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Media making Muslims: the construction of a Muslim community in Germany through media debate

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Abstract This article focuses on the ways in which Muslims actively participate in media debates about Islam and Muslims in Germany, and how they challenge or reinforce representations of themselves. It questions the narrative of powerlessness versus dominant actors in media and politics. Even though they were already perceived as part of a Muslim community, several prominent individuals in the German cultural and political sphere took an explicit position as Muslims—some insisting on their distance to religion. This paper aims at describing the various reasons and reflections accompanying this decision and argues that media images of Muslims steered individuals, who are not members of Islamic organizations let alone representatives of them, to become active or change their self-representation and act as Muslims. By demanding recognition as active members of German society, prominent Muslim individuals are creating new images of Muslims beyond an imaginary that is reducing them to their (alleged) religiosity and positioning them outside German national identity.

Keywords Secular Muslims · Islam in Germany · Media representation · Agency · Collective identity

Introduction

I'm Islamic, don't panic.

With this slogan on her t-shirt, the Berlin-based DJ İpek İpekçioğlu was photographed for a music magazine in the aftermath of 9/11. A number of highly acknowledged 'assimilated' intellectuals, who had never previously presented

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themselves as being religious, referred to themselves as Muslims in articles, interviews, and essays in the most prestigious German newspapers, on TV and in books. Until then, for the most part, individuals who defined themselves predominantly through their religion—often Islamic functionaries—had appeared as speakers for Islam and Muslims. Increasingly, others started to speak out as Muslims, including those for whom religion played a minor if any role in daily life; they introduced themselves as non-practicing Muslims, as cultural Muslims (Kulturmuslime, Feiertagsmuslime), or atheists. These were Muslims, who considered religion a private issue, and more than that, individuals who in many dimensions of their life including their identity ought to be called integrated if not assimilated. Since their public appearance did not differ from other personalities in cultural, political, and media spheres, they were largely recognized as members of German society. Their statements reveal reflections about a recent change of identity. German citizens whose family history links them to Muslim majority countries now felt urged to take up position in the German public discourse on Islam.

While the religious praxis and organizational structure of Islamic associations as well as the representation of Islam and Muslims in Europe has become a field of extensive research, the effects on peoples' identities beyond the prayer rooms in the German context have scarcely been analyzed so far. However, a fundamental change of terminology in media, political, and academic discourse, which turned foreigners into Muslims, has been pointed out (Allievi 2006; Allievi and van Bruinessen 2005; Jonker 2005; Klausen 2005; Tiesler 2006). Analyzing the construction of Muslim minorities in Europe, Nina Clara Tiesler calls this process Islamization of debates and individuals while Levent Tezcan describes a similar development in the context of inter-religious and intercultural dialogue as creation of subjects for dialogue (Tiesler 2006; Tezcan 2006). Closely looking at counter-terrorism measures, Frank Peter depicts how policies towards Muslims in France and the United Kingdom have influenced the religious praxis of Muslim communities through the reconfiguration of the category Islam (Peter 2008). In her paper on three petitions by 'secular Muslims' (musulmans laïques) launched during the French headscarf debate, Ruth Mas explicates that charged debates on the presence and visibility of Muslims can serve as a basis for communalization and the crafting of "a secular Islamic subjectivity" (Mas 2006, 588). The petitioners thereby characterize the French approach towards Muslims as a continuity of the colonial 'civilizing mission' and criticize a lack of attention for their views and the tendency to reduce Muslims to their cultural and religious particularity (Mas 2006, 585). The 'secular Muslim' emerges in close connection with the exertion of power by the state and presents an identity that "ruptures both French political designations and normative designations by Muslims of what Islam is or Muslims are" (Mas 2006, 611)

Apart from qualitative surveys, nationwide quantitative polls with thousands of respondents categorized as Muslims have been produced lately. They are documenting a much higher significance of religiosity for Muslims than polls among Christian respondents (Bertelsmanstiftung 2008, 6; Brettfeld and Wetzels 2007, 19, 424). Comparisons between the results of telephone polls in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia from 2000 and 2005 are indicating a rising importance of Islam among immigrants from Turkey. While in 2000 the percentage of respondents considering themselves as very or rather religious was 73, the number

rose to 83% in 2005 (Sen and Sauer 2006; c.f. Brettfeld and Wetzels 2007). In view of the debate on Islam and Muslims in Germany, the interpretation of these polls remains ambivalent: do these changes reflect an increase in religiosity in terms of practice and belief? Or do they indicate an increasing relevance of religious identity resulting from ascription and internalization of the ethno-religious markers as other? However, the interaction between the dominant discourse in politics and media on the one hand, and Muslim discursive spaces on the other, as well as self-perception and religiosity of Muslims remain unclear. Thorough academic descriptions of the various processes and effects of these changes in terminology are needed.

Researchers working on Muslims in Europe are expected and asked to develop categorizations and typologies of Muslims, which then can be used in socio-political negotiations. At the core of these requests often lies the search for procedures to deal with the many different and competing voices in Muslim communities. The existing literature thereby concentrates on organized forms of religious life and on organized forms of religious identification and practices (associations, mosques, initiatives, and political parties) or is based on research among persons embedded in practices of exclusion or in conflicts (mosque building, headscarf-controversies, struggle for acknowledgement as spokes-bodies, etc.) or persons sharing similar associative commitments (student initiatives, women's groups) (Amiraux 2006, 21f). Implicitly, some of these studies and explicitly many political actors point to the fact that the divergence between Muslims committed to a life of worship and the 'anonymous' Muslims remains absent from most studies as well as public discourse because they do not make an argument of their religious belief (Amiraux 2006, 22). In her article "Speaking as a Muslim," Valerie Amiraux argues that the so-called silent majority of invisible Muslims should not be too quickly reduced to 'absentees of public space' just because they have no words and no organization to represent them. Some individuals succeed in different ways to contribute and engage in public spheres without following the expected associative structures and escape organized, institutional and visible frameworks while coming very well to terms with the plurality in their communities (Amiraux 2006, 48f). Studies on the negotiation of Islam as the basis of identities in Europe conclude that ethnic and national identities are given up for a pure Islam which enables young Muslims to adopt the citizenship of and national belonging to their Western country and position themselves in Europe in a dual process. This process is often described as enabling participation in the public sphere (Fadil 2006, 76). However, this does not seem to be the only process taking place. Jytte Klausen describes a complementary development in her work on Muslim representatives in European parliaments. Some already active and recognized immigrants from Muslim majority countries, and in these cases they were mostly first-generation refugees who came for political reasons and got involved in politics immediately after their arrival, started to identify and declare their solidarity with people from their home being discriminated against because of their (alleged) religion (Klausen 2005).

Media discourses and perception of Muslims in Germany have been monitored especially since 2001 in both representative polls and qualitative empirical research. The research group around Wilhelm Heitmeyer conducts a long-term survey on group-focused enmity. The survey includes questions on attitudes that the research team is categorizing under the term of Islamophobia and measures an increase in

Islam-related hostile attitudes in its annual polls among Germans, especially since 2004. The cultural anthropologist Werner Schiffauer deploys the concept of moral panic for the German debates on citizenship, rights of religious minorities and public funding. Even though they became stronger after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the fear in these debates is not only motivated by Islamic terrorism, he argues, but reflects the rise in status of many immigrants and their descendants through naturalization (Schiffauer 2006, 2007).

> Immigrants who were hitherto considered different and unequal and who have been, in German politics, taken care of, rather than integrated into the political system, are increasingly becoming citizens who fight for their rights and seek to establish them by democratic means. This leads to fear of loosing control of key issues of German society: The reaction to it is moral panic (Schiffauer 2006, 94).

An academic debate has arisen on the thesis of a crisis of authority and/or a crisis of learned clerical bodies as suggested not only by Richard Bulliet, Jocelyne Cesari, and Olivier Roy in their analysis of globalized Islam (Bulliet 2004; Cesari 2004, 125 ff; Roy 2004, 33). With reference to European and North American examples, Cesari describes the difference between bureaucratic and parochial leaders. The reason for the upcoming of new leaders here, as she argues, is not merely a crisis of an elite group of scholars but the sheer nonexistence of established authority figures (Cesari 2004, 125–131). During the last decade, the questions 'Who can speak for Islam?' and 'Who is actually speaking for Muslims?' have been asked recurrently in politics as well as in the academic field of Islamic studies. Yet, the two questions stand for two very different approaches. The production of Islamic knowledge and the production of knowledge on Islam need to be distinguished, and, moreover, there is a difference between the representation of Islam on the one hand and of Muslims on the other. The 'coming out' of public Muslims as referred to in this article only belongs to the last phenomenon and leads to another important question: who can and/or who is accepted to speak as a Muslim and thereby for Muslims? In this, it becomes clear that Muslim not only refers to membership in a faith community but designates a religious identity, or as it is used in the debate: an ethno-cultural background.

Germany discovers its Muslims

Germany had naturalized around seven hundred thousand of the 2.4 million immigrants from Turkey in 2007. Altogether, the number of German nationals with roots in majority Muslim countries had exceeded one million in the year 2005 (Deutscher Bundestag 2006, 8). Some months later, the minister for interior affairs, Wolfgang Schäuble, broke a blockade against formalized communication with Islamic associations and started the German Islam Conference. In explaining the reasoning behind this "long-term process of negotiation and communication between representatives of the German state and Muslims living in Germany," the minister quoted the coalition agreement between Social and Christian Democrats (SPD and CDU), the two leading parties: "Interfaith and intercultural dialogue is not only an

important part of integration policy and civic education, it also serves to prevent and combat racism, anti-Semitism, and extremism."[1] The minister planned the conference as an open process for a period of 2 to 3 years with the objective "to establish a common determination which enables the federal government, the federal states and the municipalities to act jointly with Muslims."[2] The German Islam Conference has fuelled the debate on the question of legitimate representatives for Muslims in Germany by inviting Muslim individuals besides functionaries of Islamic associations. The minister had expressed his aim to include not only organized Muslims but also the "silent majority" of non-organized Muslims, since, according to his argumentation, the functionaries were only able to represent a minority of all Muslims in Germany.

The basis for the evaluation of representatives as well as the definition of Muslims in the public debate is derived from the country of origin according to the immigration statistics. Regional background thereby is equated with religious affiliation and eventually becomes a religious category—as which it is then utilized in political argumentation to legitimate political actions or delegitimize political actors.[3] Thus, the differentiations and characterizations of this newly created group of Muslims are defined by its statistical registration, itself a recurring strategy of governmentality (c.f. Appadurai 2006, 41-42). By this statistic inclusion of all persons from Muslim countries, the religious aspect is turned into the decisive and unique aspect of their identification. Religiously indifferent, atheistic, or agnostic individuals are declared members of the so-called "Muslim community."[4]

The German debate about Muslims follows a pattern which Olivier Roy calls 'neo-ethnicity': the "construction of an ethnic group, which previously did not exist as such" (Roy 2004, 125), when "religion is not seen as a faith but as a set of cultural patterns that are inherited and not related to a person's spiritual life" (Roy 2004, 124). This is a process stimulated both from outside and from inside, and it shows similarities with previous developments of ethnic groups. However, in this case, we are observing the construction of a religious community as a minority. The similarities to the concept of ethnicization are striking: as a process of social exclusion through labeling, it creates minorities in order to ensure the privileges of a dominant majority (c.f. Butterwegge and Hentges 2006). The very framework of

[1] http://www.bmi.bund.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/127198/publicationFile/17552/Zeitung_2_DIK_en.pdf (Last access 3/28/09 2008). See also: Bundesministerium des Inneren 2007.

[2] Deutscher Bundestag 2006: 11; translation by the author.

[3] Politicians of different parties and government representatives continue to refuse recognition of Islamic organizations with the status of a religious community until Germany's Muslims come up with an acceptable spokes body and combine this demand with the criterion that it should represent "the Muslim community" or at least the majority of Muslims living in the country. Thus, the migration statistics serve as the basis to evaluate the success of Islamic organizations in this endeavor. In its "Brief Information about the German Conference on Islam" the interior ministry states: "There is so far no single representative serving as an official contact for government agencies (at federal, Länder and local level). In late March of 2009, four major associations founded the Coordination Council of Muslims in Germany (KRM, Koordinierungsrat der Muslime in Deutschland) which, however, does not represent the community as a whole." http://www.bmi.bund.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/127198/publicationFile/17552/Zeitung_2_DIK_en.pdf (Last accessed 3/28/09).

[4] A recent poll commissioned by the German government and the Islam Conference revealed that a large percentage of immigrants from majority Muslim countries do not consider themselves to be affiliated with Islam. The authors of the survey come to the conclusion that one cannot derive the percentage of a certain religious group among immigrants from their percentage in the population of the country of origin. (Haug, Müssig & Stichs 2009: 12).

secularism might, as in the French case, deny "different definitions and identifications of community at the same time as it makes them a criterion of discrimination and exclusion." (Mas 2006, 605) Discrimination and other forms of ascription are here producing a communal identity, which is nearly inseparably defined as religious as well as cultural and ethnic and more than that it works homogenizing. As Olivier Roy maintains, "the culture of origin is no longer relevant" but is substituted by the reference to a newly constructed group: the Muslim community. The latter is "not related to a person's spiritual life" and therefore "not to faith and genuine religious practice" but to a "set of cultural patterns that are assumed to be inherited." (Roy 2004, 124) Not only does the compilation of the estimated total number of Muslims living in Germany match this model but also the portrayal of Muslims in the media. As another piece of the jigsaw puzzle Esra Özyürek detects a notion of secularity in Germany that is tied to the idea of religious as well as ethnic homogeneity in the country.

> This condition of homogeneity creates a specific kind of secularism where the religious majority is equated with the national majority and keeps the religious minority outside the national imagination, no matter how well integrated or assimilated the members of the minority are (Özyürek 2009, 108).

The concept of a coherent Muslim community has obviously existed in the minds of influential actors who do not belong to one of the different Muslim groups, and has been imagined in the dominant political and social discourse, while the feeling of belonging and the social interaction in face-to-face-contacts of Muslims coming from different social levels or regions of the world has only recently become recognizable. Yet, the unification is not only ascribed from outside. Certainly, many Muslims would confirm that the main motivation for all their actions lies in their faith. Even more importantly, the idea of a worldwide religious community across all borders of language, ethnicity, nationality, and of spatial distance is, indeed, an important concept of Islam (the Ummah). Islamic associations in Germany have been trying to set up a common umbrella organization on the federal level since the late 1980s and failed several times. Nevertheless, the efforts made and the individuals and groups involved have never been more extensive then during the last 5 years.

Raising the voice as Muslim

Individuals from the public sphere who already have access to the media and socio-political debates do raise their voices as Muslims. Some of them stress the fact that they are not believers or not practicing their religion, which, again, is evidence for the conclusion that the meaning of the term "Muslim" has shifted from a religious to a social category. Writers, DJs of the oriental club scene, politicians, scholars, publicists, lawyers and activists as well as journalists have taken secular and critical but explicitly Muslim positions in numerous articles, interviews, political speeches and books—some of which have become bestsellers. Their criticism is directed towards Islamic associations in Germany, developments among Muslims, as well as

towards the dominant German discourse on Muslims. Some of the statements considered here are taken from published answers to journalistic inquiries while some were proactive contributions to debates in order to correct prevailing misunderstandings and prejudices. A number of the cited personalities have publicly described the development in the definition of their identities on their own initiative, while others referred to such developments in interviews I conducted.[5]

Concerning their religiosity and religious praxis, they did not show any differences to the German population. Largely, they comply with the characteristics assigned to Muslim pluralists by Peter Mandaville: they enjoy life in the presence of a variety of value systems and communities of believers and are open to different interpretations of Islam; they elect and support parties of the political mainstream and value participation as a citizen. For them, Muslim and European identities are equally important and compatible (Mandaville 2007, 294).

It has not been easy for empirical surveys to include Muslims of this 'type' because they are not to be found in religious spaces or associations and often respond with certain ambivalence to questions regarding their religion. Moreover, in a field which is shaped by stereotypes, researchers need to question the dominant labels and avoid simply perpetuating them.

> [N]ot all of those identified as European Muslims necessarily identify primarily or even very strongly with Islam. Many are "Muslim" in the sense of having an ethno-national background from a Muslim majority country (Mandaville 2007, 294).

By approaching people with Muslim background as primarily or exclusively religious, researchers are running the risk of reducing people and groups to their (ascribed) religion until religious affiliation overshadows or even excludes all other characteristics. Not only is it problematic in analytical terms to view everybody with a Muslim background through the lens of Islam or to project Islam onto them (Mandaville 2007, 294), it is also shaping the grammar of socio-political options for the persons concerned. However, the individuals we will be looking at in the following pages entered the media sphere as Muslims whether voluntarily or rather because media actors dragged them into it. As their statements show, some of the protagonists address this circumstance in their attempt to influence the imagining of Muslims.

How to become a 'Public Muslim'

At present, there is no empirical evidence in Germany for a sense of belonging to one community, neither among all Muslims, nor amongst all individuals with a background in countries with a Muslim majority. Nevertheless, we can observe a unifying process fostered by ascriptions from outside and the growth of a collective

[5] My research material is based on 40 semi-structured interviews and participant observation in meetings of Muslim representatives with media, politicians, and governmental authorities on various levels as well as the observation of five leading national newspapers and magazines. A deeper discussion of the applied methodology and a more comprehensive analysis of the interviews and broader parts of the participant observations will be published in 2009 under the title: "Wer ist hier Muslim? Die Entwicklung eines islamischen Bewusstseins in Deutschland zwischen Selbstidentifikation und Fremdzuschreibung."

identity among immigrants with Muslim backgrounds. This applies both to members of different Muslim religious orientations, which used to be the dominant factors for religious identification, as well as to people who previously did not primarily identify themselves as religious. This evolving collective does not stem from a common belief, or from a shared religious praxis. It is rather based on the experience of being perceived as a homogeneous group in the German public discourse; often criticized as discriminating and stigmatizing.

Be it in their organizations or in personal statements, Muslims are only beginning to identify with each other as members of an entity or community. In the last 15 years, there have been several initiatives to unite Muslim associations in Germany. None of them has succeeded so far, but the process could lead to the emergence of a community based either on religious background or on the experience of ascription and discrimination if these remain the only characteristics that the members of this collective have in common.

The experience of discrimination has led to a new feeling of solidarity and thereby has strengthened the formation of the Muslim collective. Many of the Muslims in Germany who actively raise their voices in the media and in the public sphere stress the fact that they refuse to accept the role of victims but struggle for control of how they are perceived by society. Numerous debates are concerned with the question of what defines a Muslim, how people become Muslims and who is to be counted as a Muslim (see Heine and Spielhaus 2005). In this regard, the main focus is often on discussions of religious practice and daily behavior if not the expectation for religious salvation. However, this article focuses on the question how and why people publicly describe and position themselves as Muslims and, furthermore, why they do so in the context of discourses on social affiliation, security, and citizenship.

Several prominent Muslims explicitly discuss their thoughts about the moment when they became Muslim in public. The patterns here are quite similar and twofold. On the one hand stands the experience to be perceived as a Muslim, mostly in a negative way and in relation to violence or even terrorist attacks. On the other hand, becoming a 'Public Muslim' is described as an active decision. The political and media reactions to 9/11 are recurrently named as a crucial experience, but also other discursive events like so-called honor killings, the headscarf debate, and mosque building conflicts have been mentioned as turning points.

Nebahat Güçlü, member of parliament in the northern federal state of Hamburg, explained in an interview that Islam has always been part of her culture but never a central element. The impact of 9/11 led her to increasingly identify as Muslim. As a reason for this, she designates the experience of discrimination, both personally and towards the Muslim population of Hamburg, a city that was a focal point of attention since it had been the domicile of some of the terrorists.[6] The women's rights activists and lawyer Seyran Ateş phrases the changes in the perception of immigrants as follows:

> First we were guest workers, then foreigners, then foreign fellow citizen, then Germans of Turkish background. And now—since 9/11—we are perceived as Moslems.[7]

[6] Nebahat Güçlü, interview in Hamburg 15.03.2007, translated by the author.
[7] Seyran Ates, zitiert in: Die Zeit, 41/2004, translated by the author.

"You are being turned into a Muslim," answered the member of the German federal parliament for the Social Democrats, Lale Akgün, when I asked her whether she would call herself a secular Muslim.

> Yes, of course, I was socialized in this culture. I would call myself a secular Muslim or cultural Muslim. But I will tell you one thing: Maybe I wouldn't call myself anything, if there were no such debates. However, in the midst of this amount of injustice I have to take a position. And I will not tolerate that a bucket of dirt is dumped over all people of the Muslim faith. In view of that I feel how my solidarity is growing, growing more and more.[8]

In her study on the Muslim elite of Europe, Jytte Klausen quotes a parliamentarian of Turkish origin with a line that expresses a similar feeling of rising impatience and belated self-discovery.

> When I hear them talk about 'those people,' meaning Muslims, I feel like standing up and saying 'hello, I am one of those people, said one of the parliamentarians while pulling at her mini-skirt (Klausen 2005, 25).

The first member of the Federal German Parliament with a Turkish background,[9] Cem Özdemir, participated in a press conference in Berlin's British Embassy right after the 7/7 bombings in London expressing himself from the perspective of a Muslim German. In an interview, he later explained how he acknowledged that he always served as a spokesperson for Turks and Muslims in Germany no matter whether they or he himself would agree to that. The crucial point was that he was perceived as part of 'the community.'

> The majority society sees me as part of this community. For a start this does not have to be something bad. I have always tried to merge with the majority society. I wanted to be invisible in the majority society. To be one of the majority society. But then 9/11 happened and everything that followed.[10]

So he started to use his access to decision makers in politics and to the media as well as his knowledge of the conventions of the German society in order to mediate. He speaks of a feeling of responsibility which grew both out of his position as an acknowledged member of society and out of his competence and experiences in dealing with media and politics. Being the son of guest workers from Turkey on the other hand enabled him to express constructive criticism in order to develop the community.

However, behind the commitment to Muslims lies a struggle for a personal stance, a struggle for the power to define what it means to be Muslim, which the writer Navid Kermani does not want to be taken out of his hands by either journalists or extremists.

[8] Lale Akgün, interview in Berlin, 24.07.2007.

[9] In the year 1994, more than 30 years after Turkish 'guest workers' were brought to Germany based on government contracts, the young Cem Özdemir, born in Germany in a family of guest workers, became the first member of a German parliament with a Turkish background. After being a member of the European Parliament for the Green party since 2004, he became the first Turkish–German chairman of a German-wide party.

[10] Cem Özdemir, Interview in Berlin, 23.01.2008, translated by the author.

> It is a fact that I act stronger as a part of the collective 'Islam' because I am made a part of this collective. And this happens totally independently from spiritual reasons. [...] It is a political decision to act in the name of this collective. The ascriptions one is facing nearly every day: 'Islam is this and you are that, because you are Muslim,' not only to ignore this but to redefine it. To decide on your own what it means to be Muslim.[11]

Being a 'public Muslim' implies that one has to come to terms with extremism, which is demonstrated not only in Kermani's statement, but in those of other respondents as well. It also implies the refusal to give in to the dominating images of a violent Islam. Kermani even calls the disasters produced by Islam the main reason to become active as a Muslim intellectual. They are a reason to stand up and declare one's own viewpoint to be an individual answer to politicization and mobilization in the name of Islam. However, being confronted with the call to distance oneself from the evil acts of 'fellow Muslims' is not only annoying but creates a feeling of commonality. In her article for the editorial section of an established daily newspaper, Katajun Amirpur, expert on Islam and especially on feminism in Iran, referred to such calls from the federal president, a protestant bishop, the interior minister and others, suggesting that Muslims could jointly raise their voice against terrorism or do candle-lit demonstrations. Finally, Amirpur is pointing to a major fact concerning the connection of Islam and terrorism in which the mentioned representatives of German society and German Muslim differ, "since, for the majority of the Muslims who live here the so-called Islamic terrorism has nothing to do with Islam."[12]

Mehmet Daimagüler, member of the steering commission of the German Liberal Party expressed his annoyance in an article entitled "Becoming German, but staying Muslim:"

> If long chains of demonstrators carrying lights helps, then we are prepared to do this, but with the uneasy feeling that we would be trying to distance ourselves from people with whom we were never close in the first place. Shall I identify myself with an Egyptian or a Moroccan who killed women and children in Madrid, just because he is a Muslim like me?[13]

Several German newspapers and magazines asked prominent Muslims for statements, even, if they preferred the label atheist for themselves. Exemplary for this are articles compiling quotes from 'Muslim Germans' like the one published after the murder of Theo van Gogh, a Dutch journalist who was killed in 2004. By mistake, the Christian academic of Lebanese origin, Ralph Ghadban, was included in this one. An actress, a lawyer and feminist activist, a member of the board of the organization for gay and lesbians in Berlin-Brandenburg, two authors, a pop singer, a popular DJ, and a member of a lobby organization for Turkish immigrants, all of them distanced themselves from the murder, of course. They also took the opportunity to address major problems of immigrants in Europe. Most of them confessed that they are Muslim believers and consequently did not distance

[11] Navid Kermani, Interview in Cologne, 28.11.05, translated by the author.
[12] Katajun Amirpur, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2004, translated by the author.
[13] Mehmet Daimagüler, FAZ, 23.06.2004, English online-edition, translated by the newspaper.

themselves from Islam but clearly from the killing committed by a Muslim. Two statements furthermore criticized the way in which Muslims are attacked in the public discourse in Europe and started a discussion about the discourse on Islam.[14]

In an interview, the journalist Hilal Sezgin explains in detail the discomfort that such calls for dissociation from terror and terrorists bring about:

> Many non-Muslims don't understand that it is awkward to take a position. They just don't understand. I personally do not think that—as a Muslim—you have to explain to others that you are against terrorism! I think it is self-evident that every sensible and halfway good-hearted person is against terror. If anybody flies into a skyscraper in New York with an airplane, then I never gave my consent to this! This is why I do not have to renounce it. And I really deem it a sign of stigmatization and out of a personal perspective pretty awful, to permanently have to justify myself.[15]

What does being Muslim and being German mean?

Being counted amongst the Muslims—a group perceived as homogenous—and the stigmatization that comes along with this is described as the initial point of various considerations. Affirming one's Muslim background becomes an endeavor to fight back against discrimination, while it is stressed that the actor, as an acknowledged member of the German society, belongs to 'those people.' This term is meant to contradict the unifying perception of this new group and it challenges the homogeneous picture of the Muslim also by contributing statements on contemporary issues as Muslims. This is a means to criticize the debate on Islam and Muslims in Germany as a discourse of exclusion, which imposes on Muslims the role of the strange other, who does not belong to German society.

Being associated with thoughts and attitudes contradicting one's own principles is one reason for the discomfort. The other is the feeling to be excluded from the German mainstream, a sentiment, which is the essence of what Cem Özdemir, Katajun Amirpur, and Hilal Sezgin are objecting to. Navid Kermani describes the feeling of being forced into a 'new we' that he had not reflected on before, meaning the new collective of Muslims, in his criticism of the leading political magazine *Der Spiegel* in a letter to the editor.

> Your article is forcing me into this "we," when it consciously singles out some of us, quasi adopting them, only to declare the rest to be fanatics, barbarians and misogynists. Then I prefer to belong to the barbarians rather than to you.[16]

Here, Kermani not only opposes the negative depiction of devout Muslims in this political magazine, moreover he refuses to act as the 'good Muslim,' the exception and role model for an integrated immigrant who does not cause any problems

[14] TAZ, 12.11.2004. "Aufstand der Anständigen. Nach dem Mord an Theo van Gogh und den Unruhen in den Niederlanden melden sich jetzt muslimische Deutsche zu Wort - und fordern ein Ende der multikulturellen Kuschelpolitik."
[15] Hilal Sezgin, interview in Berlin, 02.04.08, translation by the author.
[16] Navid Kermani, *TAZ*, 9.10.2003, translated by the author.

anymore. This would imply, as he explains, that devoutness to Islam is the real cause of the problems in finding a job or a flat and not hostility against Muslims. The letter ends with the exclamation "I am not your Uncle Tom."

As discussed earlier, being Muslim means coming from a country with a Muslim majority in the current discourse and this is true as well for the 'new public Muslims.' While the concept of 'Public Islam' marks a certain notion of public sphere and religious discourse, becoming a public Muslim is referring to the individual level, to a personal decision and narrative. It is connected to the act of going public with a specific identity that in many cases is detached from religiosity. When talking about why and how they are Muslim, politicians, writers and journalists alike remember their childhood and where they came from, before talking about practicing or not practicing Islam. According to their statements, speaking for Muslims is not necessarily linked to observing Islamic rituals. Cem Özdemir refers to himself as a 'bad believer,'[17] İpek İpekçioğlu states that she believes in God but not that she needs to go to church on Sunday to prove this,[18] and Feridun Zaimoğlu, writer and representative of the non-organized Muslims at the Islam Conference states:

> In that sense I am a disabled Moslem, convicted but disabled, because, alas, a lot of devoutness of the mouth plays into it.[19]

Zaimoğlu continues his self-description as a German Muslim, that is a German with a Turkish background, characterized by Islam, and culminates in this statement: "Thereby I naturally want to express that no matter how long I will be living here, I will not renounce my faith."[20] The recurrence of the statement that it is possible to have multiple identities indicates the still existing notion of a pure German identity, which needs to be challenged.

Self-construction as a Muslim intellectual

Articulating their discontent about the discourse, 'non-practicing,' 'secular,' and 'cultural Muslims' use the position in society that they have struggled for to disapprove of hostility towards Muslims. Moreover, Islamic organizations get their share of criticism as well. Their statements appear in articles, comments, interviews, and essays in the most prestigious German newspapers. They get invited to TV talk shows and conferences and are interviewed by various media, where occasionally they reveal reflections about public ascriptions and an ongoing change of identity. These mainly well-known personalities present themselves as Muslims, though, often explicitly, not as practicing or religious people. The examples given here by far do not cover all Muslims speaking up in this way.

> An essentializing discourse on Islam, existing on every level of society, is imposed on them from the micro-local to the international level. This narrative,

[17] Cem Özdemir, interview in Berlin, 23.01.2008, translated by the author.
[18] İpek İpekçioğlu, Interview in Berlin, 08.02.2008.
[19] Feridun Zaimoğlu, Interview in *Islamische Zeitung*, 28.10.2004, translated by the author.
[20] Feridun Zaimoğlu, Interview in *Islamische Zeitung*, 28.10.2004, translated by the author.

> which is largely based on the idea of a conflict between Islam and the West, portraying Islam as a problem or an obstacle to modernization, has forced all Muslims from the most secularized to the most devout, to examine their beliefs and think about what it means to be Muslim (Cesari 2004, 21-22).

Being ascribed to the Muslim population, which is perceived as a homogeneous group, is rather seen as a burden, because of the stigmatization coming along with it. In the case of the Council for Ex-Muslims founded in 2007, this led to the overt rejection of and dissociation from the Muslim community, but more often the opposite seems to be the case. By stating that one is part of 'those Muslims,' prominent and integrated persons put their reputation as acknowledged members of society in the balance for the Muslim community. They thereby contradict the perception of this new group as 'the other' and challenge the negative public opinion of Muslims.

Conclusion

As has been shown in this article, the development containing both reactive and active aspects led to the public commitment of several prominent individuals as Muslims. The starting point of their narrative on this evolution is always the diagnosis of a distinct change in the discourse on Muslims in Germany, which marked my interview partners, too, as Muslims. It is only later that they decided to actively position themselves. In nearly all interviews I conducted for this research, the central role of 9/11 as the initializing key event is mentioned. Again and again the year 2001, the following debates as well as certain policies against terrorism are named as the tipping point. Nevertheless, it has been shown in earlier researches that a generalizing depiction of Muslims and Islam and an increasing focus on them as a media topic has been measurable previously (c.f. Thofern 1998). Other than the end of Cold War in 1989, the changes in the citizenship law in 2000 were certainly also a turning point for how immigrants were perceived in Germany (Schiffauer 2006, 113). In another article, I have argued that the disappearance of foreigners from the statistics by naturalization was a trigger for the new religious terminology in the debate (Spielhaus 2006). Although, the 'new public Muslims' describe their development in connection with crucial changes after September 2001, the terrorist attacks have doubtlessly not been the only cause for the new attention to Muslims in Germany. What has changed since then is that before 9/11 the only point of entry into the public space for Muslims as such was inter-religious dialogue (Jonker 2005). Muslims in Germany today are facing not simply many opportunities to express their understanding of being Muslim in a positive structure of opportunities, but are often assigned the role of the Muslim.

Besides their concrete impacts, terrorist attacks have become discursive events. Thus, they profoundly and lastingly changed the image and self-perception of individuals who feel attached to Islam: any person with a background in a majority Muslim country has to decide whether

(a) Not to make any statements about their religiosity,
(b) To distance themselves from Islam and Muslims, or
(c) To demonstrate any proximity to the imagined Muslim community.

Whoever decides for the latter option, finds him or herself in a position to question the dominant picture of a backwardly, violent, and misogynous religion. They hereby call for a differentiated view or contribute their own interpretation of Islam. Presenting oneself as Muslim entails being perceived as part of a community and shaping it. The statements of Muslims in German media are revealing both the awareness of being defined by others and the wish to regain control over the definition of their own identity. They are also showing a struggle for an individual (personal) answer to acts of violence which are legitimized with reference to Islam as well as unease with being brought in connection with such acts and those who committed them.

The reasons to become active and speak out as a Muslim are quite diverse. Among them are: anger about the dominance of extremist positions in the discourse and the wish to correct the image of Islam and Muslims; the unease to be perceived in connection with acts of violence; a feeling of responsibility resulting from the access to media and decision makers; to speak for the community; and last but not least the perception and the experience of discrimination and stereotyping which is obviously increasing feelings of solidarity and identification with other Muslims in Germany. Nevertheless, taking such a position in the debate on Islam is seen as laden with risks. One runs the danger to be pushed into the role of a spokesperson for an imagined community and therefore being held responsible for all actions of this community. To describe this development, Werner Schiffauer applies the term Zurechnungsgemeinschaft coined by Zygmunt Baumann, which means supposed and ascribed community.

> Because statements and actions of singular Islamic groups threaten to fall back on all other Muslims, they have to take position and if necessary renounce them (Schiffauer 2004).[21]

The new 'Public Muslims' appear in a context of negotiations between different markers of the other. While individuals engage in re-appropriating and re-defining the categories Islam and Muslim with reference to religious pluralism they contribute to the merging of ethnic, cultural, and religious markers (Frégosi 2005, 43).

> The secular Muslim subject emerges within the complex hubris of Europe's constituting it through race, ethnicity, culture, and religion as markers for a (post)colonial state politics of exception, exclusion and assimilation, the hierarchies and competitions set up between these markers (i.e., when religion is reduced to culture), and the partial and ambivalent appropriation of those markers by Muslims, some of whom use secularism to varying degrees to attenuate the violence of their respective stigmas. The issue becomes more complex when the erasure of the very categories that have been privileged over that of Islam—ethnicity and culture—also facilitates the erasure of the theological of Islam, especially when Muslims themselves are complicit in that very process." (Mas 2006, 609)

[21] Original: "Weil die Äußerungen und Taten einzelner islamischer Gemeinden auf alle anderen Muslime zurückzufallen drohen, müssen sie Stellung beziehen und sich gegebenenfalls distanzieren." (translated by the author)

New public Muslims participate in public spheres. Yet, it remains questionable whether this is to be called 'Public Islam'. In many cases, the content of the contributions may have nothing else to do with Islam than being expressed by a Muslim. Hence, these public contributions have nothing to do with Islam but with Muslims, expressing not the membership in a faith community but rather a socio-political or, to speak in terms of discourse, an ethno-religious identity. This is the main difference between Public Islam and Public Muslims. Nevertheless, the two influence each other: Public Islam seems to be a catalyst, a trigger, or even a fertile ground for the emergence of Public Muslims. And in this case, most of the Muslims in focus, have been public already but not as Muslims. We can understand their acting as Muslims as a broadening of the existing public sphere for Muslims and as a reinterpretation of being Muslim at the same time. The process reflected upon here certainly is part and means of an ongoing negotiation of identities and belonging. In this sense, Public Islam, as Eickelman and Salvatore describe it, has been leaving its traces since it has created "new social spaces [...] and it has facilitated modern and distinctively open senses of political and religious identity" (Salvatore and Eickelman 2004, xiii).

The terminology of religious differentiation leads to the reduction of individuals to their being Muslim or at least to an emphasis on this fact. Many people have been active in the publicity of the media because of their professions or political activities before their being Muslim became relevant. In contrast to functionaries in religious organizations their religious affiliation is neither their only nor their main point of identification, but one amongst others. During the debates on Islam in Germany, one encounters cases of imbalance when the identification with the own religious group is perceived to contradict the professional role of a person. It appears to be a positive experience to play the role of a representative out of solidarity for instance when fighting for a mosque without the intention to ever use it whereas it is described as very uncomfortable when one is pushed into the role of the emissary of all Muslims.

Public statements of Muslims are showing both in their content as well as through the place of publication that the authors are not at all victims of a media discourse but active participants in it. In some cases, journalists asked them to utter a statement; in others they published it on their own initiative. However, speechlessness yielded a strong presence of Muslim voices in various media and became a big concern for actors of civil society in socio-political debates. Not only are there numerous Muslims debating and speaking out but German mainstream media and political parties are trying to display and include a diversity of Muslim positions. Two outstanding examples for this are the initiatives of two public television stations to complement the Christian Word for Sunday, one of the oldest German TV programs, with Islamic counterparts aired in the Internet: "Forum am Freitag" and "Islamisches Wort."[22] Still, a negative image of Muslims as underprivileged, extremist, and dangerous prevails. Individuals and groups who do not conform to the stereotype are celebrated as exceptions, whereby finally the homogeneity of the group is underpinned. Accordingly, the Muslim embodying (allegedly) conservative or extremist positions remains the dominant image.

[22] Both broadcasts address Muslims and non-Muslims alike and give a podium to representatives of Islamic organizations, Muslim minorities, and non-organized individuals.

Even non-religious individuals and those for whom religiosity did not play a major role in their public appearance felt compelled to adopt a defensive position and increasingly reflect on religious issues as well as to relate to Muslims in Germany. In this way, projections and ascriptions reflected by acts of self-determination and identification are generating a reciprocity leading to a Muslim consciousness, which is neither bound to religiosity nor faith but much more so to (perceived) discrimination and alienation.

In many rather complicated ways, media, but not only media, are playing an important role in creating a consciousness of being Muslim and thereby fostering the emergence of a Muslim community. One can judge this process as being positive or negative, but either way, the cliché of the bad media excluding Muslims proves to be incorrect. A considerable amount of space in different media is given to Muslims to present their concepts and ideas about being Muslim to a broad public. Thus, they create a space for the imagination of a new community, and for the negotiation of its borders and contents.

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