effect this has on individual women's religiosity. In other words, I am interested in how the acquisition of knowledge and the crafting of the Self play out within the context of a religious group. The form of religious Self that the organization calls on the youth to realize determines and modifies several aspects of the young women's life-choices. This religious objective directly affects the youth's perception of living in Berlin in terms of their identification as Muslim, their relation to the ethnic group of their parents, their perception of gender roles in public and private, and their marriage-related choices (see chapter 6). Overall, by directly observing this small group, I have been able to delve into the disconnect between common representations of Muslim women in the public sphere, and how they themselves envision their identities and social positions. I have also been able to examine how group attitudes are marked by an insider-outsider view of what makes the good life.

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<sup>38</sup> Here, I agree with Yuval-Davis (2006), who questions Butler's argument that the process of signification is illimitable. Yuval-Davis suggests that "in specific historical situations and in relation to specific people there are some social divisions which are more important than others in constructing specific positionings" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 203). In short, I agree that some social divisions are relevant to most people in a large number of situations.

*Making Use of Situational Analysis*

Through participating in organized social events and more spontaneous social gatherings, I had access to how the youth actively deal with their identification as young people who are committed to their religion. Indeed, management of meaning—interpretation, negotiation and reformulation—takes place in small groups of people, all with their “inner” lives (Wulff 1988, 27). During participant observation, I was inspired by the approach of the Manchester school of anthropology (Rhodes-Livingstone Institute) to the collection of data and analysis of society. Mitchell (1987) suggests that data-collection can be organized by the use of apt illustration, situational analysis, and extended case study.<sup>39</sup> This book is built upon situations I participated in or witnessed, where I listened to the conversations between the youth, sometimes asking questions or trying to lead the conversation in a specific direction without guessing where it would take us.

By focusing on social situations, studying meetings between people as temporally and spatially bounded series of events, and observing sequences of events in a long-term perspective in which I followed the same actors through several social events, I seek to provide an understanding of how the crafting of a religious Self and Muslim identification is positioned within various social fields and in relation to a number of social actors. The social construction of persons and social relations takes place in these different social situations. Throughout this book, I present conversations between the youth. When young Muslims talk with each other, they comment on, confirm, intensify, or dismiss certain images, representations, or identities. In such situations, they frequently say something about themselves in contrast to the Other. This is often one of the main

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<sup>39</sup> First developed by Gluckman (1958) in his account of the opening of a bridge in Zululand, “situational analysis” was later defined by Mitchell as “the intellectual isolation of a set of events from the wider social context in which they occur in order to facilitate a logically coherent analysis of these events” (Mitchell 1987, 7). Mitchell (1987) recognizes three distinct epistemological elements of the social structure that must be identified by the analyst. First, the analyst must recognize the set of events that includes manners or actions which the researchers consider a problem or logically linked in one way or another. Second, the actors ascribe meanings to situation or activities. These meanings can be particular to the event and can be open for disputes or negotiations between individuals, and can thus facilitate an examination of the construction of symbols. Third, the analyst must identify the setting or the structural construct, which not all actors inevitably share or recognize (see also Roger and Vertovec 1995). Although I did not pursue a situational analysis entirely in the spirit of Mitchell, I remain devoted to the effort of a simultaneous investigation of the social setting or context of the youth and the meanings that the social actors give to what they are doing.

motives behind the conversations, even if other dimensions, such as idealism or the enjoyment of storytelling, should not be dismissed.

I analyze the crafting of the Self by paying attention to daily situations that the women experience and the meanings they ascribe to these events, both of which I interpret within their socio-structural context. Any social event must be seen in its social context and has to be treated with the same respect and attention as the extraordinary or dramatic (Garbett 1970). The discourses made available through situational analysis are not idiosyncratic, but are largely shared between various groups of people. By studying what goes on in a smaller faith community, I can take account of larger cultural expressions and social discourses by thinking beyond the boundaries of the particular group. Thus, studying a smaller group is a particularly fruitful approach through which to gain access to social actions and cultural (re)productions in a society.

During MJD meetings, I sat in the circle, listened, observed the activities, and often participated actively in the social games. At social gatherings, I listened to the conversations among the youth, and sometimes asked questions and joined in. I sought to listen and learn rather than dictate the agenda. I paid particular attention to novices in the group: What terminology appeared new to them and how were they welcomed in the group? Where had they heard of MJD and how did they introduce themselves to the others? Just like a child gradually learns its parents' ideas about the world, many of the newcomers in the organization—and I with them—went through a process of learning new concepts, language, and un/spoken norms or standards. Activities in the group were about processes of learning and correcting religious performances, as well as contestations and adjustments of this performance.<sup>40</sup> In the process whereby the leader corrected a new member, a youth asked questions, or the young people performed a role-play about the “correct” religious performance, there was both an individual and a collective approach to creating a common platform of transaction (see Barth 1994a).

As often happens with ethnographers, my most valuable fieldwork data often emerged from encounters when my presence was accidental, and where fieldwork was not the defining object of the conversation, but the result of several months of participant observation that reduced the

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<sup>40</sup> Here I think of performance in the broader sense, as Erving Goffman (1959) defines it in *The Performance of Self in Everyday Life*: as any public activity that influences other people. Goffman considers performance to include the moments of theatricality taking place in face-to-face interaction. The politics of identity are negotiated through performance of the Self.

initial formality and skepticism. This form of participant observation, although time-consuming and sometimes frustrating, has provided me with insight into the young women's lives and perceptions of living in Berlin that would otherwise not have been accessible, or that would have been easily overlooked had I limited the data collection to interviews.<sup>41</sup> Participant observation is unique in making available the complex ways social actors are oriented towards normative rules and material, bodily, and social constraints, and also how social practices are informed by un/intentional strategies. Through this approach, I could observe the actors' different attachments to their religious communities and the ways in which individual and group practices are affected by and form the individual religious subjectification.

As I did not make use of a tape-recorder during the conversations that took place at MJD meetings, celebrations, on the subway, in the street or shops etc., the quotes are not likely to be exact renditions of what was said.<sup>42</sup> Most of the conversations are not word for word transcripts, but rather recollections based on notes and memory. While I occasionally wrote keywords while the conversation was taking place, most of the time I rushed to take fieldnotes immediately after the event. While the loss of precise transcripts does have drawbacks (such as making cognitive or linguistic analysis impossible), this is outweighed by gaining spontaneity, genuineness in the discussions among the youth, and the sharpening of the researcher's senses. Moreover, my interest lies in the modes of everyday interaction, group discussion, and processes of knowledge formation that cannot be gathered through interviews, but which are available through partaking in a variety of social situations where the use of a tape-recorder would have been alienating for the youth and social actors involved.

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<sup>41</sup> Anthropologists generally emphasize that what a person says is not necessarily what that same person does. This is not to suggest that the person is lying. "Truth" is a relative term that is situationally conditioned. Sometimes the interview partner gives the answer that she or he expects that the interviewer would like to hear. At other times, it can be a matter of embarrassment, or the phrasing of the question that leads to a discrepancy between doing and saying. However, more importantly, doing fieldwork can lead to other types of questions beyond those that a researcher had in mind before entering "the field," because the experience of a person's life is of a different (emotional and analytical) sort than what is available through interviews. I do not deny that interviews can give different, and valuable, data and insight compared to participant observation.

<sup>42</sup> See Hannerz (1969, 206) for a discussion on the drawbacks and advantages of a tape-recorder while conducting fieldwork.

*The Social Position of the Fieldworker*

The fieldworker's status always affects the way that anthropological fieldwork is conducted and the data that is "collected" in the field. In some ways, the anthropologist has similar qualities as the stranger; neither insider nor outsider, she or he is both anomalous and ambiguous, and can be a potential risk or threat. By necessity, my presence had consequences for what happened and thus for what I was able to comprehend. This can be called "consequential presence" (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995). For example, during one MJD weekly meeting, I sat on the floor with the young women. They were discussing which categories of people would enter heaven or hell in the afterlife when a girl asked whether non-Muslims who are nevertheless "good persons" would end up in hell or not. Should I understand this question in relation to my presence, as a consequence of the girl having non-Muslim friends at school or in her neighborhood, or a combination of both?

Self-reflection and contemplation about the consequences of autobiographical issues, including my social position in the field, should be incorporated in ethnographic research (Ortner 2006). As Stuart Hall puts it: "We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always 'in context', positioned" (Hall 1996b, 211). Clearly, the interaction among the young people that takes place when the anthropologist is present is likely to be shaped by an outsider's presence. The anthropologist is never invisible when observing events, and having an effect on the fieldwork situation is unavoidable. The challenge for the fieldworker must therefore be to reflect upon how they affect the social environment they study. That I am a Norwegian woman with a white, middle-class, and a secular (yet culturally Protestant) background has consequences for how others perceive me, as well as for how I perceive my surroundings. In addition, I have the impression that the researcher's ability to express empathy or other aspects of their personal temperament, character or ego-identity, can be of equal importance in developing a personal relationship during participant observation.<sup>43</sup> The relevance of these more personal traits can be less straightforward to list or to reflect on.

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<sup>43</sup> In her monograph "Never in Anger", Brigg (1970) provides a remarkable reflection on how her personality affected her fieldwork. Yet, although such writing opens up our understanding of how the fieldworker's person has a direct impact on what type of information is made available and how the fieldwork process take place, such reflectionist approaches can also overshadow the main analysis of the field.

At the same time, the duration and process of fieldwork can change the attitude of the subjects towards the researcher, as can events. In the beginning, the girls were sometimes shy, but mostly friendly towards me. I sometimes slept in mosques, listened to their conversations, and tried to hang out with the adolescents as much as possible. Throughout the fieldwork, I was often approached with questions such as: “Why did you decide to write about Muslim women?” “Are you a Muslim?” “Do you believe in God?” and “Synnøve, do you pray?” Questions like these indicate that despite the increase in studies about Muslim women since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the youth did not find it plausible that someone would want to write about them. Yet they also suggest that my personal relationship to religion and God was of utmost importance in their relationship to me. Answering that I was brought up as a Protestant was usually sufficient, although some insisted on knowing whether or not I believed in God, which put me in a dilemma. As I realized that most of them would not trust someone who does not believe in God, I was reluctant to admit to my emotional distance to God. After a few months, I was introduced to newcomers or strangers as “this is sister Synnøve. She is a sister, though not a Muslim yet.” Some of the women commented that, “you look more and more like a Muslim,” which reflected my increasing focus on how I dressed during meetings and leisure activities. In changing my mode of dress, I sought to not cause offence and to diminish feelings of discomfort both for them and for myself. That I was unmarried and without children also made me appear more “like them.” However, in other discussions it made me an outsider or more like the “typical” German, since I was thirty years old—most of the Muslim women were married and had children by their mid-20s. My role changed throughout the period that I participated in MJD. For example, after one year of regular participant observation I wrote:

It is my second year on the bus trip to the yearly three-day MJD summer camp. The bus stops at a gas station in order for the youth to pray. Fadwa (23) shouts to me as I am walking to the bus: “Synnøve, we are praying now, are you coming?” As I remain silent, looking at her in surprise, she seems to recall and says: “Ah no, you are not praying, of course.”

Similarly, during my visit to Fatima’s (31) home, she noticed that her husband was coming home, and was about to tell me to put on my headscarf before she recalled that, “of course, you don’t veil.” Despite these momentary lapses in which the youth forgot that I was an outsider, even when it has become easier for the anthropologist to move around and conduct or



listen to conversations, she remains an outsider to a smaller or larger extent. Below, I discuss how access to the ethnographic field, the process of fieldwork, and the subsequent effort to gather relevant data for analysis can be affected by the wider social contexts of the particular ethnographic field in which the participant observation takes place.

*Conducting Fieldwork in an Atmosphere of Mistrust*

Here, I reflect upon pursuing ethnographic fieldwork with Muslim women in the context of the German media discourse post 9/11, and the German public's general suspicion of Muslim organizations and mosques. How do anthropologists gain acceptance within the social context in which they are interested? This is not a matter of political or administrative acceptance, but a basic human acceptance where the task of building a relationship of trust with the conversation partners must be done in ways that tread lightly.<sup>44</sup> This question of trust is often directly related to the particular socio-cultural and historical context within which the research field is positioned and to how the fieldworker is located within that particular context.

Two aspects of the organization particularly affected my fieldwork and my writing about the youth. First, as mentioned, MJD was under investigation by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution. Second, MJD's focus on constructing religiously virtuous Selves and emphasizing correct religious behavior initially made me uncomfortable about the goal of the organization. Three months into the fieldwork, Fatima (31) pointed to my discomfort when she commented: "You must find that some of what we are saying is quite conservative. What do you think about it?" One of the main reasons why liberals and feminists, myself included, find it difficult to deal with deeply religious movements is that these movements seek to enter the most internal part of the individual and form and shape the individual in a particular manner (see Mahmood 2001). Even if I recognize that the secular state is not objective or neutral, and know that the secular body is subjected by discourses (Asad 2003), the religious body is more challenging for a secular researcher to deal with. The orientation towards creating a religious body—ultimately to conform the body to a "divine model of moral conduct" (Hirschkind 2001a, 27)—can, as Fatima

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<sup>44</sup> I avoid the term "informants" as I consider the fieldwork process to be more dialogical and I agree with Gullestad (2006b) that the term obscures the actual contribution of the so-called informants to the research process.



recognized, feel like a conservative project. In light of my academic and feminist position, in addition to not being religiously oriented, I found it difficult to understand some of the women's decisions: Why do educated and urban young women decide to participate in a religious organization that can be said to enforce patriarchal structures and demand a submissive conduct? Why does the organization encourage women to veil, even if they are aware of the social disadvantages involved, including problems with their teachers and difficulties in getting an internship or job? At the same time, for reasons which will become clear throughout the book, I realized that to place the young women within an academic discourse of either "submissiveness," "force," and "patriarchal structures" or of "freedom" and "being liberated" would be too reductionist and represent a simplification of the young women's lives.

Two specific episodes highlight the significance of the circumstances described above. The first episode took place in a conversation after one of the weekly MJD meetings, and involves what Geertz has called the "anthropological turning point"—the moment when otherwise quiet fieldwork is interrupted and the researcher knows that it will either lead to a different stage of access to the field or it will constitute a "break" with the field. The second episode occurred at a workshop where I presented my initial ideas about the fieldwork and it is related to speech and being listened to. Whereas the first formed the social space I was given by the social actors, the second shaped my understanding of the social setting in which the youth are situated. Both had direct consequences for how I came to write about the fieldwork. Both events relate to conducting participant observation in an atmosphere of mistrust and to the "location of the speaker" and "where the speech goes and what it is doing there" (cf. Alcoff 1992, 23). It also reflects the current political climate around Islam in Germany and how this affects the public dialogue.

### *Who Is the Researcher?*

The first situation, which was also the main turning point in my fieldwork, occurred six months after my first appearance in the field. Three of the older youth who were leading the MJD Berlin branch at the time, asked me to stay for a personal conversation when the weekly meeting was over. Once we were alone, one of the women said that the group had been very friendly towards me, and that she was now wondering how far I had come with my religious belief and whether the weekly meetings had made me reflect upon my religious conviction. I responded by repeating my

explanation of what it means to do fieldwork and of my research focus. My answers did not satisfy them, and I was told to not come everywhere with them and that when they were having sleep-overs in the mosque, they did not want me around. When I went home, I felt that I had failed as a fieldworker. However, the very next day Aishegül (31) phoned me and asked how things were going, as she did not participate in the weekly meetings after turning 30 and passing the age limit. When I did not mention the odd situation to her, she quickly said: "I heard about what happened yesterday, Synnøve, and I am so angry at them!" She advised me to call one of the leaders in order to discuss in more detail what I was doing and my research methods. "Some of them think that you are a spy," she added.<sup>45</sup>

The event, I realized, highlighted the need for the researcher to continuously renew approval for the fieldwork (Wax 1977, 29).<sup>46</sup> Aishegül suggested that I meet with four of the older participants to talk more extensively about my research methods and intentions. The following week, during a breakfast meeting in one of the women's home, I succeeded in renegotiating my position within the organization.

Part of the mistrust was a result of the fact that I would sometimes jot down notes and that I did not conduct interviews—probably since they were used to journalists approaching them with specific, direct questions. Following this meeting, I stopped taking notes for a while. I also offered to make a presentation of my work. Aishegül remained the person who opened doors for me, and I was also helped by my status as Norwegian and hence partly an outsider in German society. Aishegül had coincidentally met my parents at Kottbusser Tor subway station in Kreuzberg during their visit, which provided her with a more extensive picture of who I was.

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<sup>45</sup> It is not new for the people the anthropologist is working with to perceive her as a spy. For example, Nilufer Göle (1996) has described the skepticism and suspicion that she met while interviewing Islamist women in Turkey. Ortner (2006), an anthropologist, points to the similarities between the two roles: both the spy and the anthropologist try to learn the language, seek to be treated as a member, and often do not ask direct questions. The significant difference is that anthropologists do not seek knowledge for treachery, but to shed light on humanity and possibly improve the social situation of marginalized groups (*ibid.*). However, the latter distinction is not necessarily obvious to individuals belonging to a social group that is often stigmatized and portrayed negatively both by journalists and social scientists (two examples of the latter are the recent works by Nekla Kelek, which I discuss briefly in chapter 2).

<sup>46</sup> Any human relationship and interaction constantly changes, thus maintenance of the interaction can never really be assured (Wax 1977, 29). Some anthropologists have suggested that there is a need for consent not prior to the fieldwork, but rather *ex post facto* (*ibid.*). The formalization of this is a complex matter. I suggest that it can also be done through continuous conversation with the people one works with.

Her opinion mattered to the group, as she was highly knowledgeable about Islam and had participated in MJD for a long time. Spending time with the individual women and in the group as it organized religious celebrations, picnics, or at camps outside Berlin, I came to know the women better, and they me. Gradually, I developed friendships with some of the young women, whereas others remained more peripheral to me.

I also realized that the fact that the organization was under investigation affected the atmosphere and the readiness to trust outsiders. A couple of weeks after the above incident, Fatima (31) asked me: "How do you plan to write about 'the scandal'?" She was referring to the intense media focus on the organization during the winter of 2003, a few months before my arrival in Berlin. Her comment was indicative of the uncertainty attached to outsiders writing about them, and to how I would understand the media's accusations. Consequently, I made sure to ask those involved in the media episode about what had happened, while simultaneously making it clear that the event would not be a central part of my study.

A few months later, a discussion with Fatima at her home enabled me to better understand the wariness towards my presence. Fatima pointed out that many of the women had thought that I would convert to Islam, as I was so enthusiastically involved. When they realized that there were no signs that I would convert, my status was again opened up for debate—what was I really doing there? She also noted that one of the MJD Berlin leaders had only recently become religiously active, after moving to Berlin. This young woman had only recently started to veil and she was in the process of finding her faith—or to develop her faith. This was why she was uncomfortable with having non-Muslims around her, Fatima argued. She went on to explain that, "you are there, listening, writing... For her, everything that happens there [at MJD] is very important—whereas you are only a spectator." Several of the older MJD members had also thought that I would gradually convert to Islam and had become uncertain as to why I was not reconsidering my religiosity given that I was so actively part of the process through which they themselves were becoming more religiously involved, both emotionally and in practice. In conclusion, Fatima noted that, "they [the young women] feel they have a great responsibility: they are representing Islam."

In the long run, the confrontational episode and consequent dialogues altered my research in two main ways. First, it made me reflect further on participant observation as a method and how the young women and the organizations' leaders felt about my presence. Secondly, it made me think more carefully about the possible consequences when a group is

stigmatized and made suspect without the opportunity to be heard. The mistrust was related to not only who I was, but, and perhaps even more, to how I would speak of them from my social location in the majority society. A speaker's location (which can be understood as the social location or social identity) has "an epistemically significant impact on that speaker's claims and can serve either to authorize or disauthorize one's speech" (Alcoff 1992, 7). This recognition lies behind the well-known ethnographic dilemma of the problem of speaking for others (*ibid.*). As MJD is often asked by the media and the public to talk about Muslim issues, its older members were semi-professional when talking about themselves, but also suspicious because of their continuous disappointments with journalists and with social scientists through the latter's public reports on Islam in Germany. These experiences had induced a general distrust towards "friendly strangers" among the participants.<sup>47</sup> The challenge of "talking" and being "listened to" became even clearer in the second situation.

#### *Who Are the Listeners?*

During my second year of research, I participated in a workshop on "Spaces of the Second Generation of Immigrants" at the Europa-Universität Viadrina Frankfurt/Oder, Germany, with twelve German participants with different academic backgrounds. I had been invited to talk about how MJD can be regarded as a life-space (*Lebensraum*) where the youth find a space of belonging in the city. I argued that participation in the Muslim youth group affects at least four aspects of identity work for the youth, namely education, emancipation, finding a suitable husband, and establishing a social network. Overall, I considered MJD a space where the young women's performances as young modern Muslims are constructed, negotiated and re-corrected (Bendixsen 2005).

Immediately after my presentation, a workshop participant asked in an aggressive tone about MJD's view on *shari'a* (Islamic law) and their relationship to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, and stated that in his view, the young participants were passively absorbing Islamic fundamentalism. He also brought up the negative focus on the Ta'ruf project and the "Friday

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<sup>47</sup> For example, when I discussed the German media discourses on Muslims and second-generation immigrants with Aishegül (31), she said: "They [journalists] are not stupid—it is just that they are not open to information. They have their own fixed idea and thoughts about it, and they don't ask to hear answers. (...) I used to spend so much time on it, just a waste of time and energy. You know, there is a 50 percent chance that they listen to you and write it or that they write what they want."

talk" (*Nasiha*). My analysis of MJD was ignored, as the workshop participant indirectly suggested that I asked the "wrong questions." MJD's own efforts to dispel negative opinions were not mentioned, and neither was the fact that MJD had received the "Heinz-Westphal Honor Prize" in 2002 for their voluntary engagement in "youth work" to "improve the distorted image of Islam in the public sphere and to explain Islam as a way of life."<sup>48</sup> The intervention drew my attention to how the presentation of my research would be situated in relation to the academic discourse on Islam and migrants in Germany and in relation to what may be called "political correctness" (Friedman 1999); all of which defines the questions that should be asked and what can be concluded. Moreover, it made me grasp how difficult it must be for the women to speak and to be listened to when they participate in the public sphere, in podium discussions, or in interviews.

The bias of the public sphere needs to be taken seriously by the researcher. Early Habermasian theories underline the communicative and consultative features of the public sphere, and consider it open for rational subjects to freely exchange ideas. In contrast, several scholars have drawn attention to how the public sphere also creates specific subjects and encourages particular capabilities and points of reference that facilitate the subjects' involvement in the public sphere.<sup>49</sup> Discussing secularism in the European public sphere, Asad reminds us of the pre-dispositions behind what we call free speech:

If one's speech has no effect whatever, it can hardly be said to be in the public sphere, no matter how loudly one shouts. To make others listen even if they would prefer not to hear, to speak to some consequence so that something in the political world is affected, to come to conclusion – these are all presupposed in the idea of free public debate as a liberal virtue. But these performatives are not open equally to everyone because the domain of free speech is always shaped by pre-established limits. (...) They [the performatives] are also intrinsic to the time and space it takes to build and demonstrate a particular argument, to understand a particular experience – and more broadly, to become particular speaking and listening subjects. The investment people have in particular arguments is not simply a matter of abstract, timeless logic. It relates to the kind of person one has become, and wants to continue to be. In other words, there is no public sphere of free speech at an instant. (Asad 2003, 184)

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<sup>48</sup> Author's translation from the original German. The official recognition letter is available online at MJD's homepage, [www.mjd-net.de](http://www.mjd-net.de), accessed October 15, 2005.

<sup>49</sup> See in particular Calhoun (1992), Fraser (1990), Hirschkind (2001) and Mahmood (2003).

Through my own experience of not being heard, I could better understand the doubts some women had about my presence. Even if I was listening and asking questions, it was unclear how I interpreted what they were doing and what I would write about them in the end. Moreover, I realized the impossibility of my research being able to circumvent the ongoing critique and suspicion of Islamic organizations. Saba Mahmood (2001) suggests that there is a distinction between political demands on researchers who aim to understand Islamists and Muslims and those working on questions of a secular-humanist sort. She argues that researchers who work on Muslim religious movements are expected to condemn Islamist movements for all the problems they are perceived to have caused or else risk being labeled as apologists. Researchers on secular humanists and secular projects are not expected to make such statements.<sup>50</sup>

### *Suspending Judgment*

Marianne Gullestad emphasized the need to suspend judgment in order to know more about the actor's point of view. This is a practice, she argued, that "we need to guard intensely in the present climate of populist journalism and reaffirmation of stereotypes" (Gullestad 2006b, 921). Although this position may be interpreted as entering a discourse of relativism, this is only superficially the case. Researchers do not have to choose between cultural relativism—a position which is thought to result in indifference or too much tolerance and "generous betrayal" (Gullestad 2006a)—and a critique of "negative" aspects of immigration and Islam based on moral universalism. Such a distinction ignores the difference between relativism as a moral position and relativism as a methodological approach (Jacobsen 2008). As a methodological approach, "descriptive relativism" can facilitate a sharpened contextualization of the research themes and open up for new understandings of the set of meanings expressed by people in the study.

Muslim women's voices are rarely taken seriously in the public sphere, unless they speak about topics such as forced marriages or honor killings. The use of dichotomies like tradition and modernity, harems and freedom, veiling and unveiling is a form of "associative thinking" (Frieman 1999) that has been used by the West to construct itself as superior

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<sup>50</sup> In this regard, Lila Abu-Lughod warns: "We need to have as little dogmatic faith in secular humanism as in Islamism, and as open a mind to the complex possibilities of human projects undertaken in one tradition as the other" (Abu-Lughod 2002, 788).

(Abu-Lughod 2001, 108).<sup>51</sup> These terms also form parts of what Said identified as the dogmas of Orientalism (*ibid.*) and what Spivak (1988) described as the “protection” of the woman. This woman, the “third world woman” Spivak directs us to, “becomes the signifier for the establishment of a good society, which must, at such inaugurative moments, transgress mere legality, or equity or legal policies” (Spivak 1988, 298). The status of the woman has become the means to evaluate a society’s position on the scale of modernity (Göle 1997) or the articulation of differences between civilizations (Göle 1996). Moreover, as chapter 3 examines extensively, this framing of Muslim women has a direct impact on how young people talk about themselves and represent themselves to journalists and researchers.

As mentioned, several studies point out that Muslim women from various social and ethnic backgrounds who live in Europe frequently stress their individual choice regarding their religious identity (Schmidt 2004a, 34).<sup>52</sup> Schmidt argues that the emphasis on choice is a consequence of the individualization of a person’s life within contemporary Western discourse. She claims that the ability to choose a career path and whom to marry are important elements in Western society. In the construction of the Self, being able to choose is not only a human right, it is a feature of being a well-developed individual. Giddens asserts that in a consumer society, freedom is turned into necessity so that “we have no choice but to choose” (Giddens 1994, 75). Similarly, Bauman contends that individualization is “a fate, and not a choice (...) the option to escape individualization and to refuse participation in the individualizing game is emphatically not on the agenda” (Bauman, 2002, xvi). Young Muslims I met emphasized autonomy and personal conviction in relation to their practice of Islam. Time and again, veiled women quickly said, “it was my own choice to wear the headscarf” before I had even mentioned the issue of the headscarf.

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<sup>51</sup> This “politics of associative thinking” (Friedman 1999) is also used by relativism, which then inverts the terms or equalizes them. It is the logic of association and the relation of power that is supposed to be maintained by this logic, which is combined in what Friedman (1999) calls political correctness.

<sup>52</sup> Schmidt (2004a, 34) writes that most of her young informants in the US emphasized that Islam was part of their family heritage, whereas others considered their religious practices to be a result of being stigmatized as “different.” Nevertheless, she found that all young people, independently of their various social and ethnic backgrounds, stressed the aspect of choice in their embrace of a Muslim identity (*ibid.*, 35). Further, Schmidt (2004a, 34) points out that “[w]e invest in and choose certain styles of consumption, convinced that we fabricate and state our individuality, our true selves, through them. To state oneself by reference to aspects of tradition and collective lifestyles is mostly considered archaic, repressive and even undemocratic.”



Their identification with Islam was presented as a rational decision, and as one choice among several different ways of living.<sup>53</sup> By de-emphasizing the role of their parents and kin in their decision, and by stressing their independent process of reflection on their decision to follow an Islamic lifestyle, the youth may reduce potential critiques. Processes of personal autonomy and self-confidence can be advanced by highlighting that one's choices are the result of intellectual enquiry (Schmidt 2004a, 35).

My research suggests that the weight young people place on choice has to be understood within the framework set out by Asad, where the public is never an "empty sphere" in which debates take place openly, but is composed of what he calls "sensibilities – memories and aspirations, fears and hopes of both speakers and listeners" (Asad 2003, 185). With modernity comes the idea that our actions must be presented as choice. I argue that the voices of the Muslim youth must be situated within a majority-minority relation in which majority practices are left unmarked, whereas the minority is expected to substantiate and legitimate their actions and choices as having been chosen.<sup>54</sup> Seeing the unevenness or inequality of the discourse (Grønhaug 1979) remains essential in order to understand the discussion about Muslim women in Germany and to understand how many Muslim women themselves talk about their headscarves.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> This conforms well with the conclusions of several researchers who have found that Islam is a conscious choice and related to individual reflection (i.e. Jacobson 1998, 158) in which religious belonging is considered a matter of moral choice and faith (see Babès 1997; Dassetto 1996; Marchal 2003; Roy 1999). However, I argue for a need to also contextualize the framing of what religious youth say they are doing.

<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that the current German public debate no longer resembles a binary of "minority" and "majority" actors, as the voice of the majority includes support from certain minority actors. I am thinking in particularly of the media archetype of the secular and socially mobile daughter of the *Gastarbeiter* ("guest worker") who critiques her "own" community. These speakers legitimate and are legitimated by their position as "speaking from within the community" and tend to encourage the simplified idea that the "Woman in Islam" is submissive and/or oppressed. Their presence allows public debates to claim to be diverse and maintains the impression that the debates do not start from a particular "majority" definition of the forms of speech that are valid. These actors provide the public sphere with a perception of being diverse and open for a plurality of voices. A good example of this is Kelek, whose recent books provide simplified pictures of Islam, "Muslim women," and "Muslim men," and which partly seek to present Kelek's own autobiography as the child of a Turkish *Gastarbeiter* as a true image of the situation of Muslims in Germany. She legitimizes (consciously/unconsciously) her monolithic analysis of Muslim lives in Germany by referring to her own negative experiences of Islam.

<sup>55</sup> In the 1970s, Grønhaug (1979) claimed that in the relationship between Norwegians and migrants, it is how the situation is defined that needs to be changed, not necessarily people's attitudes.



Certain argumentative styles are accepted, while others are not. In discussions about Muslims, German secularism is perceived as a neutral starting point for the debate, overlooking the fact that secularism is also a specific ideological viewpoint (see Asad 2003). Proficiency in German is not enough to participate in a public debate. In order to be listened to, one must argue from a particular standpoint, which means that the young Muslims' way of talking must be situated within a European or even German framework and perception of what makes the good life. In my research, young people argued from such standpoints, making use of arguments that promote a discourse of "choice," in direct contrast to the media's image of "force." The young Muslims also commented that "it's my own choice"—in contrast to the media characterization of "submission"—when talking about the headscarf and their identification with Islam both amongst themselves and with more public figures, including researchers.

In discussions about the headscarf, dialogue is already restricted by a binary perception that something is either "voluntarily" or "involuntary." In order to participate in public conversations, young women have to (consciously or unconsciously) draw on references to choice, accept certain premises about the meaning of freedom and self-realization, and focus on perceptions of individual decision-making.<sup>56</sup> In a context in which Muslim women are to be "saved" from their own men (see Spivak 1988), the available or legitimate frames of the discussion ("freedom" and "self-realization") is provided by the German "secular" majority.<sup>57</sup> The challenge is to construct conceptions of the public sphere and politics that take into account significant differences in the desires and complexities of groups and individuals. The issue here is not only whether or not youth submit to religious norms and ideals (which I discuss further in chapter 4 and 5), but that the way that the Muslim youth frame the discussion and explanations of what they are doing is structured by dichotomies. I contend that the public discourse is shaped in such a way that it obscures desires and motivating forces other than those of choice or the

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<sup>56</sup> An additional point here is that most of the women I worked with are socially upwardly mobile in that they are pursuing or have completed college (*Abitur*) and many of them have entered University. Their social status may affect their aspirations to be considered rational.

<sup>57</sup> Many anthropologists, Abu-Lughod (2002) included, have rightly included white women among the current "saviors." In the aftermath of 9/11, the logic of colonialist feminists who speak on behalf of or advocate for the "saving" of "subjugated" Muslim and Arab Women from patriarchal cultures has re-emerged. The Bush administration's invasion of Afghanistan was partly legitimated in the media through the logic of colonialist feminism.

quest for freedom and individuality. In light of this current social and political situation, how can we recognize and talk about differences “within women” (Lauretis 1987, 2), within “womanhood,” and between young women?

The discourse of choice, I argue, is not sufficient to understand what takes place during the weekly meetings or to understand the women’s religious practices. Rather, the fulfillment of the Self must be understood as formed within certain socio-historical strictures and includes implementations of latent boundary-making techniques. During my fieldwork, it became clear to me that it is too limiting to think about veiling or the efforts involved in following an Islamic lifestyle as questions about force and choice. I realized that to understand the decision to veil, I had to look beyond the first utterance of “it’s my free choice.” Through the analytical framework in which I situate the youth in relation to these discourses and by avoiding dichotomies such as “choice” or “force,” “resistance” or “submission,” I seek to avoid projecting a simplified image of the youths’ identification processes as well as of their process of forming or crafting a religious Self.

*As Way of Conclusion: On Conducting Fieldwork*

The social anthropologist Reidar Grønhaug once compared conducting ethnographic fieldwork to letting oneself sink down in a bath, to come up again with a completely different experience. Research is about giving oneself the possibility of being surprised; conducting fieldwork is a particularly appropriate methodological form for fertile discoveries (Grønhaug 2000). As anthropologists, we have to be prepared to find that our ideas and concepts are disputed and even transformed in the process of fieldwork. It is a challenge for anthropologists to transmit this insight to readers, who are not all social anthropologists. The increase in trans-disciplinary conferences and workshops, and the role played by the media challenge our work of speaking with or for and being listened to when writing about “people at home.” The concepts we use and the meanings we attach to them are particularly important as they can sometimes be used by others. Ethnographic knowledge may have the power to transform, but with this comes the risk that it is ignored, blocked or misappropriated (Ortner 2006). The space for talking or listening is neither neutral nor empty.

Friedman reminds us that “[e]thnography renders the other’s identity to ourselves and, via the conditions in which it is executed, back to the

other. By speaking him [or her], or for him [or her], we ultimately force him [or her] to speak through our categories" (Friedman 1994, 168). The concepts of "desire" and "moral agency" and how "we" (non-Muslim, Western and secular subjects) look at "them" (Muslims in Europe) is related to epistemology and to the fact that the different ways of writing about people who "we" perceive as acting or making different choices, has ideological consequences. How we see "them" informs how "we" look at ourselves. If how we describe "them" will form how they perceive themselves and affect intercultural relations, it is ultimately an exercise of power that should never be pursued light-heartedly.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MAKING SENSE OF THE CITY: THE RELIGIOUS SPACES OF YOUNG MUSLIM WOMEN IN BERLIN

...in the city, different people with different projects must necessarily struggle with one another over the shape of the city, the terms of access to the public realm, and even the rights of citizenship. Out of this struggle the city as work – as an oeuvre, as a collective if not singular project – emerges, and new modes of living, new modes of inhabiting, are invented.

–Mitchell 2003, 18.

#### *Introducing Berlin*

In 1989, the two parts of Berlin were again joined together as the capital of Germany, at least administratively. Since then, the city has undergone transformations in which politicians, city-planners and the media have promoted the many faces of Berlin: Berlin as a capital (*Hauptstadt*) of the unified Germany, city of culture (*Kulturstadt*) of Europe, and struggling to be a world city (*Weltstadt*) globally. The image of Berlin as “multi-cultural” (or “*multi-culti*” in Berlin slang) is another characterization that is either promoted or fretted about when media and politicians discuss migrants’ loyalty (or lack thereof) to Germany. It is also used to explain social problems, or as “proof of a policy gone wrong.”

Since the arrival of the so-called guest workers (*gastarbeiter*) in the 1960s, immigration to European urban centers has been a change factor in the urban landscape, and an introduction to new modes of living.<sup>1</sup> Today, Islam is increasingly visible in European societies. This visibility is partly a result of the growing popularity of the headscarf among young Muslims, and partly a result of the provisional courtyard or factory hall mosques of

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<sup>1</sup> The term “guest worker” is by no means neutral—rather, it draws attention to the ambiguity of the status of the migrant (Mandel 2008). Guests are, by definition, only temporarily present and are expected to return home. Guests should also follow the rules and regulations of the host. The second part of the word, workers, underlines the economic and use value of the migrant only in terms of her or his labor. It reduces them to their functions, and as Mandel powerfully argues, “it marginalizes and objectifies migrants, leaving limited conceptual, social, or linguistic space for meaningful incorporation into the society” (Mandel 2008, 55).

the 1970s having been replaced by purpose-built mosques since the late 1990s. The new four-story minaret-topped Omar Ibn al-Khattab mosque serving the al-Ahbash community officially opened in 2010 at the Görlitzer Bahnhof in the middle of Kreuzberg 36. It is merely one example of a previously hidden Muslim community now making its presence felt in Berlin with a multifunctional building that provides space for shopping, childcare, and prayer.

Estimates suggest that the Muslim population in Germany is approximately 3.2 million to 3.5 million—around four percent of the overall German population currently living in Germany (Bundesministerium des Innern 2007). There are around 213,000 Muslims in Berlin; an estimate that includes immigrants from countries where Islam is the main religion and German converts.<sup>2</sup> The accuracy of the figure is problematic as it includes



Figure 2. Ibn al-Khattab mosque at the Görlitzer Bahnhof, Kreuzberg. Photo: Synnøve Bendixsen

<sup>2</sup> Of these, 2.25–2.5 million are foreign Muslims, mostly Turks, and around 800,000 “German Muslims,” meaning German citizens, i.e. naturalized Muslims of various origins. This is only a rough estimate since precise statistical data do not exist, primarily because the German government does not keep statistics on or make distinctions concerning religious affiliation. In order to make estimations, statistical details about foreign nationals from predominantly Muslim countries and the number of naturalizations of former Turkish citizens are taken into consideration (Spielhaus and Färber 2006).

people who do not necessarily personally adhere to Islam; how to count Muslims is both a political question and a research dilemma (Spielhaus and Färber 2006). Among the two major branches of Islam, Sunni and Shiite, I focus on the Sunni branch, which represents approximately 90 percent of the Muslim prayer rooms in Berlin (Spielhaus and Färber 2006: 9).<sup>3</sup>

Berlin caters to a variety of organizations, mosques, and groups representing the varied interests of religious and secular migrants. Organizations specifically for Turks in Germany include Milli Görüş, DITIB (The Turkish Islamic Union of the Foundation for Religion), the followers of Kaplan (State of the Caliphate), the Refah Party, Süleymanci (Association of Islamic Cultural Centres), and Alevi organizations such as the Anatolian Alevi Cultural Centre (see appendix I). Religious spaces, such as mosques, provide services to the increasingly heterogeneous Muslim communities in Europe.<sup>4</sup> Although it is estimated that around 40 percent of the Muslim population of Turkish origin in Germany visits a mosque at least once a week, there are no reliable figures; many prefer to pray at home, others see mosques as a social space where ethnic social networks are strengthened.<sup>5</sup>

Currently, the building of mosques is a highly controversial topic in several European cities. One of the central themes in the contestation over sites of worship is the semiotic role that such buildings play in the

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<sup>3</sup> Shiites are also known as Shia Muslims. There are several differences between the religious practices of Shiites and Sunnis, including conceptions of religious authority and interpretation, as well as the role of the Prophet Muhammad's descendants. Around 85 percent of the worlds' Muslims are Sunni, and 15 percent are Shiite, although this estimate fluctuates slightly. According to the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Religious Monitor (2008) interview sample of 2,000 Muslims in Germany, 69 percent classified themselves as Sunnis, 9 percent as Shiites and 8 percent as Alevi. Notably, 11 percent answered "other denomination" and 8 percent "don't know/no answer." Not all Muslims recognize Alevi as fellow Muslims. Sufi orders embrace mystical practices and can fall within either the Sunni or the Shia tradition. Some Sufis may accept teachings from both traditions.

<sup>4</sup> Compared to the considerable focus on Sunni Muslims, there is relatively little focus on the around 60,000 Alevi in Berlin, a large percentage of whom are Kurds. One may question whether this is related to their relatively low visibility. The Alevi communities use *Cem* (cultural houses) rather than mosques. Because Alevi have fewer food and dress restrictions, this religious community is visible in Berlin in what may be considered "cultural" terms, including through restaurants with music performances and staff in ethnic clothing, but less in visibly "religious" terms. For example, only a few Alevi women in Germany wear the headscarf. Yet this perception of invisibility is only true to some extent: Mandel (2008) points to how the Alevi habit of concealment in Turkey (due to security concerns) has been broken in Berlin where they can be open and visually mark their cultural centers.

<sup>5</sup> According to a study by the ZfT (Centre for Turkish Studies) 42 percent of Muslims with a Turkish background visit a mosque once a week; 21 percent never, or almost never; and 7 percent on holidays (Şen & Sauer 2006, 28).

articulation of opposing social identities in urban spaces. The construction of mosques continues to be controversial partly because it lends a greater visibility to Islam in the landscape of European cities, which to some conveys the message that the new community is “here to stay” and thus takes on a symbolic significance.<sup>6</sup> In general, funding for building mosques is a topic of government concern as it relates to questions of the potential future religious, social, and political influences of Islamic donors both within and outside Europe. The heightened visibility of Islam has also led to vehement discussions because it raises questions of who belongs in the city, what the role of religion should be in the city, and whose city it is.

The perceptions and experiences of the young users of mosques and religious organizations have not yet been the subject of serious research. This chapter attempts to deal with part of this gap by examining how ideas and perceptions of Muslims spaces, and in particular mosques, are integral parts of the process by which young people craft a religious Self. Thus, I seek to further an understanding of mosques as “sites of practice” (de Certeau 1984) for young Muslims in their daily urban life. This involves going beyond the historical, architectural and geographical mapping of mosques. The analysis includes an examination of the social services and facilities (such as language and computer courses and women’s reading groups) available in those spaces, and of which groups take advantage of these services and facilities.<sup>7</sup> However, my focus here is on the social processes involved in a young person’s adherence to and use of religious places, such as mosques. Who uses which religious spaces and why? What factors are at play in the processes through which young Muslims identify with religious social spaces in Berlin? What can an understanding of mosques as spaces contribute to our understanding of the religious identifications of youth in Berlin?

When personal experiences and meanings are attached to religious places, the place of the mosque or religious organization becomes a social space. The distinction de Certeau makes between space and place is

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<sup>6</sup> See for example Cesari (2005a), Eade (1996) and Saint-Blancat and Schmidt di Friedberg (2005). In Berlin, Jonker (2005) has examined how the struggle over the Mevlana mosque, situated only meters away from the well-known subway station Kottbusser Tor, went on for several years. According to Jonker, the conflict escalated due to opposing interpretations between the municipality and religious leaders about the use and nature of the space, in addition to cultural misunderstandings.

<sup>7</sup> Spielhaus & Färber’s edited volume (2006) provides a good overview of such services and facilities in Berlin mosques.

crucial here. “Place” is the elements of the location, the “instantaneous configuration of positions” (de Certeau 1984, 117). “Space,” on the other hand, is the effect of “the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities” (ibid.). In short, it is “a practiced place” (ibid.). This distinction points to the significance in understanding the youths’ social and cultural experiences of the (religious) city in terms of space, rather than place. Social practices reside in, make use of, and give social meaning to or a “sense” of places. The social and cultural existence of a place is the arrangement of “spatial practices” or “proxemics.” These practices are organized at different levels, from urban built environments to the micro level of daily social events, such as the experience of walking (Stokes 1994, 22). The city is saturated with religious spaces that are variously experienced by Muslim youth. In order to understand how some places become religious spaces we need to pay attention to people’s social practices and experiences.

My focus in this chapter is twofold. First, the chapter introduces the city of Berlin and the religious organization MJD, which together form the main contexts for this book. I ask how the city as a space and social arena of interaction is continuously shaped, changed and imprinted by new social practices introduced by a new population – migrants from Muslim countries. With time, this population is also changing its relationship to the city and country of residence. I argue that these imprints on the city need to be understood as the visibilization of social practices that, on the one hand, seek to fulfill certain everyday social and religious needs, and, on the other hand, establish social spaces with which migrant populations in Berlin identify. Second, the chapter takes a close empirical look at the social spaces of mosques as contested spaces, both for non-Muslims and for Muslim youth. My focus here is on how religiously devoted Muslim women in Berlin experience and relate to mosques, and how they are establishing their local religious social spaces through this process. This will shed light on how particular spaces in the city, such as mosques, inspire associations and usage patterns that differ not just between the different groups of people living in Berlin, but even between members of what otherwise could be considered a homogeneous group of “young Muslims.” The various ways that youth understand mosques draws our attention to the process through which mosques as places are becoming heterogeneous and complex spaces. Here, I analyze young people’s narratives about their personal experiences of mosques, and consider how the stories transform these places into (subjective) spaces. In light of the



heated views aired in the media and by political actors and intellectuals about mosques and religious organizations, the wide range of experiences that young people have with regard to the same—and different—spatialized mosques, becomes a relevant research question.

The two parts of the chapter tell parts of the story of how the city as an oeuvre (Mitchell 2003) continuously emerges, and how people relate to the different social spaces available. While the historical or visual mapping of physical space calls to mind the idea of fixed references and measurements in the urban landscape, such mapping cannot summarize how people view their spaces (Chambers 1993). As Chambers eloquently states:

The city plan is both a rationalization of space and time; its streets, buildings, bridges and roads are temporal indices. It permits us to grasp an outline, a shape, some sort of location, but not the contexts, cultures, histories, languages, experiences, desires and hopes that course through the urban body. (ibid., 189)

Social relations and processes create places in a material sense, but simultaneously produce meanings that people connect to places (Massey 1994). Social space, which includes a personal relationship with the space, is both produced and maintained by discursive and material practices (de Certeau 1984). Different actors relate to urban religious spaces, such as mosques, in different ways that can be read as “spatial stories” (ibid.), or that can be understood in terms of “mental mapping.” The short narratives I present, combined with other ways that the youth recollect, share, perform, alter, form, and merge their experiences and understandings of Islamic movements, form part of how the young people in this study identify as Muslims and frame and make sense of their (religious) life in Berlin.

### *Changing Sociological Landscapes*

#### *City Spaces Phase 1: The Arrival of Non-European Guest Workers in Berlin*

In 1777, following an official visit to Berlin in 1763–4, the representative of the Sublime Porte, Resmî Ahmed Efendi, reported to his Sultan Abdul Hamid I that “the population of Berlin recognizes the prophet Muhammed and would not be afraid to accept Islam” (quoted in Thomä-Venske 1988, 78). His visit was part of the effort to improve the economic, political and military relations between the Ottoman state and Prussia. Although the population of Berlin did not convert to Islam, smaller Muslim groups continued to exist in the city (ibid.). Some years later, the death of the Ottoman ambassador to Berlin Giritli Ali Aziz Efendi in 1798 marked the opening of

the Muslim cemetery at the Colombiadamm. The German government financed a wooden mosque for the Muslim prisoners of war in Wünsdorf (Brandenburg) in 1915, which was demolished in 1930 (Höpp 1997). A more organized Muslim society developed in the 1920s, with the founding of an Islamic community (*Islamische Gemeinde Berlin*) in 1922, in which Muslims of forty-one nationalities participated. It presented itself as an association of all Muslims residing in Berlin and Germany (Thomä-Venske 1988). Their efforts to construct a mosque on the Kaiserdamm failed for economic reasons. In 1924, the Ahmadiyya community, which was newly established, started the building of a mosque in Brienner Strasse. This mosque was in operation from 1926–7.<sup>8</sup>

Islam's presence in the broader German society gradually grew as part of an immigration process: Turkish and Kurdish guest workers arrived following the bilateral recruitment agreements signed between Germany and Turkey. During the 1950s, West Germany experienced a tremendous post-war economic growth with full employment by the 1960s (Green 2004). In 1961, Germany and Turkey signed a recruitment agreement in which the latter would provide guest workers to West Germany.<sup>9</sup> This was shortly after the construction of the Berlin wall, thus ending the influx of East German labor. Labor migration did not become a topic of public discussion, which must be viewed in light of the fact that Germany needed foreign labor. Labor shortages were impeding economic growth and, consequently, living standards. Additionally, the agreement did not intend to introduce permanent residence in Germany for the migrants; the workers from Turkey should ultimately return to their home country after a period of two to three years, to be replaced by new workers. Even though the first generation of Turks and Kurds received social benefits and similar employment rights as German workers, they were not expected to be involved in German society outside of their work place (Helicke 2002). The workers from Turkey were generally housed in company-owned hostels. As the main concern of the workers was to save as much capital as possible in order to return to Turkey, their social lives were largely focused around the workplace and they lacked the social rootedness family life can offer. The German population perceived this first generation in particular as a group

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<sup>8</sup> The old Ahmadiyya Mosque, which was initiated by Muslim diplomats, was erected in 1927 in the borough of Wilmersdorf. It was badly damaged during the Second World War and was placed under preservation order in 1993.

<sup>9</sup> In 1955, the federal government signed a recruitment agreement with Italy mainly benefiting the agricultural sector.

of homogenous “Turks.” This presumption of homogeneity among the guest workers, who also included Kurds from Turkey, was reinforced by their lack of family life and institutional support.

In Berlin, a large number of immigrants were more or less assigned to live in the Kreuzberg neighborhood, an area that in the late 1960s was scheduled for regeneration. Originally, the intention was that immigrants would only temporarily inhabit this densely built neighborhood, which comprised late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century houses built for working-class families who settled in Berlin during the industrialization period (Häussermann and Oswald 1997). Nonetheless, with the prolongation of employment contracts these soon became permanent residences. Rather than sending workers back after a couple of years to receive new “fresh” workers, as the recruitment agreement had originally intended, employers found it more efficient and productive to continue to employ those who had already settled and trained instead of “returning” them and receiving new ones.

Unemployment grew among the German population as a result of the oil crisis in 1973. The German ban on recruitment (*Anwerbestopp*), which barred further recruitment of overseas labor, made it more difficult for foreign workers to leave West Germany and re-enter on an employment contract.<sup>10</sup> Fewer Turks and Kurds in Germany considered returning home a viable option, particularly in light of the continuing job offers from German industry. Instead, they made use of family reunification rules (*Familiennachzug*) and brought their wives or husbands and children over. From the end of the 1970s, an increasing number of non-working dependents—women and children—meant a corresponding increase in demand for basic social services, such as education and housing. From this period onwards, the media gradually expressed more concern about “foreign infiltration” (*Überfremdung*) and claimed that the “German boat is full” (Mandel 2008, 53).<sup>11</sup> The notion that Germans and Turks shared throughout the 1970s and 1980s, that the Turkish presence in Germany was simply a temporary phenomenon, turned out to be erroneous. This notion had long-lasting effects on the social position of Turks and Kurds in Germany, as policies that could have eased the social interaction between

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<sup>10</sup> The ban on recruitment remained in force until 2002.

<sup>11</sup> The term “*Überfremdung*” was also used by Nazis to describe Jews and other “undesirables” in the Third Reich (Mandel 2008). Chapter 3 discusses the negative stereotypes about migrants in German media.

the newcomers and the populations already living in Germany (like language courses) were postponed.

*The Socio-Historical Situation of Migrants from the Middle East*

While migrants in Germany are often understood as synonymous with “Turks,” and since the twenty-first century with “Muslims,” the category also comprises people from the Middle East. Here, I provide a brief account of the migration process from the Middle East, as several of the active members and leaders in MJD have parents who are originally from Egypt, while other participants have Palestinian backgrounds or are Kurdish refugees from Iraq and Syria.

The migrants with Middle Eastern backgrounds have a somewhat different socio-historical relation to Germany compared to the Turkish and Kurdish immigrants. It is difficult to give an estimate of the number of people of Middle Eastern origin living in Germany. Various sources indicate numbers between 280,000 and 400,000. These figures comprise citizens of Middle Eastern countries, ethnic Arabs who are naturalized German citizens, people with dual citizenships, and stateless Arabs (Al-Hamarneh 2008, 26). Most are originally from Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, and Syria. The migration narratives of migrants from the Middle East tend to focus on the political and socio-economic situation of the countries from which they have migrated: people from Morocco and Tunisia have parents who came as labor migrants to Germany through the bilateral governmental agreements; most people from Palestine, Iraq, and Lebanon arrived as political refugees; and a large part of people from Syria and Palestinian Arabs came as students and stayed (*ibid.*).

There are approximately 14,500 Egyptian citizens in Germany (Baraulina et al. 2007).<sup>12</sup> Traditionally, Egyptian immigrants in Germany were predominantly male students from upper-middle-class backgrounds who began to arrive in the 1950s.<sup>13</sup> This migration based on educational aspirations still takes place. Some of these migrants represent the religious intelligentsia who left Egypt in the 1950s after the attack on President Nasser. In Germany, they became part of the Islamic elite and founded mosques and

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<sup>12</sup> Egyptian authorities estimate this number to 24,000 people in 2007 (Baraulina et al. 2007). None of these numbers include Egyptians who have acquired German citizenship. This migrant group has a high naturalization rate as well as a high percentage of marriage with Germans (Gesemann 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Most Egyptian migrants in Germany study languages and cultural sciences, engineering, and natural sciences (Baraulina et al. 2007).

took over leading positions in several Muslim organizations. For example, the Islamic Community Germany (IGD) was first established as a mosque-building initiative in 1958 by Egyptian Muslim activists. Today, it has established branches in several German cities.<sup>14</sup> It is thought to represent the Muslim Brotherhood in Germany. The presumed and sometimes proved connection between Egyptian Muslim activists and the Muslim Brotherhood has also had an impact on organizations with a large representation of Muslims with Egyptian backgrounds, such as MJD. The high number of youth in MJD with Egyptian backgrounds has undoubtedly had, and continues to have, an impact on the organization's characteristics and Islamic teaching. Another consequence of their presence is that many of the youth have high educational ambitions, the effect of which will be reflected upon throughout the book.

### *City Spaces Phase 2: Ethnic Businesses and Infrastructure*

The gradual transformation from temporary workforce to settlement went hand-in-hand with the increase of "community" structures. By the mid-1980s, Kreuzberg's infrastructure was dominated by its Turkish and Kurdish population; small grocery stores and shops for household goods were set up to meet demands for familiar provisions from the migrants' country of origin. In an effort to prevent ghettoization, foreigners were banned from living in certain parts of the larger cities in the period between 1975 and 1977 (Green 2004), as it was believed that an area with more than 12 percent of foreigners would be "outside of the limits of tolerance of the infrastructure and social peace" (Bade 1994, 54). Yet this restriction had little practical effect, due to the simultaneous trends in family reunification. In contemporary Berlin, more than 25 percent of the residents of the city-district (*Bezirk*) of Neukölln, Wedding and Kreuzberg (restructured as Kreuzberg-Friedrichshain) are not German citizens.

With time, the first generation also faced social problems if they did return to Turkey. No longer considered "Turks" but "*almanyali*" ("German-like") by their relatives and neighbors in Turkey, the idea of return came to be not only an economic issue, but also a socio-cultural one since many no longer felt at home in Turkey (Mandel 1989). Throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, Kreuzberg became known as Europe's "Turkish ghetto" and

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<sup>14</sup> It was named *Islamische Gemeinschaft in Deutschland e.V.* in 1982. It opened Islamic centers in Nürnberg (1984), Marburg (1986), Frankfurt (1989), Stuttgart (1992), Köln (1998), Braunschweig and Münster (2001). In 2003, it maintained 12 of its own centers and was coordinating its activities with more than 50 other mosque associations.

tourist busses drove through the neighborhood to allow tourists to gawk at the streets filled with restaurants and shops with signs in Turkish, street markets, women with long coats and headscarves, and men with moustaches playing with their worry beads. At the same time as the most dynamic cultural and alternative scene was located in Kreuzberg, the ethnic population gradually became a more visible part of this neighborhood's urban image. Certain streets in Kreuzberg became (in)famous because of the establishment of businesses with names such as "Taksim" restaurant or "little Istanbul" hairdresser; today, these are well-known Berliner landmarks, with Wrangelstraße and Oranienstraße as oft-cited examples.<sup>15</sup> Ethnic grocers, bakeries, newsstands, clothing stores, and specialist suppliers, including specialist travel agencies, and football clubs functioning as coffee shops open only to members, serve an ethnic community and at the same time visibly express the community's presence. Ethnic businesses are often family run, and ethnic networks—people from the same village, city or region in their country of origin—are often mobilized.



Figure 3. Fruit and vegetable stand at Kottbusser Tor, Kreuzberg. Photo: Synnøve Bendixsen

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<sup>15</sup> Taksim is an upper middle class area in Istanbul where the most popular shopping street is located.



The second generation continued the early tendency towards “ethnic businesses”—partly due to a lack of alternative job opportunities. According to the Center for Studies on Turkey (CfST) at the University of Essen, job security and independence are the most frequently mentioned reasons for the trend toward self-employment among Turks.<sup>16</sup> Although Turkish-owned businesses often try to remain independent from German state control, entrepreneurship also represents a possible means of integration, as they need to operate according to rules defined by the German state. Berlin followed a trend found in most European metropolises wherein employment opportunities largely reflected ethnic, religious and social status. One consequence of this urban organization was that ethnicity became increasingly bound up with class. Saskia Sassen (1999), amongst others, argues that in global cities this tendency is reinforced, thereby to some extent preserving ethnic distinctions.<sup>17</sup> Although not a global city, Berlin has several similar characteristics, suggesting that the fusion of ethnicity and class also takes place in cities not defined as global. Importantly, this process had already started with labor migration in the 1960s: two-thirds of Turkish migrants came from rural regions and when they arrived in Germany, they occupied mostly badly paid and unpleasant jobs. Consequently, they came to occupy the lowest socio-economic and occupational positions.

### *City Spaces Phase 3: “Immigrants” and “Turks” Become “Muslims”*

Islamic religious markers have become more noticeable since the late 1990s, both through the increasing focus on Islam by the media and politicians and through the social practices of Muslims. Islamic graffiti “imprinting” on the Berliner urban landscape, such as “Muslims are the best. Long live Allah!” or “Muslims love best” (Kaschuba 2007, 83), challenge urban spaces of belonging.<sup>18</sup> The number of what I call “religious businesses” in Berlin neighborhoods in Wedding, Neukölln, and Kreuzberg has increased

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<sup>16</sup> Whereas the average unemployment rate in Germany was 10.1 percent in 2007, among the foreign population it was 22 percent (von Below and Karakoyun 2007, 34–42). In Berlin, it is estimated that the business start-up rate is twice as high among Turkish nationals as among Germans. In 2002, there were about 5,200 businesses owned by self-employed persons of Turkish descent (Pütz 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Sassen (1999) compares this to industrial cities where more universal categories such as the working class, salaried employees, private employees, and civil servants are reinforced, thereby diminishing—at least to some extent—ethnic and cultural differentiation.

<sup>18</sup> “*Muslime sind die Besten. Es lebe Allah*” and “*Muslime lieben am besten*,” author’s translation.

over the last ten years. This includes the introduction of more fast food restaurants with signs advertising “*halal döner*” (kebab made with meat slaughtered according to Islamic dietary laws), Islamic butcheries, and cafes with signs that say “no alcohol to be drunk here.”<sup>19</sup> Many restaurants in these neighborhoods also have “Ramadan specials” where anyone can get a complete meal for five Euros for *Iftar* (the first meal at the end of a day of fasting during Ramadan). Information on which of the “Turkish” or “Arabic” *Imbiss* (snack bar) are religiously “correct” is passed via word-of-mouth among religious customers. Internet sites offer lists over which additives are religiously acceptable to eat and which groceries one should avoid due to the availability of pork products in one form or another.<sup>20</sup>

Overall, the previous and more general immigrant identity has become more characteristically Muslim and is increasingly competing for a position in the public sphere. In the Neukölln neighborhood, Islamic books, CDs with readings of the Koran, “religious” toothbrushes, candies without gelatin, Muslim newspapers in German (*Islamische Zeitung, IZ*), Mecca Cola, a guidebook for food purchasing for Muslims in Germany, and hijab-Barbie (Barbie with a headscarf) can be bought while listening to Yusuf Islam or Ammer 114 (a German convert who is an “Islamic” hip hop artist – the number refers to the amount of verses in the Koran). By creating a particular atmosphere in the shop and in the neighborhood, shopkeepers can establish a religious brand and reputation among their customers. This also illustrates an increased commodification of Islam, through which the religious economic market turns piety into a commodity.<sup>21</sup> Partly, “religion becomes something which can be bought and sold” (Lukens-Bull and Calbeck 2006, 307). At the same time, this should not be dismissed as merely a commodification of or capitalization on religious

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<sup>19</sup> Permission for the slaughtering of meat in the correct Islamic way is the result of a long process of negotiation with the German government. Butchers can also apply to an Islamic organization for a certification that they sell *halal* meat. Still, regardless of whether a butcher has a certificate, there are discussions among Muslims about which butcher is “really” *halal*.

<sup>20</sup> Many groceries contain the additive E441 (used in ice cream, chocolate, candies and different food products), which is produced using pork skin. E47-E474 also contains pork products.

<sup>21</sup> Mandel (1996) has described how shopkeepers in Kreuzberg “use” the fear of *haram* (forbidden) meat and what is considered obligatory or *halal* (permitted) to their advantage. The result is an increase in shops that cater exclusively to Turks, creating a Muslim space in Germany, subdivided by Sunni or Alevi. This commercial orientation, she points out, also creates a place for migrants on their own terms. For a discussion about the commodification of religious items, see in particular Lukens-Bull and Calbeck (2006), and Metcalf (1996).





Figure 4. Bakery close in Reichenbergerstrasse, Kreuzberg. Photo: Synnøve Bendixsen

objects, because when someone buys the item she or he ascribes meaning to it, through which the object again may become a religious article.

The increasing number of young women donning the headscarf has resulted in the introduction of women-only hairdressers in these districts: the windows are covered to protect those inside against the glances of passers-by, and men are prohibited from entering. Wedding dress shops offer what is considered to be correct Islamic white dresses with matching headscarves. Allegedly, the assortment and prices of headscarves at the "Turkish market" situated on Maybach-Üfer (Kreuzberg) on Tuesdays and

Fridays can compete with those found in Istanbul. In recent years, the market has been renamed “*BiOriental*,” which plays on the educated middle class Berliner preference for organic (*Bio*) products and Germany’s traditional, rather fetishist, fascination for the “Orient.” Will the renaming cause a social upgrade of the market—making the claiming of space by certain businesses and consumers more acceptable? It remains to be seen, but the saying goes that the gentrification of a neighborhood is most visible when an organic grocery (*Bioläden*) moves in.

Gender-divided wedding parties or henna parties (engagement parties) are held in otherwise public spaces by covering windows from the gaze of outsiders, thus enabling women to dance with spaghetti strap dresses and without headscarves. German public swimming pools offer “women only” hours, which are frequently used by young veiled women and sometimes by their mothers. Young well-educated Muslims are establishing Internet platforms for Muslims in Berlin that collect information on religious, social, and political topics, and present ongoing projects in Berlin. Other educated women are establishing Muslim kindergartens or work as teachers in Islamic schools. These creative inventions and initiatives indicate



Figure 5. “Light of the Orient”, wedding dress shop in Wedding. Photo: Synnøve Bendixsen

how, as Göle points out, “Islam carves out a public space of its own, embodied in new Islamic language styles, corporeal rituals, and spatial practices” (Göle 2006a, 6). In Europe, it is also a consequence of civil, societal, and even market forces through which Muslim actors create “Muslim space[s]” (Metcalf 1996, 2), seeking visibility and legitimacy in the national public sphere.<sup>22</sup>

Simultaneously with the carving out of religious urban spaces there has been a general re-categorization of Muslim migrants in the media and political debates. While a large part of this population used to be categorized as “Turkish” or (more rarely) “Kurdish,” or as “migrants,” they are now categorized as “Muslims,” independently of whether they would define themselves as Muslim or not. Consequently, the “immigrant” and his or her children and grandchildren are increasingly viewed as part of a (homogenized) “Muslim community,” the content of which is defined by non-Muslim media, politicians and even researchers. This reduction of a heterogeneous population to a simplified notion of “Muslim” denies part of the population the right to be viewed and evaluated as a worker, mother or father, musician, or writer, etc.

The discursive change from “migrant” or “Turk” to “Muslim” must be seen in light of at least two developments. First, by now it is a truism that the relationship between the (Christian) West and the (Muslim) East took on a new (“religious”) dimension in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in New York in 2001, Madrid in 2004, and London in 2005. This new dimension was also a factor in the categorizations of the “migrant” population in Europe as “Muslims.” Debates on conflicts of interest, social problems, and immigration in European cities generally shifted to a cultural and symbolic level. Although the media turned to the image of Islam as the enemy after these global events in particular, Schiffauer (2006a) suggests that the negative focus on Islam and Muslims was already latent. These events provided legitimate reasons for expanding on the enemy images.<sup>23</sup> What is clear is that in the last decade, political actors, media, and scholars have centered their attention on assumed Islamic particularities. Second, the increase in visible religious community structures, such as prayer rooms and mosques, evidences the end of the German and

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<sup>22</sup> Such “Muslim spaces,” Metcalf (1996) maintains, include the use of certain spoken and written Arabic words (such as “*Bismillah*” [in the name of Allah]) and photographs of calligraphy in homes.

<sup>23</sup> I discuss media and public opinion about “Muslims” in Germany and the effect of these discourses on the youths’ identification processes in chapter 3.

Turkish “myth of return” of the guest workers. Islam has become part of the city and its migrant population in a more visible manner. This brings to the fore questions concerning the relationship between visible religiosity and the urban. For a long time it has generally been presumed that modernization, including urbanization, would mean a decline of religious involvement. People in large cities and administrative and industrial centers were supposedly most likely to be less religiously involved.<sup>24</sup> Whether or not one agrees with the idea that religiosity or the role of religion has diminished, there has been a broad acceptance of the idea that the urban has been considered a non-space for religious markers, with the exception of church buildings and spires—which in any case to a large extent have become socio-historical rather than religious urban markers.

### *Religion and the Urban*

Urbanization and industrialization in the nineteenth century transformed the social role of religion in the cities: secularization and a religious “indifference” dominated among the professional and commercial middle class in Germany. The movement of people from the country and into cities and industrial areas made the populations in urban centers in Europe more diverse. For the newcomers to the city, priests and ministers became important spokesmen and social network figures in ethnic communities. Churches were frequently the main basis for the communal life of the immigrant and adherence to a church represented a point of identification. As McLeod asserts: “To be a Catholic, a Protestant—or, for that matter, a socialist—was not only to believe certain doctrines, and behave in certain prescribed ways. It was to belong to a community with its own sense of common identity, and vigorous pursuit of common interests” (McLeod 1997, 78). It seems that already in the 1830s and 1840s the educated middle class in Berlin was rather detached from the church: “They belonged to the church, but each person made up his own religion. For the practical man, the church was an acceptable form of external display,

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<sup>24</sup> The secularization thesis, to which Berger’s “The Sacred Canopy” (1967) is central, holds that societies were “progressing” through modernization and rationalization, and in this process religion would lose its authority in daily life, society, and governance. Berger later strongly modified his view of the decline of religion. Some scholars have argued that secularization is a sociological “myth,” or that Europe is the “exception,” but this discussion is beyond the scope of this book.

especially for family celebrations" (ibid.). However, the "home-based piety" could still be found among the lower middle class, while aristocrats as well as clerks and officials remained relatively church-oriented. Still, religious observance in several German cities was at such a low level that the variation within the urban population mattered less: "there seemed to be a clear contrast between the secularization of the cities and the piety of many peasant populations" (ibid., 102).

Historically, the design of places of worship in urban spaces has represented the most controversial and symbolically laden theme when it comes to religious acceptance of a minority religion. Migrant groups settling in a new milieu ultimately have to organize their own places of worship within a particular historical and socio-political context. Such religious claiming of space has often not taken place without conflicts and disputes. The organization of Islam in Europe is no exception, although the scale of the conflicts may well be new. Muslim migrants in Europe had already begun setting up mosques in the early 1970s, both to create a supportive community structure and to raise children so "they would not be lost" to the "other" culture. The organization of collective Muslim identities and increased Muslim representation in urban public spheres have caused anger and anxiety in European societies. This response is admittedly not only because of their religious Otherness as a non-Christian religion or Islam as an "un-European" religion, but also because public expressions of religiousness position them as the 'other' of European secularity (Casanova 2006). Indeed, in Berlin, as in many other European cities, the influence of the Christian church declined significantly in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the 1960s, immigration to the cities did bring about a growing religious diversity. However, simultaneously as the religious culture in West Berlin was increasingly fragmented, in the 1970s and 1980s more and more West Germans declared themselves to be without religion and did not replace their rejection of religion with any other rival belief systems. As McLeod (1997, 146) asserts: "In an age of individualism more people felt strong enough to go it alone – and indeed resented the loss of freedom that any kind of commitment seemed to entail." Thus, the Muslim youths' everyday life must also be contextualized as positioned in an urban space where historically faith and religiosity have been seen as out of place.

At a national level, although Germany has been "secular" for some time, the religious authorities were not separated from the political powers as early as in other West European countries such as France and

the Netherlands. While Germany adheres to the concept of secularism, it is not radically secular in the French style (French: *laïc*). The Christian roots of the society are still apparent: there is no strict separation between religion and politics, and the Christian churches and the Jewish community have official representatives in social and political committees. Christian churches, and in particular Protestant churches, continue to be involved in public initiatives, including the construction of the German national education system in the nineteenth century (Mannitz 2004a).<sup>25</sup>

That the position of the church in Germany is privileged is a fact often ignored (Schiffauer 2006a). It has been suggested that the problem Muslim organizations face in Germany is related less to whether or not Germany is a secular society and more to Islamic religious institutions wanting similar rights as the church. The German Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) guarantees religious freedom, including freedom to create religious communities. Such religious communities have the right to organize and determine their internal structure and decision-making process, and have the right to participate in the political life of Germany. However, to benefit from the rights associated with these provisions, the religions have to be registered as “public law corporations” (*Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts*). Achieving this status entitles them to receive a share of the religious tax revenues that the state collects from their members, to operate as a civil service employer, to apply disciplinary power, and to produce documents (Warner and Wenner 2006). It also includes other benefits, such as the right to be consulted on relevant public policy matters. Regulations on the prerequisites for registering as a religion includes that it must “be an established church,” “have a hierarchical organization,” and have its clergy be “appointed independently.” These rules exclude Sunni Islam from being a recognised corporate religion in Germany. Religions that have achieved this status include the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and Judaism. None of the many Islamic associations are public law corporations, but are instead registered as associations (*eingetragener Verein e.V*) or as foundations (*Stiftung*). This status conveys some benefits, but these do not approach those afforded to public law corporations. Because Islamic communities in Germany have no public legal status as religious communities, they are not allowed to open schools or social

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<sup>25</sup> In the federal district of Northrhine-Westfalia, churches run 80 percent of the kindergartens (Karakaşoğlu 2003b, 121).



activities with financial support from the state.<sup>26</sup> However, in Berlin Milli Görüş was allowed to establish a German Islamic school.<sup>27</sup>

“Trust in God” is referenced in the preamble to the German constitution as a common moral basis and, in contrast to France, religious education is still guaranteed as a subject in state schools.<sup>28</sup> Berlin and two other federal states are exempted from this. After the “honor killing” of a young Turkish woman in 2005, the government of Berlin introduced a non-religious ethics course the following year. In 2009, there was a referendum on whether students should be allowed to choose between ethics and religion classes.<sup>29</sup> Ethics class is compulsory, while religion classes are optional extra courses. The debate prior to the referendum was less about whether or not God should enter the classroom, and more about how Muslims fit into Berlin and, ultimately, whether religious teaching fosters or hinders tolerance. Perhaps indicatively of Berlin’s long secular tradition in contrast to south Germany, the proposal was rejected, with a low 29.2 percent of all eligible voters casting a ballot.

### *Structuring Islamic Communities*

In Germany, several of the many Muslim organizations are not hierarchically—or even horizontally—linked to each other. In contrast to the situation of the Catholic and Protestant Evangelical Churches in Germany, there is no single organizational focal point for the adherents of Islam. Islam being a decentralized and generally non-hierarchical religion that

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<sup>26</sup> In 2000, a German court ruling granted the Islamic Federation Berlin (IFB, *Islamische Föderation Berlin e.V.*, an organization of mostly Turkish Muslims in Berlin) the right to outline and implement a curriculum for Islamic instruction in the public schools of Berlin, with the prerequisite that the curriculum complies with Berlin school laws and is supervised by the school administration.

<sup>27</sup> This was followed by other Muslim organizations with different religious, social and political agendas to demand similar institutions, including the Turkish state’s Diyanet (short for *Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği*, or DITIB), and the Directorate of Religious Affairs.

<sup>28</sup> The German Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) guarantees every person the right to express her or his opinion in words, written material, and pictures. Article 4 [Freedom of faith, conscience, and creed] in the German constitution states that “(1) Freedom of faith and of conscience, and freedom to profess a religious or philosophical creed, shall be inviolable. (2) The undisturbed practice of religion shall be guaranteed.” From online access of the German constitution: [www.iuscomp.org/gla/statutes/GG.htm#4](http://www.iuscomp.org/gla/statutes/GG.htm#4), accessed August 10, 2008.

<sup>29</sup> The “Reli” campaign was led by Christoph Lehmann and backed by Chancellor Angela Merkel and her ruling center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party, the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and the churches. The city-state’s government ruled by the Social Democratic Party (SPD), and the Left Party dismissed the proposal, arguing that all students should follow ethics classes in order to learn a common set of values.

has multiple and often competing schools of law and social requirements can partly explain this.<sup>30</sup> While German media and government are more concerned with the population being “Muslim” than with their ethnic background, ethnicity frequently plays a role when it comes to Muslims’ emotional and structural adherence to mosques and religious communities. Nevertheless, in realizing the need for longer term planning, some mosque representatives have increasingly been working together in order to achieve political recognition from German authorities. Over the past ten years, there has been an increase in cooperation and communication between the ethnically oriented mosques and the religious organizations, partially because a new generation is now more active within the organizational structures. Simultaneously, both the Turkish and German states have continued to try to bring Muslims under a greater degree of state control. In 1994, the Islamic Council for the Federal Republic of Germany (*Islamrat für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*) was established on the model of the Central Council of Jews in Germany. It aspires to represent the needs of the Muslim community by operating within a German legal framework.<sup>31</sup>

Established in April 2007, the Co-ordination Council of Muslims (*Koordinierungsrat der Muslime*, KRM), includes the four largest Muslim umbrella organizations: the Central Council of Muslims in Germany (*Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland e.V.*, ZMD), the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (*Turkish-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion e.V.*, DITIB, which represents 52.3 percent of organized Muslims with Turkish backgrounds), the Council of Islam (*Islamrat für die Bundesrepublik e.V.*, IRD) and the Association of Islamic Cultural Centers (*Verband der islamischen Kulturzentren e.V.*, VIKZ, which represents 13.6 percent of organized Muslims with Turkish backgrounds). (For a short explanation of these organizations, see appendix 1). The Co-ordination

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<sup>30</sup> It should be added that Shiites are much more centralized and hierarchical. However, there are few Shiites in Germany and in Europe in general. In contrast to Catholicism, Sunni Muslim religious leaders are not in possession of any enforcement mechanisms to ensure obedience from their adherents; there are no sacraments in Islam that can be withheld from Muslims in order to achieve obedience towards the imams or other “clerics” regarding policy decisions that the imams encourage or condone. The same is true of Shi’a Islam (Warner and Wenner 2006).

<sup>31</sup> This Council can be said to have adopted the religious, social, and political discourse in Germany. Helicke (2002, 186) argues that the Council frames its discussions “in terms of human rights, modern individual needs, religious freedom, and human dignity, concepts which the German state and court system can understand.” A discussion of the institutional spaces made available for Islam in Germany is beyond the scope of this book.



Council attempts to coordinate the interests of the member organizations and represent them vis-à-vis the state and the public. According to their own estimates, the Co-ordination Council of Muslims represents around 410,000 believers from approximately 1,530 mosque organizations (Şen & Sauer 2006).<sup>32</sup> However, as Barbara John (2007, 63) argues: “The direction that Islam will take in Germany, is decided neither by the gathering at the Islam conference [DIK, *Deutsche Islam Konferenz*] nor by the Co-ordination Council of Muslims [KRM] of the affiliated umbrella organizations.”<sup>33</sup> The role of Islamic communities and organizations has changed over time, in relation not only to the alteration of the status of migrants, but also in relation to the social and religious needs of the younger generation born in Europe. In most European cities, there are an increasing number of social and cultural events taking place within mosques and religious organizations. According to Cesari:

Such events tend more and more to be aimed at both the Muslim and the non-Muslim populations of a residential area. This inscription of the religious at the heart of non-religious activities is often incomprehensible to European secularised minds for whom the religious is most often confined to places of worship. (Cesari 2005a, 1028)

Since the mid-1990s, there has been some effort in Germany to make mosques more open to non-members. This has included more contact with other organizations in the neighborhood (Jonker and Kapphan 1999). The annual “open mosque day” (*Tag der offene Tür*) arranged on October 3 (the day of unification and a public holiday in Germany), is part of a strategy to make the mosque symbolically more open.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, when

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<sup>32</sup> There are around 2,500 to 2,600 Muslim mosque organizations in Germany (Şen & Sauer 2006, 35). Most of these belong to one of the umbrella organizations that represent the “Muslim population.”

<sup>33</sup> Author’s translation from German: “In welche Richtung sich der Islam in Deutschland entwickelt, das bestimmen weder die in der Islamkonferenz Versammelten noch die im Koordinierungsrat der Muslime zusammengeschlossenen Dachverbände”. In September 2006, the Federal Minister of the Interior, Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble, initiated the German Islam Conference which aimed to function as a negotiation and consultation process between representatives of the German state and Muslim communities. The state initiative has proved controversial and has been subject to much critique—in particular in terms of the Muslim and mosque actors that have been included and excluded. See the homepage of the German Federal Ministry of the Interior, “*Deutsche Islamkonferenz*,” at [www.bmi.bund.de](http://www.bmi.bund.de), accessed March 18, 2007.

<sup>34</sup> October 3 has been the Day of the Open Mosques (TOM, *Tag der offenen Moschee*) in Germany since 1997, when it was initiated by Council of Muslims in Germany (*Zentralrat der Muslime*, ZMD). On this day, several hundred mosques in Germany, and 15–18 mosques in Berlin, keep their doors open for visitors and put on a special program for

explaining my research I often received comments from non-Muslim Germans who were surprised and asked whether I had access to mosques. This suggests that there are ongoing, and in some cases well-founded, presumptions that mosques are not “open” to non-Muslims.

Practicing Muslims have always been able to choose between communities and organizations with various interpretations of Islam. Today, this range is larger than ever. The numerous associations, foundations, informal study circles, and institutions (mostly divided along ethno-national lines) contribute to a diversity of interpretations and practices among Muslims. To some extent, Islamic organizations and communities compete to attract followers in Western settings.<sup>35</sup> Compared to the first generation of migrants to whom kinship and regional loyalties were more crucial in the choice of religious spaces, the younger generation born in Europe is largely leaving these loyalties behind. Instead, and to varying degrees, they select among and switch between Islamic organizations depending on different considerations, including their personal, familial, ethnic, national, age, and political and religious outlook. Muslim youth are not merely passive consumers of religious messages, but participate in the process of interpretation and choosing where to participate in religious practice. In this process, as I will suggest, they relate to mosques as social spaces and incorporate religious communities in their mental mapping of Berlin.

### *Mosques: Contested Religious Spaces*

The social role the mosques play for migrants, particularly in establishing social networks, has been recognized in social research since the 1970s. Within the mosques, participants can find sport clubs, women’s and youth associations, “after-school” or computer help, and advising and translation

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non-Muslims. The mosques arrange tours of the mosques, podium discussions, book exhibitions, and food stands.

<sup>35</sup> To analyze the complex relationship between Islamic communities, European states, and Muslims, Yükleyn (2007, 56) introduces a heuristic tool he calls the “Islamic market model.” With “religious market” he points to the “production, reproduction, and distribution of religious views in a population” (ibid., 52). In Europe, there is a strong correlation between the religious communities and organizations, religious demands from the community, and the various state policies through which a religious market emerges (ibid.). Yükleyn argues that religious organizations constitute a “Muslim Faith Market” where the different spaces become known for a field of specialization (such as the teaching of Koran recitation among the Süleymanci) and thus attract a particular type of followers. Although the term remains controversial, the concept points to how various Muslim spaces emerge (or perish) in interaction with the demands from Muslims.

agencies (Jonker and Kapghan 1999; Spielhaus & Färber 2006).<sup>36</sup> In Berlin, extensive research on Muslim religious organizations and prayer spaces at the end of the 1990s estimated that there were 80 mosques in basements, shops, factory halls, decrepit buildings, and private apartments (Jonker and Kapghan 1999). More than 70 percent of these were located in Kreuzberg, Neukölln, and Wedding. Today, there are approximately 120 mosques or prayer spaces, many of which have moved beyond their former locations, and a few of which are built with minarets (Spielhaus & Färber 2006).<sup>37</sup>

Despite the increase in the number of mosques, the construction of religious buildings with minarets remains particularly controversial. German media commonly cite fears of either “Islamization” of Berlin neighborhoods due to an increased visibility of a religious community, or of alienating the non-Muslim population living in the area, as grounds for objections to the building of a new mosque. The increased visibility of Islam in the cityscape is perhaps less the result of an Islamization or an actual increase in religious adherence among the Muslim population, and more a consequence of religious communities moving out of hidden spaces and entering the “mainstream” area of the city. For Muslims who attend mosques, the architectural inclusion of purpose-built mosques in the cityscape may well bring with it an improved self-esteem (Kaschuba 2007). Religious sites represent new Muslim entries into the public sphere and provide symbolic references for an Islamic life in a city where the majority of the inhabitants are non-Muslims.<sup>38</sup> Nawar, a 17-year-old born in Berlin to Egyptian parents, told me that what she likes about Berlin is that “there are spaces for everyone here.” She added that Berlin is the only place in Germany where she would want to live, as the city offers her the necessary choices of living spaces.<sup>39</sup> Next, I look closer at how this

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<sup>36</sup> A mosque is not a holy building like a church, but symbolically it is very import to Muslims. There are two types of mosques: the main mosque is called *jamaca* or *Cami*, and this is where the Friday prayer is conducted. The *jamacas* are often richly adorned. The other type of mosque is *masjid* or *Mescit*, houses of worship, and these are mostly local and smaller places. Nearly all mosques in Berlin are *Mescit*, but are nevertheless called *Cami* (Jonker and Kapghan 1999).

<sup>37</sup> Mosques and religious organizations and institutions are difficult to measure and estimates need to be handled with care (Spielhaus & Färber 2006).

<sup>38</sup> The increase of visible, purpose-built mosques may well include other (religious, economic, social and political) changes in the religious movements, a question which is beyond the scope of this book.

<sup>39</sup> Yet this is only true of the former West Berlin. There is a clear difference between how the migrant population relates to former East and West Berlin. Few migrant structures are established in the former East and it is only recently that some communities have started

plurality of religious spaces is felt and experienced by young women who practice Islam. After introducing three different religious spaces in which I conducted fieldwork, I continue to examine how young people experience the mosques as social spaces in Berlin.

### *Identification with Religious Social Spaces*

Every Monday, young women, some alone and some in groups, leave a subway station in the middle of Kreuzberg and walk along a trafficked road, but deserted sidewalk, passing a window with the sign “Islamic Relief,” and stopping next door at a Muslim bookstore with green signs above the window.<sup>40</sup> As they enter, bells from the door are heard. Inside, bookshelves line the wall, and there is a tall counter under which veiled Barbies (named Fulla) and *halal* candies are arranged for sale.<sup>41</sup> By 5 p.m. young women are still arriving here at MJD, a Muslim youth organization. On some days, there is a small line of young women waiting for the bathroom in order to perform their ritual washing for the prayer (*salat*). Others take off their shoes and enter the back room where they grab two green pillows—one to sit on and the other for their backs—before finding a place on the floor, chatting. The small, carpeted room is decorated with the 99 names for Allah in Arabic as a “wallpaper” border and has a blackboard on one of the walls. On a regular day, there are 10 youth, on a busy day there may be more than 25 young women from all over Berlin. For some it takes only a 20-minute walk to arrive, others have spent more than one hour on the

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to build mosques in former East Berlin, and this turned out to be quite controversial. In October 2008, the Ahmadiyya community opened the Khadija mosque in former East Berlin (Pankow-Heinersdorf). It is the first purpose-built mosque in East Germany. In March 2007, there was a fire on the land that the mosque owns. The opening was accompanied by considerable police protection.

<sup>40</sup> Islamic Relief (IR) is an Islamic international relief and development nongovernmental organization that was founded in the UK in 1984.

<sup>41</sup> For several years, MJD Berlin used the premises of the bookshop and publishing firm “Green Palace.” When this publishing firm was reorganized in 2010, they left the premises. Consequently, MJD had to find a new meeting place. For a while, MJD borrowed the prayer rooms of the Bosnian mosque in Kreuzberg, but after some months they started to hold their meetings in the rooms of the Bilal Mosque (where the German-speaking DMK is also located) in Wedding. For a while, MJD in Berlin had an additional meeting every second Wednesday for the older participants who wanted to work more intensively on religious education. My impression is that the teachings were more structured during these meetings. For example, participants were given homework consisting of memorizing parts of the Koran. My focus during my fieldwork was on the weekly meetings, which were more open to non-members and included a broader spectrum of participants in terms of age, and religious aspirations.

subway. The young women are here to attend a religious gathering with Islamic lectures, discussions, and Koran readings.

The meeting starts with a reading of the Koran, first in Arabic (with one woman correcting the Arabic pronunciation), followed by the translation of the reading in German and a *tafsir* (commentaries to the Koran). Afterwards, the girls do a round of introductions whenever there are newcomers. The girls and young women introduce themselves first by their name, age, nationality (which is often a mix), and what they do. The meetings continue with presentations about religious books and PowerPoint presentations on, for example, the contemporary value of different *ahadith* in their own lives in Germany. The participants (especially the women of Egyptian descent) tend to either have a middle class family background or be upwardly mobile due to their success in the educational system. Many of the women over 18 are university students; the younger ones are often pursuing *Abitur* (diploma from German secondary school qualifying for university admission), or are still attending compulsory school. The ethnically mixed group speaks German, not only during presentations but also in everyday friendships. If someone starts talking in another language, one of the other youth usually demands “German please!” as she also



Figure 6. Outside the MJD premises. Photo: Synnøve Bendixsen

wants to understand what the others are laughing about. Participants give the religious presentations themselves, and the meeting is led by a young woman of the same age as the participants. The young attendees often interrupt the presenter with questions, additional information or corrections. This willingness or expectation that the young people take on responsibility for organizing events, presenting religious topics, and providing Islamic knowledge to their peers is particular to this space, as I found out after visiting another youth group in Finnowstrasse, Neukölln.

The youth group Youth Club Assalam (*Jugendtreff Assalam*, IKEZ) in Finnowstrasse is situated some subway stops away from MJD. On Friday afternoons, young people walk towards one of the many courtyard mosques in Finnowstrasse, located in an area with residential apartment buildings. Turning left by a gas station, passing the green football field, the young women enter a tall gateway leading to the inner court. During some events, a sign that is drawn as a traffic light and says “STOP. Only for sisters. Entrance forbidden for brothers” hangs on the door leading down to the basement (where there is also a sport room). On a regular Friday, the girls and young women enter the main entrance, leave their shoes on the racks, bypass a small food shop and walk the stairs two floors up. Chatting amongst each other, most make jokes in Arabic while putting their chairs in a circle. The youth are here to listen to religious topics.

The youth organization in Neukölln exists within the mosque structures, makes use of imams, and attracts a more ethnically homogeneous group of participants, most of whom have an Arab background. The majority of the participants live in the surrounding neighborhood. Presentations are introduced by older, religiously educated women or an (male) imam, and are in German. During the religious lectures, the young people are expected to answer questions, but are rarely asked to contribute with presentations. Two of the youth leaders, Fahra (23) and her 25-year old sister “grew up with MJD” and brought with them the knowledge and some of the structure to this other youth organization. Fahra emphasized that the participants in this youth group cannot be expected to take on the responsibility of presenting religious themes and religious content, as she did not consider them as mature as the participants in MJD. Additionally, I noticed that even though the age range is similar to that in MJD, the educational and career ambitions are more limited. When introducing themselves at a Friday “spending the night” at the mosque, I observed that the participants had different future prospects compared to most members of MJD. The majority had no intention of pursuing *Abitur* (diploma from German secondary school qualifying for university





Figure 7. Inside the courtyard, entrance to the mosque and Youth Club Assalam. Photo: Synnøve Bendixsen

admission), and certainly did not plan to attend university. To the question of “where they see themselves in five years,” most mentioned marriage and children. This contrasts with MJD, where most emphasized future employment or educational plans.

During the round of introductions, I also observed that the youth did not mention their ethnic backgrounds. When I expressed my surprise about this to Fahra, she pointed out that although their parents came from Jordan, Egypt or Syria, “they are in any case all Arabs.” Compared to MJD, which emphasized their “multi-cultural” characteristics, Fahra explained that ethnic background is rarely a topic here because being of “Arabic descent” is the main identity marker. The panethnicity of “Arab people” includes all Arabized people of the world defined genealogically (tracing ones ancestry to the tribes of Arabia and the Syrian Desert) or, more importantly today, linguistically (Arabic being a person’s first language and by extension, their cultural expression).<sup>42</sup> In several religious circles in Berlin, I noticed a feeling of pride among youth of Arabic descent,

<sup>42</sup> The youth identify as “Arabic” to various degrees.

which was often primarily explained in terms of their mastering the language of the Koran. At the Youth Club Assalam, during the evening with food and fun, no one complained if someone chatted in Arabic—except Fahra, who asked everyone to speak German as their guest (meaning me) did not understand Arabic.

In contrast to the two spaces described above, further north of Neukölln one of the largest gatherings of Muslim women in Berlin meets on Sunday afternoons in the Al Nur mosque. This mosque, which is housed in a former factory building, is located on a road leading to an industrial area. It attracts a variety of Muslims from all over Berlin, including regulars from the two above-mentioned spaces. While most of the female participants are between 15 and 35 years old, older women are also regular attendees. The male and female participants have their own entrance and areas. Girls and women sit on the carpet on the second floor, where they can follow the charismatic Islamic preacher Abdul Adhim (who sits among the men on the first floor), through a live feed on a TV screen.<sup>43</sup> Many take notes while listening to the presentation, which is in German interspersed with Arabic quotations from the Koran. There are no introductions among the attendees; this event is not a space where the women are expected to get to know each other. Most sit in small groups of friends with different ethnic backgrounds, including German converts.<sup>44</sup> This is a different type of meeting from the two above, performed in a preaching style and with little opportunity for discussions and direct questions about what is being said. The presentations are often emotional, evoking Paradise and Hell, and sometimes tears can be seen in the eyes of the women. The lecture series is also available on CDs that are for sale. At the end of the sermon, women (and men) can write their questions on a piece of paper that is collected by a child and brought to the imam on the first floor. The women follow

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<sup>43</sup> The Moroccan preacher Abdul Adhim is a controversial figure in Germany. He is widely known in Germany due to his sermons and commentaries on YouTube. In 2009, the German news magazine Focus presented him (under the name Abdel Hadim Kamouss) as one of the German Islamists and as a “star” on the Islamic scene. According to Focus, the Federal Criminal Police Office (*Bundeskriminalamt*, BKA) investigated “Kamouss and other extremists” in the social environment of the Al Nur mosque because they were supposed to have founded a terrorist cell. Kamouss was found not guilty in 2005 due to lack of evidence.

<sup>44</sup> I often heard of, and personally observed, German Muslims who converted in this mosque. Although probably exaggerated, the newspaper *Die Zeit* argues that each week five people convert to Islam in this mosque (*Die lässigen Gehirnwäscher*, by Julia Gerlach, October 4, 2007), [www.zeit.de/2007/41/Islam-Prediger](http://www.zeit.de/2007/41/Islam-Prediger), accessed January 20, 2009. Youth I talked with argued that this was the main reason that the German media write so negatively about the mosque: it represents a space where Germans are becoming Muslims.





Figure 8. Entrance to the Al Nur mosque, Neukölln. Photo: Synnøve Bendixsen

the TV screen with high expectations as he reads the questions and provide answers.

These three religious groups represent a small selection of the diverse religious spaces available in Berlin. Young people who seek knowledge about Islam and who, to varying degrees, identify as Muslims, visit these spaces. However, what is taught, how it is taught, and what effect it has on the attendees varies. Although I spent most of my fieldwork with MJD, I participated to some extent in all three of the above-mentioned organizations, talking and listening to the women's narratives and experiences of the religious spaces they visited or that were part of their daily lives. These stories tell us about how religious places become spaces for individuals and part of the lived experience of the youth. Lived religion is partly made up of the practice of people turning these "stories" into everyday acts (McGuire 2007, 197). An understanding of these spaces is thus part of the larger picture of the youth's identification with Islam in Berlin and of how they craft a religious Self.

Current research on mosques in Europe frequently presents a homogeneous and uniform image of the various Muslim communities. This ignores how the ever-more complex, multiple and diverse religious

associations and organizations make it increasingly necessary for active users to find ways to orient themselves. Pluralization and decentralization are two characteristics of Islam that have become even more pronounced in the modern age (Casanova 2001). The complexity of Islamic organizations in Berlin is related to migration processes and the subsequent transnationalization and urbanization of religion, and to new educational possibilities for the generation born in Germany. Islamic teaching in Berlin is inspired by authorities in the Middle East, Turkey, or other European countries that are frequently made available on cable TV. The increasingly important role played by transnational Muslim networks, make cities like Berlin, Paris, and London part of interconnected religious cities.

Additionally, migration to Germany brought with it a new relationship between society and the religious community that migrated, as it was also a move from rural areas to an urban context. The urban represents a larger and more heterogeneous pool of religious options to choose between and a reduction of the social control of where individuals participate religiously. That access to religious education has widened, not only for families who have migrated, but also within countries such as Turkey and Egypt, also adds to the fragmentation of religious authority. The complexity of the global Islamic revival makes it difficult, for Muslims and non-Muslims, to generalize about Muslim institutions and religious movements and their participants and discursive practices. Looking more closely at the reasons the women give about why and where they participate is instructive for an understanding of the urban experience of religious lifestyles in contemporary Berlin. Through participant observation, I was able to gain an understanding of young people's experiences of mosques and religious organizations in Berlin, and of how the youth make sense of these institutions. I realized that in their engagement with the different religious spaces available, the city becomes a negotiated reality.

For these young women, most of whom were born in Germany and belong to the Sunni branch of Islam, mosques are places where they can perform their religious practices, pose questions, and meet people of the "same kind." Physical proximity remains relevant for women in choosing which mosques to attend regularly. In my experience, while some mosques are tied to a city-district and primarily have participants who live close by, other mosques attract Muslims from all over Berlin. Several of the women did not attend a particular mosque even if they "really like the imam" because "it's too far away" and so "it takes too long to get

there!" Nevertheless, when discussing where they would regularly go, in general the women stressed who were there (ethnicity, mixed or whether their friends or family attend), what was taught (the branches, which school of thought, and whether it is strict), and how it was done (i.e. how the gender division during the service is solved). I found that a combination of three aspects is particularly relevant to the youth's experiences of the religious spaces: their identification with their ethnic background, the reputation of the religious space, and the teaching and presentation style in the religious space. I discuss all of these aspects in the next three sections.<sup>45</sup>

### *Ethnicity-Based Religious Spaces*

Since the mid-1990s, young Muslims born in Germany have either called for modifications in the established mosques or established their own religious inter-ethnic, "multicultural" spaces where the ethnic or national belonging of their parents is put aside. For migrants, ethnic belonging has long played a special role in the organization of religious social spaces. Mosques and religious communities and organizations are most often divided by their members' ethnic or national origin. In Berlin, there are amongst other Albanian, Arab, Bosnian, Kurdish, Indonesian, Palestinian and Turkish mosques or religious associations. Ethnically or nationally oriented mosques conduct the religious services and presentations in Turkish, Arabic or Bosnian—all conforming with and reinforcing the ethnic community of the participants.

Over the last few years, there has been a tendency among younger generations of Muslims to distinguish between their parents' Islam, which they see as traditional, and the "pure" or "de-culturalized" Islam (Roy 2004) which focuses on the worldwide religious community—the *umma*. Although ethnicity remains important for some, others feel uncomfortable within the religious, ethnic, or national structures of their parents. As many younger Muslims make a sharper distinction between ethnic

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<sup>45</sup> This should not be considered representative of all Muslims living in Berlin. Among the older women and men there may be other perspectives and factors involved. Insofar that people can change their loyalty or allegiance to one particular mosque or religious organization, this mental mapping has to be understood as fluid, not static. Perceptions can change with age, marriage, and because participants in a mosque change. Furthermore, although I focused only on mosques and semi-public religious organizations, there are also private Koran reading groups in homes, and some individuals prefer to practice their religion alone. I focus on those Muslim youth who choose to participate in a mosque on a regular basis, to learn about Islam and be part of a religious community.

and religious identification—in contrast to their parents' generation—youth consciously refuse the ethnicization of Islam as *fitna* (van der Veer 2004, 12), which in modern usage is frequently used to describe forces that cause fragmentation, chaos or discord within the Muslim community.<sup>46</sup>

In this contestation, the language of religious instruction becomes particularly relevant: learning about Islam in German is crucial because many young people feel more comfortable with German than with Turkish or Arabic. In addition, gaining Islamic knowledge in German makes it easier to explain Islam to non-Muslim Germans. In organizations like Inssan and MJD in Kreuzberg, or the German-speaking Muslim group Berlin (*Deutschsprachige Muslimkreis Berlin e.V.*, DMK) in Wedding, the religious teaching, presentations, and discussions are in German, except for the reading of the Koran, which continues to be in Arabic, usually followed by a translation in German.<sup>47</sup> Several organizations and mosques attract a mixture of ethnic or national origins, including Egyptians, Pakistanis, Palestinians, Turks, and German converts, as they teach in German. The increase in the teaching of Islam in German also potentially plays a part in restructuring the relevance of an individual's ethnic background in the religious sphere.

Yet ethnically oriented mosques remain the majority, and for some youth their ethnic belonging continues to be relevant for their experience of the religious spaces. The following assertion from Azhaar (25) suggests this:

Sitting in a mosque in Wedding, Azhaar said: "Sometimes it is nice for me to also have presentations in Arabic. Like, I have attended DMK since 1998, and I am very pleased with it (...)." She was interrupted by women around her who laughed and teased her, saying that it sounded as if she was making a commercial for a washing product or the like. Azhaar continued: "But it is like that! But sometimes I also like to hear it in Arabic, and so I go to the mosque in Neukölln [the mosque in Finnowstrasse]."

Here, the importance Azhaar places on Arabic is less about it being the holy language of Islam, and more about Arabic as an emotional aspect of her religious practices. While a regular in a German-speaking mosque, Azhaar also attended an Arabic-speaking mosque—thus she alternated

<sup>46</sup> The word "*fitna*" comes from an Arabic verb that means to "seduce, tempt or lure." There are many variations of meaning, but usually they all refer to a feeling of disorder.

<sup>47</sup> There are around seven religious organizations in Berlin with German as the main language of instruction (Özyürek 2007).

between two different religious spaces depending, at least partly, on her emotional frame of mind.

Identification with one's own or parents' ethnic identity also emerged in situations where others criticized this ethnic group, as in the following exchange between Amal (22) and Latifa (17):

After the weekly MJD meeting during Ramadan, Amal and Latifa decided to go for the prayer in a small Turkish mosque located at Kottbusser Tor, and I joined them. When the prayer finished, Latifa looked displeased and said quietly: "That was quick!" I asked: "You think it was too quick?" Latifa responded: "I will tell you later." The room was completely filled by women speaking in Turkish. There was a line to get our shoes, and then a line to get out of the mosque. Outside in the courtyard, the men were standing around; some were waiting for their wives, sisters or mothers. Several cars were lined up along the road. Afterwards, at the subway station, Latifa and Amal talked. Amal said: "It is not Sunna to sing in between the prayer-cycles (*rekâts*) and that is not how it should be. (...) They were reading too quickly, you don't have time to understand what is being said! So you don't really know what you are reciting. You just do it. It is not the point to do it that quickly; one should also understand it." Latifa seemed a bit insulted. "It is like that among us," she claimed. She started to talk about which school of law DMK, which both of them were attending at the time, belongs to and which school she belonged to. Amal was not satisfied with this answer and said: "I will go and tell my husband [he is Arab] that the Arabs have really developed it. That theirs are better. He will be happy." Not leaving the topic, Latifa argued: "Maybe it is Sunna! You don't necessarily know every Sunna." Amal replied that she will ask at home. She was pretty sure that it is not. Latifa said: "It is how *we* do it. It's not wrong!" She added that the first time she was in a Turkish mosque it had not been as quick as today: "It was also quick, but not as much as here."

Growing up in Berlin with Turkish parents, Latifa had only recently become religiously active when I met her, and had not been very active in Turkish mosques before she came to the ethnically mixed MJD and DMK. She seemed equally surprised and displeased as the German convert Amal when we left the mosque. Yet, as Amal started to talk negatively about the "Turkish" way of reciting the prayers, Latifa gradually started to defend her "ethnic community's" way of praying. She began to talk about "among us," referring to her ethnic religious social field, and emphasized "we" when she said: "it is how *we* do it." Here she was not defending Islam, but was rather defending the way "her" Turkish compatriots practiced the Islamic prayer from criticism from a German convert (who was married to an Arabic imam). For Latifa and Amal, the space of the mosque becomes both Islamic and ethnically defined through this discussion, but whereas

Latifa felt emotionally attached to the ethnic religious group, Amal contested the correctness of how the prayer was carried out and insisted on the “un-Islamic” performance that took place in this ethnic religious social field.

### *The Reputation of Religious Spaces*

Despite the continuation of ethnically homogeneous mosques and associations, cooperation across ethnic lines and between different Turkish mosques is on the increase. Simultaneously, most mosques and religious organizations are careful when selecting the partners they cooperate with. I have already mentioned the element of contamination within the media and the German public: if one organization that is considered “moderate” works with an organization that the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution considers “fundamentalist,” this can have negative consequences for the reputation of the “moderate” organization. The young participants discussed such fears of contamination and paid attention to the reputation of the mosques with which they were involved. The following discussion after the regular Friday service among women active in several Muslim organizations is indicative of this:

During a tea and cake session after the Friday prayers in the German-speaking mosque DMK, a woman expressed regret about the recent German newspaper reports in which DMK was suddenly tagged as “fundamentalist” and in which the German journalist argued that there were extremists in the congregation. One of the women, Heidi (31), who worked in DMK, pointed out that that they [DMK] had even voted no to a project initiated by Inssan [a project that included several Muslim organizations] because Milli Görüş was involved in the project.<sup>48</sup> They [DMK] wanted to be “careful with whom they cooperate, who is in the project,” she recalled disappointedly. Aishegül (31), who was personally familiar with both DMK and Inssan, responded: “Yes, but with Milli Görüş it’s just their reputation which is bad, not the people. And now DMK is also considered to be fundamentalist!” Heidi agrees, but points to the fact that DMK is not on the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*) list like Milli Görüş is. Aishegül pointed to the paradox: “DMK didn’t want to cooperate with Inssan. Now [after the newspaper article], maybe Inssan doesn’t want to cooperate with DMK. (...) They didn’t want to cooperate on the project promoted by Inssan because they were afraid of the cooperation they had

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<sup>48</sup> The German-based Turkish organization Milli Görüş is on the list of the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and is viewed as a “threat” to German democracy. The Federal Office considers Milli Görüş to represent Islamic fundamentalism



with an organization which is under observation by the Protection of the Constitution, and now people might not be going to DMK, because they get afraid." She further hinted at the impossibility of following the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution in deciding whom to cooperate with or not since it kept changing who it believed to be suspicious and because it tended to have a weak basis for its accusations.

The above discussion shows how the "politics of contamination," or the "associative thinking" (Friedman 1999), which works both among majority and minority groups, affect internal Muslim networks, potential co-operations, and partners. It also affects individual mosque participant's choices about where to attend religious services, as many were afraid that the reputation of the mosque could "spill over" on to their individual person. Yet the discussion also indicates that a potential consequence of such associative thinking when it comes to Muslim organizations is that Muslim citizens may at some point stop trusting the pronouncements of German governmental bodies as they may believe that the decisions these bodies make are not based on facts, but rather on (exaggerated) fear.

Still, the reputation of a mosque, among Muslims and in the German media, played a role in the individual youths' decisions of where to receive Islamic instruction. For example, Aishegül told me that since she lived very close to the Al Nur mosque in Neukölln, she sometimes prayed there, but some of her friends, who would never visit this mosque, asked if she was not afraid that "they" (German media and authorities) might take pictures of her there. Some youth avoided mosques that were under surveillance by the German police or media because they feared being linked to "dangerous" spaces by the German government. Hawa (22) told Fatima the following when asked why she had not come to the overnight event at DMK that MJD had organized the previous Saturday:

My mother does not like me to sleep over at unfamiliar places. They are afraid of raids against the mosque. So much is happening these days. So much is written in the media about what is supposedly going on in the mosques. They [her parents] don't know what is being said there and who are there. There are so many mosques that are under surveillance. They think about my career. They don't want to risk me being put on a list with extremists. My parents are very social. They don't want to risk that I am

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and to prevent immigrants from participating politically in German society. It also reports that the daily newspaper *Milli Gazete*, which is viewed as the main publication of Milli Görüş supporters, have published anti-German and anti-Semitic statements. See Yurdakul (2006, 155–157) and Schiffauer (2004). For a discussion on Inssan and the focus the German public has on this organization, see Bendixsen (2006).



connected with the wrong names. I would like to be more active, but the entire media storm is making us limit our activities. It is such a pity.

The current political discourse about mosques in Europe places certain restrictions on the leeway organizations and mosques have with regard to cooperating and interacting with each other, but they also restrict religious actors who need to know who is under suspicion at various times in order to decide how to relate to that particular space. Individual worshippers mainly hear about these issues via rumors, discussions, and “warnings” from other worshippers. The extent to which such reputations actually prohibit a person from attending a specific mosque depends on various individual and family factors, including one’s career aspirations and relation to German society.

### *Teaching and Presentation Style of Religious Spaces*

In Islam, there are four major Sunni schools of jurisprudence (*madhahab*): the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i and Hanbali Schools. There are also different theological traditions (*Kalam*) and numerous varieties of congregations.<sup>49</sup> The Islamic “sub-communities” have particular political orientations, such as political Islam, or are influenced by movements such as Hamas or the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Whether or not the imam (who is often officially employed by the mosque) is a figure of authority and reverence for the young women was particularly important when they decide which mosque to attend regularly. However, I found that the young people I spoke to formed an impression of individual mosques based less on the particular theological tradition per se, and more on whether they considered the mosque to be “strict,” “relaxed,” or “open.” The young Muslim women seemed broadly knowledgeable about which religious discourses to expect in different mosques, and whether they would feel that these religious meanings and concepts would be imposed on them (by mosque participants, the imam, or religious leaders) in the various mosques. The following statements from the women I worked with illustrate this:

Sitting in a German-speaking mosque in Wedding, Jannan (20) said: “What I like about DMK is that it is so open, that they do not follow particular meanings [interpretations] which are then pushed on you. There is space for you and for different meanings [interpretations]. And it is not obligatory—you can come when you feel like it.”

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<sup>49</sup> For a more detailed overview of the different schools of jurisprudence see e.g. Murata and Chittick (1994).

Another young woman, Riffat (20), started to attend the youth group *Jugendtreff Assalam* (Youth Club Assalam) in Finnowstrasse because her mother had heard from their relatives that it was a good place for youth:

I never go to Al Nur. They are so strict there! I have a friend who is there. Once, on a day trip, they were going to cross the Kurfürstendamm and everyone had to wear a headscarf! I do not wear a headscarf! With Finnowstrasse, when we are going out, like eating together, I don't have to wear a headscarf. At the other place, they immediately ask me why I am not wearing the headscarf. Here [Youth Club Assalam], the woman asks also sometimes "when are you going to wear it? Soon, *inshallah* (God willing)" and I always answer, "when I get married." Here they are completely relaxed. (...) It's the best here, they [the leaders] are also young, so they understand us better!

In contrast to Riffat, Helene (33) said the following about Al Nur:

I have been going to this mosque for one year. I used to go to the Turkish [mosque], but didn't like it because [they were too strict]. Here it is ok that I am not wearing the headscarf, they do not look down on you because of that. Because they say that the most important thing is that you pray. (...) The Turkish [mosques] put more stress on my wearing the headscarf.

Their awareness of expected behaviors within the individual mosques became relevant as they chose between the various religious spaces (Bendixsen 2007). What is striking is that rather than referring to schools of jurisprudence or to the Islamic authorities taught in the religious spaces, most of the women had a perception of whether a mosque was "open," a "free space," or "too fundamentalist," "closed," and "strict." Additionally, the youth's perception of the social expectations that other mosque participants place on them as female religious actors, specifically in regard to veiling, also (re)produces the relevance of gender and sexual difference to how they related to these spaces. This is partly based on individual perceptions.

The different appraisals of the same religious spaces suggest that personal orientations or preferences between various ways of reciting, performing the prayer, and conducting the Islamic teaching and seminars, also shaped the youths' mental mapping of the religious places and are part of the decision they make about which religious community to attend. As Riffat and Helene's statements point to, some women considered a place to be "too strict" while others believed that the very same place was "open," thus showcasing two different experiences of the space. Indeed, I found that many young women had very different views and feelings about the same mosque. Whereas Amal (23) said about Al Nur: "It's my favorite mosque, I became a Muslim there," and one of her friends, Ines

(20), often went there because she enjoyed the charismatic imam's Sunday sermon, another friend, Somaya (17), explained that she did not like the atmosphere in that particular mosque. This, she said, is because the "Arab girls" there "group" themselves together so she did not feel welcome. She preferred DMK, she said: "Even if it is so small. They could do something more with the rooms. But there, when you come, you feel that they welcome you." However, Aishegül (31) stopped attending DMK at one point, because she found their religious seminars and events "too boring."

The young women often visited different religious communities recommended by friends or family before they became regulars in one particular organization or mosque. Their choice of a mosque was explained with comments like "you learn so much there," "I like the atmosphere," "the imam there is highly respected," and references to how approachable they found the other mosque participants. The women avoided certain mosques for reasons such as, "the other women are not friendly," "they only have uninteresting presentations," "the imam prays too quickly during Ramadan," or "there, they only speak Turkish." While the latter statement is indicative of the importance of the ethnic make-up of the mosque and is also a practical matter (this person does not understand Turkish), and while some point to the authority of the religious leader in the mosque, frequently the characterizations of the spaces are emotionally based.

Almost all of the women I spoke with had a clear idea of their favorite or preferred religious space(s). Fatma (28) and Aishegül (31) were two exceptions in this regard. Aishegül (with Turkish parents) told me:

I never went to only one mosque. A lot of people go to one particular mosque, like to a Turkish or Bosnian one or so on, and belong to that. I don't do that. I go everywhere." Though Aishegül attended DMK more regularly, she said: "During Ramadan, we pray together, you know. And then I usually go to the one close to where I am. Sometimes I go to an Arab mosque. They recite very nicely, read beautifully. But there are always so many children there, and they make so much noise that sometimes you cannot even hear what they say. That is why I sometimes go to the Turkish mosque. The Turkish are really strict. And they have fewer children with them. They do it in 20 prayer cycles, but they read so quickly that you cannot really listen to it. The Arabs read 12 times, but they read it very slowly so it takes longer than with the Turks. It is so beautiful to hear. And sometimes I go to the Bosnian mosque. There, they read one each and then you can hear the differences in each reading and they read so beautifully, some are really good. That is, all are good, but some are even better. And you would like to see who is reading it. There you can see the men, because the women and men are not divided. They have only one room—that is why. And also there are not that many [attendees], so it is possible.

Prayer in Islam is highly formalized with certain components that are clearly defined, although there are some differences among the four schools of Sunni Islam. The five daily obligatory prayers comprise a specific number of prayer cycles (*rekâts*), which each have a sequence of positions.<sup>50</sup> Being a keen mosque attendee, Aishegül was knowledgeable and had specific expectations about how the prayer would be performed in various mosques. These expectations, which she partly related to the ethnic or national identity of the mosque, contribute to shaping her religious map of Berlin. For Aishegül, the emotional experience of visiting and praying in the different mosques determined her feelings about the spaces and ultimately the choice of where to attend. Aishegül visited mosques to perform her religious duty, but her choice among the religious spaces was partly determined by the feelings and emotions the space stirred in her. The level of education of the mosque attendants or religious group as well as the individual person also mattered. For example:

Fahra (23) exclaimed that although she grew up with MJD and learned a lot there, she felt more comfortable in Finnowstrasse, Neukölln. She said: “It is normal that most of the women there [MJD] have a college degree. (...) When you are only doing vocational training yourself, it can sometimes make you feel uneasy, even if the others are not making a fuss about it. Here [Finnowstrasse], it is not that normal that they go to college. It feels better.”

As she herself had “only” completed vocational school, she preferred a religious organization where the majority of the participants had a similar level of education.<sup>51</sup> Social class or social capital (Bourdieu 2004 [1977]) thus also informs individual mappings of the religious spaces.

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<sup>50</sup> Each of the five daily prayers can be performed in a few minutes for those who are familiar with their complex configurations. Nonetheless, each prayer session can be extended by adding extra prayer-cycles or a more personal prayer (*du'a*, supplication) (Henkel 2005). For ethnography on prayer in Turkey, see Henkel (2005). He suggests that, “within the Hanafi madhab (which is followed by the great majority of Turkish Sunni Muslims) there are slight differences in the performance as it is prescribed for men and women. Strictly speaking there are, of course, also nuances in the performance that vary between one person and another and even from one performance to another” (Henkel 2005, 492).

<sup>51</sup> At the age of 10 to 12 years old, children finish primary school and are recommended by the teachers for one of three high school tracks, of which only Gymnasium grants the diploma (*Artium*) needed to enter university. After graduating from *Hauptschule* and *Realschule*, youth can go to university by attending continuing education programs. In general, graduating from “the lowest track” of secondary education (*Hauptschule*) has been devalued in recent decades, putting young people in a disadvantageous position when applying for vocational training or jobs, whereas the “intermediate type”, (*Realschule*), provides better prospects for vocational training. In 2002/2003 43.8 percent of young migrants attend *Hauptschule*, and only 13.9 percent of them attended Gymnasiums. Among ethnic

*Making Sense of Religious Spaces in the City*

The spatial incorporation of Islamic communities in Berlin, both in the form of the material urban environment, such as the presence of religious buildings, and everyday urban practices and cultures, such as veiled women in the street and *halal* butchers and restaurants, create and reinforce religious markers in the urban space. Such religious spatial practices are transforming urban space, and are part of an increasing range of sites and spaces of belonging.

Religious actors perform a complex mental mapping when they make sense of the variety of political, social, ethnic, and national orientations in religious places, a process through which places become spaces to which the actors turn. An individual's perceptions and spatial practices become part of their mental maps, which produce their experiences of mosques and the city. Michel de Certeau (1984) argues that the experience of walking in the city will depend upon which city you walk in, why you are walking, and who you are. Experiences of a specific mosque likewise depends upon which mosque you attend, for what reasons you are there (religious teaching, or being social), and your personal characteristics. Identification with a religious space depends on an intersection between ethnicity, language, religious orientation, gender, and social class.<sup>52</sup> As some of the faith communities, including MJD, have branches in different cities, such spaces of faith also represent a (potential) social network, linking German cities through the religious spaces and their followers.

Young Muslims' religiosity continues to be constructed in relation to both the collective religious spaces and their personal feelings towards these communities. I have suggested that mosques are contested spaces, potentially "dangerous," not only with regard to funding and building permissions, but also as social spaces for young Muslims seeking a local faith community.<sup>53</sup> One consequence of distinguishing between a "pure" and "cultural" Islam is that German becomes more attractive as the language of instruction, again appealing to followers with various ethnic

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Germans, only 18.6 percent attend *Hauptschule*, and 32.3 percent attended Gymnasiums (von Below and Karakoyun 2007, 34–42).

<sup>52</sup> Though I do not deal with it here, I expect age also matters.

<sup>53</sup> Another space for religious knowledge and identification that I have not touched upon here, but which is increasingly important, is the internet. Today, Muslim youth can find websites with competing authorities, some self-appointed, others more educated experts. This contributes to establishing a new sphere of transnational Muslim communities with debates that cross localities, cities, and nations.

backgrounds. It also facilitates religious communication and discussions with non-Muslim Germans. The ethnic orientation of a mosque still matters, as whether or not someone is emotionally or socially attached to her ethnic community informs the decision of whether to attend an ethnically homogenous mosque. Nonetheless, the presumed “openness” or “closeness” of the Islamic teaching and teachers, the events and seminars, as well as its regular attendees, are all important factors when choosing the faith community in which to participate. The youth did not explain this orientation in theological terms, but related it to emotional insights and past experiences, whether personal or from family members and peers.

Parents still play a role in recommending or opposing places. However, while many are used to establishing ties to religious social spaces through their family (Ehrkamp 2005), this process has become more individualized. This individual decision-making is deeply embedded in and shaped by the socio-historical and political position of Muslims in Europe. What has also become clear is that the German context and the manner in which the German government responds to the different Muslim organizations and mosques ultimately have a direct impact on how young Muslims interact socially with these spaces. The continuous gaze from the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution inform their mental mapping and for many it necessitates an extensive up-to-date knowledge of how various religious spaces are assessed by this office and how these spaces relate to yet other religious spaces. Another option is to “not care” about the viewpoint of the Federal office. In general, though, reputation matters to followers. The German context also shapes what is taught and discussed within the religious spaces—which I examine in more detail in chapter 3.

### CHAPTER THREE

## NEGOTIATING, RESISTING AND (RE)CONSTRUCTING OTHERING

City air makes you free\*

The way that young Muslims in Germany identify with Islam or develop a specifically Muslim identity is influenced by how they feel that German society perceives and represents them. In this chapter, I examine the effects of the current Othering of Muslims and Islam in Germany on the everyday experiences of the youth in MJD. I briefly discuss the current German national and public discourse of cultural “Otherness.” I subsequently discuss how they actively and creatively deal with these discourses—whether consciously and unconsciously—through the use of tactics (de Certeau 1984). Through this, I seek to understand how the discourse of the “Other” becomes part of the young Muslim women’s processes of identity or identification. Yet my contention is that the youth are not passive recipients of discrimination or racism, but that they in various situations also transcend discriminatory or stigmatizing discourses.

In chapter 1, I discussed how the way Muslim youth talk about their decision to be involved in religion is shaped by the dominant discourse about choice. I also reflected on the effects of minority voices not being heard in the public sphere. Here, I examine how Othering discourses also shape the youths’ identification processes and, more importantly, how the young women respond to these discourses in multiple ways. In other words, although the youth are clearly not actors who stand outside historical structures, discourses, and limitations, they should not be understood as passive subjects entirely shaped by external processes outside their control. What effects do Othering discourses have on how young women form their identities, and in particular on how they identify with Islam and as Muslims? How do they deal with, or dismantle, the Othering process? And how, if at all, does stigma itself become an integral part of the Islam with which these young women identify?

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\* The German saying “Stadtluft macht frei” (“City air makes one free”) dates to back to the Middle Ages, in particular to the development of town charters that stipulated that anyone (particularly farmers) who lived in a free town for one year and one day would become free from customary rural obligations to lords and community.



I examine the complex social realities within which the young people I worked with maneuver and the spaces they carve out. This means taking into account specific stereotypes and Othering discourses that frame Muslim youth and Islam in Germany, and asking whether, and if so how, the youth accommodate these discourses. It also means considering how youth use everyday mechanisms of resistance or “tactics” (de Certeau 1984) in these everyday encounters and situations. First, I illustrate the changing constructions of the Other in Germany by pointing to academic research, media reports, and political statements.<sup>1</sup> Second, I consider the ways in which the young women experience Othering on a daily basis in urban spaces. Third, I point to some of the ways that the young women resist, negotiate, deconstruct, or accommodate the Othering they face in the streets by using various everyday tactics.

Examining how youth resist Othering processes is particularly important, since even if identities must be understood as created within discourse, individuals are not merely called into a social position in the discursive structures (Hall 1996a, 13). It is always important to investigate how individuals defy or refuse to submit to the definitions laid out for them by hegemonic power structures. In the process of refusal, or of resisting the Othering discourses that are used in social interactions, the youth negotiate a “presentation of the self” (Goffman 1959). The various ways the youth resist or adopt stereotypical images of what it means to be a Muslim in Berlin are part of a management of representation. It shows how the young women navigate in public urban space in relation to efforts to interpellate or construct them as Others. Still, as the youth resist or negotiate the Othering discourses, they risk embracing other powerful collective ideas of what it should mean to be a Muslim woman today. By taking up ideals of the Muslim woman, they may well enter positions in which they restrain themselves in order to act and perform ideals of the Muslim woman, thus becoming disciplined bodies.<sup>2</sup> Is the religious identity of the youth transforming their experiences of the city, in that the city takes on qualities commonly characterized as those of a village, such as social surveillance, social control, and a lack of anonymity?

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<sup>1</sup> I do not consider this to be an exhaustive study of the construction of Otherness in German society. Yet the material provided here should be sufficient to show that Muslim women are being Othered in Germany.

<sup>2</sup> With the term “Muslimwoman” Cooke (2007) has drawn attention to both the recent conflation of gender and religion, and the construction of “Muslim woman” as a primary identity, whether chosen or not, for women of Muslim origins after 9/11. While I am reluctant to use the category “cosmopolitan” identity for Muslim women, I appreciate Cooke’s effort to illustrate how women have become a “visual assumption of an Islamic identity” (ibid., 153) while they simultaneously make claims in the public sphere.

*The Occidental and Oriental Other*

The notion of the Other is used in various disciplines ranging from philosophy and psychoanalysis to postmodernist theories in anthropology. Though each of the theories are different, most theoretical approaches to Othering are based on the notion that our ideas about who and what Others are (the characteristics assigned, the kind of life they are supposedly living) are closely linked to our ideas of who and what we are (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 1996, 8). There is a general tendency to consider Others to be absolutely and essentially different. This idea of difference enables hierarchical and stereotypical thinking, which is why the effect of Othering resembles racism. An Other is someone who is not compatible with the “mythological norm” (Lorde 1980, 2); that is, she or he diverges from the societal schema of an average woman or man. One consequence of Othering is that a person is viewed as unacceptable when he or she does not meet established socio-cultural and normative standards.<sup>3</sup>

In postcolonial theory, which is my starting point, Othering refers to the discursive production of the Other. This is a process typified by the way in which Europe produces an Orient-as-other (Said 1979), also described as Othering (Spivak 1996 [1985]). Here, I only provide a short overview of the Othering processes in German majority society, while recognizing that some Muslim youth also construct simplified images of non-Muslim Germans. In recent years, scholarship on Occidentalism has cast light on the negative stereotypes which are constructed about the people and cultures of the West in a parallel process to Orientalism. In both Occidentalism and Orientalism, the Other Woman and one’s “own” Woman are central, and the former is usually abhorred while the latter is idealized.<sup>4</sup> Indeed:

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<sup>3</sup> As Žižek, writing about the psycho-social perception of the Other, puts it: “In short what really bothers us about the Other is the peculiar way in which it organizes its enjoyment: precisely the surplus, the ‘excess’ that pertains to it – the smell of their food, their ‘noisy’ songs and dances, their strange manners, their attitude to work (in the racist perspective, the Other is either a workaholic stealing our jobs or an idler living on our labor, and it is quite amusing to note the ease with which one passes from reproaching the Other with a refusal to work to reproaching him for the theft of work)” (Žižek 1990, 54). I discuss how the youth construct stereotypical and Othering images of the “German Woman” in chapter 6.

<sup>4</sup> The capitalization of “Woman” emphasizes the symbolical conflation of gender, sex and sexuality. Discussing gender within religious systems, Sered (1998) distinguishes between “women” and “Woman.” Whereas “women” are female agents who can, to various degrees, claim rights, negotiate, or protest, “Woman” is a symbolic conflation of gender, sex and sexuality. “Woman” comprises allegory, ideology, metaphor, fantasy, and men’s psychological projections. The two distinct categories are not necessarily related, meaning that

Occidentalism and Orientalism are thus discourses of power that ultimately serve as mechanisms of control over women in the West and the East; both these discourses of domination use the comparative method of describing women's inferior status in the East or West to convince "native" women that they should be content with the status quo because they are "better off" or superior to "those" women. (Parameswaran 2003, 330)

Positions of superiority are built through misinformed cultural comparisons that construct simplified images. These conflicting positions of superiority redirect the focus away from the parallel processes controlling women in both worlds (Nader 1989).

I do not here discuss how the youth and their Muslim or ethnic communities may construct Othering images of German society and the non-Muslim German Woman, because my main focus is on how the youth respond to the feeling of being Othered in Germany. This is a process that I found to be important to the youth in their daily conversations. For example, Fadwa (23) told some of the young MJD participants and me, "I was opening the car and something fell down, and then a woman passing by was staring at me. I felt like saying 'it's my car.' She was staring as if it wasn't my car, you know." As I show in this chapter, this was not a singular event: similar events occurred weekly.

The youth may respond to Othering processes in the streets that are not produced primarily by the media, but rather relate to their personal experiences as children and while growing up. Additionally, Fadwa's perception of the gaze may well be an extension of her interpretation of the media rather than ill will from the passer-by. I am aware of the ethnographic challenge of how to interpret the gaze. Clearly, sometimes the gaze may be assigned intentions that are not there. Here, I focus on how I understand the youth to perceive the gazes and statements in their discussions and comments about such gazes. Indeed, "[s]mall and trivial racializing incidents with no hateful intentions can still have a negative effect on the people who experience them over and over again" (Gullestad 2004, 185). Likewise, Fanon (1986 [1952]) has famously noted the effect it had on him when a young boy looked at him and said "Look, a Negro!" Before I examine the effects that Othering processes have on the youth,

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the experiences of women might not have much to do with Woman. However, within religion these are often conflated. In the theological and mythological structures in religious traditions, Woman as symbol often plays a profound part, and these structures imprint the lives of the women involved in those traditions, and submit them to the patriarchal structures that often characterize religion.

I briefly discuss the role of the construction of the Other and the current images of Muslims in German society.

*The Role of the Other in Constructing the Nation*

The Othering of Muslim migrants within European nation-states must be understood within the context of nationalism and the extent to which this ideology has dominated the modern European imagination. Kaschuba (2006) calls attention to the eighteenth century cultural identity politics or politics of differentiation, when the European states constructed “*das Eigene*,” (the own) or the Self, through the construction of “*des Fremden*” (the stranger). The nation developed into an imagined community (Anderson 1983) of solidarity, and developed clear territorial boundaries with political, social, and economic rights as collective goods. The concept of national citizenship is based on increasing ties of dependency linking the individual to the state. The construction of national unity requires the limitation or even elimination of all other loyalties and divisions that are thought to conflict with the idea of a continuous homogenous national population. As Bauman (1990) forcefully argues, subjects are construed as natives by nation states, and uniformity is encouraged.<sup>5</sup> Those who are thought to deviate in their cultural practices from the norms that are used to define the nation are considered potentially dissident and malfunctioning within the order built by the nation-state, and are expected to adopt the so-called national traits (Anderson 1983).

As will be discussed, in Germany, as in several Western societies, Muslim identities have increasingly come to signify “the Other” after September 11, 2001. This has contributed to Muslims becoming “the victims of discrimination, harassment, racial and religious profiling, and verbal and physical assault” (Peek 2003, 271). Simultaneously, the Muslim as the contemporary Other must also be seen in light of European colonization in the nineteenth century. Edward W. Said examined the phenomenon of Othering and assigned the term “Orientalism” to a style of thought in which the West assigned negative patterns of behavior to the East, which was constructed as inferior compared to the so-called Western superiority.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Kapfere (1988, 191) argues that: “Nations must multiply likeness, not difference, otherwise national identity is weakened.”

<sup>6</sup> Said has been critiqued, and rightly so, for constructing a too simplistic conception of the colonial reality. Drawing on a Foucauldian notion of discourse, Said contributed to a new understanding of colonialism. Nevertheless, his work on Orientalism promoted a binary thinking, which reified the existence of two rigid entities, the Occident and Orient,

Said's *Orientalism* (1979) illustrated how the West constructs representations and portraits of the East as the Other, and how the ideology of Othering is formed through art and literature. The European colonizer, man and woman, writer, politician or traveler, considered Islam to oppress women. The veil or headscarf became the ultimate symbol of Muslim women's allegedly confined and submissive role within colonized societies, and it was argued that the only way to modernize Muslim women and their cultures was through the spread of Christianity and the removal of the veil (Bullock 2007; Fanon 1969). It was thought that:

Short of Christianity, no teaching can elevate the character and position of Muhammedan women in any land; for, as long as she accepts the Koran as a rule of faith, she will unhesitatingly acquiesce in the mutilated life to which she is condemned. (Crawford [1863] quoted in Mabro 1991, 182)

As a strategy to obliterate potential resistance, the French government targeted Algerian women and suggested that they would be emancipated under French rule. Solidarity societies were formed to promote the unveiling of Algerian women (Fanon 1969).<sup>7</sup> In 1958, public displays of women taking off their veil or headscarf became the ultimate signs of the European role (or duty) of bringing enlightenment and modernity to the colonized countries and of Europe liberating colonized women from colonized men. European women travelers, both secular and Christian, were convinced of the superiority of Western civilization, and urged Muslim women to reform their society by unveiling and refusing polygamy.<sup>8</sup> In short, the colonial as well as national elites in the colonized societies sought to remove the veil as a way to promote progress, civilize the society, attempt to reveal the harem, and to enhance governmental control over the individual, colonized subject (Bullock 2007; Fanon 1969).

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while also largely ignoring discourses in the "Orient." See for example Varisco (2007) for a critical discussion of Said's work.

<sup>7</sup> Bullock's analysis of the role of the veil and the impact of the Orientalist viewpoint in colonialist discourses is particularly helpful when trying to understand the contemporary perception of the veil in the West (2007, 1–34). She argues that the veil was singled out because it prevented European men from looking at local women, leading to a European male fantasy of the Orient and exotic women. Fantasy versions of the East were presented to Europeans, for example through the inclusion of a Cairo street at the Stockholm World Exhibition in 1889, and several European travelers went to see "the real thing" in the "timeless" space of Egypt, Morocco, or Algeria.

<sup>8</sup> For example, the French woman Eugénie le Brun, who was married to an Egyptian man, urged the Egyptian activist Huda Shaarawi (1879–1947) to take off her veil (Badran 1986, 80). Shaarawi removed her veil publicly in 1923.

*Migrants Entering the European Nation-State: The Cultural Other*

The immigration to Europe from the 1960s onwards of people who came to be perceived as culturally different Others was increasingly viewed as a threat to the perceived cultural homogeneity of the nation-states. Immigrants were categorized as inherently different outsiders. Clearly, the group(s) that represents the Other within a nation-state is not constant, and the attributes assigned to it and constructed as the problematic differences, are not static. Rather, the content of the difference changes in time and space—closely intertwined with a nation's socio-historical location. In the 1970s, Germany's ultimate Other were Turkish guest workers (Soysal 2003) who, it was thought, seemed to never return where they came from. Family reunification and the increase in asylum seekers between 1975 and 1980 contributed to a feeling of increased competition on the labor market and partly fuelled a fear of foreign infiltration (*Überfremdung*) through which Germans would become strangers in their own country (Thranhardt 1988). The Heidelberg Manifesto published in 1981 indicates the then latent xenophobic atmosphere: fifteen academics called for protection of the cultural and linguistic purity of the German people (Green 2004). The previous year, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD) Minister-President of Hesse, Holger Börner, pledged during the election that “there will be no more Turks coming to this state as long as I'm in charge” (quoted in Green 2004, 43).<sup>9</sup> By the end of the 1980s, the Foreigners' Entry Law and a tightening of the rules on family reunification aimed to safeguard the national characteristics of Germany. It was argued that further immigration could lead to the:

abandonment of societal homogeneity, which is primarily determined by membership of the German nation. Germany's common history, heritage, language and culture would lose their unifying and defining nature, the Federal Republic would develop little by little into a multinational and multicultural community, which would over time be weighed down by the resulting problems with its minorities. (BMI 1988, 23, quoted in Green 2004, 61)

The proposed legislation turned out to be controversial and was abandoned. Yet it suggests that whether or not a person has formal citizenship is largely irrelevant to the question of whether that person is perceived as German or not in everyday encounters. Culture and descent are in this respect more important than civil rights and duties. In consequence,

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<sup>9</sup> SPD is a left-wing party that originally represented the working class and trade unions.

invisible social barriers are created in which German citizenship is of little relevance to participation in social life.

In the 1990s, the unification of Germany, the end of the Cold War, and the collapse of Yugoslavia led to an increase in the arrival of ethnic German immigrants (*Spätaussiedler*) and asylum seekers.<sup>10</sup> In the same period, extreme right-wing parties were gaining in popularity, and German society was shocked by a series of racially motivated attacks on foreigners in former East Germany (Hoyerswerda and Rostock).<sup>11</sup> At the end of the 1990s, the president of the German Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Peter Frisch, claimed that Islam would become the largest problem for Germany's domestic security. He also argued that the wearing of headscarves could be read as a sign of how Muslims were consciously excluding themselves from German society (Collet 2004, 121).<sup>12</sup> This style of argument would turn out to be typical for future public debates.

### *Migrants Born in Germany: The Religious Other*

At the end of the 1990s, there was a narrative shift through which the Other moved from being the Turk or guest worker to being the Muslim. This shift in categories was heavily perpetuated through media discourses (Schiffer 2005), German political discourses and policies (Spielhaus 2006), and global events (Allievi 2006). The citizenship examination introduced in Baden-Württemberg in 2006—which has become known as “the Muslim test”—indirectly focuses on a general presumption that Islam and Western democracy are incompatible.<sup>13</sup> Originally called “discussion

<sup>10</sup> Before 1993, the term for “*Spätaussiedler*” was “*Aussiedler*.” The Federal Expellee Law (*Bundesvertriebenengesetz*, BVFG) of May 19, 1953, regulates the rights of German refugees or immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe and the definition of who is a *Spätaussiedler* is found in section 4. Generally, “*Aussiedler*” are considered to be German because they migrated from Germany in the 1760s (and later) to Russia, Poland, and Romania, sometimes continuing to practice German culture and speak German. During WWII, Stalin sent the German minority to Siberia and Central Asia, as they were considered Hitler's fifth column.

<sup>11</sup> A firebombing of Turkish families in Mölln on November 23, 1992 and in Solingen on May 29, 1993, killed eight people in total. See also Green (2004) for a well-researched analysis on the difficulties surrounding reforms of asylum and citizenship legislation in this period.

<sup>12</sup> Frisch also asked all Muslims in Germany to send their daughters to school without the headscarf (Collet 2004).

<sup>13</sup> As Amir-Moazami (2011) asserts, it is not coincidental that the test was written and introduced in Catholic-oriented Baden-Württemberg. The headscarf debate that centered on Fereshta Ludin (see introduction) also began in the same federal state (*Land*). The government of Baden-Württemberg was the first to introduce the law banning headscarves for teachers based on the state's constitution and its emphasis on Germany's Christian tradition.



guidelines,” the test is taken in Baden-Württemberg by applicants for German citizenship from 57 Islamic countries (approximately 60 percent of immigrants who apply for citizenship in this federal state) and is supposed to reveal whether the applicant shares “democratic values.” Through the test, the representatives of the German bureaucracy are supposed to assess potential new (Muslim) citizens’ allegiance to German culture and values, by questioning applicants’ political, cultural and social views. Themes include views on religious freedom, equality of the sexes, homosexuality, freedom of expression, the concept of honor, and forced marriage.<sup>14</sup> It contains 30 questions, including “do you think a woman should obey her husband and that he can beat her if she is disobedient?” “Would you allow your daughter to participate in sports and swimming classes at school?” “What do you think of the fact that parents forcibly marry off their children? Do you think such marriages are compatible with human dignity?” In Germany, the test was referred to as the “Muslim test,” as it was obvious from the questions that the initiators of the test presumed that Muslims were the potential new citizens who would oppose what is considered to be the liberal democratic gender regime of Germany.

Researchers argue that German schools reinforce the continuing assumption that Germany has a largely homogeneous population by marking certain citizens or migrants as outsiders in German society. A study led by Mannitz and Schiffauer (2004) compares history teaching and textbooks from France, Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands to see whether and how the construction of Otherness occurs in schools. They argue that in Germany, the idea that students with a Turkish background are Others is reproduced in textbooks. In the construction of the nation, the German people are characterized as “a community of descent and culture” (Mannitz 2004b, 250). History textbooks reproduce the idea that Muslims have come to live “among us,” where “us” are Christians. In addition, pupils speaking Turkish in the classroom is perceived as “an expression of ‘Otherness,’” where the pupils(s) is considered to inhabit a cultural niche (Sunier 2004, 153). The youth’s foreignness (*Fremdheit*) is reproduced by the fact that she or he is speaking Turkish. By considering culture to equal mentality, migrants are constructed as Others, and at the same time

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<sup>14</sup> When introducing the text, Heribert Rech, the Minister of the Interior of Baden-Württemberg, argued that it was based on “publications by authors like Seyran Ates, Necla Kelek, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and Bassam Tibi [...], according to which in the center of Germany, the human rights of thousands of Islamic women are violated because they are treated like slaves by their families. This can no longer be ignored in the processes of naturalization.” Press note, Ministry of the Interior, July 18, 2007.

an idea of Germanness and *Leitkultur* (the leading culture or the dominant culture) is upheld although the content of these remains vague.<sup>15</sup> In sum, in German schools no (symbolic) space is given to citizens with a Muslim background or to immigrants in the construction of German national identity; instead they are negatively assessed as non-Germans, as *Ausländer* (foreigner) (Mannitz and Schiffauer 2004).

The media also play a prominent role as mediators in the process of identity formation and Othering processes. The media is a powerful source of referential power, and the identity of the Other is partly shaped by certain signs that the media present and that entail particular ideas of national, ethnic, cultural, or sub-cultural identities. The perception of the Other is further shaped by the readers' interpretation of these signs (Spencer 2006). Although clearly not operating in a vacuum, the media effectively constructs, informs, and authenticates social boundaries in German society. Media studies scholar Sabine Schiffer has suggested that German media frames Islam as Islamism and Terror, and constructs Islam as a form of strangeness (*Fremdheit*; Schiffer 2005).<sup>16</sup> According to Schiffer, a chain of associations, by now unconscious, has been constructed in which Islamism and the oppression of Muslim women are symbolized through the continuous use of references to or images of the headscarf. This representation, she argues, is related to stereotyped, preconceived ways of looking as well as to media perspectives and media's overdetermination of the headscarf (Schiffer 2004; 2008).

Today, German media and several German politicians do not consider "headscarf girls" to be emancipated. Rather, these young women are thought to be reluctant to participate in German society and are constructed as active when considered unwilling to integrate and as passive when viewed as being forced to wear a headscarf by their parents or husband. For German politicians, media, and the majority of the non-religious population, the use of the headscarf (by migrant women) in the public

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<sup>15</sup> The term "*Leitkultur*" has been coined by conservative politicians and claims to encompass the essences of German culture. The concept was introduced to the political debate by Friedrich Merz, the leader of the German Christian Democratic Union (*Deutschland Christlich Demokratische Union*, CDU)/Christian-Social Union (*Christlich-Soziale Union*, CSU) Fraction in the Bundestag. In an interview with the newspaper *Die Welt* (October 25, 2000), Merz held that immigrants should adapt to the dominant culture (*Leitkultur*) of Germany. *Leitkultur* was later defined as "adherence to the normative values contained in Germany's Basic Law" (Green 2004, 119).

<sup>16</sup> "Framing" refers to the social construction of a particular phenomenon by the media, in which the rhetorical approach to a topic advances select interpretations and rejects other interpretations.

sphere has become a sign of the failure of integration.<sup>17</sup> The German political (and originally left-leaning) weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* frequently publishes sensationalist Orientalist front covers with images of veiled or Burqa-wearing Muslim women under headlines such as “The puzzle or mystery of Islam,” and, after van Gogh’s murder, “Allah’s daughters without rights. Muslim women in Germany.”<sup>18</sup>

Here, I provide one example from the German media: under the headline “Prominent German-Turks have called upon Muslims [women] in Germany to take off their headscarf as a sign of their willingness to integrate: those who veil deliberately separate themselves from German society,” Ekin Deligöz, Member of the German Federal Parliament (*Bundestag*) for the Green Party, is quoted as telling (the tabloid newspaper) *Bild am Sonntag*: “The headscarf is a symbol of the oppression of women. Those who demand that a woman covers her head and hair are making her into a sexual object.” The article continues, “Deligöz speaks to Muslim women: ‘arrive to today, arrive in Germany. You live here, thus take off the headscarf!’ SPD member of the German Federal Parliament, Lale Akgün, criticized the headscarf as discriminatory and called for equality for Muslim women: ‘It is unacceptable that a Turkish man can walk in modern clothing in the street—and his wife next to him must wear a nondescript, floor-length coat and a headscarf.’”<sup>19</sup>

Several themes are apparent here. In this article, the idea that a woman can actually choose to wear the headscarf is completely disregarded by the speakers. Instead, the only two reasons why a woman is veiled are because she is forced by external pressures or because she is traditional and not modern. This resembles the colonizing practices in Algeria, where women were asked to remove their headscarves as part of a so-called emancipation and modernity process. Today, the veiled women are not located in (former) colonies, but within Germany. Wearing a headscarf is still

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<sup>17</sup> The categories “Other Germans” (*Andere Deutsche*) or “German-Turks” (*Deuschtürken*) are sometimes used in the media to categorize identifications not contained in “being German” (Mannitz 2004b, 298). But also “*deutsche Ausländer*” (German foreigners) or “*ausländische Einheimische*” (foreign natives) are used in the media.

<sup>18</sup> “*Rätsel Islam*,” in *Der Spiegel Special*, Nr.1/1998 and “*Allahs rechtlose Töchter. Muslimische Frauen in Deutschland*” in *Der Spiegel*, Nr. 47, November 15, 2004; my translation. *Der Spiegel* is not the only magazine engaged in this discourse. Similar stories can be found in, for example, the weekly political and social magazine Stern.

<sup>19</sup> My translation from German. Accessed online: *Der Spiegel* online, [www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,442656,00.html](http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,442656,00.html), October 15, 2006, accessed October 20, 2006. After the Green Party member of Bundestag, Ekin Deligöz, challenged Muslim women in Germany to remove the headscarf, she received anonymous death-threats.

considered to be incompatible with being German, or with having really arrived, not just physically, but mentally and spiritually, in German society. In this article, the speaker also produces a particular gender structure within what is imaged as the Muslim family: whereas the man is fashionable, he does not allow his wife to be fashionable, thus victimizing Turkish Muslim women. At the same time, Turkish Muslim men are constructed as oppressors.

The role of the headscarf in the current framing of Othering in Germany is clear: the headscarf has become the ultimate sign of oppressive gender structures. This discursive move constructs veiled women as representatives of gender inequality and as primary signs of the Other. The headscarf has come to symbolize the assumed fundamental differences between East and West. As Göle asserts, “no other symbol than the headscarf reconstructs with such force the ‘otherness’ of Islam to the West” (Göle 1996, 1). The headscarf is perceived to signal the woman as being out of time and out of place in European societies.

Additionally, the fact that the proponent of this idea was an unveiled woman of Turkish origin adds another dimension: to the German public, she casts herself as the “good migrant” who shows that it is possible to integrate in German society—in sharp contrast to the anonymous veiled women on the street. While the theme of the “good migrant” is interesting and deserves further consideration, in this chapter I look at the “bad migrant”: the Muslim woman who has no intention of removing her headscarf. Furthermore, rather than reducing the discussion to how the young women are shaped by the various classifiers (policies, the German school, media, and politicians) that construct her as the Other, I intend to examine how the youth contest some of the stereotyping images.<sup>20</sup> My focus in the rest of this chapter is on how the youth deal with these public perceptions of the headscarf.

Islamism has been viewed as a form of collective and political management of Goffmanian “spoiled identity” by several researchers who write about young Muslims in Europe. The idea is that young migrants turn to Islam as a reaction to discrimination and racism. Drawing on Goffman’s discussion of stigma, Göle argues that the Islamist movement “turns the ‘undesired differentness’ of being a Muslim into a voluntary adoption of a stigma symbol that is overtly claimed and offensively communicated in

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<sup>20</sup> In part, the meaning of the veil or headscarf that is constructed by such media stories exists independently of the reasons given by women for wearing the headscarf, although such media representation may well affect how someone thinks about her headscarf.

public" (ibid., 16). I agree with Göle that the stigma of Muslimness shapes how the youth identify with Islam and craft a Muslim Self. Still, Göle and other researchers do not analyze the complex processes through which the youth resist or make use of creative tactics to challenge the stigma of being traditional or submissive—which the headscarf is understood to signal in German public space. In other words, how do the Othering discourses in politics and media become socially relevant in women's everyday identification processes? How does the discourse shape the women's social practices in urban spaces? What are the available spaces for maneuvering or for using creative tactics to counter the Othering discourses?

### *Looking at the Headscarf*

Here, I focus on social interactions in which what the youth perceive as a construction of Muslim women as the Other becomes relevant in everyday face-to-face encounters in the subway, in shops, or on the street. Just as Simmel's stranger is a social form, the Other is not an individual, but a relationship (Tabboni 1995) that is part of a pattern of interaction. The process of Othering takes place in everyday social situations. By looking at these everyday situations, we can identify how Othering processes shape experiences of everyday life and how social actors are not passively subjected to the essentializing Othering processes (see also Bendixsen 2009a).<sup>21</sup>

The processes of Othering that I discuss here have similarities with Althusser's idea of interpellation. Althusser emphasizes how subjects are being constructed and subjected to certain cultural and historical discourses within which they are expected to operate. Althusser's famous example of ideological interpellation is that if a policeman calls out "hey, you," this interpellates the person who is being called as a subject under the law, as the person will turn and recognize this interpellation as referring to him or her.<sup>22</sup> As will be seen, this resembles the processes of Othering that the youth go through in their everyday urban encounters.

According to Althusser, interpellation takes place through language. What Althusser does not consider, as Butler (1997) eloquently points out, is why the individual accepts the subjectification and normalization

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<sup>21</sup> As the focus of my research is the perception and life-worlds of Muslim youth, I have not examined how similar situations may affect or impact the notion of "Muslims" among the non-Muslim population. This is a gap in current research.

<sup>22</sup> Othering processes resemble interpellation. The interpellated person, according to Althusser, is forced to become the subject that the interpellation is hailing.

brought into effect by the voice that calls out. Importantly, Butler also asks how the individual can negotiate, redefine, or challenge the conscious or unconscious efforts of interpellation. I discuss some of the tactics that are available to youth when they confront the interpellation or Othering. I argue that how young women use these tactics tells us a great deal about how identification processes take place (Bendixsen 2009a).

During my fieldwork, everyday conversations made it clear to me that the youth were regularly stopped by strangers on the street who asked them whether they were forced to wear the headscarf, or who hurled insulting remarks, such as, “you look stupid with the headscarf”, “Taliban!” or “another one of those Mummies.” Verbal abuse was a frequent topic of conversation among the young friends, and provoked amusement, frustration, and incredulity. Verbal abuse suggests that people in general consider the young women in this study to be representatives of Islam who have an obligation to respond to questions that are perceived to be related to Islam (be they cultural, social, or political). For example, Sarah (15), whose parents arrived from Turkey in the 1970s, told me:

“The nice thing about the World Cup (was that people were talking to her). Not only about Turkey, but about all Arabic countries, and then slowly the conversation would move to be about terrorism. All of that because of this.” She pointed to her headscarf, continuing, “people would say ‘I have been to Algeria’, and I would say, ‘ah, nice, I haven’t.’” She laughed, and added, “they say that to show me that they know people like me, it is meant to be friendly.”

Although Sarah saw the fact that strangers were talking to her as a positive development, the conversation also demonstrates the association strangers made between Sarah and Arabic countries (although Turkey is not an Arabic country) and even terrorism. Sarah considered the development of the conversation to be a direct consequence of her headscarf. Yet, rather than being insulted or feeling Othered, Sarah responded to them jokingly, interpreting their statements as uninformed rather than hostile. When she recounted the episodes to me, she even excused the statements that contain simplified and partly stigmatizing elements, implying that people do not know better. What could have become a series of social situations where Sarah would have felt Othered, she indulged and interpreted as clumsy efforts to be friendly.

Frequently, the young veiled women were treated as non-German and as Others. The relationship between veiling and being perceived as a non-German was particularly clear when talking to German converts to Islam: they felt that both the Muslim and non-Muslim population considered

them to no longer be German once they donned the headscarf. The headscarf seemed to eradicate their Germanness, erasing the fact that they were born in Germany, spoke German fluently, had German grandparents and a German education. Apparently, their religious identification made them incompatible with existing German cultural spaces of belonging.<sup>23</sup> Those who were born Muslim also felt a difference in how people at large perceived them after they started to veil. For example, Ines (20) believed that when she started to wear the headscarf it changed the way she was perceived by people around her:

Sometimes on the subway, there are like three people sitting across from you, and they stare, look at you like this [she looks at me from head to toe] as if they were in the Zoo and I, like, think, come on hey, stop looking at me like that, as if I am a monkey in a cage! And sometimes you are also imagining it, like, that (you think) they are looking, and then there is maybe no one who is really looking at you, it drives you crazy. (...) And then they ask why foreigners become criminals? Like, imagine, I feel it like that, and I am not even a foreigner, I am German. And they still don't treat me as a German. Imagine how it must feel for a real foreigner, someone who is not a German! (...) I have been German since I was able to think, and now, from the moment when I started to wear a headscarf, I am not German anymore. They treat you differently, you can just feel it.

Ines felt that there was a clear change in how (anonymous) non-Muslims reacted to her and behaved towards her after she started to veil. She personally did not see any contradiction in being German and being veiled, but experienced that she was treated as a foreigner as a result of wearing a headscarf. Growing up in a small German town where she seldom socialized with people with migrant backgrounds, Ines had mostly ethnic German friends before the age of 14. After a turbulent youth, she turned more religious and decided to veil.<sup>24</sup> Until then, she said, she had no problems considering herself German, a feeling that changed after she visually showed that she is Muslim and the subsequent external reactions towards her. In the above conversation, she particularly emphasized the experiences of being Othered through receiving looks from strangers.

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<sup>23</sup> Veiled women who insist that they too are German potentially challenge not only who is a German or a European, but also the idea that one must embrace a single identity in order to fit in with the cultural constellations that together make up the nation-state. The idea of trying to be both German and Muslim may well discomfort the nation-state constellation and may be felt as threatening the pureness of the nation-state. However, these claims need to be examined in greater ethnographic detail.

<sup>24</sup> I discuss the religious career of Ines in more detail in chapter 7.





Figure 9. Young women with headscarves, Kreuzberg. Photo: Synnøve Bendixsen.

It was pointed out to me that Othering gazes do not only come from ethnic German non-Muslims, but also from those who were born Muslims or from secular Muslims. Julie (28), a German convert, told me that she sometimes found that she was perceived to represent a political movement, as “the Islamist,” “the Extremist,” or “the anti-feminist.” She interpreted the gazes or negative looks from non-practicing Muslims or “seculars” in terms of their feeling threatened in their emancipation or feeling judged by a “moral apostle with headscarf.”

What do (anonymous) gazes do? In his research on medical practices at the end of the sixteenth century, and later in his work on the prison system, Foucault (1995 [1977]) points to how the gaze becomes a technique embedded in power. He points to five operations that the normalizing gaze of modern scientific reason leads to: comparison, differentiation, hierarchization, homogenization, and exclusion. The gaze is not neutral; it has a starting point (*ibid.*, 182–84).<sup>25</sup> The (anonymous) gazes that the youth feel others them, have social effects that are similar to the normalizing gazes within the state apparatuses Foucault described.

<sup>25</sup> The hospital was the first area where the surveillance techniques and the normalizing gaze were introduced. The early schools turned out to be a kind of examining apparatus, where the student is subjected to examination, thus promoting visibility and linking this to knowledge and power (Foucault 1995 [1977], 187).

Foucault points to how the pursuit of visibility advanced when the examination technique was introduced at the end of the classical age. In this examination technique, the power of an observing hierarchy merges with that of a normalizing judgment. The examination becomes “a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them” (ibid., 184). It seems to me that the gaze on the street bring similar operations into play for the young Muslims—namely that of comparison, differentiation, hierarchization, homogenization, and exclusion, where the veiled woman is represented and perceived as a deviation from the norm.

Reflecting upon how the urban represents a space where Othering discourses and normalizing gazes take place does not provide a sufficient understanding of the complexities of these youths’ everyday social life and identification processes.<sup>26</sup> This part of the story only emphasizes the socio-historical constraints and discourses, pointing to the positions to which the young women were (sought) summoned in their lived social experience. A deeper understanding needs to include insight into how the young women identified or did not identify with the positions they were imagined to represent. It must also analyze how they shaped, transformed, created, and performed these positions.<sup>27</sup> In short, what are the different ways that the young women creatively dealt with the Othering gazes and interpellations on the street?

### *The Tactics of Muslim Women*

Through my fieldwork, it became clear to me that the young women and teenagers did not unconditionally accept the Othering behavior they

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<sup>26</sup> Here I discuss “the gazed upon” and not “the gazer”—thus, I analyze the feelings that the gaze brings into play, and disregard the intention(s) behind the gaze.

<sup>27</sup> Although I am inspired by Foucault’s theoretical focus on how subjects also form the subject positions, I agree with the critique that Foucault tends to consider the body as being passively inscribed by a subjectifying power (McNay 1991). In her assessment of Foucault’s perception of the docile body, McNay (1991) argues that the focal point of Foucault’s analysis of the disciplinary techniques is on those in control, largely disregarding those being controlled. This weakness leads to an exaggeration of the efficiency of disciplinary forms of control. In consequence, Foucault falls short of expanding a “notion of resistance” by the subjects of disciplinary power. Foucault contends that oppression always produces resistance: “There are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised” (Foucault 1980, 142, in McNay 1991, 134). Yet, Foucault’s historical

encountered from strangers in urban situations. Rather, they made use of techniques or tactics to project an alternative self-image that challenged or negotiated the Othering encounter. While these tactics do not necessarily control the encounter, they do shape them. I find de Certeau's and Goffman's concepts useful in explaining the Othering that the youth faced and their reactions or (non)identification with the essentialism in the encounters. The youths' reactions can be considered "techniques of impression management" (Goffman 1959), or as various tactics or strategies (de Certeau 1984).<sup>28</sup> The term "tactics" refers to acts that are determined by the absence of power, whereas "strategies" are organized by the postulation of power. De Certeau distinguishes them by the types of operations and the role of spaces: "strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces, when those operations take place, whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces" (*ibid.*, 29). Tactics produce space through frequent maneuvers so as to transform spaces into chances or opportunities.<sup>29</sup> In daily social situations, people can (re)claim autonomy by using tactics that contest oppressive forces, such as Othering processes. Tactics are everyday practices, for example altering ways of walking, producing, speaking, reading, and dressing, which together can interfere with or confront the prevailing regulatory social system.<sup>30</sup>

Whereas some of the social techniques I want to address here are highly individual, others are learned or practiced within a group. To clarify this point, I provide two examples of individual creative tactics that I noticed during my fieldwork:

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studies suggest that the body does not materially resist the processes of power. In Foucault's analysis, power inscribes itself on the body, which remains a passive vector (McNay 1991).

<sup>28</sup> To understand how, if at all, the young women take up the external social discourses or interpellations, I make use of a Goffmanian situational analysis. As several researchers have noted (e.g. Calhoun 1994), in the dramaturgical theory of social relations, Goffman describes everyday social encounters and interactions as too intentional, calculating and strategic. I seek to circumvent the radical intentionality that Goffman has rightly been criticized for by drawing on Michel de Certeau's concept of "tactics" (1984) which also recognizes unconscious acts. The distinction de Certeau (1984) makes between a strategy and tactic makes it possible to avoid the models of over-reflexive or rational negotiations of Goffman.

<sup>29</sup> In the words of de Certeau: "A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it. (...) I call a 'tactic', on the other hand, a calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional location), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. (...) A tactic insinuates itself to the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance" (de Certeau 1984, xix).

<sup>30</sup> See also Foucault on tactics (1980, 90; 95), and strategy (1980, 92–95; 1994, 346–348).

Kiraz (24) told a group of friends about a recent event: She had been sitting on the subway reading Goethe when a woman next to her asked, “are you really reading that?” Kiraz had answered with a playfully invented and feigned foreign accent: “I no German speak” (*“Ich keine Deutsch spreche”*). As she told us the story she laughed, content with her playful response.

The second event was told at the MJD premises:

After a weekly MJD meeting, Naila (17) told another MJD participant and me a story: as the only veiled woman in a group of female friends, she had entered the department store KaDeWe at Kurfürstendamm. She explained that “they [the other customers and employees] were staring and I said aloud [so that everyone around her could hear] ‘you would think that they had never seen anyone with a headscarf before!’”

In the first situation, Kiraz was making fun of the woman, playing with the stereotype that the woman based her question on. In this way, she assumed control of the situation and, disregarding whether her audience understood that Kiraz was making fun of her, dismantled what could have been an experience of Othering. Instead, Kiraz gained a sense of satisfaction. In the second situation, no one confronted Naila directly, but she felt the gazes judge her. So while Naila was not facing anyone in particular, she faced the whole atmosphere, most likely strongly shaped by the particular social setting of KaDeWe, with its exclusive image. If we take a second look at this situation as a scene in a play, with this small performance or reflexive improvisation, Naila turned the situation around, talked back to her audience, and ridiculed and challenged the gazes, at the same time as she confirmed her difference. Yet in this situation, she controlled her own difference.

A performance is intrinsically interactive and risky as it can either (completely or partly) fail or be successful (Schieffelin 1998). Whether or not it is successful depends on the relationship between the different performers in the interaction. It may well be that I only heard about situations which were (partly) successful. However, it is my impression that small performances like these often take the other person(s) by surprise, and the interaction comes to an embarrassed and even confused halt. That said, Ines told me a story that was similar to Kiraz’s, but where the confrontation ended differently:

Once I was sitting on the subway reading. I was reading Noam Chomsky and then I noticed that the woman next to me was reading in my book, looking at what I was reading. And so somewhat before my stop, I closed the book so that I would have some time to talk to the woman before I got off, and I put the book on my lap so that she would see the title, and I said, “Noam

Chomsky” and the title, and then I said, “do you know it? It is very interesting.” And the woman said like, “it is very good that you are reading such books.” And I did not really understand what she meant, and said that “yes, he is very interesting; he is a Jew, but also defends the Palestinians.” And she said, “no, what I mean is that it is very good that you can read.” And I didn’t want to say something and insult her there on the subway, and just said, “yes [it is important to read].”

The effort Ines made to initiate a conversation with the woman failed, and Ines was taken aback by the woman’s response. The woman focused on Ines being able to read German and not on the content of her book. The stranger did not see Ines as a potential partner in an intellectual conversation in the way Ines hoped. Instead, the woman acted condescendingly to a veiled Muslim woman who she thought was fortunate to know how to read. I believe that the difference in the responses that Kiraz and Ines received can partly be explained by the fact that Kiraz was more self-assured, older, and enjoyed telling jokes, while Ines was more timid, quiet, and generally shy. Tactics like these will necessarily be related to personal dispositions, individual characteristics or narrative identity (Taylor 1991), and to the particular context, such as being together with close friends—like in Naila’s case.

Not all individuals chose to react: sometimes the youth were confronted with Othering gazes or interpellations too suddenly, and left the situation feeling hurt, not knowing at that very moment how to respond. At the same time, silence can also be a way to question the legitimacy of the authority called upon in the confrontation and by the stranger. It can also be an effort, as Butler, referencing Nietzsche puts it, to “circumscribe a domain of autonomy that cannot or should not be intruded upon by the questioner. As a narrative withheld, it either refuses the relation that the inquirer presupposes or changes that relation so that the one queried refuses the one who queries” (Butler 2005, 12). Silence can thus also be a rejection of what feels like differentiating and hierarchical inquiries, a performance through which the youth may reinstate their self-respect.

The techniques I want to focus on here take place or are learned and practiced within a particular religious social space, namely the MJD youth organization. The tactics mentioned below need to be considered in light of the fact that the members of MJD seek to be perceived as religious or pious, both by themselves and by others (non-Muslims and Muslims). This necessarily affects their self-confidence and the space they make available to themselves for improvisation. I focus on three tactics that the young women mainly used in conversations with or about non-Muslims:

joking, rehearsal, and normalization. Finally, I examine a fourth tactic—corrective practices—which was used with other Muslims, including strangers and family, friends and acquaintances.

### *The Joking Tactic*

I found that what I call a “joking tactic” was often used within the group. The joking tactic is characterized by the use of irony, satire, jokes, and wit as a conscious or unconscious means to mediate and overcome prevailing discourses. During their leisure activities like picnics, ice-skating, parties in homes, and during lessons the youth mocked some of the Othering processes and interactions that they faced in the street. For example, amongst themselves, the young women referred to themselves as “terrorists,” a “headscarf-band,” used the phrase “*Scheiß Ausländer*” (“damn foreigner”), played with the concept of “modern,” and made fun of the Turkish-German accent. The following episode illustrates this well:

At a picnic in Potsdam, we were constantly told by the police in the park that we could not sit here or there. One of the girls finally commented that “they think that we are going to have a picnic and leave everything behind. [Immigrants always act] like that on television.” The same day, three of the girls joked about walking in what they called “a group of headscarves”: “It was a quiet Sunday in Potsdam. Nobody knew what was going to happen. Perhaps the next minute a bomb would explode....” Everyone laughed.

The playful references suggest that the perceptions others have of their identity also actively constitute it, as others name, categorize, and respond to or treat the youth according to their perceptions of the youths’ identities. It is also indicative of the social effect an interpellation or Othering has on its target. Indeed, most “jokes are expressive of the social situations in which they occur” (Douglas 1968, 366). The youths’ jokes indicate that they believed that how they were looked upon or treated in a situation or were perceived by non-Muslim strangers in the street had direct links to the representation of migrants in the media. At the same time, by joking with the stereotypes that they knew exist, the young women shared them, took ownership of them, and subverted them. This technique exposes the content of the stereotype, ridicules the meanings, and as such reduces its power when they do encounter such normalizing gazes or utterances from strangers. These types of jokes or utterances worked within this group because the youth had the same semantic points of reference. Simultaneously, such tactics were part of efforts to redefine the content of the “Muslim” category that they were placed in, so that even if they could



not bring about positive changes in the public view of this category, they could at least label it for themselves in a way that they could control.<sup>31</sup>

### *The Rehearsal Tactic*

Second, a more direct dealing with Othering processes is what I call a “rehearsal tactic,” which took place during the weekly meetings. The women learned how to deal with different situations, and developed a specific kind of knowledge about how to (re)act in public. During the religiously oriented meetings, the leaders sometimes initiated role-plays or workshops on how to best answer some of the most typical questions that the women were confronted with, such as “how do you react if a friend is at your doorstep, and is suddenly not wearing her headscarf?” or for example:

During one weekly meeting, the youth conducted a workshop on “What do you say when someone comes up to you and asks if it isn’t hot under the headscarf?” Two participants volunteered to provide their responses. The first, a 19-year-old German convert, answered that, “I tell them that I am proud of my headscarf. That I feel naked without it. That even if it is hot, I wear it with pleasure.” The second, Latifa (17), who has a Turkish background, said, “I would tell them that though it is hot here, it is nowhere near as hot as in hell.” A discussion followed about what the young women could answer and what would be the best thing to say in such situations.

The confrontational quality of Latifa’s answer surprised me, as she had only recently become more religiously active. What does she want to achieve with this answer, I wondered? In addition to her answer partly being a consequence of her recent donning of the headscarf, I also came to realize that while non-Muslims might consider her answer aggressive, for her it emphasized that her decision to wear the headscarf was related to her perception of Paradise and Hell as two realities or space-dimensions that informed her actions and choices. By wearing the headscarf, Latifa believed that she increased her chances of entering Paradise after death. Thus, while it may be an earthly practice which caused some discomfort, this earthy discomfort was nowhere as discomforting as ending up in hell in the afterlife. In contrast, the German convert emphasized

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<sup>31</sup> The joking and negative reactions of the youth vis-à-vis the public images of “Muslims” in Germany also strongly suggests that these public images do not represent how youth conceive of their own social reality. Whether or not the media stereotypes reflect a reality of the Muslim youth is not relevant, as the youth do not recognize these images as representing their reality. I reiterate that my focus here is on the effect of images that the youth view as negatively stereotyping them.



what the headscarf provided her with on earth: pride and pleasure, which were parts of her self-confidence as a Muslim woman in Germany. The differences in the two answers show the vast range of potential reactions that various individuals can use.

At another weekly meeting, the MJD group created role-plays about how to best react in particular urban situations:

In introducing the role-play, the leader Fadwa (23) said, “this one is on the subway, we all know this situation.” Nawar (17) responded that, “ah, yes, finally at a specific place and also the subway—such an important place.” Hamida (17) volunteered and Fadwa gave her instructions: “You are sitting on the subway, and we are non-Muslims and you are yourself.” Two of the girls started staring at Hamida, whispering to each other, and continuing to stare [though they were both shy, so they sometimes only laughed]. “Just a second,” Hamida said, getting up for her cellphone and putting the headphones in her ears. “I forgot this! I am always listening to music on the subway, so that I don’t hear what they are saying.” One of the girls said that, “she is doing the right thing.” Afterwards, the group discussed how they would react in such a situation, which all the young women recognized.

This sort of role-playing can be understood as a way of practicing how to react and feel more secure in the urban sphere.<sup>32</sup> MJD represents a safe place where reactions to potentially disruptive or Othering situations can be practiced and improved upon, thus allowing the youth to acquire a certain competence. Practicing how to react also facilitated improvisation and acting in a less conscious manner in similar real situations. The comment that Hamida was “doing the right thing” indicates that ignoring or responding in silence to the gazes or talk can sometimes be the best solution. Through practicing within the group, the women developed a kind of street etiquette; a cultural capital (cf. Bourgois 2003, 135) or a *savoir-faire* that they could apply in different situations. In this way, MJD participants learned how to be streetwise as Muslim women in Berlin.<sup>33</sup> Experiences from role-playing simultaneously shaped how the youth interpreted and negotiated the public spaces in which they maneuvered.

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<sup>32</sup> Goffman argues that practicing is important: “In a performer’s acquisition of a particular competence, the first step attempted is often easier and simpler than any he will take in the serious world (...). The first phase of training thus affords the learner some protection from the anxiety produced by incompetent performances...” (Goffman 1974, 64–65). In a similar way to MJD, Jehovah’s Witnesses also go through a practice of role-playing their answers to questions, a fact that Tuomas Martikainen made me aware of.

<sup>33</sup> I draw on the term “street-wise” as defined by Anderson (1990). In his ethnography of blacks and whites living in the same American neighborhood, he portrays how they develop ways of the street and learn to maneuver in the urban environment.

Although many scholars see city life as characterized by anonymity (Simmel 1980 [1903]), forms of social interaction are to a large extent driven by the recognition of clues or imprecise identity markers, including those related to ethnicity, class, occupation, age, and sex. The street operates differently depending on who is there. In fact, this is very much related to the urban conditions where categorization and clues function as an alternative and independent system of public identification (versus, for example, occupational categories) in order to manage street encounters (Hannerz 1980). This also shapes the social performance of social shunning and practices of territorialization (Smith 1984). The qualities associated with these clues vary between societies (Hannerz 1980) and, I would add, within the same societies the meaning can vary over time (Bendixsen 2005).

MJD organizers recognized that social interactions in the street did not take place in an abstract space, but rather in a place entwined with social codes and possible uncertain interactions. They also recognized that social practice is something that can be learned. Knowing how to behave in public is about more than relating to faceless others, or merely accepting the stereotyping gazes or the feeling of being Othered. By learning how to behave in the street within a safe space such as MJD, the youth became skilled at presenting their self-image in public, which is also a form of street capital. This street capital might be a non-translatable cultural capital, but the feeling of mastering situations in the street, which is the aim of this rehearsal tactic, can provide the youth with an increased sense of safety or self-confidence in relation to what they perceive to be normalizing gazes.<sup>34</sup>

Notably, there were never any suggestions about how to act in the former East Berlin, except to avoid that area, or in a worst-case scenario “get in and out quickly.” Being streetwise in East Berlin was more a matter of knowing where the border between the former East and West runs and then avoiding the former East Berlin. Such ideas were more related to stories and images of racism and Nazis operating in Eastern areas than to first-hand experiences. The stereotypes that migrants and the second and

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<sup>34</sup> During the meeting and discussions, the tactics were mostly focused on daily situations with non-Muslims. A few discussions focused on situations with other Muslims and the “unhealthy habit” of judging too quickly, particularly in relation to the behavior of other Muslim women. It was repeatedly stressed that one should not judge someone’s actions without having enough information—that one should first know the context of the action that “seems to be un-Islamic.” Social control, including gossip and judgmental rumors, seemed to be an internal problem within the larger Muslim communities in Berlin, a point I return to later.

third generation had of the former East Berlin constructed spaces as safe or dangerous depending on perceptions of how the people living in these areas responded to those who are perceived to be foreigners or Muslims. Yet, having previously lived in Friedrichshain (former East Berlin), I noticed the increase of veiled women walking in the streets around the vivid café and restaurant life of Warschauerstrasse and Simon Dach strasse from the mid-2000s. Large parts of the neighborhood have been gentrified, and are attracting various businesses such as nightclubs, groceries, and clothing and design stores. Many of these new cafés, restaurants, hairdressers, and hotels are run by Turkish and Kurdish entrepreneurs, although interestingly the waiters or shop assistants are frequently ethnic Germans and the name and interior design of the places are more often than not ethnically non-specific. This suggests a change of perception of some parts of the former East Berlin among persons with a migrant background. In the longer run, this might also change the negative assessment of this area among the larger population with migrant backgrounds.

The emphasis MJD placed on practicing forms of self-presentation as spatial tactics fits well with what seemed to be an underlying aspiration for the organization, namely assisting youth in becoming self-confident Muslims who know how to perform and talk about Islam in the German public sphere.<sup>35</sup> During the meetings, this micropolitics about street communication took different forms, including reminders to smile to other women with headscarves, or to make references to messages in the Koran, or a *hadith*, in everyday situations. For example, one of the organizers, Leila (21) gave a presentation, in which she said:

“When we are sitting on the subway and there are no other Muslims there, we feel like an outsider and do not dare to take out the Koran to read. Why are we ashamed to do that? People are looking anyways.” Leila then referred to a verse in the Koran and a story from the life of Muhammad where the moral is that one should be proud to be who one is, including in front of other people. She asked, “what did Umar Ibn al-Khattab [the second Caliph] do when he took up [converted to] Islam or what did a young man do at a university—praying in the middle of the university? When everyone is doing this, there is a [positive] chain reaction. Trust yourself. Just do it.”<sup>36</sup>

The negative looks that someone reading the Koran on the Berlin subway may receive, might equally well happen to those reading the Bible, thus the gazes might be a reaction towards the religious act and not specifically

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<sup>35</sup> It is also a form of identity politics that I discuss more in chapter 7.

<sup>36</sup> Notice here the similarity to the Nike commercial “Just do it.”

towards Islam. Yet the youth interpreted such situations as targeting Islam exclusively. In this conversation, Leila made a direct link between historical time and today: born in the year 580, Umar converted the same day that he planned to assassinate Muhammad, and later became the second Caliph (634–644). His conversion made Muslims more confident in practicing Islam openly, as nobody dared to obstruct Umar's prayer at the Ka'ba (Islam's central house of worship, located in Mecca). The women in MJD were also encouraged to be self-confident and to not be ashamed of openly practicing Islam through a (direct or indirect) emphasis on their being part of the larger Muslim society (the *umma*). Their daring to perform their religious practices openly in the street was perceived to potentially inspire other Muslims to perform their religion openly. Openly professing one's religion can be a form of *da'wa*, which means "call" or "invitation" in Arabic and is an invitation to Islam (not unlike the Christian notion of evangelizing). Thus, the religious dimension cannot be omitted here. It forms part of the emphasis within the youth group that it is normal to be a practicing Muslim and that this should be the starting point of an effort to take Islam into the public sphere and make it common.

As mentioned, negative reactions towards displays of religion in Berlin may potentially be less directed towards Islam per se, and rather target religion in general. Expressing religiousness openly in what is typically viewed as a secular-minded city might provoke different reactions compared to cities in the south of Germany, where religion plays a more notable part of people's everyday life (for example in the common form of greeting). One can therefore question to what extent any public display of religiosity by youth would provoke negative reactions, regardless of whether they were practicing Islam or any other religion.<sup>37</sup>

While this is a question that remains to be answered, in the particular case of these women, the visibility of their practicing of Islam became a feature of their struggle for recognition. For them, the visibility of their religiosity could become a source of power, and the invisibility or suppression of the visible act could in turn be seen as a sign of subjugation (see Fraser 1999, 119). This struggle for recognition can be seen in the following *du'a*, which concluded one of the weekly meetings:<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Thus, the extent to which the Othering of the Muslim women should be understood only as a consequence of their being Muslims specifically, rather than more generally being religious in a society where religion is supposed to be confined to the private sphere, remains a question open to investigation.

<sup>38</sup> In addition to the five daily ritual prayers, different *du'a* prayers are performed, for example when undertaking a journey, or before and after a meal, or when ending a

*Ya Allah*, help us to be active... Allah, help us to be self-aware so that we can walk the street without people being able to do what they want with us. *Ya Allah*, help us to improve our knowledge of Islam, so that we can answer questions well.

The tactic of rehearsing forms of self-presentation can also be understood as a way to challenge the content or representation of Muslim women in German society in general. This is a struggle over meaning or a “politics of the image” (Hall 1997); a contestation of what is represented in the media, which fixes the meanings attached to Muslims. These struggles for “recognition of difference” (Fraser 2000) are efforts to challenge the stigmatizing gazes or media representations. It suggests that people who are constructed as deviant have the opportunity to strategically challenge the stigma and to fill their category or representation with positive content.<sup>39</sup>

Learning how best to react can also be understood as practicing *da'wa*. This group of women saw it as their religious obligation to improve, correct, or renegotiate the stereotyped image of Muslims in Germany so that more people would be attracted to Islam. The women sought to make people appreciate their religion by showing good behavior. Everyday micro-politics that the young women performed, such as being especially helpful or practicing how best to answer questions about Islam, are indicative of how Othering discourses shaped their identification process and daily activities, but also of the potential techniques available to counter the discourses.

### *The Normalization Tactic*

A third tactic is to emphasize normality. I was alerted to this intentional and conscious tactic by Julie, a German convert. Julie (28) told me that she sometimes attempted to accentuate normal or unexpected behavior to break the wall of Othering and thus strived to make the headscarf be of no importance or forgotten in the situation. Signaling that “I am normal, I am like you,” is an effort to neutralize the starting point of the situation.

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meeting. In the Berlin MJD, the youth always performed a *du'a* to end the weekly meetings. In MJD, it took the form of a combination of ritual words in Arabic, and more personal phrases in German. This was sometimes performed by all of the participants contributing one sentence each, sometimes by one youth alone.

<sup>39</sup> Although the process is different it is worth mentioning the early civil rights movement's strategy to change the connotation of the sign “black” from “Black = despised”, to “Black = beautiful.” See also Göle (1996) for a discussion of Islamist movements as social movements, a process that asserts that “Islam is beautiful” (1996, 15–18).

This can also be illustrated by Fatima (31) who, while in DMK one Friday evening, suddenly asked me:

“Do you know Pippi Longstocking?” I said that I did. Fatima continued, “I sometimes tell them [the Germans], that I also grew up with Pippi Longstocking, you know. I grew up here and have seen the same the children’s shows and have the same childhood memories as them. I was born here! They don’t realize it. They see my headscarf, and don’t understand that I have grown up here as well, just like them.”

This practice is an effort to actively establish common points of biography with people in her generation who do not consider themselves to have any biographical similarities with Fatima, since she is Muslim.<sup>40</sup> Another relevant question that is brought to light here, is who has the right to decide when being a Muslim woman should be relevant. By pointing to Pippi, Fatima insists that being German/Western and Muslim is not a contradiction. She also indirectly asserts that her religious identity is not always the most relevant aspect of her life story in a social interaction. With her emphasis on common children’s television programs, she tries to construct a common frame of reference with Germans who are not Muslim.

German converts often took this translation work particularly seriously. For example, the German convert Margit (24) told a story to other mosque participants about a time she was in a doctor’s waiting room:

They came out and asked for Margit Heinrich, and looked at everyone, except me. When I said, “that’s me,” they looked at me, and then checked my identity card to see the name. [She is wearing a headscarf in her passport photo]. Many converts take on a Muslim name when they become Muslims. But I wanted to keep my German name so that they can see that it is not only foreigners who are Muslims. There are also [Muslim] Germans, more and more.

Similar practices that assert “normality” include awareness of types of clothing and the use of colors. Some women very consciously did not wear black during interviews or in public discussions because they believed that black could present a negative image or impression of fear vis-à-vis non-Muslims.<sup>41</sup> For example, on the day before sitting an examination,

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<sup>40</sup> One of the reasons that she mentioned this popular Swedish children books and television series from the late 1970s can be related to my long red hair, which is similar to Pippi Longstocking’s, and that I am from Scandinavia. It may also be because most Germans know and enjoy this program.

<sup>41</sup> Göle (1996, 84) argues that in Turkey, the black veil symbolizes the “return to premodern Islamic traditions” and that it “acted as an expression of the active participation of women in political demonstrations.”

Rüya (21) discussed with Jenny (26) and Fadwa (23) whether her dress style “looks too extreme.” She explained that she was wondering whether she could dress like this for her examination and what her examiners would think of her. Rüya was wearing an ankle-length skirt in dark blue that had no ethnic or national associations. Jenny said that maybe she did look too fundamentalist and Fadwa suggested that Rüya wear a long shirt instead of a skirt.

Such discussions and reflections on their outer appearance suggest that the youth also adapted to the media images and discourses in their everyday social practices. For many, wearing a headscarf that matched the overall outfit was not only about personal taste. Rather, it was a matter of signaling that they were not fundamentalist or oppressed, in contrast to what the media and politicians suggested. Their matching dress is intended to show that they are modern, fashionable, and at the same time wear the headscarf. Yet while the youth tried to reverse some stereotypical images, they reinforced and adapted to others. For example, the youth displayed stereotypical images of other Muslims in Berlin, for instance about those belonging to what the youth considered more traditional and ethnic versions of Islam. At one point, Ines told me that she did not feel like going to a Kurdish wedding since, she claimed, these weddings usually ended in fighting. She explained that there were always some youth who were not “really Muslims” and that the fight would start when someone looks at their women or throws a bottle. Ines here viewed an ethnic group as more likely to become violent at a celebration, referring to stereotypical views about gender relations within a specific ethnic group. Moreover, she believed that not all of them were “real Muslims,” although culturally they were Muslims, and she believed that this in turn increased the chances that a fight would take place during the event. Though non-Muslims generally do not distinguish between “real Muslims” and “cultural Muslims,” these youth tended to explain social problems and unwanted behavior within specific ethnic and national groups in terms of a failure to understand Islam or un-Islamic behavior.

### *Politics of Representation*

The effort to present an ideal or improve the image of Islam in the public sphere increases the pressure on the youngsters within a religious team. “Team” is here defined as “any set of individuals who co-operate in staging a single routine” (Goffman 1959, 79). In his work on stigma, Goffman (1963)



contends that the burden of idealized conduct can be found in particular among marginalized individuals. Their deviance may compel them into “discredited” or “discreditable” groups, founded on the character of their stigma (Goffman 1963, 42). Managing the impression they make becomes more important among these individuals because, being discredited, they often try to tone down the tension their stigma causes in order to produce a more successful interaction with others. Inadequate social interaction leads to feelings of ambivalence and alienation for the discreditable person who struggles to pass and utilizes disidentifiers in order to establish her or himself as normal. Emphasizing an idealized, normative identity and behavior in order to gain recognition from the larger population simultaneously limits the discredited person’s capacity for interaction. Thus, when a person has to struggle with a stigma of any type, this will change the nature of their impression management and, therefore, their interactions with others change.<sup>42</sup> This is particularly the case when one identifies with a group that is marginalized and discredited. The need to present a genuine, self-affirming collective identity may well involve a moral pressure on individual group members to perform in relation to a specific group culture. A dissident may be viewed as disloyal towards the effort of building up a positive group image.<sup>43</sup> How does the fact that the youth belong to a discredited larger group of Muslims, and identify with the smaller MJD faith community, affect their public appearance and self-projection?

These youth were highly conscious of stereotypes and partly understood how these affected their daily lives. Both the Othering discourses and the tactics the youth practiced are gendered processes. Women who are defined as belonging to minority groups frequently struggle with this catch-22 dilemma: they derive self-realization and strength from their collective identity that enables them to oppose stereotypes or normalizing systems, but by adhering to a collective identity, they simultaneously risk

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<sup>42</sup> Alberoni (1984) points out that in the nascent state, the process of restructuring fields of experiences to new ends is the foundation for a shared affinity among the participants as well as that which mark their distinction.

<sup>43</sup> Likewise, Fraser directs our attention to the moral pressure on individual participants in the effort the group makes to present a genuine, self-confirming group identity (Fraser 2000, 112). She asserts: “Stressing the need to elaborate and display an authentic, self-affirming and self-generated collective identity, it puts moral pressure on individual members to conform to a given group culture. Cultural dissidence and experimentation are accordingly discouraged, when they are not simply equated with disloyalty” (ibid.). This is remarkably close to Goffman’s arguments about the pressures that exist when identifying with a group.

undermining their own room for action. In other words, minority women tend to try to defend their collective group against discrimination and subjugation, but in doing so they risk setting themselves up as representatives of the symbolic “Woman”. The effort to defend their group, or to bring about a self-affirming collective identity, may bring with it restraining or repressive aspects (see Yuval-Davis 1992, 224) in view of their social position (as Woman) within the group. Indeed, the ambition to make an idealized impression on their observers (Goffman 1959, 35) leads to individual and peer pressure on the young women and their public behavior.<sup>44</sup> One consequence of this is that youth who emphasize the need to correct negative stereotypes among the non-Muslim population try to modify other young women’s public behavior through peer pressure in order to get other youth to conform to specific behaviors.

This limits the space a young woman has for individual self-understanding, since instead of soul-searching she sets herself up as an ambassador for a wider identity she cannot herself control. Selma (19), an unveiled woman I interviewed, had decided not to veil because, she said:

I don’t look very Muslim! Like, look at the way I dress, with short skirts and such, and also my behavior is not always that Islamic. You know, when you are wearing the headscarf you are representing Islam in the street, it’s a responsibility that I don’t know whether I am ready for.

Selma’s comment illustrates the relationship between internal (she is Muslim) and external (not looking or performing as a Muslim) aspects of being a Muslim. My main point is that Selma felt that there were external expectations about veiled women in the urban space. She believed that a decision to veil was not only a personal choice, which an individual could take either on her own or with input from her family; rather, she believed that such a decision would also bring with it certain representational obligations that Selma did not know whether she was ready to take on. This shows the tension between the strength the young person may acquire from veiling and the additional limitations and peer pressure she will have to accept as a consequence of wearing a headscarf. For many of the Muslim women who seek to live a pious life, this religious path does not only mean following the religious norms and practices. It also means living up to

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<sup>44</sup> This may also be viewed as the acting out of a “performative reflexivity,” “a condition in which a sociocultural group, or its most perceptive members acting representatively, turn, bend, or reflect back upon themselves, upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, and codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other sociocultural components which make up their public ‘selves’” (Turner 1986, 24).

certain expectations in the public sphere, as being perceived as a Muslim woman comes with a variety of expectations regarding their social behavior, both from Muslims and non-Muslims - although in different ways. The silent expectations and concrete social reactions from Muslims are illustrated in the following story from Noreen (16):

My father has seen sisters with headscarves together with brothers. They were not married, but were holding hands in the street. It made him so sad. In the next speech [in a mosque] he said to the brother and the parents that this is not right—when it is like that they should rather marry. If they do that [holding hands], they are probably ready for marriage. And if they do not dare to go and talk with the father of the girl, then they should come to him and he would go with them.

Here, Noreen is expressing pride in her father, although this might be more to do with the role her father played within the religious communities than his views about gender relations. More importantly, her comment shows that religious authorities reflect on what goes on in the street, and try to correct within a religious field what they perceive to be incorrect behavior, in this case through a talk in a mosque. The social pressure and consequent feeling of community policing (Dwyer 2000) cannot be underestimated. Through such social interactions, the performance of one's identification (i.e. with gender, Islam, or both) is guided and partly structured. It also suggests how, according to Althusser, as a consequence of an interpellation (the "summoning into place") in a social situation, the person in focus (the interpellated person) is becoming the subject of the interpellation. However, this line of argumentation neglects the negotiations or tactics that social actors can make use of, leading me to a fourth tactic that I call a "corrective tactic."

### *The Corrective Tactics*

The corrective tactics were mostly directed towards Muslims—both known and unknown—who know which acts are generally considered acceptable or correct in Islam. Corrective tactics focus on paying conspicuous attention to how particular acts appear to other Muslims. These tactics can be used both to conceal acts which otherwise would be frowned upon, or to preserve appearances where an act would be (considered) religiously correct, but which could be misunderstood as not correct. For example, during a wedding celebration Aishegül (31) told me that:

My little brother is here, and I wanted to hug him, but then I couldn't because the [Muslim] brothers were there and they might not know that he is my

brother, and think that we are married. Or they know that I am not married, and wonder what am I doing? And so instead I squished his hand like that, and then there was a German brother who saw it.

To not risk that people misunderstood her action (in case they did not know that he was her brother), Aishegül abstained from hugging her brother. As Aishegül was seeking a husband, it would have been unfortunate if men believed that she was married. Moreover, it could give her a negative reputation within the religious and ethnic social sphere should there be rumors that she hugged a man (who not everyone knew to be her brother) in public. Being religiously knowledgeable and virtuous can constitute symbolic (and cultural) capital, which is important with regard to marriage, when the families make inquiries regarding a potential husband or wife within their social spheres. Thus, to appear to behave correctly when in public becomes important in order to not damage one's reputation.

Concern for appearances can also make youth modify their actions in cases where they know they are actually breaching religious norms in the public sphere. For example, when friends and I left Rüyâ (21) alone with her future fiancé in a restaurant, she later explained that she borrowed her sister's ring so that it would look as if she and her future fiancé were married. Such a corrective practice is employed to "safeguard the impression fostered by an individual during his presence before others" (Goffman 1959, 13); here towards other unknown Muslims, since those acquainted with her knew she was not married, and non-Muslims would not care.<sup>45</sup>

Both the corrective and the rehearsal tactics are ways of performing within an impression management context that can be considered a dramaturgical discipline (Goffman 1959, 216). "Dramaturgical discipline" can be understood as the necessity for every individual associated with a group to make individual efforts to maintain or improve the performance of the group's external image in order to maintain group coherence. In the process of improving the Muslim image in Germany, the young women risk becoming self-regulating subjects in a Foucauldian sense, and to turn into self-observing subjects.<sup>46</sup> The corrective and rehearsal tactics partly

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<sup>45</sup> This is also a creative form of agency: an action that conforms to norms appropriate to the situation can also entail new and unfamiliar paths of actions (Joas 1996, 233).

<sup>46</sup> Discipline, as Foucault (1995 [1977]) has illustrated, is not externally imposed but rather is performed internally; discipline does not function at the level of the entire society but at the level of detail, and not by forcing or restraining individuals and their acts but by producing them.

uphold or frame a particular image of the Muslim Self to others and oneself, and partly circumvent negative sanctions from ethnic and religious social fields in which performing in a non-normative manner risks regulative punishment—which in this particular community may take the form of a getting a bad reputation.

### *The Headscarf as Social Capital*

Thus far, I have focused on situations where the women felt that they were being Othered or felt interpellated. I want to briefly discuss situations that did not start from the point of the Othering discourses, but where being a Muslim woman was a form of symbolic capital or a resource. There were certain moments or interactions where wearing the headscarf felt advantageous or where spaces were translated into ethnoscapes (Appadurai 1996).<sup>47</sup> In a discussion about Othering, Julie emphasized that she also experienced positive reactions on the street, including admiration and comments from other Muslims:

She recalled comments from other (unveiled) Muslims who told her that “I also want to wear the headscarf at one point.” “As a veiled woman in the street,” Julie argued, “one can also be perceived as a moral role model; everything that someone—whether male or female—morally, spiritually or religiously has not (yet) achieved is projected onto the women.”

The headscarf can help present the women as positive and important Others for other (non-veiled) Muslims. Julie added that she sometimes met particularly encouraging and friendly non-Muslim faces in the street, something that for her may have indicated a certain solidarity with the stigmatized.<sup>48</sup>

Being religious and having a migration background can be turned into relevant experiences for some positions or jobs. In some exceptional cases, veiled young people are preferred as employees, either because a shop owner wants to portray a religious image or because she or he personally

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<sup>47</sup> By “ethnoscape,” Appadurai (1996, 33) means “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree.” With this concept, Appadurai draws our attention to how the reproduction of group identities is changing socially, territorially and culturally as a consequence of migration and a regrouping in new locations (*ibid.*, 48).

<sup>48</sup> Similarly, in her research on Turkish migrants in Germany, Nökel has pointed out that “[t]o be successful despite wearing a headscarf is the ultimate sign of personal recognition and personal identity politics, different from simply assimilating” (Nökel 2006, 430).

prefers her or his employees to be veiled. When Ines decided that she wanted to become a social worker and tried to enter an Evangelical School for this program, she told me:

There are not many Muslims doing social work, or there are some, but they don't bring their religion with them in their work, 'cause they don't practice it, or they don't know how to pass on their religion correctly. Like when the children ask about it, they should be given the right answer and not the wrong answer. And it's important. You know why? 'Cause when you say where you come from, you are talking about belonging, and like, when you ask me who I am, I don't really know. Like I am not German, I am not Lebanese, and I am not Palestinian. I don't know where I come from. Like, it's important to look where your parents come from, to know the culture, the history and such. I don't know my own language well; I have not been raised with it. (...) Like, my parents thought it was important for me to be integrated here, and that is why I have a German name and such. But I still miss something. Like, that is why you have these young criminals and such; they have problems, 'cause they don't know where they belong. (...) I said this at [the interview for] the Evangelical school—I said that it is important and she said that she would write very positively about me. I am so excited.

Here, Ines emphasizes her migration background, which became a motivational factor for her choice of education and future employment.<sup>49</sup> The way she was raised is also brought to the fore as a main reason that she felt somewhat out of place in Germany. She felt that using religious knowledge as well as her personal experience of growing up as a migrant was important when interacting with immigrant youth. Ines sought not so much to become a role model for immigrant youth, but to draw on her experiences in order to assist troubled immigrant youth. In this work, her goal was to create spaces of belonging in Germany for the youth that she herself was missing.

Many of Ines's friends who also wore headscarves asked her whether it would not be difficult to be accepted by a Christian school. Ines argued that on the contrary, they paid attention to her voluntary work and her personal intentions during the interview. Ines was accepted by the school and turned out to be the only one wearing a headscarf at the school, which

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<sup>49</sup> Karakaşoğlu (1999) suggests that several second-generation Muslims with Turkish backgrounds would like to be teachers, a career in which they can use their traumas constructively. She found that several intend to provide assistance for the coming migrant generation in the German educational system through their particular knowledge and institutional and life experiences. Many feel an obligation to be role models for migrant youth and to show the majority non-Muslim society that they can participate in the dominant society.

is located in former East Berlin. For a long time she had difficulties finding friends, something that changed once she got back her first homework, for which she used her knowledge of Islam and got a top grade. Subsequently, the other students started to talk with her and wanted to work with her. She realized afterwards that they “were afraid” and did not know how to talk to her. She explained that “before they considered me to be different. After all, I am different!” Thus, while she was able to turn her religiousness (it was an Evangelical school) and her migrant background into a form of symbolic capital or resource during the admission process to the social work program, she gained acceptance from the other students through her intelligence and academic success.<sup>50</sup>

### *Contesting Representations*

The young women identified with a group (MJD) that is conscious of the ruined image of Muslims and that emphasizes the role of Muslim women. This made the youth feel that it was a religious duty to negotiate and change the negative stereotypes of Islam of which the Othering is a symptom. The youth were highly aware of the viewpoints and opinions about Muslims and Islam in the wider German society; such views are clearly expressed by the media and politicians. The religious social field is deeply informed by German public discourses about its Muslim population, discourses that are situated in a specific historical and social context. At times, the youth and group leaders also accommodated these Othering images. Simultaneously, the teenagers and young women can manipulate or transform events to turn them into spaces of resistance or negotiation, and thus reject a passive discursive construction or interpellation of themselves as predefined Muslim subjects.<sup>51</sup>

What are the consequences of the tactics that reply to the perception of the Other to which the women I worked with respond? Will the woman on the subway change the ideas she has of Muslim women in one way or the other after her meeting with Kiraz? Does it represent a new experience for

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<sup>50</sup> It is noticeable that in this instance, Ines drew on her knowledge of Islam in her school work. Most of the time, such knowledge is a symbolic capital within the religious (and ethnic) social field. This is one of the few instances I have seen where a young person converted their religious knowledge into symbolic capital outside of the religious or ethnic social field.

<sup>51</sup> Clearly, the reactions of the youth may also be about playfulness as it can be fun to play against stereotypes. By provoking reactions and then responding to them, one may feel confrontational which, among other things, reduces the feeling of being a “victim.” Nevertheless, in the political climate such an individual playfulness is intertwined with a group-oriented struggle to define what Islam is.



her and will she consequently test and modify her knowledge through this situation? The identity a person seeks to communicate must be accepted by her or his social environment and socially relevant others (Barth 1969; 1981). Žižek (1991) reminds us that the subject can never completely control how she or he appears or incite changes in others. Few actors have complete power over how the other person in a social interaction will interpret and reflect on their impressions of them. Additionally, unequal power relations permeate any micro-interaction. Unfortunately, thus far there have been few studies done on the (potential) changes in the majority perception of the Other.

What I have called attention to here is the use of tactics to resist Othering discourses and the impact of such experiences and interactions on the young women I worked with, particularly in relation to how the women present themselves. The impression management efforts I have described illustrate the performative aspect of a religious identity, which is embedded in social practices. Tactics can also lead the actors to identify “new positions from which to act” (Strathern 1988, 320) as they develop a micro-politics related to the stigmatizing Othering they encounter in daily interactions. Youth are not merely passively receiving or submitting to the negative discourses or stereotypes. Rather, at the experiential level the youth challenge, subvert, and even partly transform the stereotypes or discriminatory practices.

The discourses of Islam that the youth relate to in crafting their religious Selves make them part of a group-oriented struggle to improve the current negative perception of Muslims. To some extent, youth who veil are searching for a differentiation, which in turn is confirmed by the normalizing gazes. It is the judgment and its hierarchical effect that the youth contest, reject, and seek to alter. The normalizing judgment the veiled youth face brings with it an assignment of specific attributes, such as being submissive, oppressed, traditional, and the ultimate Other. The ongoing stereotyping and homogenization situate all women with headscarves as representatives of “Muslims,” a category that the youth view as in Germany taken to mean potential terrorists, non-Germans, and products of a “traditional” immigrant culture.

In this process, youth take part in a struggle for a “recognition of difference” (Fraser 2000), which is part of identity politics. The starting point of any identity politics is representation (Brunt 1998, 152).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Brunt argues that there are two questions that need to be asked in relation to representation. One, “how are identities represented in and through culture, and assigned

By “representation” I refer to the efforts to change the negative stereotypes and categorizations; to alter what “Muslim” means in the German public sphere. In this public struggle of representation, MJD and its participants become, or strive to become, part of a struggle to define what and who is a Muslim. Seeing representation as a collective struggle recognizes that members of a group are joined together, both by means of a general understanding of the past as a narrative of discrimination and as a felt necessity to overcome the historically destructive social meanings advanced by such a narrative (Williams 2000, 181). Identification with a faith community situates the individual within a larger community of Muslims. This involves reflecting on being part of a “Muslim” category, or even community, which also entails a feeling of having to represent this category to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

These tactics to deal with a lack of confidence through training and improvisation can also be considered to be practices of resistance. Resistance questions the constituted order by putting it on trial or by insisting that it should be put on trial. The reactions of the young women are sometimes informed by their past experiences and are sometimes improvised. The process by which a young woman learns how to react during the weekly meetings becomes part of the crafting of the youth as Muslims living in Berlin. These tactics also open up for notions of changes in habitus.<sup>53</sup>

As urban actors, young women rehearse, learn, or improvise a variety of tactics to perform in their encounters with strangers, in part to gain more control over the situation and consequently potentially shape it. Both the young women and the strangers may reinforce existing stereotypes, or develop new ones. In the long run, the young generation may establish new social patterns and norms of tolerance, thus encouraging a daily ordinary civility, if not social harmony. Tactics like these interrupt, disturb, and prevent the individual from being placed in a position in which they are subjectified by Othering discourses. Subjects are clearly formed by interpellations or Othering, but cannot be reduced to their submission to these; rather there are moments and movements of autonomy and creative acts,

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particular categories”, and two, “who or what politically represents us, speaks and acts on our behalf” (Brunt 1989, 152). The latter refers to community representation and the problem that one “representative” represents people of very different categories with sometimes conflicting experiences but have in common that they are “disadvantaged.”

<sup>53</sup> Habitus is an arrangement of acquired patterns of thought, behavior, and taste. It is the link between social practices (or action) and social structure (Bourdieu 2004 [1977]). I discuss habitus further in chapter 6.

through which the young women emerge transformed. In this process, youth are starting to play the role of a marginalized group that disrupts power relations and produces moments and spaces of belonging. The youth are not trying to dominate public space, but, intentionally or unintentionally, aim to shift normative standards. MJD represents one place where they can do this with less cost and risk involved compared to other places. It is a serious game, where the (consciously or unconsciously) selected tactics must be understood as molded by several constraints, including gender, age, and internal group culture. In their efforts to challenge their Otherness, the youth restate their identities as Muslim women defined by a specific faith community. This risks creating a Self that is self-scrutinizing and self-disciplining. Taking up a position through affirming their identity as Muslim and struggling to modify or trouble the representation of that identity also risks situating them within other calculations of power and knowledge, which I discuss further in the next two chapters.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CRAFTING THE RELIGIOUS INDIVIDUAL IN A FAITH COMMUNITY

The pursuit of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim man and woman.  
–Hadith

It is Monday afternoon in MJD's small meeting room, which is located at the rear of the Green Palace bookshop, along an anonymous street in Kreuzberg. The leader of the meeting, Fadwa (23), is eager: she wants to start as they are already running late. She asks, "do everyone have wudu?"<sup>1</sup> Who can pray?" Turning to Leila (21), she repeats, "can you pray?" Leila says, "yes, I have learned how to pray." The other girls laugh. Fadwa says impatiently, "no, I mean are you allowed to pray?" Leila responds, "ah..." She nods, laughing. [It is obvious that Leila understood what Fadwa meant, but was making fun.]<sup>2</sup> Fadwa continues, "can someone hand out the Koran so we can read." Naila (17) gets up and asks who are praying today. The young women raise their hands, and Naila hands out the Korans. Leila reads the first of the five *ayahs* (verses), starting where they ended last weeks' reading.<sup>3</sup> Almost everyone reads one *ayah* and one woman is responsible for correcting their Arabic pronunciation. As Leila closes her book, Sevda (25) protests, there is a fifth line that should be read. "But it was finished," Leila argues. But Sevda insists: "no, you have to read one more line for it to be correct." One of the older participants quickly says, "ok, then I'll read it." She reads it while Leila holds the book (as women who are menstruating cannot touch the Koran). Fadwa then asks, "can someone read the translation, 'cause we don't have anyone

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<sup>1</sup> *Wudu'* (the minor ablution) is the ritual cleaning before the prayers. To perform the ritual prayer (*salat*), which is the second pillar of Islam, Muslims need to be in a state of ritual purity (*tahara*). *Wudu'* is done by rinsing the hands, the mouth, the nose, the right and left forearms, the face, the head, the ears, and the right and left feet with water – in that order (Murata and Chittick 1994).

<sup>2</sup> The question "can you pray" can of course be understood as "do you know how to perform the prayer;" but most of the time when asked of women it indicates whether or not they are allowed to pray that day, since a woman is not allowed to pray when menstruating.

<sup>3</sup> Depending on the prayer time, the youth either read the Koran first or prayed first. Those who can pray can also read from the Koran. Some argue that a woman who reads the Koran regularly is allowed to recite from the Koran while she is menstruating, as long as she is not holding the Koran in her own hands. The Koran is divided into different chapters, called *sura* ("a fence, enclosure, or any part of a structure"). Each *sura* is divided into *ayahs*, which are short passages (Murata and Chittick 1994, xvii). During the weekly MJD meetings, five *ayahs* were read, regardless of how many participants were reciting from the Koran that day. Sometimes the same five *ayahs* were read twice in order for everyone to practice reciting from the Koran.

reading that to go along with the explanation about what it means.” Afterwards, one of the participants gives a presentation. Some of the participants have brought biscuits, chocolate bars, fruit, and cakes that all enjoy in the last part of the two-hour meeting, which is when administrative issues, upcoming events, a social game, and chatting take place. The meeting ends, as usual, with a *dua* (supplication), where the first and last part is in Arabic, followed by a more spontaneous and personal part in the middle, in German.

During the weekly meetings, I observed how the youth educate themselves by reading from the Koran in Arabic and then in German “so that they can understand what they have read.” This was followed by a *tefsir* study (Koran commentary or exegesis) prepared by one of the youths, sometimes by the use of PowerPoint.<sup>4</sup> The agenda continued with presentations on how to be a Good Muslim or on issues relevant to everyday life as a young Muslim in Germany, including the application of different *ahadith* to contemporary life. The meeting also included a topic of the day, for example the history and social situation of their parents’ home country “since we are such a multicultural group” as one of the leaders put it. In the period I spent there, presentations included such topics as Amr Khaled’s “What the West means for Muslims,” and “What do Europeans think of Muslims?” Other presentations were about the wives of the Prophet Muhammad, the life of the Prophet (called *Sira*), stories about the different Prophets, and a presentation on “Time-management,” which emphasized how important a time youth is, because “it does not last forever.” Yet other meetings addressed questions about when and how to do *da’wa* (call or invitation to Islam), and “Muslims’ contribution to Science.” In the period before Ramadan, two of the older members presented on what is allowed and when one theologically speaking breaks Ramadan (by performing religiously incorrect actions). The *tefsir*, presentations, and short games were prepared by different participants each week and were often organized as PowerPoint presentations. The current leader(s) decided on the weekly program (presentations and themes) by seeking inspiration from the MJD website, following the handbook provided by the national organization, incorporating their own ideas, and asking the participants about their interests.

This chapter deals with how the young people learn and relate to a particular religious ethos that they study, negotiate, and practice within the

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<sup>4</sup> In order to prepare for this, most youth borrowed the book “The meaning of the Koran” (*Die Bedeutung des Qur’ans*), 1998, SKD Bavaria Verlag & Herdel GmbH) from MJD one week in advance of their presentation.

religious space of MJD. The main focus is on how religious discursive practices and ideals are presented to the youth, and how these practices are incorporated into the crafting of their bodies. How do the youth learn to become religious subjects within this space? Through debates, events, and presentations, as well as ideals, principles, and standards drawn from Islam, they were taught how to achieve “religious proximity” (Appelros 2007, 8), which is how to behave as religiously correct as possible. Which rules and forms of conduct were promoted in the youth’s crafting of a religious Self?

What is deemed a correct performance involves specific ideals or normative expectations as provided by a religious authority or by a faith community’s understanding of Islamic tradition. The young Muslim women I worked with strived to become pious, virtuous, or correct Muslims. Familiarizing themselves with the religious ideals, practicing these, and correcting their daily behaviors led to an awareness of what was expected in order to be or become good or correct Muslims. This ultimately shapes their continuous crafting of a religious Self. What were the expectations to the youths’ performance of their religious identity? In this process, how was a specific religious faith community forming a religious subject and what were the youths’ responses towards this religious subject formation? In short, how is the religious crafting of the Self simultaneously an individual and a group-oriented process? These practices can be viewed as cultivating pious behavior. Are these discursive practices totalizing or part of forming a subject who is not free?

In my examination of how the young Berliner women I worked with learned religiously defined ideals and norms I analyze how these young women situated themselves in relation to the religious norms they were taught and show how these norms were used in the crafting of the Self as a religious subject. I look at the content of the religious norms and ideals, and pay attention to how the correct religious knowledge, behavior, and appearance was taught and discussed within the religious space of MJD. Finally, I question whether these techniques of the Self form a submissive subject. My inquiry into the crafting of a religious Self takes place within a Foucauldian inquiry into how different social and political spaces and times produce different ideas and ideals of the subject, in relation to which the subject seeks to craft herself and through which subjects with diverse characteristics, sentiments, beliefs, and contradictions are produced. Becoming pious or Good Muslims includes the perfection of virtuous behavior, a process which is akin to the Foucauldian techniques of the self (Mahmood 2005). I understand here the techniques of the Self as

particular practices that, when performed by the subject, allow her to take up certain subject-positions—in this case, that of the virtuous Muslim woman in Berlin.

### *A Religious Ethos*

The theological structures of almost all world religions contain rules, obligations, and rights.<sup>5</sup> Suggestions on how to develop and acquire a particular Muslim personal character have always been formulated within Muslim societies (Metcalf 1984). According to Islam, a series of perfect revelations, ending with the Prophet Muhammad and the Koran, brought a prophet who provided a visible and accessible example of the revelations. Many Sunni Muslims consider the Prophet to be the realization of the truths of the Koran, and view the moral exemplification of the practice of the Prophet as the ultimate representation of how to live as a Muslim. The effort to obtain a complete moral state of being is not left to historical figures, but is expected of Muslims in the present. Moreover, each individual has the responsibility to seek to attain the internal capacity and sensibility of a religious tradition (*al-sunna al-diniyya*) in which the individual person stands alone on the Day of Judgment and must account for her or his life (Asad 2003, 91). In order to achieve moral fulfillment or to become a good or better Muslim, the Muslim subject needs to deal with the norms and obligations provided by Islamic tradition.

Most of the youth I worked with sought and ultimately expected to improve their religious subjectivity through their participation in a religious organization. MJD promotes Islamic practice among youth as particularly relevant in light of the many temptations youth face, such as sex, alcohol, fashion, music, religiously inactive friends, and TV, through which youth risk diverting their attention away from religious ideals and obligations. Leisure interests, such as dating and intercourse before marriage, use of alcohol and drugs, and going to clubs and parties are common among many youth in Germany, but these are strictly forbidden in Islam. Many Muslim youth consider easily available visual pornography (e.g. semi-nude pictures on billboards or on the cover of German newspapers, and improperly dressed men and women on the street during the

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<sup>5</sup> World religion here encompasses Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism (Sharot 2001, 5).



summer) as *haram* for the eye. Overall, the struggle for Muslim youth is both spiritual and existential (Zine 2001, 401).

Throughout my fieldwork, I paid attention to how youth learned to craft themselves as a particular religious subject, in relation to specific ideals and ethos, and with the goal of becoming good Muslims. Recognizing that Islam is a discursive tradition makes it possible to think of these ideals or ethos as normative without dismissing their religious legitimacy or authenticity. What makes the teaching and religious practices part of an Islamic tradition is not whether or not they conform to a specific rigid model, but rather that the practice(s) in its current organization, judgment, and presentation relate to authoritative discourses and past standards situated within that tradition (Asad 1999, 1993; Hirschkind 2001a).<sup>6</sup> Being or becoming a good Muslim encompasses a large variety of body compartments, value orientations, and moral behaviors that in sum constitute a subject formation. This subject formation works through the conscious cultivation of certain practices considered central in the creation of a religious Self (see Mahmood 2005). I show that in the process of becoming skilled at these practices, the young women simultaneously craft their Selves as particular religious subjects who come to understand themselves as members of a religious faith community.

### *The Religious Body*

Anthropologists have long studied how bodies, compartments, and expressions of emotions are culturally and socially shaped, and how the differences vary between genders, ages, groups, etc.<sup>7</sup> In tracing the “civilization” of manners and personality in Western Europe, Elias (2000 [1978]) shows us how individuals with different social positions were instructed in different codes of bodily conduct, including manners, etiquette, and the self-monitoring of bodily functions and actions. Likewise, Mauss (1979 [1935]) gives an account of how different cultures organize the body as a technical tool differently. With the concept of habitus, Mauss invites us to study the body not only as a vehicle of symbolic connotations, but as an assemblage of embodied capacities (Asad 1997). In an effort to avoid the Cartesian dualism that distinguishes between the mind and the objects that the mind perceives, Mauss sought to view the human body as neither

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<sup>6</sup> As my main focus is not the religious movement per se, but rather the attendees of the movement, I do not refer to how organization situates the knowledge within Islam.

<sup>7</sup> See in particular Briggs (1970), Elias (2000 [1978]), Kondo (1990), Lutz (1988), and Schepher-Hughes 1994.

a passive recipient of “cultural imprints” nor an active source of “natural expressions” (*ibid.*, 76). Instead, Mauss argued that we must look at the body as the medium through which to realize a number of human intentions, including manners of physical movement (for example walking), forms of emotive being (for example modesty), and styles of spiritual experiences (for example self-transcendence).

Later, Bourdieu (1990, 53) famously used the concept of habitus as a system of durable, transposable dispositions. He viewed the body as a mnemonic device where the essential culture—the repertoires of the habitus—is impressed and encoded through a process of socialization.<sup>8</sup> Bodily hexis denotes the deportment of actors, including their stance, walk, and gestures. Dispositions and political mythologies are made permanent, embodied, and realized in bodily hexis.

There is a limit to Bourdieu’s rationalist perspective in that it provides a too socialized and collective view of the connection between social representations and the body (Moore 2007). Consequently, he disregards individual experiences, desires, self-awareness, and motivations and fails to include the formation of desires that are not rational (Friedman 1994). In her study of pious Muslim women in Egypt, Mahmood (2005, 139) rightly criticizes Bourdieu for neglecting to investigate the process through which subjects become specific subjects, and specifically how the habitus (as embodied dispositions) is learned through pedagogical processes. Mahmood argues that one of the consequences of this negligence is that Bourdieu overlooks how particular conceptions of the self call for particular bodily capacities. She demonstrates how the participants in the women’s mosque movement in Egypt struggle to follow a particular ideal in order to construct themselves as religious subjects, a process that might appear irrational.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, the continuous process of becoming good Muslims for youth in Berlin includes perfecting behavior that is considered correct. This process resembles the Foucauldian techniques of the self: in other words, the specific practices through which a subject comes

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<sup>8</sup> Bourdieu makes no reference to Mauss in his later coining of the concept of habitus, which others have explained in terms of his conceptualization of the idea being different to that of Mauss.

<sup>9</sup> Although also critical of Butler, Mahmood’s analysis is partly an empirical demonstration of both Foucault’s and Butler’s theories on subject formation, where the subject achieves a self and comes to recognize herself within certain historically defined structures. She contends that feminist writers fail to consider how women’s desires (as those of men) are socio-historically constructed and that they thus falsely universalize the liberal-humanist interpretation of freedom and agency.

to constitute her or himself as a subject (Foucault 1988; see also Rose 1996).<sup>10</sup> Foucault asserts that the technologies of the self:

permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality. (Foucault 1988, 18)

The way an individual experiences, comprehends, assesses, and performs her or himself take place within and through systems of power that appear to be either natural or imposed from above.

Here, I focus on how the Muslim youth craft a religious Self within a religious faith community where particular religiously defined ideals are presented and taught. In Sunni Islam, each follower is considered latently competent to take up the religiously defined ideals and is also individually accountable for the self-discipline required to realize this goal (Meltcalf 1984).<sup>11</sup> An individual should endeavor to apply the highest ideals possible in order to achieve religious proximity in their everyday life instead of removing themselves in a segregated community, or an established religious order, which is the case in certain strains of Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism (Mahmood 2005).

Religious ideals and a religiously defined ethos were promoted in the weekly MJD meetings through debates, presentations, lectures, comments, and the everyday expectations of the participants. At MJD gatherings, events and seminars, attendees listened to presentations on practices that (Sunni) Muslims consider to be duties, such as prayer and fasting.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> According to Nixon (1997), it is through these contentions that Foucault shifts away from his previous more limited focus on how discourses produce historical identities. Foucault turns his attention away from how the subject is regulated and disciplined, to embrace a more complex view of agency. “Techniques of the self” continue to be carried out in fields of discourses and power-knowledge, but the practice of a discursive subject position is situated in ways that highlight that this process is dynamic. Drawing on Foucault, Butler (1993) argues that norms are not merely social obligations that limit the subject, but are the foundations through which subjects are realized. The subject is created (or produced) through power relations, and these power relations simultaneously form the conditions of the subject’s possibilities. Foucault calls this the “paradox of subjectification” since the processes through which a subject realizes her or himself also contributes to her or his subordination (Butler 1993, 1997; Foucault 1980).

<sup>11</sup> This is similar to the Protestant tradition in Christianity.

<sup>12</sup> During regional and local seminars and weekly meetings, references were made to the different *madhhabs* (schools of law or jurisprudence) in Sunni Islam, leaving individuals to decide for themselves which one of these (preferably within Sunni Islam) they choose to follow.

To varying degrees, participants sought to learn these ideals in their endeavor to be or become pious and Good Muslims.<sup>13</sup> The meetings focused not only on gaining knowledge, but also on the youth working on her outer appearances, religious performances, and the relationship between internal and external comportment. Religious ideals that are considered universal are, at the same time, made local by the specific examples used by the participants and by the contextualization of the actual difficulties, contestations, and opportunities that emerge from living in Berlin as a Good Muslim. In the course of my fieldwork, I realized that the youths' efforts to submit to religiously defined norms and rules were part of a process that required them to be actively involved, rather than passive actors. Their active interaction with, or submission to, religious laws and norms was part of their self-formation. In this chapter, I seek to expand our understanding of this process by shedding light on the creative processes by which people constantly craft, construct, and enact their Selves within a socio-historical space.<sup>14</sup>

The notion of "crafting" calls attention to the creativity involved, and opens up the process(es) of the continued creation of the young women as subjects, without ignoring the social constraints and relations that individuals continuously relate to and interact with in Berlin (see Kondo 1990). In looking at the processes within which the crafting of a religious subject takes place, I seek to remain aware of the religiously defined norms, while avoiding constructing a perception of a homogeneous, ahistorical Muslim subject.

### *Objectification and De-Culturalization of Religion*

Several scholars have argued that the immigrant generation(s) born in Germany, and in other Western European societies, relate to a different

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<sup>13</sup> I rely both on "religiousness" and on "piety," even if the women in Berlin rarely referred to themselves as pious or used the German term "*fromm*." Piety is a particular form of religiousness, which is considered not only a state of the soul, but also a practice. In recent anthropological research on Muslims in the Middle East, the term pious has been used in order to make the term *mutadayyin* (which could be understood as sincere or "*fromm*") understandable, although often without defining it (Hirschkind 2001; Mahmood 2005).

<sup>14</sup> In her ethnography of the construction of selfhood in Japanese companies and families, Kondo (1990) makes use of the term "crafting self," which I also use here. The concept of crafting, Kondo argues, "implies a concept of agency: that human beings create, construct, work on, and enact their identities, sometimes creatively challenging the limits of the cultural constraint which constitute both what we call selves and the ways those selves can be created" (Kondo 1990, 48). See also the introduction.

religious orientation than that of their parents.<sup>15</sup> A major distinction is the rejection of culture that can be found in many Muslim youth movements and among individuals, and in which pure Islam is situated above everything cultural.<sup>16</sup> Already in the early 1990s, researchers interviewing young South Asian Muslim women in England found that the women established a clear division between religion and culture. This distinction was, according to the youth, largely incomprehensible to their parents (see Knott and Khokher 1993). The practice of distinguishing between religion and culture can be found within religious reformist movements, and within more fundamentalist religious movements, in several European countries (Roy 2004).<sup>17</sup>

Likewise, most MJD participants considered the practices of their parents' generation to be a cultural, impure, or traditional Islam that mixed religious premises with traditional, ethnic, or national cultural practices. In contrast, the young Muslims sought to perform a true or pure Islam detached from ethnic and national traditions and culture.<sup>18</sup> This is a general tendency among second and third generation migrants in European societies (Cesari 2003) since the late 1990s. Most of the youth who entered MJD aimed to learn about a pure Islam, while other youth became increasingly aware of this distinction as it was drawn by the leaders in the presentations and discussions. By going back to the sources (the Koran, *hadith*, and *Sunna*), the youth sought an Islam beyond a particular national or ethnic religious tradition and community, and emphasized the worldwide *umma* (the world-wide religious community). Youth saw this form of de-ethnicized Islam as more theologically correct and objectively more religiously proximate than the traditional or cultural Islamic orientation of their parents' generation in Germany.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Cesari (2002), Karakaşoğlu (2003a, 2003b), Klinkhammer (1999), Nökel (2002).

<sup>16</sup> See in particular Amir-Moazami (2007) Hermansen (2003, 309) Jacobsen (2011), Jouili (2009), Roy (2004) and Thielmann (2005).

<sup>17</sup> In the twentieth century, Wahhabism, Tablighism and Salafism were all searching for a "pure" Islam and a standardization of the practice of Sunni Islam around an orthodoxy dissociated from local cultures (Roy 2010). Yet, the Tablighis and the Salafis are not the only ones to consider the "pinnacle of devotion" to be emulation of the Prophet. In fact, many Muslims try to follow the *Sunna* of the Prophet.

<sup>18</sup> The distinctions that Muslims born in Europe make between religion and culture have been discussed by several researchers. (See for example Bendixsen 2009b; Cesari 2003; Fadil 2008; and Roy 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Some scholars refer to this as a de-culturalized Islam (Roy 2004), and others refer to it as a de-traditionalization of Islam (Fadil 2008). I refer to it as a de-ethnicized form of Islam because this term is more neutral in regard to the form of Islam that the youth claim that their parents practice. Calling a young person's form of Islamic practices a

This de-ethnicized form of Islam is in part caused by immigration. Immigration always changes how religion is transmitted. Social alienation and frustration related to migration have an impact on ethnic and religious identification. In addition, in the process of moving, “religion and tradition cease to be prearranged identities” (Göle 2003, 813). Furthermore, as Eickelman and Piscatori (1996) point out, migration familiarizes immigrants with different ways of performing a ritual or religiously defined act, and they become aware of outsiders’ (frequently critical) views of their performance. Socio-cultural changes, such as access to higher education in the new country of residence, increase the generational gap and, to some extent, contribute to the deconstruction of the authority of the older generation and to an individualization of religion.

Yet migration alone is not the only cause of the practice of distinguishing between culture and religion. The current practice of marking this distinction needs to be understood in an ongoing, world-wide process of theological change. The idea of a Europeanized Islam that emphasizes an individualization of religion highlights that residence in Europe itself shapes the character of Islam, and as such demonstrates how an understanding of the performance of Islam needs to be socially contextualized. New religious aspects or developments are often considered a result of Islam’s entry into European societies. However, as Amir-Moazami and Salvatore (2003) have suggested, it underestimates both the particular diasporic situation and the fact that the available space for reform and change must be approached from within Muslim traditions. Changing religious aspects are often appropriated within an intellectual and Muslim Reformist tradition, which for a century has dealt with the challenges of modernity by means of Islamic sources.

Following a socio-historical approach, Amir-Moazami and Salvatore consider the role of Islamic reform movements in the second part of the nineteenth century in the Ottoman Empire. Then, as now, there were Muslim reformers active in the public sphere who critiqued local customs and called for a revivification of the sacred text. Prominent Muslim figures (such as Abdallah al-Nadim 1845–1896) targeted good Muslim women. Thus, considering youths’ attitude to Islam as a return to tradition, a re-Islamification, or a coming out as Muslims (notably using a similar discourse as gay movements), or merely as a consequence of being a minority in Europe, fails to notice critical aspects of Islam as a discursive tradition.

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de-culturalized Islam or a de-traditionalized Islam risks presenting the youth’s practices as theologically or objectively more religiously proximate than those of their parents, and this value judgment is not the role of social scientists.

Instead, the practice of the de-ethnicized Islam has to be situated within a longer process of the discursive Muslim tradition that is continuously subject to internal transformations (Amir-Moazami and Salvatore 2003, 54). Islam as a discursive tradition is a mode of engagement with sacred texts (Asad 1986). The reform of tradition is a dynamic that must also account for the inherent search for a coherence of traditions (Asad 1999), which produces a drive to self-reform. Thus, the need to feel that there is continuity in an internal logic of interventions within traditions must be taken seriously. However, the consequences this distinction has in Germany, and the effect the idea of a pure Islam has on the youths' ethnic identification and their relation to their German identification, must be situated within the specific European migration context.<sup>20</sup>

In this context, MJD attendees are participants in similar processes to those taking place in different European societies and further across the world, and which have been called a revival of Islam.<sup>21</sup> Such an orientation towards Islam resembles that of the objectification processes found in the religious imagination among Muslims in the Middle East in the 1990s (Eickelman 1992; 2000). The objectification of the religious imagination calls attention to the conscious process by which Muslims become aware of their identity as Muslims. In this process, the subjects ask themselves explicitly, "what is my religion? Why is it important to my life? and, How do my beliefs guide my conduct?" (Eickelman 1992, 643; 2000, 130). The process of objectification does not mean that religion becomes uniform or monolithic, even if that is how some religious actors subsequently perceive it. Rather, these questions continue to shape the activities and discourses of Muslims. Some try to legitimate their beliefs and practices by claiming to return to allegedly authentic established traditions (Eickelman 1992). The so-called objectified consciousness is realized through a process of modernization, where the expansion of literacy and education is a factor that supposedly decreases the need for young people to turn to

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<sup>20</sup> Chapter 6 deals with these factors.

<sup>21</sup> This can also partly explain why Berliner Muslim youth use some approaches that are similar to those used by Muslim women in Egypt (Ismail 2003), Turkey (Saktanber 2002), Indonesia (Brenner 1996), and France (Jouili 2009; Amir-Moazami 2007). Hermansen argues that "[i]nternationalist Muslim revivalist movements such as Jama'at Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Muslimoun*) have encouraged this concept of a 'cultureless' Islam around the world" (Hermansen 2003, 309). He further notes that these organizations incorporate identity by insisting on being "Muslim and proud of it" (ibid.). Without specifically mentioning these organizations, in an interview with Mahmood, Asad (1996) suggests that the new Islamist movements place importance on proper bodily practices and aim for this behavior to be reintroduced in places where it has broken down and to be maintained anywhere it subsists.



religious authorities to make sense of their religion.<sup>22</sup> How is objectification of Islam, or de-ethnicized Islam, played out and formed within MJD?

### *Knowledge Formation in MJD*

As young people familiarize themselves with the religious ideals of what is expected of a Good Muslim, and as they practice these ideals and correct their daily behavior, they consciously engage in the continuous crafting of a religious Self. In order to cast light on the religious knowledge formation in this religious faith community, I investigate four focal points of MJD's teachings: 1) learning to distinguish between culture and religion, 2) highlighting the relationship between internal motivation and external motions, 3) practicing how to have the correct desires, and 4) focusing on Islamic character. McLaren (2002, 15), referring to Foucault, points out that the practices of the Self are always oriented towards specific goals: the desires that motivate specific subject formations. The motivation for participation in MJD is discussed in chapter 7. Here, it suffices to note that I suggest that one of the main goals behind the crafting of the religious subject in MJD is that youth try to please God, and to fulfill a desire to enter Paradise when they leave their lives in "this world."<sup>23</sup> While this chapter examines the formation of a Self in relation to certain religious discourses, chapter 5 deals more extensively with the negotiations, divergences, and tensions that arise as youth relate to these discourses.

### *Distinguishing between Culture and Religion*

Here, I examine the process or pedagogy through which the youth learn to mark a distinction between their parents' ethnic culture and religion, and how the youth perform this distinction. The following excerpt from one of the weekly MJD newsletters, sent as a group email, illustrates the organization's general view:

MJD-Nasihamail: our principles regarding the reform of the Umma (Part 2)  
Asalamu alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh,  
Our principles regarding the reform of the Umma (part 2)

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<sup>22</sup> Yet, the practice of distinguishing between true or pure and false Islam reemphasizes the importance of religious authorities and authoritative sources for the youth. This is discussed in chapter 5.

<sup>23</sup> Muslims believe that their life on earth is only a preparation for the eternal life, either in Paradise or in Hell, which they will enter on death.

Every reform needs principles. Values towards which the reformers orient themselves at all times. I would now like to pass on to you a small package of principles:

#### 5. Principle

Most of us have grown up with two cultures. One, the German culture and the other the culture of our parents' home. Sometimes there are traditions that are in conflict with Islam. Unfortunately, many of us then give precedence to tradition. Thus, things like honor killings happen, which are publicized through the media. We have to be aware that Islam is our primary culture. The culture of our parents is our secondary culture. When this one is in conflict with Islam, then it is obvious that we give Islam priority. We are not allowed to adhere to traditions like honor killings or traditions that contribute to oppressing women, to preventing them from studying or working, because this is not consistent with Islam.<sup>24</sup>

This group email, which was sent to everyone who had signed up on the MJD homepage, emphasizes that Islam should prevail over any cultural norms. The differentiation between traditions that their parents adhere to and Islam as a pure religion is central to the email. This suggests that the youth and their parents represent two different epistemological traditions in defining what true Islamic knowledge is. In order for such a distinction to take place, people must know how to distinguish between religion and culture or tradition. This knowledge is not readily available to them through their parents, as the above text implies, because parents represent culture or tradition. Through talks, presentations, monthly seminars and leisure activities, the participants are told either directly or indirectly that there are right and wrong ways of performing religious activities and rituals. For example:

At one meeting, Fadwa (23) emphasized that some, in particular older women, exaggerate their tears when praying during Ramadan or funerals, constituting more of a "performance" or "a competition" to show who is the most religious, or who was the closest to the dead. "This is tradition," she argued, and not "correct religious behavior."

Here, the division between right and wrong is touched upon within the broader framework of distinguishing between culture and religion.<sup>25</sup> Reflections such as those Fadwa makes here illustrate that a correct performance is recognized through normative standards, against which

<sup>24</sup> Email received March 5, 2006. My translation.

<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Hirschkind, who conducted ethnographic work in Egypt, found that several of the people he studied were concerned "that people are crying during sermons for the wrong reasons" (Hirschkind 2001, 542).

flawed performances are distinguished and assessed. An act has to be explained “in terms of the conventions which make it meaningful *as a particular kind of activity*, one enacted for certain reasons and in accord with certain standards of excellence and understood as such by those who perform and respond to it” (Hirschkind 2001b, 633).

In MJD, efforts to perform a pure Islam were based on going back to the sources (Koran, *hadith* and Sunna), obtaining knowledge, and understanding the religious practices. It also meant reflecting on where knowledge comes from in order to judge whether or not it was valid.<sup>26</sup> I noticed that newcomers in particular asked questions that sometimes made the other members laugh. The kind of knowledge that many novices brought with them from home was often dismissed or corrected as a mixture of religious knowledge and cultural beliefs or as superstition originating in their parents’ village. In such discussions, the young women used a kind of religious logic when dismissing what they considered cultural practices, as in the following:

A newcomer, a German convert, said that her (Egyptian) husband had told her that she must wash before shaving her body. She thought that this was a bit strange and could not really understand why. When she asked the group whether it was true, the older participants replied, “why should you wash your hair before shaving it?” The newcomer explained her husband’s point of view: “Well, he says that it’s no good when you remove something that is not clean.” One of the long-term participants responded with a smile, “but we do that when we go to the toilet, for example.” The girls laughed.

Here, the young women reject the husband’s view by pointing to a specific line of reasoning. Rather than offering a yes/no answer, the discussion encourages a particular type of logic. Frequently, as in the above conversation, participants were asked to explain where they got their knowledge from and to explain their ideas. In the mosque or during events, the youth often asked each other, “where have you heard that from?” “Where does it say that?” “Is it an innovation?” This would be followed by discussions and even heated arguments about what the correct answer was. The youth

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<sup>26</sup> The youth made use of the words “*wirkliche*” (real) and “*richtige*” (right) Islam in German. Chapter 5 deals more extensively with how the youth legitimated their own and others’ activities as religious or not. MJD’s search for religious truth parallels similar processes that new movements go through, as Alberoni (1984) discusses. In the birth phase of movements, groups are frequently apt to generate a unanimous view or model about the essential issues. The movements search for the truth, the unique truth, against old institutions (Alberoni 1984).

were rarely reserved or meek when it came to disputing someone else's religious knowledge. For example:

One of the new participants said that she had heard that if you laugh during prayer, then the prayer is invalid. Somaya (17) responded, "yes, but try to remember where you have heard that from, 'cause remember that hearing something is not the same as it being correct."

When uncertainty or discussions of different opinions emerge, the organizer would stop the discussion, saying, "I will check that for next time," or would ask the attendees to "check it" with an imam or in a book. The continuous religious authority of imams, even when none are officially linked to the organization, is revealing. The youth were encouraged to ask questions, to seek answers in books, on the Internet, and to participate in organized events. MJD also occasionally invited a young imam for a dedicated Question & Answer meeting in which the youth were invited to ask specific questions. The legitimacy of a certain practice generally depends on whether it can be traced to sources that address Islam in a universal way (Koran, the *Sunna*, and the commentaries of the *ulama*). Understanding their Islam as universalistic, the youth made reference to global authorities, rather than to only Turkish or Arabic authoritative figures.<sup>27</sup>

### *Merging Internal Motivation and External Motions*

Within this religious group, it was not considered sufficient for a person to merely perform a religious act externally, meaning that one's body movements and the conduct of the performance are correct. Even if one conducts a religious act, such as prayer, in a physically or bodily accurate manner, these bodily movements had to be accompanied by the correct conscious or mental orientation. The youth often said that if someone performs a good deed "just in order to tell others" and to demonstrate "how good they are," this deed does not lead to good points (as a good deed for Allah) since such an act must be performed with the correct intentions.<sup>28</sup> The internal, one's mind and thoughts, had to be included in the act in

<sup>27</sup> Nielsen has argued that the promotion of a universal Islam is a consequence of the ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of Muslims in Europe, as "it became necessary to identify those aspects of the way of life which were culturally relative and to categorise them apart from the central Islamic core which must remain absolute" (Nielsen 1992, 65). I find this argument too Eurocentric in that he only considers the impact of the European context on Muslim identity and ignores the internal dynamic of Islam as a discursive tradition.

<sup>28</sup> Doing good deeds (*al-amal al-saliha*) secures God's blessings and aids in the formation of virtuous dispositions (Mahmood 1998, 102–104). Again, the good deeds must be

order for it to be judged a religiously moral act (also see Mahmood 2005). At one meeting, Fadwa (23) said:

“I was thinking that from next Monday on we should fast, but I don’t know if people are motivated?” One of the girls exclaimed, “if we know that twenty of us are fasting, should that not be motivating enough?” Fadwa agreed, and another young girl enthusiastically noted that “fasting is also slimming” as an incentive to fast. In response, Somaya (17) wrinkled her nose and emphasized that “dieting should not be a reason to fast.”<sup>29</sup>

A feeling of community can strengthen individual incentives to perform a religiously motivated act like fasting. Moreover, Somaya’s comment reflects the idea that the act of fasting is only religiously valid in so far as the person conducts the act with the correct motivations and virtues.<sup>30</sup> In cultivating these dispositions, the young participants learned to differentiate between performing practices that were motivated by religious experiences or religious sentiments, compared to those motivated by secular, materialistic, traditional, or fashion sentiments. Not eating or drinking was not in itself seen as sufficient for the act to count as religiously valid. In their view, fasting is only religiously valid in so far as the person conducts the act with pure motives. The youth frequently argued that whether or not someone has the correct motivations, “only Allah knows.”

The link between inner motivation and external performance was particularly emphasized with regard to the act of prayer. Presentations on the prayer referred to how the Prophet Muhammad sat during his prayer (i.e. how he placed his feet) as an ideal. Furthermore, the discussions stressed the importance of being concentrated when praying. Muslims must keep the right intentions in their hearts during prayer. During one MJD weekly meeting, the youth were impressed by a story of a companion of the Prophet who, while at war and when no anesthetic was left, asked the doctor to operate on his foot while he prayed because he would be so concentrated on the prayer as to feel no pain. “I have goose bumps,” Hawa (22)

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performed with the right sincerity of intent (*al ikhlas*). Similarities can be found in Christianity. The passage in Matthew 6:1–6 reads: “Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.”

<sup>29</sup> This conversation did not take place during Ramadan. The youth occasionally fasted throughout the year as an act that gives good points, but also in order to fulfill their Ramadan as women have to break it during menstruation.

<sup>30</sup> During Ramadan, there is a heightened attention to adherence to the right conduct. It is a situation in which Muslims should strengthen their ability to do right without being controlled by others (*at-taqwa* – fear of God), and exercise the virtue of patience (*sabr*), see [www.islam.no/newsite/content](http://www.islam.no/newsite/content), accessed May 3, 2007.

said after listening to the story, stroking her arm. Many of the young women were awed by the story, as it clearly exemplifies a unique internal orientation to God, and a standard towards which all Muslims should strive. Several youth complained about the difficulties they had in concentrating when praying. Hawa once remorsefully said that sometimes in the last prayer cycle, the thought “what should I cook afterwards?” suddenly enters her mind. She said: “It is so annoying! Then the whole prayer is not valid!” Later in the discussion, Hawa expressed admiration for Muslim converts because they tend, she argued, to perform the prayer with a fervor and concentration that she envied.

Gender- and age-specific difficulties or tensions can emerge for a young person trying to fulfill the religious ideals. For example, Fatima (31) told me that after becoming a mother, she found it more difficult to really focus on her prayer when her child was crawling on the floor, since she was constantly worried that something would happen to her daughter. This was a new situation that she had to work to master. Another younger woman, Naila (17), relayed the following story:

The previous year, Naila had gone to the “Finnowstrasse” (a mosque) during Ramadan to pray, “cause he [a man she had become interested in during another religious event] was going there. Even if I knew the whole time that it wasn’t right. Probably the prayers are not even valid.” She shook her head, obviously discontent with herself.

Here, Naila demonstrated that she was increasingly reflecting on her past religious practice. During the previous year, Naila had become aware of the importance of both internal motivation and external movements in the act of praying. Still, being a teenager in love can make this ideal difficult to reach. Naila reassessed her own behavior as not having a religious motivation: visiting a mosque in order to get a glimpse of a man she was in love with did not fulfill the internal motivation that would lead the prayer to be religiously correct. Her story also illustrates potential tensions between being young and in love, and being a religiously correct Muslim.

Generally, the difficulties over concentration during prayer were considered understandable, although an imperfection or weakness that the young people needed to work on. The youth made the following skit dealing with this issue:

At one weekly meeting, Fadwa (23) wanted to show what Leila (21), Ismail (16), and her friends had learned at a religious seminar during the weekend. Fadwa partly tucked her long top into her pants. When some of the girls wanted to fix it, she said that, “it is supposed to be like that.” They dimmed the light and Fadwa and Ismail (the latter had loosened her headscarf) laid

down on the floor, pretending to sleep. Then Leila started reciting quietly from the Koran in Arabic. She lighted a candle and put it on the floor. Leila woke Ismail up, and Ismail went to the window where she pretended to use a toothbrush and perfume, and pretended to perform *wudu*. She put on her headscarf. When Ismail tried to wake Fadwa up, the latter was reluctant. She clearly did not want to get up, and only said, "I had such a nice dream." Finally, Fadwa got up only as the other two had started to pray. Fadwa joined the two girls who were praying, and she stood very clumsily and imbalanced, half asleep with her clothes disheveled. She was wobbling, even leaning on the girl praying next to her, and was completely unfocused. When Leila and Ismail entered the prayer position where the practitioner goes down to their knees and bends the upper body down so that nose and forehead touch the ground, Fadwa even let out snoring sounds. Finally, when they sat up, Fadwa was tipping over on the two others so that all of them fell on the ground, ending the skit.<sup>31</sup>

In the course of the skit, most of the women, including a newcomer who initially looked bored, were laughing. The atmosphere was relaxed. During the skit, a cellphone with an American pop song could be heard. When the light was turned on again, Fadwa asked, "does anyone think they know what this was about?" Someone said an Arabic word, and Fadwa asked, "what would that be in German?" (...) "Does anyone know it in one German word?" A girl answered, "concentration." "Yes," Fadwa said, "we all recognize it. I have a brother who is very often tired. Or when you come home from school and are tired and want to eat and sit down and then, 'Oh, no - I need to pray first.' Or when you are in the middle of a movie and think, 'oh, I will wait to the commercial break.' I have done that sometimes. Then you are making the movie more important than the praying and that is not correct. You lose track of what is most important." She continued by suggesting that the women dress well when praying. She said, "like, some of us are married and then you dress nicely for your husband and put on perfume." Some of the married women protested, and Fadwa corrected herself, "okay, I will use another example. When we are invited to a party, we dress up nicely and put on perfume. Why should we not do the same for Allah when praying (in order to concentrate better)?" One of the younger girls said that she was not always sure of the importance of doing the prayer movements correctly since it is so dark, "I mean, he [Allah] cannot see it." A few of the elders smiled a bit in despair, explaining that Allah can see all of them, always. Fadwa resumed, "when some of the girls wear a [G-string], I can see that, you know. And that is not dressing for Allah." She said that when one of the sisters is not dressed properly, or not according to the Koran, others should talk to her about it, although she added that this should of course be done "in a

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<sup>31</sup> The prayer consists of a specific number of prayer-cycles (*rekâts*), each of which consists of a sequence of stations that include different movements of the body. In the third and fourth station of one *rekât*, the person praying goes down on their knees and the upper body is bent down so that the forehead and nose touch the ground (see Henkel 2005).



nice way so that she will not turn against you when you explain it. It is not for you, but for her. Sometimes it is just that she did not know and then it is good when you tell her." Someone protested: "Of course she knows – everyone knows what is right and not right in their heart." Leila disagreed, "no, that is not true. Sometimes she would know and sometimes not." (...) Ismail stated that, "every minute is for Allah. It says in the Koran that Allah does not need us to pray to him. It is for our own good." Fadwa inserted, "sometimes you hear about it being difficult to pray at work, 'cause there are no places provided for prayer and it is embarrassing to ask or to do it in front of others [non-Muslims]. Then you come home in the evening and have not prayed. Is it a good enough excuse?"

Many of the youth admitted that they did not pray diligently and often explained it by referring to the lack of prayer spaces, distractions, and the structuring of the day in Berlin. Praying instead of watching football or American blockbusters when returning tired from school could be difficult. Praying at school in the stairways where their schoolmates could see them could be embarrassing or uncomfortable. Fadwa proposed that such explanations were not acceptable reasons for not meeting religious requirements. Once they realized that praying should be done for its own sake, attendees should become motivated to perform the obligatory prayers. Whether practitioners pray together or alone, a fundamental feature of the prayer is that it produces and signals the dedication they have to a common moral framework, independently of social or ethnic differences (Henkel 2005). The prayer can serve as a way to order social practice in daily life, in which Muslims have to summon and perform their dedication to Islam (*ibid.*).<sup>32</sup>

Praying is both an individual and group-oriented practice. It is the duty of each individual to pray and to perform the external prayer movements with the necessary internal intentions. Simultaneously, the role of the faith community is highlighted: there is a sense of duty that each individual should correct peers and friends' erroneous behavior, as it may be that they are unaware of their faults. Indeed, the youth often reminded each other to pray on time, and during social events the youth often performed the prayer together. Furthermore, more good points are gained when praying in a group, and collective prayer seemed to deepen the sisterly feelings among the youth.

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<sup>32</sup> In this sense, Michael Lambek's argument about rituals can specifically be applied to the prayer, in that the prayer as a ritual "provides occasion for the unreserved assumption of responsibility and obligation in which agents, without distinction between the virtuous and the incontinent, acknowledge their agency and commit themselves to bearing responsibility for their actions" (Lambek 2000, 317).

*Practicing How to Desire Correctly*

Youth need to deal with different and contesting wills and desires in their efforts to adopt a particular Islamic style and taste. In Islam, children are considered to be born without sin, but youth (for girls this is marked by the moment of their first menstruation) are fully accountable for their actions and will have to answer for their actions in their “next life.” The possible tension between being young and being religiously active was a particularly important reason for the creation of MJD. As Fatima (31) told me:

“One of the ideas behind MJD is to inform the young generation in Germany that it is possible to be ‘Muslim, German, and still cool.’” She argued that they should learn that “to be a Muslim is not something bad, but something beautiful.” She continued by noting that “young Muslims should not feel that they are stupid, but that they are normal and that faith can also be fun, without segregating themselves from society.”

Here, Fatima suggests that adolescents feel the need to participate in MJD not only because they are outsiders in German society because they are Muslim, but also because being religious when young can make them feel odd in German society. She felt that being religiously active and young in a secular society is perceived as being boring or traditional. Additionally, temptations and distractions can cause young people to (momentarily or permanently) forget their main goal of entering Paradise in the afterlife. By practicing Islam in a group, the leaders try to provide the youth with emotional support and the motivation to live a religious life, including having the correct desires and a better understanding of who they are and where they are going.

Practicing to desire correctly is about obtaining a state of mind that desires to please God. This state of mind is not considered natural (Mahmood 2005), but must be produced and continuously strived towards. The youth need to craft themselves in ways that make them desire to try to reach these religious ideals. The will to become pious, virtuous, and observant can be strengthened in a religiously defined space. Older participants often contended that failure or lack of enthusiasm to meet their obligations was a consequence of “not loving God enough,” and that if they loved God as much as they should, acts like praying would be a source of joy. The creation of the virtuous Self takes place through the realization of why one should perform obligatory acts. It relies on equating the pleasing of God with benefiting one’s Self, and on generating emotional relationships with God.

The desire to become correct or better Muslims was thus a part of how the Self was crafted in MJD. The effort to reach a state of religious proximity is illustrated by the youths' exclamations like "I really try," or "it's so hard," when talking about, for example, their level of concentration when praying. "Fighting the swine dog in oneself" is a commonly used phrase. This saying is also used by non-Muslim Germans and refers to having to overcome inner temptations or inner fiends that lead to temptation. In the Islamic social space, it is used to refer to the continuous struggle and tension between complying with religious obligations and wanting to engage in non-religious acts.

The realization that certain objects, artifacts, and activities are distractions was encouraged through the argument that these things kept participants away from what should be considered important in their daily life. Their social environment, including the presence of non-religiously active schoolmates, undeniably had a constant effect on the crafting of their religious Self. However, the proposed solution was not to segregate from the majority non-Muslim society, but rather to work on one's Self—one's desires and thoughts—through certain techniques of the Self that were learned, practiced, and corrected within the group. Here, the youth followed ideas similar to those of Aristotle, namely that morality must be practiced in order to become part of one's character (Aristotle 1998 [350 BC]). In Aristotle's view, morality is both achieved through and displayed by external behaviors. In the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle's contends:

For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyre players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts. (*Ibid.*, 28–29)

Here, Aristotle presents what has been called "the learning-by-doing" thesis, which states that we get a virtuous character by doing the types of actions that are characteristic of virtuous people. Similarly, we obtain a skill or craft by doing the types of actions that are characteristic of professionals of that craft. Likewise, MJD encouraged young people to practice how to improve their character, in the process of which it was hoped that an internal motivation ultimately merged with the performance of external motions.

Strategies about how to undermine or overcome certain desires that were considered Islamically incorrect can be demonstrated by the following episode:

MJD was holding an information meeting about the upcoming annual summer camp 2005 (in Bad Orb, Frankfurter Schullandheim Wegscheide) where more than 1,000 young Muslim young men and women would gather for a religious summer camp in southern Germany. Over three days, they take part in religious presentations, sports (football, table tennis, and volleyball), handicrafts, listen to music by famous “Muslim artists,” and attend workshops. During the camp, the youth would be called for the five prayers, after which they read together from the Koran, follow religious workshops and seminars with Q&As, and perform skits on the themes of the year’s camp, including “Carpe Diem,” “Recharging batteries,” “Why Muslim?” “Moments for Eternity,” and “Open your eyes.” During the camp, most youth read the Koran after the five daily prayers, pay attention to the way they dress, and focus on what are considered to be Islamically-oriented activities.

At the weekly MJD meeting in Berlin during which camp preparations were made, Fadwa (23) handed out yellow note pads on which everyone was asked to write down their expectations. She said, “just one thought, for example sisterly feelings.” Afterwards, the yellow notes on the cupboard read: “To be with other Muslims,” “to get to know new people,” “to have fun” [2 times], “to strengthen the iman [faith],” “set new goals,” “to meet a lot of sisters again,” “recharge batteries,”<sup>33</sup> “give and receive,” “a wonderful time,” “sisterly feelings,” “to take along others who do not practice as much,” “to do my five prayers,” and “an Islamic atmosphere.” Fadwa told the girls that the camp was also meant to be an exchange. “Simply being with other sisters and seeing how they tie their headscarf will give you ideas,” she noted, continuing, “we are not only Turks, Arabs, and Palestinians and so on, from different cultures and languages. We are also all different. What brings us all together is Islam. The important thing is to give support and advice. I myself am not that good at giving advice.” She said that the previous year, some of the girls’ feelings had been hurt. There was a sister who thought that she had been in MJ for a long time, and was experienced, and therefore she felt able to give advice.<sup>34</sup> “But,” Fadwa argued, “none of us have come far enough to be able to give advice to others about how they should behave. (...) For example, last year, there was someone who used perfume, and a sister started to kind of sniff the air, and talk about it [negatively]. And also, to go to a sister and say ‘I am very fond of you’ and then kind of give advice to her is also not right. It’s wrong when it’s not coming naturally.” Leila suggested that perhaps it is possible to say, “I also have a problem with that and maybe we can try to improve that together.” Some agreed that this would be better. Fadwa carried on, “the MJ meeting is also a test for us. How do we get along with the other sisters, and how do we relate to them over a longer period of time. Here [in Berlin] we only meet once a week. And now we will be together over a longer

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<sup>33</sup> The motto for this meeting was “Recharging batteries” (“*Akku wird geladen*”) with direct connotation to cellphone batteries.

<sup>34</sup> The youth in Berlin frequently referred to the organization merely as “MJ,” hence the transcript of conversations will frequently make use of the acronym “MJ.”

period, how will that be? And then it is also a place where there are both brothers and sisters at the same time. So take care of your clothing and make-up. A swimming pool has been rented, so bring your swimming suits. But not the bikini!" One of the girls exclaimed, "but I only have a bikini!" The other girls laughed, as it was obvious that she was joking. Fadwa persisted, "cause remember that it is also *haram* to show the other sisters from knees and up to the waist." Fadwa suggested that they should set a personal goal to achieve before next year's camp. They should tell their goal to other sisters, so that the others could "sort of see whether you have fulfilled your goal the following year." She promoted the MJD camps as a place where they could test themselves by dressing in an Islamic [*Muslimich*] way. Fadwa said, "you have to bring long clothes with you. Last year some people were asked to put on longer clothes, 'cause they were not covered properly. And they answered that they had not brought any with them. That is why I'm reminding you now to bring it with you. Last year there were complaints from the brothers that the sisters were not dressed properly. The brothers are also sinning when they look at you like that [just as the girls themselves are sinning] and do you want to be guilty of their receiving punishment? No! So, think about dressing properly. No clothes that are tight-fitting. (...) Last year there was a lot of competition between the sisters as to who was the most beautiful, and how one dressed. There was also a lot of talk about others behind their backs (...)." She asked: "Who will be going to the MJ Meeting for the first time?" As some young girls raised their hands, she told the others to take good care of these youngsters. Later Fadwa added that "the rules are also for the bus, we are travelling with the brothers, you know."

During this discussion, MJD's efforts to address youth, multi-culturalism and gender issues within a religious space are particularly apparent. In this example, young people are being prepared for their participation in a space in which stricter religious norms are to be followed than those they are used to in their daily life in Berlin. The summer camp becomes a space where they should practice being diligent in their prayers, dress and bodily comportment, and where they must interact correctly with their sisters and brothers in faith and have fun with peers who have similar desires. One of the focal aims of the various MJD camps appears to be to provide a space conducive to the creation of a religiously correct Self. For example, although it is not always successful, during the summer camp there is an effort to construct a gender-divided and religiously defined sphere, such as by housing women in one part of the camp and men in another part of the camp.

Fadwa's comments recognize the importance attached to each individual person transforming her consciousness and desire to focus on religious obligations, like prayer and correct dress, with the aim of making these essential and indispensable parts of her everyday life (see Mahmood 1998).

Correct dress comportment, for example, is simultaneously an individual exercise and an exercise that situates the individual in relation to the religious group. Fadwa's concern about the rules about how to dress is presented not only as an obligation on their religious Selves, but also as part of a responsibility for the men's religious Selves. This double obligation puts more pressure on the women to look after their body and comportment than the pressure put on their male counterparts. The space of the summer camp and the practices the youth are encouraged to follow also allow the individual believer to see their place within a larger community, and to adhere to religious rules that become the means by which they compare themselves to others and scrutinize themselves. In practice, conflicts did arise between the youth during the summer camp, such as when someone wanted to sleep while someone else wanted to play music.

The summer camp becomes a social arena and a religious space where the youth test their capacities for piousness, become accustomed to the ideals of piousness, share feelings of transcendence, and exert their willingness to craft themselves as religious subjects within a larger group. It promotes an alternative source of socialization to that which they are



Figure 10. Entrance to seminar tent at MJD summer camp. Women's entrance on the left, men's entrance on the right hand side. Photo: Synnøve Bendixsen



exposed to at school and in daily life in Berlin. This, and similar events, represents an effort to create a religious space where behavior (clothing and comportment) is located outside their routine, mundane life. The summer camp is structured and limited in time and space, and situated outside of their everyday life. At the same time, the experience is made applicable to their daily life as the practice of piousness that is encouraged during the summer camp focuses on their internal intentions and characters. Furthermore, Fadwa's suggestion to set personal (religious) goals that should be accomplished throughout the year ultimately situates the exercises for the Self as independent of time and space. The summer camp becomes a space where the youth should, if not embody, then at least get accustomed to a religious lifestyle that should continue when they return to their daily life. Far from being the outcome of indoctrination, compliance with religious rules involves, on the contrary, a vigilant crafting of the Self.<sup>35</sup>

### *Acquiring an Islamic Character*

Tariq Ramadan, who is a religious authority for many European youth—in Germany and elsewhere—recalls the “Prophet’s call to seek for knowledge” (Ramadan 2004, 148). According to Ramadan and other religious authorities, a Muslim should acquire knowledge so as to come closer to the truth. The older MJD participants often quoted the following *hadith* during the weekly meeting: “The pursuit of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim man and woman.” At the same time, they stressed that

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<sup>35</sup> Mahmood argues that agency is important among religiously oriented women in their efforts to become pious. A brief discussion of the already mentioned term “*adab*” can also shed further light on the weight the youth place on inner intention and outer physical comportment. While *adab* could be understood as referring to outer behavior, it should instead be understood as sources of and, at the same time, the results of, the inner Self. Metcalf suggests that *adab*, signifying discipline and training, may “mean’ correct outer behavior, but it is understood as both the cause of, and then, reciprocally, fruit of one’s inner self. Knowing, doing, and being are inescapably one” (Metcalf 1984, 10). *Adab* directs our attention to the fact that actions that appear beautiful can only be defined as such when they derive from a beautiful inner soul. As such, the qualities of *adab* have similarities to Foucault’s “technologies of the self,” in which the comportment of the body manifests and at the same time sustains the application of a particular disciplined mastery of oneself (Foucault 1995 [1977]; Rose 1996). It also has similarities to Aristotle’s description of the acquisition of virtue. This situates the continuous efforts the youth make to desire to obtain the religious ideals and comportment as a disciplining of the Self within the Islamic understanding of *adab*. As the women I worked with rarely made use of the term in their daily life or discussions, I do not draw extensively on *adab* as a term, and instead refer to a religious ideal or ethos.



knowledge of Islam is not sufficient in itself. At one meeting, one of the longtime members, Sevda (25), said:

“MJD has two main aims; to improve knowledge and to be a community.” She stressed that knowledge of Islam is difficult to obtain and not useful when you are only sitting by yourself, reading and thinking. Many participants nodded when she added that “you need to get knowledge and improve yourself within a community. Character is half of the faith.” And character, Sevda continued, needs to be developed and practiced within a group.

Here, Sevda argues that religious character needs to be practiced with similarly oriented others who can then also correct each other, so that their characters become more Islamic. The annual three-day MJD summer camp is one arena where an individual’s efforts to achieve a more Islamic character can evolve. Sevda’s comment also indicates that being a religiously correct Muslim is a continual two-part process: faith and practice. Religiosity is not only related to whether one believes (has faith) in God or not, but also to the correct practice of the faith: that is, complying with the rules for what is *haram* and *halal*, and improving one’s Muslim character. The evaluation of moral character is based on the notion that what a human ought to be is delineated by Islam (Metcalf 1984, 2). Character, such as what kind of character is important as a Good Muslim and how to control one’s *Nafs* (soul, self, or ego), was a central topic in many presentations. The following excerpt from a weekly meeting can illustrate the discussions about character in Islam:

Leila (21) had made a PowerPoint presentation about “character,” which was projected onto the white wall. “Why is this important to talk about?” she asked, before answering by quoting a Koran verse in Arabic and providing the listeners with the German translation, “God does not change the condition of a people unless they themselves change that which is in their inner selves.”<sup>36</sup> This, she said, means that you have to start with yourself before calling attention to the mistakes of others. Leila asked the others to name some character traits, which she then wrote on the whiteboard in either red or black, depending on whether it is positive or negative. Afterwards, the whiteboard read: “Egotistic,” “reliable,” “lovable,” “being punctual,” “modesty,” and “honesty.” She turned around and asked, “is ‘shyness’ a bad or good character?” They decided to write it with both colors. Then the presentation continued by her asking, “what is characteristic of a Muslim?” Some girls suggested “friendly,” “polite,” and “always with a smile.” Others added

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<sup>36</sup> I often heard references to this verse (13:11), which is also discussed by Tariq Ramadan. According to Ramadan, it means that individuals must start with themselves and endeavor to “reform their being” (Ramadan 2004, 148).

“honest,” “patient,” and “lovable.” Not everyone agreed on the latter and openly objected. A few continued by suggesting “correct,” “merciful,” “generous,” and “humble.” The girls started a discussion about “arrogance” and being arrogant. Hamida (17) thought that some Muslims were arrogant, which, she argued, “they should not be.” Riya (21) said, “look, if we are arrogant about our belief and say that it is the best, then no one would want to become Muslim.” Ismail continued, “we should have these characteristics to show, not with words, but by being like that, and do *du’a* so that other people also would want to convert.” The attendees agreed. Today, Leila wanted to look at three characteristics in particular: being reliable, trustworthy and punctual. She presented a PowerPoint slide that said:

Are you truthful towards  
 Allah (s.a)  
 Mohammad (s.a.a.s)  
 Humanity  
 People who have done you good [teachers are given as an example]  
 Your own community.

The German convert Aysel (20) interrupted, saying: “Should not ‘yourself’ also be there. That you are true to yourself?” Leila dismissed her: “No, ‘cause that is simple. If you are true to Allah, you are true to yourself.” She continued, asking the girls: “How can you be true to Allah?”

The next slide answered:

Very easy ...;)

- to believe sincerely in Allah (Iman bihi)
- to be loyal to Allah (Ikhlas bihi)
- to do what He demands of us, and to refrain from what He has forbidden us.

Or perhaps not so easy ...

(9:75–77)<sup>37</sup>

To be truthful /faithful to the Prophet

She asked how they could be truthful to the Prophet, to which many girls responded: “To do the Sunna.” Leila clicked to the next slide:

- to learn and experience more of his life, how he handled everyday life
- to find out more about his character
- good character qualities & morals are timeless.<sup>38</sup>

Being a good Muslim is depicted not only as having a personal relationship to Allah, but also as encompassing the youths’ daily relationships

<sup>37</sup> This is a reference to the Koran. This part of the Koran deals with lies and liars, among other things.

<sup>38</sup> My translation of the PowerPoint from the German original.

with Muslims and non-Muslims. In part, the exercise aims to help the participants learn the correct forms of character, comportment, and social responsibility. It is interesting to note the suggestion the German convert Aysel made about being true to yourself as independent from any other references, such as God. We might ask whether this indicates a more individualistic orientation towards the Self. In any case, Leila's answer is striking for the indivisible relationship she drew between the ability to be true to God and true to one's Self.

The focus on having the correct character traits, a topic that recurred frequently, can also be understood as an indirect consequence of the stigmatized perception of Muslims in Germany. I suspect that the intense focus on external behavior, like smiling, or not looking sad in public, has to do with the general negative focus on Muslims. As indicated in chapter 3, many youth felt the need to improve the image of Islam in the West through their individual behavior. For some, this became a religious duty, resembling *du'a*. Through the verse that Ismail mentioned, "God does not change the condition of a people unless they themselves change that which is in their inner selves" (*Sura* number 13, verse 11), it can also become a religious duty to display the ideal character traits in order to change the negative stereotypes about Muslims among the non-Muslim population in Germany.

MJD also offered more technical suggestions about how a person should go about improving their character, such as the proposal that the youth write down faults that they find in themselves on a daily or weekly basis. The youth were thus encouraged to keep a diary of their negligence of religious obligations or erroneous performances.<sup>39</sup> This critical examination of their actions, which puts the strategy of self-supervision (*muhasabat al-nafs*) into practice (Mahmood 1998), resembles the exercise of self-writing that Foucault proposes as "a practice of the self that contributes to the self's active constitution" (McLaren 2002, 148). MJD attendees

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<sup>39</sup> Keeping a spiritual diary or a diary of conscience to note one's faults is a tradition that has characterized Protestantism since the Reformation, and which was often used by Puritans in northern Europe and North America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Gannett 1992). For the Greeks, as Foucault indicates, self-writing was an *askēsis* of truth and the notebooks (*hupomnēmata*) served as support for one's ethical behavior through self-reflection, self-examination and self-regulation (use of pleasure and the care of the self) (McLaren 2002, 145–149). Foucault distinguishes these from the later Christian journals where the author tries to write the truth of himself and through this construct a narrative of the self. Whereas the Greek and the early Christian notebooks focused on the deeds of others, the Christian notebooks had a confessional character, focusing on the self (*ibid.*).

also engaged in informal confessions, in that the youth were frequently either encouraged to or spontaneously admitted to flawed acts, such as being impatient with their younger brother or gossiping. These confessions were made either to demonstrate the meanings of a presentation or to openly acknowledge their individual need for improvement.

Through the act of confession and writing exercises, the young Muslim woman is ambivalently positioned. She becomes a subject through the confession, and is simultaneously subjected by the dominant discourse that induces her to confess. What the youth write or confess is an individual process, requiring individual self-examination. However, the fact that they seem to feel that they need to confess is also an indication of a need to seek approval from a wider group. The process of crafting the religious Self, or that of becoming a good Muslim, has similarities to the process of becoming part of a movement. It also shows that the standards of behavior against which they are trying to monitor themselves have an external source.

The youth realize their religious Self in this process, thus this act should not be considered passive or reactive (see Mahmood 2005), since it is only through conscious acts that the subject can realize herself as a religiously virtuous subject. Through the writing assignments or open confessions the youth participate in a more individualizing process, as they come to understand themselves to be the source of their action and thus responsible actors in an existential sense. Self-writing plays a role in the “subject’s own active self-constitution” (McLaren 2002, 149). The practice of writing about oneself is a process of individualization.<sup>40</sup> Yet such writing simultaneously situates the youth in relation to a specific shared discourse, which thus involves a process of collectivization. The youth realize the need for individual active engagement in order to craft themselves religiously, and through this process start to feel part of a larger whole. In the course of these practices, the youth go through a process of religiously oriented individualization, and at the same time they realize their religious Selves by responding to a normalizing discourse embedded in power structures. It is thus a process whereby the Self is becoming both individualized and collectivized, where the collective is both socially real (MJD) and abstract (the *umma*).

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<sup>40</sup> As McLaren, in her work on Foucault, argues: “The process of individualization ties one to one’s identity through normalizing discourses. Individualization is one aspect of a larger problematic that Foucault calls a hermeneutic of the self. A hermeneutic of the self refers to the process of self-decipherment, that is, the obligation of individuals to examine their desires, thoughts, and actions” (McLaren 2002, 149).

Importantly, this individualization is partly a consequence of how the youth actively craft themselves as religious subjects within a framework given by Islam (as a discursive tradition) as practiced within this group. Thus, the suggestions from scholars that Muslim youths' emphasis on choosing Islam and the headscarf is indicative of their embrace of a modern, Western discourse where the fulfilled, autonomous subject is the choosing subject, needs to be reconsidered.<sup>41</sup> The same goes for the suggestion that the triumph of the individual logic is a result of situating Islam in a secular context, and the breakdown of ethnic communities (Cesari 2000). The individualization of Islamic practice, Cesari argues, is a consequence of the Muslim communities in Europe moving out of the "iron grip" of authoritarian Muslim states on Islamic tradition" (Cesari 2005b, 4). In contrast, I view the individualization of these youths' religious Selves as a necessity in order to achieve a particular Islamic Self. In other words, within MJD a certain individualization must take place in order to become what is viewed as a Good Muslim within a religious discourse of practicing a pure Islam.<sup>42</sup>

The individualization of these youths' religious identification is part of their efforts to fulfill specific ideals they take from within Muslim tradition. In short, the individualization of the Muslim subject must be situated within the religious discourse to which these subjects are exposed.<sup>43</sup> However, individualization goes hand in hand with a collectivization of the religious Self, in that religious practices and self-understanding must be situated and accepted within a faith community in order to be considered correct. The religious ideals and ideas are not individually chosen or practiced unsystematically, but are learned, corrected, and defined

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<sup>41</sup> This is particularly the case in Cesari (2002), Karakaşoğlu (2003b), Klinkhammer (2000), and Nökel (2002).

<sup>42</sup> Peter (2006a) points to how individualization has become a characteristic narrative in literature on Muslims in Europe. Drawing on Amir-Moazami and Salvatore's work, he rejects the explanations that merely address individualization as a fragmentation of the structures of Islamic authority and that ignore the doxa in the Muslim tradition.

<sup>43</sup> Roy (2004) contends that the individualization process must be understood in relation to Islam's objectification, which he associates with the process of globalization. Islam and Muslim authorities have moved from the sphere of obviousness into an object of reflection. Both the Islamic Humanist and an Islamic neo-fundamentalist are characterized by an individualized rationale, through which religion is situated as a personal and individual affair. In contrast to Christian traditions, Roy argues, the individualizing tendencies do not lead to the fragmentation of the religious rule. Rather, religious norms and idioms maintain their stability (Roy 2004). Additionally, discussing the interpretation of *da'wa* as an individual obligation, Mahmood (2005, 62–64) contends that this illustrates the general tendency of an individualization of moral responsibility which is characteristic of modern Islam.



Figure 11. MJD Event with Ammar 114 in Berlin. Photo: Synnøve Bendixsen

within a group. The individualized subject is situated within a larger setting and in relation to specific religious authorities through the religiously defined ideals and to feelings of belonging to the group.

### *Submission to God*

The religious ideals taught within MJD provide a complex, overarching recipe for the religious body. They encompass values, practices, behavior, thoughts, and bodily comportment, which together are designed to help the individual strive for religious proximity—in other words, become as close to the religious ideals as possible. How the crafting of the subject takes place within or in relation to this religious movement strongly resembles the Foucauldian technology of the self as a way to relate to the self “epistemologically (know yourself), despotically (master yourself) and in other ways (care for yourself)” (Rose 1996, 135). These techniques are exercised within the actual or imagined authority of a system of truth. Within the space of MJD, technologies of the Self were situated in particular technical practices, such as group discussions, emphasis on

understanding the texts, and assignments that included writing down what one needed to improve in oneself. Other practices included confessing mistakes and setting goals together, like how to dress or to pray five times a day. MJD and the friendships formed among the members provided spaces where morality, self-reflection, and the desires of the individual were given direction, encouragement, and reminders to follow that direction. These youth were focused on Islamic knowledge and on improving their (religious) behavior through technologies of ethical self-perfection in a quest for self-realization. Participating in a forum where religious ideals were presented and practiced ultimately shaped the youths' everyday practices, conduct, and the crafting of their Selves.<sup>44</sup>

As they continuously learned the religiously defined normative standards of what it meant to be a good Muslim, the youth evaluated their own behavior or actions in comparison with the ideal performances, and were also evaluated and measured by their peers and members of their faith community. These ideals, which the youth continued to try to achieve, were not neutral or haphazardly defined, but were legitimated through theology. They were taught and formulated through religious references, sources, and authorities. Specific religious authorities, the Koran, and particular religious books, provided the authoritative legitimation for the religious ideals. Normative expectations were also conveyed to the youth through judgmental gazes, utterings, and comparisons, and through giving particular women more authority in religious matters than others (see chapter 5). In this way, MJD represents an alternative moral community, where participants learn how to craft the Self and the content thereof.<sup>45</sup>

### *Cultivation of a Religious State of Mind: Formation of the Unfree Subject?*

The youth and their effort to craft religious Selves are positioned within existing power structures and within a discursive tradition. The youth attempt to situate their Selves in relation to specific religious and moral norms—ideals that impose strict rules, particularly in regard to women

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<sup>44</sup> I suspect that this also true for the young Muslim men in MJD, although I cannot confirm this empirically.

<sup>45</sup> The religious ideals within the movement have similarities (and differences) to the pious ideal Mahmood (2005) finds in Egypt. Some of the similarities can be explained by these youth being part of an Islamic revival, belonging to an educated middle class that returns to the sources, and making references to some of the same authoritative figures.



and women's bodies and public comportment.<sup>46</sup> To what extent does the process of crafting oneself serve to limit the women's opportunities in the public sphere and contribute to the formation of an unfree subject?<sup>47</sup> Should we consider these practices forms of indoctrination or the result of a free choice? Do the women participate in practices that not only construct them, but also limit their opportunities to act?

Mahmood contends that feminist theorists, in their exploration of how "women contribute to reproducing their own domination, and how ... they resist or subvert it" (Mahmood 2005, 6), have naturalized their own views on agency as well as conceptualizations of freedom based on the Enlightenment. She argues that we have to recognize that it is a normative liberal assumption that women who actively participate in Muslim religious movements are acting against their own interests and agendas, an assumption that is constructed on the basis of particular liberal meanings given to the terms freedom, autonomy, and agency.<sup>48</sup> Mahmood persuasively argues that agency can also involve acts that do not aim to subvert norms, but to fulfill them, such as the desire to follow religiously defined ideals.<sup>49</sup>

The different ways people relate to norms cannot be understood if we continue with a universal perception of desire. Rather, our understanding

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<sup>46</sup> I view all world religions as dominated by patriarchal structures (Sered 1998), although this does not mean that there is no scope of action for women and for women's empowerment.

<sup>47</sup> For example, in the leftwing newspaper Taz (March 26, 2008) the article "Islamic girls' camp in the Eifel [a region] – Sisters amongst themselves" ('Muslimisches Mädchencamp in der Eifel – Schwestern unter sich') by Cigdem Akyol and the interview "Youth are indoctrinated" ('Jugendliche werden indoktriniert') by Ursula Spuler-Stegemann, which discussed one of the annual MuMM (annual meeting only for girls), argued that the youth are being indoctrinated during this meeting. According to MJD, Spuler-Stegemann has not conducted any interviews with the participants. The article provides a simplistic presentation of the complex process of how Islamic knowledge is formed. MJD made a statement against these two articles that declares that Akyol, after MJD declined her request to participate at the meeting, registered under a false name. Apparently, her strange appearance drew the organizers' attention and Akyol left the meeting voluntarily after 30 minutes. See [www.mj-net.de/node/2032#attachments](http://www.mj-net.de/node/2032#attachments), accessed December 12, 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Chapter 7 discusses the motivations and incentives the young women have for participating in MJD.

<sup>49</sup> Norms are not either consolidated or subverted, but are "performed, inhabited, and experienced in a variety of ways" (Mahmood 2005, 22). Butler has pointed to how the undoing of norms cannot take place outside of the actual doing of the very same norms. The possibility of agency dwells within a productive reiterability of the norms, "always and only opposed to power" (Butler 1997, 17). The limitation of Butler's focus on agency is that she mainly considers agency to be acts that resignify or challenge norms (Mahmood 2005, 20–22).

of desire, as well as of agency, must be detached from progressive politics and must open up for different forms of desires, including a religious desire to submit to God in order to reach Paradise.<sup>50</sup> We can better understand the social actions and endeavors of these youth by recognizing their desire to craft their Selves to be Good Muslims, with all that includes. At the same time, as I argue in chapter 3, these religiously defined ideals can be felt to restrict movement, and in the process of adopting them, women risk turning into Woman as symbol. In such a space, Woman becomes a symbolic conflation of gender, sex, and sexuality, which in turn comprises ideology, metaphor, fantasy, and men's psychological projections (Sered 1998). The question thus remains whether the consequences of these agentic acts are controlled by the intention of the actor: agentic acts can position the actor in a state of mind and space from which her future scope of action becomes limited or increasingly regulated. I return to this question in the concluding chapter.

In order to understand the practices of these youths, we need to ask what form of life they struggle to achieve, which sets of knowledge encourage these ideals, and which ethical valorizations they are linked to. I agree with Mahmood (2005) that we have to accept the possibility that the religious attendees have different goals, desires, and motivations than those liberal feminists consider liberating and true. Ultimately, reaching the ideal of a Good Muslim subject depends upon a certain self-reflection, knowledge of oneself and of religious sources, the ability to be in control of oneself, and to craft one's desires and consciousness. The willingness to obey norms is essential to obtaining the youths' goals, which frequently are to please God. In a similar way, Lambek (2002) asserts that:

...agents are always partly constructed through their acts – constituted through acts of acknowledgement, witnessing, engagement, commitment, refusal and consent. In assuming responsibility and rendering themselves subject to specific liturgical, political, and discursive regimes and orders, people simultaneously lay claim to and accept the terms through which their subsequent acts will be judged (Rappaport 1999). People are agents insofar as they choose to subject themselves, to perform and conform accordingly, to accept responsibility, and to acknowledge their commitment.

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<sup>50</sup> In her work on reuniting the subject of anthropology with that of psychoanalysis, Moore (2007) correctly points to how anthropologists have failed to incorporate desire and the imaginary into an understanding of the making and transforming of the self. By focusing on desire, she argues, we are made more aware of the motivations of the subject positions and become attentive to the discursive formations and hegemonic orders. Although I do not use her framework, I do incorporate desire in my discussion of the youths' motivations to take up a religious subject position (see chapter 7).

Agency here transcends the idea of a lone, heroic individual ostensibly independent of her acts and conscious of them as objects. (Lambek 2002, 37–38)

The techniques of the Self that the Muslim women learn and practice in Berlin, and which appear to liberal feminists to be a subversion of the women's own interests and agendas, are agentive acts. It is true that these acts do not oppose the religious strictures or the governing modes of power, in contrast to the acts that liberal feminists have naturalized as the form of agency scholars should look for. Nevertheless, following a religious ideal where the goal is to submit oneself to God should not in itself be seen as oppressive or as signaling a lack of freedom or agency. To paraphrase Lambek (2002, 37): the act of entering a submissive state is not itself a submissive act.<sup>51</sup> On the contrary, if the ability to submit oneself to religious rules is considered part of crafting oneself as a pious or good Muslim, then following the path of becoming such a subject can be considered agentive. Becoming a Muslim subject includes the ability to submit oneself to God and to follow religiously defined obligations and moral practices. This is the condition for acting as Good Muslim and reaching religious proximity within this religious social field. Striving to conform to the religiously defined ideals is a matter of personal effort, meeting challenges and performing acts that involve agency. The means through which the successful crafting of a religious Self in Berlin takes place are not realizable through being or becoming an unfree, indoctrinated, or passive subject.

I would like to push our understanding of how the youth are crafting the religious Self in a direction that includes the creative and negotiative processes that form part of their everyday life. To understand the process of crafting the religious subject in interaction with Islamic ideals, norms, and values, we also have to look at the tensions that arise when the youth try to enact them in Berlin. Tensions may arise when the youth encounter incompatibilities or conflicting demands, desires and expectations, for example between the religiously defined traditions and desires that are not related to religion (such as wanting something badly that they know is not Islamically correct). The individual is not only “contingently made

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<sup>51</sup> “[T]he act of entering a dissociated state is not itself a dissociated act” (Lambek 2002, 37). The resemblance to Mahmood's later and more complex and detailed analysis should be clear, although she makes no references to Lambek. Both Lambek (2002) and Mahmood (2005) draw extensively on Aristotle in their writing on women who tend to be considered to be in disadvantaged positions without scope for agency and who perform acts that are found strange within their social context.

possible by the discursive logic of the ethical traditions she enacts,” as Mahmood (2005, 32) notes. I argue that this is only one part of the process of crafting the Self—although an important part. The crafting of the Self also takes place in the recognition of oneself as part of a group, where an individual measures herself and is measured in relation to others. It also takes place in the individual’s interaction with norms, desires, and ideals that are not situated within the Islamic religious traditions.

During my fieldwork, I became aware that although the young women were familiar with ideals, and often made an effort to follow these, they did not necessarily succeed. Tensions arose in situations where the youth were not motivated, willing, or even able to follow the ideals. Crafting the Self is a more creative, interactive process than being summoned and actively striving to follow one single discursive logic or ethical tradition. How the youth solve these tensions and simultaneously are found to be truthful religious subjects (by themselves and socially relevant others) is a creative process to which I turn in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TRAJECTORIES OF RELIGIOUS ACTS AND DESIRES: BARGAINING WITH RELIGIOUS NORMS AND IDEALS

Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write.

—Foucault 2006 [1969], 19

I am walking in Kreuzberg on a cold October afternoon, searching for VICUM hall, a popular, Turkish-owned venue for weddings and religious events. Today, MJD and other German-speaking Muslim organizations such as DMK, are organizing a large Aquiqua celebration.<sup>1</sup> Finally, I see the “VICUM” neon sign on a tall brick building, and several men standing outside chatting. As I enter, I pass the many baby carriers in the entrance, and go up the stairs noticing women and children walking up in front of me. A young boy, perhaps around ten years old, asks if he can help me find what I am looking for. When I tell him: “I’m fine, thank you,” he insists: “Who are you looking for?” Since I am not really looking for anyone in particular, I shrug my head and say, “Noreen,” after which he leaves me alone. Maybe I simply looked lost, but my sense is that he perceived me to be in the wrong place, as I am not wearing a headscarf and clearly have no discernible Arab or Turkish background.

I leave my shoes by the entrance before entering the first room filled with men. In the right hand corner, there are several prayer rugs on the floor and a few men are praying. There are more than 400 people in the large main room, where the space is divided along gendered lines: the men on the right, and the women and children on the left. I later notice that when the common prayer is performed, the division of the room makes it possible for the women to pray behind the men. Not everyone wears the headscarf, and I also see some I believe to be ethnic Germans sitting at a table, wearing jeans and waist-long sweaters. In the main room, Noreen (16) greets me, asking: “Did you hear my father speak?” I tell her that I am sorry to have missed him, as I had difficulties finding the place. “Is there a program?” a girl asks. Some of the other girls complain about poor organization: “It’s all a bit confusing!”

I am told that they are celebrating nine newborns. Sevda (25) explains that they have to slaughter two sheep for each boy and one for each girl. Today, fourteen sheep were slaughtered. “So much was thrown away, haram!” Sevda tells me. “But we didn’t have enough time to give it away. Afterwards so much

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<sup>1</sup> This celebration marks the arrival of a newborn child.

was thrown away!" She looks annoyed at the thought. Janna (19) is walking around, serving the food. I try to help her, but quickly give up as I find it confusing and am anxious about making a mistake. We are busy eating mutton and rice with raisins, when one of the girls exclaims, "hey, there are insects in the food!" It turns out to be just a spice. A few of the young girls wrinkle their noses, they are not that happy with the food. "I don't like the food," Sevda exclaims. "They always make Pakistani food at these events. I don't know why." Reflecting further, she continues, "why do Egyptians and Turks make Pakistani food? They must have had it made by someone else." Afterwards, I stand in a group of four young girls telling jokes. "What does a blonde say after sex?" one asks, pausing before delivering the punch line, "do you all play on the same football team?" Naila (17) tells the next joke. "Why is a blonde standing at a bus stop with a mattress? She is going to an interview and they asked her to bring her 'supporting layer' (*Unterlage*)."<sup>2</sup> One of the girls laughs audibly and is quickly hushed by the others, who are constantly looking around to see if anyone is approaching. "Wait!" is uttered through the group every time an older woman comes within earshot. Another girl, Saad (16), joins us and Rezan (18) asks Naila to repeat the joke. Naila is reluctant. "I don't know her, whether she will like that sort of joke." Rezan insists, "No, she is like us, tell her!" After Naila has told the joke, Saad does not laugh and it is clear that she disapproves. Naila turns to Rezan, embarrassed and worried, "Now you see, she doesn't like it! Now what is she going to think of me?" The group stops telling jokes and chats about other subjects instead. I walk over to Noreen who tells me that she is not coming to DMK the next day (Friday) because her parents have invited the entire family in their home. Aishegül (31), joining the conversations, says that her whole family is also gathering. She explains that she has a large family in Berlin, but having them nearby is not always a good thing. She often disagrees with her family members, and it is stressful to have everyone in such close proximity. During the sugar-celebration (*Eid ul-Fitr*), Aishegül continues, all the men walk from home to home.<sup>3</sup> The tradition is for the men to visit everyone in the course of the evening, so they only stay in each home for fifteen to twenty minutes. The women, meanwhile, organize the food and drinks. Since MJD started to celebrate *Eid ul-Fitr* together, Aishegül does not celebrate it at home any more, since she "doesn't like the Turkish tradition."

Turning to the table filled with gifts, Noreen shows me that the floor under the table is also covered with wrapped presents. Usually people give money, she explains, "like, it is tradition to put money in the baby carriage. But now we have, like, become modern, and so we give presents - some people like to buy something which they can then see on the baby afterwards." Slowly, people leave the venue to pray in another mosque. Janna wonders whether to stay or go to the mosque for the prayer. In the end, she decides to stay

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<sup>2</sup> The German word *Unterlage* means both "documents" and something to sleep on.

<sup>3</sup> *Eid ul-Fitr* is the celebration of the breaking of the fasting period, also called the sugar celebration (*Zuckerfest*) by Turkish migrants in Germany.

since it is cozy now that many have left. A man calls for prayer (*adhan*) and some hurry to the toilets to do *wudu*. The prayer starts, the women find their places, and the children are left with the women who are not praying or to run around. When the event is finished, a young woman complains that people were talking too loudly while they were praying. Passing the room in front of the main room, we notice that it is filled with cigarette smoke and someone is drinking alcohol. A girl comments, "it's like a bar here." On my arrival, I had noticed that many men in the bar were smoking, which had also surprised me. It turns out that a "Turkish" wedding is taking place in the room next door. There are many people and cigarette smoke is drifting in from the other room. Sevda remarks, "not a lot of people though (given that it is a Turkish wedding)." Sevda's sister (14) adds, "hmm, what a marriage celebration. (...) I would never marry like that!"

As this event illustrates, the youth experience religious meetings and happenings very differently. During this particular event, some found it chaotic or were bored, some spent their time talking to family or friends, and others helped organize it. For Aishegül, it represented a space that was more religiously correct than the performance of the celebration held by her own family in Berlin. For Razan and Naila, it was a place to perform religious practice, but also to have fun. It was the first time I became aware that youth make great efforts to keep their incorrect behavior hidden from view. Good young Muslim women are not supposed to tell sexual jokes during religious events, yet this still occurs. The group of youth tried to hide their jokes from members of their faith community, knowing that most guests would find it inappropriate, an assumption that was confirmed by Saad's obvious disapproval of the joke.

This episode illustrates at least two sets of issues: first, as partly discussed in chapter 3, youth sometimes tried to hide actions they believed to be religiously "incorrect" within a social space that imposes particular expectations on their behavior. Indeed, nurturing and learning religious norms includes realizing what is not right, and brings a set of obligations along with it.<sup>4</sup> Following Bourdieu (1990), the entry into a social field brings with it a tacit recognition of the rules of the game, which means the legitimation of certain forms of struggle and the exclusion of others. Second, the youth did not conform consistently or blindly to the ideals given to them. The crafting of the religious subject or Self is not a linear or homogeneous process within a group. The problem is not a lack of knowledge about the correct standards of behavior, but rather the inability to

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<sup>4</sup> Knowing a rule is to implicitly recognize what one is expected to do in specific situations; rules are broadly used and sanctioned (Giddens 1984).



live up to these standards in practice. The youth cultivated a variety of desires and aspirations that were not only guided by Islam. They had to relate to a range of rhetoric and ideas about right and wrong, which sometimes produced tensions between different expectations and yearnings. In daily life, the youth related not only to the religious ideals and desires, but also to secular ideals from their school and peers, or to cultural ideas from their parents and their ethnic social field. This endeavor, namely the effort to mediate between religious obligations or expectations and non-religious yearnings that diverge from them, has frequently been perceived as youth picking and choosing the parts of Islam that best suits them and their social context (see introduction). Such perceptions of Muslim youths' religious identity, I argue, neglect the complex epistemological underpinning of the youths' decisions about which norms to adhere to and which to reject and at what time and place.

My aim in this chapter is to illustrate how crafting a religious Self takes place in negotiation with a variety of desires and through individual creativity. As discussed in chapter 4, the religious doctrines and norms comprise discursive structures that the youth are expected to adopt and embody. The contexts and structures of communication establish obligations and rights regarding what youth should do as particular religious subjects. However, as Cohen recognizes, "they do not determine substantively what he or she will do within these limits" (Cohen 1994, 50). The youths' actions and practices do not merely repeat pre-determined cultural conditions. We cannot understand how these young people are crafting a religious Self merely by looking at pre-established religious doctrines and norms. Rather, the religious rules provide a mindset and knowledge in the relation to which the individual then takes action. In the process of acting out these rules and norms, they are also given meaning and direction. Consequently, in order to understand the crafting of the subject, it is not sufficient to look at established ideals, or to assume that youth respond to the religious framework as individual selective consumers or as random and increasingly secularized actors.

As an anthropologist, I am interested in the way social actors relate to and experience religious doctrines and theology in different social contexts. This chapter looks at the ways in which youth deal with how their conduct is measured and judged within their religious social field. I want to draw attention to how the young women understand and negotiate moral standards and how they deal with the impossibility of fulfilling these ideals. What is the scope available to them for forming, styling, and negotiating a religious Self within their religious social field? How are

these youth expressing agency in both reproducing and negotiating Islam in their daily life? How can young women pursue personal desires that fall outside or are in contradiction with religious doctrine without at the same time feeling that they are failing in their efforts at becoming Good Muslims?

First, I discuss what I mean by religious trajectories in this context and in relation to Islam as a discursive tradition. Second, I trace different trajectories of religious acts, behaviors, and desires in order to demonstrate that even if the performance of religious ideals is not a homogeneous or uniform process, youth nevertheless do not relate to Islamic norms randomly. Improving one's behavior and gaining more knowledge is part of the effort of constructing oneself as a particular religious subject.<sup>5</sup> The actions that are thinkable within a social field are relatively unpredictable, and a potentially infinite number of patterns of behavior, thoughts, and expressions are possible, but at the same time their diversity is limited. What is at stake here is understanding the creativity involved in the crafting of the religious Self, without losing sight of the existing strictures that the youth continuously relate to. Overall, I argue that the behavior or desires of an individual need to be situated within a particular religious rhetoric or structure of knowledge in order to be accepted—by the youth and their faith community—as a religious performance, desire, or behavior.

### *Defining Religious Agency*

#### *Situating Social Behavior in a Discursive Tradition*

As discussed in the introductory chapter, this book uses Asad's concept of Islam as a discursive tradition. Conceiving of Islam as a discursive tradition includes acknowledging that the performance of Islam is not static or standardized across time and space, without at the same time dismissing the idea of a singular Islam. What is considered correct and incorrect

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<sup>5</sup> Researching Muslim youth in Germany, Lale Yalçın-Heckmann (1998, 171) found that whereas a significant number of youth valued Islamic teaching for the sake of the knowledge that is transmitted, many considered the knowledge as a precondition for belief and essential in their life. Others relied upon it to position themselves within the social world, as it was important for the individual's identity within the ethnic community. I did not find the latter to apply within this group of Muslim youth where religious knowledge to a large extent become a way out of the ethnic social field and stigma attached to the ethnic group (see chapter 6). The difference may relate to the fact that I focus on youth who participate

Islamic practices and knowledge is frequently a topic of discussion among individuals, between religious authorities, and between Islamic organizations and faith communities. Orthodoxy, “a distinctive relationship – a relationship of power” (Asad 1986, 15), exists “[w]herever Muslims have the power to regulate, uphold, require, or adjust correct practices, and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace incorrect ones” (ibid.). Asad emphasizes that the orthodoxy of an activity or belief may be a topic of discussion. As such, orthodoxy is an effect of power struggles and may be continuously subject to reinterpretations and modifications.

The similarity of Asad’s perception of orthodoxy and Foucault’s idea of discursive practice is worth noting. Discourse, according to Foucault (1980, 2006 [1969]), enables and limits what can be said. Whether speech is considered legible or not is marked by discursive practices.<sup>6</sup> Discursive practices, Foucault argues, are the localized socio-historical material conditions through which speech acts (i.e. writing, speaking, thinking, scheming, measuring, and concentrating) are both made feasible and constrained. These localized socio-historical material conditions are not transcendental or phenomenological, ahistorical conditions, but are historically situated. “Subjects” and “objects” of knowledge are produced by discursive practices, and discursive practices also determine which narrations are recognized as meaningful. The possibilities for meaningful statements are not static, but form a dynamic and contingent multiplicity (Barad 2003, 819).

### *Positioning Behavior as Religious*

The religious discourse taught within the space of the youths’ faith community shapes what is considered possible, correct, or legitimate among the adolescents. A religious discourse is not static or singular, but is subject to contestations. However, although the religious discourse is dynamic and situated in a socio-historical process, its legitimating force in the present depends upon how an individual conceptualizes the current practice in the context of the past (when its purpose and form was instituted) and the future (how and why the purpose of a practice should be maintained or modified) (Asad 1986).<sup>7</sup> In the process of crafting a Self, these young

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in a multicultural religious organization. Most participants view knowledge of Islam as a way to change their behavior and conduct, such as learning to control one’s *Nafs* (ego).

<sup>6</sup> The statements that can be made are part of a changing and dynamic, yet conditional multiplicity (Barad 2003, 813).

<sup>7</sup> Thus, I do not believe we should talk of several Islams as Khosrokhavar (1997, 23) argues or to get rid of the analytical category Islam altogether, as el-Zein (1977) suggests.

people do not merely conform to or replicate religious discursive practices. In their daily life, youth partake in different social fields and embrace different desires and aspirations. Second-generation migrants act in the German society through kindergarten, school, and work, where they often develop better socio-cultural competence than their parents. This cultural competence involves having access to more than one set of values, codes of conduct, languages, and knowledges. In other words, their subject positions are informed by multiple ways of relating to the Self. These discursive legacies include religious and secular modes of subjectivity. Consequently, youth have to relate to incompatible discourses or different modes of subjectification on an everyday basis. Abu-Lughod (1986) similarly recognizes that there are always several, often incompatible, discourses at play. At the same time, she argues against the notion of one dominant ideology that sets limits to the “thinkable and the unthinkable” (Abu-Lughod 1986, 256). Although I share her skepticism of the totalizing power of discourse, I argue that people tend to position their accounts or actions vis-à-vis the dominant discourse of the social field within which they are seeking to situate themselves.

The youths’ behavior is also inconsistent, inasmuch as it does not correspond to apt performances as determined by orthodoxy (Asad 1986, 15). I found that to deal with tensions that arise between religious ideals, on the one hand, and improper or irreligious behavior or feelings of inadequacy on the other, youth legitimate their behavior by relying on certain modes of argumentation. By investigating how religious action is explained and justified, we can better understand how religiously defined acts and behaviors are creative, while simultaneously being shaped by orthodoxy.

As I will show, in order to legitimate their actions, youth are prepared to explain why they make certain choices (concerning clothing, food or body comportment). I understand the youths’ practice of explaining and justifying their actions as an effort to present themselves as particular religious subjects, both to socially relevant others (such as members of the group) and in relation to their own Selves. Within the religious social field, most wish to be considered (by themselves and socially relevant others) as Good Muslims, generally defined by the extent to which they either conform to or diverge from the rules of orthodoxy. The following story illustrates the internal struggle to desire to act in concurrence with norms and the reality of lived behavior:

At a gender-divided wedding the women and girls were dancing, some without their headscarves and wearing short-sleeved tops. Suddenly, women put on their headscarves as the groom and his male family members announced

their entrance to the female section of the wedding. I was with a group of youth who already had their headscarves on and we continued to dance. Noticing that no one else was dancing, Janna (19) suddenly took the hands of her younger sister Noor (16), her friend Alesha (15), and me, stopping our dance. She was upset, saying, "I told you we shouldn't have danced. It is *haram!*" I asked, "what do you mean?" Janna explained, "we shouldn't dance when the men are here, like move our hips like that, it is [not good]. Some women were looking at us, and are now saying 'that family'... like, as if everyone from our family are like that."

Janna was upset both because she felt that she was doing something religiously wrong and because of the unwanted attention others paid to our *haram* behavior. When Janna stopped our dancing, her argument combined religious references to *haram* and *halal*, as well as concern regarding what socially relevant others would think of her and her family. Her last comment points towards the importance of avoiding a negative reputation within the religious and ethnic social sphere, as discussed in chapter 3. Here, correct appearance in the public becomes important to protect both her own reputation as well as that of her family.

Another episode that I first found puzzling entailed a short encounter on the street with a German convert, Nadia (32), during Ramadan:

As I walked towards Nadia on the street, I saw that she was trying to hide that she was eating, which I commented on. She explained that since it was not yet *iftar* (the breaking of the fast for that day) she concealed her eating. In her words, "because otherwise the older men look so funny at me," even though she was menstruating and thus religiously exempt from fasting.

Although this might be a strategy to hide that she is menstruating, my impression is that Nadia's main concern was to avoid socially relevant others believing that she was acting in a religiously incorrect manner. This tactic (see chapter 3) exemplifies the felt necessity of situating one's actions in relation to correct religious behavior. When the religious subject is acting within a religious social field where she or he is being measured by socially relevant others vis-à-vis certain standards defined by both normative and explicit rules, the subject struggles with both performing and becoming a "correct" Muslim. Through these different heterogeneous processes and practices, the youth start to relate to each other and to themselves as particular kinds of subjects.

### *The Religious Subject*

Crafting the Self religiously is about being a Good Muslim. Yet the crafting of the Self takes place within social fields, and involves a continuous

negotiation between how the individual understands herself, how she wants others to see her, and how others react to her in social interactions. Subjects do not make themselves on their own. Subjects seek to be known and recognized, but always through others (Jenkins 1996), which is why the youths' religious actions cannot be chosen or performed at random.<sup>8</sup>

The youths' desire to craft themselves as correct religious subjects must be understood in relation to personal religious motivations (see chapter 7). Yet as social actors, many of these youth were also concerned with how they were perceived by their social surroundings, in particular by members of their faith community. Participating in a faith community brings with it both security, in terms of group belonging, as well as obligations regarding one's religious behavior.

In the process of crafting a religious Self, the interpretation of the Koran provides guidelines for action or a moral compass for the youth in their daily life. The ultimate aspiration is to completely master the Self by acquiring a state of being which stays on the "straight path," meaning that one pursues the norms, values, and morals provided by Islam in all aspects of life. I see the youths' behavior and desires as having to be situated in relation to a specific religious discourse in order to be considered (by herself and socially relevant others) as a particular religious subject and as someone knowledgeable about Islam.

Although the youth situated their actions in relation to the religious discourse taught in MJD, this should not lead us to imagine a homogenous performance of religious norms and ideals. Rather, acts that are considered religiously correct or apt may take a variety of forms.<sup>9</sup> An act, desire, and behavior viewed or defined as religious is not situated in a vacuum, but is performed within a particular socio-historical context. Here, I investigate how the youth tried to situate their choices and acts as performance(s). I suggest that the available acts and performances that

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<sup>8</sup> Jenkins evokes the complex interlinkages between the individual's self-image and the external perception of her or himself: "That particular identity [...] is always a to-ing and fro-ing of how the individual sees herself and how others see her. These represent opposite ends of a continuum, one her self-image, the other her public image. Each is constructed in terms of the other and in terms of the individual's perceived similarity or difference to others. The difference is who is doing the perceiving, who is doing the constructing. This is the internal-external dialectic of individual identification" (Jenkins 1996, 52).

<sup>9</sup> Religious agency, following Leming is "a personal and collective claiming and enacting of dynamic religious identity. As religious identity, it may include, but is not limited to, a received or an acquired identity, whether passed on by family, religious group, or other social entity such as an educational community, or actively sought. To constitute religious agency, this identity is claimed and lived as one's own, with an insistence on active ownership" (Leming 2007, 74).

I view as apt religious performances should be understood as religious trajectories. I make use of the concept of religious trajectories in order to illustrate how individuals shape and fashion the structures they deal with in society, including the religious ones, and to indicate that their behavior and acts are simultaneously formed by these structures. This is important in view of the one-dimensional perception which assumes that youths' relationship to Islam has become individualized, and thus detached from religious communities and authorities. In contrast, I identify the processes through which a variety of religious performances are produced by pointing to the interaction between what is taught within the religious field, expectations from the group, and the subject's own multiple and contesting desires. By looking at available religious trajectories, I argue that youth create a variety and plurality of contingent subject positions in relation to these multiple discourses.

Not all actions or utterances made by a Muslim can be situated within an Islamic discursive tradition.<sup>10</sup> In order to be a Good Muslim in everyday life, it is important to be able to make the distinction between the acts and utterances that can be legitimated as Islamic, and those that cannot. In the everyday life of Muslims, the effort to be a Good Muslim who follows Islam (as a discursive tradition) is also about acquiring a skill. I see religious trajectories as encompassing a variety of social acts that are made acceptable as religious acts or practices within a religious social field. Thus, I am concerned with behaviors that strictly speaking seem to not completely fulfill or reproduce the religiously defined norms, but the performance of which are nevertheless made acceptable, or at least tolerable, as religious acts.

### *Trajectories of Religious Acts*

Focusing on different trajectories of religious acts and behavior allows us to talk of Muslim religiosity as individualized, negotiable, and as providing opportunities for creativity. At the same time, it makes it possible to avoid falling into the trap of dismantling the relevance of existing strictures or

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<sup>10</sup> Asad contends that "even where traditional practices appear to the anthropologists to be imitative of what has gone before, it will be the practitioners' conceptions of what is apt performance, and of how the past is related to present practices, that will be crucial for tradition, not the apparent repetition of an old form" (Asad 1986, 15). My aim here is to make use of ethnographic material in order to examine how Asad's mainly theoretical argument works in the everyday life of Muslims.



religious discourses within which the youth situate their agency in order to be perceived as particular kinds of religious subjects. It is the Self that brings the religious rules into life (Cohen 1994, 50). Religious rules and norms are pursued or performed by different individuals in different ways at different times. However, it does not follow that such variety of actions is religiously incorrect or religiously flawed. Rather, whether or not an action is religiously proximate depends upon how it is situated—by the actor and socially relevant others—in relation to the religious discourse provided by the social field.

In what follows, I present four different trajectories for defining an act, behavior, or desire as religious: “effort,” “exceptions,” “contesting knowledge,” and “the use of multiple references.” This is not intended to represent a complete range of possible ways to interact with religious knowledge and social surroundings, but rather to illustrate available trajectories of religiously defined acts. I emphasize that these categories of social practice are neither mutually exclusive nor temporally or contextually distinct.

### *Trajectory 1: Effort*

The aspiration to “stay on the straight path” is ridden with several challenges for the youth in Berlin. These are reflected in concerns voiced by individuals during meetings about not being able to perform the five daily prayers, losing patience with a younger brother, or listening to haram music. One way to justify the failure to live up to the religious norms is to demonstrate that an effort was made. In the following conversation between Fatima (31) and me in her home, Fatima talked extensively about the importance of effort:

“Many young Muslims in Germany try to do everything perfectly,” Fatima explained. “It can be too much for someone, you know. They set the goals very high. I therefore try not to set the goals too high. Like one sister in MJ in Stuttgart was from a very strict family and started in MJ. She was very concerned that we be correct, wondering why no one in MJ used a long coat, for example, which we should. She was very (insistent) that we should be correctly dressed. And then one day she ran away from her parents’ place, started to wear (Western) clothes and make-up, and took her headscarf off. No one understood why. Then, I met her in the street, and since I have been taught that we should be tolerant and try not to judge, I asked if we should sit down for tea. And then I asked her; she used to be so concerned that we should dress properly and such [why had she suddenly changed]? And she said that we will never manage to live like hundred percent correct Muslim anyway! ‘But we should at least try,’ I replied.” Fatima continued with the

story of her brother. He wore a beard for a long time, she explained. “When you are a Muslim you should have a beard, like Mohammad, it should be two centimeters long. And he had like, all around (his chin), but not long. And then after the divorce he took it all off, he shaved completely.” When Fatima asked why he had shaved it off, he said, “well, the one before wasn’t hundred percent Muslim either!” Fatima maintained that many feel that they must either practice Islam correctly or not at all. “They forget that they are human, that they should try as much as possible. Always improve themselves, knowing that they can never be perfect.” She insisted that to her, “it is a matter of trying, to continue to try the whole time! (...) They are so strict with themselves, although it is difficult.”

A little later, she related that, “there is this silly story, a story of the woman who could not pronounce the letter ‘H’ in Arabic, and so instead of saying *Herif* (“Man” in Turkish) she said *Alif* all the time, and so when she died she had this word on her mind the whole time, ‘cause she had tried so hard correcting it. And then in front of Paradise she was asked who is your book etc. and then she was saying this word the whole time, but then Allah said ‘It is fine, send her in.’ ‘Cause she had made the effort—that’s what is the most important. Effort.” She continued, “we have the alarm clock on for the Morning Prayer.” Her husband always got up, but she did not always manage to get out of bed. At those times, she would think, “ah, when I didn’t wake up, then I don’t have to do it [the prayer], ‘cause sometimes Prophet Muhammad slept in and then that was ok. And also in the beginning with [her infant] I often couldn’t do the night prayer. That was too hard. (...) But he [her husband] always thinks that I am terrible, so lazy. He always gets up; always reads one page of the Quran every night. I try, but then after one, two or three days, I can’t anymore. But I make an effort, at least.” She added, “I am always too late; when praying at the meetings, it’s always, ‘where is Fatima? Get her out of bed.’ And I, half tottering, hurry to get my clothes on. Hopeless.” She laughed.

The youth often admitted to neglecting to get up for the Morning Prayer or passing over the prayers during the day. Whereas the behavior of Prophet Muhammad is the ideal, Fatima called attention to the impossibility of completely living up to these ideals, reasoning that as humans they cannot possibly be as perfect in their religious performance as the Prophet. Fatima positioned her brother’s beard within a religious discourse. Many Muslims consider that the beard, in a similar shape as the Prophet wore it, is a sign of virtue.<sup>11</sup> At the MJD presentations, the Prophet was portrayed not only

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<sup>11</sup> The status of the beard is disputed among Islamic scholars. In recent years the beard has not only considered as a sign of virtue, but also as a sign of Muslim conservatism or fundamentalism (Fadil 2008, 153). A Muslim journalist who I met in Berlin suggested that the style of a man’s beard can indicate a range of social meanings, including whether a person is fundamentalist in his belief, merely religious, politically oriented, or just likes the beard.

as a role model, but also as the perfect Muslim. Furthermore, Fatima's reference to the young woman in Stuttgart demonstrates that it is sometimes best to modify one's cultivation of the moral codes since being too strict can lead to the other extreme, namely being discouraged and abandoning everything. Failing to live up to ideals and to perform all one's religious obligations can be partly excused by referring to effort. The sign of an effort demonstrates that the person is motivated, and that the failure to perform the ideal is not about unwillingness, idleness, or carelessness.<sup>12</sup>

### *Trajectory 2: Exception*

Sometimes young people pursue social behavior that is not considered Islamically correct within their religious community, but which they try to legitimate by arguing that "they do it like that" or "it's like that with us." As the following anecdote demonstrates, customs and social behaviors in their daily life, and during special occasions like weddings, were sometimes situated within cultural or ethnic discourses:

A 16-year old girl from Bosnia told me that she kisses her cousin on the cheek when greeting him. She said that kissing one's cousin on the cheek is not religiously correct as he is a potential marriage partner, a topic that the MJD weekly meeting some weeks earlier had dealt with extensively. Yet, she added that this is not so bad, "cause in Bosnia we are not allowed to marry our cousins anyway. It is [true] that in Islam you are allowed, but with us, it is not allowed. I grew up like that."

Furthermore, marriage celebrations and henna parties (engagement parties) sometimes comprise a mixture of religious, cultural, and traditional elements:

In the course of a conversation, three young women (16–19 years old) laughingly declared that they wanted certain celebratory elements in their weddings, like "this last girl's night out, which Germans do" or "I would like to have this tradition that you are carried around the village." A moment later, all of them added that they know it is "about tradition," and "not Islam," but that they would still like to include these elements.

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<sup>12</sup> This is in sharp contrast to the women that Mahmood (2005) discusses in her ethnography. She found that the most common answer was that a consistent failure to perform the five prayers regularly (which I must add was not the case with Fatima) will result in being sent to hell in the Hereafter. She also discusses a situation where the women argue that the failure is linked to the "vigilance with which one conducts one's daily affairs and the effort one exerts in orienting these towards securing God's pleasure" (Mahmood 1998, 110). However, the idea that the desire to pray must be cultivated and created is present both in Cairo and in Berlin.

By displaying knowledge that certain acts or desires are not correct or based on Islam, the women legitimate these behaviors or desires within the religious social field. In this process, the individual confirms her knowledge of the distinction between pure Islam and tradition or culture by simultaneously stressing that “we do it like that” where “we” are the ethnic social field. I suspect that many youth felt the need to verbally emphasize their knowledge that a certain habit or tradition is not from Islam in order to present themselves as religious subjects who take the distinction between a pure and cultural Islam seriously, even if they decided to perform it differently.

Another common way that incorrect actions were rationalized was by confessing to being “too weak” and, once the illicit activity had concluded, performing a ritual wash (*wudu'*) in order to “come closer to God again” or become religiously clean:

I visited Ines (20) in her home and we listened to German hip hop and pop music, including Xavier Naidoo, in her room.<sup>13</sup> She confessed that, “it is a sin to listen to such music in Islam, but I am too weak. I have to listen to it sometimes.” She added that she would need to do *wudu'* afterwards, because there were so many bad words in the song.

The ritual wash *wudu'* is normally performed when a ritual impurity (*hadath*) has occurred, and before praying. According to Islamic belief, impurity is a condition brought about in a variety of ways, including morally neutral and biologically unavoidable acts, such as falling asleep or going to the bathroom (Murata and Chittick 1994, 13). Here, however, Ines talked about performing *wudu'* in order to become ritually pure (*tahara*) after a specific emotional and moral state, which could close the gap between doing an act which made her feel like she was straying away from God and the correct state of being.

At times, silence or the attempt to hide failures or flaws was seen as the best way to deal with erroneous behaviors. Samira (18) told me that the reason she was so silent during the meetings was because she was afraid to say something that might “not be correct.” The desire to present oneself as a good Muslim and to be accepted as a worthy member of this community of practice can lead to impression management tactics, like withholding information about one’s private life, which could appear to contradict the norms valued within the group. Impression management is particularly

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<sup>13</sup> Xavier Naidoo is a German singer and songwriter of South African descent whose style includes soul, R&B, and hip hop.

important for newer members who may not yet have achieved the skills, knowledge, and piety that provide symbolic capital within this social field. Activities that are not considered religiously correct were not always talked about or justified, but merely performed among trusted friends who were not going to evaluate each other according to the ideals they were obviously breaking, as in the following example:

On the way to one of the yearly MJD summer camps held in south Germany, the brothers sat at the front of the bus, and the sisters sat at the back. One of the girls (17) said quietly to her close friend and me, “that’s where we should be sitting, where Fadwa and Leila are sitting!” [They were sitting on the first row of women after the brothers]. “We could amuse ourselves with the boys,” she whispered jokingly, pointing to one of the boys, “nice ass, I want to take a picture.” But she had to do it without the other girls noticing and ultimately she failed, since someone was constantly standing in the way.

Being close friends, the two girls trusted each other (and me) not to judge or talk behind each other’s backs about what would be considered irreligious behavior. In this space, the youth differentiated between individuals in the group, and some of the women were considered stricter than others. Consequently, not every woman was invited to all home parties and some of the more outspoken youth tended to be less blunt in the presence of women whom they considered more serious or strict. The joke Nadia told during the Aquiqua celebration in the VICUM hall (see the introduction to this chapter) demonstrates that the youth try to judge whether or not someone will find certain behaviors acceptable or even amusing, and this can become a test where one risks losing face. That said, sharing one’s weaknesses was also part of the meetings, as discussed in chapter 4, although few talked in detail about the stages of their lives prior to their having started to actively practice Islam.

### *Trajectory 3: Contesting Knowledge*

Contesting knowledge is a religious trajectory where one casts doubt on whether an utterance or action is actually true or religiously defined. As such, one challenges the obligation to relate to the practice or custom in one’s own daily life. Most of the time, the youth referred to religious authorities and sources when they argued for or against a statement or practice. As there is room for different interpretations within Islam, this frequently caused internal discussions, but such disagreements did not constitute a dismantling or individualizing of Islam as a discursive tradition. On the contrary, as Asad contends, “argument and conflict over

the form and significance of practices are [...] a natural part of any Islamic tradition". The following event illustrates the negotiations and internal discussions present within the religious community:

During the annual three-day summer camp in 2004, several of the Berliner youth and I attended a seminar on "Women in Islam," which was only open to female participants. A woman in her late forties, together with a female German convert in her sixties, were invited as experts to discuss concerns particular to young Muslim women. After a short presentation in a room crowded with around a hundred listeners, the floor was opened for questions. One of the youth asked whether she could use tampons or not before marrying. The elderly woman claimed it would be better if she did not, because the tampon could harm her hymen. Protesting openly, Janna (19) argued that it should not matter whether the tampon damages the hymen, since the hymen should not be important in itself. Rather, Janna argued, the actual importance of the hymen is that one should not have sex before marriage, and this was a thing between each individual and Allah. The older woman agreed with Janna, but maintained that if the tampon destroyed the hymen, there would be difficulties in proving her virginity to the family and the husband. Janna responded that if her husband-to-be did not believe her when she said that she had not had sex before marriage then she would not want to marry that guy anyway! The discussion ended without agreement among the women.

The women understood and accepted that the MJD space was open for debate and disagreement, and that consensus did not have to prevail. This controversial conversation is only one example of discussions, negotiations, and disagreements within the religious space. Here Janna, a younger woman, dismissed the older women's knowledge as unacceptable. Janna was particularly outspoken, self-confident, and reflexive, and openly contested generational hierarchies. Furthermore, Janna did not defer to age as the marker of authority in religion, but contributed her own style of argumentation reflecting her knowledge and personal thoughts on the matter. In following the youth over a longer period of time, I noticed an increase in confidence in their own abilities to answer questions or put forth arguments as their knowledge of religious norms progressed.

In this critical intervention, neither Janna nor the elderly woman referred to religious sources. Janna ultimately rejected the importance of physically proving to outsiders whether she had complied with the religious duty of abstinence before marriage, as she saw this as a personal religious obligation, and her individual duty to fulfill. Janna did not deny that having sex before marriage was incorrect from an Islamic point of view. She did not contest the principle of virginity, nor did she argue for gender equality in terms of extending the same rules regarding intercourse

before marriage to men. Rather, she challenged the older woman's ideas about how this principle should be implemented, along with the assumption that she should physically prove her virginity by keeping her hymen intact. Her critique was directed towards the idea that she had to prove she had not had sex before marriage to her future husband and his family, as well as to her own family. To Janna, this was a matter for her own conscience, and ultimately a matter between herself and Allah.

This conversation illustrates the general individualization of religiosity, which scholars have previously pointed to (Roy 2004). However, this individual reflection is mediated through broad religiously defined arguments. Thus, it points to how disagreement can exist without this meaning that each individual produces their own singular, or individualized, line of Islamic reasoning.

#### *Trajectory 4: Using Multiple References*

One result of the increased religious education, familiarity with the canonical sources, and emphasis on self-reflection and personal duty in Islam, is that the young women are empowered to actively pursue religious behavior and to argue against certain perspectives. Self-reflection and an understanding of the texts become part of being a Good Muslim. When explaining to other Muslims why they dismissed a particular religious practice, most of the women referred to religious authorities in their explanations. The following event illustrates this:

During an MJD weekly meeting, three girls and I sat outside in the bookstore while the others prayed in the main room. Alesha (15) offered us sweet gummy bears from Haribo as Latifa (17) asked skeptically "are you eating that? Isn't there gelatin in it?" Alesha seemed to have been expecting this question and told Latifa that it is fine, "cause it has been through so much processing." Latifa took the candy bag from her and read on the back of it. She said, "here it says gelatin." "Yes", Alesha answered, "me and my sisters didn't eat it for a long time, but in the past few weeks we started eating it again. 'Cause we asked a *sheikh* [Islamic scholar] about it, and he said that 'cause it is so processed, it is not really pork anymore." She agreed that it was debatable, but she ate it anyway. "Don't you want some?" She again offered the bag to Latifa, who was reluctant. "I don't know," Latifa hesitantly replied without taking the candy, though Alesha reassured her, "it's so good! We've been eating them again for three weeks. And my mother was like, 'are you sure that it is not *haram*'?" They had reassured her that it was not.

Alesha's older sister, Hamida (17), joined us and confirmed that they had started to eat Haribo again. "Cause we asked a *sheikh* and he said that it is so changed in the mix that there is no pork left in it," she added as an



explanation. “That means that you can eat all gelatin,” Latifa commented, half doubting and half questioning. Alesha clarified, “yes, when it has been processed. We have been told that it is ok, ‘cause it is so processed. We didn’t just ask one *sheikh*, but several. Do you know the *sheikh* [his name]?” Latifa nodded. Alesha added, “he says that we are allowed to eat it.” When Latifa commented that Green Palace, where they were standing, also sold gummy candies without any gelatin, the two sisters contended that, “it is so expensive!” The conversation drew to an end as we were called into the main room to start with the day’s presentation.

Although there seems to be much individual self-reflection and perhaps even some pragmatism in this situation, Alesha and Hamida referred to an authority (a *sheikh*) when justifying eating Haribo, which was generally considered *haram* among the youth. Rather than considering this as an individualization of religious practices, I understand this type of practice as an individual reflection around what to dismiss and what to accept, which has to be situated in relation to a particular rhetoric. The two sisters explained their action by referring to religious authorities in order for their action to be viewed as legitimate within the religious social field. This argument partly reassures the Self, and partly confirms for others who are evaluating the behavior that the action is religiously correct. Acquiring familiarity with the religious sources and the variety of ways to make legitimate arguments improves the youths’ comprehension of which actions are or can be made acceptable, their rights and obligations, and the possible scope for creative action.

Notably, by the end of the conversation, Latifa no longer contested the sisters’ actions, but at the same time she did not help herself to the Haribo. Latifa might accept Alesha and Hamida’s reasons for their decision, without accepting or trusting it as legitimate enough to guide her own actions. This exemplifies both the possibility for different interpretations and interactions with the religious rules, but also the necessity of situating one’s decision within a particular form of argument.

Among the youth, I noticed that what could be viewed as an individual orientation towards certain religious ideals was nevertheless frequently situated within Muslim tradition through certain styles of argumentation. For example, while on our way to a park for a picnic, I walked down a street on a summer day with Nawar (17) and Somaya (17):

The two young women talked about how to dress for the celebration the day after, including what color of dress and shoes they were going to wear. Nawar turned to Somaya, saying, “you can wear the same color of socks as your sandals. That’s what I usually do.” Somaya told Nawar that she doesn’t use socks in her sandals, to which Nawar exclaimed, “sandals without socks is

*haram!*” Somaya said, surprised, “what? I have never heard that before.” Nawar explained, “yes. Once I went out without socks in my sandals, bare-foot, and then my brother said, ‘Hey, what are you doing, that is *haram*.” Somaya sighs, “sorry, hey, but I am not doing that, I have so many sandals. I just bought a new pair.” Then Somaya asked which school of Islamic thought permits not wearing socks, and said that she would follow that school of law on this issue.

Although at first nonchalantly brushing aside the correction by Nawar, Somaya followed up by asking which school of religious law she could follow in order for her action not to be religiously flawed. Though this might seem like a banal example, my point is that Somaya’s choice to not wear socks can become religiously acceptable by referring to a school of thought that makes her action religiously legitimate.<sup>14</sup> What at first may appear as an individual practice is, by reference to Islamic law, again situated within a religious framework.

Mass education, Eickelman and Piscatori (1996, 111) contend, has opened up the interpretation of religious texts and authorization. Access to knowledge has created new spaces of religious contestation (Mandaville 2000, 283), and youth learn religious arguments to support their choices and comportment. There are, of course, limits as to which exceptions will be deemed acceptable within this religious community in Berlin. It is difficult, or probably impossible to legitimate eating pork, drinking alcohol, or openly having a sexual relationship outside of marriage. Further, listeners or viewers do not uncritically accept reference to a religious rule in a discussion or presentation. Perhaps paradoxically, the new spaces of religious contestation simultaneously increase the need for authoritative sources.<sup>15</sup> Muslims compare answers provided by different schools of law, and interpretations provided by different Islamic communities. By increasing their knowledge, the youth can compare religious interpretations and choose between them, which partly strengthens their moral autonomy.

There are certain rules and customs in Islam that the majority of youth did not wish to implement in their lives. For example, the fact that it is permissible for a man to have four wives in Islam was an issue that was often raised when debating the position of women in Islam. There are ways to deal with this principle without rejecting or contesting it, thus

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<sup>14</sup> Notice here also the role of Nawar’s brother in guiding and ultimately forming Nawar’s behavior.

<sup>15</sup> Thus, as discussed briefly in chapter 4, the idea that an increase in literacy and objectified consciousness reduces the need for young people to turn to religious authorities to make sense of their religion must be modified.

without promoting spiritual cherry-picking, but also without feeling obligated to personally implement it. The following discussion about wives in Islam at an MJD meeting illustrates potential ways to deal with controversial themes in Islam:

It was a very warm summer day and it had been warm the whole weekend. I sat on the subway on the way to an MJD meeting, reading a book, as Ismail (16) came over to me. She kissed my cheeks and sat down on the plastic seats. She was tired, she told me, as she had just been sleeping on the *S-bahn* (subway) and also because she had not sleep much over the weekend, having spent the night in the mosque for the *Qiyam* (the Night Prayer).<sup>16</sup> She recalled the school in Egypt where she spent two years, and how the teachers would punish her when she was tired. As we walked along the street towards the MJD location, we saw Leila (21) standing outside the door. "Wow," Ismail exclaimed when seeing Leila's motorbike. Fascinated, Ismail wanted to sit on the motorbike, which Leila had acquired from her brother. Leila was going to take her driving test soon, and she told her, "you have to do a lot of *du'a* for me so that I pass the examination of the driver's license." Fadwa (23) arrived in her car with ice cream. Since it was the last day of school the following day, she had thought she would not do the regular program. "Have you prayed?" she asked. They conducted the prayer together, after which the youth read from the Koran. A younger girl, Alesha (15), did not want to read a sura from the Koran for the second round, "cause the *sura* is too long." Fadwa suggested that she share it with Ismail. She will recite half of the *sura* and Ismail the rest. Alesha was finally convinced and read it. Afterwards, she continued by reading the German translation.

People were tired and not enthusiastic, and Fadwa tried to be ironic to ease the atmosphere. She then talked about the *Qiyam* in the mosque that weekend, where there had also been a nice presentation: "You missed something," she said. Fadwa continued talking about the Sunday presentation, which had been about the wives of Prophet Muhammad. "Fatima was the most loved child of Prophet Muhammad and it was like when she was sad, he was sad and when she was happy, he was happy, and that only by seeing her, he forgot everything. And then it was asked whether it is like that with us today—whether we forget everything when we see our mother and father?" She continued to talk about having more wives. "It is after all allowed in Islam. But there are certain conditions; that the man is strong enough to economically provide for them, and that he is able to treat them equally." The girls stressed this aspect and many expressed doubts that a man would be able to treat his wives equally. Leila inserted, "there are occasions when the wife also prefers the arrangement. (...) The *sheikh* was talking about that in the presentation yesterday. And he said that the Europeans criticize the

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<sup>16</sup> Literally: "standing." The reference to *Qiyam* here implies to spend the night together with other Muslims, usually in a mosque, reading the Quran, listening to religious presentations and praying the *Qiyam al-Layl* (the voluntary "night prayer") together.

Prophet Muhammad a lot, saying that he married so many women, that he (liked women a lot). But it wasn't like that. When he was 25 years old, he married a woman 15 years older than himself! And then, 25 years later he married the next! And he still really loved her the most, even if she was older."

Hamida inserted eagerly, "the Europeans always criticize the Prophet, 'cause they misunderstand it [his marriages]." Fadwa agreed, "and he [the *sheikh*] was saying that many men have more than one woman anyway—that they have at least a wife and a lover. Many have four wives anyway: one they have a legal contract with [being married], one secretary, one for the evenings and one for the weekends." Some of the girls laughed. Leila argued, "sometimes it is really better! Some prefer it. After war and catastrophe, there are more women than men, and instead of these women becoming prostitutes and having children outside marriage, it is better that a man marries them and they get support like that." Fadwa turned to Alesha, who was frowning, and told her, "you should not look like you think it is disgusting, don't be so one-sided about it. You have to think broader than that. Marriage is more than only that [sex]. There are a lot of aspects to marriage. (You should think) that the ones who are able to have more than one wife have come further [in their thinking], they have managed to think higher. It is also like a duty to take on an extra wife, so that she (will have a decent life)."

Amal (22) disagreed decisively, "yes, but then. It is not always like that! My husband [who is an imam] was once in Italy and there the men were all talking about having a second wife, and were all very excited about it, looking at the young girls. And then my husband, he was their imam, said that if you want to do your (duty), then there is this woman, she is a widow and alone and she needs someone. Who wants to marry her? And then none of the men answered—then suddenly they were not so eager." Fadwa agreed that men do not always think correctly about it. Leila argued, "it is like that in Islam, it is part of it and it is allowed [to have four wives], and we have to accept that it is like that. Allah has made (it/us) like that. But it doesn't mean that we have to accept it."

Amal emphasized that it is problematic in Germany, "cause it's not allowed, and so only one woman can be registered, and then you cannot treat all your wives equally. Like one of them will not be legally married, and the children will not receive (child benefits)." As a result, Amal continued, one of them would live without legal status. Hamida asked whether it would be possible to write something in the marriage contract about this. Fadwa responded that she did that when she got married. Before the wedding, she talked with her husband-to-be and said that she would not like it if he wanted more wives. Hajja (23), who recently married an imam, now added, "me too. Like respectfully. I said that I know it is allowed, and I respect that, and if you want to do that, I accept that, but in that case, I am not in." Amal joined in, "I also talked to my husband about it before, that there was no way that I would accept that!"

Notably, Fadwa stressed that men are allowed to have more wives according to Islam. She actively tried to make the younger ones understand and

accept this element of Islam, which is frequently criticized by non-Muslims and is a point of contention for critical voices against Islam. At first, I was surprised that Fadwa, who has grown up in Germany and has a university degree, so readily accepted this part of Islam. Yet, their answers exemplify how their style of argument relates to Islam as a discursive tradition, while at the same time refusing to incorporate certain Islamic practices in their daily life. Significantly, Leila and Fadwa acknowledged that polygamy is allowed in Islam, and thus did not hold the position that one can simply reject what one disapproves of. None of the women questioned the validity of the religious norm, and they all viewed the critique of the Prophet on the part of Europeans as a misunderstanding of his actions and the ideal behind polygamy. Yet, later in the discussion it becomes clear that Fadwa would never accept this religious custom in her own life. As her own actions demonstrate, the norms do not prescribe that the young women must accept polygamy in their lives. Notably, all of the married young women in the room, two of whom were married to imams, had written into their marriage contract that they would not accept a second wife. All of them advanced this claim without contesting the actual right of the man as provided by Islam, but instead focused on their own personal unwillingness to accept this practice in their lives.

During the debate the women also asserted that the legal reality in Germany renders it impossible to follow all the Islamically defined restrictions and obligations for polygamy that could make it religiously correct (meaning treating one's wives equally). Notably, none of the women expressed sadness or regret that polygamy is not allowed in Germany, but rather seem to happily accept this German law. Thus, drawing on a wide range of religious knowledge and rights opens up possibilities for excluding certain religious customs from one's personal life, without contesting Islamic norms.

### *Pluralization of Religious Acts and Behavior*

#### *Alteration of Acceptable Performances*

The authority of practices and utterances in MJD were contingent on the youths' relation to more general authoritative discourses. Certain imams, preachers, and scholars were more admired than others in the youths' search for religious direction. Seeking answers for actions in their life, the youth would sometimes ask more than one authority in order to hear different opinions. New experiences, authoritative information, or age could

to some extent alter their perception of what was acceptable behavior. According to Julie (28), Aishegül (31), being one of the elders and considered to be highly knowledgeable about Islam, played a prominent role in shaping ideas concerning male-female friendship among MJD participants. Julie recalled that at one point, Aishegül had said it was not Islamically correct to have male friends. However, at a later stage I overheard the following conversation between Aishegül and Somaya (17):

Somaya explained to Aishegül that she had come to better know one of the brothers during the MJD Paris trip. Aishegül responded that it is good that they should also get to know the brothers, “‘cause they are also our sisters and brothers.” Aishegül continued by saying that she used to think that one could not be friends with the brothers, but then she asked an Islamic scholar and he explained that it was not necessary to be that extreme. As a rule, she had stopped talking to brothers when the conversation became personal, since she didn’t believe that was right. The Islamic scholar had told her that “it is allowed to be friends and to talk, as long as it is done in the right way and at the right place.” Somaya asked, “For example where?” Aishegül thought about it and was hesitant, “I don’t know. Not in a café, ‘cause people can see you and think that there is something between you. Perhaps in a mosque, I would think. Hmm, no....” Aishegül changed her mind, adding that even more than a café, the mosques can be a place where people will think that there is something romantic between them. Finally, she said, “I don’t know. It is for sure ok to call to chat and if you need help or something.”

Aishegül modified her perception of what is acceptable by talking to several imams, which led her to change her understanding of what is most correct. The internal diversity of religious authority in Islam makes it possible for practicing Muslims to choose among different interpretations (Yükleyen 2007), without this process entailing a fragmentation of Islam. Importantly, within this religious community, Aishegül’s considerations of which interpretation should be followed matter, because she is older, has a high level of religious knowledge, and is viewed as pious. In sum, Aishegül’s reputation represents a symbolic capital that endows her vision of the social world with some authority. Noticeably, Somaya accepted Aishegül’s reference to an Islamic scholar (without asking for the name) and Aishegül’s evaluation of this knowledge as valid. In other situations with peers or less knowledgeable youth, I often heard Somaya inquire about the sources of knowledge before she accepted or dismissed a statement as religiously valid. The German convert Julie suggested that religious knowledge is often received more uncritically when it comes from someone with a Turkish background than when it comes from someone

with a German (a convert) background. My impression is that in this space the binding power of religious authority is not merely related to age, but is a combination of the sources used, the particular person's (perceived) piety, style of argument, and knowledge of the religious texts and interpretations. Competence in quoting from the Koran or referring to *ahadith* generated respect and authority, and sometimes brought discussion to a halt. However, more research is needed on the process through which youth in European cities come to see particular sources as authoritative.<sup>17</sup>

The latter part of the conversation shows that though Aishegül argues that it is religiously acceptable to have male friends, how this is conceptualized matters, as socially relevant others in the religious social field may still judge such actions negatively and not as apt religious performances. The difficulty that Aishegül had in finding a "decent" place where Somaya could meet someone of the opposite gender also demonstrates that personal intent is insufficient in deciding what social activities to perform; how (Muslim) outsiders (might) assess or judge one's social acts also matters.

### *(Per)forming the Religious Self*

I would like to take my argument in a different direction. As this chapter has illustrated, the youth by no means reproduce all religious norms in their social practice. They demonstrate creativity in the process of crafting their religious Self. Are the presented trajectories acts that, when performed by these women, contest the norms or ultimately subvert them?

Even if power, discourse, and ideology shape subject positions, these forces do not control how individuals take up or relate to these subject positions at various times. Furthermore, they do not control how individuals engage in transforming discourses of power (Moore 2007, 41). Just as an individual's process of identification is a perpetually unfolding story, the

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<sup>17</sup> Who represents an authority for youth living in Europe and how this authority is established is an under-researched area of study. I believe that German public discourse exaggerates the influence and authority of the imams. See Caeiro (2005) who looks at Muslim religious authority in Western Europe as expressed via the production of fatwas (formal legal judgment or view in Islamic law). He explores how this practice forms and is formed by media settings, state institutions, intergenerational change and gender dynamics. The edited volume "Women, Leadership and Mosques" (2012) by Bano & Kalmbach (eds.) argues that women base their claims to authority on a number of factors, including knowledge attained by formal religious training, a pious reputation, a charismatic style, family ties to religious leadership or education, and a dedication to religious outreach work.



process of crafting the Self never comes to a halt. These trajectories show the possibilities for action available to religious subjects, where the intention is neither to challenge nor to alter religious norms. This should not be understood as merely an individualization of Islam; rather, it is a creative negotiation of norms and represents ways to resolve the tensions and discrepancies that make up daily life in Berlin. When situated within a religious group where one's actions and individual person are (un)consciously measured against religious norms, it becomes necessary to position one's actions within or in relation to how one ought to behave.

Rather than positing these trajectories of religious acts as resistance, we might examine them as creative bargains or subtle performances in subjects' "discursive strategies" (Kondo 1990, 227), where religious meanings are (re)appropriated and played out in relation to religious orthodoxy. This does not simply create a space of resistance, nor is it a repetition of norms. These trajectories demonstrate the possibilities for individual creative agency in a particular space, and as such, they enable individuals to situate themselves as religious subjects through what might appear as contradictions and incongruities. Furthermore, they indicate the various ways of crafting a religious subject and how the "doing of norms" is performed even when the youth are not stringently replicating the norms. These various expressions of agency are positioned within the discursive field of norms and ideals, which consequently legitimate behavior as religious and the actors as specific religious subjects within a religious social field.<sup>18</sup>

A religious identity includes bodily enactments, which comprise "signifying practices" that are mediated through knowledge, exercises, reflections, and experiences. A religious subject may be individually self-determined and self-reflective, but the acting out of her religious Self must be understood as mediated through other religious bodies and the existing orthodoxy to which she decides to orient her religious Self. Through performativity, the individual continuously struggles to craft the Self in ways that move closer to the ideal religious subject, that is, moves closer to being religiously proximate. In this process the individual simultaneously

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<sup>18</sup> In this discussion, the question remains that "if ideology and power are not monolithic, if culture is not simply determining and if becoming a self is not simply a matter of socialization, of learning the codes of a particular cultural context, then what makes individuals identify with certain subject positions, and construct a sense of self through them (Moore, 1994; Ewing, 1998; Battaglia, 1995)?" (Moore 2007, 41). See Moore (2007) for an extensive discussion on this topic, in which she argues for the need to include the role of fantasy, desire and unconscious motivation.

becomes part of and affirms her identification with a particular religious group. A Muslim identity is not a universal or substantive subjectivity. Rather, this work demonstrates that the youth are creatively crafting themselves, constantly becoming, in specific, located situations (see Kondo 1990). The performance of a “correct” religious identity needs to be learned and practiced without becoming automatic or a habit in a Bourdieuan way. The performance of this religious identity is, at the same time, the expression and formation of the Self.

As discussed earlier, learning to distinguish between culture and religion is one of the means through which the subject is constituted as a specific religious subject. At the same time, there are also elements of performance involved, as individuals frequently openly contest what is correct or not in order to show their proficiency in distinguishing between these two categories. This act is considered crucial in the crafting of the Self as a truthful or authentic religious subject. Inquiring about where a particular knowledge originates from reflects a process of self-reflection, and the individualizing of religious practice. However, when asking others where their knowledge derives from, the youth demonstrate the importance of being able to distinguish between culture, tradition, ethnicity and Islam. The references to religious sources when explaining what is allowed or not, confirms that the speaker knows this difference and that she recognizes the need to be critical of sources of knowledge. Furthermore, asking for information about sources before accepting the religious legitimacy of another’s views is a way that women, in particular, position themselves as particular religious subjects. Through the MJD meetings, the youth acquire knowledge about how to become proper Muslims. This includes the performative aspects of being a proper as well as “correct” Muslim by providing what are regarded as religiously legitimate justifications for behavior.

### *Individualization of Religious Identity?*

What impact does looking at the process of how particular behavior is legitimized have on the way we look at religiosity? Are we seeing an individualization of religion or an individual selection of religious norms? Several scholars writing about Muslim youth refer to an individual appropriation of religious tradition and a process of individualization.<sup>19</sup> The so-called pluralism and individualization of religion among young

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<sup>19</sup> This is particularly the case for those writing about Muslims in France. See in particular Amiraux (2000), Babès (1996), Boubekeur (2004), Cesari (1998, 2002), Roy (2004) and Saint-Blancat (1997).

Muslims born in European societies is commonly explained in terms of an increased secularization of the youth and the impact of the European social environment on the youths' religious identity.<sup>20</sup> This view, I argue, fails to recognize Islam as a discursive tradition within which individuals seek to legitimate their acts or behavior as religiously apt or proximate. Furthermore, it fails to recognize that religious practices are rarely singular, individual acts situated outside of a religious social field, however near or far that religious field may be.

Clearly, Muslim youth who are socialized in Europe are presented with a variety of allegiances and ideals, including secularization and individualization (Klinkhammer 2003). Ulrich Beck and others have suggested that individualization in contemporary European societies include, on the one hand, "the disintegration of previously existing social forms – for example the increasing fragility of such categories as class and social status, gender roles, family, neighborhood etc.," and on the other, "new demands, controls and constraints [that] are being imposed on individuals" (Beck 2002, 2).<sup>21</sup> Just like there has been a decline of communities based on class, status, and voting behavior (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), scholars have suggested that Christian religious communities are in decline. Davie coined the expression "believing without belonging," which characterizes "the persistence of the sacred in contemporary society despite the undeniable decline in churchgoing" (Davie 1994, 94).<sup>22</sup> This process of privatization and individualization of Christian religious practices has consequences for the internal functioning of the religious sphere. It weakens both religious authority and the feeling of obligation regarding, for example, church attendance. Further effects of individualization include the lowering of social status, a reduction in the number of clerics, and the decline of adherence to moral values of sacrifice or discipline. This can also be seen

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<sup>20</sup> This includes in particular Amiraux (2000), Boubekeur (2005), and Cesari (2000, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> As a consequence, Beck argues, the "normal biography thus becomes the 'elective biography', the 'do-it yourself biography' [which] is always a risk biography' – a state of permanent endangerment" (Beck 2002, 3). Zigmun Bauman has likewise suggested that: "Nowadays everything seems to conspire against ... lifelong projects, permanent bonds, eternal alliances, immutable identities. I cannot build for the long term on my job, my profession or even my abilities. (...) togetherness lasts no longer than the gratification of one of the partners, ties are from the outset only 'until further notice'" (Bauman 1993, 17).

<sup>22</sup> Grace Davie (1994) also coined the idea of "belonging without believing," which she calls "vicarious religion" in relation to Scandinavian countries where a large part of the population remain members of the Lutheran church without attending church services. Consequently, she suggests that religion is only performed by an active minority on behalf of a much larger number.

through individual lifestyles in which self-realization prevails, people are more mobile, and there is a decline in inherited identities (*ibid.*).

One of the main outcomes resulting from the individualization and privatization of religion is a shift from religion imagined as a principle of heteronomy (which broadly means submission to governance by external control) to religion imagined as an identity and as supporting individuals in an increasingly uncertain society. The individualization of religious experiences of Muslims is meant to capture the idea that religious experiences have become personal and subjective in their endorsement and composition (Fadil 2008). The idea is that modern subjects decide whether to be religious, as well as when and how to be religious. Religious belief, then, is no longer fixed, but experiential and expressive.

As I have briefly discussed, the perception of individualization has also found resonance among scholars studying the Muslim population in Europe. It has been argued that the main style of individualization among the Muslim population in Europe is the attempt to unite personal freedom with the conviction of a type of transcendence defined as relative, meaning regulated in relation to the majority society's constrictions (Cesari 2005b, 5). Likewise, Amiraux (2003, 85) talks about the "feminization" of Islam in Europe, a situation in which Muslim women choose, assume, and assert faith. She argues that the practices are no longer "inherited," but are "reinvented" by their actors (*ibid.*, 89). According to Amiraux (2000, 120), the individualization of religion among youth can be seen in the individualization of their decision-making. She perceives this to be a structural outcome of their daily social organization, the associative environment in which they are socialized, and the available modes of participation.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Roy (2000) suggests that in the plural urban space, Islam is largely an individual affair where the community is not given, but must be constructed and invented.

I agree with Amiraux (2003) that the decision to be a practicing Muslim is actively taken by the individual. Yet I contest the idea that the decision to identify with Islam is taken independently from other individual social

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<sup>23</sup> Amiraux recognizes that this development does not include a detachment from the collective, but does not problematize the continued complex social relation between the faith an individual claims and her or his faith in the community. However, she acknowledges that there is a lack of research on the question of individual processes of religious sentiment. The latter refers to how the individual ascribes meaning to a religious sentiment and belonging to a tradition, as well as how to formulate certain practices independently of what the community recognizes as legitimate (Amiraux 2003, 88). It is in part this gap that I aim to fill in this chapter, as well as chapter 4 and chapter 5.

positions. Clearly, religious and ethnic identifications are only two among several possibilities for identification, although perhaps the most readily available for these youth. In that sense, the act of practicing Islam and of crafting themselves as religious subjects is largely a matter of choice.<sup>24</sup> To some extent, the youths' emphasis on reflection and knowledge of the religious sources leads to an individualization of religious practice (or rather an objectification of their religious practice, as discussed in chapter 4), in that they become more autonomous in the process of judging their own religious actions. Nonetheless, the understanding of the religious practices of the young women in my study must be situated in relation to the rhetoric and ideals learnt in a group. Furthermore, although the youths' interpretation of religious belief might objectively diverge from each other, they share feelings of self-transcendence and concepts of faith. In addition, being critical of religious interpretations does not automatically mean a dismissal of key religious dogmas.

Still, much research on Muslim youth in Europe overemphasizes choice, autonomy, and detachment from religious communities and authorities. For example, studying young Muslims in France and Germany, Tietze argues that "the identification with Islam becomes an ordinary means, one among many, for the construction of subjectivity" (Tietze 2001, 294). The problem with seeing Islam as yet another aspect of individual choice is that it neglects the role of Muslim traditions in the early socialization of the individual.<sup>25</sup>

A closer view of the religious activities of youth in Europe who practice Islam within a faith community demonstrates that while there is a shift in the arrangement of authority, in that women and youth both attain and transform authority, religious authority as such is not eradicated.<sup>26</sup> My observation of the youth in MJD illustrates that the idea of a free-floating and rationally chosen religious identity does not hold. The youth in MJD do not sharply distinguish between their religious belief and orthopraxis,

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<sup>24</sup> See especially Klinkhammer (2003), Nökel (2002), and Tietze (2002) who argue this for Muslims in Germany.

<sup>25</sup> This kind of argument, Salvatore claims, "superimposes an allegedly traditional continuity within religious practice between bodily disciplines and gestures and their 'spiritual sense'" (Salvatore 2004, 1023). The process of change is simply ascribed to the social context of the youth. According to Tietze (2001), the youth often celebrate the end of Ramadan without having personally fasted. The religious meaning of fasting, she argues, is separated from the practice, bringing about a culturalization of Ramadan. This, Tietze claims, reaffirms the idea of a divergence between believing and belonging. Salvatore (2004) offers an astute critique of this line of argument.

<sup>26</sup> This is suggested also by Amir-Moazami (2007), Nökel (2002) and Salvatore (2004).

as some scholars (including Tietze 2001) do. The religious agencies of these youth are not the outcome of strictly individual choices, and do not mark a private Muslim subjectivity, but are situated vis-à-vis Islam as a discursive tradition. Recognizing the increase in individualization in the religious field, the French sociologist of religion Hervieu-Léger suggests that:

Modernity has deconstructed the traditional systems of believing, but has not forsaken belief. Believing finds expression in an individualized, subjective and diffuse form, and resolves into a multiplicity of combinations and orderings of meaning which are elaborated independently of control by institutions of believing, by religious institutions in particular. (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 74)

However, at the same time, Hervieu-Léger argues in “Religion as a chain of memory” that this independence is limited by the economic and socio-cultural positions of the individual, and hence that, “there is no religion without the authority of a tradition being invoked (whether explicitly, half-explicitly or implicitly) in support of the act of believing” (ibid., 78).

Hervieu-Légers (2001) suggests that the idea that religion is currently individualized must be modified in view of the need for (religious) subjects to be with others who verify their lifeworld and value orientation. In other words, modernity does not necessarily mean that a religious person no longer needs to invoke the authority of a tradition as a foundation for her or his act of believing. This authority need not be a physical local faith community in which one regularly participates, but includes online chat rooms, Muslim neighbors, family, and religious organizations in or outside of Germany.

One may wonder whether religious experiences have not always involved a certain individualized form. It is worth evoking Simmel, who in 1898 considered the dynamism of religion to be an incomplete process where the individual person relates to a religious tradition with degrees of durability:

One must bear in mind that religion, as a spiritual experience, is not a finished product but a vital process that each soul must create for itself, no matter how stable the traditional content may be. It is precisely here that the power and depth of religion are found – namely, in its persistent ability to draw a given item of religious data into the flow of the emotions, whose movements must renew it constantly (...). (Simmel 1997 [1898], 118–19)

Simmel positions the communication between tradition and the “flow of emotions” as a process through which the religious project is generated.<sup>27</sup>

Compared to the Catholic Church, with its clerical and hierarchical centralized administrative structure, Islam, at least in its Sunni branch, has always been structured in a more decentralized and egalitarian way (Casanova 2001). Without centralized institutions defining the authoritative doctrines, Muslims continue to act within an increasingly pluralistic, modern society in ways that are multiple, varied, and sometimes inconsistent (*ibid.*, 29). Many scholars of contemporary Islam agree that there has been a process of pluralization and fragmentation of religious authority in Islamic tradition.<sup>28</sup> Rather than advancing the secularization of Muslims, this opens up and expands the terrain of religious education. Educated Muslims are given spaces—or construct their own spaces—in which to discuss Islamic tradition and how Islam is compatible with democracy, civil society and human rights. Such spaces tended only to be filled by Muslim intellectuals or the traditional *ulama*. For Casanova (2001), the creation of these new spaces within Islam reflects the broader movement of all world religions towards modernity, a process through which each religion repositions their own respective traditions in an attempt to fashion their own version of modernity. In Germany, MJD exemplifies one of these spaces in which young Muslims came together and decided to form a new religious group. Being situated outside the frameworks of the mosques, which they viewed as dominated by older, ethnically oriented leaders, provides the youth with different opportunities for constructing authority, enhancing religious understanding, and pursuing religious celebrations (Bendixsen 2013).

Furthermore, even if people draw upon religious tradition selectively, this does not destabilize the integrity of the religion (Asad 1993). Adapting a tradition in order to meet new challenges does not necessarily undermine the coherency of a tradition. The recognition of religious authority or the legitimacy granted to particular practices and utterances depends upon how an individual situates these in relation to authorizing discourses

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<sup>27</sup> It is this project, taken up individually and/or collectively, that Leming calls “religious agency.” She argues that: “the actions and adaptations that people adopt, create, and refashion to express their religious sensibility both reproduce and transform the traditional resources of religious groups” (Leming 2007, 74).

<sup>28</sup> Casanova (2001), Eickelman (1992) and Mandaville (2000) have suggested that there is a pluralization process regarding religious authority in Islam.



of a more general order.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the creative, religious practices performed by these young women are not a rejection of Islam as a discursive tradition. The coherence of Islam is maintained even within variations in practices (Asad 1986). Orthodoxy in Islam never completely establishes or predetermines social relations. It remains a pivotal and idiosyncratic relationship of power, where discourse and debates determine what is considered as correct and what should prevail.

The trajectories of young women in Berlin presented here are situated in plural, even creative, ways within Islam, without this being synonymous with the development of secularization or individualization. It also does not mean a decrease in the importance of situating one's religious acts vis-à-vis a faith community. Indeed, the young women specifically legitimate their behavior through references to orthodoxy and religious rhetoric. By examining how these youth practice Islam in their everyday life, I call attention to the need to distinguish between the religious as fixed beliefs or dogmas, and the religious as personal and collective practices situated in social life, where the social material setting has implications for subsequent interpretations and practices.<sup>30</sup>

Women who relate to a religious organization, a faith community, or a group, need to situate their actions within a religious framework, so long as they seek to be regarded as religious actors. This should modify the conclusion drawn by Nökel (2002, 67), among others, that women individually decide which religious forms to accept and Klinkhammer (2000, 286), who argues that women adopt a mode of individualization and rationalization in their orientation towards Islam.

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<sup>29</sup> As Ismail suggests, "in taking account of a discursive tradition, its continuity and evolution, one should be careful not to postulate some unchanging Islamic view or position on morality. A careful study of Islamic history demonstrates the existence of varying conceptions of morality and sexuality and also of a tradition of religious skepticism (Ismail 2006, 78)."

<sup>30</sup> Ismail convincingly argues that, "in its interaction with the social, religion ceases to be religion (understood as fixed beliefs, dogma, immutable rites and so on)" (Ismail 2004, 620). She contends that this is not only the case in the modern or postmodern period, but that the argument has "meta-theoretical implications." This observation is supported by the distinction between "religion as faith," which brings with it personal and individual direct contact with the godly and "religion as a set of rules," which are interpreted and bargained upon in social settings. In the latter process, situational factors will have an effect on the interpretations and negotiations (*ibid.*, 620–621). I believe that Ismail is here touching upon the limitations of Asad's framework of Islam as a discursive tradition. Namely, by remaining on a theoretical level, this framework cannot sufficiently illuminate the social practice of crafting a religious Self in a socially specific context where a variety of social forces are at hand.

Although this book recognizes that the women in this study choose to situate themselves vis-à-vis religious ideals, which represents a set of norms, the young people who make this choice must relate to discursive practices partly defined outside of their control. Understanding the subject to be “compelled to act from within a set of norms through which it negotiates its sense of self,” Butler (2005, 19) underscores that the agency of the subject must “struggle with the unchosen conditions of one’s life.” At the same time, the creativity involved in choosing how to interact with religious norms demonstrates the opening up of spaces for individuality and agentive decisions, outside of those acts that either comply with or reject the norms. The youth do not completely reproduce or subvert the religious norms, but they also do not dismiss or actively resist (most of) these norms. Mostly, they try to comply with the religiously defined rules that are taught in the various spaces of their religious community MJD.

The ways in which they legitimate their accomplishment or failure to meet religious norms can take different forms, as exemplified by the various possible religious trajectories. Through their education and position as self-reflexive, responsible actors, they draw on techniques to deal with the norms and ideals that are promoted within the religious field. The turn to a pure Islam and literal religious practice introduces orthodoxy into the everyday practice of Islam. Even if the youth situate themselves within a religiously defined orthodoxy, they remain reflexive and creative in their behavior, neither in a pre-given nor purely individualized way.

## CHAPTER SIX

### MAKING A RELIGIOUS GENDER ORDER

One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one.  
–Simone de Beauvoir 1989 [1949], 1:92

The young generation of Muslims born in European societies frequently makes a distinction between the traditional Islam of their parents and a global, pure Islam detached from national traditions and ethnic bonds. Few researchers have explored the effect of the distinction between culture and religion on young people's understanding and performance of gender relations and on their ethnic identification. As chapter 4 explored, distinguishing between tradition, or culture, and religion is an effort to practice a so-called universal, pure Islam. The focus in this chapter is on how the continuous efforts to disconnect tradition from religion shape how Muslim youth in Europe construct their own gender identities and how they identify with their parents' ethnic or national group(s).

MJD meetings cultivate a religious gender order whose meanings are situational, shaping a religious gendered habitus. Habitus is about the incorporation or instruction of the body vis-à-vis moral and social values considered proper within the social field, or class, in which one is socially situated (Bourdieu 1990; 2004 [1977]). Thinking about gendered subjectivity through the idea of habitus is fruitful, as gender is performed through embodied acts and dispositions. This chapter will first discuss how the young women learn to "make gender" (Ortner 1996) religiously. I demonstrate the ways in which a religiously defined gender order is constructed and contested within a framework in which a distinction is drawn between culture and religion. What gender norms and ideals are these youths subjected to in their identification as Muslim women? How do they respond to these ideals and discourses? Second, I discuss whether the religious discourse taught in MJD and its religious gender order, in relation to which they form their Self, can increase the emancipation of women. What scope of action is available within MJD's structure of values for women to contest and transform the religiously defined gender order?

*Making Gender through Religion*

Gender is socially and culturally constructed, and always acquired (Butler 1990). Similar to ethnicity and class, gender is an embodied practice (Bourdieu 1990; 2004 [1977]). Gender marks space and agency. Being a Muslim youth is always a gendered identification. Most religions have specific norms on dress, food, or body comportment that are defined according to a person's sex and that dictate how men and women should ideally interrelate.<sup>1</sup> The Islamic mode of piety or moral conduct is gender-defined in the sense that the ideals of being pious and how to be a Good Muslim are defined differently for women and men. However, the conceptualization of Muslim women's roles that are considered religiously correct also varies across time and societies, as well as between classes and generations within the same society (El-Solh and Mabro 1994). Changes in context and education, including religious instruction, can change perceptions of social roles and modify an individual's available bases for negotiation and creativity within a specific social field.

Research on young migrant women commonly argues that the process of growing up is structured from a traditional, gender-specific role attribution taught in the family.<sup>2</sup> This neglects how a gendered socialization can also take form within religious groups and organizations, such as the MJD. Gendered expectations, obligations, and rights as suggested by religious norms and traditions are taught in the family, as well as in Koran schools, mosques, and religious organizations, through the Internet, and by peers. The youths in this study also encounter a variety of discursively constructed gendered expectations from their families, faith communities, schools, and non-Muslim and Muslim peers. The process of learning and embodying what is considered correct female behavior, character, and dress comportment in a specific social field takes place in different—sometimes conflicting and sometimes coherent—social spaces such as MJD, school, and in the family. In this chapter, I therefore focus on the gender order produced in the youths' faith community, MJD. For these youths, familiarizing themselves with a religious gender order through which the individual is subjected to a gendered religious habitus is also part of the process of crafting a religious Self.

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<sup>1</sup> The moral conduct in Christianity and Judaism is also gender-defined. This does not only apply to religion. Different societies define men and women differently (Yanagisako and Collier 1987) or, as Butler states, gender is "a variable cultural accomplishment" (Butler 1990, 142).

<sup>2</sup> See Lübcke (2007).

The process through which a gender habitus is produced compels a complex social process of education (or *Bildung*). An essential feature of this process is how social relations change and mark bodily behavior, since habitus is both produced and articulated through gestures, ways of walking and dressing, and manners (Bourdieu 1990, 2004 [1977]).<sup>3</sup> Learning to dress, move, and greet is political in the sense that through this process one learns a tacit understanding of legitimate ways to (re)present the body to others and the Self. As Moi argues: “The body— and its apparel such as clothing, gesture, make-up, and so on—becomes a kind of constant reminder (un pense-bête) of sociosexual power relations” (Moi 1991, 1031). The crafting of a religious Self that is de-ethnicized and defined by a religious gender order within a religious youth culture is a continuous social process in which the individual actor situates the Self vis-à-vis a gender order defined by the group. That said, the youths do not respond homogeneously to the particular gender order or dispositions; rather, they respond through creative appropriation, as illustrated in chapter 5.<sup>4</sup>

Much of the knowledge that the young people are expected to internalize needs to remain conscious, and not tacit, in order for the practice of this knowledge to remain religiously correct (as discussed in chapter 4). Nonetheless, the concept of habitus remains appropriate to our understanding of the social processes of the youth, since the social production of bodies within this social field also involves basic activities like how one moves and how to greet others. These, and similar, bodily behaviors are ultimately supposed to become part of the unconscious religious daily comportment.<sup>5</sup> I have already discussed how corrections, fear of a bad reputation, and feelings of discomfort can have a disciplinary effect and also promote group attachment, or feelings of belonging to this faith

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<sup>3</sup> At the same time, Bourdieu stresses that the individual contributes to the reproduction of existing social structures through bodily behavior (Bourdieu 1990, 2004 [1977]). Moi (1991) argues that producing the social body also produces a political body, or an embodied politics, which points more in the direction of the possibility of changing social structures than Bourdieu’s focus on their reproduction allows.

<sup>4</sup> Yet, to the extent that the social fields develop isomorphic properties, including perceptions of exclusion and inclusion, and systems of change, the field becomes homologous (Bourdieu 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Additionally, though much of the knowledge taught in this social field is not tacit and is expressly stated, as chapter 4 illustrated, there is also a series of unspoken and unarticulated rules about what can be said or perceived in this field. To some extent, then, the social field operates with censorship (Bourdieu 1984). As Moi points out: “Within the field, every discourse is euphemistic in the sense that it has to observe the correct forms, legislated by the field, or risk exclusion as nonsense (...)” (Moi 1991, 1022). Importantly, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus has rightly been critiqued for not explaining how resistance takes a particular form or how that resistance is socio-historically possible (see LiPuma 1993).

community. Here, I pay attention to how the youth are constructed by and subjected to specific religiously defined discourses taught in MJD, as well as to the impact that German views of Islam have on their gender identities. Simultaneously, I suggest that when the youth are making gender through religion, they also enact these discourses differently by accepting, resisting, or negotiating gender ideas and ideals.<sup>6</sup>

### *The Virtuous Female Body*

Research suggests that women are more attracted to religious movements than men (Furseth and Repstad 2006; Walter and Davie 1998). MJD is no exception: two-thirds of the 600 official MJD members are women. According to one of the *shura* members, this gender ratio has proven to be constant and independent of the actual number of members. The weekly, gender-divided meetings also see more female than male attendees. Further, women seem to participate more actively than men in MJD religious events and in the administration of MJD events. I have not examined the reasons for this; one male *shura* member suggested that parents are enthusiastic about the idea that their daughters participate in a religious organization and that many young women feel that if they are involved in a Muslim organization, their parent's social surveillance of their leisure activities will diminish.

The process of crafting the Self as a young Muslim woman within the religious space of MJD involves perfecting knowledge of religious norms about dress, body comportment, and the roles and duties of a Muslim woman. In sum, it means making a (new) religious gendered habitus. For example, presentations and discussions at MJD meetings refer to the idea that Muslim women are the primary Islamic teachers for their children. As the mother will be the first teacher for the child, knowledge of and insight into Islam becomes a duty in order to be a good Muslim mother. Further, the wives of Muhammad are viewed as role models for the Muslim woman, which is an identity that is framed in family metaphors such as wife, sister, mother, and daughter.

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<sup>6</sup> I use Ortner's concept of "making gender" (1996) in order to understand the gender formation among the youth in MJD because it incorporates two relevant ideas: on the one hand, the idea of the subject as constructed by and subjected to the cultural and historical discourses that people have to relate to in their everyday life. Here, the question of what kind of identities and subject positions are constructed within a particular cultural, ideological, and discursive formation is the main focus of attention. On the other hand, it emphasizes the ethnographic actor's point of view, paying attention to how people enact, resist, and negotiate the world as given, and how this results in their actually making their life-world.

Through the MJD weekly presentations, the youth become familiar with these historical women and their characters, activities, and roles in the first Islamic society. Overall, the perception of gender in MJD is projected through familiarizing its participants with the ideal Muslim Woman as provided by the teachings of Islam and in relation to the Muslim Man, who I discuss further below. In this process, their understanding of gender is distinguished from one, the general (mis)understanding of women in Islam by the German, non-Muslim majority; two, their perception of the incorrect Muslim woman; and three, their understanding of the non-Muslim woman as constructed by the Muslim youth's understanding of the German heterosexual matrix.

First, the youth differentiated their religiously defined gender order from the more common media stereotypes of women in Islam. For example, during one MJD meeting, the young women discussed how the media promotes stereotypical views in which Muslim women are seen as without rights and as not emancipated. This perception was then disproved by pointing to how women are supposed to be treated in Islam. The youth believed that such stereotypes were both a consequence of misinformation among journalists and people in general about the role of women in Islam, and of the fact that people who are identified (by others, though not necessarily by themselves) as Muslims do not always behave according to Islam. Although they recognized that women are not always treated according to the principle of complementary genders in everyday life, most of the young women believed that there are ways of strengthening women's situation within Islam. By referring to the role of the wives of Muhammad and to prominent religious figures, they pointed to the important position of women in Islam historically. The young Muslims also made socio-historical comparisons, such as when they stated that Islam introduced rights for women that were granted only much later to Christian, European women. There was a general belief among the youth that if both women and men would only correctly follow the rights and obligations stipulated in Islam, such correct behavior would show that women are highly regarded in Islam. They believed that behaving according to Islamic teachings would assist in changing negative stereotypes of women in Islam, and consequently, people would be more likely to convert or at least seek more knowledge of Islam.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> As discussed in chapter 4, the potential consequence of this perception leads to a high pressure on women to conform their public behavior to gender norms, from herself, peers, and significant others.



Second, the youth frequently drew a distinction between themselves and other veiled young people who they considered to not behave in a correct Islamic manner. The young women differentiated between traditional gender roles (often viewed in ethnic terms, such as Turkish), which were practiced among what the youth viewed as less actively religious people, and the gender roles of de-ethnicized, religiously oriented people like themselves. The youth regularly discussed other veiled women who dressed sexily at religious youth activities (such as those organized by MJD), smoked, or in other ways did not respect Islamic gender rules; for example, by mingling improperly with men in public. Through such comparisons and distinctions, the youth presented themselves with an image of how they should or should not behave in public.

Third, the youth highlighted differences between themselves and what they viewed as the typical German woman. This took place through discussions about how German women dress (particularly during the summer), through critiquing commercials which (mis)use female bodies, and by making distinctions between the ideal gender relation between men and women in Islam versus in Western societies. These discussions fostered stereotypes of German women that are reciprocal to those which the majority German society holds about Muslim women, as the young people considered the former to be oppressed by the commercialization of their sexuality. As I discussed in chapter 3, when Westerners stereotype women in Islam as traditional and submissive, this can contribute to the construction of Western women as modern and liberated. I have found that young Muslim women also stereotype the Western woman as commercialized in order to bolster their construction of women's position in Islam as ideal and emancipated. The following event can illustrate how such processes, which resemble Occidentalism, take place:

One cold winter evening, as I was walking with a group of MJD participants after visiting the Christmas market at the Schlossplatz, a young woman with a short skirt and high-heeled shoes passed us on the way to Alexanderplatz. When she was out of sight, Helene (24), a German convert, commented to the group: "I am so glad I don't have to dress like that," referring to the woman's thin and sexy clothes. A discussion followed about how German women feel the need to dress revealingly to attract attention, which not only discredits their bodies but is even a health risk.

Women in Islam were considered better off than German women, as the former do not have to focus on their outer appearance the whole time. Many of the Muslim youth considered the German idea of emancipation to be merely about free sex and about wearing either revealing or

unfeminine clothing. The latter stereotype refers to what many considered to be the typical feminist ideal in Germany; the so-called “Emmas.”<sup>8</sup> The German feminists Emmas are Othered by the young women, as the former are seen to undermine their own femininity through their bodily performances, such as not shaving under their arms.

As discussed in chapter 3, the process of comparing stereotypes of “us” and “them” involves making contrasts in terms of status and hierarchy and allows differences within social groups, including power differences between women and men, to be concealed and controlled (Nader 1989). The comparison contributes to social control within the group by producing the group’s model of womanhood as ideal, in relation to which the other group’s model becomes inferior. In both cases, the idealized stereotype of the Self, which is compared with a negative stereotype of the Other, obscures important power distinctions between women and men within these social structures.

### *Ideals of Gender Relations: Complementarity versus Equality*

Through communication with classmates at school, through watching German and American blockbusters, and through being exposed to public advertisements and the media, the youth experienced or perceived what many of them considered to be Western gender-equality ideals, which they saw as distinctive from the Islamic gender order. The Western feminist notion of equality was interpreted to mean a specific form of gender equality in which the genders are seen as having equal capacities and as therefore being entitled to identical opportunities and rights. Such a starting point is not compatible with how the MJD youth viewed gender relations. Rather, they believed that it is God’s will for men and women to be different, and consequently, they believed that space and status must

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<sup>8</sup> Founded in 1977, the first German women’s magazine, EMMA, is written “by women, for women” and is tied to the name and image of Alice Schwarzer, the most prominent feminist in Germany. The name Emma calls to mind the word emancipation in Germany. The magazine has since its initiation been a popular forum for discussing abortion, equal rights, pornography, and prostitution. The topics it covers have changed from a focus on women’s rights and women’s status in the Catholic Church in the 1970s, to issues like eating disorders, genital mutilation, and Islam’s treatment of women (Source: *Deutsche Welle* 2007). Today EMMA is almost synonymous with feminism in Germany (Eigler and Kord 1997, 572). In recent years, Alice Schwarzer has also become known for her critical statements about political Islamism and the position of women in Islam. She favors a headscarf ban in schools or other public settings, as she considers the headscarf a symbol of oppression. She warns of a “creeping Islamization” of Europe, which she argues will lead to an erosion of Human Rights and women’s rights (ibid.).

be provided for the realization of specifically female and male potentials and values.

Gender relations at the meetings and in discussions among the youth are explained in terms of proper roles for women and men. These are determined by religious rules and norms, and an effort is made to distinguish these from cultural norms and ethnic or national traditional views of gender. At the same time, the youth took a clear stance against the German ideal of women's emancipation, which most of them found to be focused on sex. Rather than emphasizing equality or sameness, which is the focus of Western feminism, MJD encourages young Muslims to view each gender as complementing the other: women and men are different, and these differences should be given space and lived out in everyday life. The Islamic ideal of complementary genders, of what is permitted and correct for a Muslim woman both in private and in public, was considered different and better than the German emancipation movements that focus on the perception of women and men as equal because they are the same. The youth distanced themselves from what they perceived to be a German interpretation of gender equality and instead emphasized an Islamic notion of gender differentiation and gender order. For example, while on the subway on our way to a picnic, Ines told me:

I have to do something the whole time. I can't sit and do nothing; I would work even for little money, difficult things even, just 'cause I cannot sit like that and get money from the social office, for example. (...) When I get married, in 10, 20 or 30 years, my husband can sit at home and I'll go to work. [She laughs.] No, with us, Muslims, it is like that, that the man should earn the money for the family and the woman can work if she likes, but she doesn't have to. They [non-Muslims] make such a fuss about it. That it is oppressing the woman. Like, what is it about that (situation) which is not emancipated? Isn't it nice, "nah," that we can just sit at home with our feet on the table and relax and don't have to work? I don't see where the problem is. Anyhow, my husband can sit at home and I'll have to work! No, he can work, but I will also work, *in sha'a Allah* (God willing).

Ines recognized that the idea that Muslim women do not necessarily have to work is viewed as not emancipatory. However, she found it incredulous that women's right to choose not to work is seen as evidence of oppression. Yet, although Ines insisted that the Islamic idea of womanhood in which a married woman is not obliged to work is unproblematic, at the same time she maintained that she personally wanted to work. In fact, young women's aspirations in the educational system were encouraged within MJD, where education is promoted as a religious imperative. In Islam, employment is considered a right but not a duty for women.

During MJD meetings and discussions, the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad was used as an example: Khadija was a successful businesswoman who employed the Prophet to watch over her caravans.

Within MJD, higher education and employment become part of the project to deconstruct the idea of Muslim women as oppressed housewives. Working is also important to Muslim women in light of the negative stereotypes of Muslim women as not working because they have too many children, are prevented from working by their husbands, or because Muslim women are perceived to prefer to exploit the welfare state. Working while veiled is one way of communicating to German society that they, as Muslim women, can also have a career.<sup>9</sup> Completing higher education and being employed in various occupations thus becomes a religious duty (*du'a*). In other words, the working Muslim woman is promoted as one way to improve the negative stereotypes of Muslim women.

### *Creating Gendered Religious Spaces*

The MJD events that bring men and women together are spaces in which youths gain skills in the correct interaction between Muslim men and women. In particular, the monthly meetings and the annual summer camp establish social spheres where men and women are supposed to follow a religious gender order, a process in which the religiously defined gender relations become central in shaping the youths' body-place relations. The following ethnographic description of traveling with MJD exemplifies this:

As we leave together on a bus, the brothers sit at the front, and the sisters sit at the back. In the middle, some seats are reserved for married couples who prefer to sit together. The female leaders are at the front, using the microphone to go through the schedule, tell jokes, or initiate games where the sisters compete against the brothers. In a similar way to religious meetings at some mosques (like DMK in Wedding), children are bringing messages or candies between the different gendered parts of the bus. When we stop to eat and pray, the prayer is conducted on a grass field next to a petrol station and is led by one of the brothers. The sisters pray behind the brothers, as is

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<sup>9</sup> In her ethnography on Muslim youth in Chicago, Schmidt (2004b, 73) points to a similar discussion on the rights and obligations of Muslim women to finish high school and to work after marriage. She situates the arguments of the youth in terms of the American notion of individualism. Although my data suggests that these Muslim youth in Germany are shaped by the German gender structure—for example, the encouragement for (West) German women to pursue a career—Islamic rather than secular discourses are used in MJD to endorse this lifestyle choice.

religiously prescribed. Many women who cannot pray try to hide their absence, so that the brothers do not find out that they are menstruating.

Through practices like a gendered division of seating on the bus, there was an effort to organize and put spatial boundaries between the two genders. The annual MJD summer camps, a kind of “*Halal* summer camp,” are organized with a view to upholding a religiously defined gender order, including gender-divided times for sport. Some of the seminars (e.g., “the role of women in marriage”) are also geared specifically to women. During presentations at the three-day summer camp, women are seated on the left-hand side and men on the right-hand side.<sup>10</sup> Controlling the gaze is another practice that contributes to the symbolic border between the genders. By referring to *sura* 24: 30 and 24: 31, the organizers discourage direct eye contact between the genders.<sup>11</sup> However, this is mostly in principle, as in practice the leaders concentrate on issues like women not talking alone with a man or not staring at the men while they play sports. Still, contact across the gendered spheres does take place; for instance, through glances, taking pictures of brothers on the sly, and in short conversations. Indeed, these trips are also a way to get to know brothers who are potential marriage partners.

The practice of spatially ordering gender, as practiced on the bus, marks the Muslim organization as gendered. The clear rules, firm values, and marked spatial arrangements simultaneously differentiate between the genders and integrate the group as a whole. In this way MJD becomes a sometimes intuitive, sometimes structured, symbolic space for praxeological forms. At the same time that practices like greeting, manner, and body

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<sup>10</sup> Most mosques insist upon a seating plan where men sit in the front and women in the back, physically divided by a screen of some sort, or the men and women sit on different floors. Sitting in rows next to each other while on different sides of the room is considered too liberal by some Muslims and as too conservative by others.

<sup>11</sup> These two *suras* are often referred to when it comes to dress code. There are some differences in the English translations of these *suras*. *Sura* 24: 30: “Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them: And Allah is well acquainted with all that they do.” *Sura* 24:31: “And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands’ fathers, their sons, their husbands’ sons, their brothers or their brothers’ sons, or their sisters’ sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye Believers! turn ye all together towards Allah, that ye may attain Bliss.” From: <http://www.islamicity.com/mosque/QURAN/24.htm>, accessed March 18, 2009.



Figure 12. Inside the seminar tent at an MJD summer camp. Women sit on the left-hand side, men on the right-hand side. Photo: Synnøve Bendixsen.

management construct symbolic borders between the genders, they also create a feeling of belonging to a group or community.

At some MJD events, leaders and participants issued explicit guidelines and instructions for dress comportment:

When planning a picnic the forthcoming Sunday, one of the older leaders issued directions for the women's dress, saying: "And we will all wear the headscarf there. Remember that the brothers are with us. And I guess I don't have to tell you that we must dress properly. I think we all know what the limits are."

During the same weekly meeting, Fadwa (23) (the leader at that time) talked about the upcoming MJD summer camp:

There are going to be around 800 young Muslims there. Let us try to give a particularly good impression—in terms of dress—to look good. Think about how we will spend three to four days in a Muslim atmosphere and that we must also think about (how we present ourselves). It is also a chance to try to come further [religiously] with ourselves. At another meeting, we decided that for the next meeting we were not going to wear trousers, everyone was going to wear skirts. Not that trousers are not allowed, of course. And we did



it. And the next time we decided that we were not going to wear make-up. [Some of the participants make unenthusiastic comments]. And some did not wear it for months after, though most have started again. The idea is to just little by little break away from some habits. This meeting is also a place where one can get used to wearing the headscarf, for example.

Through such speeches the gender roles, norms, and ideals within this Islamic faith community are identified and encouraged, which advances collectivization. In her speech, Fadwa encouraged specific ideals for the young women that they should strive to perform. The upcoming event was presented as a space where they could practice and change their habits to become proximate to the religious gendered ideals of body and dress comportment. Later, I discuss the different ways that the young women relate to these discursively constructed subject positions.

The constraints on or expectations related to women's clothing practices seem to be more articulated than those for men. For example:

At an MJD meeting, the leader told everyone to take care this year to bring along modest clothes to the upcoming three-day MJD summer camp. This was an explicit response to the fact that some youth had not brought Islamically correct clothes with them the previous year. Bringing modest clothes, she said, is not only so that they could get used to wearing these kinds of clothes and also to not wearing make-up, but also because "for the brothers it is *haram* to look at you like that, and do you want to cause this to your brother?"

Here, the women were partly given responsibility for the male participants' transgressions, which were seen as being caused by the women's clothing. The general symbolic elevation of women as bearers of the collective (see Yuval-Davis 1997) is a practice which is brought to the forefront in this example.<sup>12</sup> One young woman asserted that the brothers should also be careful about what they wear:

During the three-day MJD summer camp, Naila (16) complained to her close friend and me that she also found it difficult to concentrate on her prayer when a handsome man is standing further up in the prayer lines wearing a tight t-shirt. Naila further reflected on how as a woman, she was always told to be careful in her dress comportment, while the brothers were not careful.

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<sup>12</sup> In so far that gender is central to the construction of collective identity, feminist social scientists point to how women often become symbols that mark the borders between social groups and categories, and that women come to signify a group or category's superiority (Moghadam 1994; Yuval-Davis 1997).



Apart from Naila's comment, I rarely heard women discussing the correctness of young men's clothing in Berlin, though they often discussed the clothing of other women. However, I often heard negative comments about the incorrect behavior of (Muslim) Turkish or Arabic men in Berlin, including the fact that they would talk to unknown (veiled) women, drink, swear, and misuse Allah's name.

Although the above discussion illustrates how MJD offered clear instructions about clothing, correct dress comportment was also indirectly developed by participating in a specific atmosphere, something I felt in relation to my own body during the fieldwork. After a period of time, I started to make sure to cover up extensively when spending time with the young women. My desire not to emphasize difference made me more conscious of how I dressed during events and meetings with the youth. When I failed to do so, such as when too much of my chest was revealed, when my sleeves stopped just below my elbows, or my sweater did not cover my hips, I noticed that I felt uncomfortable.<sup>13</sup> This feeling of being ill at ease was not related to any looks or comments (which rarely happened) but was more about being in an environment where everyone dressed in a particular way and where I felt that I did not fit in with my choice of clothing. I understand this as an indicator of the bodily practices (Asad 1997) and techniques that are part of the crafting of a specific subject.

### *The Corrections*

I noticed that the youths regularly corrected each other when they were in public, such as approaching each other if their headscarves were out of order or asserting that a friend's clothing was too sexy.<sup>14</sup> Such corrections of imperfect performances of conventions have the effect of controlling and integrating the individual subject and thus play an essential part in

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<sup>13</sup> The attention I started to pay towards my own dress comportment was a combination of trying to fit in and trying to make sure that particularly the older leaders of the group understood that I respected their way of comportment and that I did not intend to try to influence the younger participants with regard to dress. Interestingly, at the same time that some of the young women would tell me that "you are dressing more and more like a Muslim," another girl told me "if I was not a Muslim, I would dress the way you do," indirectly indicating that my dress did not pass as that of a Muslim despite my efforts to dress modestly.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Dunya (25), a student from Austria visiting Berlin for one year, told me that she often received the comment "sister, you are wearing the headscarf wrong," as she would tie the knot behind her neck, leaving her neck visible. She found this effort to correct her veiling, sometimes also by (Muslim) strangers, annoying.

the collectivization process. A social field has rules of inclusion and exclusion, as well as ideas of legitimate and illegitimate practices and discourses (Bourdieu 1994). Though much of the knowledge taught in this social field is not tacit, but rather articulated explicitly, there is also a series of unspoken and unarticulated rules for what can be said or is considered as legible in this field. To some extent, then, the social field operates with censorship (Bourdieu 1984). As Moi points out, “within the field, every discourse is euphemistic in the sense that it has to observe the correct forms, legislated by the field, or risk exclusion as nonsense” (Moi 1991, 1022). There are limits on the available choices and room for maneuver: in order to be accepted and included in the social field, the individual must operate within the borders as normatively defined by the *nomos*, namely the social rules that are of overall importance in a specific social field.<sup>15</sup>

Moving between different social contexts, such as MJD, school, work, and family, the young women were exposed to and engaged with various gender orders.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, the youth produced gender in relation to various social expectations. Furthermore, examining religious discourses on gender is insufficient when trying to understand how the young women produce gender, as this will not tell us how they react toward these discourses or how they experience the subject positions that they have to relate to in their everyday lives. Within the space of MJD, recommendations or expressions of expectations about dress comportment were not necessarily agreed upon or followed homogeneously. For example:

Naila (17) told me that during the three-day summer camp in 2004, she and her sister had been approached by a third participant who asked them to put on more decent clothes. Naila had responded that she didn't have any other clothing with her. In telling me the story, she also rhetorically asked why a young MJD participant should tell her how to dress “when not even my mother tells me?”

I understand Naila's reaction as partly a rejection of, or even resistance to, the call to conform, as she could have asked to borrow clothes to conform to what her peer considered religiously correct. It further illustrates that

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<sup>15</sup> I am not suggesting that someone who does not conform to dress and body behavior will be excluded from the faith community. However, a person who diverges extensively in her comportment and practices when participating in the faith community with which she identifies will meet continuous (often well-meaning) corrective comments and suggestions about how she should dress or behave.

<sup>16</sup> Gender subjectivity is not a fixed or singular identity, but is based upon a sequence of subject positions presented by different discourses, of which some will be in conflict or in opposition internally (Moore 2007: 35).

youth sometimes felt that MJD was a more restrictive socializing space than that of their family. Pressure from peers to conform to group orders can feel like a critique of the Self, which can be very effective as the practices are situated within a religiously defined discourse that the youths may find difficult to challenge.

That said, increased knowledge and confidence in the right to be self-reflective opens up space for individual negotiation or interpretations of these ideals. For example, during a wedding, Janna (19), who had become more concerned about her religious practice two years previously, told me:

You went to the seminar about marriage, right? [She refers to the seminar on women's and men's roles in marriage during the annual MJD summer camp in 2004, which was only for female participants]. And there was something I didn't agree with, but I didn't want to argue openly there. Like this idea that it is the duty of the women to [have intercourse] with the man if he wants. I don't think it is like that. I mean, Prophet Muhammad *s'Allahu 'alayhe wa salam* [Peace be upon him] was a perfect man, he would never have made the woman do something she didn't want to... if the woman says no, there is a reason for it. Also, I think that if a woman is cheating, it's 'cause the man is not giving her what she needs, it doesn't matter if it's only good sex.

As Prophet Muhammad is particularly relevant to the perception and construction of gender roles, having the knowledge and authority to define and narrate the different stories about the Prophet is a symbolic capital. Religious proficiency can provide a young MJD participant with status or recognition within the religious social field. Janna's account also illustrates internal disagreement over how to understand the duties and rights of women in Islam. Although she did not openly express her difference of opinion in the group, she seemed determined to follow her understanding of the marriage roles of women and men in her own life.

Internal divergences of belief about what is expected of a correct Muslim woman in the public sphere is further exemplified in the following discussion between Fahra (23) and a recently young German convert (19):

At a Saturday evening party in someone's home, Fahra tried to convince a German convert that wearing the scarf in front of her face (thus resembling a *Niqab*, the piece of cloth worn to cover a woman's face, sometimes also covering the eyes), or looking down when walking the streets in Kreuzberg during the evenings was not necessary—as long as she knew how to behave correctly in public. Fahra said: “You should not make it so hard on yourself. I, for example, know the limits. When I am here with you, I dance and sing and am crazy, but when I'm in the streets, outside, then I know how to behave. But it doesn't mean that one needs to walk with one's head down or not be outside at all or be completely covered.” Fahra continued by referring

to German converts who stare at the ground when walking in the street, which made her think, “*Maschalla* (what Allah wishes), I hope their husbands are treating them well.” The German convert said that she never looked at anyone in the street, always looked down, and sometimes used a cover for her face. Fahra found this “extreme,” “unnecessary,” and even “unfortunate” because she believed that Muslim women who behave in this way send negative signals to non-Muslim society. To her, it was particularly problematic that a German convert behaved like this in public. Fahra said that she knew many Turkish families who made their daughters come straight home after school. She noted that “they are not allowed in the street, [the family] only think about honor and reputation—not about Islam. Their sons can do everything and their daughters nothing.”

The disagreement about what is necessary and what is extreme exemplifies internal differences about what is meant by modesty. Fahra was trying to open up the social space for the German convert, who she believed was over-performing being a Muslim woman when in public. Fahra argued that Muslim women should not limit themselves; it would be enough to know how to behave, though Fahra did not really define what that meant. Quite joyful and outspoken during the private party, she assured us that she knew how to behave as a Good Muslim Woman in public. Fahra seemed to fear that what she considered the exaggerated performance of the German convert would not make the convert less visible in the public sphere. Rather, it would make her more visible to non-Muslims due to the negative views of veiled women. Furthermore, Fahra considered the stricter treatment of daughters compared to sons to be unrelated to Islam. I often heard the youth take a stance against their ethnic group and the group’s practices. The youth saw their own increased knowledge of Islam as one way to alter what they viewed as the unequal treatment of young men and women by their parents’ generation.<sup>17</sup>

Outside the social space of the faith community, the religious gender order seemed to be less actively pursued. For example, I noticed a difference in how some MJD participants dealt with Muslim brothers at MJD events and non-Muslim (male) classmates. Whereas some women did not shake hands with a brother, they seemed unconcerned about shaking hands with non-Muslim boys at school. On the one hand, this can be understood as moving between different social fields, where different role

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<sup>17</sup> I often heard youth discuss the double standards among parents with migrant backgrounds, in that daughters were treated much stricter than sons. The youth believed that if both the daughters and the family were behaving Islamically correctly—that is, following what the youth considered to be right and wrong according to Islam—the family would not enforce such strict surveillance.

performances are emphasized or considered the correct practice. On the other hand, deciding to shake hands with a classmate can also be understood as an effort to not alienate non-Muslims from Islam and may be triggered by a fear of being seen as extreme. Clearly, most youths did not expect that non-Muslim men would know the rules for how to behave in a religiously correct manner toward Muslim women. Additionally, non-Muslim men were rarely considered potential marriage partners among these religious youth, which perhaps made it less important to keep up the religious gender order in that social situation.

In their daily lives, the women not only distinguished between Muslim and non-Muslim men, but also differentiated between religious and ethnic Muslim men. The separation that the youths constructed between culture and religion shaped not only the gender order but also has two further consequences in the women's lives—their relations to their ethnic social field and their marriage practices. I turn to these next.

### *Finding a Suitable Husband*

Among the youth in Berlin, distinguishing between Islam and culture can ultimately facilitate their distancing themselves from negative stereotypes of Turks in the German media and public sphere. For example, when discussing issues like honor, shame, honor killings, and forced marriages, whether among themselves, with other Muslims, or with non-Muslims, the young people labelled these issues as un-Islamic and related to traditional practices. In discussions and when talking with friends, the women frequently referred to stereotypical images of Turkish or Arabic men as macho and not fulfilling their role as Muslim men.<sup>18</sup> The following episode illustrates this:

Spending the night for *Qiyam al-Layl* ("standing at night," the voluntary night prayer), praying, and reading the Koran in a German-speaking mosque in Wedding, the youth chatted in between the official program. One of the women, Fatima (31), told me, "the [Turkish] woman is not allowed to go out [and do the same things as men]. The man can do everything, and the woman has to stay at home [in the evening]. The Turkish are machos, I know. I can say so, because I am Turkish. But it is not Islam [that makes them macho]. In Islam, women and men are equal. It is typical Mediterranean temperament, you know. The Spanish and the Italians are also macho.

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<sup>18</sup> Ewing (2008) presents an excellent discussion of the stigmatization of Muslim masculinity in European countries and its effect on men with Turkish backgrounds.

But there are also advantages for the woman, you know. She can feel protected that way.”

Later the same evening, the Muslim brothers, who were spending the night in a different area of the mosque, made dinner for the women. When they passed by the women’s part of the house, which was attached to the mosque where the food was prepared, Noreen (16) told me, “that is how Islam is really; the men should do more than the women. It is just because they are not educated that women today do more than the men. You know, the Prophet Muhammad used to mend his own socks when he had time. In addition to being a statesman, religious (leader), and a good husband.”

The latter comment must be seen as directed toward me, a non-Muslim woman who was often invited to convert to Islam. Especially at the beginning of my fieldwork, some of the young women overemphasized what they considered positive aspects of Islam in order to combat the negative stereotypes they thought I must have been exposed to. That said, the comment also relates to a clear distinction the women made between Turkish or Arabic men and men in Islam as defined by the religious gender order taught in MJD. During the weekly discussions, the Prophet Muhammad was often presented as a role model for any person who is striving to lead a correct religious life, and specifically as a role model for how a husband should treat his wife. Notably, the young women made a comparison between ideal images of religiously devoted Muslim men and stereotyped images of culturally oriented men.

The young women also differentiated between Muslims in Germany and Muslims in their parents’ countries of origin. The following conversation among three 17-year-olds during a small friendship gathering illustrates this point:

Nawar said, “I am for sure not going to marry an Egyptian. Unless he is modern. That [he also does housework].” Naila agreed, “the men there, hey! They expect women to do everything for them, and with the attitude that ‘that is Islam,’ sort of. Like, I often saw men asking women to get them another cup of tea or something. Or that the woman is cleaning, lifting the sofa and such, while the guy is just sitting in the chair zapping through the television channels. Makes me crazy!” Somaya continued, “like, where in the Koran does it say that the women are supposed to be cleaning-women? That they are only for cooking, cleaning, and giving birth to children? They are really bad in Egypt and [the Middle East], not like here. Here, they are different.” Naila was of the same mind, “the best Muslims are here! Like there, they kill, cheat, lie, and everything. I saw it so often. Like, at least the Muslims I know here are really better.” The other girls agreed with her.

Here, the youth drew a sharp contrast between Muslim men in Egypt and in Germany. Nawar’s emphasis on marrying a modern man exemplifies

how the youth drew on ideas of what it means to be modern. In this context, being modern is not about being a Muslim or not, but about the man's attitude toward and treatment of his wife/ves. Nawar drew a distinction between Muslim men in Egypt, who were seen as traditional because they pursue gender rules provided by culture, and Muslim men in Germany, who were seen as modern because they adhere to gender rules as provided by Islam.<sup>19</sup> Such rejection of culture and traditions as sources of authority establishes a hierarchical distinction between Muslims, namely between those who understand and perform their religion in a pure form and those who relate their faith to culture and tradition. A modern Muslim is someone who struggles for a non-cultural approach to Islam. Thus, to be modern is not necessarily related to Europe but to how Islam is practiced. A modern Muslim is someone who is self-reflexive, seeks to acquire knowledge of the pure Islam, and follows these rules and obligations in their life.

### *Halal Dating*

"I didn't know MJD was this important to me!" one of the MJD youths exclaimed, referring to the large number of young Muslim men at the annual MJD summer camp. The youth often complained about how difficult it was to find a potential husband in Germany. MJD meetings, events, and trips became spaces where youth could meet devoted Muslims of the opposite sex. Often the youth found their future marriage partners within the organization. This is partly a consequence of MJD representing a space where there is a relative proximity of participants of the other sex at events but also because there is a likelihood of other participants sharing similar views about religious beliefs, values, and practices, which in turn enables a cultural and religious homogeneity within a relationship.<sup>20</sup>

Marriage is a central component in regulating sexuality and gender relations in the Islamic tradition.<sup>21</sup> Marriage can also be a particular

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<sup>19</sup> In contrast, Özyürek (2009) argues that the converted German Muslims in Berlin with whom she conducted fieldwork tended to idealize the Turks and Arabs living in Turkey and the Middle East and distanced themselves from the Turks and Arabs living in Berlin, who they viewed as ignorant and uneducated. The youth in MJD also regularly complained about the lack of higher education among the migrant Muslim population in Berlin.

<sup>20</sup> Strassburger (2003, 217) briefly mentions similar experiences among youth participating in Milli Görüş, where transnational marriages also occur. In this respect, MJD is similar to other leisure and voluntary organizations, such as sports or school bands, where youth often find partners.

<sup>21</sup> This also is the case in other world religions. The Orthodox Church, for example, considers marriage one of the seven sacraments of religion (Khuri 2001, 47). In the Koran,



moment of tension and, in some ways, the ultimate sign of identification with the ethnic or religious social field. The importance of having a religiously motivated husband was emphasized in MJD through the assumption that a woman could more easily be persuaded to be lax in performing her religious duties than a man. It was also encouraged by the idea that a religiously devoted man would be more likely to follow an Islamic, rather than a traditional, gender role. These men were therefore believed to treat women better.<sup>22</sup> The importance of establishing a family and finding a marriage partner who was religiously correct was emphasized at MJD meetings and in its newsletters. In one weekly group e-mail from MJD, a part of the “reform of the Family” item stated:

A healthy community consists of healthy families. In a few years you will marry, you are going to establish a family and your children will be future bearers of the message of the Prophet Muhammad. All the experiences, all the knowledge that a father and a mother have about Islamic work will be passed on to the son or daughter. That is why you should be wise about the choice of your marriage partner.<sup>23</sup>

Young men and young women were active in searching for a future spouse, and both made use of peers and extended family to initiate contact with a potential husband or wife. The young women were sometimes introduced to potential suitors through family visits, often initiated by the man and his family. These home visits took place mostly between people of the same ethnic background. In the course of the visits, the young man and woman would be left to talk for a while. I was often told that during these conversations, the woman would ask questions about his future plans, how he spends his money, his diligence in relation to religious practices, and whether his future wife would be allowed to work. The religious practice of the man in question was always interrogated in detail. For example:

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one-third of the legal injunctions deal with marriage, the family, and how to properly manage and regulate these (El-Hadi 2000). Marriage is deemed a religious duty in the course of which one's religious faith should grow deeper. The contractual frame of marriage comprises rights and duties linked to the individual, family, and community life (Green and Numrich 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Yet, as I suggest later, the young women recognize that the religious men do not necessarily follow these ideals.

<sup>23</sup> Email dated 24. Dhul Hijja 1426 / January 23, 2006; my translation from the German original: “Eine gesunde Gemeinschaft, besteht aus gesunden Familien. Ihr werdet in einigen Jahren heiraten, ihr werdet eine Familie gründen und eure Kinder werden die zukünftigen Überbringer der Botschaft des Propheten Muhammad sein. Alle Erfahrungen, all das Wissen eines Vaters, einer Mutter über die islamische Arbeit wird übergehen auf den Sohn oder die Tochter. Deshalb müsst ihr weise sein bei der Wahl eures Ehepartners.”

Ines (20) told me of a situation where her family accepted a request from a suitor to visit their home. Ines did not mind that her family was making this kind of contact but emphasized to her mother that if the restaurant that the man in question owned wasn't *halal*, "like if he sells alcohol and the meat isn't proper," she would not marry him. The mother had responded, "but if he has a job in these days?" Ines had answered that, surely, she was not going to tell him how to do things, but that for her this was important.

Whereas for her mother economic capital was the most important factor in the choice of a marriage partner, Ines insisted that religious or symbolic capital had to prevail. In the end, their extended family told them that the man was dirty, meaning that he had been with other girls. He was not invited back, as moral behavior was "very important to her father." Thus the man turned out to be unacceptable both to her parents and to Ines, as his reputation within the ethnic social network was tainted due to unacceptable moral conduct. This shows the continuously overlapping perceptions of values between religious and ethnic social fields.

Ines's story demonstrates how the ethnic social field continues to be important in the process of finding a suitable spouse, both as a social space to search for a husband or wife and as a source of information concerning the reputation of the suitor or potential wife. Before the woman or man decides on engagement, the family interrogates their social network, not only in Berlin but also transnationally, about the reputation of the man (or woman). This practice became clear to me through the following discussion:

Aishegül (31) told me that she was worried that a future marriage was going to be difficult for a friend of hers, Kiraz (24). Kiraz lived in Berlin and had been engaged to a Turkish man in Istanbul, but she then broke the engagement. Aishegül was afraid Kiraz would consequently face difficulties finding a new suitor. When I suggest that if the next suitor lived in Germany he would not know about Kiraz's past engagement in Istanbul, she responded, "well, if it is with a Turkish person [in Germany], then they will ask around and then they will find out." In the end, Kiraz married a good friend of her sister's husband, someone who was not Turkish.

Reputation flows across borders, linked through the ethnic social field. Moreover, Kiraz's marriage is one example of the statistically low but increasingly common occurrence of mixed marriages among Muslims in Germany.<sup>24</sup> The increase of multicultural marriages is partly a

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<sup>24</sup> According to von Below and Karakoyun (2007, 46) three-fourths of Turkish Muslims in Germany marry a Turkish partner. In comparison, half of the Italians in Germany marry ethnic Germans.

consequence of the focus on a universal Islam detached from an ethnic group, where a future partner's religious knowledge is considered more important than his or her ethnic belonging, and partly because many meet their future partners in MJD, which is inter-ethnic.

Moreover, just as religious knowledge and the ability to articulate that knowledge becomes a symbolic capital and social competence, a religiously devoted and knowledgeable husband can also represent a form of symbolic capital. This is particularly so within MJD and the larger religious field, where religious devotion and knowledge represents a means through which one can gain respect, acknowledgement, and authority. In MJD, knowledge and performance of the pure Islam represents cultural capital. It is an embodied disposition, including skills learned within the religious social field. This cultural capital can be converted into symbolic capital, in that religious knowledge, displays of piety, the use of Islamic terms in daily conversations, and religious skills are acknowledged and recognized within the religious social field.<sup>25</sup>

Symbolic capital is about accumulated distinction and prestige and exists only as far as it is recognized in the eyes of others. It depends upon Muslim youths' capacity to distinguish between what is considered good or correct and what is viewed as bad or incorrect within this social field (see Bourdieu 1990). These youth, however, must know how to convey this knowledge discreetly; although displaying piety openly is part of demonstrating authenticity, to talk about it openly demonstrates a lack of authenticity. In order for cultural capital (in this case, religious knowledge and skills) to become and remain a symbolic capital, it must be played out with care, as it is not considered good practice to boast about one's husband or one's own knowledge and abilities in reading the Koran. Modesty must prevail. This became clear to me as a German convert, Aysel (20), used to talk extensively about the religious excellence of her husband who was a *hafiz* (he knows the Koran by heart) and how he was teaching her.

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<sup>25</sup> Symbolic capital is "a credit, it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition" (Bourdieu 1990, 135). I have classified the acquisition of religious knowledge as cultural capital rather than religious capital. This is because the process strongly resembles that of an educational process and includes acquiring technical knowledge, skills, verbal facility, body movements, and aesthetic preferences or taste. For example, some youth attended summer courses in Egypt (or in Berliner mosques) to improve their Arabic skills and also took weekend seminars on religious topics, which also offered course certificates. The power of religious capital lies in how it represents a form of objective dispossession through constituting a laity (the people of a religious faith, as distinguished from its clergy), who by definition are those without, yet desiring, the resources that are controlled by specialists (Bourdieu 1991).

One of the older women commented that what Aysel was doing was wrong and that she had tried to tell Aysel that she should not boast about this, since she believed that it caused other MJD participants to react negatively toward Aysel.

Participating in a youth organization that promotes multiculturalism also changes how the young people perceive other ethnic groups. One married woman, Fatima (31), recounted that “MJ made me multiculti.” She felt that she learned to be tolerant as she interacted with people from different ethnic backgrounds. When she was younger, she had always been sure that she would marry a Turk, but then she ended up marrying an Egyptian. Similarly, a young Kurdish woman also told me that participating in MJD shaped her thoughts about life:

When I asked her for an example of how MJD changed her life, she said that it had changed how she thought about her future marriage partner. She used to think that it was important that her future husband be beautiful, but now she had realized that in the long run, his character and his practice of Islam were more important. She added that “there is so much crap out there.” She told me that she had always practiced Islam, but not “as strict” as since she started in MJD.

Her participation in MJD had clearly shaped her worldview, including transforming her ideas of what a good husband was.<sup>26</sup> Marriages outside of the ethnic group of their parents often caused tensions in the MJD youths’ family and ethnic social field. Older generations and the extended family were particularly skeptical toward marriages outside the ethnic group. These marriages often took place after long negotiations between the youths and their parents.<sup>27</sup> For the youth, stressing the importance of selecting a religiously oriented man as a future husband may be a request

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<sup>26</sup> Age and experience may, of course, also have an impact on changes in ideas about a future marriage partner.

<sup>27</sup> It should be noted that some of the MJD participants are themselves children of mixed marriages. The group attracts people whose ethnic identification is possibly relatively weak compared to other youths who choose an ethnically homogeneous religious organization. Strassburger (2003, 218) refers to a survey among Turkish youth in Germany (15–24 years old) about whether the youth would consider marrying someone of a different religion. According to Strassburger, the survey indicates that religion is statistically insignificant for inter-ethnic marriage behavior. However, she does not address the level of religiosity among the youth answering the survey. Furthermore, 29 percent of the respondents answered that they “think it necessary that their own parents accept the marriage” (*ibid.*), which leaves open the question of whether their parents’ generation is ready to accept inter-religious marriages. I also find it important to reflect on the fact that several of the married women in their late 20s told me that when they were younger, they never thought that they would marry inter-ethnically and that this only changed after they grew older and through participating in MJD, which presented them with a multi-cultural space.

for cultural homogeneity: because religion is such an important feature in their lives and to how they identify, many seek a partner with similar values, habits, and practices. It may also be a matter of personal qualities that they believe a religiously devoted man will possess; for example, that a Good Muslim man will be an attentive husband. Additionally, the role of education is particularly relevant: the preferable future husband should be an educated man, as he then will be more likely to represent what these youths consider a Good Muslim Man.

A mixed marriage can detach the young women further from their ethnic group, both emotionally and in terms of their social network. Fatima (31) suggested as much:

Sitting in a café in Kreuzberg, I told Fatima that I was interested in MJD in part because it has participants with different backgrounds, and she exclaimed, “multicultural! Yes, and you know that is quite exceptional. You don’t find that, for example, if you go to the Turkish mosques. There they only keep to themselves. They don’t want to have contact with others. (...) Like with me and my husband [she is married to an Egyptian man]—many say that it’s good that we have married and that they respect that and such, but we don’t find friends. Like the Turkish men can’t talk with him in Turkish, and they don’t like to speak German. You know, when I got married, this man who I grew up with and went to school with and had been in the mosque with, called me and said that he hoped that I had thought about it all carefully [marrying someone not Turkish], that they are so and so (...) and that you never know with the Egyptians. Can you imagine? I told him that I am 27 years old and can think about these matters fine, yes, thank you. Ah yes, he called us ‘cause we had asked to have the wedding in the mosque.”

Language was also an important factor in the choice of a husband. I frequently heard that the youths’ parents would prefer that their future son-in-law speak their language, as their German skills were often limited. Yet, for the youths who were born and socialized in Germany, and whose religious social field takes place in German, fluency in German was more relevant than Turkish or Arabic. Fatima pointed to how language was a barrier for their social interaction with people in her ethnic social field, as in her experience Turkish men prefer to speak Turkish. Her comments are also indicative of the stereotypes that exist between the various ethnic groups in Berlin, although all of them are Muslim.

One opportunity that young people have available to them to find a future husband is what might be called “*halal* dating,” where a couple can date with a view to marriage and do so in a religiously correct way. The tension between religious norms and the inter-gender socialization process is most often resolved by involving a sister or a trusted friend on the

date. New technology can also create an acceptable and religiously correct space where people can get to know someone of the opposite gender. E-mail, MSN, and Skype with webcam have made it possible to create more intimate conversations, where the two young people can interact with each other in a more private setting while still upholding the religious norm of not physically being in the same space without supervision before marriage.<sup>28</sup>

### *Female Emancipation through Religion?*

By situating their defense of Islam in a critique of tradition, and by insisting on the privileged position of women in Islam and the particular roles of men and women in Islam, the young women try to (re)negotiate the perception of Islam both among other Muslims and among the often stigmatizing non-Muslim, German public. It is by now a normal practice that women from MJD and mosque organizations like DMK give lectures on religious themes to mixed congregations.<sup>29</sup> Women were also active contributors to the monthly newsletter and organize meetings, seminars, and social events (such as religious celebrations, picnics, and trips abroad). Muslim women are entering and engaging in the administration of religious organizational structures and are educating themselves to be proficient speakers on Islam. In general, women have obtained new roles in the organizing and teaching of Islam in several European countries.<sup>30</sup>

Ironically, the headscarf debate has done much to allow Muslim women to develop expertise as public speakers on/for Islam in the German public sphere. Muslim women have taken on new functions as they speak in the

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<sup>28</sup> One active webcam user told me that she was not really sure whether or not this is strictly correct but felt that as long as the intention is to get married, which it was for her, she thought this would be sufficiently correct.

<sup>29</sup> The fact that female experts present in mixed congregations is nevertheless a practice which is not frequent among Muslims in Germany. In most Islamic organizations, including MJD, female experts are only allowed to lead women's congregations.

<sup>30</sup> Scholars (e.g. Ahlberg 1990) have pointed to a general exclusion of women from Islamic organizations and argue that the women are not treated as equal to men. Other studies, however, have found that women are increasingly making their own spaces and becoming more engaged both publicly and privately in the organization of mosques. These studies also find that women are activists, *da'wa* initiators, and teachers (Bendixsen 2009b; Göle 1996; Jacobsen 2011; Jonker 2003; Jouili 2009; Spielhaus and Färber 2006). According to recent research on mosque organizations in Berlin (Spielhaus and Färber 2006), activities for girls and women's involvement in communal activities have increased from the late 1990s to 2006. Similar processes were found in Norway, where studies show an increase in women's involvement during the 1990s (Vogt 2000).

media or on the radio, organize events, give lectures, and participate in podium discussions. Religious authorities such as Tariq Ramadan also advocate for the increased visibility of women in organizations. Consequently, many religious organizations use female spokespeople, which may well increase their credibility on gender questions in general and in the headscarf debate in particular. The representation and public involvement of women can be understood as an attempt to counteract negative images of Muslim men oppressing women within religious congregations and in their homes. Additionally, many of the young MJD participants believed they had a serious responsibility to provide role models for other young Muslims. The fact that women like them demonstrably possess organizational expertise and experience in presenting religious and political themes can encourage and give self-confidence to other women that they can also become involved and have an impact on their religious communities.

By increasing their religious knowledge, by behaving religiously correctly, and by cultivating more religiously observant friends, young women can gain social capital and a way out of parental surveillance and control while also avoiding criticism that they have become too German. As such, identification with Islam can, perhaps paradoxically, lead to an increased emancipation from their families. Research on Muslim youths has indicated that young people, and particularly young women, have the option of drawing on religious arguments to counter constraints from their families and ethnic groups.<sup>31</sup> This gives Muslim women a way to avoid traditional customs, such as forced marriage or withdrawal from the public sphere, without damaging the family relationship. In Berlin, I noticed that increased knowledge of Islam could provide youth with self-confidence and a legitimate foundation from which to challenge some of the restrictive attitudes held by the older generation. By reading the Koran and familiarizing themselves with the rules and rights within Islam, the youth empowered themselves. When their parents tried to restrict their actions on the basis of Islam, the girls and young women could “talk back” or challenge parental prohibitions by referring to Islam and the Koran. Aishegül (31) made me aware of this. She was unmarried, lived at home, and studied at university. She had joined MJD a few years previously, and started to wear the headscarf and to pray regularly. Her parents used to not allow her to take part in extra-curricular activities. Aishegül said:

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<sup>31</sup> See in particular Ali (1992), Dwyer (2000), Jacobson (1998), Nökel (2006), Salih (2003) Shaw (1988), Roy (2004).



“Now I can do whatever I want, and they won’t say no.” Being quite familiar with the Koran and its content, she now also argued with her parents. If they claimed that a particular action was not in accordance with Islam, she would ask: “Where does it say that?” She continued, “and you know, being in the Muslim group made me know more about my real rights [according to Islam]. Attending Islamic education actually emancipated me. I started to know my rights, and that Islam should not be taught at home, but in a community and that it is my right to receive Islamic education. At first, I asked my parents if I could go (and sometimes I had to argue with them), and then I just started to say, ‘I’m going here and there,’ without asking permission, ‘cause it is my right. Now I could go to Indonesia, if I wanted to. Now they really want me to finish my [university] degree. It is their only concern right now.”

Islam can offer a way out of their ethnic social field, and women can try to subvert men’s intentions by taking on a religious rhetoric that is detached from culture. Here, Aishegül suggests how in some instances, MJD can feel like a free space compared to that of the family. The clear distinction that is made between culture and religion breaks down hierarchies of knowledge, since individuals can wield book-knowledge and sources of authority that are necessary for legitimate arguments inside the group. This approach to Islam, together with enhanced education and knowledge of Islam, makes it possible for young women to de-legitimize their parents’ positions by saying that these are based on culture. To some extent, it leads to a crisis in their parents’ authority: the youth do not discuss religious matters extensively or solely with their parents. Instead, they feel that they know more about Islam than their parents and can call upon a greater Islamic knowledge and higher moral authority.<sup>32</sup> Sometimes the young women attempted to shape their own mothers’ practices, such as inducing them to veil, and they judged their parents for their lax religious lifestyles. In consequence, the age hierarchy can be overturned, and to some extent the youth can become the religious educators of their parents. This perspective can be seen as an alternative to the oft-cited idea that Islam only creates limitations for women and that Islam is a tool for parents to control their daughters. As such, the focus on the emancipatory aspects of Islam is an important consideration for those women who seek to evade strict controls legitimized as Islamic by their parents

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<sup>32</sup> The breakdown of parents’ authority and increased freedom of movement for young Muslim women as a result of turning to a pure Islam have been suggested by a variety of scholars who disagree on other issues: Amiraux (2001), Brenner (1996), Dwyer (2000), Jacobsen (2011), Jouili (2009), Khosrokhavar (1997, 144), Mahmood (2005, 116), Nökel (2002), Roy (2004), Salih (2003), Weibel (2000).

but delegitimized as unreligious and traditional by the girls and young women.

### *Reconfiguration of Authority*

However, even if I agree with the argument that a young person's orientation toward Islam can lead to some degree of emancipation or freedom of movement, my fieldwork indicates that this is by no means absolute. During fieldwork, I realized that the parents' authority was often re-emphasized through Islamic discourses. During presentations, the youths' obligations and duties as daughters or sons and the significant role and position of parents within Islam were frequently stressed. It was considered a great sin to break with one's family, and the young people avoided doing so to the extent possible. The following discussion, which took place during the annual MJD regional meeting in a mosque in Wedding, illustrates this well:

MJD members from outside Berlin were participating in a one-day event with presentations and social activities organized by MJD Berlin. The attendees included about 40 young women and 30 young men from Berlin, Bremen, and Cologne. After a presentation by a young, newly trained imam, the listeners could ask questions. A woman of about 30 years asked: "What about the parents..., if you feel that your parents are too strict, like really too much, how should you react?" The young imam answered: "Sometimes there are questions to which I feel like saying that it depends on the situation, and this is such a question. Allah has told us that after him come the parents. And it's like that, nothing we can do about that. If your parents are doing *du'a* for you, that is a blessing, that is the best. If your parents throw you out [that is very bad]." He went on to say that Allah gave them something else at the same time, which is that if there is something that goes against His wishes, then one should not do it. He continued, "but parents are sometimes very strict, we know that. But they have lived longer, have more experience, they have seen things. We are modern—we know how it is to live in this society. But we don't always know the right thing to do. We have to think about this also." He added that if they were sure that their parents were wrong, "then you have to find a way to tell them that. Like, not in a stressful situation, then you will get nowhere. Like, it is the same with your boss at work—don't ask for something when he is in a bad mood. After all, you have a goal, and try to achieve that when they are in a good mood. Ask when you see that it is a good moment, then start to talk about it (...)."

A young convert put her hand up and continued the discussion: "But how should you react when your parents are not Muslims but the opposite, and they are saying things against your headscarf and such?" The young imam answered: "One should still respect one's parents and treat them very kindly. But not go against Allah." Another woman insisted, "but what if your parents

are making you do things, like forced marriage?" He answered patiently, "as I said, parents should not make you do things which are against Allah's will. And in Islam, it is very clear, forced marriage is not allowed! But one has to be wise, and find a wise solution to the problem. It is important to find people that you respect, and people your parents respect; like that you can find a solution. One of the greatest sins, mortal sins, is (to break) with your parents. It's not recommended! There is always a solution to a problem. The wiser one is, the wiser solution one can find." After the question round finished, one of the MJD brothers came forward and said, "I want to end the meeting with a story. A woman comes to the mosque and tells the imam that she wants her daughter to become Muslim. The imam is surprised and asks her why. Is she herself a Muslim? No, but our neighbors are Muslims and I see how well they treat their parents [i.e. she also wants her daughter to treat her like that]. The imam asks, and what about you? She answers: 'My mother is already dead!'" The assembled members laughed.<sup>33</sup>

I noticed that only women asked questions during this discussion, suggesting that these themes might be more imperative for young women in their roles as Muslim daughters compared to young men. The young women need to find a path between what they see as their Islamic duty to remain respectful toward their parents and the imperative to follow what is correct according to Islam. This can lead to moments of tension where what is considered the right answer is not clear-cut. Young women can employ religious arguments in their discussions with their parents, but at the same time, the respect and authority that Islam gives to their parents create limits to this emancipation process. Islamic teaching frequently emphasizes the parents' role and position in Islam. Being a good daughter includes respecting one's parents, their needs, and their knowledge. For example, during an MJD meeting Fadwa contended that "each one of us is so fortunate because we have received the best parents." Another principle often mentioned is that "the best Muslim is the one who takes proper care of their family." It is an important part of Islamic family law, even if it is not tied to any specific legal injunction (Roald 2001). Thus, when young people's knowledge of Islam increases, this does not subvert the authority of the family, but it does restructure it. The family's authority is reinstated through the youth's religiosity.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The joke is also available at [www.youngmuslims.ca/articles/display.asp?ID=73](http://www.youngmuslims.ca/articles/display.asp?ID=73), accessed January 20, 2007.

<sup>34</sup> In Protestantism it finds its equivalence in the words of Jesus: "Leave your family, leave your friends, leave your home, and join me." This can also be understood within the framework of Alberoni's (1984) research on movements. He contends that any movement creates ethical dilemmas for its members and that each person must show to themselves and to others that they are a member of the group in order to become part of the movement.

Furthermore, even if the young people themselves understand gender roles in a religious way and try, to a greater or lesser degree, to follow this in their daily lives, this does not stop them from facing social expectations that they personally believe are solely ethnically or culturally based. Although the youth themselves turn to what they believe is a true Islam, their parents and traditionally or culturally oriented Muslims do not necessarily share this understanding of Islam. This means that the youth must mediate between different religious and cultural frames of reference, ideals, and values. Social practices and restrictions considered traditionally or culturally defined continue to be asserted and sometimes prevail. For example, the father of one eighteen-year-old MJD participant did not allow her to move outside Berlin in order to pursue her university degree. Additionally, at one point Ines (20) explained that she did not want to visit the doctor until she was married because there was always someone who would see her and who might start talking about “why she is there.” She was worried about the gossip that might damage her reputation, even though she was not behaving religiously incorrectly by visiting the doctor while not married. This calls to mind the community policing (Dwyer 2000, 479) that I discussed in chapter 3.

In this representative role the women did accept limitations on the subjects they could speak about, as many considered it necessary to focus on how Islam empowered their lives. It can be difficult for women to be critical of their own group, as their agency becomes oriented toward “defending” their group and their men. It is my impression that both women and men show a strong preference for arguments or struggles against the continued gender discrimination within different Muslim congregations to take place in the private sphere, away from the (critical) gaze of non-Muslims.<sup>35</sup>

Although a religiously defined gender order may provide the youth with more space for negotiation than culturally defined gender norms, women

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This includes leaving behind old ideas and fidelities: “leave everything and come with me”; “leave your father and mother and join us.” At the same time, such dilemmas are expressed in a form of double bind: “leave your father and mother” and at the same time the instruction to “honor father and mother” (Alberoni 1984).

<sup>35</sup> The role of women in different Muslim organizations in Berlin varies. In one mosque, some women decided to make their own women-only religious community “because the men only created problems.” Others complained about male dominance when working in certain mosque organizations (outside MJD). However, the solution these Muslim youth proposed to improve this situation was not that the men should become more German but that they should become more educated, and especially become more educated about Islam.

are not able to decide on legitimate interpretations of religious rules and texts. As discussed in chapter 5, the youths are not free to define what a Good Muslim Woman is and cannot freely choose the actions that are legitimated within the religious discourse. In fact, women seldom participate in the authoritative interpretation of the rules and texts.<sup>36</sup> Overall, women have limited access to or ability to participate in pivotal discussions about religious interpretations. These discussions are generally controlled by men. In consequence, women's experiences and interests are easily omitted. This gender-divided social space in the religious field points to the different sources of information available to men and women.<sup>37</sup> The physical and spiritual gender separation may lead to men and women not adequately sharing knowledge of each other's experiences and to a situation where women receive insufficient information and where there is little room for their opinions. Effectively, there is a risk, intended or unintended, that male privilege and male interpretations are (re)produced.

Different discourses on what pure Islam is generate conditions for the social space within which these youths operate. This space becomes especially tense in view of the fact that the correct construction of the gender order is itself the subject of much disagreement and discussion about values and attitudes among Islamic organizations. Although there was a balanced gender representation in MJD activities and five of the ten members in the *shura* (religious council) were women (in 2008), the national leadership (the *Vorsitzende* or *Amir*) of MJD has since its founding been male. There are still religious situations where gender remains a crucial category. For example, women cannot lead the prayer in mixed congregations, and the women must pray behind the men, sometimes in a separate room.<sup>38</sup> There were generally no discussions about gendered prayer spaces and ritual performances, and these were accepted as given by Islam.

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<sup>36</sup> It is not my impression that the young women I worked with were specifically pursuing a so-called Muslim feminist position. For a discussion on the usefulness of the concept of "Islamic feminism," see Mir-Hosseini (2006) and Moghadam (2002). Moghadam, focusing on Iran, contributes to a general understanding of the potentiality and limitation of Islamic feminism.

<sup>37</sup> Anne Sofie Roald contends that "this segregation is not always visible, but even when men and women are present in the same room there will be an invisible barrier due to a strong idea of segregation inhibiting interaction between the sexes. The result is that men and women have access to different information" (Roald 2001, 76).

<sup>38</sup> In several mosques, women listen to the prayer and religious presentation (*khutba*) via a loudspeaker system or a television feed from the men's section. In conservative theology, a woman's voice is considered erotic and is thus not suitable to hear, especially in ritual contexts.

In sum, there were situations where the young women's religious knowledge might not represent a symbolic capital; in particular, the structure and production of religious knowledge formation continues to be largely male-dominated.<sup>39</sup> A woman's religious knowledge thus only increases her symbolic capital in certain restricted areas, such as when talking to other women and when choosing a marriage partner.

### *An Alternative Space*

I see the set of dispositions, knowledge, and forms of behavior that the young women acquire through acting within this religious faith community as representing the acquisition of a (new) religious habitus and bodily hexis—a way of comporting their bodies. The clear distinction that the youths made between culture and tradition on the one hand, and religion on the other, made it possible for them to not feel betwixt and between their parents' home country and Germany. One of the original MJD initiators, Fatima (31), said that:

“Religion can be a bridge (because it combines both). One can say ‘I am a Muslim’ and it does not matter whether one is German, Turkish, or Arabic.” She explained that since their parents are Muslims, even if they are not necessarily religiously active, the utterance “I am a Muslim” would be accepted.

Fatima's comment exemplifies how identifying foremost with religion can form a space for youth who otherwise must struggle between their parents' expectations that they be Turkish or Arabic and those of their peers or teachers who do not consider them German. Moreover, through becoming skilled at and gaining knowledge of what constitutes correct knowledge and how that knowledge is validated (as discussed in chapter 4), as well as about correct dress and body comportment defined by a religious gender order, the youth are crafting a religiously gendered, de-ethnized Self in Germany. Separating tradition and culture from religion enables the young women to dismiss certain gendered expectations on their behavior as cultural. Simultaneously, although there are individual

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<sup>39</sup> See Jonker (2003) for a discussion about the increase in women's spaces within mosques and the entrance of more women with religious education, which she argues in the long run may shape religious knowledge formation generally. Jonker argues that the production of knowledge among Muslims in Germany is still structurally connected to an overall male core. At the same time, she shows that there are Muslim women who produce knowledge in “external production sites” (Jonker 2003, 37), outside the domination of male authority.

responses and internal disagreements, the religious field (like any social field) imposes specific kinds of efforts or struggles on them as actors.

Constructing and encouraging a Muslim identity detached from ethnic or national identity may well be an effort to achieve recognition for Islam as a religion at home in Germany, and for Muslims as not migrants, but German citizens. In the long run, it is likely that Islam and Muslims will be more accepted in German society if Islam is viewed as practiced by individuals who identify and are viewed as citizens of Germany. To some extent, then, MJD and its work represent an identity movement that seeks to create or underline a social and cultural identity of a group (or category) in order to change this group's status in society. Islam provides a glue between them and their friends; one that many are seeking to investigate further. The religious sphere offers a way out of the ethnic social field without seeking to be embraced by the non-Muslim, German social field. Yet following a pure Islam represents an alternative universality through which the youth maintain the position of the Other.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE MEANINGS OF AND INCENTIVES FOR A RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION

To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced. For such a philosophy, the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as “real” as anything else in the system.

—William James 1996 [1912], 42

At 5 PM, as I enter the weekly MJD meeting in Kreuzberg, there is no one in the front room, which is filled with baby strollers. In the inner room, I greet all 19 girls and women with “*Salam Aleikum*,” to which some of them respond “*Aleikum Salam*.” Current female participants and older ex-participants (who have children or are older than 30, and several of whom have brought their young children) are seated on the floor in the small room, which has a window to an inner courtyard. It is the annual membership meeting for all female members of MJD in Berlin. When I enter, the discussion concerns the decline in participation over the past weeks. One of the older participants asks, “why do the younger members not come any more?” Some suggest that there is no new generation of “MJD-ers.” Now that the first MJD generation has grown up, no recruitment drives have been held to attract younger members. Fatima (31) adds, “maybe we are so used to MJ that we are not doing enough to promote it to others anymore. That we forget about it?” She asks the younger participants, “what would you miss if MJ wasn’t there? Why is MJ important?” Before anyone can answer, one of the founders of the organization, Lana (35), argues that the problem is that MJD has not evolved. When she thinks back to how MJD was ten years ago, she thinks it looked the same as today. Lana continues, “but the youth today have changed. Look at my nine-year-old sister—she doesn’t think the same way as me. We must ask them, why they do not come, or what they want. When we started, it was so new. (...) Today there are more things, like Finnowstrasse does a lot, and Al Nur, and they are very well attended! That is good, of course, but we have to think about our concept, our target group and what we want.” Fatima interjects that “it is important for young people today to develop their Muslim identity.” Lana persists, saying that “MJ was thought of as being for the young, and by the young.” She feels that the older members should retire from the organization. Somaya (17), one of the young, currently active members, brings up the weekly meetings: “It is always the same people who do the presentations and that is not fair for them [i.e. they do all the work]!” She

says that when she knows she will be presenting, she makes sure to attend since she feels more obligated to be there. One of the elders insists that the younger members should say what is wrong, but the young girls are reluctant to speak. A woman in her late 20s (married, with two children) says, “for me, when I started here [six years ago] it was important, ‘cause it was the first place where I could find Muslim friends! I was at a school with only Germans and I was the only one at school with a headscarf. For me, it was very important to come here and develop friendships. It was important to be able to be in a place where the other women were Muslim, to be able to develop friendships with Muslims, others who think like me.” Another former member adds that “it is like a second family.” Aishegül (31) agrees, “that is also what it should be. The knowledge isn’t the most important aspect, but that a sisterly feeling develops. Like a second family! The community [Gemeinschaft] feeling. Knowledge could develop somewhere else. It is more important that we do things together, social events like the movies and such.” Jenny (26) adds, “and then we have children and they get to know each other and perhaps even go to same kindergarten and school!” Somaya suggests that “maybe the themes should be more contemporary? Not so much about what the Prophet did and such, but more about themes like, for example, how to deal with questions we are asked about the headscarf.”

After some discussion, Fatima inserts, “it is about learning to live as a young Muslim in this society, without making it so hard for ourselves. We should not pretend to be something we aren’t [being cool], but also not less than we are.” Lana refers to the beginning of MJD, when it was first established in Berlin: “There weren’t that many of us, and so we did a lot together and like that you really came to know each other. It doesn’t mean that you get along with everyone. That is not possible. But we developed a sisterly feeling.” Jenny says that “it has made me everything I am today! When I first started, I didn’t have a headscarf, and I didn’t know anything. I learned everything here!”

Turning the discussion towards the young current participants, Latifa (17) says that she started in MJD in January, and subsequently donned the veil. She admits that she sometimes skips the meetings, but that the Paris trip was important to her.<sup>1</sup> There, she started to get to know the others more and she realized it is important that they experienced this together. Other adolescents agree, adding that the Paris trip was important for developing sisterly feelings or a feeling of community; they think it is important to have fun together. Lana asks Latifa: “Is it like a family to you?” Latifa is hesitant—she would not really define it like that, she says. Fatima says, “when I moved to Berlin [from Frankfurt] I didn’t know anyone, I only knew that there was an MJ here too! So, when people move from one place to another it is also a contact network since MJ exists in different regions.”

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<sup>1</sup> The MJD Berlin group went to Paris in fall 2005. Each year, MJD arranges a trip abroad, for example to Istanbul, Paris or Spain. On these trips, they visit mosques and make use of contacts with Muslim organizations in the respective countries.

This discussion reflects the overall development of religious organizations in Germany since the 1990s. When first established in 1994, MJD filled a gap for the young generation in terms of available religious spaces. In recent years, youth have been given more space within several mosques and organizations (Spielhaus and Färber 2006). Some religious organizations and movements today target Muslim youth specifically, which illustrates the development of a diverse religious market, as discussed in chapter 2. Although many MJD participants emphasized that this is a positive development, there was a certain level of rivalry between the organizations over membership and attendance in the different spaces in the diverse religious urban sphere.<sup>2</sup>

In the above discussion, one of the older members felt that MJD was no longer meeting the needs of the current Muslim generation. Lana suggested that it was important for religious organizations to not be static, as this would affect the (lack of) membership. Rather, religious organizations like MJD should evolve in response to each new young generation, and each new generation should partly define and form the space. MJD is unique in that all members are between 15 and 30 years old, and there are no imams. Just as the religious authorities and knowledge accepted as relevant are not static, the space, members, and content of the organization also changes. This internal discussion also highlights the heterogeneity within the religious group. There are both intra- and inter-generational differences in what MJD represents and means for individual members. For some (and in particular for German converts), the focus on knowledge was most important, whereas others emphasized the feeling of community or family within the organization.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, I focus on the different incentives and motivations to take up a religious subject position, and to identify with Islam in general and with a Muslim faith community in particular. What are the politics that bring together a group of youth within an organization that advocates piety? What are the experiences that motivate these youth to participate

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<sup>2</sup> One of the opportunities provided by a more plural market in the urban sphere is the possibility of switching between communities or changing one's allegiance to a particular community if one does not want to associate with their cause or method.

<sup>3</sup> Some saw the MJD group in Berlin as more of a family organization at the beginning, because of the active involvement of a whole family. The impression that participation in MJD Berlin was more intense when it first started can also be understood within the framework of the formative stage of social movements, which Alberoni (1984) discusses. Alberoni views social organizations as going through different stages where one of the most fundamental characteristics of the first stage is the solidarity of the new group.

in such a religious organization? Put differently: which socio-historical structures contribute to creating and forming this local religious youth culture?

Research on Muslim youths' turn to Islam has generally pointed to external social forces, such as economic poverty, lack of social capital in the non-Muslim society, political Othering of their social identity, and the contradictory expectations from their parents on the one hand and teachers and school peers on the other. Although a combination of these explanations may help us understand why youth identify with MJD, I find them dissatisfactory as they ignore the meanings the youth ascribe to what they are doing. Instead, any effort to comprehend their turn to Islam must include both an examination of the broader context and an explanation of the meanings the youth, as social actors, ascribe to their own participation in the organization. It is necessary to look at the set of circumstances in which the young women are situated and which form the arena in which the analysis of their behavior must take place. It is also necessary to recognize the set of meanings the young women attach to their behavior.<sup>4</sup> It is critical that scholars provide an understanding of the turn to Islam as it is expressed both within the particular setting and using the young women's cognitive definition of the situation.

I will first briefly discuss the "why" question by examining the normative standpoint from which this question is posed. Second, I argue that identification with this faith community should be understood within the socio-cultural, economic, and migratory context in which the youth grow up. Third, I show that their turn to Islam can only be understood if we also take seriously the set of meanings that they attach to their Muslim identity. Limiting our understanding of youths' religious identification to the external socio-cultural context is not satisfactory, as it ignores how religiousness and desires play a significant factor in the youth's identification processes and how a religious group may actively seek to attract new

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<sup>4</sup> In Mitchell's words: "The setting and situations, therefore, stand in a reflexive relationship to one another. I mean by this that an analyst wishing to interpret a specified type of behavior in a town needs to work with two different referents simultaneously. The first of these is an appreciation of the set of circumstances in which the actors are placed and which determine the arena within which the analyst postulates the behavior must take place. The second is an appreciation of the set of meanings the actors themselves attribute to the behavior. The analysis then consists of an interpretation in general theoretical terms of the behavior as articulated both with the setting and with the actors' cognitive definition of the situation" (Mitchell 1987, 17). Thus, there is no universally specific set of contextual parameters that the researcher must include in any research, nor a list of factors which must be spelled out in each situation.

members. Overall, this chapter draws attention to the complexity of individual identifications with Islam, where global, national, local, and personal factors must be considered, and specific characteristics of religious experiences must be embraced.

*Why Are we Asking Why?*

The normative question of why women embrace religious norms and religious communities has been central in studies about Muslim women since the 1990s, and has been addressed in different ways (Bracke 2003).<sup>5</sup> Scholars have found it curious that women embrace, seek comfort in, and even find a sense of empowerment in Islam and religious (fundamentalist) organizations that many, including the scholars themselves, regard as subjecting female bodies to patriarchal gender structures. Several scholars (and self-described feminist scholars in particular) have seen women's participation in such organizations as either a paradox or as a perplexing question.<sup>6</sup> Some scholars tend to consider women who actively participate in religious organizations to be victims of false consciousness and to be disciplined by fundamentalist and repressive formations.<sup>7</sup>

In debating multiculturalism, Susan Okin (1999), a liberal feminist philosopher, claims that there is an inescapable tension between gender equality ideals (or feminism) and cultural recognition of groups (or multiculturalism). She argues that individual rights, and particularly women's rights, risk being inadequately protected if group rights are privileged over individual rights, since culturally defined groups are led by men. In this vein, some researchers (e.g. Badinter 1989) make arguments based on a "universal" feminism. These scholars posit that even though Muslim girls seem to choose to wear the headscarf, this does not mean that they are autonomous, as the headscarf is a symbol of subordination. In this view, because the content of the women's cultural norms, such as modesty, self-discipline, and gender segregation, is in opposition to personal autonomy, the women risk being subordinated by adhering to their faith

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<sup>5</sup> There is also a long scholarly debate on why Christian women seem to be more religious than Christian men. For a short overview of this discussion and one way to explain Christian women's religiosity, see Walter and Davie (1998).

<sup>6</sup> This includes Hardacre (1993), Moghadam (1994), and Yuval-Davis and Sahgal (1992).

<sup>7</sup> For example, Grewal and Kaplan (1994). For a critique of this view, see Bracke (2003) and Dwyer (1998). Bracke (2003, 337) reflects upon how the idea of "false consciousness" is gendered and ethnicized.

communities. Mookherjee (2005) points out that these perspectives call to mind John Stuart Mill's statement that "[a] person's autonomy depends not only on how they make their choices, but also on what they choose" (Mill in Mookherjee 2005, 33).

Western-oriented scholars seem to be focused on the question of why women are turning to what is considered an oppressive religion, thus starting from the assumption that the women's religiosity is irrational or an abnormal decision in need of explanation. This starting point takes for granted that it is the situation where youth are religiously active or virtuous that needs to be explained, whereas having a distant relationship to religion is normalized. Secularization and secular individuals become the neutral starting point, which ignores how the secular body is also constituted by discursive powers (see Asad 2003). Although I recognize the subjective starting point of my inquiry, I nevertheless discuss why young women turn to Islam and identify with a faith community. Such discussions contribute to our understanding of the social contexts and spheres of power in which the crafting of a religious Self is situated.

### *The Question of Why: External Social and Cultural Context*

How have social scientists explained the turn to Islam among young migrants in European cities? In the early 1990s, scholars (and particularly French scholars) thought that youth turned to Islam as the only option available, due to the conflicting demands of the majority society and their ethnic group (Sahgal 1992). The new Islamic revival observed among second generation migrants in French cities was explained as a response to external forces like discrimination (Cesari 2002, 2003), daily racism, and a way out for youth who were more or less excluded or rejected from society and who were searching for a sense of direction (Khosrokhavar 1997).<sup>8</sup> In "Islam of the youth" (*L'islam des jeunes*), Khosrokhavar (1997) distinguishes between the Islam of the excluded (*l'islam des exclus*) and Islam as a source of integration (*l'islam de l'intégration*). He defines the Islam of the excluded as a neo-communitarian construction where Muslim youth try to give meaning to their lives in a society where they feel left out and

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<sup>8</sup> To a large extent, these arguments follow a conventional explanation of the appeal of religion within sociological scholarship on religion, namely that people become religious in times of economic hardship, loss or grief, physical suffering, poor health or loneliness (see Berger 1967; Glock and Stark 1965). Sociologists of religion tend to investigate the problems of the social order more than the individual's psychological responses.

without a social space. However, he also shows that Islam can be a source of integration: young Muslims use Islam in order to create a social position within France.<sup>9</sup>

Khosrokhavar (1997) argues that for unemployed youth in the suburbs, religiosity represents an alternative “‘work’ on the self and on others.”<sup>10</sup> Likewise, in the United Kingdom, Jacobson (1998, 116) sees the turn to Islam as an alternative to unemployment prospects and as a quest for certainty, as the youth are “prone to feelings of uncertainty and general ambivalence over questions of identity, in the face of problems perceived to arise from racism, family conflict, life in the secular and immoral ‘West’, culture clash, or any combination of these and other factors.” Rogers and Vertovec (1998, 15) regard the identities of Muslim youth in Europe as “often forged in reaction to negative and essentialist representations of both Islam and migrants,” whereas Amiraux (2003, 246) argues that “Islam furnishes the tools for ‘identity management’ of migrants’ exclusion to attain a measure of autonomy and enhance the possibility for ‘integration without assimilation.’” It is also viewed as a way for youth to liberate themselves from their family without damaging the family relationship (Salih 2003). Others argue that French Muslims who affirm their Muslim identity are “social actors who, deprived of other legitimate means of asserting their collective presence, have recourse to the means of expression that are closest to them at their cultural level” (Leveau 1988, 107). More broadly, in relation to the emergence of Islamist Movements globally Moghadam (1994, 11) argues that “Islam provides a stable identity in a rapidly changing society.”<sup>11</sup>

These explanations indirectly suggest a strategic-instrumental reason for embracing Islam. Women may engage in religious practices as a form of refuge. Islam and the expression of Islam become one of many

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<sup>9</sup> As noted, Khosrokhavar argues—erroneously, in my opinion—that there is not one Islam in France, but several, that each are subject to their own dynamics and only vaguely influenced by the others. Consequently, Khosrokhavar deals with the Islam of the excluded and Islam as a source of integration as relatively independent types and approaches by different categories of people who hold different social positions in French society. As discussed in the introduction, I view Islam as a discursive tradition (Asad 1986) that recognizes that various strategies of responding to Islam and even performing Islam do not lead to the fragmentation of Islam that Khosrokhavar suggests, or to different types of Islam. Rather, they represent different strategies by which people can orient their practices within the Islamic discourse.

<sup>10</sup> Author’s translation from the French original: “‘travail’ sur soi et sur les autres.”

<sup>11</sup> Not specifically targeting Islam, but all religion, Yuval-Davis and Sahgal argue that “religion provides a compass and an anchor; it gives people a sense of stability and meaning, as well as coherent identity (Yuval-Davis and Sahgal 1992, 6).”



strategies used in order to overcome the precarious social situation in which the youth find themselves. Islam becomes an instrument with which to construct an intact subjectivity. This understanding of the turn to Islam focuses on Islam presenting youth with tools with which to operate in society. How does this resonate with the youth in Berlin and with their identification with Islam in general and MJD in particular? To what extent does the socio-cultural context and economic conditions motivate the youth in this study to turn to Islam?

*Being with Others like Themselves: Socio-Cultural Background*

There is no doubt that the social, cultural, and economic situation of the Muslim youth with whom I have been working has real consequences for their identifications and their experiences of growing up in Germany. The social area in which they live forms young people's lifestyles and experiences (Jenkins 1983). Youth with a migrant background generally live in neighborhoods with social problems, such as high unemployment, social stigmatization, and general cultural and social deprivation. The youth in Berlin are no exception; most of them grew up in Kreuzberg, Wedding, and Neukölln, which are poor neighborhoods with high unemployment rates.

The youth who decide to come to MJD have often already visited different mosques and youth groups. The majority of the young female participants were not sent by their parents, but learned about it from friends, schoolmates, or from fliers at various Islamic events. When I asked (whether explicitly or indirectly) why they participated in MJD, the youth frequently emphasized the need to "be with others like themselves." To some extent, this expression calls attention to the socio-cultural similarities among the MJD participants, since coming from a migrant family means that they have different life-narratives or biography formations than their ethnic German peers.<sup>12</sup> However, being with "others like them" also refers to others with a similar lifestyle orientation, forms of religiosity, and a shared experience of self-transcendence. I discuss the latter topics in greater detail below.

These (mostly) second-generation youths articulated certain shared horizons of experience<sup>13</sup> that were significant to their lives, including

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<sup>12</sup> At the same time, there are also internal differences, as some youth were from Turkish families, others were from Arab families, and yet others were from mixed marriages where one parent was German. However, there seemed to be a common experience of being different from ethnic Germans and of belonging to the migrant population in Germany.

<sup>13</sup> The term "horizon" has long been used within German philosophy. Gadamer uses it to refer to "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular

experiences of migration, social stigmatization, economic situations, and family structure. Further, the youth negotiated between at least two different societal systems as a consequence of the choices their parents made. The confrontation with so-called cultural differences between their parents and German society structured the youths' experiences and shaped inter-generational relations. The youths' shared horizons of experience also included transnational links with majority-Muslim countries through vacations, extended family, and consumption of media.

Through my fieldwork, I realized that the youths' mode of identification with Islam must be viewed in light of their experiences as migrants or Others, and of the stereotyped categorizations they are subject to in German society (see chapter 3). Charles Taylor (1994) reminds us that any identity (be it individual, political, communal, ethnic, or national) is shaped by recognition, non-recognition or mis-recognition of others. Identification with Islam in general and with a religious organization in particular, is one way for youth in Berlin to deal with an otherwise marginalized position. Enforcing a religious identity and attempting to modify the negative content of the Muslim category can offer these youth meaning, positive self-perception, and a feeling of control. Moreover, it is one form of identification that was readably available to them. Trying to be identified as a German was frequently impossible, as they were not accepted as such by anyone.

Embracing Islam can be a search for a collective identity. Today, many Muslim youth search for a public articulation of authenticity. This often takes place through symbols that represent their religious identity, and is a way to claim recognition from the larger society. In Berlin, the turn to a Muslim identity among youth can be understood as expressing difference and demanding public recognition of that difference, a process often described as identity politics.<sup>14</sup> Here, I follow Calhoun's suggestion that we should see identity politics as "collective and public struggles that involve both 'claiming' certain identities, on the one hand, and questioning and

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vantage point" (Gadamer 1989 [1975], 302). It has been used in similar ways by Husserl and Heidegger. The sociologist Karl Mannheim, as well as the philosopher of science Karl Popper, used it with "expectations," as "horizon of expectations." In this book, my use of the term "horizon of experience" encompasses subjective experiences and visions, as understood by subjects situated within a specific socio-economic context.

<sup>14</sup> In this framework, the return to Islam observed among many Muslim youth in Europe is considered part of identity politics (Cesari 2003; Khosrokhavar 1997) or a form of "politics from below" (Leveau 1988). This is seen as a modern phenomenon, with similarities to social movements (Göle 2003, 812).

refusing imposed or prescribed identities, on the other hand” (Calhoun 1994, 21).<sup>15</sup> Identity politics as performed by these youth can be viewed as an effort to define and (re)interpret the concepts, practices, and experiences that categorize Islam and Muslims by trying to define, change, or control what being Muslim signifies.<sup>16</sup> Insofar as the youth participated in a Muslim organization and identified with Islam because they sought to change the erroneous conception of Islam and Muslims in German society, I understand their participation as a form of identity politics.

The continuous focus on Muslim women in the German media and public sphere, as well as the daily experiences of Othering gazes, made the youth conscious of their differences. Many of the youth were constantly categorized and defined as Muslim, and felt that their cultural or family background was continuously stigmatized through references to Islam as an oppressive religion. This experience seemed to induce many of them to seek more knowledge of Islam either as a means to answer their interlocutors better, or to make up their own mind as to whether Islam is as bad as the media depicts. Others felt obliged to improve their answers to questions posed by non-Muslims, and to be more conscious of how they behaved in a context in which they had become the “Muslimwoman” (Cooke 2007); a term used to describe how, post-9/11, women of Muslim origin are constructed as a “Muslim woman,” which is made a primary identity whether chosen or not. Being constructed as a “Muslimwoman” may lead to a process whereby some women increasingly identify with Islam. Islam may thus eventually also become a central element in defining both the individual Self and the group with which they identify.

Membership in a religious group can play a supportive role in how individuals experience coming of age. The weekly meetings were not only a space for religious knowledge and performance, but were also a space where the girls could exchange, discuss, and laugh about everyday life experiences. Before and after the official weekly program, the youth discussed doubts they felt in their religious beliefs, but also problems that

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<sup>15</sup> I am aware of the extensive discussion of the use of “identity politics” and its consequences. A further discussion of this topic is outside the scope of this book. See the edited volume “Identity Politics Reconsidered” (2006) by Alcoff, Hames-Garcia, Mohanty and Moya for an overview of this debate.

<sup>16</sup> In his sociology of symbolic power, Bourdieu suggests that the fundamental dimension of all social life is the struggle for social recognition. In this process, Bourdieu (1984) contends, cultural symbols and activities, including taste, style of dress, eating habits, and language, represent interests and function in a way that develops or increases social distinctions.

arose at school after they started to veil, discrimination they experienced in the street or when applying for jobs, and problems related to their parents.

Moreover, being familiar with the reactions and worries that were common among the parents, MJD leaders usually offered to talk with the parents so that the youth might be able to participate in events. Declining to participate in social events organized by their school could also be a question of finances, though non-participation in extra-curricular activities was often understood by their teachers (and the media) as a cultural rather than an economic issue. MJD organizers were familiar with this issue and could sometimes resolve the situation. "If it is a question of money," the leader usually said when someone explained that they could not take part, "then let me know, and we can arrange something." At the same time, parents were more likely to accept their daughters' participation in a Muslim event with overnight lodging rather than a school camp, because the parents had greater confidence that the Muslim event would follow certain customary and appreciated rules and norms.

*The Question of Difference: Three Sisters with Different Desires*

Seeing an individual's participation in a religious youth organization or identification with Islam merely as a form of identity politics and as a response to a difficult social situation, reduces the identification process to a rational choice based on the socio-cultural, political, and material context. Young people who grow up in Berlin have different spheres of possibilities to choose from when constructing and directing their lives. The following narrative of a family with three siblings illustrates that external factors, including experiences of discrimination or racism, are insufficient explanations for why someone turns to Islam as a focal point of identification whereas others did not:

The three sisters (26, 28, and 31) grew up in a working class family in the neighborhood of Neukölln. Their Turkish parents arrived as guest workers in Germany at the end of the 1960s, and, like many other guest worker families, remained in Berlin. When I got to know them, two of the sisters were married and had left the family apartment. The oldest sister, Aishegül, was unmarried and living at home while finishing her university degree. Aishegül was the only one who veiled, a practice that her mother, who wore what the youth consider to be a traditional headscarf (not completely covering her hair, and in unfashionable colors), had begged her to put off, "at least until she had married." For a number of years, Aishegül had been actively involved in MJD and in inter-religious activities. She was highly respected by her local religious community as a knowledgeable, religiously active, and

virtuous individual—character traits that she continuously strove to improve. Aishegül considered herself as having “always been a Muslim, but not so active,” a mode that changed in her mid-twenties. She found it difficult to find a husband, because while she was indifferent to a potential spouse’s ethnic background, she was adamant that he had to be religiously active. Aishegül had few Turkish friends, and she considered her Turkish language proficiency to be low. During a religious event, this caused an uncomfortable situation after a Turkish man complained about her inadequate translation from German to Turkish. She recalled that the older man told her that “if you forget your language you forget your religion,” to which Aishegül had responded, “why, I can learn Islam in German!”

In contrast, her two younger sisters were both married to men with a Turkish background. Neither of them veiled, and Aishegül expressed regret that neither of them actively practiced the religion or attended religious events. Instead, they preferred clubs and Turkish pop concerts, and their friendship circles were almost exclusively composed of young people with Turkish backgrounds. Nuriye (26), the youngest sister, explained that “it’s ‘cause we have the same backgrounds: [for all of us], when we were younger we weren’t allowed to go swimming, to clubs, or to have boyfriends.” I met Nuriye accidentally on a few occasions, and I conducted an interview with her in their family apartment. Nuriye said, “until I was in eighth grade, I only had German friends. Then we reached puberty, and they wanted to go to clubs, and started to have boyfriends and such, and I could not talk with them about that. And they did not understand why I could not go with them, because they were allowed to do everything. They didn’t understand when I said that I was not allowed to go with them. It was like a division came between us.” In eighth grade, she got to know a lot of Turkish youth, to whom she didn’t have to explain as much. “Everything was different, we understood each other much better. And there was much more hospitality,” Nuriye noted. She felt that there was a lack of hospitality among Germans. She found that ethnic German youth could not invite people spontaneously and that everything needed to be well planned with notification in advance. Nuriye added that, “with the Turks, it is not like that. Then my Turkish improved. Before that, it was catastrophic!” She said, “as a Muslim and as a woman I feel better in neighborhoods with a high percentage of foreigners than in neighborhoods with only Germans. Like, you don’t always have to explain yourself when something is happening, and people help you immediately. I know I can always ask a Turk for help if there is something, and that I will get help! There, I feel safe!”

I asked her if she would feel safer with or without a headscarf. Nuriye considered this carefully. Then she concluded, “no, it’s not safer with a headscarf. ‘Cause then there is even more feelings of hate towards foreigners. But you should not forget that even if I’m going to clubs and such [and am not wearing a headscarf], I will never be completely integrated. Assimilation will never be possible, because I have black hair, my parents come from Turkey and I am a Muslim. (...) Regardless of whether I wear a headscarf or not, or how much I try to integrate, it is not possible.” She said that when entering

Berlin clubs, she and her friends often encountered discriminatory comments and were sometimes denied access “because we are Turks. We will not be accepted, with or without headscarves.” She claimed that the doormen would say that the club was full or that it was a closed party, even if they could see others entering. Even so, she did not “feel ready to wear the headscarf,” and was not religiously active—much to her older sister’s dismay. Nuriye worked in the retail sector and believed that she would lose her job immediately if she started to veil. She noted, that “it’s also difficult to find work. You need a strong personality to carry all the problems.” In further explaining why she did not veil, she concluded, “so, because of problems, but also because I do not feel ready for it. But I find it a pity that women like my sister cannot wear it [without facing problems].”

Nuriye liked the fact that her sister actively practiced Islam, because her sister could teach her a lot. Nuriye continued, “if I had more practicing Muslim friends, I would go more to the mosque and such. That makes a big difference.” Furthermore, she wishes that her parents had not forced her to go to Koran school when she was younger, “then I would have been able to read the Koran today.” Instead, for her learning the Koran had become tied up with negative obligations and feelings. Nuriye believed that this was because her parents did not understand pedagogy. She changed the topic slightly and argued that “when the Germans say integration, they mean: learn German, no headscarf, don’t be a Muslim. (...) But even if it is not clear that I am a Muslim, it is not written on my forehead, they do not let me integrate!” Nuriye’s teacher had told her that she should read the latest book by Seyran Ates.<sup>17</sup> Nuriye had responded, “no, I don’t think so, ‘cause I don’t agree with what that woman is saying. She is not a Muslim! Why is she presenting herself as a Muslim?” Nuriye did not understand why Seyran needed to label herself in this way. Nuriye inserted that she could not imagine living anywhere but in Berlin. She was born there and considered it her home. She emphasized that it is “multicultural, as nowhere else in Germany!” She added, “I love Germany because it is a country with social welfare, and the German constitution is one of the best in the world. The Human Rights! The Germans are just not friendly, that is the only thing. I love the German constitution.” I asked, “do you consider Germany your home?” Nuriye’s response was clear: “No, Berlin is my home.”

These sisters illustrate that heterogeneous identity processes take place within the same family. The different paths the sisters in this family follow

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<sup>17</sup> The lawyer Seyran Ates, a Kurdish woman from Turkey, published the book “The Multicultural Fallacy. How we can live better together in Germany” (“Der Multikulti-Irrtum - Wie wir in Deutschland besser zusammenleben können”) in 2007. In this book, she argues against the multi-cultural ideology and its focus on tolerance. According to Ates, it has established different and secluded communities where intolerant and archaic patriarchs rule and where young women are forced to marry by their fathers, and men dispose of women as property. In order for integration policies to succeed, she suggests (among other things) that the only religious education allowed in schools should be a general religious education about all world religions.

exemplify that turning to Islam as a prime identity or a main point of reference cannot be reduced to feelings of discrimination, social deprivation, or Othering processes. Moreover, it is not merely a direct consequence of socialization and parental expectations, or feelings of being different from their German peers. Two sisters turned to an ethnic, non-religiously active youth group, whereas Aishegul sought a religiously oriented group. Siblings within the same local environment and with similar socio-economic and cultural experiences can have very different ways to express themselves and have very different interests. The sisters are only a few years apart, grew up in the same neighborhood, attended the same school and two of them later went to the same university. Both Aishegul and Nuriye talked about not feeling accepted by German society and about discriminatory events throughout their lives. While the older sister defined herself foremost as a Muslim, and had few Turkish friends, her two younger sisters had mostly Turkish friends who were not practicing Muslims. The two non-practicing younger sisters spoke Turkish much better than the older and much more religious sister. Identifying with Islam had not brought Aishegül closer to the ethnic social field of her parents. On the contrary, her identification with a pure Islam had strengthened her religious identification, and not only weakened her Turkish language ability, but also her identification with her parents' ethnic group. Nuriye, in contrast, identified more strongly with her parents' ethnic social field through her Turkish friendship group, and throughout the conversation she referred to herself and her friends as Turks, which seemed to be both self-ascribed and a category imposed by German society. While this had not necessarily weakened her religious identification, it had not strengthened her religious practice either. Notably, though she did not veil, actively pray, or visit mosques, Nuriye considered herself a Muslim. It was not her main focus in life, but was nevertheless a part of how she was perceived by others and herself. Her critique of Ates must be understood in this context. Nuriye also believed that if she had more religiously active friends, she would probably also practice her religion more actively, thus recognizing the importance of peer groups on lifestyles and life choices.

Nuriye's experience is illustrative of the studies that argue that at one point in their youth, many migrant youth start to feel different from their classmates.<sup>18</sup> Often, the initial feeling of otherness or difference starts in

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<sup>18</sup> Similar tendencies among youth with migrant backgrounds have been demonstrated in France (Amir-Moazami 2007), the UK (Jacobson 1998) and Norway (Jacobsen 2011). For Germany, see e.g. Nökel (2001, 2002).



puberty and is described as partly caused by the different expectations from the woman's family compared to ethnic German families. As Nuriye mentions, at a certain age many youth with migrant backgrounds feel that they do not fit in among German youth, in part as a consequence of the Othering processes, but also due to different expectations from their families.

Growing up in Germany with migrant parents can create certain moments of tensions vis-à-vis parents, teachers, and peers. The youths' parents, afraid that their daughters become too German (i.e. do not follow the same value system as the parents), often imposed different rules and expectations on their daughters than ethnic German parents. This may contribute to many young women feeling different compared to the other girls in their age group. In contrast, I noticed that in MJD, the youth openly asked whether anyone was not allowed to participate in events, and affirmative answers rarely led to feelings of shame or embarrassment. Ethnic (Turkish) homogenous friendship groups negotiate parental controls in similar ways, as Nuriye indicated. In both Turkish and Islamic-oriented friendship groups, the youths' respect for their parents' decisions seemed to be understood in terms of custom or religion. In these spaces, the youth did not feel different because of the restrictions their families impose on their activities. In consequence, many youth sought out other youth who live within a similar socio-cultural framework. The initial feeling of being different may at a later stage of adolescence be extended to feelings of discrimination from the broader German society. This is illustrated by Nuriye's account of events that she and her Turkish friends encountered, for instance in clubs.

In coming of age, both Muslims and non-Muslims struggle to find meaning in their existence. Youth are undergoing a period of transformation where the demands to adapt are more onerous than in other periods of life (Krange and Øia 2005, 20), and many experience alienation (Epstein 1998). The search for meaning and the search to identify with others are factors that encourage the creation of youth subcultures. The pathway a young person takes through adolescence is shaped by a combination of personal characteristics (such as temperament, intelligence, coping style, and social skills) and the nature of the environment in which they live (such as family, school, peer groups, and neighborhood) (Crockett and Crouter 1995).<sup>19</sup> Additionally, youth actively seek others with similar

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<sup>19</sup> When young, people make decisions that may shape their future developmental paths, including peer selection, career choices, and future partner. New major decisions

values, morals, interests, and ethnic orientation; in short, a similar orientation as the lifestyle they seek for themselves. Shared experiences include being Othered, discrimination, negative stereotypes of Islam, and belonging to a socio-economically disadvantaged part of the German population. Furthermore, youth share religious beliefs and values as well as desires to improve a religious Self and to share feelings of self-transcendence. I turn to these next.

*The Question of Why: Incorporating Religious Experiences*

Analyses of youth culture need to include those of the youths' experiences that are not embraced by utilitarian models. Analyses of identity politics recognize that people's social experiences can lead to struggles for political representation and efforts to challenge hegemonic discourses. They affirm that the body is structured by social and political forces, and that social spaces are formed through ideology and subjugation. Experiences that mark young people as migrants, Muslims, and as potentially socio-economically disadvantaged may well lead some towards identifying with Islam.

However, the analysis of religious identification as something that is ultimately a rational decision made in terms of the socio-economic situation, sidesteps both specific features involved in the attraction to Islam—such as emotional experiences—and the effort to attract new members that religious organizations actively pursue.<sup>20</sup> These explanations fail to capture the participants' own understandings of or the sets of meanings

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will be shaped by individual experiences. Although individuals may experience comparable developmental phases, there are also personal dispositions, distinctive events and opportunities made available, in addition to the social contexts, which together shape the different pathways individuals take (Crockett and Crouter 1995). The developmental course of an individual can be modified by adjustments in family structure, such as divorce, the death or serious illness of a loved one, or socio-economic changes. Why someone takes on a religious path instead of a more ethnic oriented path, is outside the scope of this book. A historically and socially oriented psychoanalysis could potentially provide more insightful answers to such a question.

<sup>20</sup> In many ways, research on Muslim youth that argues that the turn to Islam is a reflection of their socio-economic situation, including feelings of discrimination, strongly resemble the sociological framework on youth culture in the 1950s and '60s. Albert K. Cohen (1997 [1955], 52) argued that social structures and experiences of the social environment inform the creation and selection of a set of solutions, and that the interaction between people with similar feelings of social adjustment makes new forms of references available. Notably, Stanley Cohen (1997 [1980], 162) criticizes the structuralist and semiotic approaches to subcultures, such as that of Hebdige and Clark, for their failure to capture

they attach to their Muslim identity. The explanations do not account for adolescence being a time and space where a variety of lifestyles are discovered and experimented with. These arguments also ignore certain phenomenological characteristics of religiosity and religious experiences that lead to a sense of a greater knowledge of one's identity or an understanding of the Self. Youth cultures and identifications are more than retorts or ways out of ethnic or class inequalities. Thus, an analysis of the youths' religious orientation and their participation in what might be considered a religious youth culture needs a more dynamic analysis that not only includes their everyday life experiences, but the set of meanings that they attach to their turn to Islam. In the following I suggest that the expression "being with others like me" has a variety of meanings, including a lifestyle orientation, a form of religiosity, and a need to share experiences of self-transcendence.

*Being with Others like Themselves: Lifestyle Orientation*

Although it may seem banal, research often fails to consider how the nature of the youths' attraction to Islam is also informed, structured, or shaped by their search for religious experiences. A particular religiosity can be a motivation for participating in MJD and for crafting the Self in relation to certain techniques, practices, and performances. To meet or spend time with others who are like them is not only about socio-cultural similarities, but also a matter of spending time with people who want to spend their leisure time in similar ways.<sup>21</sup>

As discussed in this book, youth who attended MJD meetings frequently struggled to fulfill a desire to be or become Good Muslims or to be with people who espouse similar values. Spending time with people who share a similar outlook can be a means to not feeling alone and to feel normal. Several MJD members said that they search for other religiously active youth in an effort to improve themselves as religious subjects, and that

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the participants' own understanding of their subcultural milieu. The struggle against subordination, he argues, is better recognized when one focuses on the daily life of the participants through their rituals of dress, attitude, rules and school life. Although there are differences among these early theories about youth sub-cultures, these studies share a rather deterministic outlook on youth cultures, where socio-economic conditions are seen as the main explanation for the youths' actions. It would be very interesting to compare the theoretical arguments in this earlier youth research with Muslim youth research in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

<sup>21</sup> This has also been suggested by Minganti (2007) in Sweden and Prieur (2002) in Norway.

they seek motivation and inspiration. For example, during a discussion at MJD, a young woman noted that “living in this society, there are distractions everywhere. It’s more difficult to be motivated to keep all the (religious rules) and religious requirements.” Two other discussions further illustrate this:

During a discussion at a weekly MJD meeting, the young women all agreed that it was important to be aware of who they spend time with. Somaya (17) noted that “when you spend a lot of time with others who, when you say that it’s time for prayer, say that they can’t be bothered, then after a while you also become influenced.”

In the course of another MJD discussion on whether certain kinds of music are religiously correct or not, Leila (21) added, “we are not living in a Muslim society: there is music everywhere, we don’t even think about it anymore, when in the shop or in the car. And it’s often easier to forget. (...) It makes us concentrate less on the important things.”

The emphasis here is on the fact that they are living in a non-Muslim society that makes it more difficult to follow what they consider to be their religious rules, values, and obligations. Living in Germany can make it harder to remember their religious moral obligations and value orientation. If a young person feels that her lifestyle is threatened by negative influences from a non-religious or non-practicing Muslim environment, she can decide to counteract the secular forces by participating in a religious space where she is called on to craft a religious Self. Becoming or being religiously virtuous is not a natural state but a constant struggle with oneself, where individual techniques of body management need to be (re) learned and repeated (see chapter 4). A faith community in which one spends time with others who share similar values, difficulties, and desires, provides strength to continue improving on a religious lifestyle and religious Self. For example, during a wedding, Fatima (31) noted:

It is so easy to be influenced by this society. It is difficult to be religious in this society, ‘cause you have to excuse yourself and explain why you do this and that. You really have to believe strongly in order to carry it out. That is also why the community [*Gemeinschaft*] is so important. I don’t know if I could do it without the community. (...) Just that you know that there are other sisters in the same situation (...).

At another MJD event, Fatima said that she felt that they (Muslims living in Germany) have to justify and think about what they do much more than the rest of the German population. She said, “that is why we need to meet and to be in such a community. They [the German non-Muslim

population] find that dangerous. They feel threatened by that, I don't really understand why." Several of the youth reflected upon the difficulties of being religious in German society. This must be understood not only in relation to the negative view of Islam in Germany, but also in relation to the position of religion in Berlin in general. The young women daily encountered various non-religious temptations and expectations from peers and family and in urban spaces, and these may draw their focus away from religious obligations and values. Fatima's comments reflect how important she thought it was to have a community in order to continue practicing Islam and to not feel alone. She situated this importance in terms of the constant pressure to explain and legitimate herself as a practicing Muslim. She felt in the minority, both as a religious individual in general and as a Muslim in particular, and noted how difficult it was to not compromise her beliefs in her daily life in Berlin. This increased Fatima's need for social spaces where her religious beliefs could be freely expressed and practiced.

Not all youth who identify with Islam and as Muslim seek to belong to or even participate in a religious organization. Some Muslim youth I met preferred to not be part of a faith community though they had religious friends. In contrast, the youth in MJD expressed a need for a religious community in order to create a universe of meaning where "what makes sense to you also makes sense to me" (Hervieu-Léger 2001, 167). As Hervieu-Léger argues, "religious identity depends on shared experiences for its reinforcement" (*ibid.*). For several of the young Muslims in MJD it was particularly important to receive confirmation of the meanings they created to make sense of their daily life. Fatima's emphasis on her need for a religious community and a space where religious values and norms take precedence (as a counter to the daily non-religious stimulus) must be understood in this context.

Further, by spending time with others who adhere to similar values, MJD participants did not need to feel embarrassment about the fact that they felt required to perform certain religious duties. For example, at one MJD meeting:

The young women discussed the shame many young people feel when they want to pray at work or at school, because it is difficult to speak up about wanting to pray. One of the young women responded, "if one is really devoted to Allah then it does not matter what the others think of you. You are only (accountable) to Allah." She believed that only their relationship with Him should matter. Leila added that "if they really are good friends, then why should you be ashamed to say that you are praying? What if you tell them

that in your religion you have to pray five times a day, but they start thinking, ‘well, we never saw you praying?’” Another youth commented that some Muslims are “afraid of being looked upon as fundamentalists” and thus do not want to talk openly about where and when they need to pray.

The discussion refers to the fact that being young and religiously active is considered non-normative and that it can be difficult or even embarrassing to admit to religious practice. It demonstrates that youth may experience non-religious friends and peers, both cultural Muslims and non-Muslims, to be distractions or impediments to the performance of their religious practices.

Several participants highlighted that MJD was a space where youth could get to know other practicing Muslims with whom they shared religious goals and who they also met outside of MJD meetings:

Somaya (17) asked the other attendees, “why do we come here [to MJD]? Think about it.” She encouraged them to also meet outside MJD in order to do something for Allah. Somaya said that “it is also good to decide to do something together to improve ourselves. It makes it easier. For example, to fast together, like you all probably have to catch up on the fasting days, no?” One of the girls said that she had been talking with three other Muslim girls at her school about working together to catch up on their fasting. Ismail interjected that she used to do this with her sister, but after a while they stopped, because they put the goals [of what religious practices to perform] too high. She stressed that fasting together the whole day and then eating well together is enjoyable.

The struggle to become a Good Muslim was framed as a wish to please God and ultimately reach their goal of entering Paradise. The willingness or wish to acquire a particular kind of self-realization was a desire that shaped their experiences and the actions they chose. These goals were pursued through learning more about Islam and improving their comportment and character, and this pursuit was guided by a particular religious discourse.<sup>22</sup> In addition to providing religious knowledge, the religious organization represents emotional support in the endeavor to craft a religious Self.

### *Being with Others like Themselves: Forms of Religiosity*

To some extent, MJD actively seeks out a particular target audience among Muslim youth in Germany. These are the youth who seek an educational

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<sup>22</sup> Fear as a religious sentiment is relevant here. As Mahmood (2005, 140–145) argues, fear not only motivates the women to pursue what they consider religious obligations, but learning to be pious is also learning to fear God. Thus, to encourage this fear is one aspect of the cultivation of a self-observant character.

approach to Islam that is not based on ethnic structures, and who position themselves socially in relation to German society. In Germany, the relatively recent establishment of such organizations can partly be seen as a generational change; youth born in Germany have had access to higher educational levels than most of their parents' generation and many seek religious spaces that can provide them with answers about how to live a correct life in Germany. MJD participants often mentioned that they considered the organization a space where they could find answers, authorities, or learn who they should consider authoritative. The following situation illustrates this:

When a young girl asked Selma (18) why she decided to join MJD, she answered, "I started to go there 'cause I wanted to improve myself (...) and to meet more correct people, you know." Other youth confirmed that this also accounts for their decision to join MJD. During another a weekly introduction, Janna (19) declared, "I am 19, Palestinian, and I lack information." This caused laughter from some of the girls before Janna impatiently explained, "I feel that I need to gain more knowledge, there is a lot of information that I do not have."

Frequently the women felt that their parents or guardians did not provide them with reliable knowledge about Islam during their childhood. This could be either because their parents were not religiously active Muslims or were not Muslims at all. Their parents' religious knowledge may also be based on ethnic and traditional beliefs that the young woman at one point started to consider inaccurate. Several complained about their parents' lax religious performance, or that they did not understand the reasons behind certain religious obligations, or that they mixed religion with tradition and culture. Seeking an Islam that is detached from traditional ideas makes it imperative to gain more knowledge and information about how best to live as a correct Muslim. The content of the local events and workshops must be seen in this light: the weekly meetings concentrated on the need to be critical and reflexive in regard to religious knowledge, and on how the youth could continuously improve themselves as pious Muslims while living in Germany (see chapter 4). The fact that MJD promoted this cerebral and self-critical approach attracted youth with a high level of educational achievement and ambition and who might otherwise leave religious organizational structures altogether.

Research has indicated that class background shapes the relationship individuals have to religious knowledge and authority (Ismail 2004). In particular, an individual's educational level defines how they relate to Islamic discourse (Salih 2003) and, I would add, which spaces they decide



to participate actively in. The emphasis in MJD on the attainment of knowledge as the only way to live Islam correctly appears to attract youth who belong to an upwardly mobile part of the migrant population due to their parents' or their own educational success. The fact that this organization is composed primarily of upwardly mobile youth also suggests that the turn to Islam is not a mere question of oppression, poverty or exclusion. MJD's organizational structure can partly explain its popularity among educated youth; participants were expected to contribute religious presentations and participate in discussions about their understanding of religious topics. While visiting other Muslim youth groups based in mosques, I noticed a difference in how the meetings were structured (see chapter 2). In MJD, even the youngest participants were expected to present on religious topics, while women in other Muslim youth meetings were more passive listeners and less involved in the organization of knowledge.

Furthermore, youth who do well in the German educational system may start to feel a distance to their ethnic group, the majority of whom the youth consider uneducated and traditional. For example, as we walk down a crowded shopping street in Wedding, Rüya (21) said:

There are so many Turks here [in Berlin], but there are only a very few whom you would want to talk to. Look at them, completely empty-headed. After such a long time without really having any people I am interested in spending time with, [for me] it is so good to have found MJ, like, people you can really talk to.

Rüya was not referring to anyone in particular, but she made a clear distinction between other Turks—with whom she did not identify—and the people who participate in her religious community. Her identification with the religious social field is clear. It is expressed through a contrast to a lack of identification with her parents' ethnic group: the Turks in an economically and socially deprived neighborhood (Wedding) where she had lived for the past five years. Her comment that the Turks are empty-headed can be considered a speech act in which she distances herself from the category "Turk." Through this speech act, she establishes a critical dissociation between herself and those who are generally considered working class, uneducated Turks. Like most MJD members, Rüya had attained more education than the majority of youth with a Turkish background. This and similar statements are framed within a perception that their parents' ethnic social group is uneducated. It illustrates the relevance of class or education in the marking of distinctions within the Muslim population. Religious identification may not only be a way out of their parents' ethnic

community, but also (although possibly as an unintended consequence), a way out of a disadvantageous social category. To perform a pure Islam detached from cultural or ethnic features requires the development of advanced knowledge.<sup>23</sup> Identifying with an Islam that attaches importance to knowledge and skills can contribute to class travel, in that the youth simultaneously identify with the Islam of an educated middle class and disassociate their Muslim identity from the traditional and uneducated guest worker. MJD represents a space in which such religious class travel can be developed and pursued.

Incentives to practice Islam within a faith community can also be found within Islamic theology. Even if it the individual has to answer for their actions, morality, and character on the Day of Judgment (when one dies and the afterlife, *akhira* begins), it is considered better to practice Islam within a group. Whether or not an individual enters the garden-like Paradise is based on the choices and actions made by the individual. However, being part of a religious community is perceived to make it easier to strengthen faith (*iman*), and to provide more opportunities to improve and be a Good Muslim. When talking about the community, Fatima (31) exclaimed:

It is so important! The Koran talks about the importance of the community [*Gemeinschaft*], of belonging to one. And that is also why it is a duty to perform the Friday prayer together, so that at least once a week people come together and pray.

To perform the Friday prayer within a religious community is not considered obligatory for women. Still, praying in a group is considered a better religious practice, and spending the night in a mosque where they read the Koran together provides participants with important good points that increase their chances of entering Paradise. So does setting shared goals for improving comportment, as Somaya suggested above, such as in regard to dress comportment or doing five good deeds a week.

*Being with Others like Themselves: Sharing Experiences of Self-Transcendence*

Scholars often overlook how the decision to participate in a religious organization can be shaped by religious or spiritual desires and experiences.

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<sup>23</sup> This is a global phenomenon: Bayat (2000, 2007) has pointed out that Islamic movements in Cairo and Teheran tend to attract the educated middle-class, and not the poor (see also Sanktanber 2002 for Muslim youth in Istanbul).

Rambo (1999, 264) argues that “religion and spirituality, like aesthetics, should be considered a domain of life and experience that has its own validity.” There are, he continues, “experiences, both cognitive and affective, that are distinctive to religion and spirituality” (ibid.). The experiences of religiosity can produce knowledge and play a part in identity formation.<sup>24</sup> Still, social scientists generally neglect, trivialize, or reject the role of spirituality or religiosity when writing about the religious activities of or religious revival among youth with migrant backgrounds living in Europe. However, I argue that certain aspects of religiosity, such as feelings of transcendence, are relevant to our understanding of the identification process among youth.

Many religious people feel a need to articulate their faith or their experience of transcendence, and this is often difficult to achieve (Joas 2006). There is no agreement on how religious people should think, feel, and act, as people are religious in different ways. Religious experiences happen to individuals and are felt or apprehended rather than cognitively recognized.<sup>25</sup> Although this contributes to making the experiences real, they make them real only for those who experience them (James [1902] 1961). For the young women in MJD, the weekly and monthly meetings represented spaces in which they could share these feelings and experiences with others who acknowledge them, although in different ways.

Spending time with other religious youth makes it possible to talk about the existence of angels, the devil, un-earthly creatures, such as *djinn* (a supernatural fiery creature with free will) and demon-possession, without risking being considered irrational or traditional.<sup>26</sup> Once I had spent some time with the youth, I started overhearing discussions of otherworldly encounters, some of which the youth had personally experienced.

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<sup>24</sup> Weller proposes that “aesthetic or religious ‘experiences’ are not shapeless or amorphous; rather, they are sui generis and radically different from theoretical ones. It is up to the researcher to reflect upon the real content of these forms, upon what they inform, without violating their individual character, but rather to translate them into the theory, or yet to encompass them by means of logical forms. This is the purpose of theoretical research, a reality-seizing process that signals back towards the initial pre-theoretical stages, towards the level of quotidian experience” (Weller et al., 2002, quoted in Weller 2006, 5).

<sup>25</sup> The phenomenologist William James defined religion as the “feeling, acts, and experiences of individual men [and women] in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (James [1903] 1961, 42). I include this definition of religion here, as it emphasizes the experience and feelings involved in a religious identity.

<sup>26</sup> *Djinn* (or *genie*) are mentioned in the Koran, and a whole *sura* is named after them (*Al-Jinn*).

Within the friendship groups, the youth freely shared episodes of meeting otherworldly creatures and discussed the relevance of their dreams when making important decisions. Prayer was incorporated in social activities in that the youth prayed when they faced specific issues, such as whether they should accept a suitor or not, when waiting for answers from educational institutions or jobs, when sitting an examination, or when experiencing an illness in the family. Individuals could involve the group by, for example, asking, “please can you do a lot of *du'a* for me so that I get my driving license.” Some would send group emails with requests such as, “please do *du'a* for the exams I take next week,” or to make *du'a* for an MJD participant’s ill daughter or relative. This exemplifies not only the relevance of God in their daily life and in relation to decisions they have to make, but also the role of the faith community in these important life events.

The need or desire to be with other youth with a religious lifestyle, to gain knowledge about how to live correctly according to Islam, and to share experiences of self-transcendence is not a unidirectional path. On the contrary, in the following I show that some of the Muslim youth in MJD turned to Islam at a specific moment of their life. Simultaneously, I suggest that the young Muslims’ turn to Islam is not a unidirectional process of identification where they become increasingly religious. Rather, the crafting of a religious Self is a process that takes various paths and directions in which youth may be more focused on religion in some periods of their life than in others. Why youth turn to Islam or turn away from Islam is thus a complex ongoing dynamic that can take new and unexpected turns.

### *Variations in Religious Careers*

Narratives about the decision to veil or to join a religious organization, such as MJD often involved dreams and religious experiences, which the individuals related to their (previous) lax religious praxis, visions, or particular emotional experiences. The content of narratives about religious experiences that MJD participants shared with their peers often involved processes of discovering parts or qualities about themselves, or focused on how they arrived at a new or expanded recognition of the importance of their values. For example, Dunya (25), who grew up in Switzerland, talked about an event in Turkey that boosted her religiosity:

During the summer holidays in Istanbul, Dunya visited a small historical mosque. As she stood alone in the courtyard, the light hit an old well in the

courtyard and she felt a presence of something otherworldly. She explained that this affected her attitude to her religious practice when she returned to Germany, where she started to actively seek a religious space with other practicing Muslim youth.

Dunya was not particularly religiously active before this episode, which occurred when she was 18 years old, and in this period she had been contemplating taking off her headscarf. After coming to Berlin on a university exchange, she enthusiastically sought a religious space in which she could feel that she belonged. Initially, she told me, she had been looking forward to coming to Berlin as she was certain that she would find a religious group among all the religious offers available. However, after her one-year exchange, Dunya left Berlin without having found any spaces that she felt were appropriate for her, though she had visited several religious organizations and groups.

The desire to improve their religious selves—to have a pious career—is not a unidirectional process, and can grow both stronger and weaker. Over time, the religiousness of MJD participants varies as they gain more knowledge of Islam, experience changes in their social status, and spend more time with other religious people. Such changes can increase awareness of the current stigmatized group image and the young women may consequently adopt an identity politics in which efforts to change the negative stereotypes of Islam and Muslims in Germany become a major factor in their Islamic identity formation. How they engage in religious movements can also depend on their childhood experiences, as Ines's (20) story suggests:

Ines had been a member of MJD for nearly two years when I first met her. She was active both in MJD and DMK, did voluntary work in Green Palace (the bookshop affiliated with MJD), and also volunteered elsewhere. During one of our conversations she told me that the DMK "is like my home, it's like my family." Her father had arrived in Germany forty years previously to work in a factory. Her mother followed him nineteen years later, one year before Ines was born. Due to his work with lasers in the factory, her father gradually went blind. When Ines was 15 years old, she and her mother would spend the days between their home and the supermarket, because her father did not want them to go out. This period of her life was a turbulent time at home. Ines would listen to loud music in her room and not communicate with her parents. The situation escalated when her mother threw their television out of the window. Ines said, "I think she was ill, mentally I mean. She didn't know what she was doing anymore." After this, Ines stayed in a community children's home with several other teenagers, mostly ethnic Germans. At the children's home, they were given a lot of freedom. In describing this time, she said, "when I was 15, I went to a children's home where I lived for one and

a half years. There, I had so much freedom that I did not need. I could stay out until midnight, go to bars and clubs. It was always, 'come on Ines, let's go to the bar' (...). I have been to bars and clubs, it doesn't interest me. Once I was even forced (by the youth workers) to go to the club 'cause I was the only one who did not want to go and then someone would have to be left behind, since you could not be there [in the children's home] alone. So I came with them, and I was sitting like that [lips sulking] the whole time, and they asked me to come and dance, and I did not want to dance (...). Then once I went to a church, because one of the girls was having a - what is it called again, when you are 14 years old ...c....?" "A confirmation?" I suggested. She said, "yes, she was getting confirmed. And I was in the church, and it was so beautiful and I started to cry, and I asked myself 'where is my religion?' And then when we moved here [to Berlin], it was ...the summer 2002, I saw foreigners, I was shocked. It was a different mentality. I saw people go to the mosque and pray there. It was a whole new world for me here. And I started to learn more about my religion, and the more I read, the greater was my (desire) to wear the headscarf. Here they think that you are 'easy,' the Turkish men also think that. I wanted to show that I am a Muslim. To limit [*abgrenzen*], not like limit so that I don't belong here, but to show that I am a Muslim. When I told my employer [she worked in a bakery after school at that time] that I would like to wear the headscarf, she said 'that is such a shame, you have such a nice hair, don't cover it up'—so typical. (...) Then when I stopped work ... it was the 17th of June... I started wearing it the day after, so strong was the need for me to wear the headscarf, I could not wait! You see, it does not have to do with oppression, but with wanting to wear it. Then from one day to the other, I was worthless. The teachers started to ignore me at school... It could have been different, easier. But it is not impossible here [to wear the headscarf], (...) there are many here who wear the headscarf, and the worst is that many women wear headscarves and are not living like Muslims. Instead, there should be less headscarves and more Muslims who live right."

Ines's story illustrates one path of a young woman living in Germany who saw Islam as a point of identification in her daily life. Despite having been brought up in a Muslim family, Ines was first personally drawn to Islam during a turbulent youth by being exposed to a Christian ritual. She told me that while she was growing up, her parents made her feel that Islam was only about rules and restrictions. Moving to Berlin became a turning point for Ines in that she met practicing Muslims and she started to learn more about Islam. Exposed to a variety of lifestyles through her experiences in the children's home, she dismissed the freedom that she was given as superfluous, and not what she needed. Additionally, Ines felt that in Berlin, people may believe that she was "easy," a stigma she believed that the headscarf would offset. This suggests how the headscarf can mark a boundary, not vis-à-vis German society, but in the sense

that it creates a gendered distance within the religious and ethnic community.<sup>27</sup>

After a few months, Ines stopped participating in MJD due to a lack of time and, I believe, because she never developed strong friendships with any of the other participants. She continued visiting other Islamic organizations such as DMK and Al Nur, and continued to craft herself as a religious subject in the sense that she focused on knowledge, prayer, and doing good deeds. Islam continued to provide an important direction in her life. She energetically performed *dua* while waiting to hear whether she had been admitted to the Evangelical Church School. She volunteered, was generally rigorous in performing her religious obligations such as praying, and whenever I spent the night at her place she read from the Koran before falling asleep. Her religious crafting of the Self may well have changed, but did not appear to come to a halt after she stopped attending MJD.

Ines's story suggests that her move to Berlin had an effect on her identification with Islam. The turn to Islam has been considered an urban phenomenon, also taking place for example in Cairo (Ismail 2006) and Istanbul (Sanktanber 2002). A city offers a variety of religious spaces representing different religious orientations and congregations and providing particular "infrastructures of action" (Ismail 2006, 12). Ines pointed out that her turn to Islam in the urban space related to seeing others practicing Islam in a different way than what she was used to. Consequently, a turn to religion in the urban setting is not simply a consequence of alienation in the urban anonymity and the weakening of community structures when moving from the rural to the urban. Rather, how religious organizations situate their message within the social antagonisms and positions that have historically always been a part of the urban landscape (Ismail 2006) are more important. In fact, the variety of religious spaces in urban Berlin makes it possible for youth to choose between various spaces (see chapter 2), or leave a space if they choose to do so.

Not all Muslim youth prefer to participate in religious organizations or mosques. Some develop their religious identity through independent study, by using the Internet, or in private religious groups based in homes. Additionally, not all MJD participants were equally religiously active in their everyday life. Samira (18) exemplifies this:

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<sup>27</sup> That Ines pointed to the fact that even though many women veil they are not necessarily behaving as Good Muslims, further reflects the idea that the headscarf should produce certain bodily comportments.



When Samira returned after some months away from the MJD meetings, we walked together to the subway after the meeting. I asked why she decided to come back to MJD. Samira said that she was not managing to do her prayers every day, and that this year she had not even been able to motivate herself to fast during Ramadan. But she was trying to be a better person and to pay *Zakat* (Alms, one of the five pillars). "That is also being a Muslim," she added. She explained that by going to MJD meetings, she focused on her faith at least once a week.

Samira is obviously discontented with her failure to perform what she considered to be her religious obligations. Her story shows that MJD provides a space to spend time with religiously oriented people, and that participants hope to be inspired to become more religiously active, at least once a week. During the time I was in the organization, Samira (like Ines) was never really included in any of the friendship cliques that developed among the attendees. She dressed differently from the others (headscarf with jeans and a sweater which ended at her waist, though never in a sexualized way), she was not studying for an *Abitur*, and she was also active in cultural activities arranged by multicultural Berliner initiatives.

When I met former MJD participants by chance (often in mosques) I sometimes asked why they were no longer attending MJD meetings. I noticed that a few participants left the organization when they felt that they had gained enough knowledge, or felt that they were not learning anything new by participating. Others continued, even though they considered their level of knowledge to be higher than the one taught at MJD, either because of friendships or in order to be in a religious atmosphere. This suggests that participating in a group such as MJD is also about developing and nurturing friendships with people of similar taste and leisure interests. I noticed that some youths stopped coming if they did not like the program, or if they found the leaders or members too strict. Most of the time this explanation was combined with a statement about how they felt (dissatisfied) with the other participants and that MJD was not a place they found friends (sometimes due to age differences).<sup>28</sup> Similarly, I also talked to youth who had heard about MJD, but who did not want to attend because they "prefer to learn about Islam alone" and, they often added, did not need the social space because they "have friends already."

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<sup>28</sup> Many of the youth who left MJD continued to build their religious knowledge and craft a religious Self in another space or in private.

*Taking Religiosity Seriously*

The status of belonging to a religious minority and still being viewed as migrants (although as second or third generation migrants) shape how the youth identify with Islam. Explanations of youths' turn to Islam as a consequence of their experiences of how the nation state, politicians, and media treat them, acknowledge that the women act as rational socio-political agents. Participating in a religious organization can be a form of identity politics, as taking up a Muslim identity can be a strategy to deal with not feeling accepted as German or as an effort to change the negative categorizations of Islam in Germany. These external factors, which constitute the set of circumstances in which the youth were located, may be considered push factors for some youth who start developing an Islamic identity.

The descriptions of young people's actions that reduce identification with Islam and a religious youth organization to "a vector for collective action and protest" as Cesari (2003, 146) does, or that simplify them as merely a reaction to Othering or discrimination as Khosrokhavar (1997) tends to do, or to an "available feminist strategy" (Salih 2003), at best ignores and at worst belittles the young women's religious experiences and desires. In this framework, identity is diminished to a question of rational strategies, made up of political or social projects. In part, these explanations reduce the agency of Muslim youth, and define them through external social orders and rational choice. Identity politics constructs the Muslim agent as part of a universal modern actor. Although this partly avoids Othering Muslim youth, it tends to allow subjects to be actors only insofar as they react to their social environment. As this perspective does not recognize the desires that motivate the youths' actions, their agency is understood as solely a response to social collective constraints. The youth are considered agentive only insofar as they struggle against oppression or discrimination. This constrains our understanding of the individual choices taken, desires, identifications sought, and the process of crafting the Self as a religious subject.

Educated young Muslims may be attracted by (or pulled to) MJD due to its focus on knowledge and self-development and because it is an autonomous organization. MJD advertises itself and its events and meetings, by fliers and seminars with catchy slogans and titles. Their events that combine religious messages with popular, well-known artists are particularly appealing to youth. Thus, religious organizations can actively attract youth

by establishing a specific profile in terms of their attendees, religious orientation, and events.

Moreover, the set of meanings that the actors ascribe to their behavior and actions must be included in the analysis of youths' identification with Islam and with a faith community. As this chapter has illustrated, youth participate in MJD specifically to be with others like them, which includes people with similar religious orientations, lifestyles, and socio-economic backgrounds. They want to feel normal in being young and religiously active individuals, and to share experiences of self-transcendence. These factors can impel youth to identify with this particular faith community, where their Muslim identity is further crafted. According to Islamic tradition, they also gain more points by performing religious rituals together. Consequently, participating in a Muslim community may even become a rational choice from a religious point of view.

Reflections on the turn to Islam and the individual's motivation to craft herself as a female Muslim subject must be understood in relation to the individual's values, morals, and desires. What image does she seek to convey to socially relevant others, and to the social fields within which she acts? The effort to gain knowledge, improve one's religious performance, and to be(come) a virtuous subject can be a vehicle for action and for identifying as a Muslim. Likewise, the desire to be(come) a virtuous subject or a better Muslim may be the main reason to join MJD, although for some this desire may gradually become an aspiration only while participating in the group.

Nevertheless, most of the youth have some sense of attraction or curiosity towards Islam before their initial visit to MJD. This initial attraction may be a consequence of the negative image of Islam in Germany and less a matter of more internal religious emotions. Searching for better answers to provide non-Muslims was mentioned as a reason for visiting MJD. Later, participation in a group where the center of attention is on becoming better Muslims can reinforce participants' willingness to follow certain religious duties and can form and strengthen a desire to become pious.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the reasons for remaining in MJD may well be different than the initial reasons for approaching this faith community. For example, the group's focus on religious subjectification could eventually alienate people who do not have a more personal desire to become a religious subject.

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<sup>29</sup> An individual's motivation for improving her religious comportment can also be structured or informed by her family, friends, and social field.

As MJD meetings focus on crafting the Self as a religious subject, it is likely that some will leave the organization quite soon if they do not feel compelled, or desire, to become Good Muslims.

A more multifaceted understanding of women's religious identity and how they orient their actions must take seriously their aspirations to become Good Muslims, to come closer to God, and to reach Paradise.<sup>30</sup> Aspirations, morals, and values must be taken seriously when analyzing why an individual turn to a specific node of identification. Yet this is not sufficient. An analysis of these young women's turn to Islam needs to include both the set of circumstances in which they are located and the set of meanings that they attribute to their behavior. By ignoring the former, the analysis risks becoming ahistorical. Desires and motivations are formed in contexts defined by time and space. Ignoring the larger social, political, economic, and cultural milieu risks also ignoring why and how specific desires and subjectivities are formed in a particular context.<sup>31</sup> Such an analysis cannot illuminate how religious organizations seek to attract particular individuals. The particular place and political discourse must be included when accounting for the life of pious young Muslim women in Europe. In order to present a deeper analysis of the youths' identification with Islam, we must therefore consider the complex interaction of factors at the global level (the "war against terror" in which Islam is constructed as the enemy, and the revival of Islam as a social force), the national level (migration processes, and the specifically German Othering processes in the media and policies), the local level (the urban context, experiences of discrimination, religious community structures, family structures, as well as the socio-economic material conditions of migrant families) and the personal level (horizons of experience, goals, desires, and interests), in addition to the specific characteristics of religiosity (the need to share transcendental experiences and practice rituals and beliefs in a group).

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<sup>30</sup> The variety of ways in which these desires or motivations are brought to life is another question which needs to be asked, but which is outside the scope of this book.

<sup>31</sup> For example, Mahmood (2005) does not consider which opportunities are available to the women she works with in the Egyptian mosque movements. This is a problem when she insists on using the term "agency" about the women's devotion to a particular religious life. It should be noted that she is not referring explicitly to questions of identity or identification, but rather talking about agency, autonomy, freedom and choice.

## CONCLUSION

This book has investigated how religious qualities and norms are learned, shared and challenged within a Muslim youth group. By participating in MJD, young people are both familiarized with Islamic virtues and offered incentives to practice them. Religious discourses are taught and discussed within a specific faith community, thus producing ideas of how a correct and Good Muslim should be crafting herself in order to become religiously proximate. This includes instruction in the gender order as given by a religious tradition, thereby learning what it means to be a young woman, a daughter, a mother, and a wife in Islam. It also involves learning the distinction made between culture and religion, how to relate external actions to internal motivation, how to desire correctly, and the importance of pursuing a specific Muslim character. MJD encourages its participants to continuously craft their Selves in relation to these religious values, attributes, and ideals. The youth were largely motivated by a desire to cultivate their Selves according to the ideals of how to be a correct and Good Muslim, which is considered a universal standard that is situated outside of time and space. But at the same time, as this study has examined, the religious space for virtuous young people that MJD provides also represents an alternative space to be a Muslim youth in a secular, modern Berlin. On the basis of this space, youth can position themselves in relation to their parents' ethnic social field, peers, family, and other youths.

The youths that were part of this study belong to a generation of Muslims who differentiate between their parents' ethnic, traditional Islam and what they describe as a pure Islam. By distinguishing between traditional and authentic religious knowledge, values, and practices, the youth make a discursive differentiation between the behavior, customs, dress, and tastes that are religiously proximate versus those they view as defined by an ethnic culture or habitus. In my research, I found that the gendered expectations among the youth partly changed in relation to their religious orientation, but also that the young women were partly taking on and partly given a representative role in guarding a religious integrity. The effort to distinguish between culture and religion emerged during the youths' discussions about the proper roles and behaviors of men and women. These discussions promote ideas of the Good Muslim Woman as an ultimate standard to aim for.

Much of the literature on Muslims' individualized religious identification seems to suggest that the religious subject is autonomous. However, Selves are also social and cultural (Cohen 1994). My concern has not been with the individual Self in isolation but with how the Self is crafted in relation to desires, motivations, and discourses, and within social relationships. The religious Self is not crafted passively or blindly vis-à-vis certain ideas; the subject is active and creative. The social individual is continuously dealing (consciously and unconsciously) with different and sometimes contradictory desires and expectations. Youth do not follow religious ideals or religious discourses homogeneously, nor are these ideals and discourses all-encompassing. I have endeavored to reveal how the religious Self is formed through complex processes: individuals go through more than a binary choice of either simply viewing and accepting the process as a submissive agent or completely rejecting religious discourses. My research uncovered many internal differences in the ways in which the young women appropriate religion or respond to religious norms, but these do not represent an individualization of religion. Rather, when investigating these differences, I found that the youths' behavior substantiates the internal flexibility of Islam as a discursive tradition. By considering how the participants deal with religious principles by analyzing the variety of ways in which they legitimate their actions (in religious trajectories), I have sought to bring attention to the creativity and negotiations involved in the crafting of the religious Self. These trajectories do not challenge or subvert norms; they are means through which the youths can position themselves within a social field in which the effort to be authentic and religiously proximate is highly valued. I have also sought to highlight the limitations of these processes of negotiation.

Thus, in social practice, there is creativity in the form, style, and performance of the youths' religiosity; and far from being universal it is firmly localized in time and space. In the process of interacting with religious texts and normative ideas, and participating in specific religious spaces, the youth also localize their religious youthfulness as a specifically twenty-first century, Berliner religious youth culture. The young women negotiate between enjoying modern, consumerist society and dedicating themselves to their religion and its practices, and they see no contradiction between these two endeavors.

Rather than conforming homogeneously to a religious or cultural matrix, the youth craft composite and multi-faceted Selves. The individual is not only responding to one specific social, material context but also to the nomos of several social fields and expectations, in addition to their

self-motivation. Religion does not completely govern the women's agency but is rather activating ideas of what being a Good Muslim involves, which guides their acts and aspirations. Tension arises in situations where different expectations and desires come into conflict. How they deal with these tensions depends on the individuals and includes confrontation, use of multiple references, contesting knowledge, joking, or silence.

Nonetheless, crafting the Self as a religious subject brings with it restrictions, obligations, and (potential) group identification, which are all reinforced by the excessive public focus on Muslim women and the headscarf. For these women, the crafting of a religious Self also takes place within a context of representing Islam, at the local, national, and global level. Being a religious minority in a secular society shapes both the process of crafting the Self and the identification process. Within MJD, the perception of the youths' roles in representing Islam is situated within a religious discourse of inviting others to Islam, and thus is seen as a religious duty. Accordingly, many youth considered it their religious obligation to alter the negative view of Islam and Muslims in Europe. I see this as participating in a public struggle over who can define, or at least form, the normative content within the tarnished Muslim category.

As young women are deepening their religious orientation, they face their own and others' expectations that they also take on a role as representatives and transmitters of the meaning of Islam in twenty-first century Germany. By striving to imitate the internal, religiously defined gender order of what a Good Muslim Woman is, the women also seek to represent this ideal in the public sphere through their own bodies. One of the primary aims of this representation is to combat the stereotypes and stigmas attached to Islam and Muslims by the non-Muslim society. The consequences that this responsibility has in the youths' everyday life, however, cannot be overstated. Social pressure from themselves, their peers, and other Muslims becomes a component of their efforts to develop into Good Muslims, as defined by an Islamic discourse situated in a socio-historically defined context.

### *Being a Modern Muslim Youth*

The shift to a religious lifestyle is broader than what is commonly called Islamic revival, since similar trends for religious renewal can be found in Christianity and in New Religious Movements. It is a phenomenon that takes place on a global scale, encompassing several countries around the world. The turn to a so-called pure Islam as found among these youth



should not be understood as a mere trend caused by migration, as it also takes place outside the European and North American contexts. This kind of religiosity needs to be situated as part of a larger, ongoing process within Muslim tradition as a living tradition that embraces continued negotiations and struggles of interpretation and authority (Amir-Moazami and Salvatore 2003). We should not consider the youths' performance of Islam as merely a return to tradition, a re-Islamification or a coming out as Muslims, or only as a consequence of the specific European migration situation. To do so would ignore the dynamics within Islam. The youths' beliefs and practices (the religious culture) of Islam must be situated within a discursive Muslim tradition that is constantly subject to internal transformations (see Asad 1986; Amir-Moazami and Salvatore 2003). Thus, we must also emphasize the continuity of the internal logic of interventions within Islamic traditions. However, the consequences of European youths' turn to Islam do need to be understood within the European context, in which Muslims are a religious minority. For the young people in my study, values and moral norms are learned within a religious, de-ethnicized social field located in Germany generally and Berlin specifically. This contributes to a situation whereby the youth increasingly identify with a non-ethnically defined, so-called universally-oriented religious sphere. At the same time, their religious practices become localized within the Berlin context, encouraging them to find ways to practice Islam in the manner best suited for their specific socio-cultural sphere.

The increasing number of mixed ethnic marriages among the youth testifies to the greater value accorded to religious knowledge and body comportment as symbolic capital. For many of the women in this study, religiosity is more important in the selection of a future spouse than ethnicity or nationality. Identification with the ethnic social field diminishes as a premium is placed on religious knowledge and as points of religious reference are increasingly found outside of an ethnically defined social field. Consequently, the social network of the youth is increasingly ethnically mixed, and social emphasis is placed on common religious goals rather than on ethnic relations. This de-ethnicization of Islam may assist in strengthening their identification as German, although this remains an open, and pressing, research question. I expect that whether or not a German identification develops partly depends on whether or not public, non-Muslim actors and Muslim organizations and individuals persist in trying to make being Muslim incompatible with being German.

For some young women, the quest to perform a pure Islam can emancipate them, to some extent, from their parents and ethnic social field.

However, the discourse of pure Islam also emphasizes the value and place of parents in Islam, which means that there is a re-structuring of parental authority. This double-edged emancipation also exists when looking at education as a means of empowerment for the young women: in so far that women acquire knowledge and master Islamic discourse, language, and laws, they can set their own agenda within the otherwise patriarchal structure typically found in any of the world religions (Cooke 2001). However, at the same time, the fact that the women want to use their educational attainments not to reform their community but to defend it from the negative stereotypes prevalent in German society means that they decide (consciously or unconsciously) to subordinate the creation of a more liberal, emancipatory agenda as defined by secular oriented feminists. The manner by which the women have chosen to fight the idea of Islam being traditional, patriarchal, and backward-looking is through presenting themselves as Good Muslim Women, an ideal informed by their understanding of scripture. In this struggle, personal and social pressure is placed on young women, both by themselves and by their peers, to conform to the standard of Good Muslim Woman. Such pressure can itself be transformed into a means of social control by themselves and others in regard to the women's public behavior.

While some young women joined MJD in order to acquire the correct knowledge and body comportment necessary for entering Paradise in the afterlife (*akhira*), others were looking for a space that includes youth with similar socio-economic backgrounds, or wanted to improve their answers to questions posed by non-Muslims about Islam. Thus, to some extent, I agree with social research on Muslim youth in Europe that positions the youths' identification with Islam as a reaction to racism, discrimination, and economic disadvantages and as a way to gain more empowerment in relation to their traditional parents. The turn to Islam can be a response to the youths' family situation, the poverty of their neighborhood, and not being accepted as German. Living in a society where they constantly need to provide answers to questions that teachers, friends, schoolmates, and strangers on the street believe are related to Islam has led many young people to feel the need to spend time with people in the same situation or to be with others like them. A religious identification becomes an alternative to, or even a way out of, the ethnic social environment or traditionally defined practices and is in this sense an urban identity politics in a context in which the youth are rejected as German.

At the same time, this explanation largely ignores the set of meanings that the youth ascribe to their religiosity. Furthermore, it overlooks how

desires to become virtuous or Good Muslims also inform their choices and acts. Most analyses of Muslim youth in Europe fail to include worship, godliness, holiness, piety, devotion, and ideas of religiousness in the understanding of the youths' activities, interests, and choices. Consequently, not only are religious desires and motivations not taken sufficiently seriously, but the role that communities play in shaping and actively forming a young person's Self is also neglected. Those who decide to form their Selves into religious subjects undertake this process in relation to Islam where socially relevant Others, including peers, family, other Muslims, and strangers, play an extensive role in the subject formation.

The dependency on religious authorities is decreasing across the Muslim world as a result of increased education and literacy, and this leads to an objectification process where Muslims reflect on what it means to be Muslim (Eickelman and Piscatori 1992). The young Muslims in Berlin emphasize and promote their Islamic identification as a conscious choice and as related to individual reflection. They voice their religious identity as a matter of personal decision, moral choice, and religious faith. As such, the youths' religious identification must be understood as individualized in terms of how they choose which religious group to identify with or not, whether or not to continue identifying with Islam, and in which form. They develop their personal networks of social relationships and peer groups through school, leisure, and virtual networks. In addition, their focus on Islamic knowledge and improving their religious behavior involves individual self-reflection and work on the Self by the individual. However, this latter process must be considered an effect of the youths' religious orientation, in which self-reflection, responsibility for the Self, and increased knowledge and skills are required to become a Good Muslim. The individualization forms parts of and is a prerequisite for the religious discourse to which they relate. Moreover, the process involves submission to a specific value system that endorses specific kinds of conformity and thus leads to a reduction of autonomy, even if this is autonomously chosen. In the search for a pure, Islam, the acquisition of correct knowledge and body comportment is alpha and omega.

My research indicates that we should modify, if not totally dismiss, the presumption that the young generation of Muslims born in European societies does not face social constraints on how to behave as Muslims. Oliver Roy (2000) contends that Muslim youth with migration backgrounds face no social constraints in their pursuits of religious rituals or practices and that individual Muslims must independently shape their religious lifestyle. I find that this argument overstates the anonymity and

individualization of the Muslim subject in Europe. Roy argues that each individual has to create their own pattern of a Muslim daily life. This might be the case for religious actors who do not participate in or identify with any religious faith community or group. Where religious actors do belong to or identify with a particular faith community or group, group norms and values, which inevitably impact the behavior of group members, must be taken into account in order to understand the formation of a Muslim identity. Moreover, some of the social constraints and expectations that I have examined throughout this book also affect individual religious actors who are not directly involved in a religious organization. For example, when a young woman encounters other Muslim youth on the street, assessments are often made about the religiousness of her behavior, in particular in terms of her dress comportment, veil, and other signals of religious praxis. Overall, this study has stressed the collective content of identity formation even if the activity is, of course individualized. Thus the religious movement that I encountered in the MJD cannot be understood as individualizing but rather as individual engagement in a clearly collective project.

### *Religion as a Modern Urban Identity*

The youths' turn to a pure or de-ethnicized Islam is not only a consequence of their high educational levels, new technology, or the general characteristics of Islam—it is also an urban phenomenon. The mobilizing opportunities that exist in the urban milieu make it possible for religious organizations to position their messages within the social antagonisms that characterize the urban landscape (Ismail 2006; Bendixsen 2011). A religious urban lifestyle makes it possible to choose between a variety of religious spaces, largely detached from one's family. At the same time, the perception that "people pick and choose what they like" (Dikomitis and Pinxten 2006, 9) because they are not bound by their neighborhood or tradition and are sheltered by the anonymity of the city ignores the continued relevance of public discourse or Othering processes that categorize people. A veiled Muslim woman is not anonymous in the city, as she is not in control of the meanings that strangers, both Muslim and non-Muslim, assign to her.

The young people I have studied hold a vision of modernity that is dissimilar to the Western models. This alternative modernity combines more typical Western ideas of modernity—such as Western-style urban

clothing, an emphasis on education, taking pleasure in (Islamic) hip hop, and marking a distance from their parent's generation—with deep religiosity. The latter takes the form of a strong place for religion and practical religious observance in their daily lives, as well as pious fun and religious consumption (see also Bendixsen 2011). Their life choices call attention to the complex amalgamation young people make in leading a life that is both religiously observant and reflective of their situation as young, modern, urban individuals. European discourses suggest that this amalgamation is contradictory and see it as impossible to be both modern and religious, and in particular to be both modern and Muslim. In the European media, “Islam” and “Muslim” stand for everything that is traditional, conservative, and conventional. Salwa Ismail (2006) argues that “the view of Islamism as anti-modern rests on the assumption that modernization is associated with secularization and the retreat of religion from the public sphere. Islamism thus appears as an expression of an anti-modern strand that, for some, is inherent in the religion” (Ismail 2006, 3).<sup>1</sup> Instead of considering Islamism to be an anti-modern movement, Ismail refocuses our attention to its rejection of the perceived Western hegemonic ownership or meta-narrative of the modern.

Indeed, my research suggests that young Berliner Muslims do not believe that there are contradictions between consuming a modern lifestyle and being religiously diligent. Rather than seeing being modern and being religious as belonging in two different spheres, to my subjects, these activities are both integral parts of being young. Indirectly, this normalizes Islam as part of a modern way of life. Religious spaces like MJD promote ways for youth to live an active, practicing Muslim life in a Western urban society. The activities, presentations, and roles of more experienced active participants construct a specific image of how the modern, young, Muslim woman should look, behave, and consume. This image is inspired by transnational media and situated within a local space. The image creates a feeling of belonging to a group of highly literate Muslims that is characterized not only by knowledge of religious and non-religious matters, and by an

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<sup>1</sup> Islamism is a contested term, and rightly so. Ismail (2006) refers to “Islamism” as both Islamist politics and re-Islamization, the latter of which relates to my usage here. Islamization is “the process whereby various domains of social life are invested with signs and symbols associated with Islamic cultural traditions. Examples of this process include the wearing of the hijab (veil), the consumption of religious literature and other religious commodities, the publicizing of symbols of religious identity, the reframing of economic activity in Islamic terms” (Ismail 2006, 2).

awareness of social, cultural, and political issues, but also by socio-economic ambitions. This image can provide young people with a sense of direction that helps them not feel inferior to so-called modern Western youth, and by which they can contest, at least internally, the traditional and backward image of religious Muslim youth. Such practices suggest that it is possible to be modern and young while maintaining a commitment to religiously defined strictures. Furthermore, the young participants in MJD consider their chosen path to crafting the Self to be more modern than a path that remains affiliated with ethnically oriented group discourses that they view as traditional, uneducated, and misinformed.

At this moment in history, when Islam is being socially, politically, and culturally positioned in European society, young people play an extensive, visible, and creative role in the establishment of new institutions and structures like MJD, which target young people specifically. The aims of this Muslim youth organization include raising awareness among young Muslims as to how they should behave in daily interaction with non-Muslims and how they should represent Islam in the German public sphere. The organizational approach that MJD assumes is part of a struggle to provide a social space where youth can learn or affirm that it is not contradictory to be modern and Muslim. The upward social mobility among the youth—mostly acquired through higher education and work—also entails a move from private to public life. Future research should examine how these actions and engagements affect the ongoing German public discussion about, and perceptions of, Islam in Germany.

By representing themselves as enlightened and well-informed in order to locate a modern Islam within Europe (which is contrasted to traditional, cultural, and misinformed Others), the youth are unintentionally sacrificing their parents and other fellow Muslims who embrace a traditional version of Islam. The youths' universalist approach to Islam privileges scripture over practice and traditions and promotes the idea of Islam as a single, universal tradition. According to universalists, the local form of Islam is contemporary and divergent (Ismail 2007). Scholars need to be conscious of not taking sides in this largely theological discussion. Whether or not a practice is more or less religiously correct according to theology should not be the focus of ethnographic attention. The main focus should rather be on how religious beliefs and practices shape social life, and on their socio-political implications.

*Politics of the Religious Self*

I have provided a description of the young women's experiences without pretending to disclose the whole truth about their lives. I have attempted to construct "new, less false stories" (Griffith 1997, 23) than those often conveyed about young Muslim women living in European societies. By engaging with the youth over an extended period, I had the privilege of understanding their aspirations, ideas, and thoughts in more detail than I would have through interviews alone. By observing their social behavior, listening to discussions among peers, and sometimes being an outsider-insider to whom they could confess their dislikes and disagreements, I was able to gain access to a deeper understanding of how the individual women form a religious Self in relation to peers and socially significant others, and how this formation is neither a one-dimensional, homogenous process nor a case of picking-and-choosing.

As noted, the process of young people identifying with Islam has long been considered a response to discrimination in European societies. Detached from their parents' form of religiosity and their parents' ethnic group, these youths are thought of as individualized and sometimes even agentive. While this approach must be commended for leaving behind the idea that religious (non-liberal) women are deluded, or brainwashed by the patriarchal structures of traditional religion, it ignores the complex social process in which this religious identification takes form and what is at stake. I agree with Abu-Lughod (2002), who argues that feminists, and social scientists in general, must recognize that individuals are called to selves in a variety of ways and that ideas of the good life are manifold. Abu-Lughod notes that "we may want justice for women, but can we accept that there might be different ideas about justice and that different women might want, or choose, different futures from what we envision as best (see Ong 1988)?" (Abu-Lughod 2002, 788).

Nevertheless, I simultaneously believe we also have a duty to investigate the social consequences of what the young women are doing. Thus, I take seriously how religious practices are activated, how they relate to broader social matrices, and how they shape everyday life. I have addressed these questions by investigating how the social and sacred power in MJD works on both individual and group levels, and how these powers affect identification with Islam and the crafting of the young women's religious Selves. Additionally, I have asked whether norms of discipline and authority are resisted or retained, and what the available scope for resistance and individual agency is. Here, we have to avoid binary distinctions between



resistance and subordination and rather recognize the scope for more subtle social bargaining, tactics, and compositions.

Yet, this approach is most valuable if it can assist us in better understanding the potential restrictions religious devotion places upon the women, thus incorporating dimensions that are oppressive and liberating (see Griffith 1997). The acquisition of religious knowledge and the religious crafting of the Self seem to create opportunities to develop a positive understanding of the Self, partly liberating young women from the traditional structures of their parents and ethnic group, and thus empowering them in Germany. This kind of interaction with Islam potentially makes it more possible for the young women to identify as German. It may also bring about the opposite effect, namely solidifying gendered roles and boundaries that restrict women's room for action.

If we consider this form of devotion as a kind of "cultural resistance" (*ibid.*, 211), we can recognize how religious submission can become a safe haven in an increasingly unstable, immoral, and individualized society. The discipline of prayer, religious moral duties, and obedience to Islamic rules and norms represents integrity, responsibility, and a meaningful direction in life within the context of the wider German society where, according to many Muslim youths' worldview, moral and family breakdown is the rule. This process includes identification with a faith community and its religious discourse, which includes opportunities and responsibilities such as representing Islam in general and a Muslim faith community in particular in the public sphere. In this space, they may feel pious or virtuous, as well as liberated and fulfilled. However, in this process the subject also remains dependent by being willing to subordinate to a collective project (see Friedman 1994, 249). As Friedman, drawing on Alberoni, argues:

The re-identification of the subject with the larger project, while eliminating the ego-project and submerging the subject within the dictates of the group, simultaneously provides a new-found meaning in life and an ontological security. This relation is the core of movement organization. It consists in the formation of new sodalities where there was previously social disintegration and consequent individual regression. (*ibid.*, 249)

Consequently, the process of individualization, or "the establishment of the complete self-directed person" (*ibid.*, 216) among the youth, is not absolute, as interpersonal unities are re-established or created. Rather, the personal project is partly replaced by an engagement in a larger social project where the female Muslim subject identifies with the gaze of the Other.

Sympathy and recognition of subjective desires aside, we have to recognize the risk posed by the politics of the Self in which the youth take part. While the young people may defend religious values and ideals in relation to the hegemonic non-Muslim culture, these same values contain elements that some participants are uncomfortable with, as they feel they subordinate them as women. By seeking to advance an “ideal” image of Islam and Muslims, any failings in an individual Muslim’s public behavior can leave them exposed to critique by their peers, their Muslim neighbors, or strangers in the street. The by-now classical feminist postcolonial dilemma is reiterated: To what extent should women struggle to improve their situation inside the group, or focus on more common struggles together with male members (Yuval-Davis 1994, 414)? Again, we have to allow for differences among women and recognize that individuals are called to different subject positions, situated within a socio-cultural and historical context. “Rescuing women” is a dubious, frequently ethnocentric project (Abu-Lughod 2002). However, we must also reflect on the limitations within which individuals make their choices, and the social consequences their choices may lead to. I am grateful to Moore for putting it so clearly:

If we imagine that individuals take up certain subject positions because of the way in which those positions provide pleasure, satisfaction, or reward on the individual or personal level, we must also recognize that such individual satisfactions have power and meaning only in the context of various institutionalized discourses and practices, that is, in the context of certain sanctioned modes of subjectivity. (Moore 1994, 65)

Moore incorporates politics and the importance of including a thick understanding of the social context within which certain desires are pursued and expressed. We have to recognize that it is never possible for individuals to completely reflect upon what they are doing with their body, or their linguistic statements, even if their intentions are clear (*ibid.*, 52–3). The youths’ thoughts are always situated: they contemplate their world from a specific place with specific available resources.

Importantly, Western society and its media and public figures play an extensive part in bringing forth a dynamic that triggers these subject positions. Paradoxically, Western efforts to rescue the Muslim subject from oppressive strictures have the counter-productive effect of increasing social demands on women who are seeking to craft a religious Self within this context. The headscarf law restricts employment possibilities in the public sector for Muslim women who veil. More subtle constraints include how the image of Muslim women brings forth a politics of Self in which

women take on a role as the incarnation of the Good Muslim Woman and which silences effective internal critiques of patriarchal aspects of Islam.

The social relationship between Islam in Germany and the non-Muslim German public is shaped by the demands Muslims make for their participation in, and formation of, the public sphere. The non-Muslim population may potentially react with suspicion or uncertainty toward a religious group that poses new demands in (and on) the public sphere. Such suspicion can easily be perpetuated by negative and sensational media coverage of Islam. The negative public assessment of Islam may well play a factor when individuals who otherwise were not particularly religious are turning to Islam as their main source of identification. The social Self of those whose religious identification is not foremost a reaction to the negative assessment of Islam is also clearly formed by these processes. Crafting a religious, Muslim Self in Berlin today is a complex process, clearly formed in relation to Islam as a religious discourse, as well as to the various local, national, and global dynamics around Islam and Muslims in Europe. The future public role of these German-educated young Muslims who seek to live out a pure Islam in German society remains to be seen.



## APPENDIX

### SITUATING THE MOVEMENTS STUDIED WITHIN THE WIDER ISLAMIC FIELD IN GERMANY

The Islamic community in Germany is not officially recognized as a religious community. Consequently, Muslims pursue their various interests in Germany through organizations registered as *Einzelverbände* (single associations), *Dachverbände* (umbrella organizations), or *Spitzenverbände* (Central organizations). These often collaborate with each other, but there are also misunderstandings and disputes between them (Şen 2008).

There are approximately 2,400 mosque communities or unions in Germany (ibid.). The mosque unions carry out a range of assignments of a political, cultural, and religious nature. The majority are run by Turkish-Muslim participants. Around 15 percent of Sunni Muslims in Germany belong to a Muslim organization (ibid.). Membership in organizations is rarely compulsory and non-members can usually also participate in organizations and mosques.

In Berlin, there are approximately 83 registered Islamic organizations (*Vereine, e.V.*).<sup>1</sup> There are 76 mosques, four Islamic prayer rooms, one Cem, and two mosque associations that do not have a permanent location (Spielhaus 2006). Around 90 percent of the mosques and prayer rooms in Berlin belong to Sunni Islam. There are two Alevi community centers, seven Shiite community centers, and two Ahmadiyya community centers (Spielhaus and Färber 2006).

In the 1980s, several of the Islamic organizations came together in city- and nation-wide umbrella organizations (see table 1-3). Less than half of Berlin's Muslim communities are organized in local and/or national umbrella organizations (Spielhaus 2006). Two *Spitzenverbände* (umbrella organizations) are the dominant public actors at the national level: *Islamrat für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Islamic Council for the Republic of Germany, IR) and the *Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland* (ZDM, Central Council of Muslims in Germany) (Şen 2008). The former is

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<sup>1</sup> In an extensive study of mosques and Muslim organizations in Berlin, Färber and Spielhaus (2006) argue that it is difficult to estimate with certainty the actual number of Muslim organizations in Berlin.

viewed as a more conservative organization than the latter. Along with the *Türkisch Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion* (Turkish Islamic Union Organization for Religion, DITIB), which is under the administration and control of the Turkish state religious authority, and the *Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren* (Union of the Islamic Culture, VIKZ), these two umbrella organizations came together in 2007 to form the *Koordinationsrat der Muslime* (KRM, Coordinating Council of Muslims). This was in response to a need to appoint a representative for Muslims (Shiite and Sunni) in Germany to act in relation to the government (Open Society Institute 2010).

Most of the Muslim communities in Berlin that are part of an umbrella organization are organized according to ethnic or national ties. One exception is the Berlin-specific *Initiative Berliner Muslime* (Initiative Berliner Muslims, IBMUS), in which the main organization in this study, *Muslimische Jugend Deutschland* (Muslim Youth in Germany, MJD), as well as *Deutschsprachiger Muslimkreis* (the German-speaking Muslim circle, DMK), the intercultural association *Inssan e.V.*, the *Islamische Kultur und Erziehungszentrum Berlin e.V.* (IKEZ-Berlin e.V.) and the *al Nur* mosque organization participate. The three first organizations explicitly target members from different ethnic and national backgrounds and most of their activities take place in German. The organizations in IKEZ are not Turkish-Muslim, but represent members from a variety of background or from Arab countries.

Other umbrella organizations are also making efforts to represent Muslims and member mosques at the national and local level. The Alevi Turks, which is a relatively large group in Germany but whose Islamic identity is still contested, are not represented in the larger unions. Instead, Alevi Turks have formed their own union (*Föderation der Aliviten Gemeinden in Europa e.V.*, Federation of the Alevi Turks Union in Europe, AABF) and are in the process of forming a second (Şen 2008).

### *A Brief Overview of the Three Main Organizations Mentioned in this Study*

#### *Muslimische Jugend in Deutschland e.V.*

The religious youth organization *Muslimische Jugend in Deutschland e.V.* (Muslim Youth in Germany, MJD) was established in 1994 under *Haus des Islam e.V.* (HDI, based in Lützelbach). For a number of years it was located in an office behind the Muslim bookshop “Green Palace,” which in turn is

next to the offices of Islamic Relief along a trafficked Kreuzberg street with little pedestrian activity.<sup>2</sup> MJD started modestly with the idea of providing religious teaching and activities for youth born in Germany. However, MJD then broke from *Haus des Islam e.V* and registered as an independent organization headquartered in a small village in Baden-Württemberg. Comprising approximately 50 branches Germany-wide, today the organization is the second-largest Muslim youth organization in Germany, after the youth section of *Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüs e.V.* (IGMG). MJD participates in the umbrella organization *Initiative Berliner Muslime* (IBMUS).

*The Islamische Kultur und Erziehungszentrum Berlin e.V.*

*The Islamische Kultur und Erziehungszentrum Berlin e.V.* (IKEZ-Berlin e.V.), where Youth Club Assalam (Jugendtreff Assalam) meets, is located in a populous residential area of Neukölln. Its homepage presents IKEZ as a socially and culturally active non-profit organization. It was founded in 1995, on the initiative of Muslim students who needed a place for their community.<sup>3</sup> Since then, it has grown to 250 official members. In addition to the more general religious seminars and Friday prayer, IKEZ offers Islamic lessons in German every Friday for girls and every Saturday afternoon for women. The youth and women who frequent the mosque mostly have Arabic backgrounds, and there are also some German converts. IKEZ participates in the umbrella organization *Initiative Berliner Muslime* (IBMUS).

*Al Nur mosque*

The *Al Nur mosque* (*the islamische Gemeinschaft in Berlin e.V.*) is located across the street from a cigarette factory, at the outskirts of an industrial area in Neukölln, a neighborhood characterized by high unemployment and many immigrants. Al Nur was founded in 2001 by one Saudi and two Lebanese citizens. The Saudi Al-Haramain Foundation, which is

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<sup>2</sup> When the bookshop went out of business 2010, MJD moved its meetings to the Bosnian mosque (*Islamische Kulturzentrum der Bosniaken*) close to Kottbusser Tor, Kreuzberg. Currently (2012), it meets in the Bilal mosque (*Islami Tahrik e.V. Berlin*, which is run by Pakistani and Indian Muslims and participates in IBMUS), in Wedding. The German-speaking Muslim organization DMK (*Deutschesprachlige Muslimkreis Berlin e.V.*) also meets in this mosque.

<sup>3</sup> From homepage of IKEZ-Berlin e.V., <http://www.almarkaz.de/>, accessed September 5, 2012.



now banned, provided 75 percent of the funding necessary to buy the property for the mosque. In the first few years, around 1,200 Muslims came to the Friday prayers. At that time, it was run by the Lebanese preacher Dr. Salem Rafei, who openly defended Palestinian suicide attacks and allegedly called on Muslims to kill all unbelievers standing in the way of Islam. When Salem Rafei was denied reentrance to Germany in 2006, he was replaced by Abdel Hadime Kamouss (also known as Abdul Adhim).

The Al Nur mosque is very popular among young Muslims across a relatively wide age span (15–45 years old) of both genders and with various ethnic and national backgrounds (although a majority are Arabs). For the Sunday religious service, participants come from all over Berlin. The mosque has been presented in the German media as a place where radical Muslims are recruited, partly because it invites preachers such as the Salafist Pierre Vogel, who is popular among youth. The media considers Pierre Vogel (who was born in 1978) to be a radical Muslim. He is a former professional boxer who converted to Islam in 2001. In 2006, when he returned to Berlin from his religious studies at the Om Al-Quara in Mecca, he started teaching Islam in the Al Nur mosque. The charismatic Moroccan preacher Abdul Adhim, who preaches regularly on Sundays, is also a controversial figure in Germany. He is widely known due to his sermons and commentaries on YouTube. In 2009, the German news magazine Focus presented him (under the name Abdel Hadim Kamouss) as one of the German Islamists and a “star” in the Islamist scene. According to Focus, the *Bundeskriminalamt* (Federal Criminal Police Office, BKA) investigated “Kamouss and other extremists” in the community centered on the Al-Nur mosque because they had allegedly founded a terrorist cell. In 2005, Kamouss was found not guilty due to lack of evidence.

The 2011 report from the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Verfassungschutzbericht*) presents the Al-Nur-mosque as one of two Salafi mosques in Berlin. The report stresses that the mosque is also frequented by non-Salafi participants. Al-Nur is a mosque where conversion (both by non-Muslim Germans and “born again” Muslims) take place regularly. There are several film clips available on Youtube that show Germans converting to Islam and interviews with German converts in this mosque. In late 2010, several Muslim centers in Berlin, including the Al-Nur mosque, were the target of arson attacks. IBMUS represents the Al-Nur mosque (on the homepage it is named the *Islamische Gemeinschaft in Berlin e.V.*, or the Islamic community in Berlin).

*Overview of Selected Islamic Organizations in Germany and Berlin<sup>4</sup>*

Table 1. Religious associations in Berlin (national)

Name	Established	Characteristics
DITIB, <i>Türkisch Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion e.V.</i> (Turkish Islamic Union Religious Organization)	1982 Berlin 1984 Kölln (nationwide)	Collaborates closely with the Turkish state and the Turkish embassy in Germany on religious matters. The member organizations are provided with Imams from Turkey who are appointed by the Turkish state (through DITIB) for a specific period of time.
IFB, <i>Islamische Föderation Berlin</i>	1980	Focuses on providing Islamic religious instruction in schools. They achieved this goal when they were rec- ognized as a religious community by the <i>Oberverwaltungsgericht</i> (Higher administrative court, OVG) in Berlin (1998). Cooperates with IGMG on events such as pilgrimages.
IGMG, <i>Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüs e.V.</i> (Islamic Community, National View Union)	1976 as <i>Vereinigung Neue Weltschift in Europa e.V.</i> 1995 as <i>Islamische Gemeinschaft Neue Weltschicht</i>	Officially no member mosque in Berlin. How- ever, I interviewed Berlin mosque spokes- men who confirmed their connection to IGMG. It is considered to be close

*(Continued)*

<sup>4</sup> Information on the year of establishment and the main focus of the organizations is from Spielhaus and Färber (2006).

Table 1. (Cont.)

Name	Established	Characteristics
ADÜTDF/TF, <i>Föderation der Türkisch- Demokratischen Idealistenvereine in Europa e.V.</i> (Promotion of Turkish Democratic idealism in Europe)	1978 main office in Frankfurt/M	to the <i>Islamist Saadet Partisi</i> (Felicity Party, successor to the Virtue Party, which was banned 2001) in Turkey. IFB has taken legal steps to not be publicly tied to IGMG. Considered to be the foreign organization of the Turkish party <i>Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi</i> (the Nationalist Movement Party, Mhp). It is often called “the Grey Wolf.” It is influ- enced by the Turkish- Islamic synthesis, dreams of a “Great Turkish Empire,” and is considered to be opposed to gays, Kurds, Armenians, and Jews.
VIKZ, <i>Verband der Islamschen Kulturzentren</i> (Union of the Islamic Culture)	1973 Kölln 1976 Berlin	Viewed as very hierarchical and focuses on offering religious instruction. Oriented towards Islamic mysticism (Sufism). It is con- sidered the German branch of the <i>Süleymancı</i> sect in Turkey. It was one of the initiators of IR and ZMD, but withdrew from these umbrella organizations after a few years.

Table 1. (Cont.)

Name	Established	Characteristics
AABF, <i>Föderation der Aleviten Gemeinden in Europa e.V.</i> , (Federation of the Alevi Turks Union in Europe)	1991 ( <i>Föderation Alevitischer Gemeinschaften in Deutschland</i> )	Focuses on promoting Alevism among the Alevi Turks in Germany also as a way to oppose "Sunnization" (Sen 2008). Favors a secular legal state.

Table 2. Berlin-specific religious associations (local)

Name	Established	Characteristics
IBMUS, <i>Initiative Berliner Muslime</i>	1994	Relatively loose union of eight Islamic organizations, of which four are mosques. Mainly cooperates on stand-alone events, such as the Berlin Islam week. Focuses on promoting dialogue between Muslims in Berlin and all parts of German society, as well as on representing Muslims in Germany nationwide. Linked to ZMD, although not a member Participating organizations that this study refers to include <i>Muslimische Jugend Deutschland</i> (MJD), <i>Deutschsprachiger Muslimkreis</i> (the German-speaking

(Continued)

Table 2. (Cont.)

Name	Established	Characteristics
<i>Islamische Religionsgemeinschaft e.V.</i>	1990 former DDR	<p data-bbox="759 305 1041 575">Muslim circle, DMK), <i>The Islamische Kultur und Erziehungszentrum Berlin e.V.</i> and <i>Al-Nur-mosque</i> (referred to online as <i>Islamische Gemeinschaft in Berlin e.V.</i>).</p> <p data-bbox="730 596 1041 931">They were recognized as a religious community in the former East Berlin, a status contested by the Senate of Berlin. Includes IFB and the mosques organized within IFB, as well as “Islam Vakfi” and individual members.</p>

Table 3. National umbrella organizations

Name	Established	Characteristics
ZMD, <i>Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland</i> (Central Council of Muslims in Germany).	1995	Different nationalities and confessional orientations. Both Sunni and Shiite organizations are represented. Dominated by the <i>Islamische Gemeinschaft Deutschland</i> (Islamic Community Germany, IGD) that was established by Egyptian Muslim activists. IGD is dominated by Arab Muslims. The media and some politicians consider IGD to represent or be close to the Muslim Brotherhood.
IR, <i>Islamrat für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland</i> (Islamic Council for the Republic of Germany)	1986	IGMG is the dominant member. Focuses on becoming recognized as a corporation under public law in Germany.

There are also organizations that are not represented at the national level. For a more detailed overview of the Islamic organizations in Germany and Berlin, see Spielhaus (2006), and Grübel/Rademacher (2003).





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