Diaspora, Islam, and belonging: Conceptualising queer Muslim subjectivities in Berlin

By

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore the formation of queer Muslim subjectivities by attending to the multi-faceted ways in which queer people of Muslim backgrounds respond to the temporal and material realities of the matrix of oppression experienced in Berlin, Germany. The project adopts a postcolonial feminist ethnographic approach in order to centre the voices of people constructed as 'others' and address the implications of power and positionality on representation in ethnographic knowledge production by foregrounding reflexivity. My analysis is based upon two months of extensive participant observation, as well as eight semi-structured ethnographic interviews, and an interdisciplinary theoretical framework building on scholarship from Religious Studies, Gender and Queer Studies, and Migration Studies. The thesis argues that queer people of Muslim backgrounds cultivate their selves through the articulation of their sense of belonging as they navigate the historically contingent understandings of Islam and sexuality within the context of migration and diaspora. As I further demonstrate, the differing modes of belonging carved out by queer Muslims in Berlin constitute unique ways of reacting to the material realities experienced within the German secular liberal regime.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 23,886 words
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Signed: Arnold Kovács

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Chapter 1

Introduction

When I first arrived in Berlin on a cold December morning in 2017, I felt an immediate affinity towards the city. Taking the S-Bahn from Schönefeld Airport to Neukölln, I distantly observed the flow of people getting on and off the city train. I spent the first day with a friend going first to a Syrian cake shop, and then through a tour of queer bookstores, followed by an afternoon prayer in Germany's second largest mosque. We ended the day with a dinner of Lebanese hummus and falafel. My first impression of the city stood in stark contrast with the negative depictions propagated in Hungarian media starting from the summer of 2015 when Germany welcomed over one million refugees arriving mainly from Syria and Iraq. The diversity and peaceful cohabitation that I experienced at first easily suited Berlin's common description as Europe's so-called 'queer capital'. It was only later through my engagement with postcolonial theory and conversations with queer Muslim migrants that I started understanding the ways in which practices of border, neo-colonialism and Islamophobia shape the city and the lives of its Muslim inhabitants.

Germany has the second largest Muslim population in Western Europe after France. While the majority of the migrants arrived as labour migrants from Turkey in the 1960s, the flow of people from Muslim-majority countries continued throughout the decades, reaching a peak due to the recent Syrian uprising and concomitant civil war. Despite the promotion of Germany as a welcoming multicultural society and the recent drop in the number of officially reported cases of Islamophobic and racist attacks against Muslims, refugees, and migrants, Islamophobia

is still very much present in Germany.[1] The growing support for the anti-migrant far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party[2] and the recent demonstrations of the PEGIDA movement are a case in point.[3] Islamophobia, however, is not only a far-right phenomenon in Germany, but rather it is rooted in the country's assimilationist integration policies which rely on the depiction of Islam as a misogynistic and homophobic religion and the image of Muslim migrants living in 'parallel societies' unwilling to assimilate into 'German modernity'.[4] This polarisation not only sets the tone of integration and the boundaries of belonging, but also contributes to the obfuscation of the multiple ways in which queer people of Muslim backgrounds cultivate their selves and articulate their sense of belonging.

This thesis centres upon the question of subject formation in the lives of queer Muslim migrants, and within the context of an increase in Islamophobia and homonationalism in contemporary Germany. I investigate how queer Muslims of various national and ethnic backgrounds navigate the stark realities of, on the one hand the oppositional construction of Islam and same-sex desire, and on the other hand Germany's secular liberal regime.[5] Building upon Wim Peumans' suggestion to foreground transnational migration in the study of queer

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[1] According to the recent European Islamophobia report, there have been 678 attacks on German Muslims, 40 attacks on mosques, 1,775 attacks on refugees, 173 attacks on asylum homes, and 95 attacks on aid workers compared to the overall 3,500 attacks in 2016. See: Anna-Esther Younes, "Islamophobia in Germany: National Report 2018," in *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, eds. Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez (Istanbul: SETA, 2018).
[2] Titus Molkenbur and Luke Cooper, "The AfD is gaining strength in Germany: A reformed EU can stop it," *The Guardian*, September 3, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/03/afd-germany-reformed-eu-immigration-parties-europe (accessed June 6, 2020).
[3] "Anti-Islam 'Pegida' rally in Dresden sees record turnout," *BBC News*, December 23, 2014, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30584891 (accessed June 6, 2020).
[4] See for instance: Christoph Ramm, "The Muslim Makers: How Germany 'Islamizes' Turkish Immigrants," *interventions* 12, no. 2 (2010).
[5] I use the term 'secular liberal regime' to stand for what I see as particular policies and forms of integration that attempt to control and reshape the country's internal 'other'. For more detail, please consult section 1.1 and Chapter 4 which delineate and discuss the effects of these policies.

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Muslims[6], I examine the ways in which different subjectivities are enabled and inhabited in the context of mobility and dwelling. My research also explores the available modes of belonging for queer people of Muslim backgrounds and how these inform the process of subject formation and self-cultivation. The thesis argues that queer people of Muslim backgrounds cultivate their selves through the articulation of their sense of belonging as they navigate historically contingent understandings of Islam and sexuality in the context of migration and diaspora. As I will demonstrate, the differing modes of belonging carved out by queer Muslims constitute unique ways of reacting to the material realities experienced under the German secular liberal regime. My research has included two months of extensive participant observation during the summer of 2019, as well as eight semi-structured interviews with first and second generation queer Muslim migrants and refugees, all of which took place in Berlin. The analysis also builds upon an interdisciplinary theoretical framework developed through an interdisciplinary training in Religious Studies, Gender and Queer Studies, and Migration Studies. By drawing together Talal Asad's notion of Islam as a discursive tradition, Saba Mahmood's study of subject formation, and Sara Ahmed's conceptualisation of affect and queerness as a way of inhabiting norms differently, the framework of the analysis offers new perspectives to the understanding of queer Muslim subjectivities by moving away from questions of identity and reconciliation in favour of attending to the ways in which historically contingent understandings of Islam and sexuality are navigated and inhabited differently in the context of migration and diaspora. In order to situate my analysis in the relevant context, I begin with a short history of recent migration to Germany.

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[6] Wim Peumans, *Queer Muslims in Europe: Sexuality, Religion and Migration in Belgium* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018).

1.1.   A brief history of migration and Islam in Germany

According to the Federal Statistical Office of Germany, approximately 20.8 million people registered as having 'a migration background' in Germany in 2018.[7] As the Pew Research Center's data indicates, the number of Muslims in Germany increased from 3.3 million in 2010 to approximately 5 million in 2016 which comprises 6.1% of the country's population.[8] Thus, Germany has the second largest Muslim population in the European Union after France.[9] Historically speaking, the first significant Muslim community of Germany consisted of mainly prisoners of war from the First World War and Muslim academics residing in Berlin. Even though Muslims in Germany before the Second World War comprised about 1.000 people, they were quickly suppressed once the National Socialist Party gained power.[10] The number of Muslims residing in Germany started increasing significantly with the beginning of labour migration from 1961. In order to tackle the 'economic miracle', West Germany recruited a number of low-skilled foreign workers in 1955, mainly from Italy, Spain, Greece and Yugoslavia. The bilateral agreement with Turkey was signed in 1961 and was followed by other Muslim-majority countries. The term *Gastarbeiter* (guest worker) was deliberately used by politicians and society to underline the temporary status of labour migrants and emphasise that Islam did not belong to the country. This denial of the situation also helped Germans not to take seriously the

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[7] Statistisches Bundesamt, "One in four people in Germany had a migrant background in 2018," 2019, https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2019/08/PE19_314_12511.html (accessed June 8, 2020).

[8] Pew Research Center, "The Growth of Germany's Muslim Population," November 29, 2017, https://www.pewforum.org/essay/the-growth-of-germanys-muslim-population/ (accessed June 8, 2020).

[9] Conrad Hackett, "5 facts about the Muslim population in Europe," *Pew Research Center*, November 29, 2017, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/29/5-facts-about-the-muslim-population-in-europe/ (accessed June 8, 2020).

[10] Rauf Ceylan, "From guest workers to Muslim immigrants: The history of Muslims and their organizations in Germany," in *Muslim Community Organizations in the West: Islam in der Gesellschaft*, ed. M. Peucker and R. Ceylan (Springer VS: Wiesbaden, 2017), 76-7.

social and cultural consequences of migration. [11] After the economic recession in 1973, recruitment had been put on hold for non-European migrants and family reunification was endorsed and even encouraged.[12] Even though the German government hoped that the situation would be solved by the return of labour migrants to their home countries, the number of migrants reached a record high by the early 1980s. Consequently, in 1983, the government decided to pay large sums to accelerate the return of labour migrants; however, despite this initiative, most migrants decided to stay as accepting the money would have rendered their future return impossible.[13] Additionally, the Muslim population also increased in number due to Turkish and Kurdish political refugees and asylum seekers coming from Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s.[14] More recently, Germany became the largest receiving country of Syrian refugees escaping the violence of the Syrian civil war. According to available statistics, between 2011 and 2017, more than 500,000 Syrian refugees have applied for asylum in Germany.[15]

The paradigmatic shift in migration and integration policies that is best reflected in today's practices took place in 1998 when the newly elected Social Democratic Party and Green coalition government officially recognised Germany as a country of immigration. This happened after decades of denial by the ruling Christian Democratic party.[16] As this new understanding of Germany gained more social and political support, a number of important migration and integration related policies had been introduced since 2000. First, the new citizenship law of

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[11] Ibid., 77-8.
[12] Ibid., 78.
[13] Ceylan, 80.
[14] Yaşar Aydın, *The Germany-Turkey Migration Corridor: Refitting Policies for a Transnational Age* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2016), 4-5.
[15] Phillip Connor, "Most displaced Syrians are in the Middle East, and about a million are in Europe," *Pew Research Center*, January 29, 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/29/where-displaced-syrians-have-resettled/ (accessed June 8, 2020),
[16] Friedrich Heckmann, *Understanding the Creation of Public Consensus: Migration and Integration in Germany, 2005 to 2015* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2016), 3-4.

2000 eased the naturalisation process and replaced the older jus sanguinis conceptualisation of citizenship by granting citizenship to children born in Germany. Initially, these children had to surrender their other nationalities when turned 21, however, the law was amended in 2014 to also allow dual citizenship.[17] Second, the new immigration law adopted in 2005 contributed to the creation of a legal framework which allows foreign workers to permanently settle in Germany. Another significant milestone was the update made to the 2005 immigration law in 2012, which fostered high-skilled and employer-driven immigration by easing the restrictions which previously limited migration to occupations with labour shortages.[18]

The migration and integration policies have also affected the development of Muslim organisations in Germany. Given the understanding of labour migration as a temporary phenomenon and the concomitant lack of integration policies, the different Muslim communities did not express any interest in establishing real local ties and networks between the 1960s to the 1990s.[19] This period was characterised by the presence of tiny backyard mosques, a focus on the home countries and lack of interest in German affairs, a lack of religious support by the state given the lack of provisions in the recruitment agreements, and an overarching lack of education due to lack of access to higher education for migrant children.[20] A number of religious organisations emerged during this time; however, most of them were only interested in influencing politics in the home country (e.g. Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion (DITIB), Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren (VIKZ), and the Islamrat für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland).[21] In contrast to the first decades, the introduction of integration policies and the emergence of a second generation led to the appearance of particular Muslim

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[17] Ibid., 4.
[18] Heckmann, 10.
[19] Ceylan, 80.
[20] Ibid., 81.
[21] Ibid., 83-4.

diasporic practices from the late 1990s. One of its most visible aspects is the establishment of multifunctional mosque buildings with a number of non-religious facilities. On the political level, Muslim diasporic practices are characterised by the founding of organisations which are more engaged in domestic affairs and represent a point of contact with the German government (e.g. Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland (ZMD) and the Deutsche Islamkonferenz).[22] Moreover, a number of other positive developments are also associated with the growing Muslim diaspora, namely the introduction of Islamic religious education in state schools, and the establishment of institutes of Islamic theology at universities.[23] Nevertheless, the positive developments around Muslim diasporic communities and practices are happening at a time of increasing anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia in the wider German society. These negative evocations of Islam in the public sphere contribute to the creation of a discourse of justification which hinders the establishment of positive agendas by Muslim organisation.[24]

As in other parts of Europe, global events such as the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the 9/11 attacks in the USA had a major influence on the perception of Islam and Muslims in Germany. However, the increasing level of anti-Muslim racism in the German public sphere cannot be attributed to global events only, but rather should be seen as the outcome of a number of factors in the context of German national identity building. Naika Foroutan highlights mainly seven factors that contributed to this negative development.[25] In the first case, the ethnic understanding of German identity was (and in certain cases still is) framed in terms of blood-and-soil and the German Leitkultur. This legacy and the brutalities committed by Germany

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[22] Ibid., 86-9.
[23] Rauf Ceylan, "Future prospects for Islam in Germany: Between secularization, anti-Muslim racism and a new religious consciousness," in *Muslim Community Organizations in the West: Islam in der Gesellschaft*, ed. M. Peucker and R. Ceylan (Springer VS: Wiesbaden, 2017), 246.
[24] Ibid., 248.
[25] Naika Foroutan, *Identity and (Muslim) Integration in Germany* (Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2013).

during National Socialism led to the exclusion of the question of a national identity from the national consciousness which was solely articulated in relation to the trauma of the Holocaust. Moreover, the above-mentioned denial of Germany's status as a country of immigration and its ongoing national identity crisis contributed the creation of an internal 'other' against which Germanness could be articulated after the reunification of West and East Germany. Pro-EU liberal politicians have also resorted to articulating German identity in post-liberal terms against an internal 'other' after their failure to develop an alternative framework. Finally, these developments are also taking place in an environment of anti-Muslim sentiments which are informed by the increasing 'Muslimisation' of national security issues and a growing competition and fear of unemployment.[26]

More recently, a shift in the discourse can be observed where the image of the Turkish migrant is increasingly 'Muslimised' and articulated against a tolerant and democratic European Germany. As Christoph Ramm argues, these debates are not new, but rather represent a reformulation of previous discourses that focused on the ethnic and cultural 'otherness' of the Turkish diaspora and which are "the characteristics of a re-evaluated German integrationism which makes allegiance to 'our values' (i.e. German values) as a necessary precondition for belonging."[27] This integrationist turn and the criticism of multiculturalism were supported by two ideas, namely the German Leitkultur and the image of the so-called 'parallel societies'. People imagined to be living in parallel societies were characterised by their rejection of Western values.[28] Thus, "the permanent calls for integration function as a disciplinary device to sustain social hegemony and – whether openly avowed or not – the dominance of the majority's

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[26] Foroutan, 9-11.
[27] Ramm, 183.
[28] Ibid., 187-8.

Leitkultur."[29] Moreover, given the recent framing of Germany as an advanced country in terms of gender equality, questions of gender and sexuality became the new integration assessment tools which lead to the 'ethnicisation of sexism'.[30] Consequently, the representation of Islam is consistently linked to questions of forced marriages and honour killings with the image of the oppressed female Muslim victim and the patriarchal Muslim man.[31] The public presence of so-called Islamkritikerinnen (female Islam critics – feminist of Muslim backgrounds who argue that Islam is the reason of patriarchal oppression of Muslim women) such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Seyran Ateş, and Necla Kelek further contributed to the construction of Islam as the source of 'failure' in Muslims' integration.[32] The racist and Islamophobic undertone of these discourses is further highlighted by the double standard regarding maternity in which white German women are praised if they stay home with their children while the same is perceived as patriarchal oppression in the case of Muslims.[33]

Similarly, the question of LGBT+ rights and Muslim homophobia has also been used to highlight a perceived German superiority and to justify repressive counter-terrorist interventions and the reversal of thus won citizen and migrant rights.[34] One of the most illustrative examples of this homonationalist development is the so-called 'Muslim-Test' introduced in the state of Baden-Württemberg in 2005-2006 which required recent migrants from Muslim-majority countries to answer a number of questions regarding their opinion about terrorism, antisemitism, and the acceptance of homosexuals. As Zülfukar Çetin argues, these developments have been

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[29] Ibid., 195.
[30] Margarete Jäger and Siegfried Jäger, *Deutungskämpfe: Theorie und Praxis Kritischer Diskursanalyse* (Wiesbaden: VS für Sozialwissenschaften, 2007), 110.
[31] Ramm, 189.
[32] Ibid., 191-2.
[33] Dagmar Herzog, "POST COITUM EST...?: Sexual Politics and Cultures in Postunification Germany," *German Politics and Society* 28, No. 1 (Spring 2010): 130-1.
[34] Jin Haritaworn et al., "Internationalismus oder Imperialismus?: Feministische und schwul-lesbische Stimmen im Krieg gegen den Terror," *frauensolidarität, Feminismen (100)* (2007).

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supported by a number of scientific studies conducted by various LGBT+ organisations (e.g. LSVD) and research centres about alleged homophobia among migrant groups which were based on cultural and biological racism.[35] Finally, another homonationalist tendency can be observed in the district politics of Berlin. As Çetin highlights, since the speech of the openly gay governing Mayor of Berlin, Klaus Wowereit, the city-based gay identity politics and the concomitant gentrification led to the transformation of former migrant-dominated districts such as Schöneberg and Kreuzberg into popular gay and queer districts.[36] As the following chapters will indicate, these developments contribute to the marginalisation of queer people of Muslim backgrounds who find themselves in an increasingly hostile environment in which Islam and Muslims are constructed in opposition and open antagonism to Germanness and German citizenship.

1.2.   Mapping the literature: Muslim migrants and LGBT+ Muslims in the West

In the following section I provide a brief overview of the existing literature on Muslim migrants in Germany and LGBT+ Muslim identity formation[37] within which my research is to be located. Thus, this section provides an important grounding to the theoretical and material parameters of my analysis and serves as a preliminary introduction to Chapter 2. Moreover, it represents a call for investigating the intersection of religion and sexuality in the study of Muslim migrants in Germany as it has not yet received enough attention.

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[35] Zülfukar Çetin, "Der Schwulenkiez: Homonationalismus und Dominanzgesellschaft," in *Dominanzkultur reloaded: Neue Texte zu gesellschaftlichen Machtverhältnissen und ihren Wechselwirkungen*, ed. I. Attia, N. Prasad, and S. Köbsell (Bielefeldt: Transcript Verlag, 2015), 38-9.
[36] Çetin, 39-42
[37] Here, I refer to "LGBT+ Muslim identity formation" in contrast to "queer Muslim subjecthood formation" as this is the main terminology used in this scholarship.

1.2.1. Muslim migrants in Germany

As highlighted in the previous section, there has been an ongoing 'Muslimisation' of Turkish and other migrant populations from Muslim-majority countries in Germany since the late twentieth century which constructs them as the internal 'others' of the country. This development and the growing securitisation of Muslims have been accompanied by an increase in academic literature on Muslims in Germany which in the early twenty-first century has mainly attempted to understand the changing nature of Islam and Muslims in diaspora. Sociologists including Michael Kiefer have developed different identity typologies to engage this broad field of research, such as non-religious, fundamental, nationalistic, and activist Muslim identities.[38] Cüneyd Dinç's article gives an excellent overview of this literature. As he maintains, the experiences of socio-cultural disintegration and the negative public discourses about Islam make young Muslims reassess their relation to Germany and create new identities as Muslims in Germany. Cüneyd Dinç builds upon two main dimensions identified in previous literature which represent differing answers to the exclusion emanating from the Islam versus West binary, namely relationship with the home country of the parents and struggle for recognition of religious difference. From this, he develops four ideal types of identity options that come about at the intersection of German, Muslim, and ethnic identities. These four identities challenge binary notions of belonging and citizenship due to their hybrid global and local nature, and point to the different effects of secular and religious sources. The identity categories are the neo-fundamentalist identity, the religious-ethnic exclusionist identity, the Pop-Islamic or Neo-

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[38] Michael Kiefer, 'Lebenswelten muslimischer Jugendlicher – eine Typologie von Identitätsentwürfen,' in *Was soll ich hier? Lebensweltorientierung muslimischer Schülerinnen und Schüler als Herausforderung*, ed. H. H. Behr et al. (Münster: LIT, 2010).

Muslim identity, and classic associational Islamic identity.[39] Taken together, this scholarship highlights the ways in which Muslims in diaspora react to the multi-layered changes and oppressions faced in their host country.

The question of sexuality and particularly non-normative sexuality in the case of Muslim migrants and diaspora in Germany has only emerged in the beginning of this decade. Wenzel Bilger's work represents one of the only books written in Germany which explores the identity construction of second- and third-generation gay Turkish migrants in Germany, *Deutschtürke* by focusing on interviews and artistic as well as political representation. Among others, his work centres upon the themes of intimacy and discrimination, diaspora and virtual space, the closet, self-ethnicisation, and activism.[40] In addition to uncovering the different identity categories available for Muslim migrants, another line of scholarship has focused on the various strategies deployed by queer migrant anti-racist activists in the context of Islamophobic sexual politics in Germany. For example, Fatima El-Tayeb maintains that racialised populations are constructed as spatially and temporally displaced within a heteronormative discourse of nation, gender, sexuality and religion which positions Muslim communities as outside of Europe and modernity. As she argues, however, this epistemological placement of 'German' and 'Muslim' as mutually exclusive opposites is deployed by queer Muslims to create alternative spatio-temporal models which defy this opposition.[41] Similarly, Paola Bacchetta, Fatima El-Tayeb and Jinn Haritaworn argue in favour of conceptualising queer people of colour (QPoC) place-making through activism and community building as strategies of resistance in the context of spatial segregation,

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[39] Cüneyd Dinç, "New and Old Identity Patterns of Religious Young Muslims in Germany," in *New Multicultural Identities in Europe: Religion and Ethnicity in Secular Societies*, ed. Erkan Toğuşlu, Johan Leman and İsmail Mesut Sezgin (Leuven: University Press, 2014).

[40] Wenzel Bilger, *Der postethnische Homosexuelle: Zur Identität »schwuler Deutschtürken«* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2012).

[41] Fatima El-Tayeb, "Time Travellers and Queer Heterotopias: Narratives from the Muslim Underground," *The Germanic Review* 88 (2013).

white-washing and pink-washing in Berlin and Amsterdam.[42] Moreover, in a recently published

book *The Queer Intersectional in Contemporary Germany: Essays on Racism, Capitalism and Sexual Politics* edited by Christopher Sweetapple, various authors explore the growing anti-racist

queer activism in urban Germany in the Merkel era.[43]

1.2.2. LGBT+ Muslims in the West

As Jasbir Puar maintains in her seminal work, queer subjects have recently been

incorporated into the nation as proper citizens at the expense of racialised 'others' within the

context of increasing Islamophobia in the United States and some Western European countries.

Puar calls this new form of state formation which articulates itself in civilisational narratives

'homonationalism'.[44] Here, Puar relies upon Lisa Duggan's notion of homonormativity which

implies "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions,

but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilised gay constituency

and a privatised, depoliticised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption."[45] Puar's

contribution is crucial for understanding the physical and discursive violence oftentimes

experienced by non-heterosexual Muslims given the widespread depiction of Islam as a hostile

homophobic religion. However, as Joseph Massad highlights, despite their anti-imperial

commitment, scholars such as Puar still rely on the same epistemologies propagated by the West

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[42] Paola Bacchetta, Fatima El-Tayeb and Jin Haritaworn, "Queer of colour formations and translocal spaces in Europe," *Environment and Planning D: Society and space* 33, no. 5 (2015).

[43] Christopher Sweetapple, ed., *The Queer Intersectional in Contemporary Germany: Essays on Racism, Capitalism and Sexual Politics* (Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2018).

[44] Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

[45] Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 2003), 50.

and thus overlook the workings of imperialism in the remaking of various local intimacies.[46] In his influential book, Massad traces the universalisation of sexuality back to the colonial encounter and argues that sexuality is a particular epistemological category which emerged in the West and has been used as a criterion according to which other cultures had been judged. Massad links the reactionary forces in the Middle East to this historical development which lead to the adoption of these very same categories by Arab intellectuals. In this sense, it is the dissemination of sexuality and sexual identities by the so-called 'Gay International' which contributes to the persecution of non-heterosexual people in the Middle East by the imposition of a homo-hetero binary which did not exist before.[47] While Massad's contribution is quintessential to understand the conjuncture of modernity and sexuality, his argument seems to reinforce the same binary and oppositional categories of East and West of which postcolonial scholarship is often accused. Moreover, his fixation on the Middle East as the only site of Islam and thus real Muslim presence assumes the impossibility of intersecting onto-epistemological categories. Given Massad's lack of anthropological insights into the working of sexuality in the lived experiences of Muslims in the West, I find Momin Rahman's call to understand how homosexual activity relates to homosexual identity in current international, national, and political contexts of great importance. As he maintains, studying LGBT+ Muslims as theoretically queer intersectional identities has the potential to evince the fallacy of the mutually exclusive and oppositional nature of Western and Eastern cultures. Moreover, it highlights the ontological instability of the West by challenging the epistemological and political origin of queer identities and LGBT rights.[48]

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[46] Félix Boggio Éwanjé-Épée and Stella Magliani-Belkacem, "The Empire of Sexuality: An Interview with Joseph Massad," *Jadaliyya*, March 5, 2013), https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/28167 (accessed June 2, 2020).
[47] Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University Press, 2008).
[48] Momin Rahman, "Queer as Intersectionality: Theorizing Gay Muslim Identities," *Sociology* 44, no. 5 (2010).

The above-mentioned theoretical and political debates greatly influenced the forms of academic engagements with Islam and sexuality. Initially, feminist and queer scholars of Islam were mainly concerned with different exegetical and historical questions. Thus, Muslim feminist scholars undertook the challenging of the regimes of truth which in their views contributed to the creation of patriarchal and misogynist traditions and interpretations. For instance, Fatima Mernissi challenges power structures by highlighting the role of gender and power in the creation of traditions.[49] Muslim feminists also claim the right to critically (re)interpret the Qur'an. Amina Wadud calls into question the objectivity and universalist claims of traditional interpreters which excluded women and the female experience. Her work advocates for a holistic interpretation which reconsiders the entire method of Qur'anic interpretation regarding multiple modern social, moral, economic, and political concerns.[50] Similarly to Islamic feminism, queer Muslim scholars challenge homophobic religious interpretations that have contributed to the marginalisation of sexual minorities. Queer theorists do not only pay attention to gender and sexuality, but rather attempt to problematise heteronormativity. Similarly, queer Muslim theologians start from the positionality of the sexual deviant in order to disrupt heteronormative theology and create queer readings of sacred texts.[51] For example, Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle foregrounds liberation as the core message of Islam and attempts to interpret the Qur'an in a 'sexuality-sensitive way'.[52] As a main trope in this literature, Kugle argues that in opposition to traditional interpretations, the sin of the tribe of Lut was not homosexuality but rather sexual violence which should be understood

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[49] Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Perseus Books, 1991).

[50] Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[51] Claudia Schippert, "Implications of Queer Theory for the Study of Religion and Gender: Entering the Third Decade," *Religion and Gender* 1 (2011).

[52] Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 38-9.

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in the context of the culture of hospitality.[53] Others such as Junaid Bin Jahangir, however, prefer

a more historical and linguistic analysis by focusing on the historic misconceptions about same-

sex desire and arguing that the Qur'an only talks about anal sex and not homosexuality given the

socio-historical context.[54]

A different line of research focuses on the lived experiences of religious Muslim migrants

in the West who experience same-sex desire. Given the lack of research in the German context,

the following delineates the main themes identified in the context of North America, Australia,

the United Kingdom, and Belgium. The majority of these works focuses on the different

strategies LGBT+ Muslims deploy to navigate their religious, sexual, and ethno-cultural

backgrounds in the context of Islamophobia, homophobia and the dominance of Western

discourses on LGBT+ identities and rights. Ibrahim Abraham maintains that LGBT+ Muslims

face double marginalisation in Australia as they are surrounded by 'hegemonic Muslim

homophobia' and 'hegemonic queer islamophobia' which point to their double marginalisation

both within their ethno-religious communities and the secular LGBT+ communities.[55] In the

words of Wim Peumans, the realisation of the perceived incompatibility of LGBT+ Muslims'

religious and sexual identities results in reoccurring moral breakdowns which lead to

ambivalence in their religious practices and moral selves.[56] In light of this conceptualisation, a

number of scholars explored the different strategies utilised by LGBT+ Muslims to navigate their

multiple marginalisations. For instance, Andrew Yip maintains that first generation migrants

often tend to reinforce the homonegative perspectives of heterosexual Muslims as a way to

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[53] Kugle, 54.
[54] Junaid Bin Jahangir, "Implied Cases for Muslim Same-sex Unions," in *Islam and Homosexuality*, ed. Samar Habib (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2010).
[55] Ibrahim Abraham, "'Everywhere You Turn You Have to Jump into Another Closet': Hegemony, Hybridity and Queer Australian Muslims," in *Islam and Homosexuality* Vol. II, ed. Samar Habib (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010).
[56] Peumans.

strengthen their belonging to their diasporic community.[57] Similarly, others negate their sexual

orientation due to fear of divine and family condemnation and its connotation with

'Whiteness'.[58] According to Momin Rahman and Ayesha Valliani, some LGBT+ Muslims often

express a certain discomfort with and question the Western coming out model. This points to the

hostility experienced in the host society and the importance of their ethnic communities.

Therefore, LGBT+ Muslims tend to sustain family relationships even if it requires the

concealment of their sexuality in the ethno-religious community.[59] Taken collectively, these

findings point to Momin Rahman's claim that homophobia among Muslim communities should

be perceived as the outcome of Western Islamophobia and exceptionalism.[60]

Literature on LGBT+ Muslims also addresses the differing strategies deployed in order to

reconcile faith and sexuality in the context of a perceived internal conflict. For instance, Yip

highlights the role of offline and online sources which enable LGBT+ Muslims to develop a

theological capital. Furthermore, this theological capital is deployed in order to create sexuality-

affirming arguments that question homophobic Qur'anic interpretations by placing them in their

historical context. This 'queering of religious texts' mainly targets the story of Lut which is

widely used to condemn homosexuality.[61] Another strategy utilised by LGBT+ Muslims consists

of joining various support groups which offer safe spaces, such as Imaan in the United

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[57] Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip, "Negotiating space with family and kin in identity construction: The narratives of British non-heterosexual Muslim," *Sociological Review* 52, no. 3 (2004).
[58] Rusi Jaspal, "Coping with religious and cultural homophobia: Emotion and narratives of identity threat among British Muslim gay men," in *Religion, Gender and Sexuality in Everyday Life*, eds. Peter Nynäs and Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).
[59] Momin Rahman and Ayesha Valliani, "Challenging the opposition of LGBT identities and Muslim cultures: initial research on the experience of LGBT Muslims in Canada," *Theology & Sexuality* 22, no. 1-2 (2016).
[60] Momin Rahman, *Homosexualities, Muslim Cultures and Modernity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
[61] Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip, "Queering religious texts: An exploration of British nonheterosexual Christians' and Muslims' strategy of constructing sexuality-affirming hermeneutics," *Sociology* 39, no. 1 (2005).

Kingdom.[62] Acquiring a theological capital or joining LGBT+-affirming Muslim communities, however, is closely related to class and education which might prevent some from developing an LGBT+ Muslim identity.[63] In addition to exegetical engagements and community membership, LGBT+ Muslims might also reconcile faith and sexuality by arguing that their sexual orientation is inborn or chosen by God.[64] According to Yip and Khalid, some LGBT+ Muslims also turn to different individualised spiritual practices given their discomfort with existing communities.[65] My analysis will attempt to bring together these two fields of enquiry by exploring the ways in which queer Muslim subjectivities are inhabited through the notion of belonging in the context of Berlin, Germany.

1.3. Chapter breakdown

The ethnographic fieldwork which constitutes the basis of this research has been conducted in order to trace the multi-faceted ways in which queer people of Muslim backgrounds respond to the temporal and material realities of the matrix of oppression which exist in Berlin, Germany. Paying close attention to the role of diaspora and migration, this thesis foregrounds belonging in the process of queer Muslim subject formation and self-cultivation which happens as they navigate historically contingent understandings of Islam and sexuality. In this way, my thesis contributes to a growing body of literature on queer Muslim bodies by using the framework of Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood, and Sara Ahmed, and by foregrounding settlement

[62] Shanon Shad, *The Making of a Gay Muslim: Religion, Sexuality, and Identity in Malaysia and Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
[63] Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip and Amna Khalid, "Looking for *Allah*: Spiritual Quests of Queer Muslims," in *Queer Spiritual Spaces – Sexuality and Sacred Places*, eds. K. Browne, S. R. Munt and A. K. T. Yip (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010).
[64] Rusi Jaspal and Marco Cinnirella, "Coping with potentially incompatible identities: Accounts of religious, ethnic, and sexual identities from British Pakistani men who identify as Muslim and gay," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 49, no. 4 (2010).
[65] Yip and Khalid.

and mobility in the context of Germany, a country which has not yet received scholarly attention in the field.

After outlining the aim and structure of the thesis, I turned to the historical context of Muslim migration in Germany and presented the relevant academic discussions which helped me situate the empirical material of this research. In the next chapter, I review some of the main literature by focusing on key theoretical concepts which form the framework of the following analytical chapters. Chapter three delineates my research design, methodology, and analysis. Focusing on the inside and outside processes that are shaped by religion, each of the following chapters offer different lenses through which belonging can be understood in the process of subject formation for queer people of Muslim backgrounds. Chapter four focuses on the ways in which the creation of a modern German Islamic tradition is used by some second-generation migrants to cultivate modern German Muslim selves and thus articulate their sense of belonging to the nation. Chapter five focuses on the process of religious individuation in the lives of queer Muslim migrants which constitute an alternative and individual way of belonging to the Islamic tradition. In chapter six, I attend to the production of queer (Muslim) diasporic moments which emerge in the face of homonational state violence and create a momentary sense of belonging. I finish the thesis by some brief concluding remarks which discuss the relevance of this research.

Chapter 2

Literature review

This chapter is a continuation of the preliminary literature review provided in the previous chapter on Muslim migrants and LGTB+ Muslims in the West. Here, I present some of the key scholarly conversations and works within which my analysis is situated. In particular, I focus on notions of Islam and Muslim subjectivity, queerness, and migration and diaspora in order to place the question of queer Muslim subject formation at the centre of the study of mobility and settlement in the spatio-temporal realities of Berlin.

2.1. Religion and the study of Islam

In his recent book, *Islam in Liberalism*, Joseph Massad levels a well-developed theoretical criticism against the anthropological undertaking of studying sexuality in Islam.[1] As he maintains, the very field of 'Islam and sexuality' is produced by an Orientalist and imperial approach which automatically (pre)positions Islam as difference and sexuality as assimilation while attempting to diffuse Western categories in places where they do not exist. As Massad emphasises, "the term "Islam" is always already a mode of othering in the logic of reaction formation and the term "sexuality" is always already a mode of assimilation in the logic of narcissistic incorporation."[2] Instead, he makes a case for studying Islam in sexuality, i.e. how Western scholarship on sexuality constitutes Islam and the West, and what are the operations and productions of sexuality in a specific type of discourse about sexuality in Islam.[3] While Massad's critique is important to understand the political and ethical dilemmas surrounding the study of

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[1] Joseph Massad, *Islam in Liberalism* (Chicago: University Press, 2016).
[2] Ibid., 272.
[3] Ibid., 273.

queer Muslims, similarly to his other works on the issue, he seems to reinforce certain binaries and miss an emic account which is necessary to understand the intricacies of subject formation and self-cultivation.

While my research does not intend to study the production of Islam in sexuality, I attempt to navigate the political and epistemological problems highlighted by Massad by situating my research in Talal Asad's genealogy on religion and Islam. Asad warns against establishing and deploying a transhistorical and universal definition of religion in terms of a separate and autonomous entity as this very endeavour is the historical product of discursive processes and of Western liberal efforts to separate religion from the domain of power.[4] Here, Asad mainly criticises Clifford Geertz's definition of religion as "a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."[5] In Asad's view, definitions such as Geertz's fail to account for the role of power in the production and transmission of religious symbols. Instead, he maintains that scholars should start by "unpacking the comprehensive concept which he or she translates as "religion" into heterogeneous elements according to its historical character."[6] This entails the study of authorising processes which create religion[7] together with the "entire range of available disciplinary activities, of institutional forms of

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[4] Talal Asad, "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category," in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Michael Lambek (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 116.
[5] Clifford Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
[6] Asad, 129
[7] Ibid., 121.

knowledge and practice, within which dispositions are formed and sustained and through which the possibilities of attaining the truth are marked out."[8]

Similarly, Asad takes a critical stance towards existing definitions of Islam used in the anthropology of Islam. For instance, by studying different Muslim societies, Clifford Geertz argues that Islam is a system of symbols which gives particular significance to social behaviour.[9] Ernest Gellner, on the other hand, argues that Muslim societies are characterised by a particular homogeneity which can be contributed to their distinct social structure consisting of community, scriptural authority, and leadership.[10] Nadia Fadil maintains that these attempts to define Islam as an autonomous object of inquiry emanate from an Orientalist drive which relies on epistemological concerns regarding the compatibility of Islam with secularisation and individualisation.[11] In a similar line, Abdul Hamid el-Zein criticises previous scholarship for its intention to define what true Islam means based on the distinction of Great and Little traditions. Instead, he argues that given the large variations among different contexts, Islam cannot be identified as an analytical category.[12] In my analysis, I rely on Asad's conceptualisation of Islam, since it offers an adequate solution for the above problems. Asad rejects the existence of distinct Muslim social structures as these are the results of political economy and questions of power. Instead, he argues in favour of studying Islam as a constantly developing "discursive tradition that connects variously with the formation of moral selves, the manipulation of populations (or

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[8] Ibid., 127.

[9] Clifford Geertz, *Islam observed: Religious development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University Press, 1971).

[10] Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Societies* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000).

[11] Nadia Fadil, "De la religious aux traditions: Quelques réflexions sur l'œuvre de Talal Asad," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 180 (2017).

[12] Abdul Hamid el-Zein, "Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for the Anthropology of Islam," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 6 (1977).

resistance to it), and the production of appropriate knowledges."[13] Asad describes tradition as consisting of discourses that are conceptually connected to an Islamic past and a future through a present, and aim at instructing practitioners about the correct form and purpose of a given practice (i.e. orthodoxy). Given his definition of orthodoxy as a relationship of power, discursive traditions inherently involve a series of reasonings and arguments over the definition of orthodoxy in a given socio-historical context.[14] According to Asad, the analysis of these reasonings and the socio-political constraints that enable them should be the first task of anthropologists as they point to the central modality of power and resistance to it, and highlight the heterogeneity of traditions. In Asad's words, "an anthropology of Islam will therefore seek to understand the historical conditions that enable the production and maintenance of specific discursive traditions, or their transformation – and the efforts of practitioners to achieve coherence."[15]

2.2. Subjectivity(ies) and subject formation

Talal Asad's conceptualisation of Islam as a discursive tradition has been widely used by anthropologists to explore the ways in which Muslim subjectivities are cultivated within the constraints of Islamic discourses. As both Asad's framework and the subsequent scholarship on Muslim self-fashioning heavily rely on Michel Foucault's notions of power, governmentality and subjectivity, it is here that I start establishing my framework on Muslim subjectivities. Foucault understands subjectivity as the result of various power relations (e.g. sciences, dividing practices, and the way in which human beings turn themselves into subjects) which transform human

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[13] Talal Asad, "The idea of an anthropology of Islam," in Occasional Papers (Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986), (1-22) 7.
[14] Asad, "The idea of an anthropology of Islam," 14-5.
[15] Ibid., 16-7.

beings into subjects. He connects the notion of subjectivity to the formation of the modern state out of Christian institutions which consists of both an individualising and a totalising form of power and which marks the emergence of a structure which integrates, reshapes and submits the individual to a set of particular patterns. Moreover, Foucault calls these specific power relations "conduct" as it implies both the leading of others in accordance with mechanisms of coercion and behaving according to various possibilities. Thus, this understanding of governmentality as the conduct of individuals and groups is also a mode of action upon the actions of free subjects.[16]

My conceptualisation of Muslim subjectivities and subject formation draws on both the Asadian understanding of Islam and the Foucauldian notion of subjectivity. More specifically, I draw upon Saba Mahmood's study of pious Muslim women in the Egyptian religious revival movement. In her study, Mahmood adopts Asad's framework to understand how moral selves are constituted and being actively constructed according to particular authoritative discourses.[17] Mahmood highlights the power of religious discourses on subjecthood in her interlocutors' efforts to actively discipline their subjectivities as a way to achieve a certain ethical self by making it conform to a discursive tradition. Thus, she demonstrates how Muslim subjects are always constructed by submission to and engagement with an Islamic discursive tradition. As she maintains, religious practice is "the means to both being and becoming a certain kind of person."[18] While Mahmood's analysis is quintessential to understand the role of discursive traditions in the fashioning of Muslim selves, the context of her study and her focus on pious Muslim women poses a number of challenges in the study of Muslim migrants with non-

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[16] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (Chicago: University Press, 1983).
[17] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).
[18] Ibid., 215.

normative sexualities. There, I find it imperative to engage with the recent call to study 'everyday Islam'. Among others, this line of scholarship argues against privileging the religious and instead invites scholars to start from and focus on the ambiguities and incoherence of everyday life.[19] As Wim Peumans research highlights, this focus on the everyday and lived Islam has the potential to highlight the complexity and ambivalence in the fashioning of moral selves of queer Muslim migrants.[20]

Nevertheless, I take into consideration Nadia Fadil and Mayanthi Fernano's caution regarding the call to study 'everyday Islam' as it often works to reinforce a binary by positioning the everyday as the site of creativity and resistance to religious norms.[21] As they maintain, this understanding locates the everyday outside of structures and power, and thus neglects "the ways in which individual experiences and actions, even those that transgress dominant norms, are always produced within and mediated by discursive norms and power relations. (...) The efficacy of norms is not only determined by their realisation but also by conscious and unconscious discursive and affective attachments to them, irrespective of one's actual practices." [22] For instance, in her study of Muslim activists in Belgium, Fadil highlights the interwoven nature of political, religious and secular elements in the process of seeking a compromise between societal and religious expectations. [23] Thus, Nadia Fadil's scholarship is especially relevant in this section

[19] See for instance: Benjamin Soares and Filippo Osella, "Islam, politics, anthropology," *Journal of the Royal Anthropology Institute* (2009); and Samuli Schielke, "Being good in Ramadan: ambivalence, fragmentation, and the moral self in the lives of young Egyptians," *Journal of the Royal Anthropology Institute* (2009).

[20] Wim Peumans, "Queer Muslim migrants in Belgium: A research note on same-sex sexualities and lived religion," *Sexualities* 17, no. 5-6 (2014).

[21] Nadia Fadil and Mayanthi Fernando, "Rediscovering the "everyday" Muslim: Notes on an anthropological divide," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5, no. 2 (2015), 69.

[22] Ibid., 69-70.

[23] Nadia Fadil, ""We should be walking Qurans". The making of an Islamic political subject," in *The Politics of Visibility: Young Muslims in European Public Spaces*, ed. V. Amiraux and G. Jonker (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2006).

as the shift represented by her scholarship allows me to address practice and the complexities of the everyday as part of religion in multiple ways.

2.3. Queerness

Queer theory as an academic field of inquiry emerged in the second half of the twentieth century as a tool to deconstruct binaries that continued to impede the study of sexuality.[24] In this research I deploy the term 'queer' both as an umbrella term for non-normative sexualities and as a theoretical concept. Similarly to my approach to subject formation, Saba Mahmood's scholarship remains conceptually useful in this section. In *Politics of Piety*, Mahmood argues that agency should not solely be understood as a 'synonym for resistance to relation of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create'.[25] According to Claudia Schippert, this understanding of agency is instructive in the case of queer scholarship on religion as it decentres the conceptualisation of queerness as the transgression of norms.[26] Consequently, 'queer' in this research does not simply refer to the challenging and transgression of heteronormativity since as Jasbir Puar highlights: "In this problematic definition of queerness, individual agency is legible only as resistance to norms rather than complicity with them, thus equating resistance and agency."[27] Puar maintains that queer liberal secularity functions as a regulatory apparatus which only considers the subject once

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[24] Some of the major literature influencing the development of queer theory are: Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité, Vol. I, La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and California: University of California Press, 1990); William B. Turner, *A Genealogy of Queer Theory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000); Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993); Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique* (Minnesota: University Press, 2004); Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

[25] Mahmood, 203.

[26] Claudia Schippert, "Implications of Queer Theory for the Study of Religion and Gender: Entering the Third Decade," *Religion and Gender* 1, no. 1 (2011), 81.

[27] Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press 2007), 23.

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it is outside the power of religious norms and complies with the norm of transgression.[28] The emphasis on transgression, however, is a particular way of narrating sexual exceptionalism in terms of anti-identitarianism which re-centres the normative queer subject as an exclusively transgressive body.[29]

Finally, my conceptualisation also draws on Sara Ahmed's understanding of affect and queerness as a way of "inhabiting norms differently."[30] As she argues, queer does not mean a clear choice between assimilation or transgression as this notion of transgression is oftentimes unattainable for individuals for a variety of physical, social and material reasons.[31] Rather the affects of 'non-fitting' by queer subjects generates new possibilities which allow inhabiting norms differently: "The inhabitance is generative or productive insofar as it does not end with the failure of norms to be secured, but with possibilities of living that do not 'follow' those norms through. (...) Queer feelings are 'affected' by the repetition of the scripts that they fail to reproduce, and this 'affect' is also a sign of what queer can do, of how it can work by *working on* the (hetero)normative. The failure to be non-normative is then not the failure of queer to be queer, but a sign of attachments that are the condition of possibility for queer. Queer feelings may embrace a sense of discomfort, a lack of ease with the available scripts for living and loving, along with an excitement in the face of the uncertainty of where the discomfort may take us.[32]

2.4.   Migration and diaspora

Scholarly interest in migration has historically framed the question of movement and mobility in economic terms. For instance, neoclassical and new economic theories both rely on a

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[28] Ibid., 13
[29] Puar, 22-3.
[30] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2004), 155.
[31] Ibid., 154
[32] Ibid., 155.

push-pull pattern in which individuals make rational choices to move from poorer to wealthier countries in order to alleviate their economic situation.[33] According to O'Reilly Karen, these models rely on individual agency and ignore the complexity of factors and motivations behind migration.[34] In contrast, Immanuel Wallerstein supports the world systems theory which relies on Marxist theory and redirects attention to the broader systems in which global capitalism exploits countries in the Global South through neo-colonial governments and multinational companies.[35] In addition, several other theories have been developed such as the cumulative causation and institutional or network theory.[36] Despite their important contributions to the field of migration, these theories are unable to fully account for the reasons behind movement and the construction of subjectivities at the intersection of gender, sexuality, and race in the context of migration. This critique has especially been put forward by feminist historians of migration starting from the 1970s who criticised androcentrism in migration studies and increasingly focused not only on the female experience but also on the ways in which gender plays a key role in structuring mobility and settlement differently. [37]

While gender has slowly been incorporated into the study of migration, sexuality has long been neglected in questions of movement. According to Martin Manalansan, this negligence can be attributed to the conflation of sexuality with gender and its relegation to the private sphere, both of which reinscribe heteronormativity. While initial studies focused on the lives of sexual minorities, the AIDS pandemic and the intellectual currents of feminist, race/ethnic, and LGBTQ

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[33] For neoclassical theory see: Ernest George Ravenstein, *The Laws of Migration* (New York: Arno Press: 1976)
[34] Karen O'reilly, "Migration theories: A critical overview," in *Routledge handbook of immigration and refugee studies*, ed. Anna Triandafyllidou (Routledge, 2015), 50-2.
[35] Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *The modern world system* (New York, London: Academic Press, 1974).
[36] For an extensive overview see: Douglas S. Massey et al., "Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal," *Population and Development Review* 19, no. 3 (September 1993).
[37] Suzanne M. Sinke, "Gender and Migration: Historical Perspectives," *International migration review* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2006).

studies redirected academic focus from a universal biological precondition to the cross-cultural migrant experience which complicates the assimilative assumptions of previous scholarship and highlights the hybrid forms that interact with Western sexual practices and identities. Thus, Manalansan maintains, there is a dual understanding of sexuality in migration studies: one is the product of the intersections of social categories, the other acts against the normalisation of heterosexual institutions and practices.[38] Eithne Luibhéid argues in favour of the latter, since it offers new ways of understanding how sexuality and migration may reinscribe or transform multiple inequalities.[39] Thus, she argues that the legal and political tools deployed by nation-states to regulate migration also discipline and reproduce sexual identities, practices, and categories.[40] Moreover, close attention to sexuality in the study of migration also highlights the role of sexuality and its intersection with gender, race and class in structuring every aspect of migrant experiences.[41] For instance, recent scholarship on asylum and non-normative sexualities highlighted the pervasiveness of Western understandings of gender and sexuality in the asylum procedure which builds on existing stereotypical depictions of non-Western people and thus renders asylum seekers vulnerable.[42]

Similarly to migration and movement, settlement and dwelling also impacts the process of subject formation. In tracing the history of diaspora, Denise Helly maintains that its meaning has markedly fluctuated throughout its most formative years in antiquity, the Middle Ages to the

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[38] Martin F. Manalansan IV, "Queer Intersections: Sexuality and Gender in Migration Studies," *International migration review* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2006).

[39] Eithne Luibhéid, "Sexuality and Migration," in *Migration: A COMPAS Anthology*, ed. Bridget Anderson and Michael Keith (Oxford: COMPASS, 2014).

[40] Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry denied: Controlling sexuality at the border* (Minnesota: University Press, 2002).

[41] Eithne Luibhéid, "Heteronormativity and Immigration Scholarship: A Call for Change," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10, no. 2 (2004).

[42] David A. B. Murray, "Real Queer: "Authentic" LGBT Refugee Claimants and Homonationalism in the Canadian Refugee System," *Anthropologica* 56 (2014). For a discussion of the German context see: Mengia Tschalaer, "Between queer liberalisms and Muslim masculinities: LGBTQ+ Muslim asylum assessment in Germany," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (2019).

Renaissance, the beginning of the nineteenth to the 1970s, and the 1980s to the present.[43] In her attempt to identify diaspora's parameters and processes, she names four main characteristics of diaspora: "the consciousness of a destiny of social precarity, of a fate always uncertain and sometimes dangerous, which past traumatic events, such as a dispersion, symbolise; the legacy of this consciousness through narrations and the construction of a collective memory, sometimes reinvented by elites; multiple seats of establishment and of cultural expression; and economic and cultural means to maintain a multinational network between those seats.[44] While Helly's characterisation of diaspora is of great importance given her extensive historical overview, its application to Muslim diaspora requires some adjustments. Indeed, Sarah Albrecht et al. maintain, conceptualising Muslim diaspora is complicated by the heterogeneity of Muslim communities and the lack of a common identity by a mythicised territorial origin.[45] Here, I find Haideh Moghissi, Saeed Rahnema, and Mark J. Goodman's definition of Muslim diaspora of high relevance. Moghissi, Rahnema and Goodman perceive the collective consciousness of marginality and discrimination in the host society as the most significant characteristic of Muslim diaspora.[46] As they maintain, the question of diaspora cannot be solely seen in terms of definitions, but has to focus on "relations of power and on the set of social practices and norms that operate to encourage or discourage a population from feeling 'at home.'"[47] Thus, the encounter of the realities of racism and Islamophobia rooted in colonial and neo-colonial histories in the host country lead migrants to the creation of a collective identity which

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[43] Denise Helly, "Diaspora: History of an idea," in *Muslim Diaspora: Gender, culture and identity*, ed. Haideh Moghissi (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.
[44] Ibid., 15.
[45] Sarah Albrecht et al., "Editorial: Conceptualising 'Muslim Diaspora'," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 5, no. 1 (2016), 3.
[46] Haideh Moghissi, Saeed Rahnema, and Mark J. Goodman, *Diaspora by Design: Muslims in Canada and Beyond* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 11.
[47] Ibid., 6.

disregards their cultural and ethnic heterogeneity and unifies them based on a need for connections and solidarity.[48]

2.5. Conclusion

This review of the relevant literature cannot come close to the sense of magnitude of this field of enquiry but what it is meant to do is to put into conversation different authors and theories across the interdisciplinary field I chose to ground my thesis in. In the following chapters, I rely on the above-mentioned academic literature and theoretical concepts in order to investigate the ways in which belonging is featured in the process of queer Muslim subject formation and self-cultivation in the spatial and temporal realities of Germany. As highlighted in this chapter, this undertaking has to account for the historically contingent understandings of Islam. Moreover, instead of looking for possible moments of transgression, queerness in this thesis directs scholarly focus to affect and the inhabitance of differing material and discursive possibilities. Finally, this requires paying special attention to the process of mobility and dwelling in the context of Germany as both contribute to the structuring of material and discursive possibilities available for queer people of Muslim backgrounds.

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[48] Moghissi et al., 14.

Chapter 3

Methodological considerations

This thesis is based on eight semi-structured interviews conducted with queer migrants and second generation people of Muslim backgrounds during two months of ethnographic fieldwork between July and August, 2019 in Berlin, Germany. The main period of fieldwork was preceded by two preliminary trips to Berlin. I spent four days in Berlin to establish contacts and map the field in February, 2019. Based on these initial contacts, I have conducted expert interviews and some preliminary participant observation for one week in May, 2019. Given my intentions to understand and represent in a non-exploitative manner the intricacies of what it means to be constructed as a marginalised 'other' in the context of Germany, my research is informed by feminist and queer postcolonial ethnographic methods and theory. The following delineates my research method, design, and analysis, paying special attention to questions of positionality, reflexivity, and representation.

3.1. Research method

Ethnographic knowledge production by predominantly white scholars located in the Global North about marginalised people in- and outside the west raises a number of complex ethical and political dilemmas. Paying attention to the impact of colonialism in reshaping the available discursive possibilities to be heard, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak maintains that people on the periphery cannot have political self-representation because their voices are not heard in

the current system.[1] As Edward Said highlights in his groundbreaking work, knowledge produced by Western scholars about the so-called 'Orient' is part of an ongoing colonial project to maintain the dominance and consumption of the West over its 'others'. Accordingly, the creation of a homogeneous unit called the 'Orient' and its articulation in opposition to the West as an inferior 'other' has been used as a justification of ongoing domination through imperial and colonial projects.[2] Given my intention to understand people who are constructed as 'others' in Germany and the potential danger of dominance and misrepresentation that this intention might entail, I adopt what Jennifer Manning calls a postcolonial feminist ethnographic approach as I believe it helps address the implications of power and positionality and the question of representation in ethnographic knowledge production.[3] A postcolonial perspective requires the decolonisation of knowledge and the acceptance of varying ontologies and epistemologies. Moreover, a postcolonial feminist approach pays close attention to questions of representation and ethics as Western feminist scholarship has often led to discursive colonisation.[4] This requires the reflexivity of the researcher regarding the situated and socially constructed nature of their positionality and the representation of the interlocutors in order to avoid differences of positionality, privilege and power while striving to build a collaborative relationship and centre the voices and experiences of the interlocutors.[5]

Building upon critical feminist scholarship, my research refrains from essentialising experience and rather follows what Joan W. Scott calls the "historicisation of the notion of

experience." [6] As Scott maintains, historians often tend to document the experience of marginalised communities and take it as self-evident and uncontestable evidence which leads to its de-contextualisation and the reproduction of existing ideological systems. [7] Against this approach, she argues in favour of investigating the constructed nature of experience and the historical and discursive processes that position subjects and reproduce their experiences. [8] Scott argues that "experience is at once always already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, and always therefore political." [9] Thus, I take evidence not as the origin but rather the object of my explanation. Moreover, following Donna Haraway's notion of situated knowledges, [10] I refrain from trying to establish positivist and universal truth claims about queer people of Muslim backgrounds and rather strive to acknowledge the situated, partial, and embodied nature of the knowledge that I produce. In accordance with Haraway, I recognise the interlocutors as actors who have the agency to shape the process of producing heterogeneous knowledge(s). [11]

Finally, my research also builds on black feminist scholarship by foregrounding intersectionality as my guiding analytical and research device. As Leslie McCall argues, due to its distinctive features of analysing people's everyday experiences and their interpretations thereof, qualitative methodology is notably compatible with intersectionality. [12] Intersectionality was first coined in 1989 by Kimberlé William Crenshaw; however, its history goes back to black

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[6] Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (Summer, 1991).
[7] Scott, 777.
[8] Ibid., 779.
[9] Ibid., 797.
[10] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988).
[11] Ibid., 583-92.
[12] Leslie McCall, "The complexity of intersectionality," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society* 30, no. 3 (2005).

feminist writings in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. Crenshaw argues that feminist and antiracist activists both neglected and thus marginalised women of colour by overlooking intersectional identities in their political agenda due to identity politics' inclination to disregard differences between communities.[13] She maintains that the lived experience and socio-political situation of women of colour cannot be fully understood by employing the categories of gender and race as separate units, but it is crucial to recognise the interaction between them in shaping the structural, political and representational aspects of the lives of women of colour.[14] Similarly, Nira Yuval-Davis argues that intersectionality should not use an additive approach by essentialising any category, but rather adopt a constitutive approach which investigates the ways in which various social categories are interconnected and construct each other.[15] Furthermore, my research follows Bowleg's recommendations of concentrating on the dimensions of experience instead of identity categories, considering the entire socio-historical context in which certain groups of people face marginalisation, and discerning the implicit intersections of one's identity by looking at the macro socio-historical reality.[16]

3.2. Research design

Following a postcolonial feminist ethnographic approach, the question of positionality occupies a key role in my research. I follow feminist scholars who call into question the insider/outsider binary as no identity can give ultimate power to speak for others and thus I

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[13] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1242.

[14] Ibid., 1244.

[15] Nira Yuval-Davis, "Intersectionality and feminist politics," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13, no. 3 (2006): 195.

[16] Lisa Bowleg, "When black + lesbian + woman ≠ black lesbian woman: the methodological challenges of qualitative and quantitative intersectionality research," *Sex Roles* 59, no. 5-6 (2008): 313-20.

regard positionality as a fluid concept.[17] In this sense, I decided to disclose my positionality as a queer Christian of an ethnic minority background on several occasions in the interview space in order to establish interpersonal relations with my interlocutors who are also queer people of faith and belong to ethnic and religious minorities in their countries. Consequently, this disclosure of my insiderness contributed to the creation of more meaningful conversations. Similarly, I believe that my positionality and personal experiences have also provided me with a deeper understanding of my interlocutors' narratives as someone who similarly encountered various layers of exclusion and feelings of alienation. Despite my fluid positionality, I remained consciously in-line with Olena Hankivsky's warning who argues that scholars conducting research on "others" often tend to practice a type of voyeurism which reinforces their privilege and contributes to the researched community's oppression.[18] Therefore, prior to undertaking the fieldwork, my research commenced with a series of critical enquires regarding my positionality, intentions, motivations, assumptions, own intersectional identities and the possibility for them to change over time. Critical self-examination and self-reflection, however, formed a fundamental component at every stage of the research. While I continuously interrogated my outsiderness as a white Christian from Europe studying queer people of Muslim backgrounds in Germany and acknowledging that our experiences are never the same, I also kept in mind the possibilities of being an insider through possible common experience. This, however, does not mean that my positionality did not limit my understanding of certain aspects of my interlocutors' narratives.

The interlocutors were recruited using a multi-pronged approach: first, I conducted a brief online research about LGBT+ Muslims in Germany and contacted a number of people on

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[17] Dana-Ain Davis and Christa Craven, *Feminist Ethnography: Thinking Through Methodologies, Challenges, and Possibilities* (Lahman: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 60-5.

[18] Olena Hankivsky et al. "Exploring the promises of intersectionality for advancing women's health research," *International Journal for Equity in Health* 9, no. 5 (2010): 3-4.

social media. This method seemed relatively unsuccessful as I only received positive answer from one person. I also used snowball sampling by asking Berlin-based friends and interlocutors to connect me with other people, which garnered a further two interlocutors. The relative failure of these approaches point to the sensitivity of my research and highlight the importance of dating applications in reaching out to marginalised and often invisible groups. Scholars doing qualitative research about queer Muslims often resort to dating applications given the public invisibility of this group of people.[19] However, most researchers do not account for their choice of using dating applications and its implications. In addition to its proved efficiency to identify different sub-groups,[20] deploying dating applications emerged as an imperative in my research given the intersectional marginalisation of queer Muslims due to their racial and religious identities, and legal statuses. Moreover, as Andrew Shield maintains, dating applications can serve a variety of different social purposes for queer migrants who thus blur the lines of friendship and romance (e.g. adapting to the local context and finding accommodation or employment).[21] My choice of using dating applications in lieu of in-person contact was also motivated by the fact that dating applications allow their users to exercise the agency of blocking undesirable interactions and provide them with methods of security.[22] I registered on the website *PlanetRomeo* (its previous name *GayRomeo* is still more common in Germany) as it does not impose any limitations on the users, in contrast with applications such as *Grindr*, and is one of the most popular platforms in Germany. In order to maintain the research relationship from the very beginning, I used a photo with the words 'Forschung über Religion und Sexualität' (i.e.

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[19] See for instance: Wim Peumans, *Queer Muslims in Europe: Sexuality, Religion and Migration in Belgium* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018).

[20] Earl R. Burrell et al., "Use of the Location-Based Social Networking Application GRINDR as a Recruitment Tool in Rectal Microbicide Development Research," AIDS Behavior 16, no. 7 (October 2012), 1819.

[21] Andrew Shield, "New in Town: Gay Immigrants and Geosocial Dating Apps," in *LGBTQs, Media and Culture in Europe*, ed. A. Dhoest, L. Szulc, B. Eeckhout (New York: Routledge, 2017), 244.

[22] Mark Davis et al., "Location, safety, (non) strangers in gay men's narratives on 'hook-up' app," *Sexualities* 19, no. 7 (2016): 842-4.

research about religion and sexuality) and included a longer description of my project both in German and English.

Unlike some other researchers,[23] I did not create any advertisement on *PlanetRomeo*, mainly due to the lack of funding. Instead, I both approached people online and waited for potential interlocutors to approach me. According to Fitzpatrick and Birnholtz, there are three main stages of the interactions on dating applications. First, the personal profiles constitute an initial negotiation. Secondly, the chat between different users functions a strategic self-presentation where goals are being negotiated. And lastly, in person encounters are also another stage of negotiation as they allow the users to verify or overturn their first impressions.[24] In order to conduct an ethical research, I stayed consistent regarding my intentions and goals throughout the research. Overall, four out of five people were contacted by me, with only one person approaching me first. I searched for people with the help of the information allowed by the application. For example, *PlanetRomeo* allows people to state their language knowledge, religion and ethnicity based on dominant German categorisations such as 'Black, Caucasian, Mediterranean, and Arab'.[25] I mainly used the language and religion option and searched for people speaking Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish, Persian, Urdu, Bosnian or Albanian. Most people did not specify their religion, thus if someone's religion was not stated but instead they claimed to speak one of the abovementioned languages, I still left a message. At this point it is important to mention the inherent Orientalism in this type of sampling, to which I was also actively contributing. Assuming people's religious background based on linguistic skills or country of

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[23] See for instance: Peumans, *Queer Muslims in Europe* or Earl R. Burrell et al., "Use of the Location-Based Social Networking Application GRINDR as a Recruitment Tool in Rectal Microbicide Development Research," AIDS Behavior 16, no. 7 (October 2012).

[24] Colin Fitzpatrick and Jeremy Birnholtz, ""I shut the door": Interactions, tensions, and negotiations from a location-based social app," *new media & society* 20, no. 7 (2018).

[25] Shield, 254.

origin can, of course, serve to reinforce the image of a homogenous 'Orient'. In order to try to counteract this problem, I tried to be respectful and explain that I use 'Muslim background' also in terms of cultural or historical inheritance. In my first message, I introduced myself and gave a short description of my research, and asked whether the person was interested in participating for research purposes. Upon request, I also sent a personal photo to increase trust. Some people asked for further information regarding the research or my personality, in which case I strove to stay open and share. If the interlocutor showed enough interest, I suggested a meeting in person so that I could establish a rapport and talk further about the research. However, I soon realised that asking for two meetings was fairly demanding upon the informants' time, and so I soon started the process of interviewing during the first meeting.

The eight interlocutors belong to different age groups and have diverse social, educational and migration backgrounds. The interlocutors range in age from nineteen to forty-one years, however, the majority were in their early thirties. Seven out of eight identified as male with only one female participant. This gender imbalance can mainly be contributed to my positionality as a male researcher and my main recruitment method. As for sexual-emotional attraction, three identified as gay, one as pansexual, two interlocutors used gay but also expressed attraction towards women, and one interlocutor described his attraction as 'man who prefers to sleep with men'. Three of them were second-generation German citizens with Turkish, Lebanese-German-American, and Turkish-Kurdish backgrounds. The other interlocutors belonged to the first generation. One of them was an ethnic Kurdish person who arrived to Germany as a child refugee from Iraq and received German citizenship. Another person arrived to Germany recently from Syria due to the ongoing armed conflict. One person came from Egypt as a student and is about to receive German citizenship. Another person came as a guest worker

from Turkey and retained his Turkish citizenship. The last person came to Germany from Turkey because his Turkish partner lived there and received German citizenship after marriage.

The interviews lasted approximately one and a half hours each. The interlocutors were interviewed at a safe space of their choice: one interview was conducted in a mosque, two at different cafés, four in various parks and one in the person's living room. The interviews were conducted in both English and German without the help of an interpreter: four interviews in English and another four in German. At the beginning of each interview, the interlocutors were provided with a written consent form (see Appendix) in both English and German which explained the main aim, procedure and risks of the research. After signing the consent form, I started recording the interviews. I used my personal mobile phone in lieu of a professional recorder. The interview questions were semi-structured and organised into three main parts. I opted for semi-structured interviewing as it enabled me to explore how certain ideas match the interlocutors' discourses and how they understand their own social worlds.[26] First, I asked a number of biographical questions as it allowed me to find out more about the interlocutor and also build trust.[27] Then, I continued with two sets of questions concerning religion and sexuality. At the end, I left room for further questions and reflections. Moreover, I tried to practice what Ruth Behar calls "listening vulnerably" throughout the interview process by exploring the role of my and the interlocutors' emotions.[28]

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[26] Kathleen M. Blee and Verta Taylor, "Semi-structured interviewing in social movement research," in *Methods of social movement research*, ed. Berta Klandermans and Suzanne Staggenborg (Minnesota: University Press, 2002), 94-5.

[27] Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording oral history: a guide for the humanities and social sciences* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005), 72.

[28] Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks your Heart* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996).

3.3.   Transcription and coding

The fieldwork was followed by two months of transcribing the recorded material. Despite my initial reservations towards transcription, I decided to include my analysis of both the oral and written 'text'. While I acknowledge the benefits of textual engagement with the interview, I also listened to the recordings various times since, as Elinor A. Mazé highlights, it provides the researcher with the advantage of including various bodily expressions and intonations that might be omitted from the written transcript.[29] Furthermore, as Donald A. Ritchie suggests, I perceived the transcript not as a final product, but rather as a partial rendering of the oral material.[30] I did not use any particular type of transcribing software or style, but rather simply transcribed the entire interviews with some notes regarding intonations, laughs, and some additional noise (e.g. the ringing of church bells and interphones).

The data garnered through interviews and participant observation was continuously analysed and coded from the beginning to the end. Even though initially I did not plan to code my interviews but to analyse them intuitively, I soon realised that the benefits of coding, as recommended by my thesis committee, offered a way of making sense and organising the discourse. Thus, as suggested by Johnny Saldaña, I created separate documents for the body of data (e.g. fieldnotes, interviews, documents from organisations) and for coding. The coding was guided by a list of general questions; similar to those proposed by Saldaña (e.g. what strikes me the most? What are these people doing? How do they do this?).[31] After several attempts at recoding, I strove to develop thematic and theoretical concepts which then led to the formulation

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[29] Elinor A. Mazé, "The Uneasy Page: Transcribing and Editing Oral History," in *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology*, ed. Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers (MD: Alta Mira Press, 2007), 230-3.
[30] Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: Practical Advice and Reasonable Explanation for Anyone* (New York: Tawyne, 1995), 43.
[31] Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2009), 18-21.

of theories and the structure of each chapter.[32] Finally, due to ethical and safety concerns, I have included pseudonyms that match the interlocutors' ethnic and religious background (e.g. Turkish, Arab, mixed family). The secrecy of the participants was also maintained during participant observation in places where I could not ask for individual consent due to the number of people present. The names of important localities (such as clubs or mosques) and well-known public figures, however, were not altered as it might undermine the credibility of the research. Nevertheless, secrecy and safety concerns were kept in mind throughout the research project as some of my interlocutors might not feel comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation publicly and the possibility of being outed might lead to emotional harm.

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[32] Saldaña, 10-11.

Chapter 4

The emergence of a modern Muslim subject

The context of Germany's place in the European Union occupies a significant place in my daily discussions with a German friend. An idea that he imparted upon me remained active in my mind as I conducted the fieldwork for my thesis in Berlin. In his opinion, Germans are now the Americans of Europe. While his intention was to highlight the important role of Germany in the promotion of democracy, diversity and human rights in Europe and beyond, his statement also demonstrates an increasing discourse according to which Germany and Germans articulate their conceptualisation of themselves. As highlighted in the introduction, the reconstruction of the nation after the unification of Germany in the late twentieth century was facilitated by the promotion of a democratic European identity and the concurrent othering of the country's Muslim population. This shift in the discourse over belonging has been advanced by the framing of European understandings of human rights, gender equality and LGBT+ rights as sites of progress in German national imaginaries against a growing depiction of Islam as a backwards patriarchal religion.[1] The acceptance of the rights of women and sexual minorities sets the tone of integration for Muslims and regulates the borders of belonging to the German nation.

As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the understanding of Germany as a liberal democratic state which endorses the rights of women and sexual minorities also constructs the discursive possibilities with which Muslims in diaspora can engage. The oppositional framing of Germany and Muslims might generate a number of tensions among the country's Muslim communities who are left with the choice of accommodation or rejection. However, this

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[1] Jin Haritaworn et al., "Internationalismus oder Imperialismus?: Feministische und schwul-lesbische Stimmen im Krieg gegen den Terror," *frauensolidarität, Feminismen (100)* (2007).

development should not be understood in negative terms, but rather as a manifestation of diverse Muslim diasporic practices in Germany. As Werner Schiffauer highlights, the religious sentiments of the first generation of Turkish migrants in Germany can mainly be perceived in terms of 'gurbet' (foreign) where Islam offered a sense of stability among feelings of disorientation and fear of self-loss.[2] In contrast to this 'Islam in exile' of first generation migrants to Germany, Schiffauer uses the term 'diaspora Islam' to describe the complex coexistence of different Islamic traditions and practices of second and third generation migrants which are structured by the host country's othering of Muslims and Islam as incompatible with German values[3] and thus stem from "the necessity to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them and losing their identities completely."[4] While the term 'diaspora Islam' might be simplistic as it relies on the image of a static 'Islam', I adopt it in this chapter in order to refer to the ways in which Muslims in diaspora react to the exclusions rooted in the negative construction of Islam by the host country while staying within the Islamic tradition. Schiffauer delineates three main reactions to the realities of being in diaspora, namely struggle for equality, struggle for the rights for difference, and rejection of the struggle for recognition.[5] Despite the diversity of reactions, academic scholarship and the media have mainly been preoccupied with the growing radicalisation among the second and third generation and the appeal of revivalist movements.[6] This fixation, however, obscures the complexities of Muslim diasporic practices and subjectivities.

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[2] Werner Schiffauer, "From exile to diaspora: the development of transnational Islam in Europe," in: eds. Aziz al-Azmeh and Effie Fokas, *Islam in Europe: Diversity, Identity and Influence* (Cambridge, University Press: 2007), 71-2.

[3] Ibid., 77.

[4] Ibid., 70.

[5] Ibid.

[6] See for instance, Werner Schiffauer, *Die Gottesmänner - Türkische Islamisten in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000) and Olivier Roy, *L'Islam Mondialisé* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

In this chapter, I will concentrate on one particular form of Muslim diasporic practices that are articulated within the Islamic tradition: the creation of a liberal German Islamic tradition and the subject positions enabled by it. The main focus of the chapter is on two ethnographic interviews conducted with members of Germany's first liberal mosque since they represent a particular narrative of negotiating the seemingly exclusionary borders of belonging by a process of rendering Islam modern. The choice to do a close reading and analysis of the narratives of Serhan and Leyla is informed by applying a methodology that includes self-reflexivity in which I followed Lorraine Nencel's advice to let my own and the interlocutors' textual representation "flow out of the particularities of the research context/process."[7] Overall, I argue that by distancing themselves from other Muslim communities and promoting a modern Islam, Serhan and Leyla actively try to render Islam modern in accordance with the secular liberal sensibilities of Germany as a way to articulate their belonging to the nation. After historicising and situating the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque at the intersection of integration and nation-building, I will attend to the specific subject position(s) this new discourse on Islam enables. Then, I will explore the implicit meanings of what it means, as Serhan and Leyla argue, to render Islam modern within the power asymmetries dictated by the secular state.

In this chapter, I draw on Talal Asad and Saba Mahmood's conceptualisation of secularism as a means of demonstrating the role of the state in the production of a German Islamic tradition and modern German Muslim subjectivities. In his groundbreaking work, *Formations of the Secular*, Talal Asad problematises mainstream understandings of secularism as the mere separation of the religious from the political and the relegation of religion to the private sphere. Asad argues in favour of understanding secularism as a tool of governmentality

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[7] Lorraine Nencel, "Situating reflexivity: Voices, positionalities and representations in feminist ethnographic texts," *Women's Studies International Forum* 43 (2014), 76.

which aims at regulating the private sphere and religion according to its own sensibilities.[8] However, I will problematise this top-down approach by drawing on Mark Goodman's notion of hybridity in diasporic subjectivity production. Mark Goodman argues that hybridity is not a chosen state, but rather the outcome of negotiations between diasporic communities and dominant powers. Moreover, given the potential of hybrid subjectivities to negotiate and renegotiate dominant identities, hybridity always contains an inherent political aspect.[9] Given my interlocutors' hybrid identities, I will argue that while they operate within the constraints of the secular state, their act of rendering Islam modern does not simply translate into assimilation, but rather it entails the renegotiation of what they perceive to be the exclusionary boundaries of both Germanness and Islam.

4.1. 'Diaspora Islam' and its subject positions

In the first chapter, I have pointed to the fact that the development of diasporic Muslim organising in Germany follows the trajectory of migration policies and the process of nation-building.[10] As follows, the establishment of the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque, its positive reception by both German and international media, and the narratives of Serhan and Leyla particularly become legible once situated in the ongoing discussion around the integration of Muslims as the mosque and my interlocutors all attempt to offer one particular solution for the perceived incompatibility of Islam and Germany. Werner Schiffauer argues that the September 11 attacks and the rise in status of many immigrants due to the new citizenship law led to an intensified

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[8] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, California, University Press, 2003). See also: Saba Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?" *Critical Inquiry 35* (2009).

[9] Mark J. Goodman, "Diaspora, ethnicity and problems of identity," in: Haideh Moghissi (ed.), *Muslim Diaspora: Gender, culture and identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006). 64-5.

[10] Rauf Ceylan, "From guest workers to Muslim immigrants: The history of Muslims and their organizations in Germany," in: Peucker M. and Ceylan R. (eds), *Muslim Community Organizations in the West: Islam in der Gesellschaft* (Springer VS: Wiesbaden, 2017). 80.

"moral panic" in German discussions regarding citizenship and religious minorities.[11] According to Riem Spielhaus, this negative depiction of Islam led so-called 'assimilated individuals of Muslim background' who are not members of Islamic organisations to speak up and shape the representation of Muslims as part and means of an ongoing negotiation of identities and belonging.[12] As she highlights, the homogenisation of migrants based on religious affiliation became a tool deployed in political arguments to take critical Muslim positions regarding diverse Muslim communities and the media depiction of Islam and Muslims.[13] According to Susanne Schröter, this development has mainly enabled four types of reactions. The first group consists of so-called Islam critics who maintain that Muslims are responsible for their situation as they actively resist integration and argue that Islam promotes a patriarchal culture of violence which is in need of a sexual revolution.[14] The second group consists of German postcolonial scholars who argue that Islam is not an obstacle for integration but rather, the problems that Muslim communities are facing stem from anti-Muslim racism as a result of the colonial past and National-Socialist antisemitism.[15] The other two positions consist on the one hand of the growing Salafi movement, and on the other hand of so-called liberal and progressive Muslims, oftentimes including the first group as well, who criticise Salafis and other conservative Muslims for not

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[11] Werner Schiffauer, "Enemies within the gates: The debate about the citizenship of Muslims in Germany," in: T. Modood, A. Triandafyllidou, and R. Zapata-Barrero (ed.), *Multiculturalism, Muslims and Citizenship: a European approach* (London: Routledge, 2006).

[12] Riem Spielhaus, "Media making Muslims: the construction of a Muslim community in Germany through media debate," *Contemporary Islam* 4 (2010). 11.

[13] Ibid., 15-6.

[14] Susanne Schröter, "Debating Salafism, Traditionalism, and Liberalism: Muslims and The State in Germany," in: Moha Ennaji (ed.), *New Horizons of Muslim Diaspora in North America and Europe* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016). 207.

[15] Ibid., 208-9.

taking a clear stance against extremism, and advocate for reforms within their own diasporic communities.[16]

The founder of the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque is situated between the first and fourth groups. Seyran Ateş was born in Istanbul to a Turkish-Kurdish family which moved to West Berlin in the 1960s as guest workers. As she retells in an article, she disliked her role as a girl in her family and thus left home at 17 and started studying law at the age of 20.[17] During her studies, Ateş worked in a women's centre with victims of domestic violence. At the age of 21 she and one of her clients were shot by a man of Turkish origin, the client died on the spot. Ateş describes it as a transformative moment in her career as a feminist and women's lawyer.[18] Together with the Somali-Dutch Ayaan Hirsi Ali and the Turkish-German Necla Kelek, Ateş became well-known for her position as a so-called *Islamkritikerin* (female Islam critic), a branch of feminism that assumes the dominant Western position and thus blames Islam for patriarchal violence and multiculturalism for the failure of integration.[19] For instance, Ateş maintains in an interview that Muslim culture all over the world is prone to violence against women and it is especially the case in Europe where immigrant societies are unwilling to develop and integrate into the so-called "modern values and lifestyles" of their host countries. Even though she admits that Germany's attitude also contributes to the lack of integration, she still holds Muslims accountable for allegedly not accepting gender equality or democracy.[20] Ateş identifies mainly two reasons behind the foundation of a German liberal mosque. As she maintains, she decided to

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[16] Schröter, 209.

[17] Seyran Ates, "Ich habe einen Traum: Seyran Ates," *Zeit Online*, April 12, 2007, https://www.zeit.de/2007/16/Traum-Ates-16/komplettansicht (accessed May 10, 2020).

[18] Scott Jacobsen, "Liberal Islam and Migrant Integration with Seyran Ateş," *Conatus News*, April 12, 2018, https://conatusnews.com/seyran-ates-faith-feminism-law/ (accessed May 5, 2020).

[19] Christoph Ramm, "The Muslim Makers: How Germany 'Islamizes' Turkish Immigrants," *interventions* 12, no.2 (2010), (183-197) 190.

[20] Jacobsen.

create a community of her own after her attack at the age of 21 brought her closer to her faith, but she could not find a place where she felt at home as she considers the Muslim communities in Berlin traditional and conservative. With the mosque, she wants to show to 'political Islam' that another Islam exists, one that has nothing to do with terrorism. According to her, the mosque is a proof that Muslims in Germany need and are open to interpretations of Islam which mirror the values of Western countries.[21]

The positions of the *Islamkritikerinnen* have come under significant criticism. Schirin Amir-Moazami especially problematises the role of Ateş and Kelek in legitimising the state's intervention into Muslim gender norms and sexuality which contributes to the normalisation of certain subjectivities and notions of freedom over others. However, Amir-Moazami also maintains that the popularity of these secular Muslim feminists over other voices is more of a symptom of the secular state's selective attempt to regulate the images of Islam.[22] This is especially the case in the state's attempt to create a 'German Islam' through the *Deutsche Islam Konferenz* (German Islam Conference) (DIK). The notion of a German 'Euro-Islam' becomes intelligible only if understood in this context as the product of the shift towards a more assimilationist integration approach following the perceived failure of German multiculturalism, commonly referred to as 'Multikulti'.[23] Coined by Bassam Tibi, German 'Euro-Islam' represents a process in which Islam, under the assumption of a homogeneous and static 'religion', becomes integrated into the European host societies as a religion compatible with secularism and

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[21] Melissa Eddy, "By Taking a Bullet, a Muslim Woman Finds Her Calling," *The New York Times*, June 22, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/22/world/europe/germany-muslims-seyran-ates.html (accessed May 05, 2020).
[22] Schirin Amir-Moazami, "dialogue as a governmental technique: managing gendered Islam in Germany," *Feminist Review*, no. 98 (2011), 15-8.
[23] Schirin Amir-Moazami, "Buried Alive: Multiculturalism in Germany," *ISIM Review* 16 (Autumn 2005).

European values.[24] As Schirin Amir-Moazami maintains, however, this notion of 'Euro-Islam' represents a one-way process which assumes the willingness of Muslims to embrace the dominant norms of the host society and is used as a mechanism to negate Germany's multicultural reality.[25] Despite its assimilationist undertone and significant criticism, the notion of 'German Islam' gained salience due to the *Deutsche Islam Konferenz* initiated by the Ministry of Interior in 2006 as a way to enter into dialogue with the country's Muslim communities and facilitate their better integration.[26] However, as Moazami argues, given its top-down approach towards Muslims, the DIK functions as a governmental technique that strives to reshape Muslims according to secular-liberal values.[27] Through the ethical and value-based claims, the state utilises the DIK to transform Muslims into secular subjects through regulating religious sensitivities and making judgements on norms and deviations.[28]

The opening of Germany's first liberal mosque in June 2017 by Seyran Ateş represents one attempt to create a liberal Islam in accordance with secular-liberal German sensibilities. The name of the mosque (Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque) is illustrative of its goals as it is meant to represent a bridge between the Occident and the Orient as Ibn Rushd was an important figure of Islamic enlightenment and Goethe was the first European with a different and more positive opinion on Islam.[29] According to the official website of the mosque, it promotes a "modern, secular and liberal Islam which is compatible with democracy, human rights and the constitution

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[24] See for instance: Bassam Tibi, "Les conditions d'un "euro-islam"," in *Islams d'Europe: intégration ou insertion communautaire?*, eds. Robert Bistolfi and François Zabbal (Paris: L'Aube, 1995); and Bassam Tibi, *Der Islam in Deutschland: Muslime in Deutschland* (Stuttgart and München: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2000), 36.

[25] Amir-Moazami, "Buried Alive," 23.

[26] Wolfgang Schäuble, "Deutsche Islam Konferenz – Perspektiven für eine gemeinsame Zukunft," September 28, 2006, http://www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de/DIK/DE/Service/Bottom/RedenInterviews/Reden/20060928-regerkl-dik-perspektiven.html?nn=3331014 (accessed May 5, 2020).

[27] Schirin Amir-Moazami, "Pitfalls of consensus-orientated dialogue: The German Islam Conference (Deutsche Islam Konferenz)," *Approaching Religion* 1 (May 2011), 2.

[28] Amir-Moazami, "Pitfalls of consensus-orientated dialogue," 8.

[29] Jacobsen.

of the Federal Republic of Germany."[30] The mosque is open for both men and women from different branches of Islam and with different sexual orientations and identities.[31] The images and examples used by Seyran Ateş in an interview with *Der Spiegel* resonate with the self-description of the mosque and highlight the kind of Islam which is deemed to be compatible with secular-liberal German sensibilities. As she maintains, the mosque provides space for all those who have been persecuted by conservative Muslim communities in Germany and want to live according to a liberal and tolerant faith.[32] Thus, she believes that she initiated a long overdue reform comparable to reforms in Christian and Jewish faiths. She maintains that liberal Muslims have to speak up against radical followers, otherwise nothing will change.[33] Ateş also criticizes the double standard of the critiques of the mosque coming from the Middle East as most countries never wrote a fatwa against the Islamic state or terrorism in the name of Islam.[34] Moreover, the mosque represents a growing trend of inclusive mosque initiatives in Western Europe. The overly positive representation of the mosque pinpoints the discourse of the mosque and the problem that as Jesper Petersen maintains, female imams are "produced in the intersection of interests between women who want to re-claim Islam and commercial media, which produce narratives that are in demand among media consumers."[35] This means that female religious leaders are constantly framed according to the existing media discourse around Islam and Muslim women. The same development can be observed in other liberal mosques in Europe

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[30] See for instance: "Die Moschee," https://www.ibn-rushd-goethe-moschee.de/die-moschee/ (accessed March 5, 2020).

[31] See: "Präambel," https://www.ibn-rushd-goethe-moschee.de/die-moschee/praeambel/ (accessed March 5, 2020).

[32] Anna Reimann, "Unsere Religion nicht den Rückständigen überlassen," *Der Spiegel*, June 12, 2017, https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/seyran-ates-warum-die-frauenrechtlerin-eine-moschee-gruendet-a-1151177.html (accessed March 2, 2020).

[33] Sabine Kinkartz, "Everyone is welcome at Berlin's Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque," *Deutsche Welle*, June 16, 2017, https://www.dw.com/en/everyone-is-welcome-at-berlins-ibn-rushd-goethe-mosque/a-39287121 (accessed May 6, 2020).

[34] Jacobsen.

[35] Jesper Petersen, "Media and the Female Imam," *Religions* 10, no. 3 (2019), 159.

as well. However, there seems to be two different types of feminism regarding the notion of emancipation. In Jesper's comparison of Seyran Ateş and the founder of a Danish mosque Sherin Khankan, Ateş positions herself in opposition to existing communities and calls out conservatism while Khankan situates herself as part of it and relativises their claims. Also, in contrast to Khankan who acknowledges the different notions of emancipation, Ateş essentialises veiling and so-called conservative gender constructions by framing them as oppressive.[36]

Basing my analysis on the theoretical frameworks established by Talal Asad and Saba Mahmood, it is possible to view the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque as a symptom of the secular state's attempt to transform Muslims into modern secular subjects and citizens through the regulation of sensibilities. This is certainly true if one looks at the self-description of the mosque which aims at rendering Islam compatible with secular-liberal German sensibilities of belonging through a series of particular oppositions. Indeed, as Moazami argues, the example of secular Muslim feminists demonstrates that the governmental practices behind the normalisation of Muslim subjects are not to be located in the state only, but work at intersections of the state, civil society and the individual.[37] Based on my conversations with different activists and people of faith during my fieldwork, I would argue that the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque can also be considered as another tool to create secular and modern Muslim subjects who conform to German secular-liberal sensibilities. While I agree with the problematic nature of this undertaking, in the following section I would like to argue that the emergence of modern Muslim subjects is not solely a one-way project, but as the case of Serhan and Leyla demonstrates, it requires a process of active self-fashioning according to a particular Islamic tradition. As Saba Mahmood argues, it is important to interrogate the practical and conceptual conditions under

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[36] Petersen, 159-60.
[37] Amir-Moazami, "dialogue as a governmental technique," 25.

which different forms of desire emerge.[38] As demonstrated in the first section of this chapter, the process of rendering Islam modern as the manifestation of a desire of belonging emerges under the conditions of failed integration policies and Islamophobic nation-building. However, it is also important to attend to the existing power asymmetries and hierarchies at play which regulate the choices available to the subject. Listening to the narratives of Serhan and Leyla pushed me to foreground hybridity as the main notion in this conversation and consider the mosque's potential for enabling certain ways of existing 'in-between'. To illustrate the role of hybridity and acculturation and the enabling effects of the mosque, let me turn to the narratives of my interlocutors who exemplify this point precisely.

4.2. Towards a modern Muslim subjectivity

The role of the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque was constantly highlighted in Serhan and Leyla's narratives as a place which enabled them to exist "in-between," i.e. to be both a Muslim and a German citizen. Even though the opening of the mosque was featured as a defining moment for both of them, Serhan and Leyla come from two relatively different backgrounds. Serhan is a self-identified "open-minded gay Turkish-Kurdish Muslim"[39] who is currently the main person responsible for LGBT-related matters at the Ibn-Rushd Goethe mosque. While sipping some cold water in the office of the mosque during the hottest summer in Germany in decades, Serhan briefly retells his family's migration story. Even though Serhan's mother was born in Turkey, she arrived to West Berlin at a young age in 1970 around the time when West Germany offered employment for Southern European countries and Turkey in order to tackle its labour shortage. Like many children of guest workers, he also grew up in what he calls a

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[38] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 15.
[39] Serhan Demir, interview by the author, July 22, 2019.

'Turkish parallel society' in the Berlin neighbourhood of Wedding, until the time of his parents' divorce when they moved to his aunt's home in what he sees a "more German neighbourhood."[40] This shifting of environments manifested itself in a continuous sense of discomfort regarding the question of belonging. For instance, Serhan told me how he was mocked for "talking so German" after he switched his "pretty German school"[41] and went to another state school with a high-percentage of Muslim students in Wedding. The most personal manifestation of this sense of discomfort, however, is connected to his sexuality. Serhan only disclosed his sexual orientation to his close family. His friends and extended family only found out about it later due to a video he made as an activist of the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque. As he maintains, once his mainly Turkish and Muslim friends found out about his sexual orientation, they all stopped communicating with him.

Leyla's way to the Ibn Rushd-Goethe's mosque differs from that of Serhan's. However, the question of belonging was also a re-emerging theme during our conversation while we were drinking cold tea outside a café in the district of Friedenau, Berlin. Friedenau stands in stark contrast to neighbourhoods described by Serhan like Wedding as it is a more upper-middle class and predominantly white area. I met Leyla through Serhan at an interfaith Iftar dinner in May 2019 organised in cooperation by the Ibn-Rushd Goethe mosque and the evangelical church which hosts the mosque on one of its floors. Leyla is a self-identified "German-Lebanese-American pansexual Muslim woman"[42] who grew up in Germany but spends a considerable amount of time in the USA because of her mother's first marriage and annually visits her family from her father's side in Lebanon. The question of disclosure did not have any severe

[40] Demir, interview.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Leyla Weber, interview by the author, July 26, 2019.

consequences in the case of Leyla which she attributes to her "very educated and liberal family."[43] However, Leyla told me in the occasional noise of cars and passers-by that she always found it hard to fit in given the exclusionary nature of most communities. While in her German school she was always the "Arabic Wikipedia", in Lebanon and the USA she was mostly the "German one". As for religion, Leyla grew up in an interfaith family and had the opportunity to participate in both Christian and Muslim celebrations. However, she also contended that she always felt some discomfort joining any Muslim community or visiting any mosque in Berlin as she thought she would be treated differently because of her gender or sexual orientation.

An often-recurring element throughout the interviews was the widespread usage of binaries such as 'liberal – open-minded' and 'conservative' by the interlocutors. While the former was mainly used to describe themselves and some of their family members, the latter always referred to Islamic communities and Muslims with whom they disagreed on a variety of topics. As Schiffauer maintains, the quest for recognition compels Muslim migrants in diaspora to define themselves by a series of opposition. This undertaking is further complicated by the dominance of the European side which relies on an antagonistic construction of Islam.[44] Similarly, Nadia Fadil also maintains that the quest for the true or authentic Islam and the articulation of a modern self among second and third generation Muslims is often articulated by the disqualification of revivalist movements which were perceived to be inauthentic compared to their parents' Islam.[45] In what follows, I will demonstrate how gender and sexuality play a significant role in the negotiations that are part of the creation of a new Islamic tradition and the active cultivation of the self in its image.

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[43] Weber, interview.
[44] Schiffauer, "From exile to diaspora," 78-9.
[45] Nadia Fadil, "Recalling the 'Islam of the parents' liberal and secular Muslims redefining the contours of religious authenticity," *Identitites* (2015).

One of the key organising elements of determining who represents conservatism and who belongs to modernity was time. Given that conservatism was mainly described through the past, it was often argued that Islam had to be brought into German time. Images of 'moving back in time' and 'modernity' along an East-West binary dominate the temporal distribution of the aforementioned liberal-conservative binary. For instance, Serhan referred to the political situation in the Middle East where there is only "fascism and war" to illustrate how "those societies are moving back in time." Here, the case of Brunei where the sultan introduced a new law against sexual minorities was also brought up as an example. As he maintains, this stands in stark contrast to the situation "five thousand years ago" when there was prosperity in the region. In Leyla's case, she used the examples of women to illustrate the importance of rendering Islam compatible with German modernity. As she maintained, "the traditional Islamic values contradict with (sic) the modern German values that we have."[46] Her main examples centred upon the right of women to work or drive without their husbands' permission. Having these rights indicate "that we have evolved."[47] In her opinion, this development is in contrast with the Islamic perspective according to which women are beneath their husbands and are only their property. As she says: "For everything to evolve the German culture has to take a few steps back to be equal with the Islamic culture or the Islamic culture has to be evolving, to be more modern."[48] Given the perceived incompatibility of German time and conservatism, both of them argued in favour of developing but not changing Islam to fit into today's world. Modernity in their narrative thus features as a break with the 'traditional' past represented by conservatism. Consequently, to avoid any conflict, they argue that the so-called Islamic values have to evolve according to the German culture.

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[46] Weber, interview.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

According to Serhan, the world is developing and while in Europe women's rights are mainly about equal pay, in 'Muslim countries' women have 'real problems': "they are being oppressed, they have to wear a hijab or niqab or whatever and they have to hide themselves and cannot live freely, and if they do, they are going to be punished and killed."[49] As for sexual minorities, Serhan maintains that they face a similar fate, "they have to hide themselves and they cannot be happy." Serhan exemplifies his claims through the case of the terrorist attack in Nice where the perpetrator who killed dozens of people on the Bastille Day was believed to be attracted to the same gender. Thus, he clearly connects the oppression of certain desires among Muslim communities to a turn towards terrorism: "there are many gay Muslims who have to decide between being an Islamist, trying to kill people to go to paradise, to please Allah and show him that you are a good Muslim because they think it's the only way to go to paradise, or they leave Islam."[50] In order to avoid these incidents, both of them argue in favour of interpreting religion according to 'our culture' and making sure that 'it is on the same level with our culture, with the German culture'.

Judith Butler maintains that hegemonic conceptions of progress deployed in sexual politics articulate themselves against a pre-modern temporality that is located in a space produced for its own self-legitimation. Moreover, this idea of progress is utilised in repressive politics against the pre-modern 'other'.[51] Similarly, Amir-Moazami correctly maintains that the discourses and examples of German *Islamkritikerinnen* as women attaining modernity and freedom from their patriarchal time have contributed to the assimilationist measures of the

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[49] Demir, interview.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Judith Butler, "Sexual politics, torture and secular time," *The British Journal of Sociology* 59, no. 1 (2008).

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DIK.[52] While one could argue that the discourses put forward by Serhan and Leyla follow a similar trajectory, it is the continuous discomfort felt by them due to their intersectional positionalities and the perceived rigidity and exclusionary nature of Muslim and German communities which differentiate their call for developing Islam. Situating their claims in their personal trajectories reveals that the call for development is not necessarily part of a civilising project, but rather it is a particular way of enabling the self to exist between seemingly exclusionary boundaries and thus to cultivate a particular Islamic self within clear power asymmetries regulated by the state. In the context of French secular Muslim, Ruth Mas reorients the focus to these power asymmetries by maintaining that the cultivation of a secular Muslim self should be comprehended as the outcome of the dominance of the secular-liberal state which compels the emergence of these subject positions.[53] Together with the constraints of the secular-liberal state and the hybridity of my interlocutors, it is also the terrain of emotions which differentiate their claims. For instance, one defining moment in Serhan's narrative was his father's funeral when his mother and sisters have been locked inside the mosque and let out only once his father's body had already been put into the hearse and was gone. This incident made Serhan infuriated as he believes that her female family members should not be treated differently. Similarly, as highlighted previously, the main reason why Leyla did not visit other mosques was that she did not want to be treated differently than her brother. In contrast to these "conservative and uptight"[54] mosques, the mosque she attends now is described as a place of personal freedom where you can wear short shorts and a tank top, voice your own opinion without being judged and most significantly, to be pansexual.

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[52] Amir-Moazami, "dialogue as a governmental technique," 17.
[53] Ruth Mas, "Compelling the Muslim Subject: Memory as Post-Colonial Violence and the Public Performativity of "Secular and Cultural Islam"," *The Muslim World* 96, no. 4 (October 2006), (585-616).
[54] Weber, interview.

The reference to different mosques and religious experiences functions as a way to negotiate and also ground their arguments within the boundaries of the Islamic tradition. The main aspect of this negotiation concerns the formulations of alternative Qur'anic interpretations compatible with secular-liberal sensibilities. This quest for contextual readings which foregrounds human rights has been pointed out by both Serhan and Leyla. When asked to describe what conservatism means, Leyla highlighted its one-sidedness and lack of flexibility: "very black and white and very set in their ways."[55] What she meant by this is the ways in which conservative Muslims deploy the Qur'an, i.e. disregarding the historical context of texts and promoting solely one true interpretation.[56] Similarly, Serhan also pointed to the role of Qur'anic interpretations. As he maintains, conservatism is about trying to "conserve or live something that was or the way they think Muslims have lived this way like one thousand years ago', but conservatism is also about 'making up new rules."[57] Serhan clearly connects his arguments to politics by stating that rules 'given to humans one thousand years ago' are not adequate for developing a safe society today. For example, Serhan states that human rights should be put 'on top of everything, also on religion' which should serve as guidance in interpreting religion. As Leyla says, merging religion and politics is difficult as 'the two are very clear (sic) different things and you need to distinguish these two things'.[58] Thus, both of them align themselves with secular-liberal ideologies and sensibilities, and argue in favour of separating religion and politics and relegating religion to the private sphere as a personal matter.

Serhan's and Leyla's quest for a liberal Islam becomes understandable within the historical trajectory of Germany's migration and integration policies and the concomitant public

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[55] Weber, interview.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Demir, interview.
[58] Weber, interview.

discussions. As Talal Asad maintains, the public sphere is always and by definition articulated by power.[59] Thus, the main aspects of liberal Islam highlighted above are consequently shaped by the dominant discourse in the public sphere. Rejecting conservatism and bringing Islam to the 'present', creating alternative Qur'anic interpretations which reflect human rights, and relegating religion to the private sphere all represent an attempt to render Islam modern and thus compatible with German secular-liberal sensibilities. The (re)articulation of Germanness in positive terms and Islam as its 'Other' in need of development highlights a conscious attempt of articulating one's belonging to the nation. This process of rendering Islam modern, however, does not represent a simple assimilation. As Ruth Mas argues in the case of French secular Muslims, the emergence of Muslim subjects as secular or cultural as a new identity "ruptures both French political designations and normative designations by Muslims of what Islam is or Muslims are. The self-crafting of the "secular Muslim" signals an important re-appropriation of the categories of "Islam" and "Muslim" from their foreclosure as "violent" by the state. In this sense, we can consider the public self-fashioning of Franco-Maghrebis as "secular Muslims," which speaks to the limitations of their agency in the public sphere." [60] Similarly, by articulating their belonging as hybrid subjects, Serhan and Leyla not only reshape the predominant depictions of Islam in the form of German secular liberal sensibilities, but by doing so, they also renegotiate the boundaries of belonging to the nation.

4.3. Conclusion

In his article, *'Turkish, Dutch, gay and proud': Mapping out the contours of agency in homonationalist times*, Armanc Yildiz attempts to understand the agency of Turkish LGBT+ migrant participants in the Amsterdam Canal Pride Parade. He argues in favour of attending to

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[59] Asad, 184.
[60] Mas, 611.

the specific context of Dutch homonationalism which produces historically contingent subject positions that are hierarchised in the Netherlands. As he maintains, none of the subject positions are neutral or innocent of power, but it is the power configurations among these subject positions that lay the ground of agency upon which the subject can act. Thus, a situated and historically informed reading of the parade reveals how difference is regulated and agentive actions are constituted differently by discourse, practice, history and power.[61] Listening to Serhan and Leyla raised similar questions regarding agency given the repressive and assimilationist political aims to which their narratives can be co-opted. Attending to their voices and situating the mosque and my interlocutors' narratives in the historical trajectory of regulating difference in Germany helped me understand the agentive potential behind their wish to render Islam modern. On the one hand, their narratives point to the unequal assessment of non-secular and non-liberal ways of being in a secular liberal regime. On the other hand, paying attention to hybridity in their stories demonstrate that being a modern German Muslim means to renegotiate the seemingly exclusionary borders of both Germanness and Islam and thus to '*inhabit norms differently'*.[62]

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[61] Armanc Yildiz, "'Turkish, Dutch, gay and proud': Mapping out the contours of agency in homonationalist times," *Sexualities* 20, no. 5-6 (2017).
[62] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2004), 155

Chapter 5

Individualisation and the Islamic tradition

In the previous chapter, I have highlighted the ways in which some people in diaspora actively render Islam modern in order to articulate their sense of belonging to Germany. As demonstrated, among other factors, growing up as a queer Muslim in a secular and predominantly Christian society and the hybridity of diaspora subjectivities contributed to their wish to create a modern German Islam. This desire to openly challenge existing discourses around Islam and to create a new community, however, was deemed of little to no importance and relevance for the queer Muslim migrants I talked to. Rather, their narratives exhibited a certain tendency towards both the individualisation and personalisation of religious beliefs and practices. While there is an often indicated link between individualisation and a heightened sense of belonging to the transnational *Ummah* in the narratives of Muslim migrants, this link is rendered ambiguous for those with non-normative sexualities. In this chapter, I rely on three interviews conducted with queer Muslim migrants to investigate the implications of individualisation for my interlocutors' self-cultivation and sense of belonging in the context of transnational movement. Focusing on the ways religion, sexuality, and migration intersect in the lives of Demir, Aziz, and Yusuf, I argue in favour of conceptualising their self-cultivation through an agency of getting-by which has the potential to capture the multi-faceted ways in which they respond to the realities of mobility and settlement in Germany. Moreover, as I will demonstrate, the individualisation and personalisation of religious practices and beliefs in the case of queer Muslims do not exclude them from the Islamic tradition, but rather represent a different way of belonging to and acting within this very same tradition.

In order to understand how my interlocutors navigate local and societal changes as queer Muslim migrants, I rely on Jason Ritchie's notion of an agency of survival. In his work, Ritchie argues in favour of understanding queer Palestinians through an agency of survival by focusing on how they, manage to get by in the quotidian spaces of everyday life. As he maintains, queer Western narratives privilege resistance to homophobic families, communities, cultures, and religion. He takes a critical stance against positioning human agency merely in the political and moral autonomy of the subject. By rejecting the binary of subordination versus resistance, he favours perceiving agency as a product of the historically contingent discursive traditions in which subjects are located. By focusing on the affective ways in which queer Palestinians engage with the world, Ritchie privileges an emic account highlighting that inhabiting the world for his interlocutors is just a matter of getting-by.[1] While the context of my research is rather different from Ritchie's, as I will demonstrate, borrowing the notion of getting-by is crucial for the understanding of the everyday realities of queer Muslim migrants in Germany. Moreover, given my focus on individualisation, this chapter will also provide an account of lived religion in my interlocutors' lives. Here, I rely on Meredith McGuire's understanding of lived religion who conceptualises it as a set of individual practices and beliefs that people engage with and ascribe to for spiritual and existential purposes.[2] As I will highlight below, it is oftentimes in the realm of lived religion that queer Muslim migrants manage to get by. My attention to the lived realities of religion, however, will not place the everyday outside of the realm of power, but rather understand it as always produced through discursive power relations.[3]

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[1] Jason Todd Ritchie, *Queer Checkpoints: Sexuality, Survival, and the Paradoxes of Sovereignty in Israel-Palestine* (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2010), 150-6.

[2] Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: University Press, 2008).

[3] Nadia Fadil and Mayanthi Fernando, "Rediscovering the "everyday" Muslim: Notes on an anthropological divide," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5, no. 2 (2015), 69-70.

5.1. Muslim belonging and migration

One of the main questions I asked my interlocutors during our interviews was: what it means to be a Muslim. The answers received pointed to the manifold meanings the term encompasses. While some mainly invoked religious requirements like the five pillars of Islam, others underscored the importance of their family and social upbringing. For instance, Yusuf, a 33-year-old Turkish man who came to Germany because his ex-husband connected his Muslimness to the fact that his whole family is Muslim: "I got it from them."[4] Yusuf's story stands out in a way that, unlike in other Turkish families, he had the choice to choose his religion before circumcision. According to him, this can be attributed to his tolerant family and the intellectual environment he grew up with given his grandfather's prominent role as a religious scholar. For Aziz, a 24-year-old Syrian guy who came to Germany as a refugee in 2015 and moved to Berlin recently after marrying a Libyan man, family was similarly important. However, he emphasised the fact that his family is not "strong minded."[5] In contrast to these definitions, Demir holds a rather different opinion. Demir is a fifty-year-old bisexual Turkish man who moved to Berlin in 1994 and established a heterosexual family with a wife and two children. For him, in addition to the role of his family, being a Muslim means that God has sent you to the world in order to pass a number of tests and achieve eternal life by entering paradise.

Given the prominent role of family in their definitions, religious practices were closely associated with their home countries and families. This was especially highlighted when talking about fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. For instance, Yusuf maintained that while he does not fast in Germany, he would definitely observe Ramadan with his family in Turkey. For

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[4] Yusuf Kocak, interview by the author, Berlin, July 24, 2019.
[5] Aziz Fadel, interview by the author, August 26, 2019.

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Demir, on the other hand, rituals were only performed for the sake of connecting with his Berlin-based family. Scholarship on Muslim migrants oftentimes connects the dislocation of religious practices from the context of the home country to an increasing identification with a global Muslim community. For instance, Peter Mandaville argues that due to migration, Muslim migrants experience a cultural and national disembeddedness which gives Islam and the Islamic *Ummah* a new political relevance.[6] Similarly, Michal Cenker argues that in the case of Slovakia, Muslim migrants develop a heightened sense of belonging to the transnational *Ummah* in order to confront the heterogeneity and negative reactions they experience.[7] In the case of my interlocutors, however, the existence of a transnational Islamic community was not deemed particularly important. For instance, Yusuf maintained that *Ummah* or the Turkish 'ümmet' is simply the societal perspective on Islam. According to him, 'ümmet' implies that since people of the same mindset and belief get along better, they seek each other's company. While it refers to the community of Muslims who follow the Prophet Mohammed, Yusuf adds that the same can be true for Jews, Christians, or even gay people.

Yusuf's definition of the *Ummah* as a group of like-minded people, however, is in contrast with his disinterest in and unwillingness to join local Muslim communities in Germany. As he maintains, his disinterest stems from the over-politicisation and the rigidity of these communities which try to enforce one truth without understanding what free love or homosexuality mean. Here, Yusuf identifies two main concerns that have been echoed by both Demir and Aziz and which highlight why individualisation in the context of queer Muslim migrants should be understood in terms of a strategy of getting-by. As the next section will

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[6] Peter Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London: Routledge, 2001), 186.
[7] Michal Cenker, "Ummah in the translocal imaginations of migrant Muslims in Slovakia" *Contemporary Islam* 9, no. 2 (2015).

demonstrate, the process of individualisation in the lives of queer Muslim migrants happens at the intersection of mainly two life course events. First, coming to terms with one's sexuality produces the impression of an ideological rift which distances them from the *Ummah*. Second, the process of migration places religious practices into a different socio-political reality which is dominated by German secularism. These factors trigger a need to get by which further contributes to the individualisation of religious beliefs and practices and by doing so it produces individual ways of belonging to the Islamic tradition.

5.2. Sexuality and migration: towards the individualisation of Islam

Initial research on queer Muslim migrants foregrounds transnational migration in the process of individualisation of religion. Wim Peumans maintains that through the process of transnational migration, being a Muslim transforms from a spirituality of dwelling into a spirituality of seeking. Thus, while migration contributes to the reconciliation of faith and sexuality through theological or embodied knowledge(s), it might also increase ethnic solidarity and the importance of a transnational *Ummah* in the lives of queer migrants in the host country.[8] Peumans identifies mainly six factors which inform and transform the religious experience of queer Muslim migrants. First, the change of place takes religious rituals out of context and implies an increased consciousness of their underlying cultural presuppositions. Second, the lack of family ties leads to a more individualised understanding of religion which is dependent on practical matters and individual decisions. Third, queer Muslims in the host country belong to a religious minority in contrast with their homeland. Fourth, the legal framework of a given country also influences religious practices. Fifth, racism and Islamophobia among both

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[8] Wim Peumans, *Queer Muslims in Europe: Sexuality, Religion and Migration in Belgium* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 217.

heterosexual and LGBT+ communities makes the public performance of Muslim subjectivities difficult. Sixth, homonormative frameworks of western countries regard same-sex desire and religion as mutually exclusive.[9] While the following narratives exhibit similar tendencies, they also complicate some of Peumans' classification by decentring the role of the *Ummah*, disrupting the teleological understanding of reconciliation of faith and sexuality through migration, and by underlining the role of tradition instead of notions of spirituality.

The first person that I will introduce here is Demir whom I met in the Hasenheide Park after some brief online chat. Unlike other people I met during my fieldwork, Demir regards his sexual orientation a sin which caused some negative changes in his life. When Demir moved to Berlin in 1994, his main dream was to find a job and establish a family. Even though he had achieved his dreams, given his growing desire for men, he cheated on his wife and shortly divorced. Demir's narrative stands in contrast to that of my other interlocutors as it is full of agony and struggle. Demir's belief that homosexuality is a sin in Islam was supported by the story of the prophet Lut in the Qur'an. According to him, the people of Lut were punished by God because men left women behind in order to "have fun with the guys."[10] Moreover, Demir expressed his strong disbelief in the existence of any alternative interpretation or scholar who would accept homosexuality. As he maintains, given that the Qur'an is clear on this point, it is his responsibility to believe every single sentence without trying to change it: "It is not possible to only take one part of the Qur'an or your faith and discharge the rest by calling it a lie."[11] When asked about why he thinks that God created him this way, Demir argued that homosexuality is a test from God. This is illustrated by a short anecdote: "There are streets

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[9] Peumans, 217-8.
[10] Demir Aksoy, interview by the author, August 06, 2019.
[11] Ibid.

where you could drive with 100 km/h, but the law allows you to drive 30 km/h. Thus, one cannot say that "I want to drive with 50 or 100 km/h" even if it is possible. He hopes that he can also drive 30 km/h so that he will be punished less severely."[12] According to Asifa Siraj, this conceptualisation of homosexuality as a test from God deploys Islam as an instrumental source to understand one's sexuality.[13] As follows, while there is a continuously reoccurring deep sense of discomfort experienced by Demir, his understanding of his sexuality as a divine test works as a strategy to get by which allows him to maintain an individual relation to God despite his perceived rejection from Muslim communities. This conscious reframing, moreover, points to his place within the Islamic tradition.

Demir's negative conceptualisation of his sexuality led to a decrease in ritual practices and mosque attendance in his life. For example, Demir stopped fasting and praying regularly because he believes that it would be a lie as God already knows that he is a sinner. He attributes this belief to Satan's attempt to bring him to hell since even though there is no imam who could tell him to pray as a gay person, he feels sorry to leave behind these requirements as even sinners are supposed to perform them. Similarly, Demir stopped going regularly to the mosque for over ten years. As he maintains, in Islam one has to be clean on both the outside and the inside when entering a mosque. However, Demir considers himself dirty on the inside which "does not simply go off with a soap."[14] Despite these inner struggles, Demir's long settlement and family in a neighbourhood with a considerable Muslim population further complicates his inner struggle as it requires him to uphold some of the religious obligations on the surface. This suggests the ongoing importance and visibility of the homeland in his imagination which structure the

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[12] Aksoy, interview.

[13] Asifa Siraj, ""I Don't Want to Taint the Name of Islam": The Influence of Religion on the Lives of Muslim Lesbians," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 16, no. 4 (2012), 460.

[14] Aksoy, interview.

material realities of his life in the host country. For instance, Demir maintains that he would feel ashamed to drink or smoke in front of other Turks during the month of Ramadan. Similarly, he still attends certain religious celebrations in the local mosque because of his wife and two children. Thus, his desire to maintain a sense of decency and respect towards his surroundings' sensibilities can be read as a series of reoccurring attempts to get by which happens through a constant process of navigating his desires, family, and faith.

The cases of Aziz and Yusuf similarly point to how sexuality and migration is navigated through a wish to get by. The process of individualisation started in their cases around the time they arrived to Germany. As both of them maintain, they never had any problem with their religion and sexual orientation. In Yusuf's view, Islam forbids anal intercourse between both men and women and not homosexuality. He highlighted the role of an Ankara-based LGBT+ organisation and the books they offered by theologians and academics on the topic of homosexuality in Islam and other religions as the main source of his knowledge. According Andrew Yip and Amna Khalid, the role of online and offline sources are crucial for developing an intellectual and theological capital for queer people of faith. [15] Relying on academic knowledge, Yusuf historicises and contextualises the prohibition of anal intercourse which he first heard about from an imam. As he argues, the main reason must be that Islam appeared in the warm climate of Mesopotamia. Given the lack of condom and medicine at the time, anal intercourse could have led to a number of diseases. Moreover, if a disease affects a newborn child, it becomes a sin. Even though he heard that love or sex between men is perverse according to the Qur'an, he maintains that given his lack of Arabic knowledge, he cannot be sure about the

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[15] Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip and Amna Khalid, "Looking for *Allah*: Spiritual Quests of Queer Muslims," in *Queer Spiritual Spaces – Sexuality and Sacred Places*, eds. K. Browne, S. R. Munt and A. K. T. Yip (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 109-10.

accuracy of this interpretation. In addition, both of them refer to the story of Lut. For instance, Aziz argues that the Qur'an does not have any Ayah (Qur'anic verse) that forbids homosexuality. He contests the mainstream interpretation of the story of Lut by arguing that it is not about homosexuality, but rather unethical behaviour such as stealing and lying. Similarly, Yusuf maintains that the people of Lut were punished for having sex with each other and with their children, and for raping young women. By putting forward and engaging with alternative interpretations, Yusuf and Aziz undertake what Yip calls the 'queering of religious texts'.[16] As Yip maintains, however, this does not imply the questioning of the content of the religious texts as such, but rather queer Muslims question the accuracy of traditional exegesis and foreground the importance of the socio-historical context of these texts.[17]

However, theological capital is not the only or main strategy to argue in favour of the compatibility of one's sexuality and religion. As Wim Peumans maintains, not all queer Muslims strive towards an intellectually informed coherence. These other individuals rely on embodied knowledge about the self, the body, the sacred and sexuality.[18] While both Yusuf and Aziz deployed theological capital, their more personal arguments were based on what Siraj calls an "essentialist understanding of their sexual orientation, by proclaiming they "were born gay" and were created "by the will of Allah"."[19] For example, Yusuf argues that Islam does not specify whom you should love and he cannot imagine that God would forbid any kind of love. Yusuf locates the question between him and God by saying: "What and how I believe is my problem. It does not interest others. It is between me and God."[20] He says that if God wants to forgive him,

[16] Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip, "Queering religious texts: An exploration of British nonheterosexual Christians' and Muslims' strategy of constructing sexuality-affirming hermeneutics," *Sociology* 39, no. 1 (2005), 51.
[17] Ibid., 53.
[18] Peumans, 221-2.
[19] Siraj, 460.
[20] Kocak, interview.

then God will forgive him. Furthermore, since homosexuality is not a choice, it cannot be his responsibility. "It comes from inside me, from my soul. And my soul belongs to God. And if God allows me this and it is not a choice, than it must be something else, not as it is interpreted."[21] Similarly, Aziz believes that if God wants him to be attracted to the opposite gender, God could have made him straight from the beginning. Aziz also naturalises his sexual orientation by stating that it was not his choice: "So if God didn't accept that, okay, maybe He doesn't accept the whoring activity, but He didn't accept my sexuality or gender, I don't think that. Because if He didn't want me to be like this; He could open other doors for me."[22] As he maintains, this position is repeatedly reconfirmed during his conversations with God. As Yip and Khalid maintain, "this kind of integration on the cognitive and personal level is crucial because it generates a sense of oneness not only within oneself, but also between the individual and Allah."[23]

The individualisation of religion for both of them was mainly prompted by settling in a new context with little to no kinship and societal ties. For Aziz, his life in Germany was in stark contrast with his previous life in Syria. For instance, he constantly highlighted that for him being a Muslim is about a person's behaviour, not necessarily the belief and misuse of Islamic knowledge. In this way, he differentiates himself from those Muslims in Syria who mobbed him because of his sexual orientation and used Qur'anic verses to judge him. As he retells, on one occasion, a number of men surrounded him and one of his friends and started insulting and hitting him. Aziz contrasts this behaviour with the Prophet's saying that Muslims should help the weak. Moreover, as he maintains, being in Germany makes it easier for him to connect with God

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[21] Kocak, interview.
[22] Fadel, interview.
[23] Yip and Khalid, 112.

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for two reasons. First, the people of Germany seem to embody similar ethics that he associates with Islam. According to him, this is in opposition to most Arabs and for this reason he avoids regular contact with other Arabs in Germany. Second, the lack of family pressure and the open environment led to the heightening of his faith in God. Going to the mosque and praying five times a day back in Syria was mainly associated with family pressure from his father. This has even deteriorated once his family suspected his sexual orientation, barred him from his friends, and forced him to regularly attend the mosque with his father as a way to "fix him."[24] Moving to Germany, however painful it is was thus perceived as God's gift which intensified their relationship. While Aziz stopped praying five times a day and going to the mosque in Germany, prayer became a form of dialogue with God. Moreover, finding the presence of God in his surrounding also became a new religious practice for him. For example, receiving more information about the world during his studies in Germany brought him closer to God. Yip and Khalid call this embodied rather than institutional spirituality where spirituality is embedded in everyday lives and interactions with others.[25]

In the case of Yusuf, individualisation was connected to the change of environment and the new structures and routines he had to accommodate himself to. For instance, he admitted that while he fasts with his family in Turkey, it is physically impossible in Germany due to his working and studying hours. However, he justifies his actions by stating that it is allowed in his religion to avoid fasting in case of serious physical work. Yusuf also stopped praying five times a day. Nevertheless, he still performed different types of prayers irregularly. For instance, he prays every day some of the short prayers his mother taught him after getting up or going to sleep. The prayer performed when taking shower, however, is subjected to practical conditions:

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[24] Fadel, interview.
[25] Yip and Khalid, 125.

as he admits, he does not pray while taking shower in public after going to the gym. In addition to the contextual differences, Yusuf maintains that being a Muslim in Germany is very different from what he learnt from his family. For instance, he dislikes the way Islam is practiced in Germany as he considers it too strict. It is this lack of a sense of belonging and the usually unattractive praying rooms which make him not to visit any mosque in his host country. Furthermore, he also dislikes the negative perception of mosque buildings in Germany. As he adds: It is only about politics (…) and I don't want to be part of this strange discussion."[26] Thus, Yusuf mainly visits Christian churches in Germany if he needs a spiritual place. Otherwise, he maintains that he does not need a particular community or building to pray: "If you think about the fact that the entire religion is for yourself, for your soul, then you can practice it wherever you are, you don't need any particular place for it."[27]

5.3. Reconceptualising the Islamic tradition

As the above narratives suggest, my interlocutors experienced a considerable transformation of their religious practices and beliefs in their host country. Thus, this chapter confirms Leven Tezcan's observation that individualisation became one of the most important aspects of Muslim practices in Germany.[28] As Frank Peter highlights, however, scholarly interest in the individualisation of Muslim beliefs led to two interrelated questions: are Muslims 'Europeanising' through individualisation and thus are the claims of Islamic groups and communities to be taken seriously?[29] Jocelyne Cesari, for example, states that individualisation in the French case is the effect of the dissolution of normative Islamic traditions which increases

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[26] Kocak, interview.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Levent Tezcan, "Das Islamische in den Studien zu Muslimen in Deutschland," *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 32, no. 3 (2003), 151.
[29] Frank Peter, "Individualization and Religious Authority in Western European Islam," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 17, no. 1 (2006) 105.

integration and links Muslims to Western modernity. [30] As Peter argues, however, individualisation should not be studied separately from 'institutionalised Islam' and the sociological realities of migrant subjects such as gender, class, or generational differences.[31] In line with Peter's suggestion, the narratives of my interlocutors also point to the importance of a variety of social and personal factors to understand of individualisation. Among others, one's relationship to sexuality featured as a key point which prompted a need for strategies to get by, be it theological or embodied knowledge. Similarly, settlement and socialisation in the host country have considerably influenced how my interlocutors as queer Muslim migrants managed to get by in Germany. For Aziz, moving to Germany represented a move away from family and societal ties and pressure which allowed him to reconceptualise his faith in a more individualistic manner. In contrast, Demir's case highlights individualisation as a strategy to maintain one's relationship with God while navigating societal and diaspora sensibilities. Finally, Yusuf's believes and practices have transformed given his discomfort among the local Muslim communities. Given the role of family and society in their definition of what it means to be a Muslim, these changes also point to the visibility and invisibility of the homeland in their imaginations.

Moreover, the process of individualisation in the case of my interlocutors was not associated with any kind of Europeanisation or integration. This stands in contrast with Ladan Rahbari and Chia Longman's observation who maintain that the personalisation of faith represents the integration of one's beliefs into European secular discourses after migration.[32] As

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[30] Jocelyne Cesari, "Muslim minorities in Europe: the silent revolution," in *Modernising Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in the Middle East and in Europe*, eds. J. Esposito and F. Burgat (London: Hurst, 2003), 259-60.

[31] Peter, 110.

[32] Ladan Rahbari and Chia Longman, "'Between me and God': a life story narrative of conciliating cultural discourses and personalized Islam," in *Women and Religion: Contemporary and Future Challenges in the Global Era*, eds. Elisabetta Ruspini, Glenda Tibe Bonifacio, and Consuela Corradi (Bristol: University Press, 2018), 176.

the narratives of Demir, Aziz, and Yusuf suggest, the personalisation or individualisation of faith and religious practices are rather motivated by a deeper sense of not-belonging and point to an agency of getting-by in which they navigate and cultivate queer Muslim selves in the process of transnational migration. Nevertheless, I agree with Rahbari and Longman's observation regarding belonging. As they maintain, the personalisation of faith requires taking a distance from traditional religious interpretations, however, it does not disrupt one's sense of belonging, but rather leads to a personalised understanding of the Islamic tradition.[33] While my interlocutors did not consider membership in the transnational *Ummah* of great importance, they still stayed within and renegotiated the boundaries of the Islamic tradition through their attempts to get by. By reconceptualising religious practices and relying on theological capital, my interlocutors did not reject the Islamic tradition or distance themselves from the *Ummah*, but rather inhabited them differently.

5.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I attended to the individualisation of religious beliefs and practices in the lives of three queer Muslim migrants. As highlighted in their life stories, all of my interlocutors experienced some form of transformation in their religious practices and beliefs. These changes happened at the intersection of migration, religion, and sexuality. Thus, the perception of the relationship between their sexuality and religion played a key role in the individualisation of religion. Moreover, as the last section demonstrated, the individualisation of religion in the lives of queer Muslim migrants through the process of transnational migration does not lead to the abandonment of the Islamic tradition or the integration into Western secular discourses. Rather,

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[33] Rahbari and Longman.

their active reliance on Islamic discourses in the process of getting-by point to the relevance of

the Islamic tradition in their self-cultivation.

Chapter 6

Compelling queer (Muslim) diasporic moments

I am sitting in the living room of Mohammed's flat waiting for my mint tea to get to room temperature. In the meantime, we start the interview and I ask my usual introductory questions. Mohammed is a 31-year-old PhD student from Egypt whom I met through a common friend. Most of the times, he easily navigates through my questions and cleverly points out what he perceives to be my epistemological standpoint. Questions around ethnicity and sexuality stand out in particular. For instance, when asked about his ethnicity, Mohammed jokingly adds that the question sounds as if it was from a dating application and he would rather answer with a question mark. It is only the German state or public that want to see him as an Arab, he does not perceive himself in any particular way, he contends. Similarly, when asked about his view on Islam and same-sex desire, Mohammed wittily answers in the following manner: "I don't know what to answer you, it's like you know ... I mean I don't feel like answering this question in any form that might be, where I might feel comfortable. For me this question is like, I'm exaggerating: what is the relationship between philosophy and tomatoes?"[1] After a long detour of academic discussion about various forms of intimacies in the Middle East, Mohammed replies to my last question by adding: "I think I articulated my discomfort enough in a way, like this dichotomous visions."[2] While the discomfort was oftentimes shared given the subversion of power dynamics throughout the interview, Mohammed's replies represented a particular reaction to the othering of Islam and people of Muslim backgrounds in the growing climate of German and Western homonationalism.

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[1] Mohammed Mahfouz, interview by the author, August 13, 2019.
[2] Ibid.

In the previous chapters, I have highlighted different ways in which queer people of Muslim backgrounds cultivate their selves and articulate their sense of belonging through the creation of a German Islam and the process of individualisation. As these chapters demonstrated, the re-articulation of the Islamic tradition happened in both cases due to the matrix of oppression experienced while navigating historically contingent understandings of Islam and sexuality. In this last chapter, I will attend to yet another way in which sexuality and Islam intersect in the context of diaspora and migration. In particular, this chapter asks what anti-Muslim racism and homonationalism do. Relying on extensive participant observation around the time of Berlin Pride, the chapter maps the potential contours of queer (Muslim) diasporic moments which emerge in the face of homonational state violence and produce a momentary sense of belonging. Contrary to the previous chapters, here I use "Muslim" to denote a cultural background and a marker which is applied from outside while acknowledging that not everyone might identify with the term. The first part of the chapter provides a brief overview of German homonationalism during the time of Berlin Pride. This is followed by an account of differing alternatives developed by queer people of colour. The last section provides some theoretical considerations regarding queer (Muslim) diasporic moments as alternative ways of belonging.

Taking the discomfort expressed by Mohammad as my starting point, the analysis of this chapter is shaped by the recent affective turn. My conceptualisation of affect here relies primarily on the scholarship of Sara Ahmed and the notion of affective nationalism coined by Elisabeth Militz and Carolin Schurr. In her work, Ahmed investigates what affects and emotions do and how they shape the 'surfaces' of individual and collective through contacts with others.[3] Thus she goes against the understanding of emotions as simple psychological dispositions and

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[3] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2004).

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underlines the political role and implication of affective encounters in the mediation of the relationship between subjects and communities. [4] While Ahmed's analysis relies mainly on written sources, Militz and Schurr combine Deleuzian and feminist approaches and foreground feminist ethnographic fieldwork and the production of vignettes in their attempt to reconstruct moments of affection. According to the authors, affective nationalism is the everyday affirmation of the nation through momentary encounters between different bodies and objects which have differing capacities to affect and be affected. Thus, the different affective practices that trigger corporeal enjoyments to the idea of a national uniqueness or not trigger and thus produce a sense of alienation are quintessential for the understanding of belonging.[5] It is along these lines that I am tracing the role of homonational state violence in the production of queer (Muslim) diasporic moments which emerge through affective encounters and create a momentary sense of belonging.

6.1. Shariah, hudood, whips and lashes

Upon my first preliminary fieldwork in Berlin in February 2019, I have decided to visit the Schwules Museum (Gay Museum). Located just a couple of minutes away from the centre of Berlin's gay neighbourhood around Nollendorfplatz, the Schwules Museum is Germany's and the world's first museum centring LGBT+ history and art. The theme of the main temporary exhibition featured the history of LGBT+ people and movement in Germany as a way to situate it within the global development of LGBT+ rights at the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots. Entering the main room of the museum, the first item that caught my and probably other visitors' attention was a large world map painted on the wall. After a closer look, the map displayed the

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[4] Sara Ahmed, "Communities that feel: Intensity, Difference and Attachment," in *Conference proceedings for affective encounters: rethinking embodiment in feminist media studies*, eds. Anu Koivunen and Susanna Paasonen (Turku, Finland: University of Turku, 2001), 10-11.
[5] Elisabeth Militz and Carolin Schurr, "Affective nationalism: Banalities of belonging in Azerbaijan," *Political Geography* 54 (2016).

rights of what the curators perceived to be LGBT+ people worldwide. The spatial arrangement of the map served a dual purpose: it solidified the progress of Germany and the West, and by doing so it relegated predominantly Muslim-majority countries to a state of lagging behind. The bottom left side of the map was reserved for the visitors' comments. It was a note left by someone called "communist.hijra" that most adequately reflected my own discomfort with the exhibition's ideologically charged neo-colonial message. The note reads: "Entering white spaces as a spectacle of oppression/liberation for the white gays/gaze and the 'saved' others requires being ambassadors of gay misery in the third world. When you don't sell brown pain in consumable terms – LGBT terms – you are invalid. You are difficult. You exist merely as a reminder of the worst. A red or green pin on a world map. A caricature sculpted from fears and anxieties – shariah, hudood, whips and lashes."

It is important to think through the arrangement of the exhibition to understand the discomfort and frustration expressed by both Mohammed and the communist.hijra. Sara Ahmed points to the role of representation of pain in the so-called Third World which produces the feeling of being a global subject through affects of likeness and unlikeness. In this sense, the global body is produced by the fixing of others.[6] Consequently, the arrangement of the exhibition does not only contribute to the negative depiction of so-called Muslim countries but, more importantly, it produces a feeling of belonging and community by fixing the non-western 'other' in an archaic time characterised by pain. This creates an "us" versus "them" binary by the co-option of the rights of sexual minorities and the concomitant depiction of Islam and Muslims (or racialised people perceived to be Muslims) as a homogeneous violent and homophobic group which has not yet reached 'western modernity'. In his article, Zülfukar Çetin traces these

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[6] Ahmed, "Communities that feel," 19.

homonationalist tendencies at the intersection of state, civil society and knowledge production in the German context.[7] In particular, Çetin connects German homonationalism and the emergence of a new definition of homophobia to famous white German gay activists and journalists such as Daniel Krause or Jan Feddersen who perceive Islam as a violent and homophobic religion which threatens the so-called western liberal civilisation.[8] As he maintains, this new definition renders homophobia a migration-specific issue described in culturalising, racialising, classing, and gendering terms. Thus, people with a migration background who are probably Muslim and come from an educationally and economically underprivileged background are perceived to be more homophobic than their German counterparts.[9] This discourse produces a spatial and temporal paradox. As Fatima El-Tayeb argues, racialised populations in Europe are depicted as being frozen in the moment of arrival and embodying seemingly incompatible temporalities and spaces which places them outside of a linear understanding of progress and thus contributes to their erasure.[10]

The case of the nationwide Christopher Street Day (CSD)[11] offers an illustrative example of the affective becoming of the nation through pride and the vilification and erasure of people of colour through anti-Muslim racism. As Çetin highlights, CSD celebrations have mainly been organised by white LGBT+ organisations which mostly left out people of colour from their platforms. Moreover, the main local news channels annually address homophobic incidents in

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[7] Zülfukar Çetin, "The Dynamics of Queer Politics and Gentrification in Berlin," in *The Queer Intersectional in Contemporary Germany: Essays on Racism, Capitalism and Sexual Politics*, ed. Christopher Sweetapple (Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2018).
[8] Ibid., 149-50.
[9] Ibid., 160.
[10] Fatima El-Tayeb, "Time Travellers and Queer Heterotopias: Narratives from the Muslim Underground," *The Germanic Review* 88 (2013), 308.
[11] Christopher Street Day (CSD) is the German equivalent for Gay Pride or Pride Parade used in Germany, Switzerland and to a lesser extent in Austria. Its name refers to the street where the Stonewall Riots took place in 1969.

the media during the week of CSD which usually describe the attackers as young men 'with a migration background'. These reports further contribute to the construction of a binary opposition rooted in anti-Muslim racism.[12] This racist undertone of the Christopher Street Day in Berlin is also due to the increasing commercialisation of CSD as opposed to the Stonewall riots' political and significantly anti-racist nature. While the name of CSD was renamed by the organisers to "Stonewall" in 2014, it still maintained its apolitical and exclusionary nature.[13] As Çetin argues, the invisibilisation politics of the Berlin CSD association is "thus characterised not only by the appropriation of histories of resistance of those affected by racist, trans-discriminatory, and class-specific power relations, but also by the erasure of these (resistance) histories in the contemporary commemorative culture that has established itself in former CSD parades."[14] However, while the proximity produced through moments of affective encounter between proud white bodies is mediated through the othering of Islam and Muslims, this similarly connects othered bodies through feelings of alienation. As El-Tayeb maintains, the embodiment of a temporal and spatial incompatibility which is mapped on the 'Muslim versus modernity' binary nevertheless enables the production of heterotopic spaces: "in the present but at odds with what is considered possible." These heterotopic spaces pinpoint the artificiality of the national space and time through the negotiation and production of alternative futurities.[15] It is these heterotopias that I turn to in the next section.

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[12] Çetin, 163-4.
[13] Ibid., 165.
[14] Ibid., 166.
[15] El-Tayeb, 316-9.

6.2. Heterotopic remembrance, joy, and protest

Leading up to the week of the Christopher Street Day, a number of events were organised by initiatives and organisations of migrant and queer people of colour. This section provides a brief account of some of the events I attended during my ethnographic fieldwork and foregrounds notions of remembrance, joy, and protest which all contribute to the emergence of queer (Muslim) diasporic moments through affective encounters of othered bodies in heterotopic spaces.

Two days prior to the Christopher Street Day on the 25th of July, a recently founded migrant queer-feminist collective called Dümtek organised a film screening event[16] at the NGO 'bi'bak' which is a project space focusing on transnational narratives, migration, global mobility and their aesthetic dimensions.[17] The film, "Lola und Bilidikid" is considered a cult film among queer migrants as it focuses on the lives of queer Turkish migrants in West Berlin.[18] The screening was followed by a small Q&A session with İpek İpekçioğlu about the emergence and development of queer migrant and people of colour community organising in Berlin. The screening and following discussion can viewed as a tool to maintain and preserve minority narratives and histories in the face of erasure from the capital's white-washed LGBT+ history. However, as Militz and Schurr remind us in the case of affective nationalism in Azerbaijan, the way in which for instance national heritage sites are identified and represented through encounters between places, memories and bodies might incite feelings of belonging.[19] Similarly,

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[16] "Pride Screening: Lola und Bilidikid | Q&A with İpek İpekçioğlu," 2019, https://www.facebook.com/events/2424845440869167/?ti=cl (accessed 6 June, 2020).

[17] See: "About Us," bi'bak, https://bi-bak.de/about-us (accessed June 6, 2020).

[18] For a brief overview, see: Peter Bradshaw, "Lola und Bilidikid," The Guardian (March 10, 2000), https://www.theguardian.com/film/2000/mar/10/culture.reviews#maincontent (accessed 6 June, 2020).

[19] Militz and Schurr, 56.

I would argue that the uncovering of minority narratives and histories by Dümtek in a district like Wedding does not solely contribute to the preservation of these memories but by doing so, it facilitates the encounter and stimulation of different bodies which produce a sense of belonging through communal remembering.

In addition to remembrance, the events organised by the Dümtek collective also highlighted one significant element of queer heterotopias, namely joy. On the 26th of July, one day following the film screening, Dümtek organised yet another event entitled "Queer Gazino: An Alternative Pride Celebration." The event was held in the garden of a Turkish restaurant surrounded by different factories in Neukölln. The arrangement of the venue reflected its name as it was meant to resemble Turkish gazinos which were also important avenues for trans and gay performers. The organisers of Queer Gazino considered the event to be "an alternative celebration of pride for those who do not align with what CSD represents today and who are in dire need of alternatives to the official pride which fails to address how the realities of queer people intersect with other axes of oppression."[20] The event featured solely queer and trans artists of colour who used music and different types of performances to "resist the oppression and commercialisation of queer culture."[21] Similarly to the film screening, the safe space provided by the organisers contributed to the facilitation of encounters between bodies and their potentials to affect and be affected. It was the encounters of bodies, objects and smells through the arrangement of the smell and taste of Turkish food, the melodies of Turkish music, the performance of belly dancers and the lively dance of people which created a sense of belonging, an affective bond which was rooted in the joy of likeness and inclusion in the face of alienation.

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[20] "Queer Gazino: An Alternative Pride Celebration," 2019, https://www.facebook.com/events/519211261951238/?ti=cl (accessed June 6, 2020).
[21] Ibid.

It is the last example, however, which illustrates most adequately the affective potential of joy, anger and fear for the creation of queer (Muslim) diasporic moments. The CSD march in Berlin took place on the 27th of July in the city's economically important central districts of Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf and Mitte. For some years now, there is another alternative pride march organised, the so-called 'radical queer march' which has been created as a response to the apolitical and commercialised nature of CSD Berlin. While at first I was eager to participate in the radical queer march, twelve days prior to it, the event took a rather unsettling turn following the organisers' statement on the event's Facebook page that antisemitic expressions would not be tolerated during the march. A long conversation unfolded quickly after one user's request for clarification. As it turned out, queer people supporting the Palestinian call for Boycott, Divest and Sanction and opposing Israeli pink-washing were not welcome at the march. The statement was followed by a virtual debate between BDS supporters, many of them Arab or Israeli, and mainly white Germans describing BDS as antisemitic[22] and racist.[23] This political statement points to the organisers' affiliation with the anti-German movement (Antideutsch) which also became obvious during the march. The anti-Germans are a heterogeneous group of people who belong to the radical left and oppose any form of German nationalism or national identity due to its inherent connection to antisemitism. Thus, they vehemently support the state of Israel which is perceived to be under the threat of anti-Zionist Islamism and oftentimes call anti-Zionist

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[22] I use "antisemitism" instead of "anti-Semitism" as the latter leads to the othering of Western Jews and reinforces implicit antisemitic conspiracies that there is a unified and homogeneous Jewish people and ideology. See for instance, Armin Langer, "Anti-Semitism or antisemitism? And why the Hyphen Matters" *Evolve*, 2019 http://evolve.reconstructingjudaism.org/antisemitism-hyphen (accessed June 7, 2020).

[23] For more information, see: "Hundreds fight repression, show solidarity with Palestine at Berlin Radical Queer March," *Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network*, July 28, 2019, https://samidoun.net/2019/07/hundreds-fight-repression-show-solidarity-with-palestine-at-berlin-radical-queer-march/?fbclid=IwAR3sE8n4u4Wt3ZGhrHo0ZNeSx2GjDkKTr12ddAI__4qQMcvEZm2mYsR-_nk (accessed June 7, 2020).

Israelis antisemitic.[24] Ironically, as Leandros Fischer highlights, the support of Israel from the German left imitates the wider social structure of the country as it represents the post-unification need for a national identity and contributes to the enhancement of the existing Islamophobic environment by the creation of a Judeo-Christian discourse and the aggrandisement and over-visibilisation of 'Muslim antisemitism'.[25]

Despite the heated online debate, an ad hoc group of people, among them members of the group Berlin Against Pinkwashing, managed to organise a so-called 'Queers for Palestine soli block' as part of 'the radical queer march' which encouraged the participation of queer people dedicated to anti-racism and anti-colonialism against "the shameful attempt at appropriating anti-racism for furthering racist and colonial politics."[26] The march was organised in the ethnically diverse district of Kreuzberg which has faced a significant gentrification in the past decade. While waiting for the event to start, the Palestine soli block grew bigger and bigger, making up a considerable part of the overall participants of the march. The march starts, however, within less than half an hour, a group of fully armed police surrounded the soli block on the request of the organisers to separate the two groups. This came after a number of violent verbal and physical attacks on the participants of the soli block from the 'radical queer marchers'. The actions taken by the organisers stood in stark contrast with their goals presented on the event's Facebook page which criticised police violence against queer people and queer refugees and "the hetero-cis-normative and racist systems that primarily integrates (sic) queer subjects into its own privilege

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[24] For a detailed overview of the movement, see: Mohamed Amjahid, "Antideutsche: Ga Ga Land," *Zeit Magazin* (March 16, 2017), https://www.zeit.de/zeit-magazin/2017/12/antideutsche-israel-linke-deutschland/seite-1 (accessed June 7, 2020).
[25] Leandros Fischer, "The German Left's Palestine Problem," *Jacobin Magazine* (March 12, 2014), https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/12/the-germans-lefts-palestine-problem/ (accessed June 7, 2020).
[26] "Queers for Palestine soli block at Radical Queer March Berlin 2019" 2019, https://www.facebook.com/events/391799308115460/ (June 7, 2020).

structures when they are as white as possible, cis and bourgeois."[27] While the march continued

after some discussion among the organisers of the 'radical queer march' and the soli block, the

fear of racism, police violence and deportation was tangible in the crowd which consisted of

mainly queer migrants and refugees of colour. The organisers of the soli block highlighted in a

later online statement the absurdity of the steps taken by the organisers which posed considerable

stress and risk on the participants.[28] Consider for instance the following excerpt from a comment

left by a participant: "For us, principally illegalized, refugees and migrants, when they are calling

the police to take us out from the march, (sic) are doing so not just to take us apart from it, but

from Europe. (…) These people know very well what the police means for us and in which

danger we are when even after our delicate situation in germany we decide to attend such an

event thinking we would be safe to manifestate (sic) ourselves being in between the crowd, a

crowd which is claimed to be queer and radical. when the polices started walking around us,

being a centimeter far away from my friends and me... I was shaking inside."[29]

The affective language of the soli block participant eloquently highlights how whiteness

is implicated in the structuring of spaces which acquire their shapes through the bodies that

inhabit them. As Sara Ahmed argues, it is the lagging behind of white bodies which extends

them and makes them go unnoticed and unstressed in their encounters with objects.[30] As she

maintains, "spaces are orientated 'around' whiteness, insofar as whiteness is not seen. We do not

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[27] "Radical Queer March Berlin 2019," 2019, https://www.facebook.com/events/2356989967878298/ (accessed June 7, 2020).

[28] Palästina Spricht Palestine Speaks "Official statement from the organizers of the 'Queers for Palestine' solidarity block at the 2019 Berlin Radical Queer March: "Our Lives, Our Streets! Palestine Solidarity in the Radical Queer March Berlin 2019," 2019 https://www.facebook.com/841053319611755/photos/pcb.872368763146877/872364643147289/?type=3&theater (accessed June 8, 2020).

[29] "Queers for Palestine soli block at Radical Queer March Berlin 2019 (Discussion)" 2019, https://www.facebook.com/events/391799308115460/?active_tab=discussion (June 8, 2020).

[30] Sara Ahmed, "A phenomenology of whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007), 156.

face whiteness; it 'trails behind' bodies, as what is assumed to be given. The effect of this 'around whiteness' is the institutionalization of a certain 'likeness', which makes non-white bodies feel uncomfortable, exposed, visible, different, when they take up this space."[31] However, the discomfort emanating from the inability to 'sink in' also offers a different viewpoint, one which disorients how things are arranged and can lead to pleasure and excitement.[32] Consider the affective potential of the chanting of slogans such as 'Queer liberation – end the occupation!', the sound of drums and the energy of a crowd of like-minded people moving together along the same route. It is another quote from a participant's account which describes how a sense of alienation defined by the structuring of spaces by whiteness is necessary for the stimulation of a sense of belonging rooted in emotions of likeness. The quote reads: "I walked around the entire march, to the expected predominance of Whiteness and in contrast of the Queers for Palestine block that was a beautiful and heart-warming mix of queers and our allies. Queers that were White, Black, Brown, PoC, Latinxs, migrants, refugees, Palestinians, Israelis, Jewish, Turkish, US citizens, Iranians, Indigenous, undocumented, sex-workers, anarchists, antiFa and the list goes on. Many people showed up (sic) the Queers for Palestine block as a response to the way White Germans have been attacking the block for days."[33]

6.3. Discussion: queer (Muslim) diasporic moments?

How can we think about the above comments left by the participants? And how do they relate to the discomfort of Mohammed or the note left by the communist.hijra? I started this

[31] Ahmed, "A phenomenology of whiteness," 157.
[32] Ibid., 163.
[33] Palästina Spricht Palestine Speaks "Official statement from the organizers of the 'Queers for Palestine' solidarity block at the 2019 Berlin Radical Queer March: "Our Lives, Our Streets! Palestine Solidarity in the Radical Queer March Berlin 2019," 2019, https://www.facebook.com/841053319611755/photos/pcb.872368763146877/872364643147289/?type=3&theater (accessed June 8, 2020).

chapter as an attempt to trace the production and emergence of queer (Muslims) diasporic moments which create a momentary sense of belonging. In the first section, I highlighted the affective function of German homonationalism which is circulated by the othering of Muslims and people who are perceived as such through the depiction of Islam as an evil and homophobic religion which hinders the assimilation of migrants and their ability to reach 'German modernity'. I used the example of CSD Berlin to illustrate how this process of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism contributes to the production of a sense of belonging through the affective encounters of proud white German bodies which simultaneously creates a sense of alienation in bodies rendered other. As Moghissi, Rahnema and Goodman argue, the notion of Muslim diaspora is closely linked to the collective awareness of marginalisation and discrimination in the host societies. It is the existing asymmetries of power relations rooted in Islamophobia and racism and their ability to dislocate bodies which leads to the unification of bodies under the term 'Muslim' based on a need for solidarity. [34] It is this sense of solidarity that emerges in the face of alienation and discomfort which leads to the production of queer (Muslim) diasporic moments through the affective encounters of bodies in the heterotopic spaces that I presented in the previous section.

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[34] Haideh Moghissi, Saeed Rahnema, and Mark J. Goodman, *Diaspora by Design: Muslims in Canada and Beyond* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 6-14.

Conclusion

This thesis has addressed the multi-faceted ways in which queer people of Muslim backgrounds react to the matrix of oppression existing in Berlin, Germany. In my analysis, I demonstrated that queer people of Muslim backgrounds cultivate their selves through the articulation of their sense of belonging as they navigate historically contingent understandings of Islam and sexuality in the context of migration and diaspora. Instead of identifying trends and focusing on identity categories, my thesis offered different lenses through which belonging can be understood in the lives of queer people of Muslim backgrounds. In chapter four, I highlighted how certain people in diaspora try to articulate their sense of belonging to the nation in a context of increased Islamophobia by actively rendering Islam modern according to German secular liberal sensibilities. Chapter five attended to the process of individualisation in the lives of queer Muslim migrants which is informed by a strategy of getting-by in the host country and constitutes an alternative way of belonging to the Islamic tradition. In the last chapter, I traced the emergence of queer (Muslim) diasporic moments which are produced in the face of homonational state violence and create a momentary sense of belonging.

The various modes of belonging traced in my analysis and the potential tensions between them raise the question whether or not we can apply the term 'queer Muslim' to investigate and describe such a heterogeneous group of people from differing ethnic, national, and cultural backgrounds. The methodological and ethical dilemmas of this question have accompanied me throughout the fieldwork and thesis writing process. In my analysis, I did not attempt to offer one particular solution to this question, but rather I decided to embrace its complexities and think through the concomitant difficulties by redirecting scholarly attention to the historically

contingent categories of Islam and sexuality which are navigated in the process of movement and dwelling. As my thesis suggested, the different modes of belonging developed by queer people of Muslim backgrounds in Berlin should be understood as particular ways of reacting to the oppositional construction of Islam and same-sex desire and the material realities experienced as queer people of Muslim backgrounds within the German secular liberal regime. It is the fact of being positioned at the intersection of these realities that render the term 'queer Muslim' applicable and allow me to talk about processes of subject formation. In this way, I hope that my thesis and framework contribute to future research on the intricacies of embodying queer Muslim subjectivities in the context of Western Europe.

Appendix 1: Informed Consent Form (English version)

Arnold Kovács, MA student

Department of Gender Studies, Central European University

Research into Lived Religion among Queer Muslims in Berlin

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This is to state that I, _____, agree to participate in the research being conducted by Arnold Kovács from the Department of Gender Studies at the Central European University, Budapest. The extent of my involvement in this project will be to participate in one or more interviews with Arnold Kovács in which I will be asked to speak about my own life and experiences. My participation in this project is voluntary, and I may refuse to participate, withdraw at any time, and/or decline to answer any questions without negative consequences.

Please take as much time as you need to read the information sheet. You may also decide to discuss it with your family or friends. You will be given a copy of this form.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to learn more about the lived experience of people of Muslim backgrounds who identify as LGB, queer, or experience same-sex attraction. The research will focus mainly on identity formation within conflicting social realities and moralities, individual forms of religious and spiritual practices and meaning-making, and community building within

the context of secularism. Overall, the research attempts to indicate how LGB people of faith can navigate and negotiate their religious and sexual subjectivities.

Procedures

This component of the research consists of a series of interviews conducted between the researcher, Arnold Kovács, and the interviewee. The interview will take approximately one hour and the location will be determined according to your preference. It may be conducted in your home, nearby coffee shop, or other locations you prefer. The discussion will be audio taped to help the researcher accurately capture your insights in your own words. The tapes will only be heard by the researcher for the purpose of this study. If you feel uncomfortable with the recorder, you may ask that it be turned off at any time. There may be additional follow-up/clarification through email, unless otherwise requested by you.

Potential risks and benefits

There are no anticipated risks to your participation. When you feel some discomfort at responding some questions, please feel free to ask to skip the question. Moreover, you can withdraw from the interview at any time without prejudice. During the interview you may request to stop the recording at any time to discuss or clarify how you wish to respond to a question or topic before proceeding. In the event that you choose to withdraw during the interview, any tape made of the interview will be destroyed, and no transcript will be made of the interview. You will not benefit directly from your participation in this research study and will not receive any payment. The overall goal is to reveal the experiences of people of Muslim backgrounds who identify as LGB, queer, or experience same-sex attraction.

Confidentiality

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. The information collected about you will be coded using a pseudonym. The data will be stored in an encrypted file in a protected computer.

Your consent will be asked before the audio recording will be started. You may decline to be taped. The researcher will transcribe the tapes and may provide you with a copy of the transcripts upon request. You have the right to review and edit the tapes. Sentences that you ask the researcher to leave out will not be used and they will be erased from all relevant documents.

When the result of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. The material may be used in future publications and research projects.

Participation and withdrawal

You can choose whether to be part of this research or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you are reluctant to answer and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

Alternatives to participation

You may choose to answer the questions via e-mail or Skype, and keep a solicited diary.

By signing below I acknowledge that I have carefully read and understood the above information. I freely consent and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Interviewee Name_____

Interviewee Signature_____

Date_____

Interviewee's Address_____

City, State/Province, Country_____

Interviewer Signature_____

Should you have any questions about this project or your rights as a participant, please contact Arnold Kovács (arnoldkov.95@gmail.com) or his academic supervisor, Dr. Nadia Jones-Gailani (JonesN@ceu.edu).

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