

Maruta Herding

Inventing the Muslim Cool

Islamic Youth Culture
in Western Europe



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I. Introduction

Clothing to believe in
URBAN UMMAH

Put your tawheeds up, ones in the air
And praise Allah
POETIC PILGRIMAGE

Read Quran, charge your iman
STYLEISLAM

Comedy, 200% halal
SAMIA, ORIENTAL COMIC

Waymo salamt dich
WAYMO JUGENDPLATTFORM

Qui a dit que les musulmans n'avaient pas
d'humour?
A PART ÇA TOUT VA BIEN

15 Jahre MJD... und kein bisschen leise!
MUSLIMISCHE JUGEND IN DEUTSCHLAND

This isn't your ordinary Friday talk. This is the
iCircle. We have games, workshops, football,
and fun-tastic stuff that will make you shout Al-
lahuakbar out loud without being perceived as
some sort of terrorist.
YOUNG MUSLIMS UK

Du kannst mir Millionen bieten
doch eine Sache ist klar
Das beste Angebot
kommt immer noch von Allah
AMMAR114

Mach mit beim Muslim Comedy Contest!
WAYMO & STYLEISLAM

These slogans, brand mottos and lyrics encapsulate the spirit of a young, European Islam. They are found on T-shirts, in rap songs, youth magazines, online platforms, video clips, comedy shows and at youth meetings that have been developed by and for young Muslims in France, Germany and the United Kingdom. Having mainly emerged in the first decade of the twenty-first century, this phenomenon is rather young itself and is still a largely unfamiliar sight.¹

This study is an exploration of the recent development of Islamic youth culture in Western Europe, which is a combination of religion and youth culture and which manifests itself in explicitly religious rap, Islamic comedy, young urban fashion with pious slogans or media products catering for young European Muslims. In this book, I aim to present a well-rounded picture of this youth culture and to shed light on its character and the details of its cultural components. Its emergence gives rise to many questions about contemporary Islam, the significance of youth cultures in society and in Islam, and about the context in which it takes place – Western Europe as a non-Muslim place with a significant Muslim presence. I have therefore researched into why Islamic youth culture has become established and what motivates people to create it, either individually or as part of a perceived movement.

My approach is an ethnographic one, providing a close description of Islamic youth culture in its diverse dimensions, and at the same time giving a thorough analysis of the reasons for its development. This takes into account a vast array of artefacts, my own observations among the participants and in-depth interviews with the producers of this youth culture, all of which I collected during extensive field research. To conceptualise this, I have drawn on youth culture theory and on concepts of hybridity, as well as previous research in the field of Islam in Europe. This combination should illuminate the study of the empirical phenomenon, which in turn reveals some of the limitations of these theoretic approaches.

The label “Muslim” can never be a given category, as it raises questions of self-identification and ascriptions by others. Thus, when I claim to research young Muslims, this requires some clarification. One definition that comes to mind is that of family background. Theologically, a child born into a Muslim family is automatically a Muslim, but this only applies to clear-cut cases and simplifies multifaceted issues. For instance, it homogenises people of various convictions, ranging from pious devotion to belief without practice, to agnosticism or indifference. All of these people could have a Muslim family background, but to label them “Muslim” would essentialise a very diverse population and take part of their identity as a whole – not to mention the exclusion of con-

1 Arabic expressions are explained in the Glossary in Appendix F.

verts to Islam. Another basis for a definition would be self-attribution, regarding only those as Muslim who identify themselves as such, clearing the term of its predetermined ethnic dimension. But at times research practicality requires a slightly more pragmatic approach. For example, the following section presents data on the Muslim populations of Western Europe as background information. The figures correspond to people with family ties to Islamic countries rather than taking individual self-identification into account, since the large numbers are based on estimates. In this study, however, I look at “practising Muslims” with a high religiosity, who attend events with a strong religious focus or express their faith in public – often in the form of Islamic youth cultural artefacts. The population under study is therefore only a fraction of the larger category of all those who are Muslim by background.

Islam and Muslims in Germany

Muslims have been present in Germany since the seventeenth century, when during several wars the Ottomans came to Germany, either as prisoners of war or as military officials (Abdullah 1981). After World War I, students, intellectuals and converts made up the small but growing Muslim community that was mainly active in Berlin and opened the first mosque in Berlin-Wilmersdorf, which still exists today, in 1924 (Deutsche Islam Konferenz 2008). The first major wave of immigration from Islamic countries, however, came as a result of bilateral agreements between West Germany and several Mediterranean countries in the 1950s and 1960s, recruiting “guest workers” for the German economy, including contracts with Turkey in 1961, but also with Morocco (1963), Tunisia (1965) and Yugoslavia (1968) (*ibid.*). When Germany ended the agreements in 1973, many of the immigrant workers remained in their new home country and were often joined by their families. However, Germany denied their long-term presence and insisted on their status as temporary migrants (Penn/Lambert 2009: 35–36). Until 2000, this was reflected in the German citizenship rules, which were traditionally based on descent rather than place of birth. As Ruud Koopmans et al. (2005) show, Germany’s naturalisation rate is still the lowest in Western Europe, which explains the high percentage of foreigners among Muslims living in Germany. Roger Penn and Paul Lambert point out, however, that a “partial incorporation” took place, since although full political and citizenship rights were largely denied, immigrants were granted inclusion into the state welfare system, including social security and public housing, the latter preventing ghettoised residential patterns from emerging (Penn/Lambert 2009: 37).

A report by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF) estimated the number of Muslims living in

Germany to be 3.8 to 4.3 million, or 4.6% to 5.2% of the general population, which is more than previous estimates have suggested (Haug et al. 2009). Around 45% have German nationality, while 55% own a foreign passport; German converts, of whom no reliable numbers exist, are not counted in this study (ibid.: 74–75). The estimate relies on a thorough analysis of nearly 50 Islamic countries of origin from which people have migrated into Germany. The most important regions from where foreign Muslims and naturalised German Muslims originate are Turkey (2,600,000), Southeast Europe (550,000), the Middle East (330,000), North Africa (280,000), South/Southeast Asia (187,000), then Iran, Central Asia and other parts of Africa (ibid.: 61–74). The vast majority are Sunni Muslims (72%), followed by Alevis (14%), Shiites (7%) and other smaller denominations (ibid.: 128–131).

The BAMF study reveals that the average age of Muslims living in Germany is rather young (just over 30), compared with the average age of the overall German population and of those with a non-Islamic migratory background. The proportion of children under 16 years (around 25% of German Muslims) is more than 10% higher than that of the general population, while the 16- to 24-year-olds (nearly 17%) make up 6% more than their corresponding age group among non-Muslims (Haug et al. 2009: 97–99). If the total Muslim population amounts to around 4 million, the share of young Muslims under 25 thus adds up to 42% or approximately 1.7 million.

Because Islam is not institutionalised like the Church, the religion has not acquired the legal status of a religious community in Germany, which would, for instance, be a prerequisite for providing Islamic education in schools. Religious organisations usually take the form of associations (*Vereine, e.V.*) that are recognised under general association law, and some of these have been acknowledged as religious communities on a local level (Robbers 2009: 141–142; Bodenstein 2010: 57–59). Owing to the lack of a formalised dialogue partner, the Interior Minister at the time, Wolfgang Schäuble, initiated the German Islam Conference (*Deutsche Islam Konferenz*) in 2006, which has become the most important committee for the state to interact with a broad variety of Muslim organisations and individuals shaping Islam in Germany (Robbers 2009: 142; Rohe 2010: 218–219). Committed to improving integration, it provides policy recommendations on topics including imam training, mosque construction or Islamic education in schools. Apart from an annual plenary meeting, several project groups meet frequently to develop more practical initiatives such as improved integration into the labour market or the prevention of radicalisation of young people.² Although it is obvious on the one hand, and highly contested by parts of the

2 Deutsche Islam Konferenz: <http://www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de>.

population on the other hand, it was an important affirmation by the former German President Christian Wulff to underline that Islam is a part of Germany, which he stated in a speech on the occasion of 20 years of German reunification (Der Tagesspiegel 03/10/2010).

There have been several attempts by Muslim representatives to create umbrella organisations for the many associations, in order to speak with one voice. Around 150,000 Turkish Muslims are represented by the Turkish Islamic Union of the Institution for Religion (*Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion e.V., DITIB*), which is supervised by the Turkish Presidency for Religious Affairs. The Central Council of Muslims in Germany (*Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland e.V., ZMD*) represents numerous mosque associations with a total of 12,000 members of chiefly non-Turkish background. The Islam Council for the Federal Republic of Germany (*Islamrat für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*) has 136,000 members and hosts the Islamic Community Milli Görüş (*Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş, IGMG*), an international Turkish movement that has been strongly criticised for anti-democratic tendencies, but which has also been described as “post-Islamist” (Schiffauer 2010). Finally, the Union of Islamic Cultural Centres (*Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren e.V., VIKZ*) represents 20,000 Sunni Muslims (Robbers 2009: 143). In 2007, these four umbrella organisations (DITIB, ZMD, Islamrat, VIKZ) established the Coordination Council of Muslims in Germany (*Koordinierungsrat der Muslime in Deutschland, KRM*) to facilitate cooperation in matters of common interest (ibid.; Bodenstein 2010: 60). There are several other organisations, including the Federation of European Alevites (*Föderation der europäischen Aleviten, AABF*), representing at least 20,000 German Alevites. The problem is, however, that the majority of German Muslims are not part of these large organisations, whose representatives therefore cannot claim to speak on behalf of the entire Muslim population, since only 10 to 15% seem to be represented by the umbrella organisations (Robbers 2009: 143). Five organisations have been banned for not acting in line with the constitution (ibid.: 142).

The largest youth organisation is the Muslim Youth in Germany (*Muslimische Jugend in Deutschland, MJD*), founded in 1994 in Berlin, which has several hundred members according to its own website.³ Local groups meet regularly, and an annual gathering with up to 1,500 young people takes place at Easter every year. While the MJD attracts most young Muslims, not least by being ethnically mixed as well as highly organised and present all over Germany, other organisations also have a youth branch, including the Milli Görüş and smaller mosque associations.

3 Muslimische Jugend in Deutschland: <http://www.mjd-net.de>.

Around 2,600 buildings serve as mosques, many of which are not purpose-built, as only about 180 of them have been erected as a traditional mosque, with another 150 currently under construction. There have been a few conflicts with sections of the general population regarding the construction of some of the mosques, but the establishment of prayer houses is recognised and protected as a matter of religious freedom by the law (Rohe 2010: 221). Islamic education is usually provided by mosque associations, but as part of the school curriculum it remains a matter of debate. A number of German states have introduced such classes, but this is far from providing a general model on the federal level (ibid.: 223; Robbers 2009: 144–146). In 2010, the German Council of Science and Humanities (*Wissenschaftsrat*) recommended that universities should take over the training of Islamic schoolteachers and imams (Wissenschaftsrat 2010: 35–44, 69–80), which is currently being put into practice at the universities of Erlangen-Nürnberg, Frankfurt, Münster and Osnabrück. The degree of advice that Islamic organisations should provide in this process is still under debate (Euro-Islam 30/01/2010).

Wearing the headscarf, *hijab*, is permitted in public spaces, schools and offices, but in many German states it is banned for schoolteachers. Federal law requires an equal treatment of religions – either allowing or banning all religious symbols – but it is up to the individual states to implement laws based on this. Court appeals and public debate are likely to continue (Rohe 2010: 228–229).

Recent public debates on Islam in Germany have included a variety of topics and voices. In 2010, Muslims and non-Muslims alike discussed the question whether it were possible and legitimate to criticise Islam, making use of the full spectrum of opinions from Islamophobic statements to rational, weighted arguments, to apologetic declarations (Euro-Islam 05/02/2010); in the same year, a small anti-Islamic party (*Die Freiheit*) was founded. Following the recommendation for universities to train imams and Islamic teachers, discussions began about the role of state institutions in religious affairs and the influence of religious institutions on state curricula. The ongoing discourse about security issues and radicalisation was fuelled once more by the attack of a radical Islamist, who killed two American soldiers at Frankfurt airport in March 2011. Debates emphasised the possibly growing influence of extreme Salafist thought among German Muslims (Der Spiegel 14/03/2011). Islamophobia is addressed once in a while, though tentatively, but it was discussed profoundly after a supremacist stabbed and killed Egyptian Marwa el-Sherbini in a Dresden courtroom during a trial in which he was charged with previous racist remarks against the woman (Die Zeit 14/07/2009). Highly emotional disputes were fought after the 2010 publication of Thilo Sarrazin's book, which depicts Germany's alleged "down-

The book *Inventing the Muslim Cool* is the publication of her doctoral research, which she conducted at the University of Cambridge. Her research interests include the study of young people, subcultures and Muslims in Europe. BIBLIOGRAPHIC DETAIL: 242 pages 225x148mm 7 b/w & 8 color illus November 2013 PB 9783837625110 Â£34.99 Transcript Verlag SUBJECT: Islam, Muslims In Europe, Muslim Youth, Youth Culture, Popular Culture, Migration, Culture, Sociology of Culture, Islamic Studies, Cultural Studies, Sociology Gazelle Book Services Ltd /+44(0) 1524 68765 / sales@gazellebooks.co.uk / www.gazel Maruta Herding. In the current environment of a growing Muslim presence in Europe, young Muslims have started to develop a subculture of their own. The manifestations reach from religious rap and street wear with Islamic slogans to morally 'impeccable' comedy. This form of religiously permissible fun and of youth-compatible worship is actively engaged in shaping the future of Islam in Europe and of Muslim/non-Muslims relations. Based on a vast collection of youth cultural artefacts, participant observations and in-depth interviews in France, Britain and Germany, this book provides a