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## **ALIENATION AND RADICALIZATION: YOUNG MUSLIMS IN GERMANY**

“I want to call myself ‘a Muslim’ whenever I want, but I do not want to be called ‘a Muslim’ by ‘the others’ whenever they want. It is like when you call yourself ‘a farmer’: you mean that you are reliable, steadfast, and generous. But when others call you a farmer, they might have rather negative connotations, like being dirty and uncivilized.” (Algerian, 32 years old)

These are the words of an Arabic student whom I interviewed in 2002 in Augsburg, Germany. He did not want to be viewed as a Muslim in Germany and refused the German media’s frequent demands that Muslims should organize demonstrations in order to distance themselves from violence and terrorism:

“Why should I go out and excuse myself for the terror attacks on New York, when I am not personally responsible for them? Why do I not expect every Christian to come to me and excuse himself for the massacre of Muslims by Christians in Bosnia and Chechnya?”

In this chapter I examine two common assumptions in Germany. One holds that religious Muslims are more inclined to radicalization and militant ideologies than are “westernized” or “Western-oriented” Muslims. The other suggests that the established Islamic organizations in Germany are breeding grounds for terrorism and might even have relations with international terrorist organizations. I question the relation between religion and terrorism in order to determine whether or not the practice of violence as a means of visibility is a widespread phenomenon among Muslim diaspora communities.

As I examined the issue of the (in)visibility of young Muslims in public space in Europe, I observed that the majority of my interviewees were at no point willing to draw political or media attention to themselves. They did not want to be visible as individuals, though they were trying to put their “case” at the center of the political debate. That case was by no means always the same. An Arabic student has different priorities and demands than a Turkish worker does, even when both define themselves as Muslims. I was able to discern, however, a set of strategies adopted by young Muslims in their attempt to create a collective voice in their European societies. This collective voice should not be confounded with the “voices” of public violence (Guggemos and Abdel-Samad 2003; Waldmann 2003).

This chapter draws mainly from interviews with sixty-five Muslims, which I conducted in various German cities during the years 2002 and 2003.<sup>1</sup> Most of the interviewees were Arab students, others were members of the first generation—the so-called guest-worker generation—or second generation. The interviewees were selected according to the following criteria: age (up to 40 years old), length of stay in Germany (minimum of two years), and their willingness to be interviewed. Their political inclinations (e.g., their personal views on terrorism) did not represent a criterion, as the idea was to get to know the worldview of “normal” Muslims. While assembling the sample, however, I aimed at an equal proportion of religious and practicing Muslims and nonreligious Muslims. Personal contacts were also significant in the process of selection. When the interviews were conducted, most of the participants were between 26 and 38 years old. Twenty-five of them were Arabs (mainly from the Near East), another twenty-nine were Turks (including Germans of Turkish origin). Forty of the interviewees were students (among them, nine were women). The total number of women interviewed was fourteen. Twenty-three were active members of or sympathized with some form of Islamic organization.<sup>2</sup> About half of the interviewees are among those who visit Islamic associations, mosques, and other community settings on a regular basis.

I had started off by distributing questionnaires, but soon realize that this method was in many ways insufficient to represent the various worldviews of young Muslims in Germany in a realistic and differentiated way. Especially since 9/11 many young Muslims in Germany have been interrogated by the police about their living habits and political opinions; it therefore was hardly advisable to confront the interviewees with standardized questions reminiscent of officialdom. An evaluation of the questionnaires that had been filled out revealed that most had answered the questions rather reticently and sometimes evasively. Thus, the questionnaires could not fully reflect the real situation of the subjects in question. Suspicion towards the questionnaires even kept some from answering in their own handwriting, so as not produce any evidence that could be used against them. My decision to switch to qualitative interviews proved successful in many ways. During extensive conversations I gained the confidence of these individuals, who allowed me to get a more detailed look into their lives and life philosophies. Most of them, however, insisted on remaining anonymous, making it impossible to use a tape recorder or even take notes during the interview. I attempted to reconstruct the discussions immediately afterwards in as complete a form as possible. Therefore, some of the quotations in this chapter reproduce content but are not verbatim. Many interviewees insisted on keeping silent about their personal data, but at least granted me the right to mention their country of

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- 1 The duration of the interviews varied between thirty minutes and six hours; most took about three hours.
- 2 I am aware that it is difficult to draw a clear line between an active member and a regular visitor of communal activities.

origin. Though I am aware of all these shortcomings, I had no other alternative but to finish my fieldwork under these circumstances, as others did before me in similar situations (see, e.g., Lindholm 2002).

What I intend to stress in the following is that the process of radicalization in a foreign environment always depends on the articulation of several factors. In some isolated cases these factors can evolve in a framework in which an individual opts for violence aimed at public space (Finn 2001). More often, however, violence surfaces in a closed circuit: within the individual's personality, in which some or all of these factors clash, or within the private sphere of marriage and partnership. In the first two sections I consider the web in which personality structure links up to marginalization and culture shock. In particular, I distinguish between two pathways: the first leading to isolation and the second to radicalization. In the next section I add gender conflicts in cultural transfers as a further component on the path to eventual acts of violence. In the final section, I recount the options that are open to individuals caught up in this web: to either remain invisible or to gain a visibility of their own choosing and making.

### **Individual Embeddedness in a Complex Web: Pathways to Isolation and Radicalization**

The ways people practice Islam and live as a Muslim in a foreign environment are clearly different from the way people experience Islam in Muslim societies. In considering such difference, it is important to recognize that Islam is both a way of life and a *Weltbild* that is constitutive for identity. Within Islamic societies, Islamic belief and practice are part and parcel of everyday life, which means that Islam is automatically lived with a certain sense of commonality. Within the diaspora community, this sense of commonality often finds expression in an automatism of confrontation. Consequently, Muslims in the diaspora have no fixed strategies for (in)visibility. Rather, one's behavior as an individual or the image of a group depends on subjective interpretations as well as social and political calculations. Echoing the first quotation by the student who did not want to be called a Muslim by others, one female student tried to explain to me why "German paranoia" is responsible for disrupting the religious and social meaning of her veil.

"The original purpose of wearing the veil for a woman is to be hidden, and as a consequence to be protected in society. But when everybody—both Germans and Muslims—either attacks or defends the veil publicly, then the veil automatically becomes a means of visibility ... Why can't I simply wear my veil peacefully without German institutions or Muslim interest groups making politics out of my harmless piece of cloth?" (Turkish, 26 years old, in Munich, 2002)

The Muslim diasporas of Europe find themselves having to confront different worlds, and the challenge lies in finding a way to live within a non-Muslim

secular society that is subject to rapid societal change. At the same time, Muslims face the dilemma of complying with both the customs cherished by the members of the diaspora, on the one hand, and the normative regulations of a European society, on the other. Additionally, they feel compelled to clearly define their position towards their places of origin and/or home countries. Grappling with issues of continuity and preservation of cultural independence in a foreign environment often leads to an increase in the importance of religion. Moreover, in many cases the resulting fear and insecurity arising from these pressures instigate diaspora communities to turn to forms of tradition that are more radical than those commonly practiced in their home societies. In addition, many perceive their voluntary migration due to economic hardship as a form of exile and therefore mystify it. There is no shortage of examples of groups that have held on to outdated forms of religious expression, in all kinds of religious contexts: the German protestants who during the nineteenth century emigrated to southern Chile and rebuilt their rural communities in the middle of the Araucarias; the pivotal role of Catholicism among the Irish in the United States; and the role of the Talmud among the Jews in their various communities around the world until the founding of the Israeli state (Berthomière 2003).

Like many Europeans, Muslims have a rather ambivalent attitude towards the expansion of Europe. On the one hand, they see the opportunity to live as equals in a pluralistic society that guards the rights of religious minorities; on the other, they fear that European society will be unable to offer them a stable sense of identity. There is a tendency, particularly among Muslim youth, to visualize their future in terms of the *umma*, the community of all-faithful, rather than to think of themselves as part of European society. The search for and insistence on possessing and maintaining a stable “closed-corpus identity” may lead to alienation as well as social and political radicalization. It is thus essential to map the forms of radicalization that have gained prominence in various milieus of migration. They can, but must not of necessity, lead to violence (Waldmann 1974, 2003).

## Mapping the Pathways to Isolation

First on the map of pathways to isolation would be *archaic conservatism*, a tendency common among groups of migrants that come from rural, patriarchal regions where only a low level of education is available and tribal law is applied. This form does not necessarily rest on religious attitudes, yet religion is often instrumental in its legitimization of various forms of action. The violence that is generated within this atmosphere is usually not directed at the society of the host country. Rather, the “apostates” of the diaspora community become the victims of this violence, because they are charged with endangering the stability and integrity of the entire group. This form of radicalization is exemplified in cases of honor killings and forced marriage, which various

European governments are currently targeting as a new kind of public problem. In Germany, for example, the norms and behavioral attitudes among certain groups of Turkish migrants have long been outdated in Turkey itself. Yet the existence of the virtual community in the diaspora is thought to be—at least according to my research—dependent on the moral conduct of its members. Not only are blasphemous acts and apostasy severely sanctioned, so too are any kinds of liberal thinking or Western-oriented action. Characteristic for such milieus is the demand for unconditional solidarity as well as strong social and moral surveillance.

Young people who grow up with weak social structures are especially open to a form of radicalization that I call *escapism*. To them, neither their own families nor the host society can offer any kind of useful guidance in life. Frustration and a lack of substantial, positive perspectives for their future push these members of the second and third generations and young people with a migrant background to form so-called Turkish gangs and to direct outbreaks of violence against others in the migrant community. In the district of Mülheim in Cologne, cases of street-fighting between Turks and Arabs are common, despite the fact that they are coreligionists.

*Religious avant-gardism* can be found in the biographies of certain radical individuals. They generally refrain from traditional forms of Islam by steering clear of the conservative centers of so-called mainstream Islam in Europe. Religious solipsism, a tendency towards autodidactic methods, intergenerational tensions, dissolution and/or rejection of any kind of family-based authority, a minimum of socialization within one's own ethnic and religious communities: all are as characteristic for these individuals as their strong orientation towards the *umma*—conceptualized in the form of an ahistorical, abstract, and falsely heroic model of Islam.

These three pathways often produce isolated individuals. Once alienated from their milieus of origin, they rarely become integrated into the host society and consequently suffer a double marginalization. Lack of integration is especially critical among second-generation Muslims. It is thus especially alarming that members of the second generation—in particular those with an academic education—set the tone within the radicalization process. One example is the conduct of the Kaplan community, whose leaders explicitly aim at an “Islamic revolution” (Schiffauer 2000). Yet members of the first generation do not seem to be immune to radicalization. A closer look at the biographies of the perpetrators of the terrorist acts in New York and Madrid reveals that these individuals initially arrived in Europe as ambitious students oriented to the West, who then became radicalized during their stay in the “Occident.” One should therefore recognize that the anxieties caused by an identity conflict and the unsuccessful pursuit of a sense of security may also become reasons for a turn to radical Islamic organizations.

## Pathways to Radicalization

A closer examination of the relationship between religion and terrorism can clarify this. It is a common (mis-)conception in the West that a potential for violence is inherent in Islam, and that, as a result, faithful Muslims are more open to intolerance and radicalism than are their more “liberal,” Western-oriented coreligionists. Most Muslims, however, are eager to stress that Islam literally means “peace” and hence has nothing to do with violence and terror. Certainly there is in Islam, as in any other religion, a potential for peace and charity as well as war and division. Whereas the West nourishes the commonplace notion of an “Islam on the move,” in which Muslims increasingly turn to their postulates of faith for guidance, Muslims feel rather defensive about their faith and complain about a general decline of religiosity within Muslim societies. In fact “Islam on the move” is nothing more than a drifting from mainstream Islam. The jihad Muslims believe that they are living in an emergency situation and therefore try to reconstruct an “emergency Islam” in which they search for angry answers to their geopolitical situation. Needless to say, when it comes to Islamic terrorism, religion constitutes the central factor in the mobilization of zealots and the legitimization of violence, as it remains the most important source of identity.

An examination of the biographies of the alleged perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks shows that, against all appearances, the majority of them did not visit Quranic schools in their childhood. They did, however, belong to those Muslims who are decisively familiar with the West: “They all pursued modern ways of life common to the secular middle and upper classes in the West, their lives marked only later by experiences of conversion” (Kermani 2002, 27). Such biographies make it clear that we are not dealing here with poor, underprivileged, barely educated, and naive individuals who spent their lives in religious isolation. Rather, these people have had a rich experience of life and have been commuting between the East and the West. Under the pressure of their insecurity and isolation in the West, they turned to radical organizations, but they had envisaged other aims in life before turning to the career of a terrorist. Religion, then, was not the driving motive behind their terrorist activities; it rather became the legitimization of their actions. To a great extent, these were converts discovering their religion for the first time or rediscovering it after a period of “drifting.” They were not socialized in these religious structures to any considerable degree; rather, religion became more important later in their lives, offering them much-needed shelter from disappointment and social stress. Converts and reconverts seem to be especially susceptible to extreme forms of religiosity and moral purism.<sup>3</sup>

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3 In this context it is of particular interest that the life of the current U.S. president, George W. Bush, also has a biographical turn of a religious nature. After a “sinful” life of indulging in the consumption of alcohol and the like, he experienced a Christian conversion that changed his life radically. Now, as a president, he does

Yet one cannot conceive of a direct link between religiosity and radicalism (Roy 2004). Instead, one might consider the nexus that forms when a certain personality structure hits upon the double process of marginalization, the identity conflicts that are specific to migration, and the proximity of a radical group. A few lines will suffice to typify each of these strands.

The *personality structure* matters. A sensibility for social issues and low frustration-tolerance are characteristic for individuals involved in extremist groups. Often they are people who want to change the world radically but do not have enough patience with it. They suffer from the paradoxical combination of an inferiority complex and dreams of omnipotence. This explosive combination explains how these people can both lead a schizophrenic way of life and perpetrate inhumane, deadly acts of terror. *Marginalization* touches upon the dual experience of alienation and marginality. It is “characterized by close relationships entertained by persons of diverse groups, while the issue of belonging remains unclear” (Heckmann 2002, 7). There is much to back the hypothesis that emotional and social isolation facilitate the bonding of individuals with radical groups. The most important forms of isolation are (a) self-isolation, (b) isolation resulting from discrimination, and (c) marginalization, or the isolation of entire groups. *Culture shock* results from a range of identity conflicts specific to migration—the problems of alienation among Muslim migrants among them. The term culture shock is actually too simplistic to adequately describe the complex processes that a young Muslim undergoes in a foreign society. There is more at stake than merely coming to terms with two very different cultures. Questions of origin, cultural identity, and positioning one’s self become especially salient when the decision to live in a foreign environment is made. Finally, *radical proximity* can take several forms, including growing up within a fundamentalist infrastructure and proximity to a radical (peer) group or radical preacher. It seems that when young Muslims turn to extremist organizations, it is mainly due to a lack of self-esteem and a feeling of abandonment. Initially these organizations offer youth a way to re-establish self-esteem, while empowering them as emancipated social actors. Soon, though, the organizations demand full commitment. This newly acquired membership status helps compensate for numerous frustrating experiences in both the family network and the host society at large.

## **Culture Shock, Male Pride, and the Concept of “Sin”**

There are roughly four groups that account for the presence of people with different religious and social backgrounds in Germany today: the so-called guest workers (*Gastarbeiter*), fugitives who seek asylum, academics and

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not seem to be willing to accept “evil” in the world, pursuing his goal to free the world of its “villains.”

other intellectuals pursuing an education, and persons who marry a German.<sup>4</sup> Putting the category of guest workers aside, we are looking at persons who seem in principle to be willing to dispose of their old shared social structures by adjusting themselves to new conditions in order to work towards political, economic, and/or personal fulfillment. To a large extent they are capable of and willing to take risks, such as the danger of losing contact with their homeland or, worse, the danger of sacrificing part of their cultural identity. They are emotionally prepared to confront something new, and they approach the prospect of being intellectually and culturally challenged with curiosity and eagerness.

The problems that develop in the process are specific to each group. The guest workers conceive of themselves as migrants, whereas their children usually view themselves as part of the host society. In other words, what is “home” to the first generation is myth to their children. On the other hand, what is “home” to these children remains an alien environment to their parents. The children often cannot afford to limit their social activities to diaspora circles: the host society has certain expectations of them, and often they have no choice but to conform (e.g., learning the language of the host country). Whereas this participation is crucial to the development of the children, it was less central to their parents’ concerns. On the other hand, a new factor for the second generation is an inescapable friction with the country of origin. For many, their own families appear to be rather conservative, yet the seemingly more liberal host society appears to be exclusive and difficult to approach. According to a young Turkish Muslim male, many feel pressured and hindered by both their family and the host society. Nevertheless, the second generation finds new and more creative ways to deal with the issues of discrimination and marginalization, perhaps because members of this generation have proceeded further on the path of assimilation and have been socialized to some extent according to the norms of the host society. As one Turkish male interviewee told me, “Since kindergarten we have been learning to make ourselves heard ... but we certainly have gained more than just bad experiences” (Augsburg, 2003). In contrast to the first generation—and many other migrant groups—the second generation has advanced German language skills and identifies to an extent with Germany. Germany has become, by necessity, the center of their lives. In fact, although a conscious adoption of a German identity might still be problematic for some, a self-understanding in terms of regional or urban belonging—for example as an “Augsburger” or a “Kölner”—is more easily accepted.

The situation for refugees is far more problematic. Unlike other migrant groups, refugees do not have a choice between two or more societies while “relocating” their identity. The factors that force them to leave their countries essentially make them dependent on the protection of the society of refuge.

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4 This list is not exhaustive. There are many other ways to enter Germany legally (e.g., as a tourist) or illegally (e.g., clandestine migration).

Indicative of the complex emotional implications that result from this relation of dependence is the fact that many traumatic processes are projected onto the host society. Marginalization and discrimination levels are, it seems, at their highest when it comes to refugees. The paradox of their situation—being excluded from the very society that simultaneously welcomes them as a place of refuge—generates a kind of “love/hate relationship.” This ambiguous sentiment can be observed among all migrant groups but is strongest among refugees, in part because complex problems originating from their socially and politically charged places of origin continue in exile. Often the refugee has been politically active in the home country, in some cases within fundamentalist circles. In the latter case, neither the authority of their home country nor the principles of the host society can have much of an impact when competing against their own ideologies. Consequently, the options for social ascension that are open to refugees—including the illegal ones—are rather few and far between, to say the least. As one refugee put it, “I thought I would come here and after one or two years I would be financially independent. But never in my life have I been more dependent than I am today” (male Iraqi refugee, 37 years old, in Cologne, 2002).

Inappropriate treatment by public agencies and institutions leave many refugees in doubt about the alleged principles of freedom and equality in Germany. “I have the impression that the institutions are punishing us because we chose Germany as a place of refuge … Human rights and dignity in this place are reserved for Germans” (male Iraqi refugee, 37 years old). Under these circumstances, religious frameworks offer ultimate protection in the face of humiliation and discrimination. One of the positive dynamics of religious socialization circles is the integrative power they exert on many young and insecure persons, who often stand on the verge to criminality. One student told me:

“If there is still blood running in your veins [i.e., if you still have pride and emotions], you’ll lose control several times a day. They [the institutions] don’t leave a single door open for us and humiliate us intentionally. If I wasn’t a believer, I would already have a criminal record.” (Iraqi, 28 years old, in Augsburg, 2002)

Last but not least, the so-called illegal migrants pose a rather obvious problem, as much for themselves as for the “alien” host society. An illegal migrant from the Muslim world is very much in need of support from those he meets and can trust. Hiding and keeping a low profile is a constant necessity that requires help from fellow Muslims who are familiar with the host country and who can provide offers of work on the black market. These people look for such help in the mosques and are completely dependent on whoever can offer it. Once they land in the wrong hands, they are easily manipulated and led astray.

The attraction of religious identification can enhance the resentments and frustration that young people entertain towards a society that offers them almost no perspective. The normative standards set by a “consumer and

hedonistic culture,” widely accepted in Germany, are perceived by young Muslim men as a kind of “cultural hostility,” against which they feel defenseless. The ensuing contradictions and tensions that young Muslims, in particular, have to deal with are felt more intensely in a foreign environment. In this setting religion often becomes an alternative to an imposing Western civilization and to a “God is dead” attitude. To many Muslims, freedom in a foreign environment proves to be nothing more than a *fata morgana*, either unattainable or simply threatening. Freedom is understood as a way to define the self and the right to participate. Yet this often remains only partly achievable. When one looks on from the outside, it is hard to grasp the psychological strain on the ambitious newcomer, who experiences rejection and disappointment once he sees his cultural identity and moral standards excluded.

In contrast to people back home, who face conflicts in a rational and practical manner, diaspora communities tend to approach conflicts in their home societies with a dogmatic spirit and largely infeasible purism. With respect to the Near East conflict, for example, the Muslim and Jewish communities in the United States and Europe usually take extremist positions. Whereas people in the affected regions try to reach a practicable solution through negotiations, the diaspora hardly ever sees options for a rational compromise. When I asked Avi Primor, the former Israeli consul in Germany, why the diaspora appears to be much more emotional and less willing to compromise, he explained, “The diaspora cultivates a bad conscience. People say, ‘We are happy here. We are in no position to tell people in Israel what to do, we should simply support them’” (Augsburg, 2003).

Indeed, people abroad often judge conflicts with a sense of detachment from the real conditions, taking up an emotionally charged and dogmatic stance. This stance is often accompanied by fierce religiosity, which can be interpreted as a kind of “symbolic return to one’s roots,” or even a kind of “making up” with one’s home country and the family one left behind. Migrants often arrive in a host country with certain “life projects” in mind and little interest for the conditions they find there. In the same sense, there is little interest on the part of the host society in the “life project” of the newcomers. All that is expected of them is a certain amount of loyalty and fulfillment of the duties that the conditions for their entry state or imply. Yet many of the hopes that drive people to emigrate in the first place remain unfulfilled, even after a long period in the new environment. Desires for wealth, freedom, independence, and the right to participate in society hardly ever are realized. Poor migrants do not really see the relation of poverty and wealth change, for even if migrants experience a slight economic improvement in comparison to their situation back home, they continue to be among the poorer, in their new environment as well.

Within a foreign environment, most migrants belong to an underprivileged minority. Various forms of dependency on the host society—for the right to asylum, employee status, or financial support from the state or even a German spouse, just to name a few—determine the situation of the foreigner

in Germany to a substantial degree. These dependencies affect the self-esteem and pride of a “man from the Orient.” Interestingly, one could replace “pride” with “masculinity,” as the words “man” and “pride” are semantically linked in the Arab language. Maintaining a “culture of honor” in a society in which the notion of honor is rather relative and ambivalent can lead to an outbreak of violence against Western ways of life, as the murder of Theo Van Gogh in the Netherlands has shown. Yet autoaggression and violence against weaker members of one’s own community (e.g., women and children) are often the result of an adherence to archaic understandings of honor. In the home societies, public practice of religion and adherence to moral standards help relieve life’s pressures (Dupret, Berger, and Zwaini 1999). In a Western, non-Muslim environment, however, these practices can turn into obligations whose compliance proves difficult. If an individual is not embedded in a community in which religious practices are followed collectively, religious zeal can serve to isolate him or her. At times, this exaggerated holding on to religious principles leads to a disorientation of values and moral confusion.

Needless to say, the marginalized position of religion in societies like Germany and the usual “enlightened” treatment of religious symbols intimidate those who guard their sense of holiness. One of the Arab students I interviewed told me of his bewilderment when listening to a fellow German student tell a joke that involved disrespectful reference to Jesus and Mary. “How should a society,” he asked, “that does not understand nor respect its own religion understand and respect our own?” The relativization of what is “holy” or even “sin” intimidates many Muslims of the diaspora. For the most part, the idea of sin has lost its implications for emancipated German society. Indeed, the concept is marginalized and robbed of its seriousness when it is applied to actions like tax fraud, petty crime, or even giving in to small indulgences such as eating too much chocolate. In Europe in general, the practice of quoting from the Holy Scripture or of interpreting life in wider religious contexts of meaning has become outdated. For a Muslim, however, the concepts of “sin,” the “devil,” and “divine punishment” are omnipresent.

When one “reads between the lines” when talking to young Muslims, it becomes quite clear that insecurity about their identity is at the core of a host of problems that these young migrants face. The friction between imported ideals of social conduct and the norms of Western societies—all accompanied by a sense of ambivalence and relativity—proves much harder to deal with than the daily experiences of discrimination and social inequality. In the West the young Muslim man lacks a certain “absolute” that functions at the center of his life. This estrangement manifests itself even in everyday language. In a way, the German use of the conditional—such as “it could be the case, but not necessarily”—makes it difficult for young Muslims to adjust and make decisions. The “lack of a center” and the “end of metaphysics” foster their fears that the line between the “holy” and the “profane” might dissolve. One of the interviewees tried to express this crisis as follows: “This relativity strips down young Muslims in front of themselves, only to reveal their purposefully

hidden double morale, their personal duality, and the weaknesses of their culture.” This, he added, is “unforgivable” (Egyptian, 33 years old, in Augsburg, 2003).

Although in Germany many young Muslims experience these problems of alienation and the consequent identity conflicts, the majority refrain from choosing a confrontational course with the host society. In a way it is not unlike the rules on haggling at an “Oriental bazaar,” with which they are familiar: one must constantly evaluate one’s own interests. Although they seldom admit it, these young people have an elastic and versatile identity. Their life practices and perspectives are constantly renegotiated while they choose from a range of values offered to them from both their families and the host society. To some extent this process of constructing a hybrid identity that can respond to specific situations unfolds as a conscious act of choosing among values. Yet most processes of adoption or rejection of the components that add up to hybrid identities take place subconsciously; the individual is seldom aware of them. Those who shy away from the idea of “contaminating” what they understand to be their “pure cultural identity,” or who are incapable of coming to terms with foreign values, tend to retreat into a parallel society. Within this confined social space the forces of assimilation increasingly weaken as confrontation with everyday German society becomes less frequent. Yet the social tensions remain the same. Because of their inability to reduce or avoid the increasing pressures and expectations, some individuals project the conflicts that emerge from a hybridization of their identity onto the world around them. A reconstructed, unrealistic, and falsely heroic Islam provides them with an “angry answer” to modernity, to the geopolitical situation that they hold responsible for their situation. What these angry answers can look like can be clearly seen in the recent attacks on New York, Madrid, and London. The longing for a “sense of home,” for tolerance and security, shifts the focus to the question of ethnic and religious belonging.

## **Gender and Class Issues in Cultural Transfers**

When thinking about another migrant group in Germany, namely, those who pursue academic and other kinds of education in this country, one hardly considers them to be at all problematic. The image of an academic person lends an aura of sincerity, reinforcing their reputation as studious and—above all—temporary residents of the country. Yet since 9/11 these commonplace assumptions have been proved wrong, if not dangerous. Although a revision of the common understanding of this migrant group is in order, one should not jump to conclusions by conceiving a “sleeper theory” or regard them as typical suspects. Many Germans are not aware of the difficulties that non-European students face in Germany, let alone can sympathize with them. Their stay in Germany is complicated by extensive bureaucratic requirements, which demand from them constant attention to matters of administration. In

order to prolong their visa for one year, for example, it is necessary to give proof of relative financial independence—namely, €6,000 or more in a bank account and an income—or provision from home—of €600 per month. In addition, their work allowance is limited to 90 days or 180 half-days per year. Understandably, many feel cheated and ripped off by the institutions, and this perception weighs heavily on their emotional and intellectual ties to the host society. As one Arab student lamented, “My father earns less than €150 a month. How can I possibly have €6,000 in one go? Only terrorists can meet these standards, because only they have so much money” (Egyptian, 33 years old, in Augsburg, 2003).

Students are known to be, in the best case, ambitious, curious, and critical idealists—some want to change the world. Yet, they often also are impatient and do not tolerate frustration well. None of these qualities protects a young and angry person from turning to radical organizations once he sees no other perspectives open to him. Students of the natural sciences, engineering, or economics usually do not encounter situations in which they can familiarize themselves with the outlooks and values of the host society, as do students of the humanities. For the most part, the actors involved in the terrorist attacks of 9/11 were students of the natural sciences. Yet neither quarrels with the bureaucracy nor financial burdens seem to have stood in the way of their radicalization. Rather, it seems alienation and identity conflicts played a major role.

Binational marriages provide a good opportunity and basis for integration, though at times they do become a platform for intercultural and interreligious conflict. In many cases, the foreign male depends on the woman financially and legally. This circumstance encourages the development of the love/hate relationship mentioned above, creating feelings of gratitude and at the same time nourishing general dissatisfaction. It is a constellation that primarily affects Arab men who have been socialized with a strong sense of pride. Individual conflicts often get blown out of proportion. One Arab man I interviewed told me of his marriage: “a German woman together with an Arab man equals hell.” Usually it is the German woman who takes on the daily work that back home is traditionally left to men, such as caring for the material well-being of the family or dealing with administrative institutions. This situation proves harmful for the husband’s pride and puts his role as *paterfamilias* into question.

The potential for conflict emerges with the birth of the first child. Even a moderately religious person will insist on granting his child a Muslim education. He starts to familiarize himself with the principles of Islam, often in order to sustain the upper hand in negotiations with his wife. Yet the fact that the child spends the greatest part of his or her early years with the mother is in many ways troublesome for the husband. A divorced man named one of the reasons for his divorce from his German wife: “Whenever I left the house, I feared my ex-wife would talk to my daughter about Christianity and speak disrespectfully about Islam” (Moroccan, 39 years old, in Augsburg, 2002).

Especially with regard to their daughters, Muslim fathers tend to be overprotective: “I don’t want to sit and wait to see my daughter coming home with a boy at the age of fourteen.” Marriage to a German woman nevertheless can help Muslim men in many respects, enabling their detachment from religion and old traditions while furthering their integration into the host society. Yet only very few continue on this path.

“My wife and I had decided to raise our children without coercion or fear. We always went around naked in the house and on the beach. But at one point I realized that my children, as they were growing up, tended to be ashamed. I tried to convince them that being naked means being free, but I had to understand that I actually did exercise coercion on my children, by forcing them to act against nature. It is in the nature of man to be ashamed, but we in the West try to rid ourselves of any sense of shame and call that free and natural ... When Adam turned from animal to human, he was looking for leaves to cover himself ... The West tries to wake up the animal in us, but Islam tries to domesticate it. Islam attempts to protect man from his own weaknesses, yet the West tries to use these weaknesses to increase consumerism, and disguises it in the cloak of freedom.” (Syrian, 62 years old, in Augsburg, 2002)

The 62-year-old Arab male who made this statement has been living in Germany for forty-three years; he is now divorced from his wife. He found his way back to religion because he tried

“many ways that led me nowhere ... Freedom over here is not real freedom. While nobody would tell you not to ‘do this or that,’ often you would get to hear: ‘What? You didn’t do it?’ They exercise a certain power—not with orders and commandments, but with deals and offers!”

Young men who are married to older women in Germany—a phenomenon that can be observed among those who come from countries that are tourist destinations—often are looked down upon by fellow nationals and coreligionists. Within the mosques and Muslim community these men feel obliged to show ever more faithfulness and activism in order to rid themselves of the outsider role. Many avoid the places where their fellow nationals gather. Moreover, many marriages break up as soon as the husband acquires German citizenship, even if the marriage initially did not serve this single purpose. After divorce many turn back to the Muslim diaspora community and invest their time and efforts there.

## **Options for (In)Visibility**

On the basis of my research I have concluded that Muslims in Germany choose between the following options when negotiating their relationships to the host society, religion, and the homeland:

1. The individual follows a predetermined path, sticking to the family perspective and goals or following the principles of society: for example,

a student who comes to Germany from an Arab country in order to study at a German university and then returns home after a couple of years and marries within the wider circle of relatives. Those who achieve this option usually prove to be mentally strong and quite flexible. They prefer to have things unfold according to plan. Their social backgrounds and their cultural identity serve as a protective layer between them and the influences of the host society. They seek out familiar structures within the Muslim community and/or the mosque. Because these individuals do not entertain any clear perspective during their stay in the host country and plan to return to their home country, one might expect them to be harmless. This is only the case, however, as long as aggravations from local society keep within certain limits and bonds with the family and community stay intact. One could view this relationship as a kind of “noninterventionist” agreement between the migrant and the host society, amounting to a mutual policy of “live and let live.” Yet this agreement remains, at best, imaginary. For a conservative migrant to be able to reintegrate into his home society after his stay in a Western country, three factors must come into play. First, the host society does not provoke him too much; second, the bonds to his family back home remain strong over this period; and third, the migrant encounters supportive structures in the respective migrant milieu. It is commonly assumed that conservative and religious persons are more isolated and feel a stronger aversion towards the host society. Yet the research presented in this chapter has offered a slightly different picture. Through long conversations with members of migrant groups and an discourse analysis, I came to the conclusion that religious persons who stand firmly by their beliefs encounter fewer problems because they internalize a fundamental respect for hegemony through their belief system.

2. The migrant succumbs to new influences and starts to stray off the path. He becomes acquainted with new Western lifestyles and adopts them as an alternative. He may risk damaging his reputation and losing respect within traditional circles of the diaspora and homeland, but some manage to ascend socially and assimilate themselves into the host society through “westernization.” An improvement of one’s social and economic situation is seen as a strong enough reason to distance oneself from tradition. Families and traditional groups in the diaspora interpret this step rather harshly, as though “the lost son had sold his soul to the devil.” Regrets and a bad conscience about what often turns out to be a complete detachment from religion, tradition, and family are in many cases the consequences. If the “lost son” does not find a ready and welcoming new harbor within the host society, it is likely that he will return to old structures and be left with strong resentment and frustration towards the host country.
3. The individual changes sides frequently inhabiting and negotiating the “in-between” of the two camps—the traditional one and the “Western” one—yet without having any essential connections to the core of either of them. His belonging—to his self and to the respective camps—remains

only partially defined: he is neither fully integrated nor excluded. This situation could carry on indefinitely, as long as the pros and cons offered by both worlds maintain an equilibrium. As time goes by, the pressures arising from this polarization may result in conflicts of belonging, dual identification, or multiple personality structures. At some point the desire to break out of this situation emerges; the individual then either chooses a clear orientation along the lines of one group and detaches himself from the other, or he looks for other alternatives.

4. The migrant arrives with radical ideologies but becomes increasingly tolerant and moderate within the host society. These people arrive with an exaggerated sense of being under threat, viewing the West as inherently evil even before their departure. Through positive and personal social interactions with Germans, both their ideologies and the conception of Western societies are called into question. This process presupposes a certain amount of acceptance of criticism as well as a readiness to learn and develop. Migrants who once were persecuted in their home countries for their radical beliefs now enjoy constitutional protection in the host country while exercising their freedoms of speech, religious expression, and social conduct. As a result, some may soften their radical attitudes towards German institutions. Interestingly, the original position taken towards the policies of the regimes and institutions back home is maintained in the new environment and often is even strengthened and radicalized under the favorable conditions for freedom of expression.
5. The individual tries to find a healthy balance between his or her own cultural identity and the fundamental principles of Western lifestyles. These people often have intentionally chosen Germany as their country of immigration. A pre-existing notion of or intellectual connection with Germany provides the basis for a readiness to accept Germany as a second home. Anything encountered in the host or home society that is identity-enhancing and that communicates meaning may function as an equalizing factor between one's cultural identity and Western principles, thereby helping to keep and solidify a healthy balance between the two. Once the everyday presence of Muslim symbols loses its intimidating effect on members of the host society—as is happening through the increased number of mosques and veiled women in public spaces—Muslims also might ease up in their conduct with these symbols and refrain from politicizing them. Further steps taken by the host society, such as logistical support in the process of building new mosques, might in turn encourage Muslims to engage with local society.
6. What I did not find in my sample is the option of premeditated murder. It is conceivable that this option opens up when the factors of marginalization, culture shock, and a specific personality merge with radical company and begin a process of radicalization. What follows contains a religious element that no longer can be ignored. It seems, for instance, that the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington used a

manual instructing them to follow rigorous code of ritual conduct (Kippenberg and Seidensticker 2004). However that may be, my research revealed that the overwhelming majority of Muslim youth, even when they experience culture shock, isolation, radical ideologies, and loss of identity, nonetheless rejected this option.

## Conclusions

It is difficult to conceive of the members of the second generation committing a terrorist act in the country that to a certain extent is their second “home country.” Though many children of immigrants distance themselves from Germans when describing their experiences of discrimination and racism, they still speak of their strong bonds to Germany. Most of them view themselves as Germans, but they identify primarily with the cities in which they were brought up. Newcomers, on the other hand, seldom identify with their country of immigration. Because they do not have a history in Germany, it is easier for them to identify and label the country with terms such as “the West,” “capitalism,” or even “the devil.” In contrast, children of the second generation have been socialized in German schools; they are reluctant, despite all difficulties, to describe their country in such vague and abstract terms.

However, against the odds there is some evidence to support the hypothesis that second-generation children are more resistant to militant ideologies and terrorism than are newcomers. They are very unlikely candidates for calculated terrorist violence. Still, it is possible that they may react to daily discrimination through spontaneous violence, anger, and frustration. Of course, one should not outright exclude the possibility that the second generation could make contacts with terrorist groups. The latest attacks in London have been terrible proof of that possibility. Yet it is difficult to compare German and British policies on immigration, for it is difficult to draw parallels between the Pakistani and the Turkish communities. It therefore seems hardly probable that a group recruiting exclusively from the second generation would perform terrorist acts on their own initiative. However, under the effects of social stress, discrimination, and identity conflicts, violence could erupt among the children of migrants as well. Typical for this group, however, is escapism or violence committed by individuals, not violence in the form of organized terrorism.

It is important to distinguish between tendencies to violence as a means of conveying a political or social message and the tendency to use violent rhetoric as a means to gain attention or publicity. Most of the time the loud paroles of violence and the conspicuous Islamic clothes are nothing more than a message aimed at both German society and Turkish communities: We are different; we are here. Though these groups wish to stress their self-made identity and to reconstruct their religion, they are in fact still willing to address their surroundings. Their clothes and rhetoric could therefore be seen

as a strategy of communication. Rhetoric often is the weapon used by those who have no other weapons: those who feel helpless, unheard, and humiliated. It can be seen as an outlet or as a means of channeling frustration and social stress. A person who is seriously planning to burn the world down does not announce it in advance. The perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks chose to be “invisible” up to the actual attacks. In accounts made to the press, they were frequently described by those who had known them as “polite,” “restrained,” and “helpful.”

Some Muslim organizations nevertheless use violent rhetoric occasionally as a strategy to keep their own members or gain new supporters. When such groups talk about their aims, they do not claim to behave like good citizens—at least not as the concept is commonly understood. Rather, they wish to give their supporters the feeling that they are part of a great avant-garde mission, one that “liberates the world from injustice,” “leads the world to the path of Islam,” or “sends the unbelievers to hell.” Undoubtedly, such statements work against peace and integration, but there is not always a readiness for violence behind them. Such statements are made primarily to legitimate the existence of the club or organization and to increase the likelihood of receiving more donations. Nevertheless, one should not underestimate the effects of the rhetoric of violence. Many young people begin their radical career after listening to a charismatic leader using precisely such rhetoric. Since the latest wave of violence in the name of Islam, many members of Islamic organizations seem to understand that they cannot maintain the split between democratic structures and militant rhetoric for much longer. Yet there are still some among them who believe that following the ideology of jihad is a better investment.

Finally, there are ways to counteract these processes within the migrant context, so that political radicalism will remain the exception and not become the norm. The classic candidate for such radicalism is the socially isolated individual—the biographies of the 9/11 perpetrators and the members of the Kaplan community have made this clear. To them the attractiveness of radical organizations and their charismatic leaders lies in the promise of “community” and “security.” Further conclusions can be summarized as follows:

1. The diaspora does not nourish the tendency to violence; rather, it creates conditions for political calm and conservatism.
2. Those who feel grounded in their faith tend less towards radicalism than do “converted” or “reconverted” former liberals. This claim is supported by the biographies of the 9/11 perpetrators and by analysis of the interviews conducted for my research.
3. Individuals who are not fully integrated into a religious or ethnic community or into the host society may be more open to terrorism.
4. In the diaspora community, Islam is understood to be the main source of ethnic self-understanding and continuity with the past. Therefore, the ethnic community and the religious community are considered to be identical.

5. There is reason to believe that integration into the migrant milieu (i.e., internal integration) can neutralize tendencies towards political radicalization.

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