CHAPTER FOUR

CRAFTING THE RELIGIOUS INDIVIDUAL IN A FAITH COMMUNITY

The pursuit of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim man and woman.

–Hadith

It is Monday afternoon in MJD’s small meeting room, which is located at the rear of the Green Palace bookshop, along an anonymous street in Kreuzberg. The leader of the meeting, Fadwa (23), is eager; she wants to start as they are already running late. She asks, “do everyone have wudu’? Who can pray?” Turning to Leila (21), she repeats, “can you pray?” Leila says, “yes, I have learned how to pray.” The other girls laugh. Fadwa says impatiently, “no, I mean are you allowed to pray?” Leila responds, “ah...” She nods, laughing. [It is obvious that Leila understood what Fadwa meant, but was making fun.] Fadwa continues, “can someone hand out the Koran so we can read.” Naila (17) gets up and asks who are praying today. The young women raise their hands, and Naila hands out the Korans. Leila reads the first of the five ayahs (verses), starting where they ended last weeks’ reading. Almost everyone reads one ayah and one woman is responsible for correcting their Arabic pronunciation. As Leila closes her book, Sevda (25) protests, there is a fifth line that should be read. “But it was finished,” Leila argues. But Sevda insists: “no, you have to read one more line for it to be correct.” One of the older participants quickly says, “ok, then I’ll read it.” She reads it while Leila holds the book (as women who are menstruating cannot touch the Koran). Fadwa then asks, “can someone read the translation, ‘cause we don't have anyone

1 Wudu’ (the minor ablution) is the ritual cleaning before the prayers. To perform the ritual prayer (salat), which is the second pillar of Islam, Muslims need to be in a state of ritual purity (tahara). Wudu’ is done by rinsing the hands, the mouth, the nose, the right and left forearms, the face, the head, the ears, and the right and left feet with water – in that order (Murata and Chittick 1994).

2 The question “can you pray” can of course be understood as “do you know how to perform the prayer,” but most of the time when asked of women it indicates whether or not they are allowed to pray that day, since a woman is not allowed to pray when menstruating.

3 Depending on the prayer time, the youth either read the Koran first or prayed first. Those who can pray can also read from the Koran. Some argue that a woman who reads the Koran regularly is allowed to recite from the Koran while she is menstruating, as long as she is not holding the Koran in her own hands. The Koran is divided into different chapters, called sura (“a fence, enclosure, or any part of a structure”). Each sura is divided into ayahs, which are short passages (Murata and Chittick 1994, xvii). During the weekly MJD meetings, five ayahs were read, regardless of how many participants were reciting from the Koran that day. Sometimes the same five ayahs were read twice in order for everyone to practice reciting from the Koran.
In order to prepare for this, most youth borrowed the book “The meaning of the Koran” ("Die Bedeutung des Qur’ans", 1998, SKD Bavaria Verlag & Herdel GmbH) from MJD one week in advance of their presentation. Reading that to go along with the explanation about what it means.” Afterwards, one of the participants gives a presentation. Some of the participants have brought biscuits, chocolate bars, fruit, and cakes that all enjoy in the last part of the two-hour meeting, which is when administrative issues, upcoming events, a social game, and chatting take place. The meeting ends, as usual, with a ādāb (supplication), where the first and last part is in Arabic, followed by a more spontaneous and personal part in the middle, in German.

During the weekly meetings, I observed how the youth educate themselves by reading from the Koran in Arabic and then in German “so that they can understand what they have read.” This was followed by a tafsir study (Koran commentary or exegesis) prepared by one of the youths, sometimes by the use of PowerPoint.4 The agenda continued with presentations on how to be a Good Muslim or on issues relevant to everyday life as a young Muslim in Germany, including the application of different aḥādīth to contemporary life. The meeting also included a topic of the day, for example the history and social situation of their parents’ home country “since we are such a multicultural group” as one of the leaders put it. In the period I spent there, presentations included such topics as Amr Khaled’s “What the West means for Muslims,” and “What do Europeans think of Muslims?” Other presentations were about the wives of the Prophet Muhammad, the life of the Prophet (called Sira), stories about the different Prophets, and a presentation on “Time-management,” which emphasized how important a time youth is, because “it does not last forever.” Yet other meetings addressed questions about when and how to do daʿwa (call or invitation to Islam), and “Muslims’ contribution to Science.” In the period before Ramadan, two of the older members presented on what is allowed and when one theologically speaking breaks Ramadan (by performing religiously incorrect actions). The tafsir, presentations, and short games were prepared by different participants each week and were often organized as PowerPoint presentations. The current leader(s) decided on the weekly program (presentations and themes) by seeking inspiration from the MJD website, following the handbook provided by the national organization, incorporating their own ideas, and asking the participants about their interests.

This chapter deals with how the young people learn and relate to a particular religious ethos that they study, negotiate, and practice within the

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4 In order to prepare for this, most youth borrowed the book “The meaning of the Koran” ("Die Bedeutung des Qur’ans", 1998, SKD Bavaria Verlag & Herdel GmbH) from MJD one week in advance of their presentation.
religious space of MJD. The main focus is on how religious discursive practices and ideals are presented to the youth, and how these practices are incorporated into the crafting of their bodies. How do the youth learn to become religious subjects within this space? Through debates, events, and presentations, as well as ideals, principles, and standards drawn from Islam, they were taught how to achieve “religious proximity” (Appelros 2007, 8), which is how to behave as religiously correct as possible. Which rules and forms of conduct were promoted in the youth’s crafting of a religious Self?

What is deemed a correct performance involves specific ideals or normative expectations as provided by a religious authority or by a faith community’s understanding of Islamic tradition. The young Muslim women I worked with strived to become pious, virtuous, or correct Muslims. Familiarizing themselves with the religious ideals, practicing these, and correcting their daily behaviors led to an awareness of what was expected in order to be or become good or correct Muslims. This ultimately shapes their continuous crafting of a religious Self. What were the expectations to the youths’ performance of their religious identity? In this process, how was a specific religious faith community forming a religious subject and what were the youths’ responses towards this religious subject formation? In short, how is the religious crafting of the Self simultaneously an individual and a group-oriented process? These practices can be viewed as cultivating pious behavior. Are these discursive practices totalizing or part of forming a subject who is not free?

In my examination of how the young Berliner women I worked with learned religiously defined ideals and norms I analyze how these young women situated themselves in relation to the religious norms they were taught and show how these norms were used in the crafting of the Self as a religious subject. I look at the content of the religious norms and ideals, and pay attention to how the correct religious knowledge, behavior, and appearance was taught and discussed within the religious space of MJD. Finally, I question whether these techniques of the Self form a submissive subject. My inquiry into the crafting of a religious Self takes place within a Foucauldian inquiry into how different social and political spaces and times produce different ideas and ideals of the subject, in relation to which the subject seeks to craft herself and through which subjects with diverse characteristics, sentiments, beliefs, and contradictions are produced. Becoming pious or Good Muslims includes the perfection of virtuous behavior, a process which is akin to the Foucauldian techniques of the self (Mahmood 2005). I understand here the techniques of the Self as
particular practices that, when performed by the subject, allow her to take up certain subject-positions—in this case, that of the virtuous Muslim woman in Berlin.

A Religious Ethos

The theological structures of almost all world religions contain rules, obligations, and rights. Suggestions on how to develop and acquire a particular Muslim personal character have always been formulated within Muslim societies (Metcalf 1984). According to Islam, a series of perfect revelations, ending with the Prophet Muhammad and the Koran, brought a prophet who provided a visible and accessible example of the revelations. Many Sunni Muslims consider the Prophet to be the realization of the truths of the Koran, and view the moral exemplification of the practice of the Prophet as the ultimate representation of how to live as a Muslim. The effort to obtain a complete moral state of being is not left to historical figures, but is expected of Muslims in the present. Moreover, each individual has the responsibility to seek to attain the internal capacity and sensibility of a religious tradition (al-sunna al-diniyya) in which the individual person stands alone on the Day of Judgment and must account for her or his life (Asad 2003, 91). In order to achieve moral fulfillment or to become a good or better Muslim, the Muslim subject needs to deal with the norms and obligations provided by Islamic tradition.

Most of the youth I worked with sought and ultimately expected to improve their religious subjectivity through their participation in a religious organization. MJD promotes Islamic practice among youth as particularly relevant in light of the many temptations youth face, such as sex, alcohol, fashion, music, religiously inactive friends, and TV, through which youth risk diverting their attention away from religious ideals and obligations. Leisure interests, such as dating and intercourse before marriage, use of alcohol and drugs, and going to clubs and parties are common among many youth in Germany, but these are strictly forbidden in Islam. Many Muslim youth consider easily available visual pornography (e.g. semi-nude pictures on billboards or on the cover of German newspapers, and improperly dressed men and women on the street during the

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5 World religion here encompasses Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism (Sharot 2001, 5).
summer) as *haram* for the eye. Overall, the struggle for Muslim youth is both spiritual and existential (Zine 2001, 401).

Throughout my fieldwork, I paid attention to how youth learned to craft themselves as a particular religious subject, in relation to specific ideals and ethos, and with the goal of becoming good Muslims. Recognizing that Islam is a discursive tradition makes it possible to think of these ideals or ethos as normative without dismissing their religious legitimacy or authenticity. What makes the teaching and religious practices part of an Islamic tradition is not whether or not they conform to a specific rigid model, but rather that the practice(s) in its current organization, judgment, and presentation relate to authoritative discourses and past standards situated within that tradition (Asad 1999, 1993; Hirschkind 2001a).\(^6\) Being or becoming a good Muslim encompasses a large variety of body comportments, value orientations, and moral behaviors that in sum constitute a subject formation. This subject formation works through the conscious cultivation of certain practices considered central in the creation of a religious Self (see Mahmood 2005). I show that in the process of becoming skilled at these practices, the young women simultaneously craft their Selves as particular religious subjects who come to understand themselves as members of a religious faith community.

*The Religious Body*

Anthropologists have long studied how bodies, comportments, and expressions of emotions are culturally and socially shaped, and how the differences vary between genders, ages, groups, etc.\(^7\) In tracing the “civilization” of manners and personality in Western Europe, Elias (2000 [1978]) shows us how individuals with different social positions were instructed in different codes of bodily conduct, including manners, etiquette, and the self-monitoring of bodily functions and actions. Likewise, Mauss (1979 [1935]) gives an account of how different cultures organize the body as a technical tool differently. With the concept of habitus, Mauss invites us to study the body not only as a vehicle of symbolic connotations, but as an assemblage of embodied capacities (Asad 1997). In an effort to avoid the Cartesian dualism that distinguishes between the mind and the objects that the mind perceives, Mauss sought to view the human body as neither

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\(^6\) As my main focus is not the religious movement per se, but rather the attendees of the movement, I do not refer to how organization situates the knowledge within Islam.

\(^7\) See in particular Briggs (1970), Elias (2000 [1978]), Kondo (1990), Lutz (1988), and Scheper-Hughes 1994.
a passive recipient of “cultural imprints” nor an active source of “natural expressions” (ibid., 76). Instead, Mauss argued that we must look at the body as the medium through which to realize a number of human intentions, including manners of physical movement (for example walking), forms of emotive being (for example modesty), and styles of spiritual experiences (for example self-transcendence).

Later, Bourdieu (1990, 53) famously used the concept of habitus as a system of durable, transposable dispositions. He viewed the body as a mnemonic device where the essential culture—the repertoires of the habitus—is impressed and encoded through a process of socialization. Bodily hexis denotes the deportment of actors, including their stance, walk, and gestures. Dispositions and political mythologies are made permanent, embodied, and realized in bodily hexis.

There is a limit to Bourdieu’s rationalist perspective in that it provides a too socialized and collective view of the connection between social representations and the body (Moore 2007). Consequently, he disregards individual experiences, desires, self-awareness, and motivations and fails to include the formation of desires that are not rational (Friedman 1994). In her study of pious Muslim women in Egypt, Mahmood (2005, 139) rightly criticizes Bourdieu for neglecting to investigate the process through which subjects become specific subjects, and specifically how the habitus (as embodied dispositions) is learned through pedagogical processes. Mahmood argues that one of the consequences of this negligence is that Bourdieu overlooks how particular conceptions of the self call for particular bodily capacities. She demonstrates how the participants in the women’s mosque movement in Egypt struggle to follow a particular ideal in order to construct themselves as religious subjects, a process that might appear irrational. Likewise, the continuous process of becoming good Muslims for youth in Berlin includes perfecting behavior that is considered correct. This process resembles the Foucauldian techniques of the self: in other words, the specific practices through which a subject comes

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8 Bourdieu makes no reference to Mauss in his later coinage of the concept of habitus, which others have explained in terms of his conceptualization of the idea being different to that of Mauss.

9 Although also critical of Butler, Mahmood’s analysis is partly an empirical demonstration of both Foucault’s and Butler’s theories on subject formation, where the subject achieves a self and comes to recognize herself within certain historically defined structures. She contends that feminist writers fail to consider how women’s desires (as those of men) are socio-historically constructed and that they thus falsely universalize the liberal-humanist interpretation of freedom and agency.
to constitute her or himself as a subject (Foucault 1988; see also Rose 1996).10 Foucault asserts that the technologies of the self:

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\text{permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality. (Foucault 1988, 18)}
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The way an individual experiences, comprehends, assesses, and performs her or himself take place within and through systems of power that appear to be either natural or imposed from above.

Here, I focus on how the Muslim youth craft a religious Self within a religious faith community where particular religiously defined ideals are presented and taught. In Sunni Islam, each follower is considered latently competent to take up the religiously defined ideals and is also individually accountable for the self-discipline required to realize this goal (Meltcalf 1984).11 An individual should endeavor to apply the highest ideals possible in order to achieve religious proximity in their everyday life instead of removing themselves in a segregated community, or an established religious order, which is the case in certain strains of Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism (Mahmood 2005).

Religious ideals and a religiously defined ethos were promoted in the weekly MJD meetings through debates, presentations, lectures, comments, and the everyday expectations of the participants. At MJD gatherings, events and seminars, attendees listened to presentations on practices that (Sunni) Muslims consider to be duties, such as prayer and fasting.12

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10 According to Nixon (1997), it is through these contentions that Foucault shifts away from his previous more limited focus on how discourses produce historical identities. Foucault turns his attention away from how the subject is regulated and disciplined, to embrace a more complex view of agency. “Techniques of the self” continue to be carried out in fields of discourses and power-knowledge, but the practice of a discursive subject position is situated in ways that highlight that this process is dynamic. Drawing on Foucault, Butler (1993) argues that norms are not merely social obligations that limit the subject, but are the foundations through which subjects are realized. The subject is created (or produced) through power relations, and these power relations simultaneously form the conditions of the subject’s possibilities. Foucault calls this the “paradox of subjectification” since the processes through which a subject realizes her or himself also contributes to her or his subordination (Butler 1993, 1997; Foucault 1980).

11 This is similar to the Protestant tradition in Christianity.

12 During regional and local seminars and weekly meetings, references were made to the different madhhabs (schools of law or jurisprudence) in Sunni Islam, leaving individuals to decide for themselves which one of these (preferably within Sunni Islam) they choose to follow.
To varying degrees, participants sought to learn these ideals in their endeavor to be or become pious and Good Muslims.\textsuperscript{13} The meetings focused not only on gaining knowledge, but also on the youth working on her outer appearances, religious performances, and the relationship between internal and external comportment. Religious ideals that are considered universal are, at the same time, made local by the specific examples used by the participants and by the contextualization of the actual difficulties, contestations, and opportunities that emerge from living in Berlin as a Good Muslim. In the course of my fieldwork, I realized that the youths’ efforts to submit to religiously defined norms and rules were part of a process that required them to be actively involved, rather than passive actors. Their active interaction with, or submission to, religious laws and norms was part of their self-formation. In this chapter, I seek to expand our understanding of this process by shedding light on the creative processes by which people constantly craft, construct, and enact their Selves within a socio-historical space.\textsuperscript{14}

The notion of “crafting” calls attention to the creativity involved, and opens up the process(es) of the continued creation of the young women as subjects, without ignoring the social constraints and relations that individuals continuously relate to and interact with in Berlin (see Kondo 1990). In looking at the processes within which the crafting of a religious subject takes place, I seek to remain aware of the religiously defined norms, while avoiding constructing a perception of a homogeneous, ahistorical Muslim subject.

\textit{Objectification and De-Culturalization of Religion}

Several scholars have argued that the immigrant generation(s) born in Germany, and in other Western European societies, relate to a different

\textsuperscript{13} I rely both on “religiousness” and on “piety,” even if the women in Berlin rarely referred to themselves as pious or used the German term “\textit{fromm}.” Piety is a particular form of religiousness, which is considered not only a state of the soul, but also a practice. In recent anthropological research on Muslims in the Middle East, the term pious has been used in order to make the term \textit{mutadawiyin} (which could be understood as sincere or “\textit{fromm}”) understandable, although often without defining it (Hirschkind 2001; Mahmood 2005).

\textsuperscript{14} In her ethnography of the construction of selfhood in Japanese companies and families, Kondo (1990) makes use of the term “crafting self,” which I also use here. The concept of crafting, Kondo argues, “implies a concept of agency: that human beings create, construct, work on, and enact their identities, sometimes creatively challenging the limits of the cultural constraint which constitute both what we call selves and the ways those selves can be created” (Kondo 1990, 48). See also the introduction.
religious orientation than that of their parents. A major distinction is the rejection of culture that can be found in many Muslim youth movements and among individuals, and in which pure Islam is situated above everything cultural. Already in the early 1990s, researchers interviewing young South Asian Muslim women in England found that the women established a clear division between religion and culture. This distinction was, according to the youth, largely incomprehensible to their parents (see Knott and Khokher 1993). The practice of distinguishing between religion and culture can be found within religious reformist movements, and within more fundamentalist religious movements, in several European countries (Roy 2004).

Likewise, most MJD participants considered the practices of their parents’ generation to be a cultural, impure, or traditional Islam that mixed religious premises with traditional, ethnic, or national cultural practices. In contrast, the young Muslims sought to perform a true or pure Islam detached from ethnic and national traditions and culture. This is a general tendency among second and third generation migrants in European societies (Cesari 2003) since the late 1990s. Most of the youth who entered MJD aimed to learn about a pure Islam, while other youth became increasingly aware of this distinction as it was drawn by the leaders in the presentations and discussions. By going back to the sources (the Koran, hadith, and Sunna), the youth sought an Islam beyond a particular national or ethnic religious tradition and community, and emphasized the worldwide umma (the world-wide religious community). Youth saw this form of de-ethnicized Islam as more theologically correct and objectively more religiously proximate than the traditional or cultural Islamic orientation of their parents’ generation in Germany.

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15 See Cesari (2002), Karakaşoğlu (2003a, 2003b), Klinkhammer (1999), Nökel (2002).
16 See in particular Amir-Moazami (2007) Hermansen (2003, 309) Jacobsen (2011), Jouili (2009), Roy (2004) and Thielmann (2005).
17 In the twentieth century, Wahhabism, Tablighism and Salafism were all searching for a “pure” Islam and a standardization of the practice of Sunni Islam around an orthodoxy dissociated from local cultures (Roy 2010). Yet, the Tablighis and the Salafis are not the only ones to consider the “pinnacle of devotion” to be emulation of the Prophet. In fact, many Muslims try to follow the Sunna of the Prophet.
18 The distinctions that Muslims born in Europe make between religion and culture have been discussed by several researchers. (See for example Bendixsen 2009b; Cesari 2003; Fadil 2008; and Roy 2004).
19 Some scholars refer to this as a de-culturalized Islam (Roy 2004), and others refer to it as a de-traditionalization of Islam (Fadil 2008). I refer to it as a de-ethnicized form of Islam because this term is more neutral in regard to the form of Islam that the youth claim that their parents practice. Calling a young person’s form of Islamic practices a
This de-ethnicized form of Islam is in part caused by immigration. Immigration always changes how religion is transmitted. Social alienation and frustration related to migration have an impact on ethnic and religious identification. In addition, in the process of moving, “religion and tradition cease to be prearranged identities” (Göle 2003, 813). Furthermore, as Eickelman and Piscatori (1996) point out, migration familiarizes immigrants with different ways of performing a ritual or religiously defined act, and they become aware of outsiders’ (frequently critical) views of their performance. Socio-cultural changes, such as access to higher education in the new country of residence, increase the generational gap and, to some extent, contribute to the deconstruction of the authority of the older generation and to an individualization of religion.

Yet migration alone is not the only cause of the practice of distinguishing between culture and religion. The current practice of marking this distinction needs to be understood in an ongoing, world-wide process of theological change. The idea of a Europeanized Islam that emphasizes an individualization of religion highlights that residence in Europe itself shapes the character of Islam, and as such demonstrates how an understanding of the performance of Islam needs to be socially contextualized. New religious aspects or developments are often considered a result of Islam’s entry into European societies. However, as Amir-Moazami and Salvatore (2003) have suggested, it underestimates both the particular diasporic situation and the fact that the available space for reform and change must be approached from within Muslim traditions. Changing religious aspects are often appropriated within an intellectual and Muslim Reformist tradition, which for a century has dealt with the challenges of modernity by means of Islamic sources.

Following a socio-historical approach, Amir-Moazami and Salvatore consider the role of Islamic reform movements in the second part of the nineteenth century in the Ottoman Empire. Then, as now, there were Muslim reformers active in the public sphere who critiqued local customs and called for a revivification of the sacred text. Prominent Muslim figures (such as Abdallah al-Nadim 1845–1896) targeted good Muslim women. Thus, considering youths’ attitude to Islam as a return to tradition, a re-Islamification, or a coming out as Muslims (notably using a similar discourse as gay movements), or merely as a consequence of being a minority in Europe, fails to notice critical aspects of Islam as a discursive tradition.

de-culturalized Islam or a de-traditionalized Islam risks presenting the youth’s practices as theologically or objectively more religiously proximate than those of their parents, and this value judgment is not the role of social scientists.
Instead, the practice of the de-ethnicized Islam has to be situated within a longer process of the discursive Muslim tradition that is continuously subject to internal transformations (Amir-Moazami and Salvatore 2003, 54). Islam as a discursive tradition is a mode of engagement with sacred texts (Asad 1986). The reform of tradition is a dynamic that must also account for the inherent search for a coherence of traditions (Asad 1999), which produces a drive to self-reform. Thus, the need to feel that there is continuity in an internal logic of interventions within traditions must be taken seriously. However, the consequences this distinction has in Germany, and the effect the idea of a pure Islam has on the youths’ ethnic identification and their relation to their German identification, must be situated within the specific European migration context.20

In this context, MJD attendees are participants in similar processes to those taking place in different European societies and further across the world, and which have been called a revival of Islam.21 Such an orientation towards Islam resembles that of the objectification processes found in the religious imagination among Muslims in the Middle East in the 1990s (Eickelman 1992; 2000). The objectification of the religious imagination calls attention to the conscious process by which Muslims become aware of their identity as Muslims. In this process, the subjects ask themselves explicitly, “what is my religion? Why is it important to my life? and, How do my beliefs guide my conduct?” (Eickelman 1992, 643; 2000, 130). The process of objectification does not mean that religion becomes uniform or monolithic, even if that is how some religious actors subsequently perceive it. Rather, these questions continue to shape the activities and discourses of Muslims. Some try to legitimate their beliefs and practices by claiming to return to allegedly authentic established traditions (Eickelman 1992). The so-called objectified consciousness is realized through a process of modernization, where the expansion of literacy and education is a factor that supposedly decreases the need for young people to turn to

20 Chapter 6 deals with these factors.
21 This can also partly explain why Berliner Muslim youth use some approaches that are similar to those used by Muslim women in Egypt (Ismail 2003), Turkey (Saktanber 2002), Indonesia (Brenner 1996), and France (Jouili 2009; Amir-Moazami 2007). Hermansen argues that “[i]nternationalist Muslim revivalist movements such as Jama’at Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan al-Muslimoun) have encouraged this concept of a ‘culture-less’ Islam around the world” (Hermansen 2003, 309). He further notes that these organizations incorporate identity by insisting on being “Muslim and proud of it” (ibid.). Without specifically mentioning these organizations, in an interview with Mahmood, Asad (1996) suggests that the new Islamist movements place importance on proper bodily practices and aim for this behavior to be reintroduced in places where it has broken down and to be maintained anywhere it subsists.
religious authorities to make sense of their religion. How is objectification of Islam, or de-ethnicized Islam, played out and formed within MJD?

**Knowledge Formation in MJD**

As young people familiarize themselves with the religious ideals of what is expected of a Good Muslim, and as they practice these ideals and correct their daily behavior, they consciously engage in the continuous crafting of a religious Self. In order to cast light on the religious knowledge formation in this religious faith community, I investigate four focal points of MJD’s teachings: 1) learning to distinguish between culture and religion, 2) highlighting the relationship between internal motivation and external motions, 3) practicing how to have the correct desires, and 4) focusing on Islamic character. McLaren (2002, 15), referring to Foucault, points out that the practices of the Self are always oriented towards specific goals: the desires that motivate specific subject formations. The motivation for participation in MJD is discussed in chapter 7. Here, it suffices to note that I suggest that one of the main goals behind the crafting of the religious subject in MJD is that youth try to please God, and to fulfill a desire to enter Paradise when they leave their lives in “this world.” While this chapter examines the formation of a Self in relation to certain religious discourses, chapter 5 deals more extensively with the negotiations, divergences, and tensions that arise as youth relate to these discourses.

**Distinguishing between Culture and Religion**

Here, I examine the process or pedagogy through which the youth learn to mark a distinction between their parents’ ethnic culture and religion, and how the youth perform this distinction. The following excerpt from one of the weekly MJD newsletters, sent as a group email, illustrates the organization’s general view:

MJD-Nasihamail: our principles regarding the reform of the Umma (Part 2)
Asalamu alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh,
Our principles regarding the reform of the Umma (part 2)

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22 Yet, the practice of distinguishing between true or pure and false Islam reemphasizes the importance of religious authorities and authoritative sources for the youth. This is discussed in chapter 5.

23 Muslims believe that their life on earth is only a preparation for the eternal life, either in Paradise or in Hell, which they will enter on death.
Every reform needs principles. Values towards which the reformers orient themselves at all times. I would now like to pass on to you a small package of principles:

5. Principle

Most of us have grown up with two cultures. One, the German culture and the other the culture of our parents’ home. Sometimes there are traditions that are in conflict with Islam. Unfortunately, many of us then give precedence to tradition. Thus, things like honor killings happen, which are publicized through the media. We have to be aware that Islam is our primary culture. The culture of our parents is our secondary culture. When this one is in conflict with Islam, then it is obvious that we give Islam priority. We are not allowed to adhere to traditions like honor killings or traditions that contribute to oppressing women, to preventing them from studying or working, because this is not consistent with Islam.24

This group email, which was sent to everyone who had signed up on the MJD homepage, emphasizes that Islam should prevail over any cultural norms. The differentiation between traditions that their parents adhere to and Islam as a pure religion is central to the email. This suggests that the youth and their parents represent two different epistemological traditions in defining what true Islamic knowledge is. In order for such a distinction to take place, people must know how to distinguish between religion and culture or tradition. This knowledge is not readily available to them through their parents, as the above text implies, because parents represent culture or tradition. Through talks, presentations, monthly seminars and leisure activities, the participants are told either directly or indirectly that there are right and wrong ways of performing religious activities and rituals. For example:

At one meeting, Fadwa (23) emphasized that some, in particular older women, exaggerate their tears when praying during Ramadan or funerals, constituting more of a “performance” or “a competition” to show who is the most religious, or who was the closest to the dead. “This is tradition,” she argued, and not “correct religious behavior.”

Here, the division between right and wrong is touched upon within the broader framework of distinguishing between culture and religion.25 Reflections such as those Fadwa makes here illustrate that a correct performance is recognized through normative standards, against which

24 Email received March 5, 2006. My translation.
25 Similarly, Hirschkind, who conducted ethnographic work in Egypt, found that several of the people he studied were concerned “that people are crying during sermons for the wrong reasons” (Hirschkind 2001, 542).
flawed performances are distinguished and assessed. An act has to be explained “in terms of the conventions which make it meaningful as a particular kind of activity, one enacted for certain reasons and in accord with certain standards of excellence and understood as such by those who perform and respond to it” (Hirschkind 2001b, 633).

In MJD, efforts to perform a pure Islam were based on going back to the sources (Koran, hadith and Sunna), obtaining knowledge, and understanding the religious practices. It also meant reflecting on where knowledge comes from in order to judge whether or not it was valid. I noticed that newcomers in particular asked questions that sometimes made the other members laugh. The kind of knowledge that many novices brought with them from home was often dismissed or corrected as a mixture of religious knowledge and cultural beliefs or as superstition originating in their parents’ village. In such discussions, the young women used a kind of religious logic when dismissing what they considered cultural practices, as in the following:

A newcomer, a German convert, said that her (Egyptian) husband had told her that she must wash before shaving her body. She thought that this was a bit strange and could not really understand why. When she asked the group whether it was true, the older participants replied, “why should you wash your hair before shaving it?” The newcomer explained her husband’s point of view: “Well, he says that it’s no good when you remove something that is not clean.” One of the long-term participants responded with a smile, “but we do that when we go to the toilet, for example.” The girls laughed.

Here, the young women reject the husband’s view by pointing to a specific line of reasoning. Rather than offering a yes/no answer, the discussion encourages a particular type of logic. Frequently, as in the above conversation, participants were asked to explain where they got their knowledge from and to explain their ideas. In the mosque or during events, the youth often asked each other, “where have you heard that from?” “Where does it say that?” “Is it an innovation?” This would be followed by discussions and even heated arguments about what the correct answer was. The youth

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26 The youth made use of the words “wirkliche” (real) and “richtige” (right) Islam in German. Chapter 5 deals more extensively with how the youth legitimated their own and others’ activities as religious or not. MJD’s search for religious truth parallels similar processes that new movements go through, as Alberoni (1984) discusses. In the birth phase of movements, groups are frequently apt to generate a unanimous view or model about the essential issues. The movements search for the truth, the unique truth, against old institutions (Alberoni 1984).
were rarely reserved or meek when it came to disputing someone else’s religious knowledge. For example:

One of the new participants said that she had heard that if you laugh during prayer, then the prayer is invalid. Somaya (17) responded, “yes, but try to remember where you have heard that from, ‘cause remember that hearing something is not the same as it being correct.”

When uncertainty or discussions of different opinions emerge, the organizer would stop the discussion, saying, “I will check that for next time,” or would ask the attendees to “check it” with an imam or in a book. The continuous religious authority of imams, even when none are officially linked to the organization, is revealing. The youth were encouraged to ask questions, to seek answers in books, on the Internet, and to participate in organized events. MJD also occasionally invited a young imam for a dedicated Question & Answer meeting in which the youth were invited to ask specific questions. The legitimacy of a certain practice generally depends on whether it can be traced to sources that address Islam in a universal way (Koran, the Sunna, and the commentaries of the ulama). Understanding their Islam as universalistic, the youth made reference to global authorities, rather than to only Turkish or Arabic authoritative figures.27

Merging Internal Motivation and External Motions

Within this religious group, it was not considered sufficient for a person to merely perform a religious act externally, meaning that one’s body movements and the conduct of the performance are correct. Even if one conducts a religious act, such as prayer, in a physically or bodily accurate manner, these bodily movements had to be accompanied by the correct conscious or mental orientation. The youth often said that if someone performs a good deed “just in order to tell others” and to demonstrate “how good they are,” this deed does not lead to good points (as a good deed for Allah) since such an act must be performed with the correct intentions.28

The internal, one’s mind and thoughts, had to be included in the act in

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27 Nielsen has argued that the promotion of a universal Islam is a consequence of the ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of Muslims in Europe, as “it became necessary to identify those aspects of the way of life which were culturally relative and to categorise them apart from the central Islamic core which must remain absolute” (Nielsen 1992, 65). I find this argument too Eurocentric in that he only considers the impact of the European context on Muslim identity and ignores the internal dynamic of Islam as a discursive tradition.

28 Doing good deeds (al-amal al-saliha) secures God’s blessings and aids in the formation of virtuous dispositions (Mahmood 1998, 102–104). Again, the good deeds must be
Chapter Four

order for it to be judged a religiously moral act (also see Mahmood 2005). At one meeting, Fadwa (23) said:

“I was thinking that from next Monday on we should fast, but I don’t know if people are motivated?” One of the girls exclaimed, “if we know that twenty of us are fasting, should that not be motivating enough?” Fadwa agreed, and another young girl enthusiastically noted that “fasting is also slimming” as an incentive to fast. In response, Somaya (17) wrinkled her nose and emphasized that “dieting should not be a reason to fast.”

A feeling of community can strengthen individual incentives to perform a religiously motivated act like fasting. Moreover, Somaya’s comment reflects the idea that the act of fasting is only religiously valid in so far as the person conducts the act with the correct motivations and virtues. In cultivating these dispositions, the young participants learned to differentiate between performing practices that were motivated by religious experiences or religious sentiments, compared to those motivated by secular, materialistic, traditional, or fashion sentiments. Not eating or drinking was not in itself seen as sufficient for the act to count as religiously valid. In their view, fasting is only religiously valid in so far as the person conducts the act with pure motives. The youth frequently argued that whether or not someone has the correct motivations, “only Allah knows.”

The link between inner motivation and external performance was particularly emphasized with regard to the act of prayer. Presentations on the prayer referred to how the Prophet Muhammad sat during his prayer (i.e. how he placed his feet) as an ideal. Furthermore, the discussions stressed the importance of being concentrated when praying. Muslims must keep the right intentions in their hearts during prayer. During one MJD weekly meeting, the youth were impressed by a story of a companion of the Prophet who, while at war and when no anesthetic was left, asked the doctor to operate on his foot while he prayed because he would be so concentrated on the prayer as to feel no pain. “I have goose bumps,” Hawa (22)

performed with the right sincerity of intent (al ikhlas). Similarities can be found in Christianity. The passage in Matthew 6:1–6 reads: “Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.”

29 This conversation did not take place during Ramadan. The youth occasionally fasted throughout the year as an act that gives good points, but also in order to fulfill their Ramadan as women have to break it during menstruation.

30 During Ramadan, there is a heightened attention to adherence to the right conduct. It is a situation in which Muslims should strengthen their ability to do right without being controlled by others (at-taqwa – fear of God), and exercise the virtue of patience (sabr), see www.islam.no/newsite/content, accessed May 3, 2007.
said after listening to the story, stroking her arm. Many of the young women were awed by the story, as it clearly exemplifies a unique internal orientation to God, and a standard towards which all Muslims should strive. Several youth complained about the difficulties they had in concentrating when praying. Hawa once remorsefully said that sometimes in the last prayer cycle, the thought “what should I cook afterwards?” suddenly enters her mind. She said: “It is so annoying! Then the whole prayer is not valid!” Later in the discussion, Hawa expressed admiration for Muslim converts because they tend, she argued, to perform the prayer with a fervor and concentration that she envied.

Gender- and age-specific difficulties or tensions can emerge for a young person trying to fulfill the religious ideals. For example, Fatima (31) told me that after becoming a mother, she found it more difficult to really focus on her prayer when her child was crawling on the floor, since she was constantly worried that something would happen to her daughter. This was a new situation that she had to work to master. Another younger woman, Naila (17), relayed the following story:

The previous year, Naila had gone to the “Finnowstrasse” (a mosque) during Ramadan to pray, “cause he [a man she had become interested in during another religious event] was going there. Even if I knew the whole time that it wasn't right. Probably the prayers are not even valid.” She shook her head, obviously discontent with herself.

Here, Naila demonstrated that she was increasingly reflecting on her past religious practice. During the previous year, Naila had become aware of the importance of both internal motivation and external movements in the act of praying. Still, being a teenager in love can make this ideal difficult to reach. Naila reassessed her own behavior as not having a religious motivation: visiting a mosque in order to get a glimpse of a man she was in love with did not fulfill the internal motivation that would lead the prayer to be religiously correct. Her story also illustrates potential tensions between being young and in love, and being a religiously correct Muslim.

Generally, the difficulties over concentration during prayer were considered understandable, although an imperfection or weakness that the young people needed to work on. The youth made the following skit dealing with this issue:

At one weekly meeting, Fadwa (23) wanted to show what Leila (21), Ismail (16), and her friends had learned at a religious seminar during the weekend. Fadwa partly tucked her long top into her pants. When some of the girls wanted to fix it, she said that, “it is supposed to be like that.” They dimmed the light and Fadwa and Ismail (the latter had loosened her headscarf) laid
The prayer consists of a specific number of prayer-cycles (rekâts), each of which consists of a sequence of stations that include different movements of the body. In the third and fourth station of one rekât, the person praying goes down on their knees and the upper body is bent down so that nose and forehead touch the ground (see Henkel 2005).
nice way so that she will not turn against you when you explain it. It is not for you, but for her. Sometimes it is just that she did not know and then it is good when you tell her.” Someone protested: “Of course she knows – everyone knows what is right and not right in their heart.” Leila disagreed, “no, that is not true. Sometimes she would know and sometimes not.” (...) Ismail stated that, “every minute is for Allah. It says in the Koran that Allah does not need us to pray to him. It is for our own good.” Fadwa inserted, “sometimes you hear about it being difficult to pray at work, ‘cause there are no places provided for prayer and it is embarrassing to ask or to do it in front of others [non-Muslims]. Then you come home in the evening and have not prayed. Is it a good enough excuse?”

Many of the youth admitted that they did not pray diligently and often explained it by referring to the lack of prayer spaces, distractions, and the structuring of the day in Berlin. Praying instead of watching football or American blockbusters when returning tired from school could be difficult. Praying at school in the stairways where their schoolmates could see them could be embarrassing or uncomfortable. Fadwa proposed that such explanations were not acceptable reasons for not meeting religious requirements. Once they realized that praying should be done for its own sake, attendees should become motivated to perform the obligatory prayers. Whether practitioners pray together or alone, a fundamental feature of the prayer is that it produces and signals the dedication they have to a common moral framework, independently of social or ethnic differences (Henkel 2005). The prayer can serve as a way to order social practice in daily life, in which Muslims have to summon and perform their dedication to Islam (ibid.).32

Praying is both an individual and group-oriented practice. It is the duty of each individual to pray and to perform the external prayer movements with the necessary internal intentions. Simultaneously, the role of the faith community is highlighted: there is a sense of duty that each individual should correct peers and friends’ erroneous behavior, as it may be that they are unaware of their faults. Indeed, the youth often reminded each other to pray on time, and during social events the youth often performed the prayer together. Furthermore, more good points are gained when praying in a group, and collective prayer seemed to deepen the sisterly feelings among the youth.

32 In this sense, Michael Lambek’s argument about rituals can specifically be applied to the prayer, in that the prayer as a ritual “provides occasion for the unreserved assumption of responsibility and obligation in which agents, without distinction between the virtuous and the incontinent, acknowledge their agency and commit themselves to bearing responsibility for their actions” (Lambek 2000, 317).


Practicing How to Desire Correctly

Youth need to deal with different and contesting wills and desires in their efforts to adopt a particular Islamic style and taste. In Islam, children are considered to be born without sin, but youth (for girls this is marked by the moment of their first menstruation) are fully accountable for their actions and will have to answer for their actions in their “next life.” The possible tension between being young and being religiously active was a particularly important reason for the creation of MJD. As Fatima (31) told me:

“One of the ideas behind MJD is to inform the young generation in Germany that it is possible to be ‘Muslim, German, and still cool.’” She argued that they should learn that “to be a Muslim is not something bad, but something beautiful.” She continued by noting that “young Muslims should not feel that they are stupid, but that they are normal and that faith can also be fun, without segregating themselves from society.”

Here, Fatima suggests that adolescents feel the need to participate in MJD not only because they are outsiders in German society because they are Muslim, but also because being religious when young can make them feel odd in German society. She felt that being religiously active and young in a secular society is perceived as being boring or traditional. Additionally, temptations and distractions can cause young people to (momentarily or permanently) forget their main goal of entering Paradise in the afterlife. By practicing Islam in a group, the leaders try to provide the youth with emotional support and the motivation to live a religious life, including having the correct desires and a better understanding of who they are and where they are going.

Practicing to desire correctly is about obtaining a state of mind that desires to please God. This state of mind is not considered natural (Mahmood 2005), but must be produced and continuously strived towards. The youth need to craft themselves in ways that make them desire to try to reach these religious ideals. The will to become pious, virtuous, and observant can be strengthened in a religiously defined space. Older participants often contended that failure or lack of enthusiasm to meet their obligations was a consequence of “not loving God enough,” and that if they loved God as much as they should, acts like praying would be a source of joy. The creation of the virtuous Self takes place through the realization of why one should perform obligatory acts. It relies on equating the pleasing of God with benefiting one’s Self, and on generating emotional relationships with God.
The desire to become correct or better Muslims was thus a part of how the Self was crafted in MJD. The effort to reach a state of religious proximity is illustrated by the youths’ exclamations like “I really try,” or “it’s so hard,” when talking about, for example, their level of concentration when praying. “Fighting the swine dog in oneself” is a commonly used phrase. This saying is also used by non-Muslim Germans and refers to having to overcome inner temptations or inner fiends that lead to temptation. In the Islamic social space, it is used to refer to the continuous struggle and tension between complying with religious obligations and wanting to engage in non-religious acts.

The realization that certain objects, artifacts, and activities are distractions was encouraged through the argument that these things kept participants away from what should be considered important in their daily life. Their social environment, including the presence of non-religiously active schoolmates, undeniably had a constant effect on the crafting of their religious Self. However, the proposed solution was not to segregate from the majority non-Muslim society, but rather to work on one’s Self—one’s desires and thoughts—through certain techniques of the Self that were learned, practiced, and corrected within the group. Here, the youth followed ideas similar to those of Aristotle, namely that morality must be practiced in order to become part of one’s character (Aristotle 1998 [350 BC]). In Aristotle’s view, morality is both achieved through and displayed by external behaviors. In the Nichomachean Ethics, Aristotle contends:

> For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyre players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts. (Ibid., 28–29)

Here, Aristotle presents what has been called “the learning-by-doing” thesis, which states that we get a virtuous character by doing the types of actions that are characteristic of virtuous people. Similarly, we obtain a skill or craft by doing the types of actions that are characteristic of professionals of that craft. Likewise, MJD encouraged young people to practice how to improve their character, in the process of which it was hoped that an internal motivation ultimately merged with the performance of external motions.

Strategies about how to undermine or overcome certain desires that were considered Islamically incorrect can be demonstrated by the following episode:
MJD was holding an information meeting about the upcoming annual summer camp 2005 (in Bad Orb, Frankfurter Schullandheim Wegscheide) where more than 1,000 young Muslim young men and women would gather for a religious summer camp in southern Germany. Over three days, they take part in religious presentations, sports (football, table tennis, and volleyball), handicrafts, listen to music by famous “Muslim artists,” and attend workshops. During the camp, the youth would be called for the five prayers, after which they read together from the Koran, follow religious workshops and seminars with Q&As, and perform skits on the themes of the year’s camp, including “Carpe Diem,” “Recharging batteries,” “Why Muslim?” “Moments for Eternity,” and “Open your eyes.” During the camp, most youth read the Koran after the five daily prayers, pay attention to the way they dress, and focus on what are considered to be Islamically-oriented activities.

At the weekly MJD meeting in Berlin during which camp preparations were made, Fadwa (23) handed out yellow note pads on which everyone was asked to write down their expectations. She said, “just one thought, for example sisterly feelings.” Afterwards, the yellow notes on the cupboard read: “To be with other Muslims,” “to get to know new people,” “to have fun” [2 times], “to strengthen the iman [faith],” “set new goals,” “to meet a lot of sisters again,” “recharge batteries,”33 “give and receive,” “a wonderful time,” “sisterly feelings,” “to take along others who do not practice as much,” “to do my five prayers,” and “an Islamic atmosphere.” Fadwa told the girls that the camp was also meant to be an exchange. “Simply being with other sisters and seeing how they tie their headscarf will give you ideas,” she noted, continuing, “we are not only Turks, Arabs, and Palestinians and so on, from different cultures and languages. We are also all different. What brings us all together is Islam. The important thing is to give support and advice. I myself am not that good at giving advice.” She said that the previous year, some of the girls’ feelings had been hurt. There was a sister who thought that she had been in MJ for a long time, and was experienced, and therefore she felt able to give advice.34 “But,” Fadwa argued, “none of us have come far enough to be able to give advice to others about how they should behave. (...) For example, last year, there was someone who used perfume, and a sister started to kind of sniff the air, and talk about it [negatively]. And also, to go to a sister and say ‘I am very fond of you’ and then kind of give advice to her is also not right. It’s wrong when it’s not coming naturally.” Leila suggested that perhaps it is possible to say, “I also have a problem with that and maybe we can try to improve that together.” Some agreed that this would be better. Fadwa carried on, “the MJ meeting is also a test for us. How do we get along with the other sisters, and how do we relate to them over a longer period of time. Here [in Berlin] we only meet once a week. And now we will be together over a longer time.”

33 The motto for this meeting was “Recharging batteries” (“Akku wird geladen”) with direct connotation to cellphone batteries.
34 The youth in Berlin frequently referred to the organization merely as “MJ,” hence the transcript of conversations will frequently make use of the acronym “MJ.”
period, how will that be? And then it is also a place where there are both brothers and sisters at the same time. So take care of your clothing and make-up. A swimming pool has been rented, so bring your swimming suits. But not the bikini!" One of the girls exclaimed, “but I only have a bikini!” The other girls laughed, as it was obvious that she was joking. Fadwa persisted, “cause remember that it is also *haram* to show the other sisters from knees and up to the waist.” Fadwa suggested that they should set a personal goal to achieve before next year’s camp. They should tell their goal to other sisters, so that the others could “sort of see whether you have fulfilled your goal the following year.” She promoted the MJD camps as a place where they could test themselves by dressing in an Islamic [*Muslimich*] way. Fadwa said, “you have to bring long clothes with you. Last year some people were asked to put on longer clothes, ‘cause they were not covered properly. And they answered that they had not brought any with them. That is why I’m reminding you now to bring it with you. Last year there were complaints from the brothers that the sisters were not dressed properly. The brothers are also sinning when they look at you like that [just as the girls themselves are sinning] and do you want to be guilty of their receiving punishment? No! So, think about dressing properly. No clothes that are tight-fitting. (…) Last year there was a lot of competition between the sisters as to who was the most beautiful, and how one dressed. There was also a lot of talk about others behind their backs (…).” She asked: “Who will be going to the MJ Meeting for the first time?” As some young girls raised their hands, she told the others to take good care of these youngsters. Later Fadwa added that “the rules are also for the bus, we are travelling with the brothers, you know.”

During this discussion, MJD’s efforts to address youth, multi-culturalism and gender issues within a religious space are particularly apparent. In this example, young people are being prepared for their participation in a space in which stricter religious norms are to be followed than those they are used to in their daily life in Berlin. The summer camp becomes a space where they should practice being diligent in their prayers, dress and bodily comportment, and where they must interact correctly with their sisters and brothers in faith and have fun with peers who have similar desires. One of the focal aims of the various MJD camps appears to be to provide a space conducive to the creation of a religiously correct Self. For example, although it is not always successful, during the summer camp there is an effort to construct a gender-divided and religiously defined sphere, such as by housing women in one part of the camp and men in another part of the camp.

Fadwa's comments recognize the importance attached to each individual person transforming her consciousness and desire to focus on religious obligations, like prayer and correct dress, with the aim of making these essential and indispensable parts of her everyday life (see Mahmood 1998).
Correct dress comportment, for example, is simultaneously an individual exercise and an exercise that situates the individual in relation to the religious group. Fadwa’s concern about the rules about how to dress is presented not only as an obligation on their religious Selves, but also as part of a responsibility for the men’s religious Selves. This double obligation puts more pressure on the women to look after their body and comportment than the pressure put on their male counterparts. The space of the summer camp and the practices the youth are encouraged to follow also allow the individual believer to see their place within a larger community, and to adhere to religious rules that become the means by which they compare themselves to others and scrutinize themselves. In practice, conflicts did arise between the youth during the summer camp, such as when someone wanted to sleep while someone else wanted to play music.

The summer camp becomes a social arena and a religious space where the youth test their capacities for piousness, become accustomed to the ideals of piousness, share feelings of transcendence, and exert their willingness to craft themselves as religious subjects within a larger group. It promotes an alternative source of socialization to that which they are

Figure 10. Entrance to seminar tent at MJD summer camp. Women’s entrance on the left, men’s entrance on the right hand side. Photo: Synnøve Bendixsen
exposed to at school and in daily life in Berlin. This, and similar events, represents an effort to create a religious space where behavior (clothing and comportment) is located outside their routine, mundane life. The summer camp is structured and limited in time and space, and situated outside of their everyday life. At the same time, the experience is made applicable to their daily life as the practice of piety that is encouraged during the summer camp focuses on their internal intentions and characters. Furthermore, Fadwa’s suggestion to set personal (religious) goals that should be accomplished throughout the year ultimately situates the exercises for the Self as independent of time and space. The summer camp becomes a space where the youth should, if not embody, then at least get accustomed to a religious lifestyle that should continue when they return to their daily life. Far from being the outcome of indoctrination, compliance with religious rules involves, on the contrary, a vigilant crafting of the Self.35

**Acquiring an Islamic Character**

Tariq Ramadan, who is a religious authority for many European youth—in Germany and elsewhere—recalls the “Prophet’s call to seek for knowledge” (Ramadan 2004, 148). According to Ramadan and other religious authorities, a Muslim should acquire knowledge so as to come closer to the truth. The older MJD participants often quoted the following hadith during the weekly meeting: “The pursuit of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim man and woman.” At the same time, they stressed that

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35 Mahmood argues that agency is important among religiously oriented women in their efforts to become pious. A brief discussion of the already mentioned term “adab” can also shed further light on the weight the youth place on inner intention and outer physical comportment. While *adab* could be understood as referring to outer behavior, it should instead be understood as sources of and, at the same time, the results of, the inner Self. Metcalf suggests that *adab*, signifying discipline and training, may “mean” correct outer behavior, but it is understood as both the cause of, and then, reciprocally, fruit of one’s inner self. Knowing, doing, and being are inescapably one (Metcalf 1984, 10). *Adab* directs our attention to the fact that actions that appear beautiful can only be defined as such when they derive from a beautiful inner soul. As such, the qualities of *adab* have similarities to Foucault’s “technologies of the self,” in which the comportment of the body manifests and at the same time sustains the application of a particular disciplined mastery of oneself (Foucault 1995 [1977]; Rose 1996). It also has similarities to Aristotle’s description of the acquisition of virtue. This situates the continuous efforts the youth make to desire to obtain the religious ideals and comportment as a disciplining of the Self within the Islamic understanding of *adab*. As the women I worked with rarely made use of the term in their daily life or discussions, I do not draw extensively on *adab* as a term, and instead refer to a religious ideal or ethos.
knowledge of Islam is not sufficient in itself. At one meeting, one of the longtime members, Sevda (25), said:

“MJD has two main aims; to improve knowledge and to be a community.” She stressed that knowledge of Islam is difficult to obtain and not useful when you are only sitting by yourself, reading and thinking. Many participants nodded when she added that “you need to get knowledge and improve yourself within a community. Character is half of the faith.” And character, Sevda continued, needs to be developed and practiced within a group.

Here, Sevda argues that religious character needs to be practiced with similarly oriented others who can then also correct each other, so that their characters become more Islamic. The annual three-day MJD summer camp is one arena where an individual’s efforts to achieve a more Islamic character can evolve. Sevda’s comment also indicates that being a religiously correct Muslim is a continual two-part process: faith and practice. Religiosity is not only related to whether one believes (has faith) in God or not, but also to the correct practice of the faith: that is, complying with the rules for what is haram and halal, and improving one’s Muslim character. The evaluation of moral character is based on the notion that what a human ought to be is delineated by Islam (Metcalf 1984, 2). Character, such as what kind of character is important as a Good Muslim and how to control one’s Nafs (soul, self, or ego), was a central topic in many presentations. The following excerpt from a weekly meeting can illustrate the discussions about character in Islam:

Leila (21) had made a PowerPoint presentation about “character,” which was projected onto the white wall. “Why is this important to talk about?” she asked, before answering by quoting a Koran verse in Arabic and providing the listeners with the German translation, “God does not change the condition of a people unless they themselves change that which is in their inner selves.” This, she said, means that you have to start with yourself before calling attention to the mistakes of others. Leila asked the others to name some character traits, which she then wrote on the whiteboard in either red or black, depending on whether it is positive or negative. Afterwards, the whiteboard read: “Egotistic,” “reliable,” “lovable,” “being punctual,” “modesty,” and “honesty.” She turned around and asked, “is ‘shyness’ a bad or good character?” They decided to write it with both colors. Then the presentation continued by her asking, “what is characteristic of a Muslim?” Some girls suggested “friendly,” “polite,” and “always with a smile.” Others added

36 I often heard references to this verse (13:31), which is also discussed by Tariq Ramadan. According to Ramadan, it means that individuals must start with themselves and endeavor to “reform their being” (Ramadan 2004, 148).
“honest,” “patient,” and “lovable.” Not everyone agreed on the latter and openly objected. A few continued by suggesting “correct,” “merciful,” “generous,” and “humble.” The girls started a discussion about “arrogance” and being arrogant. Hamida (17) thought that some Muslims were arrogant, which, she argued, “they should not be.” Rüya (21) said, “look, if we are arrogant about our belief and say that it is the best, then no one would want to become Muslim.” Ismail continued, “we should have these characteristics to show, not with words, but by being like that, and do du’a so that other people also would want to convert.” The attendees agreed. Today, Leila wanted to look at three characteristics in particular: being reliable, trustworthy and punctual. She presented a PowerPoint slide that said:

Are you truthful towards
Allah (s.a)
Mohammad (s.a.a.s)
Humanity
People who have done you good [teachers are given as an example]
Your own community.

The German convert Aysel (20) interruped, saying: “Should not ‘yourself’ also be there. That you are true to yourself?” Leila dismissed her: “No, ‘cause that is simple. If you are true to Allah, you are true to yourself.” She continued, asking the girls: “How can you be true to Allah?”

The next slide answered:

Very easy …;

- to believe sincerely in Allah (Iman bihi)
- to be loyal to Allah (Ikhlas bihi)
- to do what He demands of us, and to refrain from what He has forbidden us.

Or perhaps not so easy ...

(9:75–77)37

To be truthful /faithful to the Prophet

She asked how they could be truthful to the Prophet, to which many girls responded: “To do the Sunna.” Leila clicked to the next slide:

- to learn and experience more of his life, how he handled everyday life
- to find out more about his character
- good character qualities & morals are timeless.38

Being a good Muslim is depicted not only as having a personal relationship to Allah, but also as encompassing the youths’ daily relationships

37 This is a reference to the Koran. This part of the Koran deals with lies and liars, among other things.
38 My translation of the PowerPoint from the German original.
with Muslims and non-Muslims. In part, the exercise aims to help the participants learn the correct forms of character, comportment, and social responsibility. It is interesting to note the suggestion the German convert Aysel made about being true to yourself as independent from any other references, such as God. We might ask whether this indicates a more individualistic orientation towards the Self. In any case, Leila’s answer is striking for the indivisible relationship she drew between the ability to be true to God and true to one’s Self.

The focus on having the correct character traits, a topic that recurred frequently, can also be understood as an indirect consequence of the stigmatized perception of Muslims in Germany. I suspect that the intense focus on external behavior, like smiling, or not looking sad in public, has to do with the general negative focus on Muslims. As indicated in chapter 3, many youth felt the need to improve the image of Islam in the West through their individual behavior. For some, this became a religious duty, resembling du’a. Through the verse that Ismail mentioned, “God does not change the condition of a people unless they themselves change that which is in their inner selves” (Sura number 13, verse 11), it can also become a religious duty to display the ideal character traits in order to change the negative stereotypes about Muslims among the non-Muslim population in Germany.

MJD also offered more technical suggestions about how a person should go about improving their character, such as the proposal that the youth write down faults that they find in themselves on a daily or weekly basis. The youth were thus encouraged to keep a diary of their negligence of religious obligations or erroneous performances. This critical examination of their actions, which puts the strategy of self-supervision (muhasabat al-nafs) into practice (Mahmood 1998), resembles the exercise of self-writing that Foucault proposes as “a practice of the self that contributes to the self’s active constitution” (McLaren 2002, 148). MJD attendees

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39 Keeping a spiritual diary or a diary of conscience to note one’s faults is a tradition that has characterized Protestantism since the Reformation, and which was often used by Puritans in northern Europe and North America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Gannett 1992). For the Greeks, as Foucault indicates, self-writing was an askesis of truth and the notebooks (hupomnémati) served as support for one’s ethical behavior through self-reflection, self-examination and self-regulation (use of pleasure and the care of the self) (McLaren 2002, 145–149). Foucault distinguishes these from the later Christian journals where the author tries to write the truth of himself and through this construct a narrative of the self. Whereas the Greek and the early Christian notebooks focused on the deeds of others, the Christian notebooks had a confessional character, focusing on the self (ibid.).
also engaged in informal confessions, in that the youth were frequently either encouraged to or spontaneously admitted to flawed acts, such as being impatient with their younger brother or gossiping. These confessions were made either to demonstrate the meanings of a presentation or to openly acknowledge their individual need for improvement.

Through the act of confession and writing exercises, the young Muslim woman is ambivalently positioned. She becomes a subject through the confession, and is simultaneously subjected by the dominant discourse that induces her to confess. What the youth write or confess is an individual process, requiring individual self-examination. However, the fact that they seem to feel that they need to confess is also an indication of a need to seek approval from a wider group. The process of crafting the religious Self, or that of becoming a good Muslim, has similarities to the process of becoming part of a movement. It also shows that the standards of behavior against which they are trying to monitor themselves have an external source.

The youth realize their religious Self in this process, thus this act should not be considered passive or reactive (see Mahmood 2005), since it is only through conscious acts that the subject can realize herself as a religiously virtuous subject. Through the writing assignments or open confessions the youth participate in a more individualizing process, as they come to understand themselves to be the source of their action and thus responsible actors in an existential sense. Self-writing plays a role in the "subject's own active self-constitution" (McLaren 2002, 149). The practice of writing about oneself is a process of individualization. Yet such writing simultaneously situates the youth in relation to a specific shared discourse, which thus involves a process of collectivization. The youth realize the need for individual active engagement in order to craft themselves religiously, and through this process start to feel part of a larger whole. In the course of these practices, the youth go through a process of religiously oriented individualization, and at the same time they realize their religious Selves by responding to a normalizing discourse embedded in power structures. It is thus a process whereby the Self is becoming both individualized and collectivized, where the collective is both socially real (MJD) and abstract (the umma).

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40 As McLaren, in her work on Foucault, argues: “The process of individualization ties one to one’s identity through normalizing discourses. Individualization is one aspect of a larger problematic that Foucault calls a hermeneutic of the self. A hermeneutic of the self refers to the process of self-decipherment, that is, the obligation of individuals to examine their desires, thoughts, and actions” (McLaren 2002, 149).
Importantly, this individualization is partly a consequence of how the youth actively craft themselves as religious subjects within a framework given by Islam (as a discursive tradition) as practiced within this group. Thus, the suggestions from scholars that Muslim youths’ emphasis on choosing Islam and the headscarf is indicative of their embrace of a modern, Western discourse where the fulfilled, autonomous subject is the choosing subject, needs to be reconsidered. The same goes for the suggestion that the triumph of the individual logic is a result of situating Islam in a secular context, and the breakdown of ethnic communities (Cesari 2000). The individualization of Islamic practice, Cesari argues, is a consequence of the Muslim communities in Europe moving out of the “iron grip” of authoritarian Muslim states on Islamic tradition (Cesari 2005b, 4). In contrast, I view the individualization of these youths’ religious Selves as a necessity in order to achieve a particular Islamic Self. In other words, within MJD a certain individualization must take place in order to become what is viewed as a Good Muslim within a religious discourse of practicing a pure Islam.

The individualization of these youths’ religious identification is part of their efforts to fulfill specific ideals they take from within Muslim tradition. In short, the individualization of the Muslim subject must be situated within the religious discourse to which these subjects are exposed. However, individualization goes hand in hand with a collectivization of the religious Self, in that religious practices and self-understanding must be situated and accepted within a faith community in order to be considered correct. The religious ideals and ideas are not individually chosen or practiced unsystematically, but are learned, corrected, and defined

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41 This is particularly the case in Cesari (2002), Karakaşoğlu (2003b), Klinkhammer (2000), and Nökel (2002).
42 Peter (2006a) points to how individualization has become a characteristic narrative in literature on Muslims in Europe. Drawing on Amir-Moazami and Salvatore’s work, he rejects the explanations that merely address individualization as a fragmentation of the structures of Islamic authority and that ignore the doxa in the Muslim tradition.
43 Roy (2004) contends that the individualization process must be understood in relation to Islam’s objectification, which he associates with the process of globalization. Islam and Muslim authorities have moved from the sphere of obviousness into an object of reflection. Both the Islamic Humanist and an Islamic neo-fundamentalist are characterized by an individualized rationale, through which religion is situated as a personal and individual affair. In contrast to Christian traditions, Roy argues, the individualizing tendencies do not lead to the fragmentation of the religious rule. Rather, religious norms and idioms maintain their stability (Roy 2004). Additionally, discussing the interpretation of da’wa as an individual obligation, Mahmood (2005, 62–64) contends that this illustrates the general tendency of an individualization of moral responsibility which is characteristic of modern Islam.
within a group. The individualized subject is situated within a larger setting and in relation to specific religious authorities through the religiously defined ideals and to feelings of belonging to the group.

**Submission to God**

The religious ideals taught within MJD provide a complex, overarching recipe for the religious body. They encompass values, practices, behavior, thoughts, and bodily comportment, which together are designed to help the individual strive for religious proximity—in other words, become as close to the religious ideals as possible. How the crafting of the subject takes place within or in relation to this religious movement strongly resembles the Foucauldian technology of the self as a way to relate to the self “epistemologically (know yourself), despotically (master yourself) and in other ways (care for yourself)” (Rose 1996, 135). These techniques are exercised within the actual or imagined authority of a system of truth. Within the space of MJD, technologies of the Self were situated in particular technical practices, such as group discussions, emphasis on
understanding the texts, and assignments that included writing down what one needed to improve in oneself. Other practices included confessing mistakes and setting goals together, like how to dress or to pray five times a day. MJD and the friendships formed among the members provided spaces where morality, self-reflection, and the desires of the individual were given direction, encouragement, and reminders to follow that direction. These youth were focused on Islamic knowledge and on improving their (religious) behavior through technologies of ethical self-perfection in a quest for self-realization. Participating in a forum where religious ideals were presented and practiced ultimately shaped the youths’ everyday practices, conduct, and the crafting of their Selves.44

As they continuously learned the religiously defined normative standards of what it meant to be a good Muslim, the youth evaluated their own behavior or actions in comparison with the ideal performances, and were also evaluated and measured by their peers and members of their faith community. These ideals, which the youth continued to try to achieve, were not neutral or haphazardly defined, but were legitimated through theology. They were taught and formulated through religious references, sources, and authorities. Specific religious authorities, the Koran, and particular religious books, provided the authoritative legitimation for the religious ideals. Normative expectations were also conveyed to the youth through judgmental gazes, utterings, and comparisons, and through giving particular women more authority in religious matters than others (see chapter 5). In this way, MJD represents an alternative moral community, where participants learn how to craft the Self and the content thereof.45

Cultivation of a Religious State of Mind: Formation of the Unfree Subject?
The youth and their effort to craft religious Selves are positioned within existing power structures and within a discursive tradition. The youth attempt to situate their Selves in relation to specific religious and moral norms—ideals that impose strict rules, particularly in regard to women

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44 I suspect that this also true for the young Muslim men in MJD, although I cannot confirm this empirically.

45 The religious ideals within the movement have similarities (and differences) to the pious ideal Mahmood (2005) finds in Egypt. Some of the similarities can be explained by these youth being part of an Islamic revival, belonging to an educated middle class that returns to the sources, and making references to some of the same authoritative figures.
and women's bodies and public comportment. To what extent does the process of crafting oneself serve to limit the women's opportunities in the public sphere and contribute to the formation of an unfree subject? Should we consider these practices forms of indoctrination or the result of a free choice? Do the women participate in practices that not only construct them, but also limit their opportunities to act?

Mahmood contends that feminist theorists, in their exploration of how “women contribute to reproducing their own domination, and how ... they resist or subvert it” (Mahmood 2005, 6), have naturalized their own views on agency as well as conceptualizations of freedom based on the Enlightenment. She argues that we have to recognize that it is a normative liberal assumption that women who actively participate in Muslim religious movements are acting against their own interests and agendas, an assumption that is constructed on the basis of particular liberal meanings given to the terms freedom, autonomy, and agency. Mahmood persuasively argues that agency can also involve acts that do not aim to subvert norms, but to fulfill them, such as the desire to follow religiously defined ideals.

The different ways people relate to norms cannot be understood if we continue with a universal perception of desire. Rather, our understanding

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46 I view all world religions as dominated by patriarchal structures (Sered 1998), although this does not mean that there is no scope of action for women and for women's empowerment.

47 For example, in the leftwing newspaper Taz (March 26, 2008) the article “Islamic girls' camp in the Eifel [a region] – Sisters amongst themselves” (‘Muslimisches Mädchencamp in der Eifel – Schwestern unter sich’) by Cigdem Akyol and the interview “Youth are indoctrinated” (‘Jugendliche werden indoktriniert’) by Ursula Spuler-Stegemann, which discussed one of the annual MuMM (annual meeting only for girls), argued that the youth are being indoctrinated during this meeting. According to MJD, Spuler-Stegemann has not conducted any interviews with the participants. The article provides a simplistic presentation of the complex process of how Islamic knowledge is formed. MJD made a statement against these two articles that declares that Akyol, after MJD declined her request to participate at the meeting, registered under a false name. Apparently, her strange appearance drew the organizers' attention and Akyol left the meeting voluntarily after 30 minutes. See www.mj-net.de/node/2032#attachments, accessed December 12, 2008.

48 Chapter 7 discusses the motivations and incentives the young women have for participating in MJD.

49 Norms are not either consolidated or subverted, but are "performed, inhabited, and experienced in a variety of ways" (Mahmood 2005, 22). Butler has pointed to how the undoing of norms cannot take place outside of the actual doing of the very same norms. The possibility of agency dwells within a productive reiterability of the norms, “always and only opposed to power” (Butler 1997, 17). The limitation of Butler’s focus on agency is that she mainly considers agency to be acts that resignify or challenge norms (Mahmood 2005, 20–22).
of desire, as well as of agency, must be detached from progressive politics and must open up for different forms of desires, including a religious desire to submit to God in order to reach Paradise. We can better understand the social actions and endeavors of these youths by recognizing their desire to craft their Selves to be Good Muslims, with all that includes. At the same time, as I argue in chapter 3, these religiously defined ideals can be felt to restrict movement, and in the process of adopting them, women risk turning into Woman as symbol. In such a space, Woman becomes a symbolic conflation of gender, sex, and sexuality, which in turn comprises ideology, metaphor, fantasy, and men’s psychological projections (Sered 1998). The question thus remains whether the consequences of these agentive acts are controlled by the intention of the actor: agentive acts can position the actor in a state of mind and space from which her future scope of action becomes limited or increasingly regulated. I return to this question in the concluding chapter.

In order to understand the practices of these youths, we need to ask what form of life they struggle to achieve, which sets of knowledge encourage these ideals, and which ethical valorizations they are linked to. I agree with Mahmood (2005) that we have to accept the possibility that the religious attendees have different goals, desires, and motivations than those liberal feminists consider liberating and true. Ultimately, reaching the ideal of a Good Muslim subject depends upon a certain self-reflection, knowledge of oneself and of religious sources, the ability to be in control of oneself, and to craft one’s desires and consciousness. The willingness to obey norms is essential to obtaining the youths’ goals, which frequently are to please God. In a similar way, Lambek (2002) asserts that:

...agents are always partly constructed through their acts – constituted through acts of acknowledgement, witnessing, engagement, commitment, refusal and consent. In assuming responsibility and rendering themselves subject to specific liturgical, political, and discursive regimes and orders, people simultaneously lay claim to and accept the terms through which their subsequent acts will be judged (Rappaport 1999). People are agents insofar as they choose to subject themselves, to perform and conform accordingly, to accept responsibility, and to acknowledge their commitment.

50 In her work on reuniting the subject of anthropology with that of psychoanalysis, Moore (2007) correctly points to how anthropologists have failed to incorporate desire and the imaginary into an understanding of the making and transforming of the self. By focusing on desire, she argues, we are made more aware of the motivations of the subject positions and become attentive to the discursive formations and hegemonic orders. Although I do not use her framework, I do incorporate desire in my discussion of the youths’ motivations to take up a religious subject position (see chapter 7).
The techniques of the Self that the Muslim women learn and practice in Berlin, and which appear to liberal feminists to be a subversion of the women’s own interests and agendas, are agentive acts. It is true that these acts do not oppose the religious strictures or the governing modes of power, in contrast to the acts that liberal feminists have naturalized as the form of agency scholars should look for. Nevertheless, following a religious ideal where the goal is to submit oneself to God should not in itself be seen as oppressive or as signaling a lack of freedom or agency. To paraphrase Lambek (2002, 37): the act of entering a submissive state is not itself a submissive act. On the contrary, if the ability to submit oneself to religious rules is considered part of crafting oneself as a pious or good Muslim, then following the path of becoming such a subject can be considered agentive. Becoming a Muslim subject includes the ability to submit oneself to God and to follow religiously defined obligations and moral practices. This is the condition for acting as Good Muslim and reaching religious proximity within this religious social field. Striving to conform to the religiously defined ideals is a matter of personal effort, meeting challenges and performing acts that involve agency. The means through which the successful crafting of a religious Self in Berlin takes place are not realizable through being or becoming an unfree, indoctrinated, or passive subject.

I would like to push our understanding of how the youth are crafting the religious Self in a direction that includes the creative and negotiative processes that form part of their everyday life. To understand the process of crafting the religious subject in interaction with Islamic ideals, norms, and values, we also have to look at the tensions that arise when the youth try to enact them in Berlin. Tensions may arise when the youth encounter incompatibilities or conflicting demands, desires and expectations, for example between the religiously defined traditions and desires that are not related to religion (such as wanting something badly that they know is not Islamically correct). The individual is not only “contingently made

51 “[T]he act of entering a dissociated state is not itself a dissociated act” (Lambek 2002, 37). The resemblance to Mahmood’s later and more complex and detailed analysis should be clear, although she makes no references to Lambek. Both Lambek (2002) and Mahmood (2005) draw extensively on Aristotle in their writing on women who tend to be considered to be in disadvantaged positions without scope for agency and who perform acts that are found strange within their social context.
possible by the discursive logic of the ethical traditions she enacts,” as Mahmood (2005, 32) notes. I argue that this is only one part of the process of crafting the Self—although an important part. The crafting of the Self also takes place in the recognition of oneself as part of a group, where an individual measures herself and is measured in relation to others. It also takes place in the individual’s interaction with norms, desires, and ideals that are not situated within the Islamic religious traditions.

During my fieldwork, I became aware that although the young women were familiar with ideals, and often made an effort to follow these, they did not necessarily succeed. Tensions arose in situations where the youth were not motivated, willing, or even able to follow the ideals. Crafting the Self is a more creative, interactive process than being summoned and actively striving to follow one single discursive logic or ethical tradition. How the youth solve these tensions and simultaneously are found to be truthful religious subjects (by themselves and socially relevant others) is a creative process to which I turn in the next chapter.