Nadia Fadil

"We Should Be Walking Qurans": The Making of an Islamic Political Subject

Introduction

Recent events and developments such as the attacks in New York and Madrid, the murder of Theo Van Gogh in the Netherlands, the Islamic terrorist threat, and the emergence of Islam in the Western European public sphere have led to an increased interest in Islam in the Western world, which is seeking explanations for what is going on. While many have turned to polarizing, Huntingtonian visions in which Islam and Muslims are framed as the new enemy, others, in the hope of avoiding such polarization, have hoped to find "new" Islamic leaders who are able to offer "new" discourses and approaches to Islam and citizenship. Questions of representation and leadership are important not only for a broader Western European public; they are crucial for Muslims themselves.

In this chapter I focus on a group of young Muslim professionals who are actively engaged in issues of representation and citizenship. Three years ago, some younger members of the Union of Mosque and Islamic Organisations of Antwerp (UMIVA) decided to organize a conference in response to the negative representation of Islam in the aftermath of 9/11. Faced with an increasing level of Islamophobia and stereotypical representations of Islam, they came up with the idea of organizing "Treasures of Islam," a conference on the scientific contributions of medieval Islam. In the process of preparation for the conference, new members—both men and women—were attracted, resulting in the establishment of a stable group of young professionals within the existing umbrella organization.

This chapter focuses on how some of the members frame their political and religious involvement in this working group. The working group is characterized by its explicit references to Islam, which plays a prominent role in both a normative framework and a framework for defining identity. I attempt to describe and analyze how the engagement of the members of the working group is an expression of the creation and performance of an Islamic political subject. By questioning the existing and dominant representations of Muslims on the one hand, and by articulating an alternative, politicized discourse on the self on the other, the members of the working group process and construct a particular vision of their identity. Identity politics refers to collective actions that aim not only at accessing equal rights but also at

questioning and refusing imposed or prescribed identities (Calhoun 1994, 21). After briefly situating and presenting the working group, I discuss how the challenging of dominant essentialist discourses on Muslims involves the articulation of and reliance on alternative, but equally essentialist, accounts. In the third section I focus in more detail on the group's discourse of active citizenship and how it relates to dominant accounts of this issue.

The UMIVA Working Group

In 1974 Islam was recognized as the third official religion in Belgium. This year also ushered in both the end of the large-scale Belgian labor immigration policy, which attracted workers from North Africa, Turkey, and the southern Mediterranean, and the worldwide oil crisis. It is estimated that around 400,000 Muslims now live in Belgium, and that this group is mainly composed of Moroccan and Turkish nationals (Landman 2002, 100). Initially, most Muslim immigrants were located in the coal-mining regions of Le Borinage, Liege, and Limburg. Bigger cities like Brussels and Antwerp also attracted a large number of Muslims in the early 1970s, when alternative industries such as metallurgy and car assembly were developed in these regions. The working group upon which this chapter focuses is situated in the city of Antwerp, the second-largest city of Belgium, with 457,739 inhabitants.[1]

Institutional and Political Setting

The city of Antwerp has a history of migration and international contacts due to its international port and diamond trade (Bousetta 2001, 144). Moroccans make up the highest share of non-nationals among the overall average of 13.3 % for non-nationals (4.6 % for Moroccans; 1.5 % for Turks). Due to the increasing number of naturalizations, however, it is difficult to estimate the number of Moroccan Muslims actually residing in the city (Peleman 2002, 115).[2] Antwerp is home to a variety of contradictory political and sociological trends, making the city an interesting setting for observing multicultural developments.

One striking characteristic of the city is the presence of an extreme right-wing political party, previously called Vlaams Blok and recently renamed Vlaams Belang. With its 33 % of the votes in the last municipal elections

1 DIA-Antwerp, November 2004, http://www.antwerpen.be/feitenencijfers/diversiteit//.

2 Estimates vary between 20 % and 25 %. According to the city of Antwerp, "new Belgians" (naturalized Belgians) and non-nationals represented 22.1 % of the city's population in 2005 (http://www.antwerpen.be/feitenencijfers/demografie/diversiteit.htm).

(2000), it is the largest party in Antwerp.[3] After its major electoral breakthrough in 1994, a *cordon sanitaire* was formed around Vlaams Blok, obliging all other elected political parties to form a "monster coalition" and thereby obtain the majority of seats needed to govern.[4] Although kept out of the local administration, Vlaams Belang clearly has a great impact on this political constellation. To begin with, the composition of divergent political parties in city government hampers smooth operation of the coalition, resulting in regular crises between the coalition partners, which Vlaams Belang, as the only opposition party, eagerly exploits. In addition, the strong presence of Vlaams Belang since its political breakthrough in the late 1980s has influenced the political positions and measures proposed and taken up by established parties and institutions. Hassan Bousetta has pointed, for instance, to the difficulties of building new mosques and the propositions of the Antwerp mayor in 1990 to create immigrant-exclusive neighborhoods (2001: 154). More recently, knowledge of Dutch has become a criterion in the allocation of social housing in Antwerp.[5]

As mentioned, the presence of a strong extreme-right party goes hand in hand with the broad spectrum of ethnic and economic diversity in the city, which has a major port and is one of the leading capitals in the global diamond trade. Among the city's diverse mix of ethnic and cultural minorities, the presence of a strong and visible Chassidic Jewish community is particularly noteworthy.

As noted, there is also a sizable Islamic community, with Moroccans representing the largest ethnic minority from outside the European Union. This group is characterized by a weak socioeconomic position and a strong concentration in neighborhoods like Borgerhout, where 25 % to 30 % of Moroccan nationals live (Peleman 2002, 120).[6] This concentration coincides with a high level of unemployment, low levels of education, and poor housing. The highest Flemish unemployment rate is in the city of Antwerp, with 32 % of the unemployed 18- to 29-year-olds of Moroccan origin.[7] A majority of pupils of Moroccan origin do not finish their secondary schooling, and

3 The last regional elections of June 13, 2004, only confirmed its leading position, with 34 % of the votes in the city of Antwerp.

4 This coalition included the SP, VLD, Agalev, CVP, and VU. Only the small party Waardig Oud Worden (WOW), with its one seat on the council, was not included (Bousetta 2001, 153).

5 The newspaper *De Standaard* reported on December 30, 2004, on agreements made between several social-housing companies to refuse social housing to people who do not speak Dutch.

6 Borgerhout is often cynically called "Borgerokko," in reference to the considerable Moroccan community in this neighborhood.

7 Data from the following Web site (in Dutch): http://www.wvc.vlaanderen.be/minderheden/minderhedenbeleid/icem/publicaties/jaarrapport1998/04werk~1.htm#P7_8.

persons of Moroccan origin are only marginally present in higher education.[8] Moreover, only 1.6 % of the Moroccans in Belgium live in houses of good quality (Bousetta 2001, 102).

Snapshots of Moroccan Civil Society

These weak social conditions are combined with relatively active and diverse social and political activities. Four types of organizations within Moroccan civil society in Antwerp can be differentiated.[9] The first is small-scale and locally based ethnic organizations, often established for concrete needs and purposes: Arabic/Dutch language courses, homework tutoring, sewing lessons, and so forth. These organizations are often gender-segregated and are mainly composed of first-generation Moroccans (with the exception of homework tutoring). They have no explicit "political agenda,"[10] and tend to be integrated in the neighborhood.11

A second type consists of Islamic organizations whose clear aim is *da'wa*, the religious duty of each Muslim to spread the message of Islam.[12] They tend to organize Arabic language courses, lessons in Islamic history or *fiqh*, and

8 Data from research carried out at the University of Brussels and the University of Antwerp. Further information is available at the following Web site (in Dutch): http://www.studentfocus.be/UA%20onderzoek%202004.pdf.

9 These descriptions are based on observations from my fieldwork for a doctoral research project with the working title Secularisation and Individualisation Processes in the Religiosity of Organised and Non-Organised Moroccan Muslims in Antwerp and Brussels (2002–2006). This rough typology does not include mosques, but instead is oriented to organizations whose primary function is not the organization of Islamic rituals such as prayer. Furthermore, this typology focuses only on what Bousetta calls "ethnic organisations," that is, organizations established and run mainly by and for members of the Moroccan community (2001, 352). Other ethnic groups or "mixed organizations" are not included.

10 I use the term "political agenda" to refer to organizations that, among other things, act as pressure groups through their interactions and/or their interventions in the public sphere and that negotiate with political officials. I am aware of the restrictiveness of this definition and concept of what is political (see Mahmood 2005).

11 Examples of the first type in the neighborhood of Borgerhout are Nibras (Islamic organizations for religious and leisure activities, primarily for women and children), El Moustaqbal (a first-generation women's organization offering sporting activities, Dutch classes, and the like), Safina (a first-generation, mainly men's organization, arranging Arabic courses for children and lectures and debates on different social topics), and Al Kitaab (a homework tutoring organization, mainly run by highly educated second-generation Moroccan Muslims).

12 This is not to say that the first type of organization is not Islamic. The difference lies in their explicit purpose of spreading knowledge about Islam and orienting all their activities to this purpose.

lectures on various religious themes. They reach a large number of people—mainly young persons and sometimes people from outside Antwerp—and are not involved in the political scene.[13]

Third, there are the federations and umbrella organizations with a clear political agenda embedded in an institutional logic.[14] Established in reaction to the paternalistic approach of Belgian integration policies and the political interference of Moroccan authorities, these organizations seek more autonomy in community affairs. They not only act as unofficial representatives of the community in dealing with city officials, but also are called upon during times of conflict (Bousetta 2001). In the Ramadan period of November 2002, when riots broke out after the racist murder of a locally well-known Islamic teacher by his Flemish neighbor, the different federations and umbrella organizations were called together to act as intermediaries with the city officials and to prepare the teacher's funeral.

The last type of organization is an outsider in the Belgian political scene because of its outspoken political positions and radical discourse on multiculturalism: the Arab European League (AEL). Its noninstitutional logic and grassroots approach also differentiate it from the other organization types: through its emphasis on popular mobilization and its strategy of pursuing its own network of organizations (e.g., in media, scouting, and schooling) within the pillared structure of Belgian society, the AEL challenges the established institutions as well as the strategies of other Moroccan ethnic organizations.[15] The visibility of the organization reached a national level with the organization of civil patrols to check and document the alleged racist behavior of the Antwerp police force, as well as with its political positions on Belgian integration policy. It gained international attention in November 2002, when the leader of the movement, Dyab Abou Jahjah, was held responsible and imprisoned for the outburst of riots following the murder of the Islamic teacher, only to be released soon afterwards because the case against him was weak.[16] After a tumultuous year characterized by extensive media coverage,

13 The most prominent example of this type for Antwerp is the Islamic organization Jongeren Voor Islam (Youth for Islam).

14 Three umbrella organizations representing mainly Moroccan ethnic organizations are based in the city of Antwerp: Federatie van Marokkaanse Vereniging, Vereniging voor Ontwikkeling en Emancipatie van de Moslims, and Unie van de Moskeeën en Islamitische Verenigingen van Antwerpen (UMIVA).

15 Here I am borrowing from McAdam's definition of social movements, which limits it to "those organized efforts, on the part of the excluded groups, to promote or resist changes in the structure of society that involve resource to noninstitutional forms of political participation" (1999, 25).

16 Abou Jahjah's imprisonment was highly contested not only because the evidence against him was weak, but also because of a suspicious entanglement of political and judiciary powers: Abou Jahjah's arrest was preceded by a heated parliamentary debate in which the minister of the interior and the prime minister insisted on the need to immediately stop the activities of the AEL.

offensive political attacks on the movement, and poor election results,[17] the AEL was weakened and marginalized in the public arena (see Abou Jahjah 2003; Jacobs 2003; Fadil 2003; De Witte 2004).

I stress the importance of this movement because of the impact that its discourse, activities, and actions in November 2002 had on the local Antwerp setting and on ethnic associations. The rise of the AEL and the climactic events in the fall of 2002 led to a number of proposals, formulated by local and regional officials, on the different social problems that the Moroccan community was facing. Some political parties even spoke of a "Marshall Plan" for Borgerhout.[18] Moreover, the presence of the AEL had a direct and indirect impact on other ethnic organizations and the larger Moroccan community. Organizations and Muslims were asked to take a position on (and preferably against) the AEL. The organization's rise led to a stronger political and social consciousness among the Moroccan community, which was evident both in the increasing number of public debates on socioeconomic issues related to the community and in the support and creation of new organizations.[19]

The UMIVA Working Group: Description and Presentation

Established in 1995, UMIVA brings together mainly Arab-language mosques and strives for an active partnership with local and regional officials by acting as a representative and mediator for the Moroccan Islamic community.[20] The members work on themes ranging from issues related to Islamic worship to youth issues and social problems. UMIVA also joins other regional mosque

17 The AEL ran in two elections: in the federal elections of May 2003 under the open list "RESIST!", which was an alliance primarily between the AEL and the far-left party Partij Van De Arbeid, and in the regional elections of June 2004, for which it established the Muslim Democratic Party. The results of both elections were weak, with 2.32 % in 2003 and only 0.62 % in 2004 for the city of Antwerp.

18 G. Timmerman "Agalev wil een Marshallplan voor Borgerhout," *De Morgen*, December 2, 2002.

19 The presence and positions of the AEL also influenced the activities of the UMIVA working group. An example is the intervention of UMIVA members in the Carim Bouziane affair, a politician of the Green Party. Bouziane announced in September 2003, in a documentary on homosexuality in the Islamic community, his intention to distribute posters depicting covered Muslim girls kissing each other; he planned to distribute these posters in neighborhoods where many Muslims live. After the AEL's sharp reaction and condemnation, which led to a small public riot, the group of young UMIVA professionals contacted Bouziane in order to convince him to abandon the plan. In the end, however, it was internal problems in the Green Party which prevented the plan from going through.

20 The union brings together thirty-five mosques; most of these are Moroccan, with the exception of a Chechnyan, a Bosnian, an Afghan, and a Roma mosque.

unions in a larger structure that interacts with Flemish and federal officials.[21] The working group presented in this chapter acts within this larger structure, but has a quasi-autonomous status. Meetings take place in UMIVA's meeting room and are often attended by the union's secretary. There is, however, no explicit interference of the UMIVA board in the activities and decision-making of the working group.

Most male members were already active within UMIVA before the working group came into being. Informally called "the group of young people" (*groupes de jeunes* in French, or *jongerengroep* in Dutch), the working group began in 2003 as an organizational committee for the conference Treasures of Islam. Female members and new external members were attracted to support preparations for the conference. What started as an ad hoc working group soon became a stable group of professional volunteers meeting on a regular basis, discussing societal developments, and organizing activities and projects. The group is composed mainly of higher educated people and includes both sexes. Whereas the women are all second-generation Moroccans born in Belgium, the male members comprise second-generation Moroccans as well as recently arrived first-generation Moroccans and one converted Muslim. There is no official structure within the group, which does not mean that there are no key figures.

The material presented in this chapter was gathered during the months of October, November, and December of 2003. At that time, the group had existed for almost a year and was busy preparing a large Islamic fair and making public interventions on different social and political matters. The ethnographic material includes notes taken during three group meetings (on October 16, 2003; October 19, 2003; and December 14, 2003), one group interview (on November 13, 2003), and individual interviews with five members of the group.[22] The following description of the group is based mainly on the accounts of Fouad, Amina, and Nora. Fouad could be described as the "informal" president of the working group. Ever since his migration from Morocco to France, and later to Belgium, in order to pursue his studies, Fouad has been involved in different Islamic organizations. He was one of the main sources of inspiration for the organization of the conference as well as for the enlargement of the working group to include female members and external members. The second member presented is Amina; born in Belgium, she holds a university degree and is currently working as a civil servant. Her professional and educational career was always accompanied with civic engagement, first in student affairs and later in women's issues. For several years she headed a Muslim women's organization aimed at deconstructing the media's stereotypical representation of Muslim women and at promoting

21 Umivel (for the province of Limburg) and Umivow (for the province of Eastern and Western Flanders).

22 Although the "strict" gathering of information took place in October, November, and December of 2003, some relevant events that occurred after this period also will be discussed.

equal rights within an Islamic framework. Two other members mentioned are Nora, an Islam teacher, and Ahmed, an engineer; both are second-generation Moroccans.

My interviews with the working-group members attempted to trace the motivations and reasons for their engagement. The Treasures of Islam conference and the plan to organize an Islamic fair reflect the two main lines of their engagement: to work against negative and stereotypical representations of Muslims and to empower Muslims who too often find themselves in weak socioeconomic conditions and without a strong sense of identity. The common thread for all members of the working group is an active reference to an Islamic framework. In what follows, I shall show how this active use of and reference to Islam is a means to resist and challenge existing stereotypes about Muslims and Islam, and how their active discourse on Islamic identity constructs and reflects a certain vision of the Islamic subject and its relation to the political sphere.

Recognition through New Representation

One of the main features of identity movements, as Craig Calhoun explains, is resistance to imposed identities and the search for recognition and legitimacy (1994, 21). Dominant discourses about and representations of particular groups are not abstract, but affect and influence the identity formation of the concerned subjects and the relationship to outsiders. Hence, questioning and challenging dominant representations is of fundamental importance (Jordan and Weedon 2000, 170). In this section I show how the conference Treasures of Islam, which featured scientific discoveries and advancements made by Muslims in the Middle Ages,[23] served to deconstruct dominant and stereotypical representations of Islam and Muslims.

In Search of a New Essence

Nora described the problem of negative representation as follows:

"After 9/11 everything was observed from a negative perspective … Most people, whether they have a PhD or a university degree, know Islam only through books or the media. And generally it's only from one specific perspective that things are reported. So it's not real Islam, but more extreme variations of Islam, like the attacks that were committed in Bali and America … So they only know that Islam." (Nora, Islam teacher)

23 More information on the conference can be found at the conference Web site: http://users.pandora.be/abdelhay/favorite.htm.

The problem, according to Nora, is that Islam is systematically considered from a negative point of view. To illustrate the reach and dominance of this negative representation, she uses two references: "most people" and "people with PhDs." "Most people" stands for broader public opinion, presumably non-Islamic, whereas "people with PhDs" counters the idea that this negative representation is a matter of ignorance, hence emphasizing that it is a vision widely shared by groups with quite different educational backgrounds.

In order to deconstruct this general idea, she describes existing stereotypes as "extreme variations," which contrast with what she calls "real Islam." In this juxtaposition of real versus extreme, Nora's account is situated on the side of the "real," whereas "other" accounts of Islam, notably media representations, are dismissed as being marginal and extreme versions of Islam to which only a small group of people adhere.

Fouad also pursues this line of describing dominant accounts of Islam as nonrepresentative and false. The following quotation illustrates how this deconstruction of dominant discourse goes together with the establishment of an alternative essence and narrative for contemporary Islam, namely, science.

"We thought the best answer was through science. This science was the essence, the soul of Islamic civilization. By showing Islam through this perspective … we could show people that Islam is not the WTC [World Trade Center], but it's algorithms, it's Avicenna, it's people who weaved a whole Islamic civilization lasting for centuries and centuries, at the source of a European civilization. Therefore, in a way we have our roots in Europe, and we have something in common … On the other hand, this scientific approach could also describe our contribution to European civilization, which is marginalized in all the educational programs. There are fifteen hundred years within the history of humanity which are called the Dark Ages, but for us they were enlightened years." (Fouad, scientist)

For Fouad, the main aim of the conference was to present Islam through a new narrative, and in particular a scientific one. Algorithms and philosophy provide Islam with an essence, not 9/11. A major advantage of using science as a "new" account for the presentation of the self is that it allows the integration of Islam into one of the main narratives of modernity. This becomes explicit when Fouad contrasts the history of the Middle Ages, also called the Dark Ages, with the simultaneous developments in Islamic civilization in science, culture, and philosophy. By arguing "for us they were enlightened years," Fouad not only points at a Western-biased and ethnocentric vision of history; his use of the term "enlightenment" also insists on the compatibility—or even causality—between Islam and (Western) modernity.

Consequently, the use of science as an alternative narrative allows Fouad to deconstruct the opposition between the West and the Orient and to insist on the connection between Europe and Islam. This strategy is also evident in sentences like "We have our roots in Europe," which allows Fouad to counter the Orientalizing discourse of Islam as the ultimate other, as the alien outsider (see Said 1995).

In Search of Legitimacy

The deconstruction of dominant representations of collective identities is not only about challenging stereotypical representations; it also involves a quest for legitimacy. Calhoun links identity politics to the question of *recognition*: identity is constructed not only through *self-recognition* but also through *recognition by the other*. Hence, the relationship with this "constitutive other" remains central in the process of acquiring an autonomous and legitimate self (Hall 1996). This need for recognition emerged again and again in the accounts of several members of the group as a reason to organize the conference and, more generally, as a reason to present alternative accounts of their identity.

"They say that a silent person is someone who consents. We wanted to break that vicious circle [of polarization] by letting ourselves be heard, and we have done so by organizing a conference to make clear to the outside world, to policymakers, politicians, youth workers, and all organizations in civil society, to show them that there is no clash of civilizations and that Islam is not at all a foreign religion." (Amina, civil servant)

When Amina speaks of the outside world, she speaks of politicians and actors in civil society. The target audience of the conference were people active in the field and involved in political topics. The political purpose of the conference was thus explicit: the conference was intended to inform and—more important—to establish an alternative form of recognition, and thus an alternative societal discourse on Islam and Muslims.

The need for an alternative form of recognition of Muslims and Islam is also linked to daily interactions with the mainstream—in this case, non-Muslims—and the wish to be recognized, as Amina puts it, as a "normal citizen":

"My main motivation is to prove by doing it, through my engagement in the union, that Muslims are normal people … The main aim is to stop the abnormalization so that Muslims, like any other citizen, can participate and be seen as a normal citizen." (Amina, civil servant)

Amina frames the negative and stereotypical discourses on Muslims as a process of "abnormalization," a process through which the category of Muslim gradually becomes deviant. Being a Muslim thus becomes a stigma, which limits Muslims' ability to participate in broader society. Nilüfer Göle (2003) describes the process of celebrating and actively referring to Islamic discourses and using embodied practices (like the Islamic headscarf) in the public sphere as the voluntary adoption of stigma symbols in order to achieve a reversal of their meanings. The domestication of such stigmatic practices and symbols and their inclusion in the secular public sphere are, according to Göle, not only acts of self-empowerment and self-definition (2003, 820).

They are also a form of cultural resistance to dominant and hegemonic (Western) cultural models of modernity that oppose the idea of modernity and Islam (or religion in general): they become both Muslim and modern (2003, 818, 824).

"It [working on representation] is a priority. Why? At school, I teach in four schools, I always get the same questions. They come from what they see on TV. So if the representation was positive, they won't ask that number of questions … I mean, of course there will be questions, but not the questions about an inexistent Islam … It is also a duty of a Muslim to … Religion is, Islam is not like a job or something you only do at home. You live according to it: at work and everything. So it's normal that as a Muslim you talk about your religion to non-Muslims … Da'wa, preaching the religion, is a duty of any Muslim. Every Muslim knows it's a duty to do something about it." (Nora, Islam teacher)

In this last quotation Nora illustrates how she, as a Muslim, is always confronted with the same questions related to negative media representations, questions, she emphasizes, about "an inexistent Islam." She also repeats the distinction between the *false* Islam, that is, the one conveyed through the media, and *her* Islam, which she considers the real one. In the second part of the quotation she also introduces a new motivation to work towards a more positive representation of Islam. She frames this task of offering new, more positive accounts as "da'wa," or the religious duty that each Muslim has in terms of spreading the message of Islam. Hence, to work towards a more positive representation is not only about deconstructing stereotypes and being recognized; it is also simply a religious practice and part of being a devout Muslim. In the next section I show how this discourse on religious duty is linked to the larger question of citizenship.

Empowering the Islamic Community

So far I have observed how Treasures of Islam aimed at challenging mainstream representations while offering alternative accounts of Islam and Muslims. In this section I continue to explore this formation of a political Islamic subject and show both how questions of identity and citizenship are interrelated and how a particular discourse and vision of the Islamic subject are performed. I explore this question on the basis of the motivations of the working-group members to plan the second major project, namely, an Islamic fair organized by and for the Muslim community of Flanders, inspired by Le Bourget, the major annual fair in France.

Becoming an Active, but Anonymous, Citizen

Each spring about three hundred French Islamic organizations and over seventy-five thousand participants gather in the exposition halls of Le Bourget, a few kilometers outside Paris, in order to present their associations, to network, to buy or sell literature, and to discuss contemporary issues. Started in 1983 with nearly two hundred participants under the banner of the Union des Organisations Islamiques de France, the yearly gatherings in Le Bourget have become one of the largest and most important mass events of and for Muslims in France (see Amghar 2003). The gatherings in Le Bourget attracted publicity throughout France in 2003, when Minister of the Interior Nikolas Sarkozy was booed at during a speech in which he positioned himself against the possibility of wearing the headscarf in pictures for official documents.[24]

Inspired by the success and importance of Le Bourget, the members of UMIVA wished to organize similar gatherings for Belgian and Flemish Muslims.

> "The idea is to answer, to start from zero in order to build a dynamic of associations. When you go to the Bourget, there is a life, an Islamic model: there are people who sleep, people who cry, it's a society. We would like to create that climate here, to export it at the level of the community here. To tell others that we exist: there is an Islamic presence. And that's what is lacking here in Flanders, in a very basic way." (Fouad, scientist)

Fouad describes the main motivation for organizing such a gathering: he speaks of the importance of networking, but also of creating and affirming an "Islamic model." Le Bourget shows that Muslims are present, that they can and do organize themselves, and that they are more than only passive subjects. This idea of making the Islamic presence visible—almost of proving that Muslims are organized and alive—is one of the main themes in dealing with the question of citizenship.

As I have shown in the previous section, the quest for visibility is closely linked to the question of recognition. Invisibility in the public sphere is tantamount to inexistence, which explains the importance of a quest for active citizenship, for visibility, for recognition. Becoming visible, however, is not the end; it is a *means* to this process of normalization. The final aim is to remain unnoticed but visible. The political claim is thus paradoxical: the ultimate ambition of identity movements in their struggle for recognition and visibility is to be unnoticed while being part of the picture.

24 This was the first time that a French official was invited and present at this gathering. Moreover, it was one of the major events that relaunched the headscarf debate on a national level in France, which eventually led to the creation of the Stasi commission and the law prohibiting religious symbols in public schools.

This section illustrates how this question of visibility in the public sphere also entails a certain vision and articulation of the collective identity. The point of departure for most members of the group is an existential question about who they are. Making the Islamic presence visible therefore is not only about a certain vision of citizenship, it is also about fostering and shaping an Islamic subject.

Forging a Muslim Identity

"It is precisely due to our concern about the negative representations, and the identity crisis of Muslims, that we want to dedicate our second conference entirely to Muslims, to the community, in order to make clear to Muslims that Islam is present here in a manifest way, and that we can proudly tell Muslims in a constructive and playful way that Muslims are starting to organize themselves in a very good way." (Amina, civil servant)

For Amina, the first function of visibility is to empower people by showing their positive presence. Moreover, she presents an Islamic framework as a way out of the identity crisis that she identifies. By referring to the negative representations, Amina acknowledges that the image of the self is highly influenced by dominant negative discourses. Consequently, making "the Islamic presence" visible is not only about countering stereotypical images of Muslims but also about offering new, alternative, and positive messages about and images of their identity. This becomes clear when Amina refers to the question of pride and emphasizes the need to show in a "constructive" and "playful" way what Muslims are doing: they not only are there; their presence is also a positive and constructive contribution to society at large.

The lack of an assumed and positive identity among Muslim youth appeared to be one of the main problems identified by the group.

"I have always said that the young people here are the result of street culture, television, and education at school and at home. At home things are seen in a certain way; on the street another image of life is offered; television offers a different image; school offers an ideal of another way of life. Young people are the result of all this, and there is no compatibility … When you ask a kid, 'Are you Moroccan or Belgian?', he answers, 'Neither.' This is the problem: Who is he?" (Fouad, scientist)

To Fouad, the root of the problem lies in the scattered identity that most youngsters of the second generation have to cope with. He enumerates different frames of reference that young people encounter, each with its own expectations, visions of the world, and normative values. The incompatibility of these frames leads to incomplete identifications. Hence, for Fouad one of the main challenges is to find an answer to these existential questions about a cultural identity that is neither Moroccan nor Belgian.

The members of the working group find in Islam a way to deal with the question of identification. This observation corresponds with much of the

literature, which describes Islam as a new, alternative identity that transcends ethnic and cultural dilemmas, thereby allowing youngsters to fully find their place in the European context (Khosrokhavar 1997; Cesari 1994; Vertovec and Rogers 1998; Roy 2002; Amiraux 2001; Kanmaz 2003). Terms such as the "ethnicisation of Islam" (Modood and Werbner 1997) refer to this process of differentiation between a cultural and a religious identity, with the latter developing into a new ethnic identity: "European Muslim" is the new and preferred self-appellation. This religious framework, however, is more than merely a cultural resource for identity claims; it is also a normative framework that deals with questions of meaning and life orientation (Beyer 2000, 67). Yet within the literature on the Islamic revival and Islam as an identity, this second dimension—the normative framework—is often overlooked.[25]

In my conversations with members of the working group, the normative implications linked to an Islamic identity were clearly evident. As Amina explained, when asked why it is important to emphasize the presence of Islam:

"To Muslims, religion is an important part of life, in the sense that the Islamic value system is a component of a Muslim's daily life. You already see it, for instance, during the year; Ramadan—clearly visible—shows for instance how Muslims fast for a month, and are busy with Islam for at least one month each year. Also, the fact remains that people go actively to the mosques. Muslims don't really have a process of de-churchification. Quite the contrary: Islam remains an important part of life." (Amina, civil servant)

For Amina, Islam is more than just a cultural resource: when she states that "to Muslims, religion is an important part of life," she first associates Islam with religion, and describes Islam as a normative framework and "value system" with a dominant place in and influence on daily life. When speaking about Islam, the members of the working group speak not only about the cultural resources but also—and more important—about the normative framework behind it. Fouad not only confirms this observation; his words also reveal an important implication of the normative dimension of Islamic identity.

"For a Muslim, it is that: if he doesn't have an ideal, a clear vision, if he doesn't have a goal, whether it is an intermediary goal, or a final goal, he is always disoriented … Where are we going? Even the philosophy of the Quran always speaks about a clear set of goals. What is this goal? Judgment Day. And if you lose this reference, you lose all references. The molding of your life changes in such a way that you are destabilized. Why? Because you don't have a clear set of goals. And, by the way, this is human nature. If I tell you, 'In a week you have an exam,' you will make a

25 When the "normative" dimension of Islamic identity is assessed in the literature, its compatibility with the citizenship issue tends to be explored (see, for instance, Roy 2002 and Cesari 1994), whereas other dimensions remain relatively unexplored or receive little recognition (see also Asad 2003; Mahmood 2005).

plan, you will change your life to achieve that goal, which in this case is passing the exam. This means that you will take two hours to study, two hours to eat … You will organize yourself in order to achieve that goal and pass the exam. So it's about that. Even Ramadan is about that. What is Ramadan? It's about having well-defined behavior for thirty days, and about being in a specific psychological state of mind in order to achieve that goal, which is the end of Ramadan. There is even a hadith that says that life is like Ramadan. Ramadan is life, and during this life we have to abstain from things, we have to do other things, we have to behave in a specific way. It's in fact the Muslim's ideal. And the end of Ramadan is the triumph, it's the gift, it's *al-Jahana* [paradise], it's that … Hence, life for a Muslim is about reaching an ideal, achieving a goal, which is: to satisfy Allah. *Soebhana-wa-Ta'ala* [Praise Allah the great/all-knowing]. And if this goal is disrupted, everything is disrupted … I always say: The *shari'a Islamiya* [Islamic path] is a positive means of integration into society." (Fouad, scientist)

In this quotation, Fouad tells us that Islam is about having a clear set of goals and orienting one's life towards these goals. The ultimate goal he identifies is Judgment Day: the moment when all actions of earthly life will be assessed and the ultimate verdict will follow. The view that civic (or other) activities are a means to achieving a larger religious purpose—Judgment Day and/or satisfying Allah—was frequently expressed by other members of the group as well. It was also observable when Nora presented the need to work on the representation of Muslims as a form of da'wa, the religious duty of each Muslim to spread the message of Islam. By using concepts such as da'wa or, in this case, Judgment Day, Fouad and Nora frame their actions within the realm of religious duties and obligations. Furthermore, Fouad's reference to the "final goal," or Judgment Day, is not merely allegorical; rather, it is consistent with a strong insistence on disciplinary actions. God's blessing is not something that one acquires by longing for it; it is something that one must work for by "molding" one's personality and actions in that direction.

These insights converge with Saba Mahmood's observations and analysis of women active in pious movements in Cairo (2001, 2005). She argues that the literature on pious and Islamist movements tends to overlook and undervalue existing discourses on the moral subject and the way in which this moral subject is actively constructed and transformed. When religious practice is included in the analysis, it is often framed as something functional to nationalistic claims and/or claims about identity.[26] The respondents' accounts, which situate these practices within a "religious logic," are rarely included in the broader analytical framework or are only viewed as "phantom imaginings of the hegemonized" (Mahmood 2001, 209).

Mahmood has analyzed the religious discourse of women active in "nonliberal" women's movements in order to understand their relation to

26 Mahmood gives the example of the veil, which is often described as a nationalistic symbol or a means of resistance, but rarely as a religious practice.

religious practices and the notion of subject implicitly involved.[27] She discovered a seeming "paradox": a discourse of submission to prescriptions, combined with active agency in performing this submission. For many of the women with whom she worked, the attainment of religious virtues (e.g., patience, shyness, modesty) was not considered something "natural," but rather something one had to work on. Mahmood has recounted the efforts of these women to acquire these virtues, and how this process went together with a conscious and active drilling and molding of their subjectivities and bodies. The activities of these women are not aimed at resisting certain norms or prescriptions but rather at actively disciplining subjectivity in order to make it compatible with a discursive tradition, that is, the Islamic moral and ethical subject.[28]

My emphasis on Mahmood's writings is prompted by similar observations about what Fouad tells us in the last quotation, which is crucial in this respect, as well as about other conversations with members of the working group. The members' introduction of the Islamic subject as a means to frame their identity was not only about having a cultural resource; it also fits with a larger discourse on the moral subject and its compliance with an ethical and discursive tradition, namely, Islam.[29] The reference to an Islamic identity and religious practice not only points to the larger goal—Judgment Day—but also to the necessity of forging and molding a certain subjectivity, one in which religious practice is not only a means to reach an ultimate goal but also a means to perform and shape a specific kind of subjectivity. Religious practice therefore becomes "the means to both *being* and *becoming* a certain kind of person" (Mahmood 2001, 215; italics in original).

Fouad not only describes this Islamic identity as a "mold" for forging one's subjectivity in a certain way; he also strengthens this claim by describing this process in secular terms. He does so by arguing, first, that it is a normal thing, proper to the way that society is organized, and, second, that it is present in all aspects of religious life, even in its most elementary forms. This normalization takes place in three steps: making the process seem

27 Mahmood uses the word "nonliberal" to refer to movements with a conception of selfhood and subjectivity which contrast with the liberal tradition.

28 Mahmood asserts that, from a poststructural perspective, this insight is compatible with descriptions and observations of *any* subject formation. She refers to Judith Butler's *paradox of subjectivation*: the active subject acquires its agency (and its potential to resist) by paradoxically inscribing itself in and submitting itself to a discursive tradition. Thus, the subject is *always* formed through the obedience to certain norms, and it is precisely this obedience to (and acquiring of) these norms which makes resistance possible. This leads Mahmood to argue for a conception of agency not solely as a "synonym for resistance to a relation of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically *specific* relations of subordination enable and create" (2001, 203).

29 Or, to be more precise, compliance with a specific ethical and discursive tradition within Islam.

natural, referring to the example of taking exams, and relating the process to Ramadan. The first step in normalizing the process is to describe it as part of "human nature." Second, the reference to taking exams serves as a "secular" example that illustrates the broadness and validity of his claims and dissociates it from the religious sphere. Fouad concludes by arguing that this method of disciplining the subject is also present in the most elementary forms of religious practice, such as Ramadan. Thus, this disciplining of the subject is not something exceptional, nor something limited to extremely pious Muslims; it is something natural, general, and present in all aspects of society, in both religious and secular life.

To conclude, and in line with Mahmood (2001, 2005), I argue that this quest for and/or reference to a framework for an Islamic identity coincides with the construction and disciplining of an Islamic ethical and moral subject. When people like Fouad refer to Islam as an alternative framework, they also refer to and perform a certain moral and ethical subject. Hence, identity movements—in this case Islamic ones—are not only about seeking and establishing an alternative narrative about the self, but also about constructing and disciplining the self in order to make it compatible with a specific Islamic tradition. In the following subsection I illustrate how the working-group members view a relationship with the political sphere as a vital aspect of this moral and ethical subject.

Active Citizenship as Part of Religious Practice

Active citizenship is viewed by all members in the working group as a worthy objective. They all support the idea that political involvement in society at large is a sign not only of good citizenship but also of being a good Muslim. Furthermore, active citizenship includes reaching out to non-Muslims and striving together for shared political aims. It is therefore not surprising that members of the group appreciate an intellectual like Tariq Ramadan. His vision and ideas were often mentioned, and one of the ambitions of the working group was to organize discussion seminars on citizenship issues with Tariq Ramadan.

"And that's where we come to the new discourse of Tariq Ramadan; it is about active involvement in society. The idea of the social contract, the idea of testimony: the *shahada*. He is revolutionizing, he is leading a silent revolution of the second generation. And that's what youngsters like; they recognize themselves in a way in Tariq Ramadan. And *al-hamdu-lilah*, it works, even in different communities, even if he is French-speaking, because it is an Islamic discourse." (Fouad, scientist)

According to Fouad, many Muslims, regardless of their origin, recognize themselves in Tariq Ramadan's discourse through the universal weight of the Islamic message. This discourse calls upon Muslims to fulfill their prime responsibility, the first pillar, the shahada: to testify that God exists and that

Muhammad is his prophet. By equating the idea of the social contract with the first pillar, Fouad inscribes the political sphere within the Islamic engagement and prime duties of Muslims, thus clearly challenging and rearticulating secular-liberal notions of citizenship and its relation to religion. In the discourse of Fouad, both become interlinked: active citizenship stands for being a good Muslim, and being a good Muslim becomes synonymous with active involvement in society.

"Even the act of taking a stone from the street is part of our religion, is part of *laïcité* [being an active citizen in a secular environment]. And this should be understood … Our duty, the effort we have to make, is to present a positive image of Islam … Efforts should be made from both sides. We always talk about the internal effort we have to make to go to the others. I forgot to say something: Even if we spend one thousand or twenty-four hundred hours telling people about Muslims and Islam, if each one of us is not a walking Quran, we will always have problems explaining things to others. They see Islam, but don't see the Muslims." (Fouad, scientist)

Fouad expresses a vision of political and religious engagement in which both are interlinked, if not equated. In the first sentence of the quotation, he not only links civic involvement with religious duty but also insists on their compatibility: it "is part of *laïcité*." These last words indicate that he is aware that his approach—linking religious duty to civic duty—could be considered deviant when compared to the "common" secular-liberal separation of religious duty from civic duty. But Fouad seeks a way out of what might appear to be an inconsistency by arguing that his vision is perfectly compatible with the concept of *laïcité*. He thus dissociates the definition of *laïcité* from a secular-liberal tradition and makes it compatible with a vision in which religion and politics are interlinked.

"If the existing rules are in contradiction with your rules, then you have to adapt your rules to those of the community, to the rules of the country … and it is possible to do so. Our religion is a very flexible one. The goal of each religion is to guarantee the internal stability of human beings; it's to live in harmony with others. Certainly for the Islamic religion. Seventy percent of the Quranic verses are about social relations; at least thirty percent are about the spiritual aspects of faith. And all the *'ibadaat,* they are about good behavior towards others: *ahlaq*. Why do we pray? To be good with others. We fast to feel the hunger of others. We do the *hadj* [the pilgrimage to Mecca] in order to meet people from all over the world. *Zakat* is about helping others, to have a sense of social responsibility. Hence, our religion is made to live in society." (Fouad, scientist)

This quotation illustrates once more how Fouad links religious and civic engagement. Hence, his discourse on active citizenship is related not only to the question of identity but also to his religious practice. On several occasions, and with reference to various examples, Fouad emphasized the intrinsically social and civic dimensions of Islam. In his conciliation of Islamic and civic engagement, however, he tries to remain within the boundaries of a

"mainstream" understanding of citizenship. He does not fundamentally question the way in which larger society conceives of political citizenship; a telling indication of this is his emphasis on the flexibility and adaptability of religious rules to society's expectations.

This observation has already been made by other authors analyzing active citizenship, especially those focusing on Tariq Ramadan's discourse (Frégosi 2000; Mohsen-Finan 2002). Khadija Mohsen-Finan, for instance, describes Ramadan's discourse as the development of a faith-based citizenship that questions the strict French separation of state and religion and calls for a middle way between the British communitarian model and the French model of assimilation (2002, 139). Franck Frégosi (2000), on the other hand, maintains that the success of the "Ramadanian verbs" derives from the combination of presenting active citizenship as part of religious practice—as a message of Islam—while fully embracing the dominant discourse on citizenship, and simultaneously opening up possibilities for changes to and adaptation of some Islamic rulings.[30] A call for flexibility and openness is also evident in Fouad's discourse.

One could, however, also construe Fouad's emphasis on the flexibility of his religion as a defensive stance, almost as if to avoid accusations of being "fundamentalist" or a "threat to society." The hegemonic discourse on secularism and citizenship, certainly when dealing with Islam, is such that any public appearance of religion is quickly viewed as an illegitimate interference, as "'inflecting' the secular domain or as replicating within it the structure of theological concepts" (Asad 2003, 191). This becomes explicit in Fouad's answer to my question about how far this flexibility can go and whether it also would have implications for prescriptions such as the headscarf.

> "But concerning the headscarf issue, the secular context in which we live allows it since it respects the religion and faith of everyone among us. Hence, by wearing the headscarf we have to—and this is also our responsibility, of our community—we need to say that for us, that we do not practice Islam but we live Islam. And this we have to make clear to people. But how can you explain that in a context that always stigmatizes Islam, in a context that always says, 'What's this covered woman, this guru coming to invade us?' There is a fear fed by the media, which remains unexplained." (Fouad, scientist)

Clearly, flexibility to Fouad does not mean the alienation or far-reaching adaptation of religious prescriptions; his position on the Islamic headscarf illustrates this. In order to resist the suggestion of simply adapting or abandoning religious prescriptions, he frames prescriptions such as the Islamic headscarf within the liberal principle of freedom of religion, which, according to him, is characteristic of the secular organization of society. Furthermore, he

30 The most well-known adaptation, popularized by Tariq Ramadan, is without a doubt the abolition of the theological categories *dar-al-harb/dar-al-islam* (house of war/house of Islam), thus enabling theologically the full participation of Muslims in a non-Islamic setting (Ramadan 1999, 202–204).

argues that it is the responsibility of Muslims to make clear that to them religion is not practiced but lived. This sentence supports my earlier observation about a strong articulation of both the political subject and the religious subject. Hence, and certainly when reading the sentences in which Fouad describes the "stigmatization" that persists towards Muslims, I argue that the need to legitimize Islamic discourse within the "mainstream" liberal framework is also motivated by a defensive approach, and does not strictly deviate from a vision in which religious practice is framed within liberal and secular political accounts.

Frégosi observed a similar mechanism in Tariq Ramadan's discourse, which he described as a "paradox": although Ramadan states that he does not claim a "special status" for Muslims and that he embraces the existing concept of citizenship, he nevertheless describes religion as a way of life, as a civilization and culture (2000, 211). My position differs from Frégosi in that I do not observe this "ambivalence" as a paradox, but rather as an illustration of the difficulties inherent in an approach to religion as a political subject which differs from those prescribed by dominant secular-liberal frameworks. The reason these claims appear to be "ambiguous" is mainly linked with the need and urge of people like Fouad to remain within the boundaries of accepted consensus and not be marginalized because of their approach and vision. Fouad's reference in this quotation to suspicions towards Muslims illustrates this claim. Hence, I argue that what appears to be an "ambivalence" is rather the articulation of the difficulty of reconciling an "imposed" secular-modernist vision of the religious and political subject with an alternative vision in which the political and religious subject are more interlinked. What appears to be a "paradox" thus not only reveals the tension between the two visions; more important, it unveils the particularity of the dominant framework, its implicit definition of and approach to religion, and its effect on other approaches to religion.

Hence, I argue that the interpretation of this ambivalence as a "paradox" is linked to the use of analytical frameworks that rely on a secular opposition between "the religious" and "the political." Consequently, when one departs from analytical concepts that reproduce a sharp differentiation between the "religious" and the "secular" spheres, interactions between the two tend to appear paradoxical or at least inconsistent. I argue that it is not enough to observe the interaction between "the secular" and "the religious"; rather, one also needs to be reflexive about the assumptions and a priori conclusions on which both concepts rest. Not doing this will hinder social scientists from tracing the complexity of existing dynamics and will lead them to reproduce too quickly the normative differentiation between "the religious" and "the secular," which is implicitly present when one speaks of the "paradoxical" combination of a religious and a civic discourse.

On this point I rely heavily on Talal Asad's *Formations of the Secular* (2003), in which he urges scholars to scrutinize and question the traditional concept of secularization, which opposes a "religious sphere" with a "secular

sphere." The latter is described as the space in which human freedom and individual rights prevail; in contrast, the religious sphere is where authoritarian obedience to rules is said to dominate. Asad questions this equation: "I am arguing that 'the secular' should not be thought of as the space in which real human life gradually emancipates itself from the controlling power of 'religion' and thus achieves the latter's relocation" (191). Hence, when one questions the way in which secularity is traditionally defined, one's analytical conception of the world also needs to be revised. This also entails examining how "politics" and "religion" have come to be defined and how the two "turn out to implicate each other more profoundly than we thought" (200). The concept of religion is not only *opposed* to the secular, it is also *produced* by it (193; see also Smith 1968).

Discourses like those of Fouad enable one to see how this process of constructing "the religious" through "the secular" takes place. Fouad's active, though "subversive" (with respect to religion), engagement with the notion of citizenship shows how a dominant definition of citizenship relies on a particular relationship between religion and politics, one which only allows religion as a discourse and not as a practice, one which defines religion in a specific way and recognizes it as long as it does not transgress prescribed limits (Asad 2003, 199). In Fouad's description of his civic and religious engagement, one can see how a specific "secular" articulation of religion (i.e., religion as a discourse and a private practice) conflicts with his vision of religion (i.e., religion as a way of life and a total practice), and how an equilibrium is sought to conciliate both visions.[31] It is too early to know what the end result of such negotiation will be, but one thing can be said: discourses like those of Fouad reveal the dynamics behind societal narratives and challenge "us" (i.e., social scientists) to unpack the normative, a priori conclusions of these narratives (see also Bracke 2004).

The Process of Internal Negotiations

The internal difficulties encountered in promoting a vision of citizenship were another recurrent element in the way members of the working group framed their engagement.

31 This point constitutes the main difference between Islamic movements that reproduce discourses on "active citizenship" and "pious movements" that do not actively intervene in the political sphere, like those described by Saba Mahmood (2005). Although both are "political" in the sense that they actively reshape the way society is organized through an Islamic ethical framework, discourses like Fouad's actively seek to negotiate an approach to citizenship with the dominant secular framework, whereas pious movements consciously withdraw from this kind of negotiation and do not seek compromise.

"We first need an internal debate; we should harmonize the different opinions. Within the Islamic community there are too many differences … There are those who say that the environment is haram [illicit], that we are in *dar-al-harb.*[32] There is the Shi'i fraction; there is the *hizb-a-tahrir*. They have different views on Islam, and this makes the task more difficult on the intracommunitarian and intercommunitarian levels … That's why we need time. We first have to agree among ourselves, before being able to bring things to the outside world. It is a major challenge, and I think we can do it. The means are there for it, we just need the will to live together." (Fouad, scientist)

According to Fouad, divergent opinions must be harmonized before Muslims can act within society at large. In this quotation Fouad refers to the existing ideological and sectarian divisions within the Islamic community not only to illustrate its diversity, but also to show the difficulty of reaching a consensus over citizenship issues. To strengthen his argument, he refers to the disagreements over the use of concepts such as dar-al-harb when referring to Western Europe. Fouad views this diversity as problematic because it hampers his political aim of constructing a strong and internally coherent political subject in order to achieve certain political goals.[33] Thus, what is needed is the creation of a stable ground, a consensus, in order to be able to engage at the political level. Internal debate is a way to achieve this vision of citizenship and to harmonize opinions on this matter.

Not all Muslims, however, were included in these discussions about harmonizing existing differences. One of the most recurrent divisions referred to by members of the working group was that of generational difference. Most members saw a clear difference in approach to the citizenship issue between the second and the first generations. As a group operating within a union of mosques, it also specifically targeted the mosques, with the aim of opening them up to larger segments of society.

"I always say that the first generation was a generation of mosque builders … It then falls to the second generation to get involved in mosques, to make the mosque come to the outside. That is, I think, the challenge for the coming five to ten years. The second generation has to enter into mosques in order to make them come outside through open-house days, cultural activities … to show that mosques are not only a place to pray, but also a place to meet, a place of interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims. This is in a way our challenge for the coming five to ten years." (Fouad, scientist)

32 Some traditional scholars divide the world into *dar-al-harb* (the house of war) and *dar-al-islam* (the house of Islam) in order to differentiate an Islamic from a non-Islamic region. Muslims in a non-Islamic region are considered a minority and have special rules and prescriptions. Lately, however, this traditional dichotomy has increasingly been called into question. Several scholars, including Tariq Ramadan, have called for abandoning this outdated differentiation.

33 The need for and dangers of essentialism in the construction of a political identity have been extensively debated in poststructuralist feminist theory (Calhoun 1994; Fuss 1989).

Fouad's notion of the role of mosques reflects his conception of citizenship. Mosques should be not only a place to pray, but also a space for interaction, a *new public sphere* for Muslims and non-Muslims. Hence, two shifts are made in his conception of the mosque: first, by adding to it alternative functions such as meetings and cultural activities and, second, by opening it up to non-Muslims. In addition, Fouad clearly frames this new approach as something befitting the second generation. This generational dynamic has been observed by several researchers (Kanmaz and Mokhless 2002; Sunier 1996).

Generation thus becomes the ultimate factor for explaining differences in orientation. Without disputing this claim or observation, I would argue that this insistence on the generational factor can also be viewed in terms of its functional capacities of constructing a stable and coherent Islamic political subject. By locating the existing disagreements mainly within a generational framework, rather than a framework of ideological or sectarian difference, one presumably has better control over the identified internal differences, as there is an underlying conviction that these differences will be "solved" in the long term. An emphasis on sectarian or ideological differences, on the other hand, would hamper the smooth construction of a stable political subject.

As for the observed generational differences, it was striking to note how the working-group members avoided a confrontational approach with the first generation. They instead called for patience and acceptance of this difference.

"Most of them are stubborn. If you try to explain something like that to a first generation, they don't always understand you … There are people of the first generation who understand us and can follow us, but the majority doesn't want any contact with the outside world. They just want to stay separated in their mosques. It's up to us, the second generations, and converted Muslims, to have contact with the outside world." (Ahmed, engineer)

Ahmed describes a generational rift, without arguing for change. By using the word "stubborn," he characterizes the disagreements in terms of personal traits and features of the first generation, rather than differences in point of view. Consequently, Ahmed argues that both the second generation and converted Muslims should lead the way to active citizenship.

Conclusion: Which Space for Political Interactions and Negotiations of Religious Subjects?

One of the most frequent topics in the literature and in mainstream media is the recent upheaval of Islamic identity among second-generation youths in Western Europe. Labels such as European Muslims and the "ethnicisation of Islam" indicate a shift: Islam is becoming a new identity for participation in the European public opinion. This reference to and use of the Islamic label is often analyzed as a dual process. On the one hand, there is a differentiation and distancing from ethnic identity, which enables young Muslims to position

themselves in Western Europe; on the other hand, this practice can be read as a defensive identification with Islam in reaction to the negative stereotypes about Muslims and Islam (Roy 2002; Göle 2003). In this chapter I have observed and analyzed how a group of young professionals frames and uses Islamic identity in their political engagement.

The two main threads running through their involvement are representation and empowerment. Challenging stereotypical discourses on Islam and offering alternative representations not only are ways to frame their identity in a different—and to them, more accurate—light; they also are ways to achieve recognition. The ability to influence public opinion about Muslims is felt to be crucial, as public opinion affects their daily interactions and contributes to their societal marginalization. A second thread in their involvement focuses on the empowerment of Muslims in the light of their weak socioeconomic integration. In this case, Islam is presented as a solution for these weak conditions, which are linked to a lack of an assumed and positive identity.

This chapter has examined how an active reference to and use of an Islamic framework also entails and performs an Islamic ethical, moral, and political subject. Referring to positive representation as da'wa, building a strong Islamic identity through religious discipline, considering citizenship a religious duty—such perspectives and strategies imply that Islam is not only an identity but also a religious and normative framework. In addition to a "new" identity, Islam is, above all, a religion with prescriptions for and expectations of the moral and ethical subject (Asad 2003; Mahmood 2001, 2005).

This is also evident in the relationship between citizenship and religion: religious identity is not only inscribed within a discourse on citizenship; civic involvement is also framed as a religious duty. The difference between the two formulations is important, for the latter stresses that Islamic citizenship not only *adapts* to the secular expectations and norms of modern life, it also *interacts* with it and *questions* it. The "subject" implicitly assumed in secular modernity is a subject for whom religious and political life are clearly differentiated, for whom there is no problem adapting to the expectations of secular social life. People like Fouad, for whom religious, political, and other elements are largely interwoven, do not simply try to conform to the implicit expectations of modern life; they also try to find a compromise with the explicit and implicit expectations of society as a whole. Hence, to seek a compromise is something other than "adapting" to the expectations of modern life, and the limits of "flexibility" are not endless. The balancing act remains difficult and fragile, with people like Fouad in a weak position for negotiation, particularly in the current political climate, in which every public manifestation of Islam (or other religions) is suspiciously observed or even hysterically and repressively attacked.

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